



The OSCE Security Concept

By M. Merrick Yamamoto

Executive Summary

The OSCE security concept is a theoretical and operational framework based on the idea that international and domestic security depend on principles guiding three areas: how States deal with each other and resolve problems; the protection and promotion of individual rights within States; and the processes to develop, implement, and advance agreements regarding the principles. The OSCE security concept is based on principles that OSCE States began to develop in 1975 with the Helsinki Final Act, and continued to develop over the next decades and into the 21st century.

This brief identifies and articulates the OSCE security principles by analyzing a series of official documents adopted by the OSCE States from 1975 to 2001. The concept was described in greater length in the CISSM monograph, *OSCE Principles in Practice*, which also tested the practical application of the principles in three case studies. The monograph then extended the research on OSCE principles to express an OSCE security concept.

As a concept based on principles developed by democratic States, the OSCE security concept has significant policy implications. One highlighted in this brief is that international security cannot be achieved without the protection and promotion of individual rights and freedoms.

Introduction

The OSCE security concept was a security framework based on the idea that security depends on principles guiding three areas: how States deal with each other and resolve problems; the protection and promotion of individual rights within States; and the processes to develop, implement, and advance agreements regarding the principles.¹ The OSCE security concept was

¹ In 2001, the OSCE (the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe), was an international organization comprised of more than fifty democratic countries. The OSCE security concept was the approach to security

based on principles that the OSCE States began to develop in 1975 with the Helsinki Final Act, and continued to develop over the next decades and into the 21st century.²

The OSCE security concept can be summarized as below, and expressed in ten principles, divided into three groups:

Security depends on the development and implementation of principles guiding three areas: how States deal with each other and resolve problems; the protection and promotion of individual rights within States; and the processes and mechanisms to review and advance values, principles, and commitments.

The OSCE Security Concept Principles, 2001 Summary	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Respect for the sovereign rights of States, with agreed-upon limits on sovereign rights. 2. Mutual State involvement, accountability, and assistance regarding OSCE commitments. 3. A comprehensive, cooperative, and common security approach. 4. The prevention of security threats, and the use of peaceful means to reduce tensions and resolve disputes and conflicts. 	<p>Group I: Principles Guiding Relations Between OSCE States</p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. State responsibility to ensure respect for individual rights through democracy, the rule of law, and the market economy. 6. Rights and responsibilities pertaining to national minorities. 7. Respect for the equal rights of all, and a climate of respect. 	<p>Group II: Principles Guiding the Protection and Promotion of Individual Rights within States</p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8. Good faith, full, equal, and continuous efforts to implement OSCE principles and commitments. 9. The development and advancement of shared values. 10. Processes and mechanisms. 	<p>Group III: Principles Guiding Implementation, Review, and Development Processes</p>

Group I: Principles Guiding Relations Between OSCE States

The first component of the OSCE security concept consisted of principles guiding relations between OSCE States; that is, their international relations. These principles were designed to provide security by avoiding conflict between OSCE States, reducing tensions between them,

developed by these countries, a summation of the efforts of nearly all of the world’s democracies to identify and implement the standards and principles needed to achieve security, peace, and freedom.

² The OSCE principles were extracted from a series of documents adopted by the OSCE States from 1975 to 2001.

and strengthening their relations. Group I principles addressed four areas: respect for the sovereign rights of States, with agreed-upon limits on these rights; mutual State involvement, accountability, and assistance regarding OSCE commitments; a comprehensive, cooperative, and common security approach; and the use of peaceful and preventive methods to prevent and reduce tensions and resolve disputes and conflicts.

1. Respect for the sovereign rights of States, with agreed-upon limits on sovereign rights. States would respect the rights and responsibilities of State sovereignty, and agreed-upon limits to those rights. Sovereign rights included equality under international law (juridical equality); the rights of territorial integrity; and the right to external and internal political independence, in accordance with international law and the spirit of the Helsinki Final Act. The States accepted limitations on their sovereignty: three specific agreements were that the States' form of government would be liberal democracy; respect for individual rights and fundamental freedoms were matters of direct and legitimate concern to all OSCE States; and the economic system of the OSCE States would be the market economy, and adherence to the rules involved.

