
Israeli-Palestinian Track II Diplomacy

Manachim Klein and Riad Malki

15 This chapter was written separately by Menachem Klein and Riad Malki. Klein's part focuses on the theoretical background of the Oslo Accords' Track II diplomacy, classifying and defining this growing tool of unofficial negotiations, and widely used in the Israeli-Palestinian context. Klein also provides us with a comparative perspective as well as with a brief analysis of Track II on the disputes over Jerusalem.¹ The second part, Malki,s provides a variety of issues relevant to the Israeli-Palestinian Track II issues and focuses on specific examples. Due to space limitations, we cannot cover the full picture of such channel that perhaps make the Israeli and Palestinian cases the richest in Track I, both in quantity and quality, as analyzed in a current book by Hussein Agha et al.² In a recent conference at Tel Aviv University on Track IIs in which several of the contributors of this book have participated, the potential of such avenues was explored. The original concept of an alternative channel to official diplomacy has now been widened so that it includes citizen's diplomacy (or societal track IIs). Hence a first conceptual categorization may be useful for a better understanding of the scope that now includes concepts such as multitrack diplomacy, citizens' diplomacy,³ or societal Track II.

35 **Background to Track II Diplomacy and the Israeli-Palestinian Case Study on Jerusalem**
(*Menachem Klein*)

Track II: Definitions and Types

40 Track II is different from secret negotiation and back-channel talks. While secret negotiations and the back channel are "secret official negotiations between the contending parties that take place in parallel with front-channel negotiations or replace them," Track II is not an official negotiation.⁴ First,

the very existence of Track II as a form of negotiation and its outcome are deniable by the government officials. Second, Track II negotiators are unauthorized, whereas invisible negotiation is managed on behalf of the statesmen. Oslo talks illustrate these differences. They began in January 1993 as a classical Track II negotiation between two Israeli academics and two PLO senior members acting in their private capacity to help the official talks in Washington, but soon this Track II came to be a secret negotiation and a back channel. The two Israeli academics were authorized by their leaders to negotiate, alongside two official envoys, with their Palestinian counterparts acting formally as PLO negotiators.

Track II had many variations and modes of operation. It could be categorized by means of participants, aims, success in influencing target audiences and achieving the track's main goals, timing, political context, and relation to official talks and power holders. Track II could be run by retired diplomats and civil servants, as well as by people-to-people activists with no previous official position, or volunteer advisers, or academic experts with access to decisionmakers.

The aims of Track II were varied as well. Track II could be geared toward influencing a small group of negotiators and bureaucrats by offering them strategies of negotiation and understandings, providing the decisionmakers substantive input and setting the prenegotiation stage for the benefit of the later formal discussion. Track II could also seek to shape public opinion and expose the public to creative ideas and new approaches, as well as to change the contentious discourse within and between each side. The Geneva agreement of October 2003 is the best expression of Track II. Track II participants could be either optimistic or pessimistic about their ability to influence decisionmakers; in either case they aimed to define concretely the issues at stake and to conceptualize in terms of cognitive and social psychology the different perceptions of self, the other side, and the conflict. As such, Track II participants were to act as agents of change. Nevertheless, no special timing was involved in Track II activity, nor was it a necessary introduction to the official negotiations. It could operate in the absence of official negotiation or parallel to it, and parallel to secret backchannel talks as well.⁵

Using the well-known concepts of peacebuilding, peacemaking and peacekeeping, Benjamin Gidron, Stanley Katz, and Yeheskel Hasenfeld preferred to put Track II activities into the categories of peacebuilding and peacemaking.⁶ Track II contributes to those two categories by developing bridges between rival communities and offering their interested members a chance to interact and develop effective means of communication—a prerequisite for any successful negotiation. These means include the creation of common language, joint technical terms, and shared cultural symbols, as well as interpersonal skills, mutual respect, and trust. The use of these

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1 tools helps to create a perception of common ground and parity in status
between unequal sides. The authors classify Track II organizations not only
in terms of their aims but also according to their structure and type of activ-
ity: service delivery (e.g., social, legal, and educational services); advocacy
5 (exerting political pressure with the aim of changing political policy from
confrontation to negotiation); dialogue (face-to-face dialogues and work on
joint projects with the other side); and consciousness raising (educating the
public about the conflict's high cost and its possible peaceful resolutions).⁷

Daniel Lieberfeld is more specific. He defines a Track II meeting as
one being held between participants who belong to adversarial groups that
10 discuss specific political programs for action without forming a secret
channel of talks between officials. No participant tries to bypass the official
representative of the other side. Track II thus aims "to further conflict res-
olution by improving understanding and relationships between groups, by
humanizing adversary groups through face to face meetings, and by prepar-
15 ing the ground for official negotiations by exploring in an unofficial and
informal setting and without commitment underlying issues and possible
solutions."⁸

Lieberfeld argues that Track II has only a long-term impact. In the short
run, a public debate on Track II by an open society with a well-functioning
20 communications system can contribute to political polarization by pushing
the mainstream out to the extreme. Unless shown differently, in such a case
the decisionmakers have an incentive for status quo negotiations to preserve
their political power base. Shifts in electoral politics can result when politi-
cians with Track II experience gain popularity among moderates with argu-
25 ments that a conflict is resolvable at a lower cost than its continuation. In
this case, Track II can strengthen negotiation-oriented leaders within their
organizations, as happened in South Africa, and become an agent of change.

Track II does not always serve the decisionmaker's opposite interest, as
Nadim Rouhana argues. He suggests that Track II enables the decision-
30 maker to have a better sense of negotiation possibilities and thus smoothes
the way. It can serve in the prenegotiation stage to find options of under-
standing, gain familiarity with others' points of view, and clarify probably
redefine the vague goals of the decisionmaker and negotiating partners.
Two other means that Track II may provide the decisionmaker are gather-
35 ing information about the other side and exploring optional divisions.
Moreover, through public Track II meetings the decisionmaker can measure
possible shifts in public and elite opinion, calculate his or her political risks
and rewards, and lead the concerned constituency toward accepting the
negotiation and the needed concessions.⁹ Like many Track II activists and
40 scholars, Herbert Kelman tried to find criteria for successful influence by
Track II in changing the political systems and values involved. According
to Kelman, Track II is successful insofar as it contributes to changes in the

political culture on each side in ways that make the parties more receptive to negotiation. Such outcomes include “the emergence of a sense of possibility”; “belief that at least some elements on the other side are interested in a peaceful solution”; “greater awareness of the other’s perspective”; “initiation of mutually reassuring actions”; “a shared vision of a desirable future”; “exploration of ideas for the overall shape of a solution to the conflict”; “exploration of ideas for moving the negotiations forward”; and “developing ‘cadres’ with direct experience in communication with the other side.”¹⁰

