

**Track Two Diplomacy and Regional Security in the Middle East:
Prospects and Limits**

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Introduction

Over the past decade former, and sometimes current, adversaries in the Middle East increasingly have been turning to a unique form of combat -- dialogue. Drawing in part on the example of U.S.-Soviet military contacts during the Cold War, Arab, Israeli and even Iranian elites have come together in multilateral settings to discuss threat perceptions and common security concerns and to engage in a variety of unofficial “confidence-building measures” (CBMs). Commonly referred to as “track two” diplomacy, some of these security dialogues are sponsored by governments, others by private actors such as NGOs, research institutes and universities. With the breakdown of the official Arab-Israeli multilateral Arms Control and Regional Security (ACRS) working group in 1995—an outgrowth of the 1991 Arab-Israeli Madrid peace process¹— a myriad of track two initiatives have emerged which specifically focus on regional security issues in the Middle East. Especially in the midst of the tense regional environment resulting from the Al-Aksa intifada, an examination of alternative mechanisms to foster regional security dialogue seems particularly appropriate.

Despite the proliferation of Arab-Israeli security dialogues over the past decade, it is remarkable how little we know about them. Some of this ignorance may be attributable to the desire of regional parties to preserve the confidentiality of such dialogues, which often touch on sensitive, even taboo, regional topics that could potentially embarrass governments in the realm of public opinion. This explains the rather low profile of security dialogues and the desire for its participants to preserve anonymity. Nonetheless, these dialogues are not secret and, after a decade of activity, an assessment of the nature and impact of track

¹On ACRS and the overall multilateral Middle East peace process, see Dalia Dassa Kaye, *Beyond the Handshake: Multilateral Cooperation in the Arab-Israeli Peace Process, 1991-1997* (New York: Columbia University Press, forthcoming 2001). Also see Bruce W. Jentleson and Dalia Dassa Kaye, “Security Status: Explaining Regional Security Cooperation and its Limits in the Middle East,” *Security Studies* vol. 8, no. 1: 204-38.

two security dialogues is warranted. This paper presents initial conclusions regarding the nature and content of a variety of track two security dialogues in the Middle East and evaluates the impact of such activities. What have such dialogues accomplished to date, and what are their limitations? By what standards should we measure success and failure? How can such dialogues be improved in the Middle East and other conflictual regions?

To answer these questions, the paper draws not only on previous literature about the objectives of track two diplomacy, but also on concrete examples from the Middle East based on interviews with participants of such processes and observation of track two discussions in the region.² My research suggests that those who expect track two to lead to major policy shifts in “track one” (i.e., the official negotiating process) will be disappointed and perceive such dialogues as a failure. Track two dialogues, especially those I am examining (multilateral forums focused on regional security issues), have not, and are unlikely to, solve the core bilateral disputes between Israel and its neighbors.³ However, if we evaluate track two based on what the process itself produces, both in terms of changing regional perceptions and impacting regional security policy in an incremental fashion, we are more likely to see its value.

I argue that the previous trend to view track two (as the term unfortunately suggests) as mainly a mechanism for the facilitation of track one agreements has been misplaced and undervalues the significance of track two dialogues for their own sake. For this reason, I prefer the term “unofficial regional security dialogues,” although it is difficult to escape the track two terminology given its widespread use and acceptance. Because the term “track

² I have interviewed over thirty elites for this project during a research trip to the region (Egypt, Israel and Jordan) and in Washington, DC. I also observed and participated in a track two dialogue in the Gulf region. In most cases, the individuals interviewed have participated in more than one track two activity; many have been involved in such dialogues consistently since the early nineties.

³ Breakthroughs like the back-channel Oslo talks, for example, are rare and are the exception rather than the rule. Moreover, analysts of multilateral track two dialogues face the daunting methodological problem of demonstrating causation (e.g., showing that a particular track two discussion or paper was the central determinant of a particular policy outcome, as compared to a variety of other variables which may have affected the outcome).

two” evokes a variety of meanings, the first section of the paper clarifies my usage of the concept as it applies to regional security dialogues. After resolving definitional issues, the paper provides an empirical overview of the different types of regional security dialogues which have emerged in the Middle East over the last decade. The next section consequently seeks to assess the impact of such discussions, suggesting six central functions of track two dialogues and providing specific examples to support these propositions. The paper then considers the limitations of unofficial security dialogues. The final section of the paper considers the implications of such dialogues for current debates in the International Relations literature.

What is Unofficial Dialogue, or Track Two Diplomacy?

The broadest definition of track two diplomacy refers to interactions among individuals or groups that take place outside an official negotiation process. Thus, while “track one” refers to all official, governmental diplomacy (bilateral or multilateral), track two—a phrase coined by Joseph Montville of the Foreign Service Institute in 1982—describes all other methods of diplomacy that occurs outside the formal government system.⁴ As Louise Diamond and John McDonald explain, track two refers to “non-governmental, informal and unofficial contacts and activities between private citizens or groups of individuals, sometimes called ‘non-state actors.’”⁵ John McDonald and Diane Bendahmanne offer a similar definition, suggesting that track two is informal and unofficial

⁴Although the term track two did not enter common usage until the mid-1980s, similar ideas and practices had been discussed long before, particularly in the conflict resolution community of scholars and practitioners. For example, in his study of track two diplomacy, Nathan Funk cites several studies which have drawn on similar concepts (e.g., citizen diplomacy, public diplomacy, unofficial diplomacy, non-official mediation, analytic problem solving). See Nathan C. Funk, Theory and Practice of Track II Diplomacy: Impact and Dynamics of the Search for Common Ground in the Middle East Initiative, Ph.D. dissertation, American University, 2000, p. 26. For a general overview of the nature and development of track two as a practice, see Funk, Chapter 2.

⁵ Diamond and McDonald, Multi-track Diplomacy: A Systems Guide and Analysis, Occasional Paper No. 3 (Iowa: Iowa Peace Institute, June 1991), p. 1.

“interaction between private citizens or groups of people within a country or from different countries who are outside the formal governmental power structure.”⁶ However, these types of definitions are so broad that any non-governmental activity could constitute track two, including business contacts, citizen exchange programs, advocacy work, or religious contacts.⁷

I am interested in a subset of unofficial activity which focuses on professional contacts among elites from opposing groups with the purpose of addressing policy problems in efforts to analyze, prevent, manage and resolve inter-group or inter-state conflicts. These efforts, as in the case of track one diplomacy, can take place on a bilateral or multilateral basis. As Harold Saunders suggests, track two diplomacy involves citizens who engage in “policy-related, problem-solving dialogue” where they may discuss “elements of the overall political relationship, solutions to arms control problems, resolution of regional conflicts, issues of trade policy, or other areas of competition.”⁸ Saunders distinguishes this type of interaction from “people-to-people” diplomacy where the objective is solely “getting to know the other side” and developing personal experiences with one’s adversaries (such as student exchanges) rather than finding solutions to problems.⁹ For the purposes of this study, track two diplomacy is 1) related to policy and 2) consciously organized problem-solving exercises.¹⁰

⁶ John W. McDonald, Jr. and Diane B. Bendahmanne, eds., Conflict Resolution: Track Two Diplomacy (Washington, D.C.: Foreign Service Institute, 1987).

⁷Indeed, Diamond and McDonald refer to these types of activities (and others) as distinct types of diplomacy, breaking the concept down into nine tracks. See Diamond and McDonald, Multi-track Diplomacy.

⁸ Harold H. Saunders, “Officials and Citizens in International Relationships: The Dartmouth Conference,” in Vamik D. Volkan, Joseph V. Montville, and Demetrios A. Julius, eds., The Psychodynamics of International Relationships, Volume II: Unofficial Diplomacy at Work (Lexington, Mass: Lexington Books, 1991), p. 49.

⁹ See Saunders, “Officials and Citizens in International Relationships,” p. 50.

¹⁰ These distinctions are based on Herbert C. Kelman, “Interactive Problem Solving: The Uses and Limits of a Therapeutic Model for the Resolution of International Conflicts,” in Vamik D. Volkan, Joseph V.

The focus on policy and problem-solving does not suggest, however, that the process-promoting elements of track two are absent;¹¹ rather, in the effort to work toward addressing and solving common problems the process itself provides important benefits to its members, as I will discuss later. It is also the case that most regional track two efforts do not ultimately succeed in solving the substantive problem on the agenda (or other regional conflicts for that matter), so the process value of such activities is crucial. Still, despite its often limited impact on official policy, track two participants are expected to have some communication with government policymakers (many participants are often influential former government officials, active and retired military personnel, think tank specialists, and journalists) so that the ideas discussed in the unofficial setting have the prospect to filter into the thinking of official policy circles. In fact, those who organize track two dialogues hope their conferences produce just such results. In some cases, when the political climate is favorable, current officials and policymakers sit in on the proceedings, acting in an unofficial capacity. Such participation of active policymakers obviously facilitates the ability of track two to influence official thinking and policy.

