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# Research Report

## Oslo and Its Aftermath: Lessons Learned from Track Two Diplomacy

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*Since the collapse of the Oslo peace process and the violence that followed, many scholars have reflected upon the Israeli–Palestinian peace process. Most of this analysis has focused on official negotiations without considering the substantial role that unofficial peace efforts have played in peacebuilding, both prior to and after Oslo. This article, in contrast, seeks to better understand the application of “track two” diplomacy to the Israeli–Palestinian case. It reports on a self-reflection effort by numerous Israeli–Palestinian peace practitioners to better understand what has worked, what has not, and how new initiatives could be more effectively organized and carried out in the future. The research presented is based on an inventory of seventy-nine track two projects that occurred between Israelis and Palestinians between 1992 and 2004, personal interviews with many of those who organized and oversaw these projects, and two focus group meetings that brought together a total of forty practitioners.*

*In this article, we seek to better understand two issues: (1) how track two initiatives have changed in scope, organization, and intent; and (2) how track two practitioners have sought to disseminate their work beyond the participants of those initiatives. Our findings present an overall picture of the Israeli–Palestinian second track practice and identify a number of trends and common types of practice.*

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*Among the trends we have identified are the following: during the peace process years, more track two initiatives were undertaken with elite/professional participants than with representatives of the grassroots, but in the subsequent decade-and-a-half, Israeli-Palestinian grassroots, track two initiatives gradually replaced senior-level track two exchanges; most of the grassroots initiatives we studied were relationship focused, whereas those involving elite participants are outcome focused; the track two community subscribes to a set of theoretical propositions about which conditions and contexts facilitate the transmission of track two insights and ideas to the political process, but these propositions have yet to be validated; and track two specialists do little strategic planning about ways to most effectively transfer track two insights and ideas to the political process. Our research also identified four distinct, but not mutually exclusive, approaches to practice: the psychological, the constructivist, the capacity building, and the realistic interest.*

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**Key words:** conflict resolution, negotiation, track two diplomacy, Israeli-Palestinian peace process, reflective practice, theories of conflict transformation.

## Introduction

In the years following the Oslo Peace Accords in 1993, the second Intifada, and the subsequent breakdown of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, much has been written about “what went wrong” and how meaningful peace between Israelis and Palestinians can be reestablished (see e.g., Hanieh 2001; Pundak 2001; Slater 2001). Much of this analysis has focused on weaknesses within the official peace-making process, which is indeed where the main responsibility for failure rests. But there is little agreement among analysts, especially among Israeli and Palestinian ones, with regard to the specific reason for failure in the negotiation process. Explanations include an anthology of reasons, such as the lack of commitment of key political stakeholders to the map agreed on during the Oslo process, the lack of mechanisms to effectively implement the peace agreements, the inability of the leaders to deal with their hard-line constituencies, the lack of preparation on the part of the negotiation teams, the shortcomings of the mediation process designed by the United States, poor timing, and a failure to address the structural conditions that sustain the conflict. A significant amount of literature reflects specifically on the negotiation process and its failure (e.g., Savir 1998; Enderlin 2003; Beilin 2004; Ross 2004; Qurie 2006; Miller 2008).

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While recognizing the central role that official peace making played in the failure of the Israeli–Palestinian peace process, this article focuses on a more neglected area of investigation: track two diplomacy. We seek to examine how track two processes were designed and implemented, and to better understand what worked, what did not, and how new initiatives could be more effectively organized and carried out in the future. Although numerous track two initiatives involving Israelis and Palestinians have been undertaken since the early 1990s, few authors have reflected on these unofficial efforts and how they affected the larger peace process. Moreover, much of the writing on this subject focuses on individual track two initiatives and hardly looks at them comparatively or as pieces of a whole.

In 2005 and 2006, we joined together with two other colleagues to conduct a research project to examine second track diplomatic activities involving Israelis and Palestinians between 1992 and 2004. This was a particularly fruitful time for second track activities as it coincided with the lead-up to the Oslo peace process, and the subsequent efforts to sustain that initiative after the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin, the outbreak of the second Intifada, and the failure of the 2000 Camp David summit. Our research included a series of interviews with well-known practitioners who were active in Israeli–Palestinian peacebuilding initiatives, and culminated with two workshops that brought together a cross-section of these individuals, one in Istanbul and the other in Washington, DC. Throughout, we have sought to better understand two issues: (1) how second track initiatives have changed in scope, organization, and intent; and (2) how track two practitioners have sought to disseminate the results of their work beyond the participants of the initiative such that they have a broader impact on peacebuilding. This article reports on our findings.

## **Track Two Diplomacy**

Track two diplomacy<sup>1</sup> (Montville 2006) and interactive conflict resolution (ICR) workshops (Fisher 1997) have emerged in the last several decades as a complementary method to official state-based diplomacy, particularly when intractable identity-based conflicts have proven resistant to formal peace-making efforts. Often defined as interventions in which influential representatives from communities in conflict are brought together by an unofficial third party to consider the underlying roots of the conflict and means for its positive transformation (Davies and Kaufman 2002), track two provides a pathway for off-the-record and sustained contact between representatives of adversary groups even when official diplomacy proves impossible. Unlike official diplomacy, track two diplomacy begins with an assumption that protracted social conflicts cannot be resolved without paying attention to the intersocietal dimensions and social identity needs of the conflicting parties, or in Harold Saunders's terms only with a "multi-level peace process" (Çuhadar 2010: 574).

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An essential aspect of the track two diplomacy/problem-solving workshop approach is that the parties need to go beyond the zero-sum thinking that shapes their view of the conflict, to reframe the conflict as a “mutually shared problem” in which they work “together” toward finding a mutually acceptable solution (Mitchell 2003). The early pioneers of the method, such as John Burton (1969), Leonard Doob (1974), Herbert Kelman (1977), and Vamik Volkan, Demetrios Julius, and Joseph Montville (1991), argued that these workshops need to be interactive, and that the underlying psychological and social dynamics of intergroup conflict, such as victimization and dehumanization, should be understood, and the basic human and psychological needs of these groups should be addressed.

