The OSCE’s Security Model: Conceptual confusion and competing visions

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The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) will submit the preliminary results of its discussions on a ‘common and comprehensive security model for the 21st century’ to the Lisbon Summit at the end of the year. But even as participating states move discussions from a conceptual to an operational stage, ambiguities and competing political goals continue to plague the emerging model.

The OSCE participating states launched the security model discussions at the 1994 Budapest Ministerial. Russia initiated the project after failing in its efforts to make the CSCE the leading European security organization. The model’s first ambiguity, then, involves the place of the OSCE itself in the security model. Is the OSCE to be the foundation on which the new system will be set up or is it to provide a kind of framework for a new security order based on ‘interlocking’ institutions? The 1992 Helsinki document established the OSCE as a European regional arrangement in the sense of Chapter VIII of the UN Charter. But it is as yet unclear how the OSCE-UN link fits into the model. A similar set of questions regards the OSCE’s place within the emerging European security order, and more generally, how broader-based organizations like the OSCE and the Council of Europe should interact with regional groupings such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the European Union (EU), and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

The next ambiguity relates to the idea of ‘common and comprehensive’ security, which has been the OSCE’s trademark. A common, or cooperative, security regime functions through agreement on common goals, norms and procedures, thus making coercive measures or the use of physical force unnecessary. It implies that security is indivisible, in that a state cannot achieve security at the expense of another, and that it is of a global, or comprehensive nature. This approach stresses that security is not just a military question, but encompasses political, economic, social and environmental factors. It goes even further in establishing a link between domestic and international security. Thus, in the 20 years of the Helsinki Final Act, matters regarding human rights have come to be accepted as areas of legitimate involvement for all states, and not just the state concerned. Essentially, a cooperative security regime allows for constraints on sovereignty and non-intervention.

1. For the decision on the security model, see OSCE Ministerial Council, Budapest, 8-9 December 1995, journal no. 2, decision no. 2.
A security model based on cooperative security brings up two kinds of questions. The first is functional in nature. Norms, institutions and procedures form the backbone of a cooperative security regime. Yet while the participating states agree that the model should be based on this cooperative notion of security, there is still considerable room for disagreement as to its precise meaning in terms of shape and substance. The OSCE has almost completed its evolution from an ad hoc process, rooted in the old confrontation between blocs, toward a structured system of political consultation with its own institutions and mechanisms. But what is the long-term goal for the OSCE? Are its members prepared to provide it with the real teeth necessary for it to engage decisively in preventive diplomacy?

The second question regards the suitability of a cooperative security regime in meeting the challenges of post-Cold War Europe. Three types of challenges have been identified: first, the establishment of a post-Cold War security order which would satisfy Russia's desire for a formalized say in pan-European security matters; second, the break-up of states and political fragmentation; and third, issues regarding national minorities. These differ markedly from the main aim of the original Helsinki process: overcoming the political and military threats stemming from two opposed but relatively stable regimes. How can the OSCE update its cooperative security regime to deal with the new instabilities facing the region? Likewise, will the new model be able to cope with the growing strategic differentiation of the Eurasian area which makes the idea of indivisible security difficult to implement?

The way in which the participating states perceive these conceptual ambiguities sheds light on the model's prospects to meaningfully address the security challenges of the next century. The goals attributed to the model mirror states' perceptions of their security environments, as well as their visions of the evolution of the OSCE and of the European security landscape in general. This paper will identify and analyze the diverging conceptions of the model in light of the ambiguities outlined above (the link between the OSCE and the model, the model's role in defining the new European security order, and the nature of cooperative security). The 'maximalist' Russian model, the spectrum of European models, and the 'minimalist' American model will be discussed.

Russia's vision: A maximum of model, a minimum of cooperation?
Russia's version of the security model can be called maximal because its ultimate goal is to codify a new comprehensive security system based on the 'coordination and allocation of functions,' between organizations. The model