Thus, purely academic conferences, citizen exchanges or encounters among adversaries in existing international forums, for example, would not constitute track two activity as defined here. In this sense, my use of the term is closer to what some call “track one and a half,”¹² suggesting that the participants have considerable access to the official policy process. For example, such individuals may either regularly communicate with government officials while participating in track two dialogues or enter government after

Montville, and Demetrios A. Julius, eds., The Psychodynamics of International Relationships, Volume II: Unofficial Diplomacy at Work.

¹¹Other students of track two diplomacy and conflict resolution have drawn on the distinction between “problem-solving” and “process-promoting” workshops, with the former focused externally on impacting policy and the latter focused internally on impacting the participants themselves. See Funk, Theory and Practice of Track II Diplomacy, p. 108. However, as Funk correctly observes, such distinctions blur in practice, with most track two activity (at least as I have defined it here), serving both functions.

exposure to track two activity (many participants move in and out of government depending on the political conditions in their respective countries). I thus define and limit my use of track two diplomacy to *unofficial policy dialogues focused on problem-solving where the participants have access to the official policymaking process*.

The central tool of track two diplomacy is the problem-solving seminar, based on unofficial, structured dialogues among elites.¹³ While other types of track two efforts are important, such as bilateral back-channel talks that have occurred at several points in the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations (most notably the discussions leading to the 1993 Oslo Accords), my focus and empirical explorations center on more consciously organized, multilateral (attended by three or more regional parties) problem-solving dialogues among adversaries. My empirical application examines security dialogues in the Arab-Israeli arena, but the general concepts discussed in such efforts are applicable to other issue areas and regions as well.

The goal of such seminars and workshops, many of which are ongoing processes, is to facilitate communication among conflicting parties so that “mutually acceptable” solutions can emerge.¹⁴ The unofficial nature of the dialogue allows the participants to express ideas more freely and explore options that might be too sensitive to discuss at the official level, where policymakers are far more constrained and cautious. As Herbert Kelman explains, “The unofficial, private nature of the workshop and its embeddedness in an academic context makes it easier to communicate with adversaries without the implication that one is thereby recognizing and legitimizing them... There is, moreover, the

¹²For an elaboration of this term, see David Smock, ed., Private Peacemaking: USIP-assisted peacemaking projects of nonprofit organizations (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 1998).

¹³ One of the oldest unofficial dialogues of this nature was the Dartmouth Conference, a bilateral discussion between the U.S. and the Soviets which began in October 1960 after the breakdown of the Eisenhower-Khrushchev summit in 1959. For more on the Dartmouth process, see Saunders, “Officials and Citizens in International Relationships.”

¹⁴ See Kelman, “Interactive Problem Solving: The Uses and Limits of a Therapeutic Model for the Resolution of International Conflicts,” p. 147.

understanding that there will be no publicity and that participants will not be held accountable outside the workshop for what they say in the course of a discussion.”¹⁵ The key to such dialogues is personal and direct interaction, although as mentioned earlier the purpose of the interaction is not just for the parties to get to know each other but rather for them to analyze problems, explore alternative solutions and perspectives, develop new ideas and ultimately resolve problems. In doing so, the participants attempt to redefine their conflict in ways that lead to “win-win” solutions in what usually begins as a zero-sum process.

Often, such track two workshops foster a sense of a “continuing relationship and cumulative dialogue,” where the participants increasingly perceive the problems on the agenda as “shared” and develop common analytic frameworks.¹⁶ Such dialogues are more effective when the elites participate with the knowledge of their governments (and preferably have government access) so that the ideas and learning that takes place within the dialogue have a chance to be integrated at a later point into official levels of policymaking. The idea is not only to change individual perceptions but also to change policy at the broader (i.e., group or national) level. Herbert Kelman also reminds us that track two dialogues (in contrast to some of the psychological accounts of such efforts) are not solely about building interpersonal trust among adversaries. In fact, Kelman suggests that building such trust is not only unrealistic in some cases, but can also backfire because it could make “reentry” into one’s national policy circles difficult since an individual may lose credibility with his or her home constituents.¹⁷ Rather, the purpose of such exercises is to highlight common interests while recognizing continuing differences so that participants can work on problem-solving.

¹⁵ Kelman, “Interactive Problem Solving: The Uses and Limits of a Therapeutic Model for the Resolution of International Conflicts,” p. 150.

¹⁶ Saunders, “Officials and Citizens in International Relationships,” p. 57.

Regional Security Dialogues in the Middle East: The Empirical Landscape

While track two dialogues focused on regional security issues began in the Middle East context even before the Persian Gulf War, such efforts proliferated after 1991. The emergence and development of the first official regional forum to discuss regional arms control and security (the ACRS working group of the multilateral peace process) encouraged much regional thinking and collaboration on the topic, including a number of track two activities. The demise of ACRS by 1995 only increased the importance of track two security dialogues since they became the primary forum to address such issues and preserve the institutional memory of the work accomplished by the ACRS process. While most track two workshops are organized and run by universities and non-governmental organizations, the United States and Western European governments help fund such activities, in addition to major private foundations. According to U.S. State Department figures, approximately 500 Arab and Israeli elites have participated in regional track two activities over the past decade.¹⁸ Of these, 200 are military representatives, including a number of former generals. Every country in the region has been represented at such meetings (including Syria, Iran, and Iraq) except Libya (Yemen's participation is also quite limited). Approximately \$2.5 million is spent a year on track two activities, with the U.S. spending about \$1.5 million annually. Because the large number of regional track two activity (over forty track two projects have emerged in the region since 1992), this section will identify only the major, mostly serial regional track two dialogues between Arabs and Israelis and review their central activities. Table One summarizes these groups and identifies key publications which they have produced.

¹⁷ See Kelman, "Interactive Problem Solving: The Uses and Limits of a Therapeutic Model for the Resolution of International Conflicts."

¹⁸ Interview with State Department official, November 21, 2000, Washington, DC.

IGCC and UCLA-sponsored activity

Among the most visible organizations sponsoring track two activities since the early 1990's is the University of California's Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation (IGCC), whose activities have been shepherded primarily by Steven Spiegel of UCLA. Indeed, the first IGCC track two workshop on the Middle East took place ten days after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990 and the second convened a week before the Arab-Israeli Madrid peace conference in October 1991. Since many of the same regional elites left the IGCC conference to attend the formal Madrid talks, many considered the track two conference a "trial run" since many of the same issues were discussed. After the Madrid conference launched multilateral working groups in five regional issue-areas, the IGCC sponsored a number of track two workshops to mirror the activity of the multilateral working groups in the areas of arms control and regional security cooperation, water, the environment, refugees and economic development. Many ideas developed in these workshops influenced the formal ACRS process as well as the economic components of the Oslo process. However, by the mid-1990s, funding for track two activity focused on multilateral issues was no longer available.

In 1997 the IGCC began a project promoting military-to-military dialogue among regional elites, the only such program of its kind in the region. The project has brought senior Arab and Israeli military officers together to exchange views and ideas about regional security and to expand the group of regional officials who are familiar with regional arms control issues. In fact, more military officers have been involved with this project than were involved in the formal ACRS process. The group met six times over the course of three years and the project has been extended indefinitely. The topics the group has covered include: military balances in the region, weapons effects, military doctrines, arms control, counterproliferation measures, military ethics, and military education. Some of the regional parties have presented papers sharing their country's regional security perspectives and threat perceptions. Later meetings have focused on operational issues, such as a code of

conduct for military behavior in the Middle East. As part of the project, IGCC planned to produce a number of publications, including a data base on the Middle East military balance, syllabi for arms control and regional security courses for military war colleges, proposals for maritime confidence-building, a proposal to establish a regional security study center, and a military code of ethics.

In addition to IGCC-sponsored activity, UCLA's Steven Spiegel has also developed two other serial projects on Middle East security. One is an annual workshop series, "Arms Control in the Middle East," which has also met six times, beginning in 1995. The central objective of this track two series is to maintain and expand relationships among regional security elites in the absence of a formal arms control process. The idea is to maintain and build upon the ACRS's work so that once a formal regional security process begins again, the parties will not be starting from scratch. Each annual meeting focuses on a different theme, such as weapons of mass destruction or future visions for regional security. One meeting at Wilton Park in 1997 produced a volume suggesting hundreds of ideas for regional arms control. Another meeting in Australia in 1999 was held with Asian counterparts and sought to draw lessons from the Asian regional security experience for the Middle East.

