

*How It Helped<sup>1</sup>:*  
*The Role of Track Two in Protracted, Asymmetric and Ethnonational Conflicts*  
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**Overview:** This paper seeks to understand the extent to which Track Two Diplomacy (Track Two) contributed to the resolution of protracted, asymmetric and ethnonational (PAE) conflicts. Track Two refers to informal, facilitated dialogues between influential representatives of conflicting parties to develop insights and ideas that can be “transferred” to formal negotiations and communicated to broader public opinion. More specifically, this article discusses the ways in which Track Two pushed a larger peace process forward, with a focus on the role of the third party, the inclusion of civil society actors and how broader public opinion in the respective conflict contexts impacted negotiations and dialogue. The paper develops an original typology of roles that Track Two can play, which provides a framework for our analysis and presents a conceptual tool based on this typology to illustrate multi-directional transfer from Track Two.

**Typology/Tool:** The paper produces both an original typology or roles that Track Two can play in conflicts, and also a new tool for understanding Track Two. The typology comprises five distinct stages that a Track Two process can go through and posits particular roles for different types of Track Two at each stage. It is important to note that the application of these stages is not linear; the role of Track Two in a peace process can move between the different stages in various directions over time. Moreover, different levels/kinds of Track Two can be active at the same time at different levels of a peace process, sometimes unknown to each other. Finally, not all Track Two processes will exhibit each of these stages during their lifetime; some will not have a particular stage while others will have all of them at one time or another.

The stages are:

- *In the beginning* – At the very outset of dialogue, before there is a formal peace process, exploratory discussions at the T2 level can help to establish the idea that dialogue with the other side is something that is possible.
- *Heavy Lifting* – The detailed work that Track 1 cannot or will not do, but that needs to be done. Exploring whether particular compromises may be workable.
- *Great Leap Forward* – Serving as the place where breakthroughs happen which would not be possible by conventional diplomatic means. Often this happens as a result of a combination of both political shifts, and the existence of a dialogue which has allowed people to get to know and trust each other.
- *Life Support* – Keeping doors to dialogue open, even if the official process is dormant.
- *Endgame or Endless Game?* – A peace process has reached a point whereby it is more about “process” than about “peace;” an ongoing discussion which does not seem capable of reaching any sort of resolution of the issues, but keeps going because it has become part of the “furniture”

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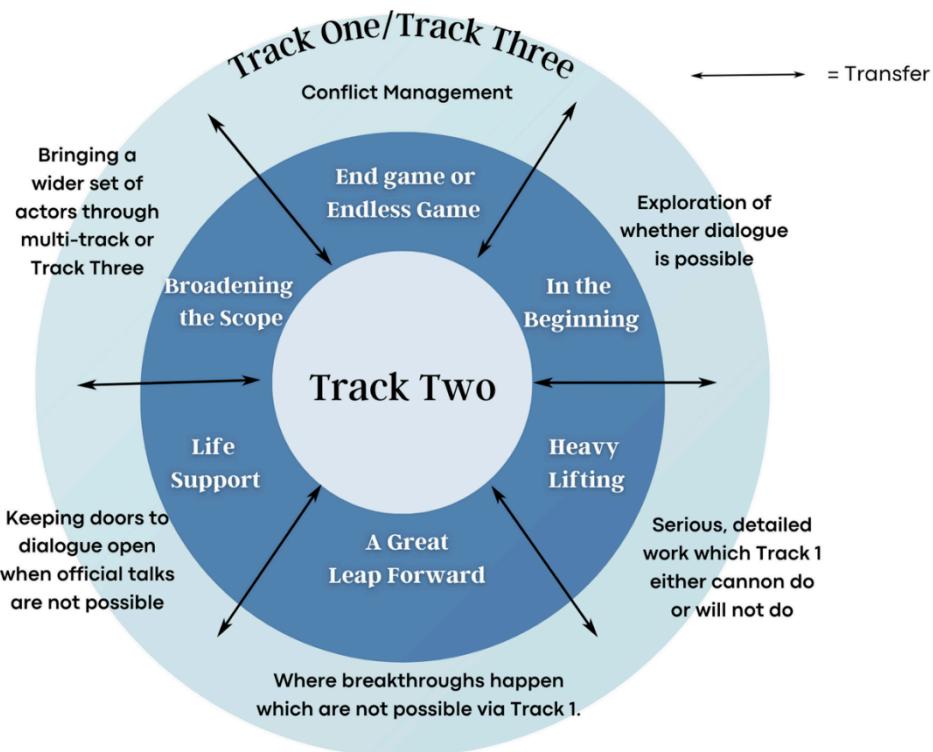
<sup>1</sup> Thanks to Peter Jones – Executive Director, Ottawa Dialogue, University of Ottawa – for drafting, with permission, this summary report derived from “How It Helped: The Role of Track Two in Protracted, Asymmetric and Ethnonational Conflicts,” by Jones et al.

