



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
Secretariat

FSC.NGO/3/18

26 June 2018

ENGLISH only

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ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE

2018 ANNUAL SECURITY REVIEW CONFERENCE

**Working session III: Conventional arms control and confidence- and security-building
measures: challenges and opportunities**

27 June 2018,
Neuer Saal, Hofburg, Vienna

Risk-Reduction, CSBMs, and Conventional Limitations

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Dear Ambassador Benedejčič, dear Ambassador Boháč, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Let me first express my deep gratitude to the organizers for inviting me to the Annual Security Review Conference, giving me the opportunity to share some reflections on the perspectives for risk-reduction, arms control, and CSBMs in the OSCE area.

Since many years, the OSCE instruments of cooperative security are in retreat. Today, due to severe mistrust, a number of OSCE participating States view military strength once more as providing a higher degree of security. Notwithstanding any unexpected political changes, this situation is here to stay for the foreseeable future. But that does not mean that there is no room for cooperative security. Quite to the contrary, conventional CSBMs and arms control can play a significant security-enhancing role in the current environment marked by an overall lack of trust, by hybrid challenges, military deniability, and deterrence. In order to make my point, let me first look for a few minutes at the paradigm of deterrence.

Deterrence – whether nuclear or conventional – is a defensive security concept aimed at preventing large-scale conflict. It can be a powerful tool for preserving peace. For example, nuclear deterrence contributed to avoiding a direct military clash between the two blocks throughout the Cold War. Today, proportionate deterrence contributes to ensuring the safety of NATO's easternmost member states by a rotational presence of small-scale multilateral forces in the three Baltic States and Poland.

But deterrence comes with a number of trade-offs. What looms large is the concern of failure which usually leads to examining one's own material capabilities and declaratory policies against those of the opponent. Generic questions are: do we have enough and the right military capabilities? Is our message credible? How much ambiguity is beneficial in support of our message?

The dilemma is that answering these questions might lead to political decisions that increase one's own security at the expense of the opponent's. Enhancing military strength, though meant in a defensive way, can lead to misinterpretations on the other side. Assuming the other feels threatened and reciprocates, very costly arms racing might be the result. That way, sides may enter into a security dilemma of mutually reinforcing perceptions of insecurity. Those periods can create the very real or perceived risk of military instability. Over the long run, relying mainly on military capabilities can prolong the already existing mutual mistrust which, in turn, then aggravates the chances for dialogue and impedes potential cooperation.

These trade-offs might be acceptable as long as each side can undertake unilateral military actions to address its own perception of insecurity. But one implicit risk, at least, can only be addressed through cooperation: the risk of unintended escalation.

As we experience today, military close-calls involving Russian and NATO forces over both the Baltic and Black Sea regions create the risk of accidental escalation. In addition, large-scale military exercises create the risk of potential misunderstandings that could lead to inadvertent escalation. It is there where CSBMs and arms control can play a significant and cost-effective role. In concrete terms, they can mitigate some of the risks of accidental or inadvertent escalation.

Let us now look at what cooperative means are available or conceivable. Given today's atmosphere, we might conceive of them as 'early CSBM and risk-reduction measures', designed to enhance mutual security in the OSCE area. It might be easier to build on already existing measures than start from scratch.

One such existing measure is the Structured Dialogue. One of its potential value lies in providing the forum for exploring early CSBM and risk-reduction measures. Participating States could for instance kick off a discussion about the practical value and implementation of arrangements for the prevention and management of military incidents. In addition, participating States could reach out for additional information and lessons learned from OSCE partner states, from civil aviation organizations, and from countries involved in the Syrian de-confliction agreements. States could use the information to prepare a catalogue of available instruments and best practices for application by participating States.

Participating States could also explore options for additional bilateral or multilateral risk-reduction agreements akin to the U.S.-Russian Agreement on the Prevention of Incidents On and Over the High Seas (INCSEA) and the Agreement on the Prevention of Dangerous Military Activities (DMA) as well as additional measures under Chapter X of the Vienna Document. States that do not have INCSEA- or DMA-like agreements in place could publish their national principles of due regards as well as review their national approaches to military encounters and interdiction, and introduce restraint as a general rule.

Having addressed some of the risks of accidental escalation through early CSBM and risk-reduction measures, participating States may find value in mitigating some of the additional risks of inadvertent escalation caused by military exercises with threatening scenarios. One way for doing so could be modernizing the Vienna Document (VD). The VD in its current form contains a number of loopholes. For example, large-scale exercises, normally subject to prior notification, may be sliced into smaller ones under different commands, however maintaining the same objective or scenario in order to avoid prior notification or observation. Also, 'snap exercises', conducted within a very short timeframe, might fall below the time limit for prior notification. Closing these loopholes could provide all sides with more certainty while not necessarily interfering with the dominant principle of deterrence.

Over the long run however, participating States should ask themselves whether more far-reaching CSBM and conventional arms control measures could become a more cost-effective way of dealing with uncertainties and insecurities. While such undertakings might still be deemed far away, deliberations on their scope and application could well start today.

One early insight might be that classical conventional arms control accords akin to the CFE Treaty do not comprehensively address security concerns in the current environment anymore. Therefore, States might also look into regional limitation mechanisms, or discuss modern capabilities. Hybrid challenges, paramilitary forces, naval and coastal forces, long-range precision-guided munitions, air defence, and A2/AD systems are undisputable elements of today's security environment. At some point, it might be worth to consider extending the scope of the VD to include such forces and systems. It would be up to the parties involved to define which offensive as well as defensive weapons systems could be included in such deliberations.

In parallel, Track 1.5 efforts aimed at developing tailor-made CSBMs and arms control for disputed regions should continue. The Swiss government has already supported a scholarly effort looking into the general value and theoretical feasibility of such measures. Building on that effort, additional work could focus on concrete, tailor-made measures for specific regions.

Another insight that might take hold could be that some of the existing but dysfunctional elements of conventional arms control are worth saving. Again, starting from scratch could be quite cumbersome. Therefore we should keep what we have and save it for better days.

Just imagine consultations on a future regional regime limiting conventional equipment and forces on a reciprocal basis. Should that become politically conceivable, we might be glad to build on a limitations regime as stipulated in the NATO-Russia Founding Act – even if we disagree on the political meaningfulness of the Founding Act in the current environment.

The same can be said about the five categories of treaty-limited equipment of the CFE Treaty. Yes, in today's world enabling and denying systems play a crucial role. But, as we have seen in the last years, so do helicopters, tanks, armoured combat vehicles, and artillery pieces.

Ladies and Gentlemen.

In a security environment characterised by the paradigm of military strength, CSBM and arms control measures can play a critical stabilizing role. They can help to mitigate the most urgent risk of accidental escalation. They can as well provide for more transparency in order to avoid inadvertent escalation. Over the long run, more ambitious CSBMs and conventional limitations could become a more cost-effective way of dealing with uncertainties and insecurities.