Professor Kelman is not only a Track II theoretician but a practitioner as well. He developed the working group model at Harvard University and experimented with it in an unofficial third-party effort to promote resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in Track II meetings based on interactive problem solving.¹¹ Kelman’s method is to bring together politically engaged and highly influential Palestinians and Israelis for private, confidential discussions facilitated by a panel of social scientists who are knowledgeable about international and intercommunal conflict, group processes, and the Middle East. These discussions take place in intensive workshop designed to enable the parties to explore each other’s perspective and understand each other’s concerns, needs, fears, priorities, and constraints. On the basis of the resulting analysis, participants are encouraged to engage in a process of creative, joint problem solving to generate new ideas, which are responsive to both sets of needs and fears, to resolve their conflicts. The ultimate goal is to transfer the insights and ideas gained from these interactions into the public debate and the decisionmaking processes in the two communities.¹² In another project, also at Harvard, such meetings brought about some consensus on how to structure the negotiations and accepted main points on subjects relevant to a future Palestinian state, the Palestinian refugees, and Jerusalem.¹³

The distinction between a “hard” and “soft” Track II is introduced by Hussein Agha et al.: Soft Track II is aimed at exchange of views, perception and information between the sides involved and improvement of their mutual understanding. Hard Track II, on the other hand, is more politically oriented. It is not only about achieving better knowledge of the other side helping to negotiate with it, and if possible even achieving a breakthrough that will help to conclude a political settlement between the sides.

Agha et al. suggest that learning lessons from the Middle East Track II cases on sponsorship, procedure, participation, methods, substance, secrecy and leakage, formality, the right environment, moving from Track II to official talks, and measuring success and failure. On procedure they emphasize the importance of informality, the need to avoid contentious issues at the outset, allowing ideological exchange, devising rules of engagements, setting an agreement on timetables, frequency and places of meeting, and reaching

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1 an understanding on conditions of confidentiality and release of information. On participants they recommend selecting the best qualified experts available, who are risk takers, good deal makers, problem solvers, and who share a common language and outlook. The participants should be selected according to the nature of the track either by the negotiating sides or by the
5 sponsor. No less important is to work with a small core group of participants that creates its own modus operandi, group interest, and group dynamic. Track II organizers must deal constantly with the dilemma of whether to include hardliners, who more truly represent the societies involved in the conflict, or to limit it to moderates who have a better chance of reaching
10 an understanding. While it is preferred that Track II leaders should maintain an open channel to their respective leaders, they also must keep a distance from the political echelons in order to keep thinking freely and to understand the other side's limits.

15 On method and substance Agha et al. find it important for Track II to work on solutions, but not on too comprehensive ones that often turn out to be more elusive than real.

Track II participants should refrain from dealing with daily crisis management. Instead it is better for them to choose the right and ready context to work on a goal. In most cases the whole exercise should be kept secret to
20 achieve positive results. However, the Middle East experience shows that ideas raised and texts composed in Track II run the risk of rejection by public opinion or by decisionmakers who feel belittled in being denied information about the exercise. Therefore careful attention should be taken to inform potential troublemakers and to sell the track's main ideas. Secrecy provokes
25 abusing and deliberately misrepresenting Track II outcomes by certain individuals and groups. Maintaining control over the process and mutual trust cannot prevent manipulation but can help to reduce its chances for misrepresentation and leaks. Leaks, however, do not necessarily produce negative results. They can serve the overall aims by demystifying the track and protecting it, or protecting similar track II's by moving public attention to a
30 only a certain one. Since almost nothing remains secret in Middle East politics it is strongly suggested for Track II practitioners to conclude how to face a negative leak and the ways to reduce its destructive results.

Finally, according to Agha et al., there are some criteria to measure the
35 success of Track II besides the obvious one of endorsing a Track II product partly or completely by Track I. It can be measured by the extent to which the track fulfilled its stated purpose by checking the impact on other Track II agendas and outcomes. When the sides face major physical or psychological obstacles to getting together, the very existence of a Track II can be seen as a success. The above-mentioned authors suggest the following
40 criteria for establishing the success or failure of Track II talks. These range from the readiness to sit together, after building a joint frame of reference,

to achieving agreement or understanding, establishing informal contacts and political networking, and bringing new and positive ideas to each of the involved constituencies.

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A Comparative Perspective: Case Studies of Track II in South Africa, Northern Ireland, and Israel/Palestine

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The main conclusion of Gidron, Katz, and Hasenfeld on peace and conflict resolution organizations in South Africa, Northern Ireland, and Israel/Palestine is that they were most successful in institutionalizing their values for peace in public discourse.¹⁴

Utilizing the media, these organizations brought about changes in the public perception of the conflict, redefined it, and introduced new ways for proceeding toward peace. Track II groups also suggested new types of relationships between the parties, linked their idea of peace to other moral values such as human rights or democracy, and developed a new set of public activities to promote peace and understanding. The organizations were less successful in bringing about changes in the structure of their respective political systems. However, they had almost no impact on key events or major developments in the peace and conflict resolution process.¹⁵

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In his comparative research on the involvement of conflict resolution organizations in Track II activity and its influence in South Africa, Israel/Palestine, and Northern Ireland, Feargal Cochrane reached several interesting conclusions.¹⁶ First, political compromises that were made in the official negotiations between members of the elites did not penetrate down to the popular levels. Still, these organizations built a consensus that filtered up to the Track I level and made a positive contribution to the political process. Second, the focus, roles, and impacts of these organizations depend on their respective political context. Understanding and defining terms such as “peace process” depend on the specific political context. In the Israeli-Palestinian case the research found that most of the activists are well-educated middle-class Israelis concentrating on consciousness raising. As in South Africa, the peace groups in Israel possess ideological cohesiveness and are funded largely by international donors. And unlike Northern Ireland, in the Israeli- Palestinian case there is much less cross-community activity within the peace sector. Although Israel and the Palestinians signed political agreements, the relationship between them, far from being substantively transformed, was made worse. Extremists on both sides reacted violently to the political agreements, heightening mistrust, hostility, and antagonism between the communities. Nevertheless, the peace movements in Israel had an important impact on the political process by changing the way in which both sides view their self-interest, from a zero-sum game to a positive-sum equation based on the formula of land for peace.

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Within the Palestinian sector, peace and NGO organizations are much smaller than in any of the other cases studied and concentrate on delivering

1 services rather than promoting the values of reconciliation. Most believe in
 justice before peace and are committed to the national struggle in the same
 way that the South African groups were. According to Cochrane, f the Pales-
 5 tinian peace and conflict-resolution organizations have had any impact it is
 at the level of providing support to their beleaguered communities rather
 than in transforming conflict relations between Palestinians and Israelis.