The original research was conducted as part of the research project, “Why It Worked: Research-Driven Model for Conflict Resolution,” a project devised and funded by Bridging Insights, Inc. and designed and led by Harvard Kennedy School’s Negotiation and Conflict Resolution Collaboratory. Bridging Insights, Inc. is a registered nonprofit organization seeking to build a research-based model for conflict resolution to provide new ideas, paradigms, and methods of engagement applicable to practitioners in diverse conflicted areas. Between 2021 and 2023, Bridging Insights worked with five universities on a large-scale, multi-case comparative, interdisciplinary study of conflicts between 1946 and 2018 that are considered resolved. For further information please reach out to [research@bridginginsights.com](mailto:research@bridginginsights.com).

of the dispute. It can also play a role of helping to “manage” a conflict, which can be a positive thing, but can also lead to a situation whereby the conflict becomes “frozen” at an “acceptable” level of violence.

- *Broadening the Scope* – Bringing in the wider set of actors required to establish real peace between societies.

In addition to the Typology, the paper produces a new tool. The comparative research showed that Track Two plays several distinct roles at different points in the conflict process. It does so in a non-linear fashion, and these different roles impact the nature of “transfer” to different tracks in different ways, thereby having a multi-dimensional impact and contribution to the resolution of conflicts. Furthermore, the research design, typology and case study analysis showed that different manifestations of Track Two played specific roles in incrementally accompanying, supporting or pushing the process forward in specific ways and therefore *“helping”* the process move forward towards an agreement. This is shown through **combining** the **typology** of the specific roles Track Two plays with distilling specific mechanisms or environmental conditions that helped the **“transfer”** of tangible (outputs, draft agreements, proposals) and intangible (trust, relationship, legitimacy) elements from Track Two to Track One (or Three).



It is important to view the tool in a holistic, not linear fashion, and not only from the inside out, but from the outside in as well. The inner circle shows the Track Two initiative, workshop or process at the center. The different compartments of the circle shape denote the different stages of the typology, underscoring the non-linearity of the reality of most past and ongoing conflict resolution processes. The outer section denotes that Track 1 and Track 3 are equally both the envisaged direction and recipients of transfer and the importance of civil society, or Track 3 inclusion in the sustainable resolution of conflicts. The arrows denote the process of transfer, also illustrating that transfer can be thought of as existing in multiple directions.

**Case Studies:** The case studies showed that meeting in a neutral environment, spending significant time together over a long period, equal treatment of both parties and third party facilitation contributed to Track One processes. These things contributed through preventing walkouts and impasses, building trust and political relationships between decision-makers and influential stakeholders, making direct inputs to decision-makers, and creating opportunities to produce joint statements then passed on to actors at the Track One level. Project data highlighted the importance of multiple directions of transfer to both Track One and Track Three. Analysis shows that Track Two can be an essential component in fostering inclusion, or the relationship between the parties and the broader societies in question. This is accomplished through consultative forums at the Track Two level, non-armed Track Two level actors such as business or cultural leaders producing joint statements for upward transfer, and intense advocacy and involvement from Track Two and Track Three to increase participation or transfer perspectives into formal negotiations or agreements. In addition, Track Two dialogues contributed to the peace process by desensitizing the public to dialogue and building greater understanding and latent support for negotiations in society. Research also illustrates that the lack of civil society inclusion or lack of linkage/connection/transfer between all three tracks was one a factor that led to protests or voting against the final peace agreement or challenges with the implementation of the agreement. Analysis showed that the contributions Track Two makes to the substance and relationships within a process contributes to the creation of moment when progress is possible – however it is important to distinguish how exactly this takes place. Therefore, the typology illustrates the roles or “critical junctures” (e.g. Great Leap Forward; In The Beginning) that Track Two creates to nudge the process forwards. Analysis also highlights the role of the third party as a mechanism for transfer from Track Two to Track One, such as direct contact with Track One negotiators, engaging in shuttle dialogue between sides (and Tracks) and connection to key constituencies outside the negotiating parties, to name a few key roles.

**Conclusions:** The Typology and the Tool illustrate how Track Two can “help” or contribute to the resolution of conflicts at different junctures. In each section of the circle, transfer can occur within different environments. The paper contributes to research and practice of Track Two in conflict resolution in three ways. *First*, the notion of **multi-directionality** in Track Two scholarship. While Lederach’s triangle model of conflict resolution is a central and important way of visualizing how multiple levels of society play important roles in conflict resolution, a triangle model creates, even if inadvertently, a hierarchy between the Tracks. Our typology and tool therefore move beyond the hierarchy of triangular models of Track Two and views both Track One and Track Three as important destinations for transfer. *Second*, in a related way, as many conflict resolution processes are presented in a temporally linear way, the typology and tool strive to capture **non-linearity** through the circular shape, understanding that each part can occur in different stages, repeat itself or start and stop again after long periods of time, reflecting the messy reality of the field. *Third*, the typology and tool illustrate **modularity** by showing the contributing factors such as the role that third parties play, or contextual factors like changes in administration or breakdowns in negotiations which play different roles at different stages of the process. Therefore, the typology and tool seek to create ways to capture complexity and engender hope, understanding that even if a conflict resolution process moves from a “Great Leap Forward” back to “In the Beginning”, it does not necessarily signal an “end” of a process.