

"Conventional Arms Control: Can the European experience be of use?"

by Zdzislaw Lachowski
Project Leader of Conventional Arms Control
Stockholm International Peace Research Institute

Introduction

History does not repeat itself, and even if the present sometimes resembles the past it is not identical to it.* North-East Asia and Europe may appear somewhat similar, but current and future developments in North-East Asia will differ from the seemingly comparable events which took place in Europe because of the unique security environment and premises and the changed times and specific features of North-East Asia. Accordingly, when discussing the usability of the European achievements in conventional arms control there are several general caveats. First, the European model is inapplicable in the context of the Korean peninsula. This has been argued numerous times in the literature and is commonly agreed. Second, the apparent similarities between the former East and West Germany and North and South Korea - two pairs of ideologically, politically and militarily divided countries - should not be taken at face value. The specific situation in North-East Asia must be analyzed carefully and measures taken accordingly. Third, non-violent, peaceful transformation, such as that which occurred in Europe (albeit the preferable scenario) is still not certain to transpire in inter-Korean relations. The North Korean communist regime, which is both coping with serious domestic difficulties and seeking to establish a more open dialogue with other countries of the world, may well prove unpredictable and irresponsible. The following analysis is based on the conviction that this will not occur and that arms control measures can be taken to facilitate the process of political and military detente and foster change in the region.

The European experience with conventional arms control is generally and rightly regarded as a success story. In conditions of enmity and distrust, two military groupings entangled in the ideological and political complexities of the cold war managed to negotiate and agree on advanced regimes that helped overcome a lack of confidence in each other's intentions both on the

military and political planes. While the 1973-87 inter-alliance talks on force reductions failed to achieve success, confidence-building measures (CBMs) not only survived but also were developed. Gradually, the way was paved towards enhanced political dialogue and, eventually, substantial and militarily significant arms control measures.

The new risks and challenges of the post-cold war era resulted in a shift of the centre of gravity in the 1990s and the next decade. In the early 1990s European arms control faced a paradoxical situation: it was to be carried out in a security environment different from that for which it was intended. Moreover it was eclipsed by other cooperative security tools - crisis management, conflict prevention and peace operations. Although the Conventional Armed Forces in Europe Treaty (CFE) was designed for the cold war, the parties to it decided that the treaty should be implemented in a slightly modified form rather than renegotiated and exposed to potentially destabilizing political, military and other factors of the post cold-war world. Once the implementation stage was concluded, further steps were taken to adapt the treaty to the new circumstances. Confidence- and security-building measures (CSBMs) were a somewhat different matter. Unlike the new structural arms control measures, CSBMs were already in place and well developed. However, they are not immune to the impact of political change.

The profound transformation of the European security environment, including arms control, was not accompanied by major changes elsewhere. Despite hopes and expectations of a political and military breakthrough on the Korean peninsula following the end of the cold war, the past decade has seen a stalemate for the most part. The impact of the change in world politics on the Korean situation was rather disappointing; the 'historic' visit in June 2000 of the North Korean leader to his South Korean counterpart has thus far proved to be less significant than expected.

This paper reviews the European experience. That experience may suggest possible security approaches which could be taken by the antagonists on the Korean peninsula once they are willing to enter arms control talks.

The premises of arms control in Europe

European conventional arms control has interested policy-makers and scholars since the 1950s, and this was particularly true in the 1980s. However, interest in military-related measures to enhance security and stability dwindled with the end of the bloc confrontation in Europe and the world, as their applicability to new risks and challenges emerging on the continent became a moot point. Nonetheless, arms control was not abandoned, and the search for new measures and approaches has continued.

There were at least six major premises for the arms control dialogue in Europe.

The first was the limited number of actors - two major politico-military blocs (the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, NATO, and the Warsaw Treaty Organization, WTO) with antagonistic ideologies and political systems but nonetheless sharing an interest in avoiding serious military conflict. An important role was also played by a third party - the group of the European neutral and non-aligned countries.

The second was the fairly high degree of stability of the European security system which accompanied the high levels of tension and confrontation in East-West relations.

The third element was the relatively recent nature of the antagonism between the European actors. There was no deep-seated historical ideological hostility to hinder dialogue between the adversaries. The successive crises of the 1960s (Berlin, Cuba, Czechoslovakia) brought home to the Western and Eastern leaders the necessity to elaborate measures to prevent war between the East and the West. The 1969 NATO Harmel Report, the settlement of certain aspects of the German question and the German Ostpolitik, stressing the renunciation of use of force at the threshold of the 1960s and the 1970s, each in its own way cleared the path to inter-bloc detente and dialogue.