*The Role of Track II in Connection
 with the Israeli-Palestinian Final-Status Talks*

10 I would like to share with the readers some illustrations of Track II, based
 on personal knowledge as well as formal analysis

15 *1948 refugees.* The issue of the 1948 Palestinian refugees is highly sensitive and
 challenging. It touches both the most delicate nerves of the Israeli-Palestinian
 conflict and the formative myth of each of the two nations. Discussions over
 the Palestinian refugee issue commenced upon the conclusion of the 1948 war,
 though the main drive for it started in the late 1980s with the establishment of
 20 Israeli-Palestinian unofficial contacts. To this present day, the 1948 refugees
 issue has received much attention in many informal Israeli-Palestinian inter-
 actions. These happened mostly in Track II meetings, with its various formats:
 professional academic forums; discussions that were meant to prepare for the
 official negotiations and to release the Track I talks from any deadlocks; as
 well as talks made by official personnel yet in their private capacity.¹⁷ Besides
 25 extensive discussions about compensation, Track II on 1948 Palestinian refu-
 gees introduced the following differentiation between permitted modes of return
 to those which are forbidden.

1. The right of return in principle to return in actual practice.
2. Return and family unification: in the range between a semantic
 30 change made by titling the return “family reunification” to that of
 limiting the return to this title-specific content and persisting in it in
 the phases of enactment.
3. The right of return as an unfulfilled principle on the one hand and
 compensation on the other (i.e., financial, territorial and symbolic
 35 optional Israeli compensations, including an official apology for the
 wrongs during the war).
4. Distinction between return to Israeli territories and return to Pales-
 tinian sovereign land.
5. A distinction between the individual argument on realizing the right
 40 of return to an area under Israeli sovereignty from the immigration
 process that rules the practical arrangements of changing the refugee’s
 permanent place of residency. These arrangements provide Israel the
 authority not to let the refugee in, while according to the right of return
 Israel is imposed to absorb him/her.

These optional distinctions do not necessarily exclude one another. Mostly attempts have been made to introduce several of them simultaneously in order to maximize the compensation to Palestine for not permitting all the refugees to exercise their right to return. Unfortunately, the impact of these Track II models in public debate and in official talks was limited. The dispute in principle over the refugee issue was sharp in all the official talks, and the debate was dominated by discussion of national rights rather than oriented toward problem solving and pragmatic solutions.

Jerusalem. Since 1994 more than thirty Israeli and Palestinian groups have discussed the parameters of a permanent status agreement in Jerusalem.¹⁸ The contacts between the two sides have created a common professional discourse and a program based on more or less agreed-upon data. In some cases the participants stopped at that point, though they sometimes went beyond it in an attempt to find a political structure that would encompass and give direction to the points on which the experts reached consensus. Some of the groups dealt with the city and the metropolitan region only, while others included Jerusalem in a wider framework and addressed all the issues of a permanent status agreement.

As far as is known, most of the groups met under Western European auspices, sometimes under the sponsorship of government institutions and sometimes at the initiative of NGOs. A Palestinian participant in many Track II meetings summed them up this way: "The Dutch and Swedish track sponsored issues related to planning, zoning and infrastructure for the whole city in times of peace, while the British track focused more on the political dimension of the conflict in Jerusalem. The Spanish track sponsored the religious dimension of the Holy City, and the Greek track focused on the discussion of general issues in preparations of the final talks."¹⁹ The United States government was influenced by the Israeli taboo that forbade any discussion of the future of Jerusalem. Washington did not initiate informal channels for talks on a subject that could have impinged on internal US politics through the domestic Jewish vote and lobbies.

There were only *three cases* in which the participants in the informal channels went public, announced their position, and submitted their paper to the heads of the relevant states. In January 2000, a joint statement on the principles that were to guide the negotiations on Jerusalem was published following discussions held under the auspices of the University of Oklahoma and the Rockefeller Foundation. In 2003, the Ayalon Nusseibeh document on the final-status principles was published and in October 2003 the Geneva agreement was signed.

It would be difficult to exaggerate the importance of the informal channels and their contribution to the negotiations. They prepared the professional and political infrastructure and created a common language between

1 the two sides. Through them, several breakthroughs were made and creative ideas formulated that were later brought to the negotiating table. These ideas included new concepts of sovereignty—suspended, joint, and divine; a common economic regime for Jerusalem and Al-Quds; territorial exchange by mutual agreement; a Jewish-Muslim-Christian religious council
5 that would coordinate management of the holy places; cooperation between the Israeli and Palestinian police and the creation of a joint police force for the seam zone between East and West Jerusalem; and the concept of the sacred basin.²⁰

10 However, these back channels had their shortcomings. They were conducted almost exclusively between professionals, and insufficient effort was made to bring together community leaders representing the two peoples who would have to live side by side under the terms of a peace accord. Second, government officials and bureaucrats rarely participated. (True, a few highly placed decisionmakers on each sides were briefed about the issues discussed, but they were content to remain outside Track II meetings.) Their attitudes to the back channels varied. Some of them underestimated the potential of Track II talks for creating understanding, let alone an acceptable agreement; others were apathetic, and some used the back channels to float experimental balloons without incurring political costs.

20 Thus when the official track was about to commence, and as it proceeded, mutual dependence produced relationships between officials and professionals. The taboo that prevented government officials from adequately preparing their brief for negotiations over Jerusalem forced them to open their minds to understandings reached and ideas exchanged in the
25 Track II talks over the capital city. For their part, the Track II professionals were eager to inject their insights, ideas, and proposals (whether fully thought out or half-baked) into the official talks. On both the Israeli and Palestinian sides, however, official-professional dialogue was shaped by the decisionmakers' selectivity, preferences, and limited attention span. All
30 officials chose the professional voice they would listen to and placed time limits on professional involvement. The outsider professional was called in either intermittently or when the talks faced a deadlock and a serious crisis. The leaders also decided which government level the professionals would meet with and were able to limit access to senior decisionmakers and to the
35 official negotiating team. The officials' decision about which professionals to heed did not depend solely on the professionals' skills and expertise. The officials tended to prefer mainstream, level-headed voices, as well as people that the political leader sensed were loyal to him, to his negotiating goals, or to his administration. Former civil servants and experts who maintained open channels with the administration also had a great advantage.
40 Furthermore, the decisionmakers' selection was influenced by "packaging" considerations. A professional's influence increased to the extent that his

ideas were consistent with other components of the deal the political leader had prepared or already offered. Finally, in choosing his negotiating strategy and tactics, the leader's approach was shaped also by political and public relations considerations. The decisionmaker did not share these considerations with the ex-establishment professionals, confiding only in his own close and loyal assistants.

