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Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

The Secretariat

Conflict Prevention Centre
Operations Service/Planning and Analysis

Strengthening Local Ownership of
Non-Military Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs)

Food-for-Thought Paper

Introduction

The origins of many contemporary non-military confidence-building measures (CBMs) can be traced to the early work of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE). Indeed, its 1975 Helsinki Final Act, the 1986 Stockholm Document on Confidence- and Security-Building Measures (CSBMs) and Disarmament in Europe, and the 1990 Vienna Document[1] put the Organization at the forefront of employing such measures as essential tools in building and maintaining confidence in different phases of conflict. While many of the measures developed in the earlier years were more focused on hard security and geared towards inter-State relations, and reducing the potential outbreak of military confrontation in particular, non-military CBMs are increasingly seen as providing an essential additional bridge to sustainable peace - especially, but not exclusively, in intra-State conflicts/crises such as those found in the Balkans, the South Caucasus, Moldova and elsewhere.

The success of CBMs is directly linked to the involvement of the parties to the conflict/crisis, for it is they who must agree the modalities of and should derive the benefit from the CBMs. Not only is local ownership the key to success, it is very often a main cause of failure (i.e., the lack of mutual political will to implement CBMs in good faith). While the international community cannot solve the parties' lack of political will, it can at least play an important enabling role, including through assistance in the design of CBMs and capacity building, the provision of neutral verification and problem solving, administrative/logistical support and assistance in the implementation of complementary activities.

What are CBMs

CBMs and CSBMs are terms widely used in many of the OSCE's milestone documents, from the 1975 Helsinki Final Act onwards. The Organization has not, however, defined the terms and hence, for the purposes of this paper, *CSBMs* can be understood as measures which are more narrowly geared towards building confidence primarily in the military arena, whereas *CBMs* are measures with a broader focus on building confidence in the political, economic, environmental and/or human realms among people within a State and/or between States. The focus of this paper is on CBMs - 'non-military' has been included in the title merely to emphasize that military-related CSBMs will not be discussed.

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[1] Subsequently modernized in 1992, 1994 and 1999.

CBM Characteristics

CBMs can be considered as: 1) tools to lower tensions and make it less likely that a conflict would break out through a lack of information, misunderstanding, mistake or misreading of the actions of a potential adversary; and/or, 2) a means to foster trust and bridge dividing lines between potential antagonists as an essential element of building sustainable peace. As OSCE experiences show, CBMs can play a significant role in conflict prevention and post-conflict rehabilitation and reconciliation.

Dozens of successful CBMs have been applied throughout the world. Approaches vary, understandably as CBMs should be tailored to the prevailing context in which they are to be implemented. While 'one size does not fit all', successful CBMs share many of the following common characteristics:

Mutual confidence/Reciprocity: Measures taken by one party should logically and naturally lead to similar measures being taken by the other party in a balanced and reciprocal manner. Moreover, the commitment by one side to a given measure, especially if it is in good faith, should be matched by the other side as a quid pro quo, thus also avoiding a perception of imbalanced concessions by either party.

Transparency: The intent and modalities of a CBM should be obvious, open and unambiguous and there should be no chance that its purpose or conduct could be misconstrued. Conversely, the opportunity for one party to exploit a measure for its own gain at the expense of another should be minimized.

Predictability: The parties should each be convinced that any wrongful actions by one will be quickly and accurately identified by others and that there will be sufficient time for the wronged party and/or the international community to react appropriately.

Communication: CBMs should be accompanied by appropriate communication channels between the parties to facilitate information flow. This is important so that misunderstandings or mistakes can be quickly addressed. Also, such channels in themselves can build credibility and reliability, and thus trust between the parties.

Incremental: Progressively implementing CBMs in evolutionary stages of increasing meaningfulness can allow the parties to mutually reinforce small steps of trust towards more difficult and/or risky measures. In that respect, grass-roots and/or symbolic measures can have a greater impact on the whole process of confidence building than the isolated effect of each individual measure, particularly if a deadlock is present.

Verification: Particularly for those CBMs where reciprocity is expected and/or one party feels exposed through its compliance, verification, including by third parties when appropriate, is an important component of allaying the fears and mistrust of one side of the other side's compliance. Moreover, verification and monitoring are themselves confidence building activities. Additionally, verification can be useful when progressing in small steps to more substantial CBMs, as it allows the sides to be confident of each other's continuing commitment to building lasting peace.

Voluntary: The successful long-term implementation of CBMs depends on the voluntary entering into and compliance by the parties. CBMs rarely succeed when imposed on the parties from the outside.