The fourth premise was that both sides wanted to avoid inadvertent major military conflict or nuclear annihilation. The configuration of massive armaments - conventional and nuclear - especially in Central Europe, called for some measure of mutual reassurance in the absence of disarmament or arms control.

The fifth factor was the creation of a political framework, the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE), for the elaboration, negotiation and review of implementation.

The sixth factor was the civilizational and cultural affinity of the states concerned - their shared values and goals were conducive to mutual understanding, albeit not always in equal measure and often restrained for ideological and political reasons.

A historical overview

Ready-made blueprints or theories could not be applied to the issue of arms control in Europe. Its evolution proceeded in accordance with the political, military, socio-economic, cultural and other needs and interests of the region. At least five stages can be distinguished in the history of European arms control.

1. The origins. In the post-World War II period, the European powers tried to inject confidence into their mutual relations, especially in the face of the dangerous, developing East-West bloc confrontation. Soviet disarmament propaganda, which aimed to achieve ideological and political gains rather than true arms reductions, did not impress the West. At the height of the cold war, with its excessively militant strategies and postures, there was little room for institutionalized military-related measures to enhance mutual confidence and security. Nevertheless, or maybe because of it, in the mid-1950s the 'Geneva spirit' of detente developed between the two superpowers and the blocs led by them. While the potentially valuable initiatives on Open Skies, observers at strategic sites or nuclear-weapon-free zones fell victim to the deep distrust and divergent outlooks of the antagonists - the Soviet broad 'political-declaratory' versus the Western 'military-technical' approach - they set a precedent for a multilateral East-West forum to exchange views on CBMs. The first period of detente ended with the Cuban and Berlin crises in the early 1960s.

2. The next stage occurred with the adoption of the first generation of CBMs. The 1973-75 Helsinki CSCE was not focused primarily on CBMs. Indeed, seen from today's vantage point, the Helsinki CBMs were very modest. It was

the Mutual Balance Force Reduction (MBFR) negotiation and its 'associated measures' that were designed to address the main issues of security in relations between the two blocs. For NATO, the inclusion of CBMs in the CSCE package was an additional test of the WTO's goodwill. The idea of CBMs was reluctantly accepted by the Soviet Union, which wanted CBMs to follow, not precede, troop and armament reductions. In addition, the USSR, enjoying supremacy in conventional forces in Europe, was not eager to accept any constraints.

The record of CBM implementation in 1975-85 was generally disappointing. Numerous Soviet violations of the modest CBM commitments were legitimately suspected. Information provided by the WTO members was of little use because it was incomplete and unclear, and their invitations to observe military activities all but routinely ignored the NATO states. The crisis in Poland in 1980-81 demonstrated that non-obligatory CBMs could be manipulated to force a state to act in a certain manner or to threaten it with military intervention. The acrimonious debates at the CSCE follow-up conferences in Belgrade (1977-78) and Madrid (1980-83) illustrated the divergent views of the blocs regarding the role that they should play and demonstrated that the confidence-building process, in its Helsinki-created form, was ineffective.

3. At the 1984-86 Stockholm Conference a more advanced generation of CBMs - the so-called CSBMs, was elaborated. In the face of political stalemate and in the wake of the new Soviet doctrine of glasnost, the states which signed the 1986 Stockholm Document agreed to adopt measures that would meet four major criteria: (a) to be politically binding; (b) to be militarily significant; (c) to be verifiable, when possible; and (d) to extend from the Atlantic to the Urals.

4. The CSBM package was further expanded in the successive Vienna Documents. This expansion paralleled a structural arms control endeavour - the negotiation and signing of the 1990 CFE Treaty, which established a balance of forces between NATO and the WTO,

The breakdown of the East-West bloc system and the dissolution of the Soviet Union heralded changes in the approach to military security processes in Europe. Participants at the 1992 CSCE Helsinki Summit created a Forum for Security Co-operation, a single multilateral

arms control body for European states, with the aim of 'establishing among themselves new security relations based on co-operative and common approaches to security'. All the subsequent changes, especially those regarding communications, transparency and consultation, earned the measures the name 'third generation-CSBMs '.