Consequently, ideas created or understandings reached in Track II were rarely adopted by the official negotiators in their original form. They were either rejected outright or revised or placed in a different context. It goes without saying that they were presented in a style very different from that used by the Track II professionals, which had smoothed their acceptance by the opposing side on Track II. This is neither to say that a decisionmaker went beyond his authority and responsibility, nor to conclude that the Israeli-Palestinian case is unique—quite the opposite. However, comparing the above-mentioned creative ideas and understandings produced in Track II with the positions taken by the decision-makers during the official talks can help us understand the parameters that shaped the official talks and limited the influence of Track II.

Track II Diplomacy **(Riad Malki)**

The idea of the Track II diplomacy was presented only as a result of the 1967 Six-Day War, and after the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip. Without such occupation, it could have been impossible to think about Track II at all. Dissolving existing borders between the Israel and the Palestinian occupied territories and the initiation of movement of goods and people across the old borders has prompted the creation of a new reality. This later led to the creation and development of the Track II diplomacy to facilitate the contact and dialogue between the two sides that had been in conflict since 1948.

Isolated efforts to establish political contacts with Israeli were initiated immediately after the end of the 1967 war, mainly by Palestinian Communists who contacted their comrades on the Israeli side, and right-wing Palestinian politicians started to survey possible contacts with their Israeli counterparts (and through the Israeli military commanders in the occupied territories). These people were encouraged by the Israeli officials to pursue some of the preliminary contacts, at least for the sake of knowledge and understanding. Such a channel was always limited in participation due to the few individuals who gambled at that time to initiate such contacts, either as exploratory meetings to assess the Israeli positions or to go deeper in uncovering potentials for national reconciliation and peace agreements. During those years the general and national mood did not help such initiatives, and people who were involved were either scared to continue such

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1 contacts or were isolated in their approach and not supported publicly. Nevertheless, others did opt for opening channels of dialogue on a smaller scale, but systematic and organized with a clear objective. The move was categorized as an initiative rather than a process, because it lacked the continuity, the permanent commitment by the people involved and lacking the
 5 mechanism behind it. Despite the fact that at a later stage there were some things in common between the promoters of such an approach among the Palestinian side, yet it did not gather any momentum or the backing of the population or the political elite. The same conditions remained unchanged for a decade with fewer people committing themselves to this path, and it is
 10 possible to say that Track II did not exist prior to first unofficial PLO-Israeli meetings in the second half of the 1970s.

In a summary, one could define the whole issue of Track II in the following way:

- 15 1. Track II is a direct result of the Israeli occupation of West Bank and Gaza Strip.
2. Mostly people from East Jerusalem were the first pioneers in introducing such activity.
- 20 3. It took some time for such activities to become a reality in Palestinian life. It did not start immediately with the beginning of occupation except in few cases, and first efforts were not serious at all but spontaneous and unplanned.
4. The initiative was categorized as a selective initiative and not considered a process.
- 25 5. The nature of the activities was secret.
6. The reaction of people at large was negative, and in most instances publicly condemned.

Track II Characteristics

30 For the sake of knowledge it is worth defining the basic elements of Track II in terms of major aspects to illustrate the real characteristics of the specific track of public diplomacy beyond the norms of official approval and official constraints (see Table 5.1).

35 Historical Background

In retrospect, one has to look at the numerous initiatives and activities for the promotion of peace and in breaking the stereotypes about each other, One has to differentiate between the activities of ordinary citizens for peace and without any government connection to such initiatives, and between officially initiated actions by PLO officials according to a plan to proceed with such contacts. In the first case, many such initiatives are not documented. There is no
 40 accumulation of knowledge of achievements or conclusions. But in the other,

TABLE 5.1 Basic Elements of Track II

People Involved: Government, nongovernment, individuals, groups with special interest

Topics: All topics without any limitation or exclusion

Objectives: To play a role in peace promotion, to be useful and active, to be a catalyst and a bridge, to use existing connections, to respond to needs and invitation, to act as a mediator or a messenger, to put an end to human suffering, to reconcile with the enemy, to normalize relations and to turn enemies into nonenemies, to change people's perception versus the other side, to serve personal interests, to develop different pressure groups, to transform society, to improve professional cooperation, to improve living conditions and so on.

Mechanism Used: One-time meetings, series of meetings

Geographical locations: Basically East Jerusalem, with participation from West Bank cities, in particular Bethlehem, Ramallah, Nablus, and Hebron

Personal background: Christians and businessmen

Outcome: Documents, statements, or nothing

Documentation: Nonexistence except in personal notes, if published

officially sanctioned situation there was always a clear objective in such activity, with clear short-term and long-term limits.

The Table 5.2 illustrates the two approaches.

The Short Term Versus the Long Term

As noted, there are notable differences between the two approaches in Track II, between the approaches serving solely the official efforts associated with Track I and between the efforts made by different players in Palestinian civil society and others to bring together members of both societies to discuss specific issues of mutual concern in developing confidence and trust. This includes members of the Palestinian Authority. The aim and objectives of the latter group in Palestinian civil society is for the long term, despite its de facto short-term influence and its limited impact on the society. The least influence on society's life will produce limited attention and support by the different segments of the same society. On the other hand, while the activity and scope of events associated with the first group of Track II (serving the official negotiations) is limited in duration and discrete in action, the immediate impact is enormous and could influence the total outcome of negotiations and affect the historic and future expectations of the society at large.

Palestinian Official Approach to Track II Contacts

The Palestinian National Council in its 13th session, in the second half of March 1977, adopted for the first time a positive resolution referring to the importance of relations and coordination with democratic Jewish forces