Advocates of track two work claim that it can have many positive benefits to peace processes, including providing a safe, off-the-record, and sustained venue for dialogue among adversary groups; engaging adversaries in dialogue when official peace processes fail or are not possible; testing out proposals for conflict management prior to the initiation of formal mediation or diplomacy; and empowering citizens as participants in peace processes. Indeed, Ronald Fisher (2006) and Susan Allen Nan (1999) have shown that track two diplomacy is most useful as a prenegotiation strategy.

Track two initiatives vary considerably in terms of their structure, content, methodology, and goals. Esra Çuhadar (2009) has categorized track two activities along two dimensions: the type of people who are brought together for interaction, and the stage at which the conflict is being waged. The first dimension, type of participants, includes political leaders who interact unofficially (also known as track one-and-a-half diplomacy; see Nan 2005), influential elites who do not hold official positions (such as newspaper editors, academics, leaders of civil society groups), or people representing the grassroots sector (such as students). The second dimension categorizes track two activities according to the stage of the conflict they take place in: preventive, prenegotiation, negotiation, and postagreement peacebuilding.

Another useful distinction in understanding different forms of track two diplomacy is to distinguish between *outcome-focused initiatives* (initiatives designed to generate ideas for political agreements that can be adopted by official diplomats) and *process-focused initiatives* (initiatives that are designed to build relationships, trust, and mutual understanding among adversaries at both the elite and grassroots level to prepare the groundwork for peace to take hold). Both approaches have been widely used in track two circles, either separately or in combination. For example, the now famous Pugwash meetings focused on elite-to-elite exchange by bringing together Soviet and American scientists and military and civilian analysts at the height of the Cold War to consider specific initiatives that could facilitate bilateral cooperation on nuclear issues and reduce the likelihood of an outbreak of war between the Soviet Union and the United States. Another eminent example of elite-to-elite track two exchange was

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the Geneva Initiative between the Israeli and Palestinian elite under the leadership of former Israeli Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister Yossi Beilin. By contrast, Seeds of Peace is a nongovernmental organization (NGO) that often seeks to help build relationships at the grassroots level. Among its projects is an international summer camp that brings together young people from across various conflict sectors in order to promote coexistence and reconciliation. Although the first two initiatives focused on high-level technical discussions and the other on changing the way that individuals, often children, understand each other, we consider both to be track two initiatives in this study.

### ***Track Two and Oslo***

In this research, we focus on track two initiatives carried out in the Israeli-Palestinian context between 1992 and 2004. Perhaps no contemporary conflict has received more attention by practitioners of track two diplomacy than the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Since the 1980s, track two initiatives have brought together hundreds of Israelis and Palestinians from a variety of sectors. Participants in track two initiatives have included, among others, officials acting in an unofficial capacity, youth groups, academic researchers, teachers, journalists, bureaucrats, artists, health-care practitioners, environmentalists, and business groups. Some of these efforts have focused specifically on communication and relationship building, while others have engaged the parties in discussions of specific issues, such as the management of water resources, the political future of Jerusalem, the right of return, and curriculum reform (Kaufman, Salem, and Verhoeven 2006).

Some of the early meetings were arranged by international scholar practitioners, such as Herbert Kelman of Harvard University, who started bringing together people close to Israeli decision makers and to the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) beginning in the 1980s and also throughout the 1990s (Kelman 1995). Other examples of unofficial peace efforts that were facilitated by international third parties during these years include an American Psychiatric Association initiative in the early and mid-1980s, and meetings organized by Everett Mendelsohn of Harvard University toward the end of the 1980s, sponsored by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

In the 1990s, unofficial peace efforts gained further momentum and peaked with the signing of the 1993 Oslo Peace Accord (known as the Declaration of Principles). The Oslo process began in the form of unofficial meetings between Israeli academics and PLO affiliates sponsored by Norway (Abbas 1995; Savir 1998; Beilin 1999). The transformation of the unofficial process into an official peace agreement was considered a major achievement for unofficial peace efforts around the world. The Oslo peace process also resulted in the proliferation of many unofficial peace efforts between 1993 and 2000. After the failure of the final status talks and the

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outbreak of the second Intifada in 2000, track two initiatives continued, but their number has dropped. Still, some important unofficial efforts were carried out during the period following the second Intifada to reactivate negotiations between the parties, such as the Geneva Initiative (see Beilin 2004) and the People's Voice Initiative (explained below).

During this time of violence, it became especially challenging to continue grassroots-level activities. Indeed, some observers have charged that the Oslo process was too focused on secrecy and on back channel talks to address peacebuilding barriers at the elite level and not focused enough on mobilizing the grassroots in support of the peace process (Maney et al. 2006; Lieberfeld 2008; Wanis-St. John 2010). Recently, scholarly research has also argued that a lack of civil society or grassroots involvement in a peace process makes it harder to achieve a sustainable peace (Wanis-St. John and Kew 2008). This argument, however, calls for further analysis in the Israeli-Palestinian context. As we discuss in the results section of this article, grassroots initiatives were also widespread after 1993, although they occurred less frequently than elite-to-elite track two initiatives.

Despite their widespread application and the considerable funding that they have attracted, academic studies of track two initiatives, especially of a comparative nature, have been somewhat rare. One notable exception is a study by Fisher (2005), who used a structured focused method to compare nine cases of violent and protracted social conflicts in which interactive conflict resolution (ICR) was used. Focusing specifically on the ways that ICR outcomes were disseminated to external participants and processes, he has demonstrated that such efforts often have a positive impact on the overall peacebuilding effort. (Other examples of studies that have studied track two impacts on official negotiations more systematically include Kelman 1995; Rouhana 1995; Agha et al. 2003; Lieberfeld 2005; Kaufman, Salem, and Verhoeven 2006; Dassa Kaye 2007; Çuhadar 2009; Wanis-St. John 2010; and Schiff 2010).

