

Understanding and Sustaining Confidence Building Measures in Conflict Prevention

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Source – CICA summit

Introduction

In a world where conflicts and tensions run deep, achieving peace often depends on more than just formal agreements—it requires building trust and commitment. Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) can play a key role in this process. They act as the quiet but strong connections that mend broken relationships, encourage communication, and keep conflicts from turning violent. Understanding these measures is crucial for creating and maintaining peace.

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CBMs can be understood as a series of actions that are negotiated, agreed and implemented by the conflict parties, in order to build confidence, without specifically focusing on the root cause of the conflict.² Through CBMs, mediators try to “humanize” the conflict parties and to break down the image of impeccable villain, usually incarnate beyond redemption. The aim of CBMs is not to make people like each other or to address the root cause of the conflict. Rather, the idea is to help build a working trust by addressing easier issues, which will then allow parties to address the root causes of a conflict through substantive negotiations.³

Understanding and maintaining these measures is like learning the language of diplomacy. Every small action matters and helps create an atmosphere where people can talk and work together for maintaining a good relation among different nation. By exploring the details of Confidence Building Measures (CBMs), we discover the strategies that have not only prevented crises but also built a foundation for lasting peace.



Source – CICA conference

² Mason, Simon J. A. and Matthias Siegfried, "Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) in Peace Processes", In: *Managing Peace Processes: Process related questions. A handbook for AU practitioners, Volume 1, African Union and the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue*, 2013: 57-77.

³ Mason, Simon J. A. and Matthias Siegfried, "Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) in Peace Processes", In: *Managing Peace Processes: Process related questions*.

Understanding Confidence Building Measures (CBMs)

Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) play a significant role in international relations by fostering trust, promoting dialogue, and reducing national tensions. These measures are essential for creating an environment conducive to conflict resolution and peacebuilding.⁴ CBMs aim to adjust between two or more States possibly inaccurate perceptions of motives, to avoid misunderstandings about military actions and policies, and to foster cooperation and inter-dependency. Over time, CBMs can pave the way for more stable bilateral relations, transform ideas about national requirements for security, and even encourage steps to jointly identify shared security needs.⁵

Here are key characteristics and examples of confidence-building measures:

- Communication and dialogue
- Transparency and information sharing
- Risk reduction and crisis management
- Arms control and disarmament
- Humanitarian and environmental cooperation
- Track II diplomacy and people-to-people contacts⁶

So basically, CBMs are agreements between two or more parties regarding exchanges of information, dialogue and verification, typically with respect to the use of military forces and armaments. Some measures attempt to make military capabilities more transparent and to clarify the intention of military and political activities.

Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) are crucial in international relations for creating a foundation of trust, dialogue, and cooperation between conflicting parties. Their primary objectives include preventing the escalation of conflicts, initiating and deepening negotiations, and integrating the process and outcomes of peace efforts. These objectives are vital for establishing a stable and peaceful international environment.

⁴ Sheikh, None Younis Ahmad. "Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) Between India and Pakistan." *Journal of Islamic World and Politics* 7, no. 1 (June 30, 2023): 109–18. <https://doi.org/10.18196/jiwp.v7i1.46>.

⁵ "Military Confidence-Building Measures – UNODA," n.d. [https://disarmament.unoda.org/convarms/military-cbms/#:~:text=Confidence%2Dbuilding%20measures%20\(CBMs\),build%20mutual%20trust%20between%20countries.](https://disarmament.unoda.org/convarms/military-cbms/#:~:text=Confidence%2Dbuilding%20measures%20(CBMs),build%20mutual%20trust%20between%20countries.)

⁶ "Military Confidence-Building Measures – UNODA."

- **Preventing Escalation:** By establishing clear communication channels and promoting transparency, CBMs help reduce misunderstandings and miscalculations that could lead to conflict. For instance, when parties exchange military information or notify each other of military exercises, they diminish the fear and suspicion that could trigger an unintended escalation.⁷ This proactive approach ensures that even in times of tension, the risk of confrontation is minimized, and conflicts are kept under control.
- **Initiating and Deepening Negotiation:** CBMs also play a critical role in fostering trust and creating a cooperative atmosphere, CBMs encourage dialogue and make it easier for parties to come to the negotiating table.⁸ As trust builds, parties become more willing to engage in meaningful discussions and explore peaceful solutions to their disputes. This process not only initiates negotiations but also deepens them, making it possible for the parties to address more complex and sensitive issues as they progress.
- **Integrating the Process and Its Outcome:** Also, CBMs are instrumental in integrating the process of conflict resolution with its outcomes. By consistently promoting transparency, cooperation, and mutual reassurance, CBMs help ensure that the peacebuilding process is sustained over time. This integration is essential for creating long-lasting peace, as it aligns the negotiation process with the eventual outcomes, leading to a stable and peaceful regional environment.⁹

Challenges in Implementing and Sustaining CBM

Challenges in using CBMs can arise due to misuse or misalignment with the core issues, such as when trust isn't the primary barrier, leading to ineffective conflict resolution. Parties may also exploit CBMs to delay substantive negotiations or create false appearances of progress.¹⁰ Vague,

⁷ Mason, Simon J. A. and Matthias Siegfried, "Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) in Peace Processes", In: *Managing Peace Processes: Process related questions. A handbook for AU practitioners*, Volume 1, African Union and the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, 2013: 57-77.