1 Table 5.2 Comparative Approaches

| Comparative element | Unofficial approach | Official approach |
|--|--|--|
| Who are behind it? | Individuals or groups with a clear interest in promoting peace and ending hostilities | PLO leadership |
| 5 Any connection to official policies and resolutions? | Not necessary; there could be cases where individuals decided to initiate contacts for the sake of doing something, but linked up with the PLO at later; there could be cases with individuals asked to follow official instructions | Initial intentions and contacts not officially legitimized and approved, but when resolutions were adopted by Palestinian national Council, then contacts became officially supported |
| 10 Any limitation or selection of who should be the other side? | No specific criteria used, but initiatives targeting groups or individuals with similar characteristics or professional backgrounds | Selection intended to reach out to politicians (members of political parties and Knesset), close associates with people in authority, community leaders, intellectuals, and religious leaders |
| Any accumulation of results or building up on achievement of initial activities? | Not the case in most of the activities; no connection between one activity and the other; lack of communication at the level of participants or initiators | From the beginning the intention always to build on contacts, to proceed with results to serve the official objective |
| 15 Role of participants? | Unofficial connections served as the bridge for official communication; were used as contact agents and go-betweens when official channels did not exist | Official side recruited civilians to carry out the mission; the tasks were coordinated fully with the officials, and civilians were not independent at all in their actions or missions |
| Where the activities secret or publicly known? | Some low-profile activities maintained for the sake of secrecy and confidentiality, while others were leaked and became known to the public | Most actions meant to stay secret |
| 20 Any sign of interest from the public or the media? | In general, low interest shown, but depending on the period in which such meetings took place; moften, anti-normalization movements and factions behind most of the verbal attacks and condemnations | High level of interest from media, political parties, and governments; any leak of meeting could mean its collapse and embarrassment if not considered politically a risk for people behind it |
| Availability of information or any reference to publication? | No documentation whatsoever for this aspect of contacts; efforts lost for lack of collection and documentation; no agency or initiative to collect such efforts and document them for lessons learned or achievements mad. | Every effort, regardless of its outcome or importance, completely approved and documented for lessons to be learned and knowledge for leadership |

inside and outside occupied Palestine. The same resolution was reinforced again in the 15th Fatah session in April 1981, in the 16th in 1982, the 18th and the 19th in November 1988, and finally in the 5th Fatah conference in August 1989. Since then the contacts with the Israeli peace movement became legal according to PNC resolutions.

The Stockholm meeting in November 21, 1988 was considered a turning point in the Jewish-American relations with the Palestinians in general and the PLO in particular.

Track II Serving the Official Track

On July 4, 1987, at the house was of Moshe Amirav, the Likud central committee member, were two Palestinians, Sari Nusseibeh and Salah Zahalka. The discussion was to look for the best solution to the Palestinian problem. Regardless of what was said, in this meeting was considered another turning point in Israeli-Palestinian relations and history. Within a week another meeting was organized in Nusseibeh's house in Abu dies on the outskirts of Jerusalem, and this time Faisal Husseini attended the meeting. Both Husseini and Amirav reached the understanding that historic rights belong to history, and historic dreams are just dreams. The inclusion of Husseini in the second meeting openly reflected PLO participation in the official process. Thus, it was clear what role Track II could play in serving the basic interests of the official track, and could provide the necessary elements and a proper mechanism for contemplating the different options for an outcome to the conflict.

Track II Description

Basic differentiations. When discussing Track II, one needs to explain the difference between serious work helping Track I and between Track II activity to promote people-to-people cooperation and rapprochement. There has been much confusion in describing both activities and interplay between them, since both belong theoretically to Track II. This study has intended to give attention to both tracks without eliminating the overall picture, but always favoring the kind of activity that would help negotiations at the official level.

Track II Versus Political Realities

Track II activities are influenced by political reality and by realities on the ground. Track II implies joint work between Palestinian and Israeli individuals or groups in pursuing a specific objective or a series of objectives directly related from the two parties' points of view. From a thorough observation of the pace of Track II activities over a year, it is clear that Track II was directly influenced by political realities on either side. While the

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- 1 beginning of the Oslo process was considered the opening for Track II initiatives by different and new people over different and new issues. The new ideas reached their peak between 1998 and 1999, and stopped in in 2000, in expectation of the outcome of the Camp David talks. The collapse of the talks and the visit by Ariel Sharon to the Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem provoked another round of hostilities associated with the Aqsa intifada. The collapse of the Camp David talks was considered the turning point, and end, of Track II activities. If we compare Track II between the first intifada and the second, it is clear that the level of activity in the first stage was superior in many ways to the level of Track II activity during the second. In other words, one could say that the Track II activity during the first intifada is the foundation for what followed in terms of a serious opening up of peace initiatives and political negotiations.

Political Reality

- 15 The top of the curve shown in Figure 5.2 shows the time span associated with signing the Oslo Accords as well as the time immediately before it and the longer time afterward. The “golden period,” as it was called, described the period of opportunity for developing contacts and extending cooperation, not only at the Track II level, but also at other levels. The low points correspond to to the first and second intifadas, which were times of increased security risks and instability during the political talks and negotiations.

Track II and Types of Cooperation

- 25 *Professional cooperation, including professional training and capacity building.* Palestinians could learn and benefit from the advanced Israeli experience in certain areas or fields of expertise, specially health, agriculture, water, and planning. Different professional groups had been directly engaged in certain cooperative projects, even during the most difficult times of conflict. Such projects were not interrupted by deterioration of the security conditions, but were treated separately and in a their own atmosphere. The Israelis who were behind such projects stressed the importance for Palestine that such projects should continue, and evidently that was what happened. The good contacts that they developed over the years and the human and developmental dimension of such projects were strong enough to win official approval on both sides for their continuation.

- 40 *People-to-people projects.* Such projects were affected dramatically by the existing security conditions, and resulted in the huge reduction of the total number of projects classified as part of the such projects. It is worth mentioning here that this specific experience was evaluated the most extensively by both sides and by donors. This element received the strongest criticism

Figure 5.1 Levels of Track II Activity

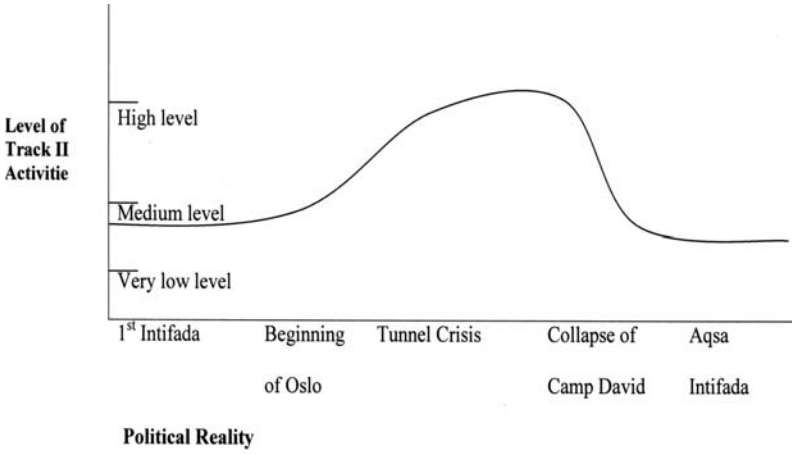
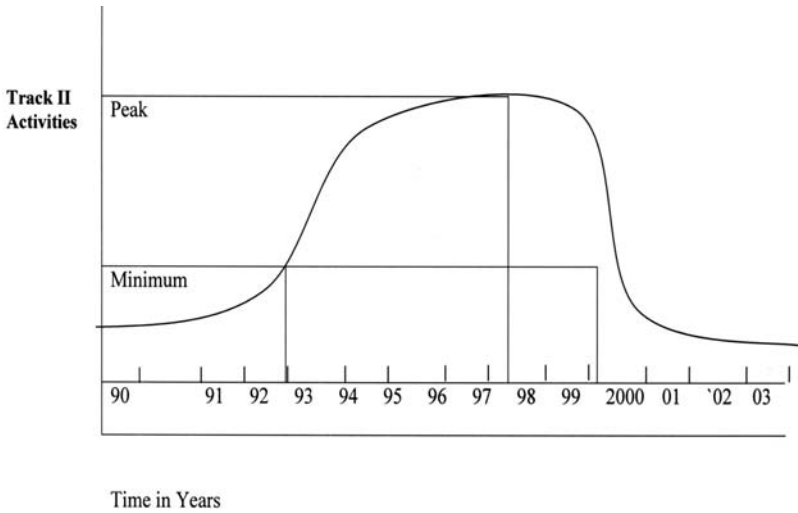