Of these assessments, several (Kelman 1995; Rouhana 1995; Agha et al. 2003; Dassa Kaye 2007; Çuhadar 2009; Schiff 2010) focused specifically on the use of track two diplomacy in the Israeli-Palestinian context. Some of these studies suggested that Palestinian-Israeli track two initiatives have achieved some transmission to the official process, although mostly in the form of contributing to the process rather than to the outcome (e.g., Kelman 1995; Agha et al. 2003; Çuhadar 2009). Some of this work also elaborated on the barriers to effective transmission, such as asymmetry (Rouhana 1995; Çuhadar 2009).

The majority of existing studies that have examined track two efforts, however, are descriptive in nature and focus on only one initiative or one conflict rather than examining them comparatively. Our main motive with this research has been to understand and to look critically and comparatively at the modus operandi of peace practitioners in this conflict: how

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practitioners have envisaged social change in this conflict and what they undertook to realize such social and political change. How do they differ from each other in terms of approaches to track two practice in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict? In sum, our intention was to understand the “theories of conflict transformation” used by the peace practitioners in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as well as to comprehend how and why they adopted these theories of conflict transformation.

### ***Theories of Conflict Transformation***

Prior to initiating any track two project, practitioners need to develop a conceptual understanding of where the conflict “comes from,” what factors keep it from being resolved, and what kind of programmatic interventions are likely to transform the conflict in different ways. These assumptions are called “theories of change,” and are “the causal processes through which change comes about as a result of a program’s strategies and action” (Shapiro 2005: 1).

Theories of change used in conflict resolution initiatives in general, and track two diplomacy in particular, are focused on how change occurs within individuals and groups as a result of intergroup interaction. We refer to the particular theories of change used in conflict resolution and peace-building practice as “theories of conflict transformation.” For instance, a project that brings together Israeli and Palestinian school teachers to look at the narratives of conflict taught in secondary school settings would need to include a theory of change about how that discussion would enlighten and transform those individuals, and how they could then become agents of change, spreading the impacts of the initiative beyond the original group that was convened. To date, research into the theories of change that guide track two activities has been very limited (for an exception, see Anderson and Olson 2003).

### **Research Methodology**

In this project, we elicited directly from practitioners their theories of conflict transformation. Our research proceeded in five phases. In Phase One, we completed background research on people and organizations involved in track two work between Israelis and Palestinians from the early 1990s and 2004. We then categorized and mapped each initiative that we studied onto a 1990–2004 time line that included the pre-Oslo, interim, and post-Oslo periods. We then shared these lists with the pioneers of track two diplomacy in the region to check for accuracy and to complete any missing information. These initiatives were then coded according to year, outcome or relationship focus, and type of participant.

In the second phase of the project, we designed an interview protocol to elicit from organizers of track two initiatives their assessments of the roots of the conflict, the corresponding goals of their work, and the

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pathways by which they sought to disseminate impacts from the micro- to macrolevel. Next, we conducted nineteen face-to-face in-depth interviews with practitioners involved in track two initiatives using this protocol. These interviews were followed by two workshops that brought together additional track two practitioners to further discuss the theories of change behind their work; one was held in Istanbul and the other in Washington, DC. The Istanbul workshop was held with ten practitioners working at the grassroots level, whereas the Washington workshop was held with ten practitioners working at the academic/elite level.

All the individual interviews and the records of the focus group meetings were transcribed verbatim. They were then coded using the NVivo qualitative data analysis software (QSR International, Cambridge, MA) for the following main categories: what practitioners think is the heart of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; their beliefs about what went wrong in the peace process; their beliefs about what track two should address and the most appropriate type of intervention; the types of activities designed; goals of the activities (outcome, relationship, or both); expected outcomes from their initiatives; and what dissemination strategies were used, if any. The results are reported in this article along these main categories as well. The main categories for coding were determined by the research team with a theory of change assessment logic in mind. The categories were organized following the interview questionnaire. The interview questionnaire can be found in Appendix One. Within each category, answers were coded following the rules of grounded theory approach in which each emerging subcategory was coded inductively.<sup>2</sup>

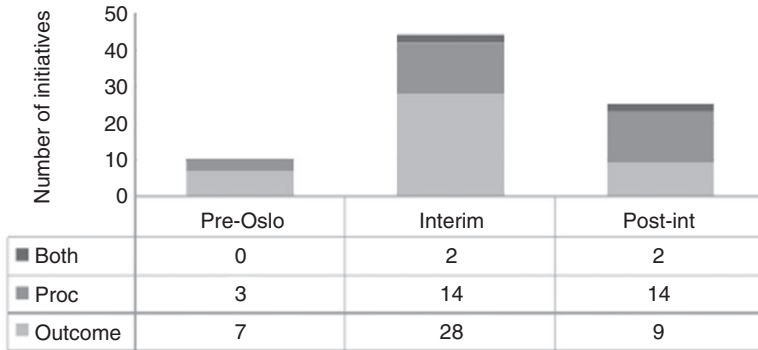
## Results

We first present the general findings from Phase One of the project in which we compiled a list of initiatives and coded them for their goal, type of participants, conflict stage, and duration. The following tables indicate the diversity of track two work conducted between Israelis and Palestinians between 1992 and 2004.<sup>3</sup>

Figure One below shows that of the seventy-nine initiatives we identified, most occurred during the interim period. Although the number of initiatives declined considerably in the post-Intifada period, contrary to the common wisdom they have not come to termination completely. Figure One further breaks down these initiatives according to their goals: whether they were outcome oriented or relationship oriented (see above discussion). It shows that overall, across the entire time frame of the study, the number of outcome-oriented and relationship-oriented initiatives were about the same. The number of outcome-oriented initiatives, however, did decline significantly between the interim and post-Intifada periods, whereas the number of process-oriented initiatives did not change much across different time periods.