5. A new chapter in the history of European arms control opened with the most recent accords: the 1999 adapted CFE Treaty and the Vienna Document 1999. The Agreement on Adaptation of the CFE Treaty further reduces the levels of heavy armaments in Europe and is open to new parties. It succeeded in removing the bloc straitjacket from the treaty, freeing it to adjust to the new security environment in Europe. Its entry into force remains stalled by Russia's non-compliance in the context of the Chechnya conflict.

The success of the revised Vienna Document consists of the adoption of a new chapter, which envisages complementing the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) CSBMs with voluntary political and legally binding measures tailored to regional needs. This success is qualified: it is the beginning of the road rather than the culmination of efforts by the participating states,

Arms control in the post-cold war period

The role and place of European arms control has changed since 1989: it is less conspicuous and seems less useful in the face of new challenges and threats. Its evolution in the qualitatively changed security environment took place on three general levels: in the pan-European context, below the European (regional, sub-regional, bilateral) level, and through arrangements that have a confidence- and security building effect.

The post cold-war period has witnessed quantitative rather than qualitative changes Structural arms control, for example, still focuses on the same categories of weaponry. The successive versions of the Vienna Document (1990, 1992, 1994 and 1999) were based on the achievements of the former era, building on preceding accords. For all its commitments and appeals that the new risks and challenges, especially those related to sub-regional and intra-state crises and conflicts, should be urgently addressed, the OSCE community has stuck to old

patterns and directions, which has resulted in a host of incrementally growing obligations, procedures and mechanisms as well as the cost of implementing and sustaining them. States have been unable to quickly conceptualize change and translate it into more appropriate approaches to security-building. In fact the main threats to international security since the end of the cold war have been generated by situations within states: conflicts stemming from ethnic, religious, historical and cultural differences. The situation which arms control was intended to avoid - preparations for a sudden, unexpected mass-scale attack launched by one state (or military bloc) against another - no longer exists.

The implementation of international agreements is a measure of their relevance and viability. The history of compliance with the CSBM documents is replete with cases of states not conforming to the provisions of the Vienna Document. Minor non-compliance issues are usually of a non-political character and stem from various technical or financial causes or are related to inexperience. This is most true of some of the former Soviet republics, which have limited experience of complex arms control procedures and scant resources to meet all the requirements of compliance. They have generally complied with verification measures, while the provision of various kinds of information (e.g., on military activities, defense planning and budgets) has been less forthcoming. Thus far, the CSBM operation has for the most part taken place in 'fair-weather' conditions, that is, in peacetime. Other, 'compliant' participants have therefore adopted fairly liberal attitudes and been willing to render assistance to their less experienced partners. However, serious cases of non-compliance with the arms control agreements have also occurred during major domestic and international crises. Both conflicts in Chechnya in 1994-95 and 1999 and the Kosovo intervention in 1999 demonstrated the limitations of arms control 'inter arma'.

The centre of gravity of arms control in Europe is now shifting towards the regions from which the main challenges to peace and stability flow. The Balkan crises, which started in the early 1990s, showed both the inadequacy of traditional arms control and CSBMs and the need for new solutions. In the aftermath of the Bosnian tragedy, the 1995 Dayton Agreement instituted

(sub)regional arms control measures and CSBMs for the entities of Bosnia and Herzegovina, It is to be hoped that the network of various regional arms control-related accords there (including measures under the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe) will inject enough stability and security into the Balkans to make the peace process in the region irreversible.

Arrangements in other regions of Europe are also promising. In the past decade there have been more than 20 initiatives by OSCE states to supplement their Vienna Document obligations with additional bilateral commitments. These endeavours include Open Skies arrangements, numerous confidence-building agreements between Balkan states, especially with regard to border areas, the Baltic Sea states' bilateral CSBM arrangements, and unilateral initiatives.

The third strain of military security-building solutions is the so-called norm- and standard-setting measures, which encompass the Code of Conduct on Politico-Military Aspects of Security, the Global Exchange of Military Information (GEMI), the principles governing conventional arms transfers and non-proliferation and stabilizing measures for localized crisis situations, and the recent OSCE Document on Small Arms and Light Weapons. The Code of Conduct is of particular interest. It formulates a kind of solidarity rule with a state that has fallen victim to the threat or use of force. Currently, its most relevant provisions are those related to the use of force for domestic security. They were invoked in both the Chechen and Kosovo crises. The code has not been utilized to its full extent and further elaboration of its provisions would remove the vagueness about its relevant commitments and strengthen the enforcement of compliance.