⁸ Sheikh, None Younis Ahmad. "Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) Between India and Pakistan." *Journal of Islamic World and Politics* 7, no. 1 (June 30, 2023): 109–18. <https://doi.org/10.18196/jiwp.v7i1.46>.

⁹ Mason, Simon J. A. and Matthias Siegfried, "Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) in Peace Processes", In: *Managing Peace Processes: Process related questions*.

¹⁰ Schmidt, Annie. "Possibilities and Pitfalls of Confidence-building Measures." International Peace Institute, June 3, 2019. <https://www.ipinst.org/2012/09/possibilities-and-pitfalls-of-confidence-building-measures>.

unilateral, or overly successful CBMs can further exacerbate mistrust, distracting from addressing the root causes of the conflict.

Avoid Using CBMs When Lack of Trust Isn't the Core Problem: CBMs are most effective when lack of trust is a significant barrier. However, when trust exists but there is a lack of political will or common understanding, other tools like capacity-building workshops or expert consultations might be more appropriate. Misusing CBMs in such contexts can lead to ineffective peace processes.¹¹



Source - OSCE Guide

Prevent CBMs from Becoming Stalling or Cover-Up Tactics: Parties may misuse CBMs to delay substantive negotiations or give the appearance of progress while avoiding real change. Mediators must ensure that CBMs are not used to distract from meaningful dialogue by clarifying the parties' true intentions and motivations behind adopting CBMs.

Beware of "Overly Successful" CBMs Distracting from Real Negotiations: If CBMs become too successful, they might reduce the urgency to address the core issues of the conflict. Mediators

¹¹ Mason, Simon J. A. and Matthias Siegfried, "Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) in Peace Processes", In: Managing Peace Processes: Process related questions.

should aim to balance the success of CBMs with ongoing negotiations on the root causes, ensuring that CBMs do not become an end in themselves.¹²

Watch for Unilateral, Asymmetric, and “False” CBMs: CBMs should be designed symmetrically to avoid unequal impacts that could increase distrust. Unilateral gestures may lead to one party losing face, while false CBMs that only benefit one side can undermine the mediator’s impartiality.

Avoid Unrealistic, Vague, and Non-Verifiable CBMs: CBMs must be clear, realistic, and include verification mechanisms. Ambiguous or non-verifiable CBMs risk non-implementation, leading to increased distrust.¹³ Effective CBMs should have well-defined implementation procedures and monitoring systems to ensure compliance.

To sustain Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs), countries must ensure these measures are aligned with the core issues of the conflict, focusing on trust-building where it's most needed. Regular and transparent communication, along with verified implementation, helps maintain momentum and trust between parties. It's crucial to avoid the misuse of CBMs as stalling tactics or distractions from substantive negotiations.¹⁴ With that, countries should adapt CBMs to changing circumstances, ensuring they remain relevant and effective over time. By fostering mutual understanding, maintaining political will, and involving third-party verification, countries can sustain CBMs as a foundation for lasting peace.

Case Study: Successes and Failures of CBMs between India and Pakistan

The relationship between India and Pakistan has long been marked by tensions, conflicts, and a history of mistrust (Ashraf, 2016). Since their independence from British colonial rule in 1947, the two neighboring countries have engaged in multiple wars, territorial disputes, and cross border conflicts. In this context, Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) have emerged as an essential framework to promote trust, reduce tensions, and create an environment conducive to peaceful coexistence between the two nations.¹⁵

¹² Ibid

¹³ Schmidt, Annie. “Possibilities and Pitfalls of Confidence-building Measures.” International Peace Institute, June 3, 2019. <https://www.ipinst.org/2012/09/possibilities-and-pitfalls-of-confidence-building-measures>.

¹⁴ ¹⁴ Noor, Sitara. “Strategic Stability in South Asia: The Evolving Challenges and Potential Opportunities for India and Pakistan.” *Strategic Studies* 43, no. 1 (August 11, 2023): 64–94. <https://doi.org/10.53532/ss.043.01.00272>.