**Figure One**  
**Distribution of Track Two Initiatives by Historic Periods and Goals (*n* = 79)**



**Figure Two**  
**Distribution of Track Two Initiatives by Period and Type of Participant (*n* = 79)**

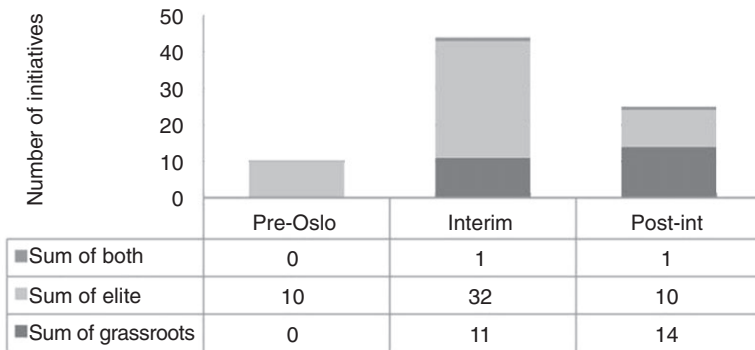


Figure Two shows the seventy-nine initiatives by periods again, but this time with a focus on the type of participants. It indicates that most of the initiatives during the pre-Oslo and interim periods were held with elites (i.e., academics, professionals, policy makers, e.g., track one and a half). The number of grassroots-level initiatives increased during the interim period, and — surprisingly — slightly increased in number in the post-Intifada period despite the breakdown in negotiations and the violence on the ground.

**Table One**  
**Distribution of Israeli–Palestinian Track Two Initiatives by Goals**  
**1990–2004 (n = 79)**

	Relationship Oriented	Outcome Oriented
Grassroots	27 (34%)	1 (1.26%)
Elite/professional	13 (16.4%)	38 (48%)

Interestingly, some of the elite-focused initiatives adopted a grassroots approach either simultaneously or as a replacement strategy during this period. One such example is the People’s Voice initiative founded by Ami Ayalon and Sari Nusseibeh, which hoped to garner widespread support for a two-state solution. This trend can be explained by the failure of the official negotiations and back channel talks that dominated the interim period. Figures One and Two indicate that while the official negotiations were continuing during the interim period, most of the track two initiatives were focused on official negotiations, were held with elites/professionals, and were more outcome oriented. As the negotiations broke down, however, some practitioners shifted their strategy toward a more grassroots-level mobilization.

All in all, we can say that more track two initiatives were undertaken with elite/professional participants than with representatives of the grassroots. This is not surprising given that many of the track two initiatives in the Israeli–Palestinian context were undertaken in preparation for the final status negotiations. One interesting finding from these data is that there was a slight increase in the number of grassroots-level initiatives *after* the collapse of peace negotiations, while in the time period that included the Oslo talks and the final status negotiations, we found a greater incidence of elite-oriented and outcome-focused initiatives.

Finally, Table One (above) breaks all of the initiatives down according to type of participants and goal. The overall picture shows that most of the process-oriented workshops were held with grassroots people such as youth, whereas most of the outcome-oriented initiatives were held with elite/professional-level participants such as academics and policy makers. Initiatives that are geared toward achieving an outcome for peace negotiations or that focus on a specific joint product (such as the formation of a water master plan) were carried out with professional and elite people. The other combinations are rare, especially outcome-oriented initiatives held with grassroots-level people.

In the second phase of the project, we tried to understand the rationale behind these major trends in the Israeli–Palestinian track two practices. Most of the practitioners (thirty-five people out of thirty-nine) we

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interviewed emphasized subjective or psychological factors at the heart of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The factors cited include such psychological dynamics of intergroup conflicts as prejudice, stereotypes, enemy images, dehumanization, distrust, existential fears, as well as humiliation and honor, chosen traumas, and taboos.

After the psychological factors, the second and third most frequently mentioned sources of the conflict cited by our study participants were:

- religious and cultural differences (eleven people);
- power asymmetry and the impact of being “occupied” (eight people);
- access to resources and their control (seven);
- “realpolitik,” referring to power politics in the region and between global actors (three people);
- the “other side” (e.g., the behavior of the enemy) (two people); and
- inflammatory media (one person).

Few of the practitioners interviewed suggested that the “other side” is the source of the conflict. Therefore, we conclude that practitioners attribute the conflict to several different social, economic, political, and psychological factors rather than to the inherent characteristics of the “enemy.” This more nuanced assessment of the basis of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict contradicts “attribution theory,” which posits that individuals and social groups tend to attribute their own group’s negative behaviors to external factors, while the negative behavior of out-groups is viewed as being a product of internal characteristics, such as poor moral character (Kelley 1973). This finding is not surprising given that the practitioners we interviewed are schooled in conflict resolution theory and methods, and thus more likely to see the basis of social conflict from a more conceptually complex point of view.

We also observed that structural sources of the conflict, such as resource and power asymmetry and the impact of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, were mostly brought up by, and thus were more salient for, the Palestinian practitioners who were interviewed. Only a few Israeli or American practitioners mentioned resource and power asymmetry as the major source of the conflict, and those who mentioned it were mostly practitioners who carried out activities specifically concerning environment, resources, and security. Furthermore, local (those living in the region) practitioners (especially Palestinian) were more likely to report that resource and power asymmetry and issues related to the occupation are important sources of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict than

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were the American practitioners who did not mention them as being significant.

