

Role of Track II Diplomacy in Disarmament From 1991 Till Today

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Abstract—The Cold War's end brought about a new era in global security, with opportunities for new cooperative methods in arms control and disarmament. In this context, Track II diplomacy is informal discussions between academics, policy experts, past officials and civil society organizations has proved to be a useful complement to official diplomacy. This paper discusses the changing nature of Track II diplomacy in the context of promoting disarmament efforts worldwide since 1991. It follows the contribution of unofficial diplomatic channels in providing opportunities for dialogue, developing policy ideas, building confidence among stakeholders and supporting negotiations on key arms control treaties, such as the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaties (START), the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and the Treaty on the Prohibition of nuclear weapons (TPNW). The study uses descriptive and analytical methods, secondary sources of qualitative research, to analyse the effectiveness, opportunities and limitations of Track II diplomacy in the evolving international security scenario. The paper suggests that while Track II does not supplant formal diplomatic talks, it can help to establish rapport, diffusion of norms, expert-level interaction and overcoming political impasses that can prevent official diplomacy to move forward. It also underscores the importance of Track II in meeting new challenges of cyber weapons, artificial intelligence, autonomous weapon systems and new great-power competition. The study concludes that strengthening the cooperation between official and non-official diplomatic efforts is fundamental to realize sustainable global disarmament and improve peace and security in the 21st century.

Index Terms— Arms Control, Civil Society, Constructivism, Diplomacy, Disarmament, International Security, Nuclear Non-Proliferation, Peacebuilding, Track II.

I. INTRODUCTION

First coined by Joseph Montville in 1981; Track II refers to unofficial communication on issues of conflict resolution and cooperation that do not involve formal and official government channels (Notter & McDonald, 1996). It emphasizes dialogue, trust building and innovative solutions, sometimes with the assistance of experts, academics and civil society in addition to formal negotiations. In the post-Cold War period, disarmament Track II initiatives came about to tackle international security concerns (Capie, 2010) in various ways including the Pugwash Conferences and advocacy by civil society. These efforts have also contributed to the advancement of global disarmament efforts such as the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) and toxic chemical weapons by means of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC).

Although effective in some high-profile fields of activity, the possibilities of Track II diplomacy to address contemporary issues are underestimated. New weapons, like cyberweapons and autonomous arms, have changed the landscape of security around the world, requiring new thinking in disarmament diplomacy. Moreover, lining Track II efforts along with formal tracks, including NPT Review Conferences and regional processes, such as the Middle East WMD-Free Zone, creates its own complexities (Kamrava, 2017). This uncertainty of Track II initiatives represents a barrier to their credibility. The purpose of this study is to map out how Track II diplomacy has functioned relative to facilitating disarmament agreements from 1991 to the present, what its role has been, its shortcomings and what is in store for the future.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Evolution of Track II Diplomacy in Disarmament

The term Track Two Diplomacy was coined in 1981 by Joseph Montville, who defined it as a wide range of unofficial contact and interaction with the project of addressing disputes, both between states and internally. A U.S. diplomat at the time, Montville coined the term in contrast to Track One diplomacy, which is diplomatic work to avert conflicts through the normal processes of government. In the beginning years of Track Two diplomacy, the focus of the concept was primarily on the work of professional practitioners in the emerging field of conflict resolution. Such professionals informally brought people together to use creative problem-solving to resolve international conflicts being dealt with at Track One.

In their personal capacities, members of conflicting groups meet via consultation; probably the most frequent kind of Track Two action to promote discussion or stimulate innovative approaches to problem resolution. If these unofficial participants have political power, only then there is a chance for these creative ideas to be even adopted in the official conflict resolution process. Dialogue as a Track Two form of diplomacy describes interaction between conflicting parties that is facilitated where communication is not with a view; to convincing or persuading but rather to a search for meaning that how groups make sense of their existence or a given circumstance. It is a matter of sharing that meaning, in sharing it, finding a link, a bridge, across what separates the groups in conflict. Training is the third category of Track Two intervention. Masters of conflict resolution train conflicting parties to achieve capacity they can leverage to resolve and transform those conflicts. Such skills are not only needed in many common situations but apply also to more intractable and deep-rooted national or ethnic conflicts. As with any track in the multi-track system, Track Two will always be more effective when used in combination and coordination with efforts from all of the other tracks (James Notter and John McDonald, 1996).