¹⁵ ———. “Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) Between India and Pakistan.” *Journal of Islamic World and Politics* 7, no. 1 (June 30, 2023): 109–18. <https://doi.org/10.18196/jiwp.v7i1.46>.

Some major CBMs between India-Pakistan:

- **Shimla Agreement (1972):** Following the Indo-Pakistani War of 1971, this agreement emphasized peaceful solutions, respect for territorial integrity, and non-interference in each other's internal affairs.
- **Prohibition of Attack against Nuclear Facilities Agreement (1988):** Signed by Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, this agreement prohibits attacks on each other's nuclear installations and requires annual exchange of nuclear facilities' lists.¹⁶
- **Lahore Declaration (1999):** Signed during a thaw in relations, this declaration focused on nuclear risk reduction and the peaceful resolution of disputes, reaffirming both countries' commitment to dialogue.¹⁷



Source – The Diplomat

- **Ceasefire and Negotiations (2003):** A ceasefire was established in 2003, leading to new military and nuclear CBMs, such as troop reductions along the LoC and missile test notifications.

¹⁶ ——. "THE ROLE OF CONFIDENCE-BUILDING MEASURES IN THE EVOLUTION OF RELATIONS BETWEEN PAKISTAN AND INDIA." *World Affairs* 184, no. 3 (August 3, 2021): 294–317. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00438200211030222>.

¹⁷ *Ibid*

- **Agreement on Pre-Notification of Flight Testing of Ballistic Missiles (2005):** Requires both countries to notify each other before conducting ballistic missile tests to prevent misunderstandings.¹⁸
- **Agreement on Reducing the Risk from Accidents Relating to Nuclear Weapons (2007):** Aimed at preventing accidental nuclear war by exchanging information on nuclear installations and implementing CBMs related to nuclear command and control systems.
- **Kartarpur Corridor (2019):** A visa-free corridor allowing Indian Sikh pilgrims to visit the Gurdwara Darbar Sahib in Pakistan, fostering religious and people-to-people ties.
- **Ceasefire Agreement (2021):** Reaffirmed the 2003 ceasefire along the Line of Control (LoC) in Jammu and Kashmir, significantly reducing cross-border firing and military skirmishes.¹⁹

The history of Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs) between India and Pakistan has seen a mix of successes and failures. Successful CBMs include the Nuclear Facility Agreement (1988), which involved exchanging lists of nuclear facilities to prevent attacks, and the establishment of a military hotline (1971), providing direct communication during crises. These succeeded due to their transparency and the mutual respect shown even during heightened tensions. The 2003 ceasefire agreement along the Line of Control (LoC) was another success, reducing cross-border violence due to strong political will.²⁰ Also many CBMs failed, often due to deep-seated mistrust and political crises. The Lahore Accord (1999), aimed at nuclear risk reduction, was undermined by the Kargil War shortly after its signing. The Chemical Weapons Agreement (1992) failed when India's declaration of its chemical arsenal deepened suspicions in Pakistan. Post-2008 efforts to revive CBMs after the Mumbai attacks also faltered due to the lack of trust and persistent accusations.²¹

Overall, successful CBMs were characterized by clear communication, transparency, and political commitment. Failures, on the other hand, were often due to a lack of trust, inconsistent engagement, and the impact of unresolved political and military tensions. While some CBMs have

¹⁸ Applying Confidence Building Measures in a regional context” Paper presented by Holly Higgins, Research analyst , Institute for science and International security.

¹⁹ Noor, Sitara. “Strategic Stability in South Asia: The Evolving Challenges and Potential Opportunities for India and Pakistan.” *Strategic Studies* 43, no. 1 (August 11, 2023): 64–94. <https://doi.org/10.53532/ss.043.01.00272>.

²⁰ ———. “Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) Between India and Pakistan.” *Journal of Islamic World and Politics* 7, no. 1 (June 30, 2023): 109–18. <https://doi.org/10.18196/jiwp.v7i1.46>.

²¹ Ibid

managed to build a degree of stability, the overall progress has been hindered by the recurring crises and mistrust between the two nations.

Conclusion

Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) are essential tools in conflict resolution, especially between long-standing adversaries like India and Pakistan. They have played a critical role in fostering trust, reducing tensions, and promoting dialogue, leading to some notable successes such as the Nuclear Facility Agreement (1988) and the 2003 ceasefire along the Line of Control. However, many CBMs have failed due to deep-rooted mistrust, political crises, and inconsistent implementation. The successes of CBMs highlight the importance of transparency, clear communication, and sustained political commitment. Conversely, their failures underscore the challenges posed by unresolved political tensions and the misuse of these measures. To be effective, CBMs must be carefully designed, realistically implemented, and continuously supported to create a lasting foundation for peace and stability in conflict-prone regions.