Although some practitioners reported that resource/power asymmetry and the impact of the occupation are critically important sources of the conflict, they still choose to exclusively address psychological factors in their activities. For instance, one practitioner who stressed the essential importance of the Israeli occupation as the driver of the conflict was, nevertheless, involved in a project that targeted psychological dynamics, such as dehumanization and prejudice. The practitioners' activities may be disconnected from their beliefs, and they may fail to address "structural" aspects of the conflict in their track two work for several structural reasons. First, funding may be easier to obtain in a certain domain of peacebuilding — the practice is often donor driven (Hanafi and Tabar 2005; Çuhadar and Hanafi 2009). In addition, different NGOs specialize in different services and activities — the organization's practices will support its mission, even if individual practitioners may have contradictory opinions. Finally, because track two is an unofficial process, practitioners who engage in these efforts will have limited ability to address the structural dimensions of conflict.

Nonetheless, some practitioners, especially NGOs that work in both the environment and the peace domains, choose to address both types of root causes successfully. For instance, one initiative that we studied provided water services to residents of an impoverished area, and at the same time turned this development project into an intergroup contact activity in which Israeli and Palestinian villagers had the chance to work together in a joint cooperative effort.

Religious and cultural differences were the second most mentioned source of the conflict by Israeli, Palestinian, and American practitioners. Specifically mentioned were irreconcilable religious beliefs, such as the notion of a "promised land," beliefs held about the religious significance of Jerusalem on both sides, and attitudes of dishonor and disrespect for each other's values. Most of the time, these sources of conflict were mentioned together with psychological factors rather than by themselves, and some initiatives appeared to seek to target both kinds of conflict sources. For example, a project carried out among religious leaders to discuss Jerusalem addressed religious, psychological, and political concerns. Another project focused on the history of Muslim Spain, a civilization in which peaceful coexistence among Muslims, Jews, and Christians lasted several hundred years.

Finally, although few practitioners cited "realpolitik" as an issue at the heart of the conflict, some felt strongly that Machiavellian political dynamics, such as the activities of international powers, was an important component of any analysis of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Realpolitik was mentioned exclusively by Palestinian practitioners.

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### ***Type of Activities and Theories of Conflict Transformation***

Differentiating among the range of practices in the Israeli-Palestinian context and organizing those practices into strict categories proved to be a challenge. Although in the narratives told to us by the practitioners, theories were clearly distinguishable, their actual practice seemed often to represent a blend of several theories. In our research, however, we identified four different, although interrelated, types of track two practice at work in these organizations. Our findings reveal information about which activities are usually preferred and which theories of conflict transformation are adopted in light of these activities. Although we found overlaps between each type, and also found that sometimes practitioners use several of them in combination simultaneously or contemporaneously, we believe these trends can be distinguished — at least at a theoretical level. Below, we refer to types of practice that are shared by several of the peace practitioners. We labeled these four categories as the “psychological,” the “constructivist,” “the “capacity building,” and the “realistic interest” approaches.

*The “Psychological” Approach.* This approach sees psychological factors as the most important causes of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The activities organized in this tradition of practice usually have such end goals as overcoming negative stereotypes and images toward the other disputants, rehumanizing the other, eliminating intergroup prejudice, and building trust and empathy between the adversaries. The theory of conflict transformation articulated in this discourse relies on psychological processes related to cognitive, affective, and behavioral change. The preferred method is social contact that brings together the representatives of adversarial groups in an interactive and friendly environment in order to change the way that each side thinks about, feels toward, and acts toward the other side. The social contact, according to this theory, will trigger a cognitive and affective change process in individuals, and will result in the replacement of negative attitudes, feelings, and zero-sum understanding of the conflict. These new understandings will then, according to this theory, influence public opinion or be considered by people when they make decisions. For example, one practitioner described a program that brought Israeli and Palestinian teachers together to address enemy images and negative stereotypes in order to improve relations between the individuals from adversarial societies. “Teachers get a better knowledge about the history and politics and [each other’s] communities,” she told us. “When teachers from both sides get together and meet together they will know more about the other side from the emotional, personal, and professional level.” The social contact between teachers from adversarial parties changes how they see and feel about each other individually. The

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rationale for focusing on teachers is their eventual impact on a much larger group of people, their students.

Social contact has long been used to decrease intergroup bias and prejudice (Pettigrew 1998). In the context of track two diplomacy, this approach is used as a mechanism to resolve or transform the conflict as well. A vast amount of social psychology literature describes the consequences and conditions of social contact. We observed, however, that despite this literature, some of the practitioners did not elaborate how and why the contact activity would result in the positive individual change. Contact — that is, “when they get together and meet together” — is seen as the tool for change, but the psychological processes that are triggered by contact are not necessarily something of which the practitioners in our study were aware.

*The “Constructivist” Approach.* The constructivist approach focuses on the conflicting and competing historical conflict narratives that lie at the heart of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. These practitioners work with conflict narratives in order to reframe the stakeholders’ zero-sum views of the conflict into narratives that allow for mutual accommodation, compromise, and cooperation.

Activities to transform conflict narratives sometimes take place within joint groups of Israelis and Palestinians, other times new conflict narratives are produced by a group of scholars and then disseminated through media. The goal is often to get individuals to rethink their existing views of the conflict and the other side either by challenging their existing beliefs or by showing them that an alternative and more constructive narrative is legitimate. An example of an activity based on this approach is the formation of an international news service to distribute newspaper articles that emphasize constructive ways of managing the conflict or that describe ways to resolve it. These articles are selected and then distributed in several languages to a wide range of readers. Thus, the service provides a constructive alternative to the mainstream nationalistic discourse of the two sides. In a similar vein, another project brings together historians to rewrite a common historical narrative about the Israeli–Palestinian conflict that focuses on human security aspects.

Here again, however, practitioners faced difficulties when pressed to explain the actual causal mechanisms that would catalyze the changes they seek. For instance, practitioners operating from the constructivist perspective could not explain what kind of cognitive change is envisioned or how it will be realized, under what conditions individuals change their existing beliefs, or how cognitions about the conflict are defended or abandoned when contradicting pieces of information are presented.