Figure 5.2 Track II Activities



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1 by the public at large and political parties, in particular. Regardless of the
strong attack on the people-to-people projects, they were able to survive the
criticism and continue with a minimum level of projects and NGOs. The NGOs
from both sides who decided to continue despite strong criticism opted for
discreet action in the implementation phase of their projects instead of any
5 previously publicized.

Nonessential cooperation. Track II has its own attraction and incentives.
Some people looked at the Track II as a form of expressing their interests,
for developing additional agendas, for political purposes because of frustra-
10 tion on other fronts, for financial purposes, and for employment, while oth-
ers maintained their belief that such opportunities presented by Track II are
intended to reduce the gap between the two sides and bring the prospects of
peace closer. The Palestinians had witnessed, though, a sort of Track II
activity reflecting the different interests of the people behind the activity.
15 It had not been necessary that the activity represented either a Palestinian
or Israeli priority or a donor interest. Since no serious effort was put into
this activity, at least on the Palestinian side, then this activity was the first
to disappear because of the deterioration of the security situation and as a
direct result of strong public criticism. Most of the earlier activity was
20 driven by Israelis or was donor initiated; the Palestinian role was limited
to a basic requirement of having a Palestinian partner in the project, with-
out needing the partner to participate in the development of the idea or the
project or to take any responsibility in their implementation and financial
management. The outcome of such activity was a total halt to everything.

25 *Visits and exchange programs.* Some kind of cooperation was needed for
maintaining visits between families, as a reflection of normalization, trust,
cooperation, and as a sign that hostilities resulting from the occupation
were being transformed into a more humane aspect of family visits. Most
30 donors have stressed the need to create such projects, in particular the need
to work more with the younger generations, and to influence their minds,
especially among the Palestinians. Incentives were presented to such pro-
jects and found the necessary cooperation from the Israeli side. However,
despite the facilities offered for such projects, the total number of projects
35 presented for visits and exchanges were minimal compared to the total
number of projects dealing with other issues. Such projects were com-
pletely reduced and even stopped when there were verbal or written attacks
in schools, mosques, and political parties. Even at the height of such pro-
jects, the participants in such projects was limited to a narrow segment of
40 Palestinian society, mostly associated with private schools, affluent fami-
lies, and some religious groups.

Track II Versus Official Reaction

The reaction of the Palestinian Authority to this track, in terms of its importance, contribution, participants, timing, and topics varied according to the official interlocutor. There was no agreed official assessment of Track II a person in the authority could always be found who could easily endorse any project related to this track.

It is worth mentioning here that tracks I and II were not mutually exclusive, and always allowed for space to develop other options. It might be said that Track II was initiated before even Track I was built and ready to move. Still, everyone believes that the fundamental idea behind Track II is to provide the necessary support to Track I, to pave the way for Track I to move and develop the conditions to succeed.

Observers have witnessed some fluctuation in the position of of official criticism, and the fluctuation stems from the notion that Track II might endanger the role Track I could and should play. There had been a demand that Track II should cease to exist as long as Track I was moving ahead with its certain achievements: any duplication through the presence of Track II dealing with similar topics of discussion might jeopardize the importance and the role of Track I. Such pressure was never completely effective or able to stop or delay all the Track II activities. On the other hand, there was clear acknowledgement by the political leadership of the importance of Track II when Track I was comatose or halted by political and security complications. It was then that Track II again gained importance and was considered the only active type of track, thus temporarily replacing the official track I negotiations: people known to be active in Track II were asked to provide help to officials during crises. Officials on both sides of the conflict were aware of such advantages and availed themselves of Track II during critical times, even replacing the official track. Government officials have gone even further in their recognition of the role Track II plays and could act by requesting the addition of some Track II higher-ups to work next to government officials in order to benefit from the services and the venue Track II offers, without endangering any official positions or being criticized publicly.

The basic criticism of Track II by objectors on within officialdom has to do with the lack of control mechanisms. The political leadership's lack of complete knowledge and authority over the existing tracks, and the sometimes irresponsible attitudes or behavior of some of those active in the tracks in terms of the topics they dealt with or the positions they offered that deviated from official positions, endangered Track I negotiations.

Track II Versus Different Players

When writing about the different players in Track II, one needs to explain that while there were groups of Palestinians ready to join, other groups were

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1 completely against joining such activities. The criteria used by the oppo-
nents had to do with their fear that the general public was not supportive,
and that such activities might be considered as normalization or leading to
a process of normalization. The normalization threat has prevented the
5 inclusion of many important segments of the Palestinian society, and pre-
vented the direct benefit of their knowledge and expertise in Track II. The
self-exclusion of important segments of the society, in particular most uni-
versity professors, trade unionists, professional associations, intellectuals,
journalists and other writers, and sectarians, among others, have deprived
10 Track II of the added value of their contributions and knowledge. On the
Israeli side such exclusions did not happen; to the contrary, there was a
clear involvement of individuals coming from the corresponding Israeli
groups, thus enriching the Israeli participation and strengthening its role in
the Track II negotiations.

15 In principle, it is important to highlight the following dimensions in rela-
tion to the Palestinian players contributing to Track II activities: (while it was
decided to raise these issues because of importance, no one should under-
stand that such issues are inclusive to all second track or activist involved in
second track, rather the involvement of unqualified few has damaged the rep-
utation of the qualified majority. Regardless and for the sake of fair descrip-
20 tion it is important to allude to such negative contributions)

Qualification level of Palestinian participants. The self-exclusion of many
important segments of the Palestinian population has promoted a serious
lowering in the quality of Palestinian participants and resulted in the intro-
25 duction of less qualified individuals.