2. Mutual State involvement, accountability, and assistance regarding OSCE commitments. The States would be mutually involved with and accountable to each other regarding the implementation of their OSCE commitments, and assist each other in this implementation. The States fulfilled this commitment primarily through the OSCE, using two methods in particular. One method was the "Helsinki process," which was the periodic review of how well the States were implementing their commitments, and the process of further developing the principles and commitments. A second method was through organizational structures established to assist the participating States in fulfilling their OSCE commitments. An example was the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), which the States established to strengthen and defend the liberal democratic form of government, and to help the new democracies in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union after the end of the Cold War.

3. A comprehensive, cooperative, and common security approach. The States would use a "comprehensive, cooperative, and common" approach to security.

Comprehensive security was a broad approach that encompassed all areas that could cause tensions, disputes, or conflicts between States, or affect their security. These areas included such threats as military attack, weapons of mass destruction, weapons proliferation, ethnic conflict, international crime, terrorism, transnational diseases, environmental degradation, unregulated population flows, and human rights violations. The States adopted the comprehensive security approach so that they would be able to address all issues that caused tensions between them, and because the different aspects of security were interrelated.

The OSCE generally used three categories or “dimensions” to express their comprehensive security approach: the political-military; economic, scientific/technological, and environmental; and human rights aspects (the “human dimension”).³ The three dimensions of security follow.

The Three Dimensions of Comprehensive Security		
I. The Political-Military Dimension	II. The Economic, Scientific & Technological, and Environmental Dimension	III. The Human Dimension: Individual Rights, Democracy, and the Rule of Law

Cooperative security was an approach that sought to achieve security *with* other States and not *against* them, and recognized that States have common interests and face common threats. Cooperative security was required because many threats can only be met by working together, and since problems in one State can affect others, States should cooperate to prevent crises and reduce the risk of existing crises from worsening. Furthermore, since cooperation can benefit all States, it is in their best interest. The vast majority of people in any country share common interests in economic prosperity and the ability to exercise rights and freedoms, and cooperative security can promote those interests.

Common security was an approach that viewed the security of States as “indivisible” or “linked,” and thus needed to be pursued in common with other States. The common security approach recognized the need of each State for security, that the level of security in each State affects the security of other countries, and that all States need to contribute to overall security. A common security goal was equal security for all OSCE States, and since insecurity in one State or region decreases the security of other countries, States would not strengthen their security at the expense of the security of other States. All States had the responsibility to contribute to overall security, and to promote fundamental rights and the well-being of all peoples.

The interrelation of the comprehensive, cooperative, and common approaches to security. The three elements of the States’ comprehensive, cooperative, and common security approach were interrelated and mutually reinforcing. For example, promoting cooperation in security matters can also strengthen the implementation of common security.

4. The prevention of security threats, and the use of peaceful means to reduce tensions and resolve disputes and conflicts. States would take actions to prevent security threats from arising, and use peaceful means to resolve existing problems. This principle was based on the belief that

³ The “human dimension” consisted of those commitments made by the OSCE States to ensure full respect for individual rights and fundamental freedoms; abide by the rule of law; promote the principles of democracy; and build, strengthen, and protect democratic institutions. (Note that the OSCE has used different constructs to express its comprehensive security concept, and that the concept can be used to organize the tools of national strategy.)

preventing security threats, and using peaceful means to resolve any that did arise, provided a better and more cost-effective outcome for all concerned.

The peaceful settlement of disputes was considered an essential complement to the duty of States to refrain from the threat or use of force, and also essential for international peace and security. Preventive means included such methods as mediation, fact-finding missions, peacekeeping, openness and predictability, military constraints, confidence-building measures, arms control, and the control of dangerous technologies. States would not use certain methods to resolve threats, such as force or the threat of force.