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*The "Capacity Builder" Approach.* The capacity-building approach addresses the lack of conflict management skills and knowledge about the other side among Israelis and Palestinians. By extension, the capacity builder views education and training as the main tools for conflict de-escalation, and the acquisition of nonviolent conflict resolution skills as the remedy to violent destructive conflict. Trainings are conducted in various areas, such as problem solving, negotiation and mediation skills, and peace education. These trainings often touch upon topics related to human rights, diversity, citizenship, and peacebuilding. The idea behind these activities is that people who acquire such skills will make more informed and nonviolent decisions regarding conflict management. Similarly, peace education projects seek to prepare educational curricula devoid of prejudice and negative images. Often, the teachers of both parties are brought together for the joint preparation of new curricula and/or to be trained in how to use them.

The theory of change in these types of activities usually relies on the empowerment of individuals (especially of youth) through equipping them with skills and knowledge. In addition to empowerment, attitude change is another frequently mentioned end goal in these types of initiatives. In either case, skills training and education are expected to enhance the capacity of individuals in both societies to undertake peaceful change. As such, the capacity builder is seeking to create "change agents" within each community.

An example of a project that adopts this approach is a special program that educates Jewish youth in the fifth and sixth grades in Arabic language and culture. Instruction is provided by Palestinian teachers. In addition to experiencing the curriculum, Israeli and Palestinian students also interact through various social activities at which Arabic language is practiced. By participating in this program, Jewish students have the opportunity to be in contact with the "other" while also developing new language skills. Therefore, the project claims to contribute to the peaceful coexistence of members of the two cultures, and thus equips and empowers young people with new skills and knowledge. The project specifically targets fifth and sixth graders because they are believed to respond more positively to new information and are seen as having the capacity to transform.

*The "Realistic Interest" Approach.* This approach often deals with the "realistic interest" aspects of the conflict, such as resource conflicts and negotiable interests. The approach is somewhat reminiscent of Muzaffer Sherif's (1966) realistic group conflict theory, which focuses on the realistic interests at the heart of the conflict and the superordinate goals that can facilitate cooperation between conflicting groups.

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The types of activities that fall under this approach include “functionalist” track two activities that use tangible development challenges to bring each side together to solve a joint problem. Typical projects focus on environmental or agricultural issues, health care, or urban planning challenges. Many have focused on technical cooperation to better manage water resources in the region. Practitioners hope that by solving a joint problem together, participants will develop a degree of trust and understanding that contributes to peacebuilding. For example, one of the practitioners told us, “I got this idea that environment can serve as a bridge and working on environmental ideas together can help two communities work together and rather than just talking about relations, they will have a common goal.”

Such activities usually have two goals: one goal often targets technical or functional cooperation, another goal targets relationships between the parties. For instance, an NGO educates youth groups in each community about the water situation in their community and the neighbor’s community. In another program, people from neighboring adversarial communities are brought together to work on joint development projects that could improve the water situation in each community. In both cases, the professional and technical backgrounds of participants are used as starting points. Many claim that water is the ultimate peace building resource because it is relevant to the daily lives of people, it can attract the interest of professionals who are concerned with the environment, and it is related to the conflict at the micro- and macrolevel. “Water can be a bridge in dialogue instead of reason for conflict,” said one of the practitioners. As it is a major issue in the conflict, it has to be discussed together. It can be a base for regional cooperation.”

Another practitioner adds: “Each side is affected by the behavior of the other. [They need] clean water in sufficient quantities. . . . Practically, if people learn to save water they understand that there can be enough for everyone, and there will be enough for everybody. . . . The project enables each side to express their needs and concerns and helps them to develop an understanding of their interests and the common interests.”

### ***Dissemination Strategies***

Another goal of our study has been to identify the strategies that track two practitioners use to transmit the outputs of their conflict transformation work beyond the participants of the particular initiative (Fisher 2005). In this article, the conduits for the transmission of track two products and insights are called “dissemination strategies,” although different terms have been used in the literature by other scholars referring to the same phenomenon, for example, “transfer strategies” (Fisher 1997; Çuhadar 2009) and “crucial juncture” (Volkan, Julius, and Montville 1991). Of special interest to



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us was whether the practitioners have developed strategies to make an impact at the macrolevel or not, and what common strategies, if any, were selected by the advocates of certain “theories of change.”

In general, our findings about dissemination strategies fall into the “insider” and “outsider” categories suggested by Mari Fitzduff and Cheyanne Church (2004). Insider strategies include working with elite “insiders” who are close to decision makers and negotiators, such as experts and advisors. Outsider strategies seek to influence decision makers through a bottom-up approach, such as influencing public opinion by mobilizing peace campaigns. As we noted earlier, such bottom-up approaches have been somewhat neglected in the literature on track two diplomacy, although a number of recent works have focused on the role that NGOs and other actors have played in organizing grassroots efforts to advance peace (Goodhand 2006; Kaufman, Salem, and Verhoeven 2006; Aall 2007; Wanis-St. John and Kew 2008).

*Insider Strategies.* During our interviews and focus group workshops with practitioners, we identified five insider strategies being employed by practitioners: sending artifacts (e.g., recommendations, information) to the decision makers, selecting the “right” participants (i.e., influential, representative, skilled), involving international participants and third parties for leverage purposes, establishing a functional role for the group (e.g., epistemic, policy advisory, etc.), and lobbying and advocacy. Of these, the selection of the “right” participants was clearly the preferred insider strategy used by most practitioners. Indeed, the selection of participants appeared to be one of the most organized aspects of most track two initiatives. Oftentimes, the right people were a mixed group of politically influential people and experts/academics.