Lack of prior knowledge or preparation. The immediate introduction of Track II
onto the Palestinian scene and its forceful presence in the Israeli–Palestinian
conflict developed a need to bring Palestinian participants into the exercise
30 without their having time enough to go through training or preparation.

Lack of quality control and inspection. Track II is an unofficial track, govern-
ment officials were taking positions regarding the nature of the second
track, and officials in Track I even tried to sabotage Track II and the idea
35 behind it. But there was not, and still there still is not a proper, self-
imposed mechanism among Track II activists and promoters to monitor per-
formance, measure results, and evaluate actions and corrections in the
direction of improving performance and securing a minimal level of results.

40 *Serious lack of knowledge of official negotiating positions or fall-back positions.*
Some of the Palestinian participants lack the basic political background
and knowledge of negotiating skills and basic information of their official

negotiating positions. The lack of knowledge endangers the consistency of the official positions and official track, especially if those on the Israeli side discover the discrepancies between the two tracks and the weakness of the second in contrast to the first. This should be encouraging, and even focus on, the need to develop and emphasize the role of Track II instead of the importance and role of Track I.

Sending officials to Track II occasions. It was very difficult sometimes for Track II promoters and even for officials in charge of negotiations to differentiate between tracks I and II. For some of them, the difference was in the names and the styles and not in the content. Sometimes because of ego and sometimes for serious reasons, officials in charge of negotiations felt the need to send official representation to some Track II meetings. This was to enhance the negotiations, control the kind of concessions offered and enforce maintaining an official position, or have a presence in Track II processes in accordance with a donor's demand for official endorsement. On the other hand, it is clear that some senior official negotiators decided on their own to take part in the Track II activities without official approval—or by providing only partial information on the exercise, and thus obtaining official approval. Some of the official negotiators attending such activities and meetings received honoraria for their attendance directly from the organizers of Track II, without reporting anything about the associated earnings.

Lack of knowledge accumulation and results benefiting at the official level. Since there is no coordination at Track II level between all participants and organizers, there is no institutional knowledge or available documentation. The absence of a data bank to record all activities as a reference for future needs has minimized the importance and the contribution of the track despite its serious additions to the official negotiations. The lack of any coordinating body to let people know what all are doing in the field of Track II, and how to benefit from the available results and achieved agreements is an undermining factor in search for complementary elements between the two tracks.

Undermining the official track (Track I) through official participation and concessions. Whenever the official participants discuss the issues raised in Track II, and not in Track I, despite the fact that such knowledge is accepted by all participants in both tracks, the moment any official (i.e., Track I) participant offers any concession to the Israeli side and retreats from an officially announced position, the official position loses its protection and the concession offered by such an official, even in his personal and unofficial capacity, will be known in official Israeli negotiating circles. The Israelis, of course, will use and stress it whenever the official negotiating track in

1 convened, taking advantage of any concession in promoting their side in official negotiations.

Palestinian participants chosen by Israelis. At the start of the people-to-people activities, and because the initiatives for such projects came from the
 5 Israelis, they opted to identify their own Palestinian partners and chose them according to Israeli standards and expectations and not according to adherence to the official Palestinian positions. This resulted in the promotion of new Palestinian people-to-people participants according to Israeli
 10 criteria and selection, imposed on the Palestinian population and Palestinian Authority as their own representatives. Most selected in this way were qualified only by Israeli criteria. All this was later corrected, after the damage it inflicted on the Palestinian position, and making the general Palestinian public extremely suspicious about such joint “normalization” activities.

15 **Track II Versus Achievements**

In general, one could simply say that the total achievements of Track II went beyond expectations and contributed enormously to the development and promotion of the official track. Regardless of some of the setbacks from the less thought-out people-to-people activities, if one study the direct
 20 and indirect contributions by Track II (that is, serving the official track), then the only conclusion is positive confirmation for Track II’s role in serving and facilitating Track I.

25 **Conclusions**

- Track II is connected to the political development, and its pace does reflect the political mood.
- Track II gets its importance from either the failure of the official negotiations or from its limitations.
- 30 • Track II requires minimal conditions for its promotion. The lack of the necessary items will prevent its promotion, while the presence of the required items will accelerate such promotion.
- Track II is not expected to become a popular act, with any ability of attraction.
- 35 • Track II lacks clear official support and backing. Different signals and indicators were sent by different Palestinian decisionmakers in respect of the real Palestinian Authority position’s view of the unofficial track.
- Track II is and has been seen as a catalyst track, a support mechanism, promoter of ideas, and a facilitator to the official track. It lacks
 40 an independent concept or consensus objective. It was never considered or developed as a process.

- Track II gets its importance at the expense of the decrease in the importance of the official track, or the latter's inability to perform. 1

Recommendations

- Collect, review, and study all work done by Track II over the years. 5
- Draw conclusions from collective study and analysis.
- Arrange study days for the people and organizations working on or involved in Track II, to come up with lessons learned, conclusions, and recommendations for future work.
- Establish a coordinating Track II committee among the participants to represent the relevant organizations to coordinate their work and to set up mechanisms and agree on future plans. 10
- Publicly introduce a set of well-known, creditable names associated with Track II to facilitate the public acceptance and to increase public support. 15
- Define Track II strategy, focusing either on specific issues and areas of work or opening it up without limitations and even expanding activities.
- Establish working communications and permanent contact with the Palestinian Authority for reviewing action, improving performance, and coordinating measures among the authority, and NGOs regarding track II. 20
- To publish and distribute reviews, conclusions and to highlight actions and results through articles, meetings and publications. To eliminate any secret activities associated with track II, instead concepts like openness and transparency should become the leading track II elements. 25
- Achieve a working standard among Track II practitioners and agree on a set of standards to be followed and acknowledged by the different civil-society organizations, and NGOs This should include improving the preparatory level and background knowledge, setting up quality control and inspection, developing smooth and comprehensive dissemination processes, and maintaining the knowledge accumulation process. 30
- Set up a Track II observation and resource center that can issue periodical reports about professional performance of Track II practitioners and identify recommendations to be adhered to by such activists. 35
- Adopt a series of meetings with the public, as part of public diplomacy to create the necessary awareness among the people, political parties and, influential public figures. 40
- Get clear public statements from high-level decision-makers and officials acknowledging the role, importance, and the continual need for Track II, in coordination with and complementary to the official track.

- 1 • Use the media to normalize the action among the general populace, and even as far as considering its own media outlets.