At the fourth meeting in Norway in 1998, the regional parties expressed a desire to meet more frequently for shorter periods of time in the region itself, which led to the launching of a second serial project sponsored by UCLA. This project is co-sponsored with the National Center for Middle East Studies in Cairo and began meeting approximately three to four times a year in 1999. The project's ultimate goal is to create an Association of National Security Centers. These meetings are smaller than the annual UCLA workshop (and have all taken place in Cairo) and are more focused on specific regional security topics, with the objective of producing group papers on issues such as threat perceptions and the refinement of the regional security regime concept.

The Search for Common Ground

In 1991 the Search for Common Ground launched the Initiative for Peace and Cooperation in the Middle East, now called the Search for Common Ground in the Middle East.¹⁹ The organization is one of the most visible and experienced NGOs working on track two initiatives in the region. This Middle East project established a number of working groups to facilitate regional contacts and catalyze the official policy process, including the Security Working Group (other working groups focus on issues such as civil society, conflict resolution, economics, and the media). The Security Group met seventeen times between 1992 and 1999.²⁰ Unlike the IGCC and UCLA sponsored activities, the Security Working Group involves fewer participants, with usually no more than twenty five per session. Over the years, the group has formed a variety of sub-groups focused on particular regional security problems: weapons of mass destruction; the Gulf (which includes conferences on Iran, Iraq and the Iran-UAE dispute); wider regional security (including Turkey, Syria and Iran); and Arab-Israeli security. The group has addressed specific issues such as arms control, a regional security regime, confidence-building in Lebanon, the redeployment of Israeli troops in the West Bank and Gaza, an outline for a Syrian-Israeli peace agreement, Israeli-Jordanian relations, and Iraq-Kuwait reconciliation. Several publications on these topics have emerged as a result of the meetings (see Table one), usually co-authored by the regional participants in the group. Because of its small size, the security working group has been able to maintain a core group of participants who have regularly met over the years and have collaborated on numerous papers and publications. Like the IGCC and UCLA conferences, the participants in the security group are influential elites (retired diplomats and generals, academics, journalists and other security analysts) with access to official decision-makers.

¹⁹For an elaborate study of the Search for Common Ground's activities in the Middle East, see Funk, Theory and Practice of Track II Diplomacy, Chapter five.

²⁰ Funk, Theory and Practice of Track II Diplomacy, p. 259

The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI)

SIPRI has sponsored a number of projects from 1995 to the spring of 1999 on Middle East regional security. The projects have three main objectives: 1) to use the neutral stance of SIPRI to develop regional dialogue, especially among non-ACRS parties (e.g., Iran and Iraq); 2) to look beyond immediate issues toward future regional security regimes; and 3) to use technology to facilitate regional contact. SIPRI's projects have included a Persian Gulf group which attempted to develop CBMs for the sub-region, an electronic network on security issues and arms control, and a project focused on the development of a regional security regime. Its regional security regime project led to a high-profile report, prepared by the project organizer, Dr. Peter Jones, entitled, Towards a Regional Security Regime for the Middle East: Issues and Options. A group of established regional and extra-regional security experts (including representatives from Iran and former ACRS participants) met for four sessions over an 18 month period between 1997-1998 to prepare this report. Drawing on lessons from security regimes in other regions, the report developed guiding principles for the establishment of a security regime in the Middle East. The report, published in December 1998, has been widely distributed throughout the region, and Jones (a Canadian diplomat) toured the Middle East to share the findings of the report with regional parties. The report will be translated into Hebrew, Arabic and Farsi to further encourage its distribution. Although SIPRI ended its Middle East projects by 1999, much of its work has been continued through other forums. A Gulf-oriented track two project, Gulf 2000,²¹ has continued much of its work on CBMs in the Gulf region. The University of Toronto now runs the electronic network project, funded by the Canadian government. This network allows for private and secure communications on timely and often sensitive

²¹Gulf 2000 promotes communication, cooperation and change in the Gulf sub-region. This serial project is based at Columbia University and began in 1993 under the direction of Gary Sick. The project has held eight conferences involving hundreds of regional experts. Over 600 members also communicate electronically through the project's web site (<http://gulf2000.columbia.edu>).

security issues for regional participants. The network also includes an electronic library on arms control and security in the Middle East, which will be open to the public.

DePaul University

Since 1995, DePaul University has sponsored a trilateral project among Egyptians, Israelis and Jordanians (unlike many of the other track two activities which include a broader range of regional parties). The project is called the “Group of Experts on Arms Control and Regional Security in the Middle East” (some participants also call the project the “Elimination of Mass Destruction Weapons in the Context of a Regional Security System”²²) and was originally created with the specific goal of creating a draft treaty on the elimination of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) from the region. The idea for the project emanated from Egyptian security elites, who wanted to create a dialogue with the Israelis which focused explicitly on the issue of Israel’s nuclear capability (the idea was taken up and financed by Dr. Cherif Bassiouni of DePaul University and was expanded to include the Jordanians and other WMD, such as chemical, biological and missile technology). The project has sponsored one to two meetings a year since its creation, with the meetings largely taking place in Egypt, Israel and Jordan. Most of its participants are affiliated with a strategic institute in their respective countries (e.g., the National Center for Middle East Studies in Cairo, the Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies in Tel Aviv, and the Hassan Council in Amman), thus offering one of the few track two initiatives promoting regional institutional cooperation. All of the national centers participating in the project have links to officials in their respective countries. It is also one of the only track two activities focused explicitly on the WMD issue and one of the first forums where Arabs and Israelis discuss the issue of Israel’s nuclear capability. Perhaps because of its institutional dimension, participation in the group (totaling approximately 30 individuals) has been rather consistent since its inception. In the early meetings, the participants worked on a Manual of

WMD in the Middle East, but the parties have so far been unable to agree on the proposed document that would establish a framework for the elimination of WMD from the region. Dialogue and progress has been made, however, on the definition of the region, guiding principles for a regional security regime and frameworks for future regional security institutions. Three central sub-groups have developed in the project focused on WMD, conventional weapons and institutions for the region. The parties have even discussed the idea of a Regional Security Council which would include regional defense ministers and have studied other regional models, such as the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), in order to draw lessons for the Middle East. Despite regional tensions, the group has plans to continue its meetings.

Wilton Park

Although Wilton Park is an executive agency with links to the British government, the program is academically independent. The primary goal of the program is to promote international understanding and reconciliation through conferences at its facility in the United Kingdom. Policy practitioners, academics, journalists and business representatives are invited to the conferences, although about half of the participants are usually from government. Wilton Park sponsors four annual conferences on the Middle East (on the Middle East peace process, Gulf security, Europe and the Maghreb, and Islam and the West, in addition to topical issues like WMD, economic security and environmental security). Like other track two workshops, the setting is informal, the discussion not for attribution. The organizers try to provide maximum time for regional networking and informal discussions to build confidence among the parties. In the past, such conferences have facilitated contacts between Israelis and Syrians and between Iran and its Gulf neighbors. Meetings on the Arab-Israeli peace process have focused on themes such as final status

²²Interview with an Egyptian security analyst, January 23, 2001, Cairo.

issues in the Israeli-Palestinian track, future regional functional cooperation, and post-peace policy in areas like energy, foreign direct investment and infrastructure.

United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR)

UNIDIR has supported track two activities in the Middle East since 1993, relying on contributions from governments and foundations to support its work. Although UNIDIR does not sponsor a regular serial event, it has sponsored a number of workshops over the years and has produced a number of publications, including a handbook on arms control which has been published in both English and Arabic. UNIDIR is also producing a book on verification measures. In September 1998 UNIDIR co-sponsored a workshop with Sandia National Laboratories' Cooperative Monitoring Center (CMC) on the role of commercial satellite and aerial imagery in arms control, environmental enhancement and natural resource exploration in the Middle East region. Arab and Israeli regional experts discussed the possibilities and limits of such technology in their region, particularly in relation to verification of regional arms control agreements. UNIDIR also proposed the idea for a consortium of Middle East research centers focused on security issues, although this project never materialized.

Cooperative Monitoring Center (CMC)

In addition to its collaboration with UNIDIR, Sandia National Laboratories' CMC cooperates with other track two efforts, adding a technical side to such exercises in order to educate regional actors on the role of technology in confidence-building. Activities include technical demonstrations of verification exercises and monitoring systems through the Center's technology laboratories. Its programs on the Middle East include scholar exchange programs, workshops, training on cooperative monitoring technology and technical collaborations. For example, in one workshop, Jordanians and Israelis examined how to monitor borders and published two papers on border monitoring and technology.