In regard to disputes and conflicts, the States would endeavor in good faith and a spirit of cooperation to reach a rapid and equitable solution on the basis of international law, and act in a manner that would not endanger international peace, security, and justice. The States, whether or not parties to a dispute among them, would refrain from any action that might aggravate a situation and thereby make a peaceful settlement more difficult.

Group II: Principles Guiding the Protection and Promotion of Individual Rights within States.

The second component of the OSCE security concept consisted of principles guiding the protection and promotion of individual rights and freedoms within States.⁴ The principles addressed three areas: government responsibility to establish and maintain the conditions in which all members of the State could exercise their rights and freedoms: the means to be used were democracy, the rule of law, and the market economy; rights and responsibilities pertaining to national minorities; and the requirement for respect among all parties. Group II principles were designed to protect individual rights and freedoms, and thereby increase both national and international security.

The principles were based on the premise that all people have individual rights and freedoms that are inalienable and derive from the inherent dignity of the human person. These rights and freedoms are the birthright of all human beings, and are essential for their free and full development. The individual is the primary focus of governments, and the protection and promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms is the first responsibility of governments.

Group II principles were intended to increase security by providing the conditions in which all members of the State could fully exercise their rights and freedoms, and thus reduce the tensions and conflicts within and between States that can result from the nonrespect of rights. In this view, violating individual rights within a State causes tensions that can lead to instability and conflict, which in turn can cause instability in other States, and threaten international security. The core of Group II principles in terms of security is that respect for individual rights is inherently stabilizing, and thereby contributes to both national and international security. Respect

⁴ The terms “individual rights” and “human rights” are generally used interchangeably.

for human rights constitutes one of the foundations of international order, freedom, justice, and peace, and the protection and promotion of rights through democracy and the rule of law is required for lasting security.

5. State responsibility to ensure respect for individual rights through democracy, the rule of law, and the market economy. States had the responsibility to establish and maintain the conditions in which all members of the State are able to exercise their individual rights and freedoms: the means to be used would be a democratic political framework, a rule of law based on human rights, and the market economy (economic liberty). The States considered this political framework as the only system able to effectively guarantee full respect for individual rights and freedoms, equal rights and status for all citizens, the free pursuit of legitimate interests and aspirations, political pluralism, and restraints on the abuse of government power. As such, democracy would be the OSCE States' only system of government.

A democratic form of government. A democratic form of government was the first means governments would use to protect and promote individual rights. A democratic government included a representative form of government with characteristics that included the following:

- the executive is accountable to the elected legislature or the electorate;
- a clear separation is maintained between the State and political parties—in particular, political parties are not merged with the State; and
- periodic, free, and fair elections are held for which individuals and groups have the right to freely establish political parties, organizations can compete with each other on a basis of equal treatment before the law and the authorities, and governmental and nongovernmental observers are present for national elections. The will of the people, expressed through periodic free and fair elections, is the basis of government legitimacy and authority.

The rule of law. The rule of law was the second means governments would use to protect and promote individual rights. The rule of law included that judges are independent and the judicial services operate impartially; military forces and the police are under the control of, and accountable to, civil authorities; and government and public authorities comply with their constitutions and are not above the law. The rule of law would be based on respect for individual rights: “The rule of law does not mean merely a formal legality which assures regularity and consistency in the achievement and enforcement of democratic order, but justice based on the recognition and full acceptance of the supreme value of the human personality and guaranteed by institutions providing a framework for its fullest expression.”⁵

The market economy. The market economy (economic liberty) was the third means governments would use to protect and promote individual rights. All individuals have the right to exercise individual enterprise, and to own property alone or in association with others. Economic freedom is essential to the effective functioning of markets and economies, and fosters economic progress. The market economy would be the States' only economic system, and States would accept the rules involved in the international economic and financial system.