European arms control and external regional contexts

European arms control was tailored to the specific context of a divided Europe. The experience of some non-European regions seems to prove its exclusivity rather than universality. The results of various attempts to import it into other politico-military contexts have been mixed. In the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) region and in Central Asia and Latin America military CBMs have been agreed upon as components of packages of broader confidence-enhancing steps and have been tested by the political and military authorities.

China, Russia and three Central Asian states have even reached a 'hard' arms control agreement. In other conflict-ridden parts of the world such activities have remained at the level of discussions or theoretical concepts proposed by policy analysts. Nonetheless, outside Europe confidence-building may be successfully pursued and function as the first step towards a more advanced arms control regime.

If it is assumed that the historical premises for arms control in Europe (a limited number of actors, a high level of stability, no long-standing deep antagonisms, fear of inadvertent nuclear catastrophe, an institutional framework and affinity of values), are essential conditions for applying the measures outside the OSCE area, their applicability would be out of the question. It is a truism that each region has its own political, social, economic and military characteristics as well as specific peculiarities which should be taken into account when attempting to strengthen confidence among states.

However, both perception and experience suggest that once states are ready to believe that the benefits of peaceful relations outweigh the costs of confrontation and conflict among them, there is a starting point for a security-building process. Some of the OSCE experience could be of relevance. In seeking such a regime, several basic premises ought to be taken into account:

1. It is important that the beneficiaries of future CBMs understand their capabilities and limitations. Arms control is not a cure-all for international security problems. It is part of a wider cooperative process of reconfiguring interstate relations, but does not create such a process.

2. Stability and predictability in the region in question are preconditions for confidence and security building. This can only be achieved against a broader background of political, economic and social relations and ties in the area of application. Confidence is a 'fair-weather' feature and cannot exist in a state of crisis or conflict.

3. Convergence of the norms and values pursued by the parties to an agreement is desirable. It is a challenge to ensure that the obligations undertaken are respected. In nondemocratic regimes decisions and pledges can be

made easily, but they are just as soon abandoned. Democracies require protracted processes of adopting obligations, but when an essential decision has been made it is more difficult to retreat from it.

4. Arms control measures are not valuable per se; they serve broader objectives. It is advisable that strong overarching goal(s) be shared by parties in their pursuit of better mutual relations, whether it is to avert war or build durable peace. In the northern hemisphere the goal is cooperative security. Elsewhere, advanced cooperative undertakings are not yet in place. Instead armed forces are seen as the main tool for enhancing state security, and the interests and perceptions of neighbouring countries are rarely taken into account by states. Moreover, such tenets as the renunciation of violence, non-violation of borders and non-intervention are not addressed in earnest in other regions. In order to implement arms control in a non-European context, a comprehensive political framework within which such measures could be elaborated, reviewed and/or verified is needed, supported by broad political commitments and principles.

5. Political culture is also significant. Countries that are at different stages of state formation, with various political cultures and outlooks, risk mutual misunderstanding and misconceptions. Some observers point especially to the psychological aspect of launching a confidence- and security-building process; if poorly timed, the introduction of CBMs may be counterproductive or simply fail.

6. Sub-regional and bilateral solutions appear to hold greater promise for the pursuit of confidence at the early stages of an arms control process than the introduction of a comprehensive regime as an instant 'package solution'. The process must be a well considered, well-prepared, well-timed, earnestly executed incremental exercise rather than a ready-made blueprint.

As noted above, the European accomplishments in the conventional arms control field remain unique, both in the scope and complexity of the adopted measures. The situation on the Korean peninsula is roughly reminiscent of the cold war circumstances of the late 1960s, on the eve of political and military detente, when mutual misperceptions, profound distrust and fears prevailed.

This does not necessarily mean that only measures like those used in Europe in the 1960s and 1970s are applicable. Both Korean states are in the rather privileged position of being able to benefit from Europe's structural and operational arms control achievements. The menu of measures is at their disposal, from political declaratory and technical military CBMs and CSBMs through other stability enhancing measures to 'hard' arms control arrangements. The main challenge is when, how, in what context (bilateral, sub-regional), at what pace and to what degree they are willing to make use of these measures in their security context.

In the light of these general premises, the following factors could be taken into account while pursuing an arms control dialogue:

1. Gradualism, or a step-by-step approach. This strategy was successfully employed in the European process. It started from a few crude measures, from which the edifice of confidence- and security-building measures and arms control on the continent was then incrementally built and developed over a period of years.