As part of the project, the scholars traveled to Washington, DC to share their work and ideas with policymakers. In 1996 the Center hosted Jordan, Egypt and Israel to examine options for a Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone (WMDFZ) in the Middle East and the role of technology in monitoring such an agreement. As mentioned, the program also joined with UNIDIR in 1998 to examine satellite imagery and its role in monitoring peace agreements, including water and environmental issues (this meeting also produced a book). In 1996-1997, the CMC collaborated with the U.S. State Department and provided regional participants a two-week course on regional arms control. The first week of the course took place in Washington and focused on the history and concepts of regional arms control while during the second week the participants moved to New Mexico to study the technology that could be used in monitoring agreements. Over fifty regional officials participated in this training course. The US government has used this course as a model for other arms control training courses for regional security experts.

Canadian-sponsored Maritime Activities

Since the demise of ACRS, Canadians have sponsored a number of track two activities in the maritime area (the Government of Canada previously mentored maritime CBMs as an operational activity in ACRS), with the guidance of former Canadian naval officer David Griffiths. The objective of such projects is to avoid losing the progress made in ACRS in this area, particularly its work on regional Search and Rescue (SAR) activities. Indeed, cooperative projects in the maritime area proved to be one of the most successful aspects of the ACRS process, perhaps because the international maritime culture provides a powerful tool for dialogue and cooperation on humanitarian issues at sea is less political and controversial than other regional security issues.²³ Drawing on the ACRS experience,

²³On the advantages of maritime cooperation, see David Griffiths, Maritime Aspects of Arms Control and Security Improvement in the Middle East, Policy Paper #56 (San Diego: Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation, June 2000) and Jill Junnola, ed., Maritime Confidence Building in Regions of Tension, Report No. 21 (Washington, D.C.: The Henry Stimson Center, May 1996).

the Canadian Coast Guard started the Maritime Safety Colloquium for Middle East naval officers, which has met annually since its establishment in 1997 (while its 2000 meeting was postponed due to political sensitivity following the Al-Aksa intifada, the parties intend to continue the activity in 2001). Although the American government supports the project (including financial assistance), it has kept a rather low profile, allowing the Canadians to take the lead in this area. In its 1998 session at the Canadian Coast Guard College in Sydney, Canada, regional maritime officers and specialists from nine Middle East nations participated. The program promotes concrete exercises in search and rescue coordination in the region, including simulation activities where Arab and Israelis are forced to coordinate activity in a crisis-like situation. The Canadian government has also supported conferences on maritime CBMs in the Middle East for regional naval officers. A proposal for a one-week maritime peacekeeping course (tentatively scheduled to take place in Jordan) is also still on the table. To maintain regional naval contacts between meetings and cooperative exercises, David Griffiths serves as the secretariat for a maritime communications network (www.marsaf.net).

The US Geological Survey and Lawrence Livermore Labs: Regional Seismic Monitoring Cooperation Project

Beginning in 1992, this project has held nearly two workshops a year (organized primarily by the US Geological Survey and Lawrence Livermore Labs) with the aim of promoting scientific cooperation in order to create a data base of Middle East seismic events which will provide a baseline necessary to distinguish between a natural seismic event and a man-made activity such as a nuclear test. The project also seeks to facilitate economic and urban planning in the region to reduce the losses associated with earthquakes and educates regional parties about the technologies needed for monitoring the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). Many of the workshops and training sessions have taken place in the region. Project participants have shared national data on seismic activities to a

clearinghouse in Europe and have produced a joint study on the November 1995 Gulf of Aqaba earthquake. For this study, even Israel and Saudi Arabia exchanged seismic data. Joint exercises, such as planned explosions in the Aqaba region, have resulted from the project.

U.S. Air War College

The U.S. Air War College has sponsored a number of track two workshops to educate military elites about ACRS-related activities in special seminars focused on regional security and arms control. In 1998, for example, the Air War College sponsored a conference on Middle East security and WMD proliferation, which was attended by international fellows from the Middle East attending the University. The idea of such seminars is to educate future military leaders about regional security issues and arms control techniques so that such ideas may affect them when they are promoted to high-ranking positions within their respective governments.

European-Sponsored Activities

In addition to funding many of the above-mentioned track two sessions, European governments also support Middle East security track two workshops through NATO, the European Union and the Organization on Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). For example, the six non-member Middle East NATO countries (Israel, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia and Mauritania) meet once a year to discuss lessons from NATO strategy for the Middle East and the OSCE organizes a “Mediterranean seminar” once a year to foster regional dialogue on security issues. Germany also supports an annual conference focused Middle East security topics, the Kronberg Conference, which also includes sub-groups that meet more frequently during the year (around fifty regional elites participate in this activity which is similar to the Wilton Park format). The establishment of the official

EU sponsored Barcelona Process in 1995²⁴ –intended to promote European-Mediterranean cooperation on political, economic and cultural affairs—has led to a number of track two workshops which mirror the official work, including a security working group. Because Arabs and Israelis participate, such activities provide an additional forum for dialogue on regional security issues. For example, the EuroMeSCO (Euro-Mediterranean Study Commission) project began in 1996 and brings together foreign policy research centers from around the Mediterranean region to, as the Barcelona Declaration states, “establish a network for more intensive [regional] cooperation.” EuroMeSCO has a secretariat in Lisbon and a web site (<http://www.euromesco.net/>), providing a forum for dialogue and discussion on regional security issues, particularly the Arab-Israeli conflict. The project usually meets two times a year in addition to special occasional meetings. The group has been working on a regional security charter.

The Impact of Regional Security Dialogues

The impact of track two dialogues should be evaluated on two levels: 1) effect on the participants themselves and 2) effect on official policy. These assessments examining security dialogues will underscore the value of track two in the first area and its as yet uncertain and limited nature in the second. That said, the distinction between the internal and external effects of track two can be very difficult to discern; nuanced or secret internal changes may lay the foundation for future impact on policy even while outsiders fail to detect such effects. Regional security dialogues in the Middle East have provided an impressive base for future official regional security structures and have produced some concrete results, including joint regional exercises, training and publications. However, observers and participants should not expect profound results outside the regional security and arms control context, such as the facilitation of Arab-Israeli peace treaties. Even in the

²⁴On the Barcelona process, see Alvaro Vasconcelos and George Joffe, eds., The Barcelona Process (London: Frank Cass, 2000).

regional security realm, track two dialogues are unlikely to effect, in the short term, broad shifts in national security policy (e.g., a change in Israel's nuclear position or shifts in military doctrines). Still, by better defining the scope of regional security dialogues, we can better appreciate their impact and provide realistic expectations for the future of such activities.

Before specifying the six central areas of impact and offering examples from the Middle East regional security experience, it bears emphasizing that changes in security perceptions and even policy resulting from track two are likely to take time. Track two dialogue is a process, not an event. As Harold Saunders explains, "The measurement for the success of nonofficial dialogue between nations should not be immediate impact on policy. Its success lies in its contributing a sensitive picture of the problems to be faced and, as moments of impasse approach, alternative ways of approaching those problems."²⁵ Even the ten year time-frame covered in this assessment may not do justice to the impact of track two activities, which may take decades to provide a cumulative imprint on the region.

1. Improving Understanding of the Other Side

One of the most important objectives of track two dialogue is to foster understanding among participants from adversarial backgrounds. It does this in two ways: 1) by allowing participants to get to know each other personally in informal and even social settings, helping to breakdown psychological barriers and stereotypes and 2) by helping individuals better understand their adversaries' threat-perceptions, policies and red-lines. These functions do not suggest that just because the parties get to know each other and better understand each others' policy positions they will necessarily be able to resolve the substantive problems on the agenda or larger regional conflicts. It does suggest, however, that greater sensitivity will at least allow the parties to understand and appreciate their

²⁵Saunders in McDonald, p. 87.

differences, and perhaps (in the rosiest expectation) adopt policies that may avoid unnecessary escalation of tensions and armed conflict.

From my observation of track two exercises and through personal interviews with participants, it is clear that such exercises facilitate friendships across national boundaries and allow the parties to “humanize” the enemy.²⁶ Track two dialogue’s ability to break down stereotypes and myths was particularly important in the early stages of the process (in the early 1990s) because of the paucity of Arab-Israeli contact at that time. Several Arab participants commented that they did not know Israelis before they engaged in such dialogues and felt that just knowing them as individuals changed their previous conceptions. One participant from the Gulf noted that he had never even met a Jew until 1992 and often forgot that Israel was even on the map. But such dialogues allowed him to become familiar with Israelis, even if he did not feel entirely comfortable.²⁷

An Israeli participant acknowledged that early track two meetings broke down the myth in his mind that the Arab side was not interested in substantive dialogue; through the process, he learned that some Arabs were not just “maneuvering” but were ready for genuine dialogue.²⁸ Facing your adversary across the breakfast, lunch and dinner table rather than the formal negotiation table personalizes the conflict and helps the parties recognize that the enemy shares many of the same fears and constraints. In his study of the Search for Common Ground’s security working group, Nathan Funk relayed the testimony of a Syrian participant, who suggested, “The greatest contribution of the meetings was that the Israelis were humanized in my mind, and I as a Syrian became humanized in the minds

²⁶For an elaboration of the humanization concept, drawn from social psychology, see Funk. Among the more important features of humanizing the enemy is viewing the “other” in more personal rather than abstract terms and breaking down the in-group vs. out-group dichotomy.