⁵ Copenhagen Document, 1990, 3.

The primacy of individual rights. The States did not view democracy, the rule of law, and the market economy as ends in themselves, but as means to support and enforce respect for human rights. The rule of law protects and enforces respect for rights and freedoms, and democratic institutions support individual rights through such means as safeguarding freedom of expression, limiting governments, ensuring respect for all groups in society, and providing equality of opportunity for each person.

Individual rights, democracy, the rule of law, and the market economy as interdependent and mutually reinforcing. The States viewed human rights, democracy, the rule of law, and the market economy as interrelated and mutually reinforcing. Respect for the human person is the foundation of democracy and the rule of law, democracy is an inherent element of the rule of law, and the rule of law must be based on the recognition of the value of the individual and the individual's rights. The market economy is necessary for economic growth, and democratic institutions foster economic progress: the free will of the individual, exercised in democracy and protected by the rule of law, is the basis for sustainable prosperity.

6. Rights and responsibilities pertaining to national minorities. Governments and minorities each had responsibilities pertaining to national minorities.⁶ The fulfilment of these responsibilities can increase security by ensuring that minorities are able to fully exercise their rights, and thus reduce the tensions that can arise from minority issues. Respect for the rights of persons belonging to minorities is essential for stability and peace, for tensions can arise from such threats to security as ethnic conflict, aggressive nationalism, xenophobia, and intolerance.⁷

Government responsibilities. Government responsibilities included ensuring the right of national minorities to equality under the law; to participate fully in public affairs; and to develop their identity, though not at the expense of other groups.

— *Equality under the law.* Governments had the responsibility to ensure equal protection and nondiscrimination for all individuals, regardless of any group that a person may belong to.

⁶ The States did not define a national minority, but stated that to belong to one was a matter of “individual choice” and that “no disadvantage may arise from the exercise of such choice”—see the Copenhagen Document, 1990, 18. By emphasizing that each person had the right to decide whether or not to belong to a national minority, the States in effect agreed not to impose a definition. The OSCE stressed individuals rather than groups on the basis that all groups consist of individuals acting in community, and therefore, OSCE documents usually referred to “persons belonging to national minorities” rather than to “national minorities.” Many democratic States rejected the idea of “group rights” because of the State’s focus on the individual, and because of the potential for groups to dominate individuals. However, some countries recognized certain group rights, such as the right to education to a particular level in a group’s mother tongue.

⁷ The realization of the security aspects of minorities came as a result of the many wars in Europe during the 20th century, in which tensions relating to minorities were a major cause of conflict. Max van der Stoep addressed this point as follows: “On the basis of our sad European history during which minorities have been subjected to all manner of denial of rights, abuse, and even attempted extermination, we have...finally understood that persons belonging to minorities must not only be protected, but also supported.” See Max van der Stoep, address, “The Role and Importance of Integrating Diversity,” Oct. 18, 1998.

Where necessary, States would adopt special measures to ensure that persons belonging to national minorities had full equality with other citizens in exercising their rights and freedoms.

— *Minority participation in public affairs.* Governments had the responsibility to ensure that minorities could participate fully in public affairs, to include making special provisions as necessary.⁸

— *The development of identity.* Governments had the responsibility to ensure that persons belonging to national minorities were able to exercise their right to freely express, preserve, and develop their ethnic, cultural, linguistic, or religious identity. Any government measures to protect the identity of national minorities, and create the conditions in which they could promote their identities, would be in accordance with the principles of equality and nondiscrimination with respect to the other citizens. Limits to the freedom to develop and promote identity included that no action could be illegal; imperil the safety of others; conflict with public order, public health, national security, or morals; or infringe on the freedoms or rights of others.

Minority responsibilities. Minority responsibilities included participating in public affairs; integrating into the wider society to a certain degree, particularly by learning the State language or languages; and maintaining responsible behavior in general. No minority right could be interpreted as implying the right to take any action in contravention of international law; the Helsinki Final Act, including the principle of the territorial integrity of States; or the purposes and principles of the UN Charter.