2. Selectiveness, Pursuing an all-encompassing approach should be avoided because this creates the risk of total collapse in the event of a major disagreement or difference over one element of the whole. Links among various areas of negotiation can easily hamper or hamstring progress in arms control talks. Therefore it is advisable to separate the negotiations on a range of issues. As a result of such an approach, the deadlocked MBFR talks could not impair the C(S)BM dialogue in the 1970s and the 1980s.

3. This does not prevent the parties from conducting parallel dialogues on both military and non-military security issues. The goal is to avoid a situation in which the entire security-building process might easily become hostage or fall victim to lack of progress in the military sphere.

4. Flexibility. In the light of the European East-West talks, in the early stages it is advisable not to emphasize stringent legal agreements. Politically binding accords are preferable. Some unilateral gestures are allowable, but should be made with caution.

5. Institutional framework. Such a forum should be provided with a mandate (aim, principles, modalities, zone of application, etc.) and an agenda. This will help ensure regular and continuous contact and communication and, later, enable verification and improvement of implementation. Such a role was and is played by the CSCE/OSCE and its arms control-related bodies. In the early 1980s, the arms control forums additionally provided the major powers with a venue for dialogue during the political deadlock over NATO's dual-track policy.

6. Mutual advantage should be sought and political will sustained rather than pursuing the logic of zero-sum games and negative rhetoric. Sending positive signals is of essential importance for the political climate of negotiations and dialogue. In addition to military significant measures, politically symbolic and declaratory measures - such as non-use of force and reduced military spending - can be useful.

7. The participation of a third party/parties is advisable. Such an element can play the brokering role, help break deadlocks and suggest new solutions. The European neutral and non-aligned countries played a positive role in the bloc negotiations, especially in overcoming stalemates. In the North-East Asian context, the engagement of the major powers concerned - China, Japan, Russia and the USA - should be sustained provided that they are not played off against either Korean state. Additionally, placing the future inter-Korean regime in a broader regional context would enhance its chances of survival.

8. Arms control is a continuing process. Once started it cannot merely be stopped at some stage and declared complete. Even in the most advanced regime, the dynamism of international relations calls for its cultivation and further development.

9. The European record far exceeds what has so far been agreed and put into effect. Ideas such as the concepts of thinned-out troop zones adjacent to the line of divide or non-offensive defense as elaborated in the 1980s as well as naval measures could be of use in the search for an innovative and creative approach in North-East Asia.

Conclusion

Europe and the Korean peninsula are in an asymmetrical situation today. Having accomplished most of its military security job, conventional arms control in Europe is no longer of the utmost urgency. In contrast, the Korean peninsula confronts the task of building a basic security arrangement including, hopefully, a conventional arms control component.

Nevertheless, the answer to the question contained in the title of this paper - Can the European experience be of use? - should be 'yes'. The final shape and content of conventional arms control on the Korean peninsula will be determined by its regional actors. Europe's arms control history provides both an impressive range of measures and mechanisms for use and at the same time, a caution against various risks and pitfalls that can be avoided. Moreover, the European experience should not be considered only in the context of the cold war but should also be seen in its entirety. The existing record of conventional arms control demonstrates that it can help 'demilitarize' political relations, eliminate the risk of irrational and disproportionate responses, and provide means for addressing crisis situations. The success of arms control is measured by its diminishing role as a 'militarized' tool and its enhanced status as a political instrument of cooperative relations.

The record of OSCE accomplishments is not perfect and work remains to be done. There is a need to ensure compliance, verify obligations and improve the response to new challenges and perils. In this sense, the European lesson can be of significant value to the North-East Asian region. Currently, European arms control is undergoing a significant evolution. Four general tendencies are discernible. First, it is turning from 'hard', structural (that is, limitation and reduction) steps towards 'soft', less stringent arrangements made in a cooperative spirit: CSBMs, risk reduction, transparency and other stability enhancing measures. Second, there is increased regionalization of European arms control. Third, attempts are being made to employ CSBMs in 'all-weather', domestic-related missions; here it appears that lack of political will, not insufficient mechanisms, is what prevents states from making progress. Fourth, the impact of arms control measures is being enhanced by combining them with other soft security steps and institutions under an international umbrella, as is being

done within the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe. It is hoped that the resulting synergy will enhance the chances for peace and stability in volatile sub-regions and in Europe as a whole. All these trends are worth careful analysis by states in the North-East Asian region.

* The 19th-century philosopher Karl Marx even observed that when history repeats itself the result is a farce.