The CSCE Forum on Security and Cooperation: Creating an Arms Control Negotiation for Post-Arms Control Europe

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Introduction

The CSCE Forum for Security Cooperation, as it emerged from the Helsinki Follow-up Meeting, is an uneasy melding of three strains of European security enhancement activity: arms reductions and limitations, known as 'hard' arms control, confidence- and security-building measures (CSBMs), and development of security structures. Each had been pursued along separate, sometimes parallel and sometimes conflicting tracks in post-war, post-détente Europe. During the Cold War, each had held a propaganda value quite distinct from its actual effect on security. Negotiations on conventional weaponry, while less spectacular than the fits and starts of nuclear arms control, plodded along through the 1970s and 1980s, attracting public attention for their financial as well as military implications.

Confidence- and security-building measures, although a poor relation of arms control in public awareness terms, developed steadily: from the Helsinki Final Act's (1975) provisions for notification and voluntary observation of large-scale military activities to agreement on separate CSBM negotiations (Madrid, 1983) and the ground-breaking Stockholm Document that resulted (1986). CSBMs developed at Stockholm included Europe's first mandatory inspections of military sites, paving the way for the Treaty on Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) and subsequent intrusive verification regimes.

Meanwhile, proposals for European security regimes or institutions, many also mooted around the 1975 Helsinki Final Act, lay dormant as Europe's division into two alliances seemed to harden after 1980. The extent of CSCE's involvement in military security remained the Stockholm regime.

Setting the Stage

Ironically, the very developments which unblocked progress in all three strands of multilateral security policy, allowing the CSCE to play a central role in its further development, also lowered the intrinsic value of arms control as a central policy objective. Changed attitudes (and changed governments) emerging from Soviet reform and the collapse of the Communist system set the stage for a trailing-off of military competition.

In 1989, NATO and Warsaw Pact states set up new negotiations on conventional forces in Europe (CFE), replacing the moribund Mutual and

1. The views expressed are those of the author alone and represent neither positions of the Helsinki Commission nor the US Government.
Balanced Force Reduction (MBFR) talks, ongoing in Vienna since 1978. At US insistence, the CFE negotiation was separated from CSCE, set within its framework but legally-binding and excluding CSCE participants not members of NATO or the Warsaw Pact. The near-instantaneous collapse of the Warsaw Pact after the late 1989 revolutions in Central and Eastern Europe was the final impetus for a quick agreement, allowing 1990 conclusion of the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe. This extremely complex set of limits on major conventional weapons systems was viewed as the foundation of future European security, and complemented by the simultaneous expansion of the CSBM regime (in the 1990 Vienna Document) and the Declaration of Twenty-Two states, a statement of friendly relations among NATO and Warsaw Pact countries. The three documents were adopted together at the Paris Summit in November 1990.

With the basis for friendly, open relations apparently well-established, countries with strong historic interest in arms control and disarmament (e.g. Germany) pressed on, and further agreements were concluded in 1992 establishing voluntary limits on troop levels (the Concluding Act of the Negotiation on Personnel Strength of Conventional Armed Forces in Europe, a politically-binding follow-on to CFE) and further expansion of the CSBM regime (the 1992 Vienna Document). However, the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact and subsequently of the Soviet Union itself had made the bloc-to-bloc structure of the CFE treaty (equipment limits were set by alliance, with national levels to be negotiated within each alliance), as well as many assumptions underlying the CFE and CSBM regimes, obsolete. Europe was no longer a staging ground for two well-armed ideologies, and the accidental or inevitable eruption of destructive conventional war leading inexorably to nuclear holocaust no longer loomed over daily life. Thus, maintaining a precise military balance and increasing openness of intentions and capabilities were no longer such immediate objectives as they had been. Rather, events after 1990 would make increasingly clear the localization of conflict among and within CSCE states, and its springs in unresolved social and human rather than geopolitical conflicts.

Already in 1990, new kinds of confidence-building measures were under consideration as a response to changing circumstances. The 1990 Vienna Document contained measures unprecedented in their cooperative nature and their aims — preventing and defusing crises. These were the Mechanism for Consultation and Cooperation on Unusual Military Activities, which gave any state the right to a response to the raising of a security concern with any other; if the response was unsatisfactory, the state could hold a bilateral or full CSCE meeting within 48 hours. A similar measure promoted notification and discussion of hazardous military incidents, and an annual meeting was foreseen to review the implementation of existing CSBMs. These measures were first steps away from purely military confidence-building, toward a wider view of and closer cooperation on security matters.

Recognition that arms control could no longer be a primary means of