The role of democracy. The States declared that questions relating to national minorities could only be satisfactorily resolved in a democratic political framework based on the rule of law, with a functioning independent judiciary. Democracy, the rule of law, and full respect for human rights are the best guarantees for a positive situation for minorities.

7. Respect for the equal rights of all, and a climate of respect. Governments had the responsibility to promote a climate of respect, and all individuals and groups had the responsibility to respect all others and their equal rights. The involvement of the wider society is essential in promoting respect and balancing competing interests—nongovernmental organizations such as political parties, trade unions, human rights organizations, and religious groups have important roles in promoting respect, diversity, and the resolution of questions relating to national minorities.

⁸ To help States achieve minority participation in government, a panel of international experts made recommendations on ways to facilitate this involvement, *The Lund Recommendations on the Effective Participation of National Minorities in Public Life*. The *Recommendations* outlined ways that States can include minorities in public life while enabling them to maintain their own identity and characteristics, and thereby promote good governance and the integrity of the State. Recommendations included such measures as special provisions for decentralization, autonomy, minority representation, and mechanisms for dialogue. These kinds of ways can enable minorities to maintain their identity while including them in the overall life of the State, and to have a greater say over decisions that affect them, without breaking up States.

Respect is necessary among individuals and groups, whether groups are based on race, ethnicity, religion, or however else formed. The States recognized the contributions of culture to security, and the contributions of minorities to society, and would foster these contributions.

Group III: Principles Guiding Implementation, Review, and Development Processes.

The third component of the OSCE security concept consisted of principles guiding the processes and mechanisms States would use to develop, interpret, and apply OSCE principles, standards, and commitments; review their implementation; advance them further; and respond to State requirements. The States intended for Group III principles to increase security by enabling the States to address current and future security threats and concerns; be responsive to new requirements; and progress towards greater security, stronger relations, and increased respect for individual rights. Group III principles addressed three areas: good faith, full, equal, and continuous efforts to implement OSCE principles and commitments; the development and advancement of shared values; and processes and mechanisms.

8. Good faith, full, equal, and continuous efforts to implement OSCE principles and commitments. States would apply all OSCE principles equally and unreservedly, and would interpret all principles in light of all of the others, and in light of the OSCE *acquis* (the body of OSCE commitments).⁹ The principles were intended to help States achieve balanced progress towards political, military, economic, and human rights goals. Progress towards shared objectives requires the active involvement and good faith efforts of all parties—governments, groups, organizations, and individuals—to make continuous efforts to implement OSCE principles and commitments.

The full implementation of OSCE commitments takes time and continued effort by all parties. States are not perfect and may not always live up to all of their OSCE commitments, but failing to meet standards meant continuing to try.

9. The development and advancement of shared values. States would identify and build on shared values. States would conduct their international relations based on the shared values of respect for individual rights and freedoms, democracy, the rule of law, and the market economy. Shared values guide the relationship between the State and the people who comprise the State: the States' common aims included respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the rights of persons belonging to national minorities; democracy; the rule of law; and economic liberty. Shared values and norms develop over time, and the advancement of human rights, democracy, and the rule of law is essential to strengthening peace and security.

10. Processes and mechanisms. Processes and mechanisms are needed to develop standards and commitments, review their implementation, and respond to State requirements. These processes

⁹ New standards and commitments were usually expressed in OSCE documents, and thus became part of the *acquis*.

need to be flexible and responsive to State needs, concerns, and situations. Agreed-upon processes and mechanisms are necessary to achieve and maintain international security.

Summary

The OSCE security concept can be summarized as below, and expressed in ten principles, divided into three groups:

Security depends on the development and implementation of principles guiding three areas: how States deal with each other and resolve problems; the protection and promotion of individual rights within States; and the processes and mechanisms to review and advance values, principles, and commitments.

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