²⁷ Interview with Gulf analyst, September 23, 2000, Muscat, Oman.

²⁸ Interview with Israeli participant, January 14, Jerusalem.

of the Israelis...Before that, it was ‘subhuman Syrians’ and ‘superhuman Israelis.’ The meeting destroyed the whole stereotype...”²⁹

This “humanizing” aspect, however, can be and often is overstated. While some individuals have developed sincere friendships, mistrust and tension continues to prevail, and the participants tend to congregate as national delegations whenever possible. Moreover, many of the Gulf participants (with the exception of the Iranians) are cautious and quiet in meetings and generally do not interact unnecessarily with the Israeli participants. There are also a number of participants who do not come to the table to understand the other side better but rather attend in order to make sure their (usually well-known) position is heard. Further, not all participants may be authorized by their sponsors (whether government or not) to engage in the kind of serious and open discussion the dialogues are designed to produce.

Thus, perhaps more important than just getting to know the other side and developing personal friendships is the role such dialogues play in educating the parties about the positions and policies of the other players. Because of track two’s informal and off-the-record nature, the parties are provided an opportunity to engage in frank dialogue and explain the rationale for various policies (as opposed to just repeating public rhetorical positions). It can also sensitize the parties’ understandings of others’ threat perceptions. For instance, a Gulf participant explained that while he does not view Iran as a regional threat, such security dialogues have helped him understand why others see Iran as a threat.³⁰

Another lengthy example from an interview with a well-connected Israeli participant underscores the importance of track two dialogue for learning about the perceptions of the other side; for this Israeli, generating better understanding was the most important aspect of

²⁹ Funk, Theory and Practice of Track II Diplomacy, pp. 321-322.

³⁰ Interview with Omani participant, September 24, 2000, Muscat, Oman.

the dialogue.³¹ Before engaging in regional security dialogues, the Israeli was not aware of how others looked at the balance of forces in the Middle East. Through the process, he learned that the Arabs were aware of their weakness vis-a-vis Israel. He explained how the Israelis always looked at quality *and* numbers and thus thought the Arabs should be more confident because they have more numbers. But the discussion convinced him that the Arabs feel weak, that this was not just a rhetorical position. This knowledge allowed the Israeli to better understand Arab sensitivities and the effect of Israeli policy for the other side, leading him to become more cautious and sensitive to mis-perceptions and the importance of signals. Such understandings also led to some concrete Israeli actions, such as the unilateral notification to its neighbors about large-scale exercises (including to the Syrians through the UN force in the Golan Heights). Such notifications, according to the Israeli, began in 1995 (although they are no longer occurring). The Israeli also suggested that the better understandings fostered through track two led Israel to become more receptive toward certain arms control agreements; Israel has signed both the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) in recent years. He also argues that even in the sensitive area of nuclear weapons, such dialogue has affected Israeli thinking, leading to its signing of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT).³² Of course, such dialogues do not change basic interests (e.g., Israel is not going to give up its nuclear capability), but the Israeli noted that they can create what he termed “a space of flexibility” within which contact can influence perceptions and (in a more limited way) policies.

³¹ Interview with Israeli participant, November 30, 2000, Washington, DC.

³² Another Israeli participant familiar with regional arms control, however, does not think Israel signed the CTBT because of track two dialogue but rather because Israel had joined the Conference on Disarmament so it wanted to be involved with the CTBT. Interview with Israeli participant, January 14, 2001, Jerusalem. However, one may still ask whether participation in such dialogues had sensitized Israelis to the importance of global arms control, even if the dialogues themselves were not the sole trigger for specific policy outcomes.

The same Israeli also believed that the better understandings generated through security dialogues influenced the positions of his Arab counterparts. For example, the Egyptian position in the arms control area has always been the most persistent, with the Egyptians insisting that regional arms control focus on Israeli nuclear capabilities and Israeli adherence to the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT). But the Israelis consistently explained to them that progress on the nuclear issue could not be made without Arab efforts to make Israel feel more secure, thus emphasizing the importance of incremental confidence-building. The Israeli believes that Egyptian participants may now better understand this Israeli position and consequently be more willing to discuss non-nuclear CBMs over time than they had been in the past.

Several Israeli participants also shared examples relating to Israel's understanding of Iranian threat perceptions. One Israeli participant attended a meeting where an Iranian academic with close contacts with Iranian officials presented a paper on Iranian threat perceptions.³³ As an Israeli, he was aware that Iran faced other threats beside Israel (Iraq, Russia, South Asia, etc.) but he found it interesting how the Iranian differentiated between threat perceptions of the regime and the Iranian state itself. The presentation gave the Israeli insight into the evolutionary situation in internal Iranian politics and suggested to him that if ideological concerns recede and strategic concerns rise, common ground may be possible between Israel and Iran. An Israeli professor also noted that his contact with Iranians has increased his sensitivity to their threat perception of Israel and felt that their fears of Israeli attack sounded genuine.³⁴ As a consequence, his own writings have changed with respect to Iran.

Another Israeli participant also noted the effect of track two dialogue on Israel's position toward Iran, arguing that Israel has shifted its public posture and toned down its

³³ Interview with Israeli foreign ministry official, January 15, 2001, Jerusalem.

³⁴ Interview with Israeli professor, January 18, 2001, Tel Aviv.

anti-Iranian rhetoric.³⁵ He also believes that the Iranians are aware of these changes and are interested in engaging Israelis in substantive discussions in order to learn why Israelis behave as they do. For example, at one meeting, members of the Iranian delegation were ignoring the Israeli participants at the more formal sessions, but during a break in the meeting the Iranians found the Israelis in a mini-market and engaged in a substantive discussion on security issues (e.g., asking the Israelis why they do policy x and why they do not do policy y). This Israeli participant also found that such dialogues gave him a better understanding not only of Iran but the entire Gulf region, an area which had not previously been his primary area of focus. Another Israeli participant found value in learning more about the domestic politics, constraints and “unofficial public opinion” of Arab societies thorough such forums.³⁶ Track two dialogues not only help the parties understand the fundamental positions and policies of the other side, but they also allow the exchange of views and perceptions on ever evolving regional developments, a particularly important function during times of crises when misperceptions are likely to arise.³⁷

Arab participants similarly point to examples suggesting the value of track two dialogue in sensitizing them to Israeli positions. One Jordanian participant noted how before such meetings, he did not know there were Israelis who genuinely wanted peace, and the sessions have improved his understandings of Israeli perceptions.³⁸ Another Jordanian observed that he not only understood Israeli positions better (and also came to recognize that there were Israelis favoring compromise), but that such dialogues allowed him to affect

³⁵Interview with Israeli journalist, January 15, 2001, Jerusalem.

³⁶ Interview with Israeli analyst, January 17, 2001, Tel Aviv.

³⁷Interview with Israeli security analyst, January 17, 2001, Tel Aviv.

³⁸Interview with Jordanian official, January 21, 2001, Amman.

Israeli thinking as well, leading Israeli participants go home with better views of Jordan and to write favorable stories about Jordan in the press upon their return.³⁹

An Egyptian participant observed how interactions with Israelis underscored for him how Israel faces similar problems as Egypt (such as inadequate civilian control over the military) which normalized Israel in his mind and diminished the perception that Israel can do everything.⁴⁰ He also noted that contacts through track two have allowed Israeli security analysts to appear on influential Egyptian television programs to explain Israeli positions. Many of these Israeli views would not be known absent such a forum. Moreover, this Egyptian analyst noted that his own language has changed when he appears on radio or television programs so that now he is much more inclined to explain Israeli behavior rather than just state they are wrong to do what they do. Another Egyptian security analyst learned through such dialogues what was important to Israelis, which encouraged him to begin an Arab-Israeli peace movement among intellectuals.⁴¹ This Egyptian analyst also believes that through track two dialogues, Israelis are better able to understand why Arabs feel threatened by Israel's nuclear capability⁴² while the Arabs now understand that Israel does not object in principle to the idea of a WMDFZ.

