

Arms Control: Confidence-Building Measures

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Background: Confidence-building measures are agreements designed to increase mutual understanding, knowledge, and communications between East and West. Their overall purpose is to reduce the possibility of conflict--especially nuclear conflict--through accident, miscalculation, or failure of communications. They also may help to inhibit opportunities for surprise attack or political intimidation, thus reinforcing stability in time of calm as well as crisis. Overall, confidence-building measures complement the US effort to establish a more stable and secure military balance at lower levels through negotiated arms reductions.

The US and Soviet Union have a long history of negotiating confidence-building measures. Bilateral US-Soviet agreements include: the establishment in 1963 of the Direct Communications Link ("Hotline") at the head-of-state level between Washington and Moscow; the 1971 "Accidents Measures" Agreement intended to prevent the accidental or unauthorized use of nuclear weapons; the 1972 Incidents at Sea Agreement to prevent provocative acts at sea that could increase the danger of war; and the 1973 Agreement on the Prevention of Nuclear War requiring that each side refrain from acts that could lead to a military confrontation with the other and/or a third country. 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, and voluntary invitation of observers to, military maneuvers involving more than 25,000 troops in the CSCE area.

Reagan Administration efforts: In June 1982 in Berlin, President Reagan stated that he would offer new initiatives to the Soviet Union "...to reinforce the peace and help reduce the possibility of a nuclear conflict." That year in Geneva the US proposed new bilateral confidence-building measures to the Soviets for discussion at the strategic arms reduction talks (START), including: prior notification of all launches of land-based intercontinental ballistic missiles and submarine-launched ballistic missiles; expanded exchange of data on strategic nuclear forces; and advance notice of major military exercises involving strategic forces. The US also proposed an expanded exchange of data on intermediate-range nuclear forces and prior notification of all launches of ballistic missiles of the type under negotiation in the intermediate-range nuclear forces (INF) talks.

In 1983 and 1984, the US made additional suggestions for improving bilateral communications with the Soviet Union and reducing further the risk of accidental war. Among these were proposals to: add a high-speed facsimile capability to the Hotline to provide for the transmission of full texts and graphics that could be vital to

averting or resolving a crisis; establish a Joint Military Communications Link as a government-to-government channel to complement the Hotline; improve diplomatic communications capabilities; facilitate communications in the event of nuclear incidents involving unknown or unauthorized parties; and institute periodic consultations on regional issues at the policy level. Moreover, at the Conference on Security and Confidence-Building Measures and Disarmament in Europe, the US and its allies proposed a package of confidence-building measures that would provide for mandatory invitations to observe various military activities--to include onsite inspection--and improved communications among conference participants.

Speaking to the European Parliament in May 1985, President Reagan reiterated his commitment to practical steps toward reducing East-West tensions--for example, by instituting regular, high-level contacts between Soviet and US military leaders and by exchanging information on defense budgets and plans.

Continuing commitment: US initiatives have met with some success. In July 1984 the US and the Soviet Union agreed to the Hotline upgrade, and an agreement on the transfer of US upgrade equipment to the Soviets was signed in September 1985. In July 1985 the two sides signed a Common Understanding to the "Accidents Measures" Agreement clarifying their obligations to consult in the event of a nuclear incident involving unknown or unauthorized parties, and high-level exchanges on regional issues are taking place.

The Soviet Union, however, has turned down or failed to respond to numerous other proposals by the US and its allies for new confidence-building measures. Instead, the Soviets have made proposals that generally rely on simple declarations of intent and that are unverifiable and not designed to increase stability.

The US believes that despite differences with the Soviet Union, our countries share an interest in reducing the risk of armed conflict that might result from accident, miscalculation, or misunderstanding. The US continues to seek to build upon existing confidence-building measures and to begin a serious dialogue with the Soviet Union on possible new approaches to reduce such risks.