Notes

- 5 1. Menachem Klein's research on Track II is planned to be complemented next year by his analysis of the impact of Track II on the official talks, under the auspices and support of the United States Institute for Peace.
2. Hussein Agah et al. *Track II Diplomacy—Lessons from the Middle East* (Cambridge, MIT Press, 2003).
- 10 3. For a recent book covering the wider scope see John Davies and Edward (Edy) Kaufman, eds., *Second Track/Citizens Diplomacy: Concepts and Techniques of Conflict Transformation* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003).
4. Anthony Wanis-St. John, *Back Channel Diplomacy—The Strategic Use of Multiple Channels of Negotiation in Middle East Peacemaking* (Boston: Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University, 2001) 12.
- 15 5. *Ibid.*, 12–15; Gennady I. Chufirin and Harold H. Saunders, "A Public Peace Process," *Negotiation Journal* 9, 2 (1993): 155–178; Harold Saunders, "Possibilities and Change: Another Way to Consider Unofficial Third Party Intervention," *Negotiation Journal* 11, 3 (1995): 271–276. For additional references see the Bibliography.
6. Benjamin Gidron, Stanley N. Katz, and Yeheskel Hasenfeld, eds. "Introduction, Theoretical Approach and Methodology," *Mobilizing for Peace: Conflict Resolution in Northern Ireland, Israel/Palestine and South Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 8–9
- 20 7. *Ibid.*, 25.
8. Daniel Lieberfeld, "Evaluating the Contribution of Track II Diplomacy to Conflict Termination in South Africa 1984–90," *Journal of Peace Research* 39, 3 (May 2002): 356
9. Nadim Rouhana, "Unofficial Third Party Intervention in International Conflict: Between Legitimacy and Disarray," *Negotiation Journal* 11, 3 (1995): 255–271; Nadim Rouhana, "Interactive Conflict Resolution: Theoretical and Methodological Issues in Conducting Research and Evaluation," in Paul Stern, Alexander George and Daniel Druckman, eds., *International Conflict Resolution: Techniques and Evaluation* (Washington DC, National Academy Press, 2000), 294–337.
- 25 10. Herbert C. Kelman, "The Contributions of Non-Governmental Organizations to the Resolution of Ethno-national Conflicts: An Approach to Evaluation" (Paper presented at the Carnegie Corporation Conference on the Role of International NGOs in Ethnic and Nationalist Conflicts, New York, November 1996), 12–13; Lieberfeld, *ibid.*, 370
- 30 11. Herbert C. Kelman, "Interactive Problem Solving: An Approach to Conflict Resolution and its Application in the Middle East," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 31, (1998): 190–198
- 35 12. Moshe Maoz et al., "The Future Israeli-Palestinian Relations," *Middle East Policy*, 7, 2 (February 2000): 3.
13. Naomi Chazan, "Negotiating the Non-Negotiable: Jerusalem in the Framework of an Israeli-Palestinian Settlement," *Occasional Papers of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, 7 (March 1991)
- 40 14. Gidron et al.
- One of the most difficult aspects of peace-making is the need to replace the arsenal of cultural tools (e.g., language, images, and symbols), that the contesting parties have institutionalized over time to define their opponents. These tools often are connected to events that are rooted in the historical

ethos of each opponent’s collective identity . . . because of the manner in which they frame the opponents and define the conflict, these tools become major impediments to the peace-making or conflict-resolution process . . . one of Peace and Conflict Resolution Organizations’ major contributions is providing alternative cultural tools that redefine both the contesting parties and the nature of the conflict in a manner that enables dialogue and negotiation,

15. Ibid., 205–234.

16. Feargal Cochrane, “Beyond the Political Elites: A Comparative Analysis of the Roles and Impacts of Community-Based NGOs in Conflict Resolution Activity,” *Civil Wars*, 3, 2 (Summer 2000):1–22

17. Based on Menachem Klein, “The Palestinian 1948 Refugees—Models of Allowed and Refused Return,” presented in an Exeter University international workshop on the comparative study of refugee return programs with reference to the Palestinian context, titled as (“Transferring Best Practice”), June 2004

18. Based on Menachem Klein, *The Jerusalem Problem: The Struggle for Permanent Status* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2003), 23–32

19. Issa Kassisyyeh, “Second Track Negotiations: The Jerusalem File,” *Jerusalem Quarterly* 15, (2002) www.jqf-jerusalem.org.

20. Ibid., 2002; Michael Hassassian, “Final Status Negotiations on Jerusalem: An Inside Look” (presentation at PASSIA, March 13,2001), <http://www.passia.org>.

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JHU Press Blog. Track-Two Diplomacy toward an Israel-Palestinian Solution, 1978-2014. Track-Two Diplomacy toward an Israel-Palestinian Solution, 1978-2014. Submitted by jmh on Wed, 2014-09-03 8:30 AM. The basic fact is that these two peoples, who have both gone through traumatic existential threat experiences, have for the last thirty years made a great effort to move forward (with setbacks) on the way to peace. Throughout those thirty years I was "behind the scenes" involved in this effort, and I give account of that experience in the research-based study Track Two Diplomacy Toward an Israel-Palestinian Two State Solution, 1978-2014. In this book, I argue that the definition of peace, as such, must be decisive for a successful outcome. Track-II talks in the Middle East "unofficial discussions among Israeli and Arab scholars, journalists, and former government and military officials" have been going on since soon after the 1967 Six Day War and have often paved the way for official negotiations. Despite their different perspectives, the book's two Israeli and two Palestinian authors are able to reach shared conclusions about the effectiveness and consequences of Track-II talks. Track-II Diplomacy not only makes a valuable contribution to the historical record of Arab-Israeli diplomacy but also offers insights into the role of informal and non-official discussions in resolving conflicts. A book launch for Track-Two Diplomacy toward an Israeli-Palestinian Solution, 1978-2014 was held at the Wilson Center on September 17, 2014. Tables and Figures Preface Acknowledgments. 1. The Camp David Accords Lay the Foundations for a Two-State Solution, 1978-79. 2. The First Multitrack Diplomacy Efforts and the Unsuccessful "Jordanian Option," 1979-88. 3. A Multitrack Approach to Israeli-Palestinian Negotiations, 1989-91. 4. Back-Channel Negotiations in Norway: The Challenges, the Planning, and the Track-Two Efforts of the Oslo Accords, 1991-93. 5. Preparing for Permanent Status: The First Can track II diplomacy help bring peace? (photo credit: REUTERS). Advertisement. The recent cross-border Environmental Cooperation Conference held at the Arava Institute, Kibbutz Ketura, brought together Israeli, Palestinian and Jordanian academics, NGOs and policy-makers focusing on wastewater treatment and reuse in the West Bank, renewable energy, charcoal production pollution in the northern West Bank, climate change, and the looming humanitarian crisis in Gaza.