2. Building Knowledge and Regional Expertise

Track two dialogues resemble both a think tank and a university in that they generate new ideas as well as teach regional parties about the substance of a particular issue area. Other scholars of track two diplomacy have noted this “visionary” function whereby the

³⁹Interview with Jordanian security analyst, January 21, 2001, Amman.

⁴⁰Interview with Egyptian military analyst, January 22, 2001, Cairo.

⁴¹ Interview with Egyptian security analyst, January 22, 2001, Cairo.

⁴²One Egyptian participant and former high-level military official also noted the importance of such a forum in order for Egypt to tell the Israelis why they find the nuclear issue so threatening; such communication can not take place in an official, track one session. Interview with Egyptian security analyst, January 23, 2001, Cairo.

parties can explore issues and policy options not yet on the official agenda.⁴³ Such interaction can provide “ideas in the air”⁴⁴ that can impact policy when officials at the track one level are ready to move in a new direction (e.g., with the emergence of a new government) and lead to the development of shared definitions, analysis and frameworks. Developing a shared sense of the problems faced by all parties and a common analytic framework by which to address them can also give the parties more confidence that a solution to the problem is possible.

The Middle East regional security dialogues have produced numerous ideas for future regional security and arms control processes. The informal and academic atmosphere allows participants to engage in more creative, flexible and long-term thinking than may be possible in official forums. Perhaps the best example of this is the SIPRI project which produced a document outlining guidelines for a future regional security regime. One prominent Egyptian participant believes that the SIPRI report has had a major impact on regional thinking and cannot be ignored.⁴⁵ He believes that the future regional security structure after peace (i.e., after the conclusion of Arab-Israeli bilateral treaties) will depend largely on the ideas developed by projects like SIPRI. Indeed, several regional participants mentioned the SIPRI report as one of the most valuable products of track two activities. A State Department official also suggested that the SIPRI report has been instrumental in shaping thinking at senior levels and has encouraged senior officials to talk about post-peace issues and institutions more than they ever have in the past.⁴⁶ Other publications resulting from track two, such as the Wilton Park publication produced by the UCLA group, have also laid out a series of ideas for future arms control and regional security cooperation. Moreover, a recent UCLA conference specifically dedicated a section

⁴³ See Stewart, “The Dartmouth Conference: U.S.-U.S.S.R. Relations.”

⁴⁴ Saunders, “Officials and Citizens in International Relationships,” p. 61.

⁴⁵ Interview with Egyptian security analyst, January 22, 2001, Cairo.

of its proceedings to the discussion of future visions for regional security after peace, allowing regional elites to discuss forward-thinking ideas. Many of the more practical projects in track two, such as cooperative maritime exercises and technology training, are also likely to lay the groundwork for future activities in an official Middle East arms control process.

Security dialogues have also educated regional elites about arms control issues. Before such dialogues, some participants had never heard the term “CBM” and most were unfamiliar with the arms control experiences of other regions or the U.S.-Soviet experience. Many of the early track two meetings focused explicitly on seminars led by extra-regional participants about the arms control experiences in their regions in order to draw lessons for the Middle East and introduce an arms control vocabulary to the region. Projects like UNIDIR’s arms control handbook have also contributed to building a common knowledge base on regional arms control. Regional elites are also becoming familiar with technology needed for verification of arms control agreements through training courses provided by track two sponsors. The development of technology for mutual verification monitoring can be useful for future peace agreements.⁴⁷ Taken together, these track two activities have developed a cadre of regional elites who are now familiar with regional arms control issues on both the analytic and operational level. This common knowledge base did not exist in the region just over a decade ago. And the creation of this common knowledge will help ensure that when an official arms control process begins again, it will not resume in a vacuum.⁴⁸

⁴⁶Interview with State Department official, November 21, 2000, Washington, D.C.

⁴⁷An Egyptian participant believed that such technology should be developed so that it is ready when the political environment improves and peace treaties have been established. Interview with Egyptian security analyst, January 23, 2001, Cairo.

⁴⁸An Egyptian official viewed this aspect of track two as one of its more valuable contributions, especially since no formal process has operated since 1995. Interview with Egyptian official, January 22, 2001, Cairo.

In addition, security dialogues encourage regional parties to develop some common analytic frameworks and definitions. The small trilateral group sponsored by DePaul University made some progress on common definitional issues in the WMD area and operational activities such as the Canadian Maritime Safety Colloquium requires adversaries to work together in a crisis-like setting in order to address a mutual problem. Many of the collaborative publications emerging from track two led the contributors to view regional problems using common analytic frameworks. The ability to exchange views and ideas freely in track two settings also allows the parties to better identify areas of common ground. For example, from 1992-1994 a group of Israelis and Syrians from Search for Common Ground's security working group engaged in a series of meetings and almost came to an agreement on security arrangements⁴⁹ that, if successful, might have helped bridge the gap in the official Israeli-Syrian peace process (as I will discuss later, a leak to the media destroyed the progress made by this group). Participants in this process came to believe that a solution to the Syrian-Israeli conflict was possible as a result of their dialogue and produced some concrete ideas about how to bridge the gaps.

3. Socializing the Parties

The notion that diplomacy is not just about bargaining but also about socialization⁵⁰ is particularly relevant in the track two context. In the process of developing greater understanding about one's adversary and building a common set of knowledge, many participants in track two dialogues begin to identify themselves as part of a track two group. To be sure, national identities never recede and sometimes are reinforced in such processes, but over time some participants have observed that they feel they are now part of a group

⁴⁹Interview with Jordanian security analyst, January 21, 2001, Amman and Interview with American participant, January 11, 2001, Washington, D.C. For a detailed account of this Israeli-Syrian dialogue, see Funk, Theory and Practice of Track II Diplomacy.

⁵⁰See Alastair Iain Johnston, "Treating International Institutions as Social Environments: Implications for Cooperation Theory," draft paper, revised July 2000.

which thinks differently than those who are outside the process. My observation of track two activity, including of a small group session where track two participants explicitly discussed the value and role of track two diplomacy, underscored this dynamic, with many of the participants speaking of the process as if it were a club that needed to be preserved and strengthened.

Many participants noted that people they meet in track two become their “buddies;” they find it easier to talk to them the next time they meet, even if the context is not a track two setting. All track two participants are also in the “same boat” in terms of justifying what they do when they go back home.⁵¹ One track two participant in the maritime colloquium exercise observed that the dialogues and exercises over time have helped the participants increasingly feel part of a group, where they develop a feeling of common interest.⁵² However, this same participant noted that he has not felt the same sense of group in other, more broadly focused track two exercises, suggesting that more focused activities with consistent regional participation can prove more successful in developing this group cohesion.

4. Providing a Safety Net for Dialogue

Track two dialogues allow discussions and exchanges of ideas to continue even when official processes are deadlocked or no official communication is taking place. Indeed, many participants noted that track two dialogues become particularly important in times of crisis because no other forums for regional dialogue exist. Such dialogues can also allow parties to exchange views on a current political crisis, allowing them to better understand the others’ positions and the political climate in different parts of the region. This safety net function was particularly useful after 1996 when Benjamin Netanyahu’s policies led to a freezing of many regional cooperation efforts. In fact, track two security

⁵¹Interview with Israeli analyst, January 17, 2001, Tel Aviv.

dialogues flourished during this period and provided continuity in the regional security process and a forum for dialogue that regional parties found extremely useful. During the recent crisis in Israeli-Palestinian relations, one Israeli participant, for example, has been receiving messages from track two friends expressing opinions about the current violence, exchanges which he finds extremely enriching.⁵³ Because regional parties are finding it difficult to communicate when formal normalization measures have been curtailed in the midst of this recent wave of regional violence (e.g., trade missions closed, ambassadors sent home), they are turning to track two as an outlet for continued regional dialogue.

However, track two's insulation from the political environment is never complete, as the next section of the paper will discuss. Indeed, several track two activities have been "postponed" due to the Israeli-Palestinian violence. Many Arab participants are sensitive to the political climate in their countries opposing normalization with Israel, including official prohibitions against contacts with Israelis,⁵⁴ and thus are more reluctant to attend such forums. However, regional communication has continued on the electronic networks established by some of the projects and regional parties have indicated to track two sponsors that they want the dialogues to continue (a number of meetings are scheduled to take place in the late winter and spring 2001).

5. Extending the Web of Regional Contacts

Track two dialogues can facilitate contacts among adversaries who could not otherwise meet. In fact, track two security dialogues allow for the participation of regional

⁵²Interview with Israeli official, January 16, 2001, Tel Aviv.

⁵³Interview with Israeli journalist, January 15, 2001, Jerusalem.