Some practitioners, especially those working in highly institutionalized NGOs, took further steps beyond merely selecting the “right people” to increase the likelihood that their project would have macro- as well as microimpacts. Some, for instance, considered how their initiative could augment the lobbying and advocacy process within government. Others sought to organize meetings with decision makers after the initiative concluded in order to communicate the results of their track two activity. One Israeli NGO, which had organized a dialogue on the future of Jerusalem, even sought to have an impact on the negotiation process at Camp David by contacting and lobbying the American mediators, and transmitting information and insights to the American mediation team before and during the negotiations. Some of these ideas were actually tested at the negotiation table by the mediators.

Interestingly, however, most of the practitioners interviewed for this project had only vague notions of how these elite participants could

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actually become change agents in their communities. Moreover, most practitioners showed little interest in developing a greater understanding of how political processes at the official level work so that they could develop transmission strategies that would support political change at the official level.

To what extent insider strategies have successfully disseminated the effects and outcomes of track two initiatives remains a major question facing practitioners. Findings from our interviews and workshops suggest that the track two community subscribes to a set of theoretical propositions about the conditions and contexts that facilitate the dissemination of track two insights and ideas to the political process, but these propositions have yet to be tested or confirmed as valid. For example, while one practitioner suggested that including only elite-level participants is the most effective transmission strategy, another argued that working specifically with technical experts who have political connections is the best means to increase the likelihood of dissemination. Still another practitioner argued that including journalists in track two projects is the most effective mechanisms for dissemination.

Çuhadar (2009) previously discussed the effectiveness of some of the insider strategies listed above in terms of their impact on the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. That study found that for successful transmission to occur in a way that affects the outcome of a decision-making process, an effective dissemination strategy (i.e., symmetrical transfer of ideas and participants in addition to contacts and communication with the negotiators) must be accompanied by openness to outside information by the official negotiating team and leadership. Thus, conducting track two initiatives with influential people was not an adequate strategy by itself — to be effective, additional actions were needed from both practitioners and participants. These included visiting official mediators, working closely with particular official negotiators, or arranging to have track two practitioners present at official negotiations, oftentimes as advisors.

Among the five transmission mechanisms listed earlier, contacting the official mediators and negotiators and exporting key people from track two initiatives to participate in formal negotiations provided the most direct access to the process and seemed most effective at facilitating direct input into the official negotiation process.

*Outsider Strategies.* Outsider strategies focus on disseminating the results of track two initiatives to a broader public in order to make an impact at the macrolevel. This strategy includes using the media to report about the outcomes of the initiative, organizing public peace campaigns, publicizing alternative narratives about the conflict, and utilizing public opinion polls to influence the behavior of the masses. Initiatives relying

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on outsider strategies are more commonly undertaken by practitioners who work with participants either from the grassroots level or from the media sector. These approaches seek to build mass support for the peace process or to move the stalled peace process forward by illustrating what is possible through unofficial diplomacy. Practitioners using these tactics often resort to powerful symbols and credible community leaders in the society to augment the impact of their work.

One of our important findings regarding transmission strategies is that most of the outcome-oriented initiatives preferred to use “insider” strategies to effect change, especially during the pre-Oslo and interim periods of the conflict. Interestingly, however, we observed a reduction in the use of insider strategies and an increase in the use of outsider strategies after the collapse of the final status negotiations. A prominent example of such a shift is the Geneva Initiative. While the NGO responsible for the Geneva Initiative preferred insider strategies during the interim period, it later shifted to an outsider strategy, concentrating specifically on strategies to build public support for the plan even in the absence of official support.

Another important finding is that most practitioners involved in relationship-oriented grassroots initiatives did not seem to have developed outreach strategies to support their work, unlike practitioners associated with outcome-oriented and elite-level initiatives. In relationship-oriented grassroots-level initiatives, the end goal was often stated as improving the relations among the participants in the activity. But even when these practitioners stated that their projects had the ultimate goal of contributing to peace at large, they still were unable to articulate how changes at the microlevel that came as a result of their work would affect the macrolevel. We should note that a few of the initiatives that we examined did have a clearly articulated strategy for *meso-level* change. For instance, a practitioner involved in an educational project undertaken with teachers stated that spreading the impact of that initiative from teachers to students through curriculum reform was one of that project’s goals.

Another important finding of our study is related to “lateral transmission,” that is, the transmission of the effects and outcomes of the initiatives to other peace practitioners and initiatives. Only a handful of the practitioners we interviewed stated that they had attempted this lateral dissemination. In cases in which lateral transmission was attempted, the goal was typically to generate collaboration among peace practitioners in order to increase peer-to-peer support. But the “big picture” results from the interviews that we conducted suggest that practitioners of track two diplomacy rarely tried to synchronize or sequence their work with each other, preferring individual over collective efforts. Indeed, some practitioners

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reported that competition for donor funds provided a negative incentive structure for collaboration.

Finally, nearly half of the practitioners we interviewed expressed concern about how to overcome the “usual suspects” problem — that is, how to involve new types of political actors in track two efforts in order to expand the number and types of people engaged in this work. Some participants noted that track two work in the region typically involves the same set of people, most of whom are already predisposed toward bilateral peacebuilding efforts. Several practitioners said that if track two was to have a wider impact on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, organizers would need to find ways to involve more politically extreme representatives of each society and/or to reach out to new and emerging political actors on both sides of the conflict.

## Conclusion

We believe that researchers who study track two diplomacy, as well as practitioners who engage in it, would benefit from examining track two efforts in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict over the past two decades, and this article represents a modest beginning in that direction. Our research shows that track two efforts express a variety of:

- alternative conceptualizations of the nature of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict;
- beliefs about what kind of projects will lead to its transformation; and
- views about how track two initiatives can be transmitted from the micro- to the macrolevel.