Pitfalls to Avoid

While the creation and maintenance of confidence between societies is a necessary condition for enduring peace, the limitations of CBMs must be acknowledged. Otherwise unrealistic expectations may be raised - and when these are not met, trust and confidence may be even more damaged. Limitations include: CBMs cannot resolve the basic causes of a conflict; they are unlikely to alter the existing capabilities, core interests and balance of power between and within States; where deep animosity exists, particularly in the immediate aftermath of conflict, they are unlikely to be acceptable to the parties; and, perhaps most important of all, they depend on a genuine desire for peace by all parties and this often only appears when the parties have moved from a zero-sum mindset.

CBMs should not be expected to deliver speedy results - as compromise and the fostering of co-operation based on recognition of shared interests is a long and gradual process. Also, CBMs should be understood as the means to the broader objective of peace rather than objectives in themselves.

Official actors often fail to pursue community-based initiatives. Yet these are the very measures that are likely to be non-threatening, low-risk, focused on strong shared interests, integrate vulnerable groups, help manage anxiety and gain the most local support.

Care must be taken to ensure that CBMs are not used for manipulation, especially by a party that wishes to cloak its intentions through controlled transparency as it seeks to gain time to strengthen its position. Moreover, CBMs are often ill-advised if any of the parties flagrantly flouts widely-accepted international or regional standards that directly relate to the specific measure. Also, if dialogue is limited to small elites, it is possible, and quite likely in many cases, that the hostility among the masses on the street will continue unabated, perhaps fed by myths, negative stereotypes and ignorance.

The prevailing international situation will have an impact as CBMs are more difficult to implement effectively if major powers outside and/or regional powers within the region are in competition with each other for influence in the region. Moreover, tensions in the wider international arena may have a debilitating effect. To the extent possible, divisive external pressure should be mitigated.

Some Examples of CBMs

Political CBMs build confidence in the political system, through such measures as power sharing, proportional recruitment and allocation, electoral reform and the decentralization of power to various localities and regions. Such democratization methods can foster political inclusion and allow for political exchange and learning among parties in conflict. This is particularly pertinent in building intra-State peace.

Economic CBMs can bind nations and communities together through economic co-operation and thereby remove barriers of mistrust. In today's world of global competitiveness, economic factors can play a major role in determining relations amongst States, particularly as economic interdependencies also foster close and fruitful relationships. States which are in such relationship seldom risk their economic wellbeing and survival by entering into any confrontation. Cross-border and inter-community trade can also help provide a basis for dialogue and a co-operative approach to joint problem solving beyond the economic domain.

Environmental CBMs can include collaborative planning and training in joint responses to natural disasters (such as earthquakes, floods, and even prolonged drought) as well as man-made disasters (such as fires and toxic spillages). Other examples of environmental CBMs include the management of shared water resources and forestry management. Measures that have a trans-boundary focus (in terms of both state and community boundaries) can have confidence-building functions if they address interdependencies and offer concrete incentives for the community/state representatives to co-operate. Moreover, issues in the environmental field are often seen as non-sensitive and thus politically safe to be discussed by governments.

Cultural CBMs aim to demonstrate a government's sensitivity to local cultures and show respect for traditional authorities. Such measures can include refraining from repressive laws on language or religion, avoiding the declaration of a single official language when the State includes a significant ethnic minority grouping with a different language, showing respect for and allowing traditional authorities some role in local affairs (even if it is only symbolic), demonstrating respect for cultural leaders and local practices by the state, and exercising sensitivity on such issues as removing monuments meaningful to certain ethnic/regional groups.

Societal CBMs include networks of people-to-people activities, dialogues and joint projects that create the foundations upon which mutual understanding and compromise can be built. Examples include: dialogues between educators and journalists; joint textbook projects; academic conferences, workshops and joint research projects; meetings between journalists; exchanges of journalists, academics, and other public figures; interaction between neighbourhood groups, religious communities, students, and professional guilds (doctors, lawyers, teachers); agreements on the transit by citizens of one country through another and the promotion of travel facilities for the nationals of the other State; the opening of borders; regular air and bus services between the territories of the parties; and, the resumption of communications, postal and telegraphic links.

International Support to Local Ownership

While local ownership is clearly crucial, the chances of CBMs succeeding may be increased if the international community fulfills an enabling role – especially when the parties are deadlocked or lack, *inter alia*, the necessary knowledge, skills and/or resources to work on CBMs alone. The involvement of the international community is also particularly relevant when international actors are involved in other peacebuilding activities, including as donors.

International support, which obviously has associated resource implications, can range from providing support to the design of CBMs (drawing on lessons learned/best practices from similar situations elsewhere), to capacity building (such as training), to hosting CBM conferences/workshops for the parties (on neutral territory when necessary), to verification (although care must be taken to ensure the international actor has the necessary freedom of action and skills to carry out the task and can avoid being manipulated by any party), to offering third party assistance in problem solving (mindful of the need to avoid being used by the parties to justify their resistance), to providing administrative/logistical support, to implementing complementary activities (especially as parallel activity can mutual reinforce the benefits of CBMs), to assisting in the development of regional and sub-regional CBMs.