⁵⁴The October 2000 Arab League Summit communiqué stated that Arab leaders "resolve not to resume any official or unofficial activity in the framework of the multilateral track and to stop all steps and activities concerning regional economic cooperation with Israel in the said framework, not to participate in any such endeavors and to link their resumption to tangible progress towards the realization of just and comprehensive peace on all track of the peace process." See the Arab summit's closing statement, Mideast Mirror, October 23, 2000, Vol. 14, No. 204.

parties who were not included or did not attend the official ACRS process (Iran, Iraq, Syria and Lebanon). Track two dialogues are one of the few forums where Israelis and Iranians, for example, can meet and, as mentioned, has contributed to a measure of understanding between these countries' participants. On the side of track two dialogues (during breaks and meals) many personal contacts between Israelis and Iranians take place. The participation of Iraqi opposition figures also allows parties to hear additional views that are not expressed in official forums.

Likewise, because of Syrian reluctance to participate in regional cooperation efforts before the bilateral conflicts with Israel are settled (the European Barcelona process is the only official regional forum in which the Syrians participate), track two dialogues offer a unique opportunity for Israeli-Syrian interaction. One Israeli official noted that his first encounter with a Syrian occurred during a track two session, where they engaged in a substantive conversation about each country's perspectives and regional developments.⁵⁵ At the end of the conference, the Syrian told the Israeli that he found their conversation to be the most important outcome of the meeting for him personally. Because countries like Iran, Iraq, and Syria are so central to the future of regional security, it is important to include them in regional security dialogues even before official relations between Israel and these countries has been established. Track two forums are the only mechanism to date to allow for such inclusion.

6. Creating a Spill-Over Effect to Track One

As I have argued, the spill-over impact of track two dialogues to track one processes is rather limited. That said, examples exist of track two influence on official policy processes. Because most track two participants are influential elites with connections to official decision-makers (if they are not decision-makers themselves), the influence on official policy should not be surprising. Track two efforts are well known among

governments in the region, and at the highest levels.⁵⁶ However, most examples of influence are not as dramatic as the Oslo back-channel talks and usually relate to more limited issues in the security area.

One example of how personal contacts affected official policymakers occurred when an Israeli participant associated with the Likud party used his track two contacts with Jordanian counterparts to arrange meetings between Benjamin Netanyahu (before he became Prime Minister of Israel) and Jordanian officials, including Crown Prince Hassan.⁵⁷ An Israeli participant also noted how personal contacts established in track two groups allowed members of the top political echelon to pass messages or to clarify points, particularly with respect to the Palestinian track.⁵⁸ Personal contacts among officials participating in track two (always in an unofficial capacity) can also prove useful when the officials meet in non-track two settings. For example, because an Israeli knew an Egyptian counterpart from track two, he found it easier to negotiate with him at the official level when the two were working on language for a global arms control agreement.⁵⁹

And even some limited impact on the bilateral tracks is evident. One Jordanian participant who conducted a joint study with an Israeli in a track two group on Israeli-Jordanian security issues suggested that this document affected how senior level Jordanian officials (including the former King) thought about the Israeli side and ultimately influenced the security section of the Israel-Jordan peace treaty.⁶⁰ In another case, track two

⁵⁵Interview with Israeli official, January 15, 2001, Jerusalem.

⁵⁶One Jordanian participant, for example, has given briefings on such meetings to up to fifty Jordanian officials. Interview with Jordanian security analyst, January 21, 2001, Amman. Other participants also noted that they make an effort to brief officials and their colleagues about such meetings upon their return.

⁵⁷Interview with American analyst, January 11, 2001, Washington, D.C. and Interview with an American analyst, January 21, 2001, Amman.

⁵⁸Interview with Israeli journalist, January 15, 2001, Jerusalem.

⁵⁹Interview with Israeli official, January 15, 2001, Jerusalem.

⁶⁰Interview with Jordanian security analyst, January 21, 2001, Amman.

participants deliberately tried to influence the bilateral track, although the effort failed. As mentioned, the effort occurred in the Search for Common Ground's working group, where contacts between Israelis and Syrians (with close connections to the political leadership) made considerable progress until 1994 in bridging gaps in the security area. However, such deliberate attempts to influence the bilateral tracks are rare in multilateral security dialogues, which usually involve a much broader and more regional focus. In this sense, its greatest impact on policy will probably be apparent when an official regional arms control process re-emerges.

Limitations of Regional Security Dialogues

It is an ironic aspect of track two that when such dialogue is most needed, it is often most difficult to bring about. That is because in a tense regional environment, particularly when developments in the Israeli-Palestinian track deteriorate, regional sensitivities make it difficult to establish dialogues. Because track two dialogue is unofficial, it has been better able to insulate itself from the political environment than official regional processes (such as the multilateral talks), but not completely. This is particularly true because in the case of Arab parties, governments often provide signals to participants suggesting whether they approve of their participation in such forums. Some governments may be less willing to sanction or at least not object to such activities in the midst of negative regional developments. It is also simply harder, logistically, to get elites together for such meetings when they are preoccupied with current crises.

Several track two activities planned for the fall of 2000, for example, were postponed due to violence between Israelis and Palestinians. Track two planners also fear that even if they are able to convene sessions, the tone of the meeting is likely to be highly politicized, undermining the dialogue's ability to foster mutual understanding and a free exchange of ideas. The danger of track two processes being held captive to political developments on the official track is very real. Still, even in the midst of the worst violence since the Israeli-

Palestinian peace process began, several track two events are going ahead as scheduled. But there is no doubt that a more favorable regional environment would improve the prospects for track two diplomacy in the future.

A related limitation of track two is its sensitivity to exposure in the media. Although such dialogues are not secret, they are kept rather low-profile, and the sponsors guarantee the confidentiality of the participants. The reason for this is that such dialogues are not popular in the realm of Arab public opinion, and even in some Israeli circles. Public opinion in the Arab world is wary of normalization with Israelis before all bilateral disputes are settled, with many professional societies banning its members from contact with Israelis. Consequently, exposure of particular Arab participants could prove embarrassing and even damaging to individuals' careers, and can also jeopardize the process as a whole. This is particularly true because the media often portrays such meetings as secret negotiations and journalists often do not understand the unofficial nature and purpose of such processes. Moreover, some governments, such as the Syrians, are extremely suspicious of track two activity, and very rarely give the green light for individuals to participate. The Syrians fear that informal contacts can be dangerous and used by the Israelis to embarrass them by revealing that the Syrians are "flexible" and willing to hold "secret talks."⁶¹ As with other regional cooperative initiatives, the Syrians view such contacts as a concession to Israel absent a peace treaty between the two countries.

Two instances of leaks to the media exemplify the negative impact of media exposure. The first occurred in the Search for Common Ground's working group in 1994, when discussions between Israelis and Syrians regarding security arrangements were leaked

⁶¹Interview with American analyst, January 11, 2001, Washington, D.C.

to the press.⁶² Some suspect the leak was made by an Israeli opposed to the types of concessions being discussed in the talks in an effort to sabotage the process, although the Palestinians also used the leak in order to embarrass the Syrians.⁶³ It worked. The Syrians immediately pulled out of the process and have not participated in this track two dialogue since. Another leak to the press occurred in one of the smaller UCLA sessions which took place in Cairo in July 2000, with an article listing the names of the Iranian, Syrian, Lebanese, Israeli and American participants taking part in the dialogue. This time, the Egyptians were suspected as the source of the leak. As a result of the leak, a Syrian participant was warned not to attend such meetings again.⁶⁴ The Iranians who attended this meeting faced professional pressures upon their return and did not attend future track two talks (a subsequent meeting of the larger UCLA group was attended by an entirely new group of Iranians, although the sponsors were surprised the Iranians continued to show up at all).

In addition to problems stemming from the political environment and leaks to the media, track two dialogues can also be limited by the quality of participants. Some participants may not be interested in a genuine exchange of ideas or believe in the value of the process. The result can be a politicized “dialogue of the deaf.” Such exchanges can reinforce negative images of the adversary and leave a feeling that the other side is not committed to peaceful relations. This type of interaction is more likely at the larger, formal sessions within the process and when there is an audience of extra-regional actors whom some parties may wish to influence.⁶⁵

⁶²On this particular media leak, see: Ehud Ya’ari, “Rabin’s Double Bypass,” The Jerusalem Report, January 27, 1994; Marjorie Olster, “Syrian, Israeli Academics Met Secretly in Oslo,” Reuters, January 2, 1994; and “Syrian, Israeli Academics Met Secretly in Oslo,” Mideast Mirror, January 4, 1994, p. 9.

⁶³Interview with Jordanian security analyst, January 21, 2001, Amman.

⁶⁴Interview with American official, November 21, 2000, Washington, D.C.