We have also identified a number of trends in track two work between Israelis and Palestinians, among them:

- Israeli-Palestinian “people-to-people” track two initiatives have gradually replaced senior-level track two exchanges over the past fifteen years.
- The track two community subscribes to a set of theoretical propositions about the conditions and contexts that facilitate the transmission of track two insights and ideas to the political process, but these propositions have yet to be validated.
- Track two specialists do little strategic planning about ways to most effectively disseminate track two insights and ideas to the political process, and rarely try to synchronize or sequence their work within their own community.
- And track two practitioners have faced difficulties in enlarging their circle of influence beyond the “usual suspects.”

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Future research could test the four approaches to conflict transformation identified in this research report to determine whether these approaches are also found in the work of other practitioners in different regions of the world. If they are, measurement categories and methods of data collection could be developed for each approach, making possible a more robust assessment of the impacts of track two initiatives across different contexts and regions.

At the applied level, our research contains four recommendations for more effective practice. First, practitioners should more consciously map out the theory of change behind their work prior to its implementation. Such efforts would improve the connection among program goals, program activities, and program dissemination. Second, the impacts of track two activities will likely be increased if practitioners and participants spend some of their time developing more targeted and effective strategies for dissemination of project outcomes to both the track one community and to the broader public. This could begin by learning more about the conduits through which official decision making occurs but also include the development of new strategies, such as the use of social media campaigns to drive political change. Third, the four practice approaches reviewed above are distinct avenues for conflict transformation that, if combined within a single project, might increase overall peacebuilding impacts. Some practitioners are already doing this, while others may find our categorization beneficial to developing a more holistic set of project activities that jointly target the emotional, cognitive, structural, and functional bases of social and political conflicts.

Finally, our findings indicate that track two initiatives are often “silos” of activity, with practitioners and participants only vaguely aware of other projects being conducted concurrently. We would recommend that connections among initiatives be established so that track two efforts are more effectively combined and sequenced to increase impacts. For instance, track two projects designed to create cross-communal interdependency within a particular industry (such as olive oil production) might have a greater impact if they are done in tandem with other initiatives taking place in other sectors (such as the protection of watersheds). This final recommendation is directed primarily to those funding track two work.

## NOTES

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1. Various terms are used to refer to problem-solving workshops held interactively, for example, interactive conflict resolution (Fisher 1997; Rouhana 2000); interactive problem solving (Kelman 1995); sustained dialogue (Saunders 1999; Voorhees 2002); unofficial diplomacy (Volkan,

Julius, and Montville 1991); multitrack diplomacy (Diamond and McDonald 1996); and track one and a half (Nan 2005). Although they are each different in their methodological and philosophical approach to dialogue and the end goal they formulate for their practice, in this research and article, we include all of these terms that refer to a similar type of peacebuilding activity based on social contact between the adversaries often facilitated by a neutral third party. Therefore, we use the term “track two diplomacy” throughout this article as a generic shortcut to refer to all of such contact-based interactive activities.

2. All interview and meeting quotes are reported anonymously in this article. Transcripts of the interviews and the meetings are held by the researchers. Please contact the authors for further inquiry and information.

3. At this point, the reader should keep in mind that the data listed here exclude the work done within Israel among Arabs and Jews (e.g., Abraham Fund), and only cover initiatives between Israelis and Palestinians in the occupied territories.

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## Appendix One: Questionnaire Used during the Interviews

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### ***Interview Protocol for Oslo and Its Aftermath: Lessons Learned from Track Two Diplomacy***

*Instructions to participants.* This interview protocol has been developed for use with the project *Oslo and Its Aftermath: Lessons Learned from Track Two Diplomacy*. The goal of this project is to investigate the basic ideas that guided the work of track two practitioners seeking to transform the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, particularly ideas related to the transfer of insights and ideas from the initiative to individuals and institutions outside of it.

#### ***Interview Questions***

*Clearly identify the specific initiative being discussed by name, duration, and other relevant descriptors prior to asking the following questions.*

##### 1. Theory of Change

- When you got involved with this initiative, how did you understand the nature of the conflict (causes, sources of intractability, important milestones)?
- What was the initiative trying to accomplish? What were its goals?
  - Process or outcome changes?
  - Cognitive, emotional, or structural changes?
  - Scope of change: individual, interpersonal, intergroup, societal, global
  - Short-term/long-term changes
- How was the initiative planned so that it could achieve these changes?
  - Design and sequencing of activities
  - Assumptions made about pathways and obstacles to change
  - Selection of participants
  - Duration
  - Role of facilitator(s)

##### 2. Transfer Dynamics

- Were plans made to transfer the accomplishments (achievements) of the initiative (project) beyond the immediate participants? If yes, what kinds of strategies/methods were used? If not, why not? (*see attached list of transfer strategies as a guide*)?
  - Upward impact strategies (decision makers)
  - Downward impact strategies (community institutions and representatives)
  - Lateral impact strategies (coordination with other track II initiatives, sequencing, network building, etc.)
- Did these strategies/methods change over the course of the initiative? If so, how?
- Do you think these strategies worked? That is, do you think the initiative ended up having an impact on people, institutions, and political processes outside of it? If yes, how?
  - Lessons (insights)
  - Information, ideas, knowledge
  - Proposals
- What factors inhibited these impacts from occurring?
- Did any unanticipated impacts result from the project?

##### 3. Impact Assessment

- In general, how do you know if you've been successful with this type of initiative?
- What methods/measures were in place to monitor the impacts and effects of the initiative?



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- In retrospect, what tools/methods might have been more appropriate for assessing project impacts?
  - Based on your experience, what do you think worked and did not work? What would you do differently?

\*Transfer Strategies

- Send artifacts (consensus-based recommendations, technical information, etc.)
- Select the “right” participants (influential participants, representative participants, skilled participants, etc.)
- Perform outreach to key decision makers, community leaders, other track II organizers, etc., about the initiative
- Conduct a media campaign
- Involve international participants for leverage purposes
- Pursue insider strategies
- Pursue outsider strategies
- Facilitate the continuation of the dialogue in a new form once the initiative is concluded
- Establish functional role for group (epistemic, policy advisory, etc.)