

Arms Control: Confidence-Building Measures

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Background: Confidence-building measures are an integral part of the Administration's efforts to achieve greater international security and stability. They are designed to reduce the possibility of an accidental confrontation, a miscalculation, or a failure of communication; to inhibit opportunities for surprise attack; and to increase stability in time of calm as well as crisis. They contribute significantly to global security and also complement the US effort to establish a more stable and secure military balance at lower levels of armaments through negotiated arms reductions. We already have in place an extensive set of national and international mechanisms to reduce the risk of accidental or unintended conflict. But the US is committed to doing still more in this vital area.

The US and the Soviet Union have a long history of negotiating agreements on confidence-building measures. Such bilateral measures include the 1963 "Hotline" Agreement establishing a direct communications link between Washington and Moscow, the 1971 "Accidents Measures" Agreement intended to prevent accidental nuclear war, and the 1972 Incidents at Sea Agreement intended to prohibit acts at sea that could increase the risk of war.

In addition, in the 1975 Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe--the Helsinki accords--the US, Canada, and 33 European NATO, neutral, and Warsaw Pact states agreed to multilateral confidence-building measures. The most important of these provides for prior notification of large-scale military maneuvers to reduce the risk of conflict arising through misinterpretation. Notification, information, and inspection measures are also a part of the NATO-Warsaw Pact talks on mutual and balanced force reductions (MBFR) that began in 1973 in Vienna.

Current initiatives: In 1982, President Reagan proposed to the Soviet Union a new set of bilateral confidence-building measures, including prior notification of ballistic missile launches as well as major exercises, and an expanded exchange of information on US and Soviet military forces. These proposals have been tabled at the strategic arms reduction talks (START) and the intermediate-range nuclear forces (INF) negotiations. In addition, in 1983, the US initiated negotiations with the Soviet Union to add a high-speed facsimile capability to the Hotline, to establish a US-USSR Joint Military Communications Link, and to improve diplomatic communications links. These measures would permit more rapid and extensive communications to avoid miscalculation or misinterpretation at all levels--head of state, diplomatic, and military. The US also has proposed an agreement that would be open to all states to facilitate consultations concerning unexplained nuclear incidents. We also support actively the work of the UN Disarmament Commission in exploring further regional applications of confidence-building measures.

Conference on Disarmament in Europe: In January 1984 in Stockholm, the US will begin participation in the 35-nation Conference on Confidence- and Security-Building Measures and Disarmament in Europe (CDE). This new conference is aimed at reducing the risk of surprise attack or miscalculation in Europe and making it harder to use military forces for intimidation. Its objective is the adoption of militarily significant, politically binding, and verifiable confidence-building measures that would be applicable to the whole of Europe. The CDE grows out of a process that began with the 1975 Helsinki accords. The CDE criteria represent a significant advance over the confidence-building measures of the Helsinki accords, which frequently cannot be verified and apply only to a part of the Soviet Union's European territory.

In tandem with the far-reaching reductions in both conventional and nuclear forces proposed by President Reagan, the new confidence-building measures proposed by the US can help reduce even further the risk of war. We hope that the Soviets will join the US and other countries in working together to adopt new confidence-building measures that will achieve greater security and stability for the entire international community.