⁶⁵This point was made during an interview with an Israeli academic fairly critical of track two process, January 14, 2001, Jerusalem.

One particularly heated exchange between an Israeli and Egyptian on the nuclear issue at one of the larger UCLA meetings left a negative impression with an Israeli participant, who began to question the value of such activity and felt that such exchanges only hardened positions.⁶⁶ Another Israeli participant similarly commented that the tense Israeli-Egyptian dynamic at the meetings led him to view the Egyptians more negatively, remarking that it appeared as if the Iranians and Syrians were more capable of “civilized” dialogue with the Israelis than the Egyptians.⁶⁷ He felt that some (though not all) Egyptians were relaying official government positions and “toe-ing the line” rather than engaging in serious dialogue, making him question whether future meetings in Cairo were useful. In a different meeting, one Israeli found that an encounter with a Syrian only underscored how far apart the parties were and convinced him that the gaps were unbridgeable, a view he did not hold going into the process.⁶⁸ Many other participants, including Arab parties, expressed concern about “rejectionists” who attend track two dialogues, noting how participation of the wrong type of individuals (e.g., ideological rather than pragmatic) could undermine the process.

Another danger of track two is the potential for misinformation. Although participants are not speaking at the official level, at times the positions they suggest their government will take do not accurately portray official position. One Israeli participant expressed concern that some Israelis have at times indicated concessions that were perceived by Arab interlocutors to suggest a margin of flexibility when such flexibility did not exist, such as on the nuclear issue.⁶⁹ Track two dialogue may generate misinformation when individuals claim more authority than they actually have. This problem again underscores how important it is to ensure that the appropriate elites participate in such processes.

⁶⁶Interview with Israeli academic, January 14, 2001, Jerusalem.

⁶⁷Interview with Israeli official, January 15, 2001, Jerusalem.

⁶⁸Interview with Israeli official, January 18, 2001, Tel Aviv.

And finally, some believe that track two is limited because it involves only a small number of elites and, because it produces few if any dramatic policy shifts, does not affect the popular level. Indeed, a number of Arab and Israeli participants expressed a desire to see more concrete results from the process and more visibility. Others expressed a desire to keep track two low profile because of the sensitivities in the region. This limitation, however, is only of great concern if one judges track two on its ability to produce grand policy shifts. But as I have suggested, this is probably the wrong standard by which to judge such processes, raising unrealistic expectations for track two dialogues. Moreover, while such dialogues are indeed limited to a relatively small (though not insignificant) number of regional security specialists, this is exactly the audience the dialogues are supposed to address. The purpose of track two (as defined here) is not to disseminate ideas at the mass level but rather to impact gradually the thinking of regional elites who have access to the policy making process.

Implications of Security Dialogues for IR Theory⁷⁰

Several of the predominant theories of international politics would likely find track two dialogues puzzling. Such interactions are not simply balance of power politics where preferences are assumed based on one's power position. Nor are they examples of strategic bargaining where actors try to maximize, optimize or satisfy existing preferences and interests. Indeed, because much of mainstream IR theory assumes preferences and interests, including the realist and neoliberal schools, it is difficult for such theories to explain interactive processes where the central goal is to *shape* and even *change* such preferences. Indeed, much of IR theory focuses on international outcomes more than

⁶⁹Interview with Israeli journalist, January 15, 2001, Jerusalem.

⁷⁰I have an expanded theoretical exploration of the role of track two in IR Theory in a separate paper, "Security Dialogues Among Adversaries: Track Two Diplomacy and IR Theory," Prepared for delivery at the 2000 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Mariott Wardman Park, August 31-September 3, 2000.

international *processes*, thus marginalizing diplomatic processes, including track two discussions.

Most of the analytical frameworks which have been applied to track two dialogues are located in the conflict resolution literature, which draws heavily on social psychology, psychoanalytic theory, and sociology. I suggest a need to bring lessons from the conflict resolution literature, particularly its sociological elements, into current debates taking place in the IR field. This is particularly important because there is a growing recognition in IR that studying diplomatic processes can shed light on emerging theories of IR which also draw on sociology, such as constructivism. A brief review of constructivism will illustrate why track two processes can contribute to a better understanding of such approaches and better specify the mechanisms through which norms and communication can impact actor understandings, interests and even identity.

Constructivists suggest the need to examine, rather than assume, actor interests and identity, arguing that the source of interests may stem from ideational factors such as international norms or political culture. Many constructivists who focus on norms (commonly defined as collective expectations about proper behavior for a given identity)⁷¹ argue that international actors do not behave as they do because they worry about consequences (as a strategic bargaining model would suggest) but rather because they worry about appropriateness.⁷² Thus, drawing on sociological institutionalism, constructivists suggest that rule-guided behavior characterizes international politics. As Thomas Risse explains, “Rule-guided behavior differs from instrumentally rational behavior in that actors are trying to ‘do the right thing’ rather than maximizing or

⁷¹ See Ronald L. Jepperson, Alexander Wendt, and Peter J. Katzenstein, “Norms, Identity and Culture in National Security,” in Peter J. Katzenstein, ed., The Culture of National Security (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), p. 54.

⁷² James March and John Olsen used this terminology of the “logic of consequentialism” and the “logic of appropriateness.” Thomas Risse draws on these distinctions to introduce his own logic of social interaction, the “logic of arguing.” See James G. March and John Olsen, “The Institutional Dynamics of International Political Orders,” International Organization 52, 4 (1998):943-69.

optimizing their given preferences.”⁷³ For constructivists, interests and preferences are not fixed over time and place but rather are contingent on social context. Thus, interests and preferences can change over time as the social context in which international players act changes. For example, a preference for mercenaries in one era may seem taboo and abnormal in another, and not just because mercenaries are no longer useful but because they are no longer perceived as legitimate.⁷⁴ The logic of appropriateness not only regulates how international actors behave, according to constructivists, but also can constitute or “define social identities (“good people do X”).”⁷⁵ For example, a human rights norm not only tells actors what they can not do, but also suggests who they are (i.e., a civilized nation).

However, one critique of constructivists has been a neglect of agency⁷⁶—how and who decides what is appropriate behavior, especially if the norms are contested? As Risse points out, “The more the norms are contested, the less the logic of the situation can be captured by the statement ‘good people do X’ than by ‘what does ‘good’ mean in this situation?’ or even ‘what is the right thing to do?’ But how do actors adjudicate which norm applies? They argue.”(p. 6). Thus, to improve social constructivism’s ability to explain a range of social interaction, Risse adds a third logic of social interaction to the logic of consequence and logic of appropriateness—the logic of arguing. International interaction, according to this theory, is also about communication, communication which can help actors define norms in the first place. Risse’s variant of social constructivism can shed light on interactive processes, like track two dialogues, where actors are trying to form preferences and interests and decide on the “right thing to do.”

⁷³ Thomas Risse, “‘Let’s Argue!’: Communicative Action in World Politics,” International Organization 54, 1 (winter 2000), p. 4.

⁷⁴See, for example, Janice E. Thomson, Mercenaries, Pirates, and Sovereigns: State-Building and Extraterritorial Violence in Early Modern Europe (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994).

⁷⁵ Risse, “‘Let’s Argue!’: Communicative Action in World Politics,” p. 5.

⁷⁶See Jeffrey T. Checkel, “The Constructivist Turn in International Relations Theory,” World Politics 50, 2 (January 1998):324-48.

An examination of track two activities can provide empirical support for Risse's arguing theory—and link it to similar arguments stemming from the social psychology literature—as well as illustrate areas where the theory might be improved. While I will not explore such linkages and improvements here (this paper is intended to introduce the empirical aspects of track two diplomacy), the above description of track two and its impact in the regional security realm underscores the importance of viewing such developments through theories emphasizing process and social interaction, such as constructivism.

Conclusion

Only a small minority of Arab and Israeli participants interviewed for this research project failed to see value in track two, and mostly because they expected track two to produce major policy shifts and bring about Arab-Israeli peace treaties. The majority, however, recognized such expectations as unrealistic and appreciated the value of the track two process itself and its ability to affect policy on a smaller scale and in an incremental fashion. Indeed, this paper provided numerous examples of the impact of track two in the regional security realm. Still, I also demonstrated that such dialogues do face limitations and can be improved. But one needs to critique track two processes on the terms they set for themselves, not on the basis of objectives beyond the scope of their mandates. Similarly, track two dialogues speak to prominent theories of International Relations which value the role of process, and such cases can support and improve the development of theory in this area. Despite problems and limitations, track two dialogue has proved an important mechanism in building regional understanding and knowledge in the arms control and regional security realm. There is no reason such dialogues could not also be applied to other issues and regions in the course of the lengthy process of building peace among adversaries.