Nathaniel Allen and Travis Sharp usefully compile four outputs that could make Track II processes successful: (1) idea generation (2) building relationships (3) effective moderation and (4) changing perceptions. Track II analysts may quantitatively measure whether a process has led to new ideas, but it is a much more difficult job to judge whether a Track II process systematically has modified perceptions over time. As Mehran Kamrava notes, “the resolution of conflicts in the long-term entails ... the capacity to [...] persist in shaping the behaviors and preferences of the disputants long after the disputants have departed the bargaining table.”

Theoretical Foundations of Track II Diplomacy

The most influential early example of track two dialogues was developed out of the postwar experience in Europe, particularly in the U.S.-Soviet context. Many of these East-West arms control processes introduced ideas of “cooperative” and “mutual” security, ideas that became the center of gravity of subsequent security socialization efforts elsewhere (Krause and Latham, 1998).

From a theoretical perspective, Track II diplomacy is grounded in constructivist paradigms which highlight its function in norm diffusion and identity change. Constructivist approaches posit that Track II forums serve as an arena for reformulating preferences of states and promoting the localization of global norms to satisfy local or national context. Epistemic communities like groups of think tanks, academics and other conveners of policy expertise promote learning among state and non-state actors via ideational exchanges by means of persuasion and socialization until those actors incorporate norms that know which actions are appropriate in which situations (Capie 2010).

Post-Cold War Scenario

One of the most important functions of Track II diplomacy in the post-Cold War era has been to support formal disarmament agreements by engaging informal discussions and enhancing expert dialogue to help complement formal negotiations. Track II played a helpful role in the implementation discussions for the START I (1991) and START II (1993) treaties, which limited deployed nuclear warheads and delivery systems between the United States and Russia (Bunn & Timerbaev, 1994). The Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT, 1996) drew on scientific Track II engagements, including the Pugwash Conferences, to develop verification protocols for the treaty (Perkovich, 1998). The Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC, 1997) also took advantage of Track II platforms, which were used to promote technical exchanges on compliance mechanism (Kelle, 2003).

Following the year 2000, Track II processes, which permitted expert-to-expert discussions at times of difficult U.S.-Russia relations informed the SORT (2002) and New STAR (2010) treaties (Gottemoeller, 2021). Multiple civil society-led initiatives advocating disarmament progress emerged in the context of the NPT Review Conferences (Evans, 1995) and particularly around the Review Conferences of 1995 and 2000. Third and last, the Treaty on the Prohibition of nuclear weapons (TPNW, 2017) was a direct result of civil society Track II advocacy, led by ICAN, with its stark focus on the humanitarian consequences of the use of nuclear weapons (Fihn, 2018).

Impact of Track II Diplomacy on Major Disarmament Agreements

The Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on their Destruction, commonly referred to as the Chemical Weapons Convention or CWC, is considered one of the only successfully concluded treaties negotiated at the CD (OPCW 2005).

As Thakur and Ere Haru explain, “the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), which was possible to adopt and signed in 1993 and has been in force since 1997, was the last in the trinity of global treaties regulating the three categories of WMD. Nuclear weapons were the first on a defined international regime out of the classes of weapons typically considered together as WMD (Thakur and Haru 2006: 1).

III. RESEARCH GAP

The work on Track II diplomacy traditionally has been almost exclusively concerned with its work in conflict resolution and peace-building, confidence-building and informal diplomacy in areas where long-running political tensions exist, such as the Middle East, South Asia and the Korean Peninsula. Joseph Montville, James Notter, John McDonald and David Capie have pointed to the importance of unofficial diplomatic channels in promoting dialogue, lowering the level of mistrust and creating new policy options when formal channels are limited. In the same vein, the importance of epistemic communities and civil society for the adoption of international norms and cooperation for security has been explored by constructivist scholars.

In addition, the literature on Track II diplomacy focuses either on conflict resolution or on regional case studies, while neglecting to investigate its impact on the overall international arms control architecture. There is also limited research that examines the development of Track II mechanisms in response to new and emerging security threats, including cyber warfare, AI-driven weapon systems, autonomous lethal weapons, hypersonic missile technologies and a resurgence of great power competition.

A second important lack is the failure to evaluate how Track I and Track II diplomacy affect international disarmament results. While there is ample informal communication that can complement formal negotiation, there has been little comparative study of the circumstances in which Track II processes are effective in affecting formal diplomatic negotiations. This study aims to fill these gaps by offering a broad analysis of the history, effectiveness, weaknesses and future prospects of Track II diplomacy in the realm of global disarmament from 1991 to now.

IV. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study is based on the Constructivist approach to International Relations and also draws on the theories of Liberal Institutionalism and Multi-Track Diplomacy and Epistemic Communities. Constructivism maintains that ideas, norms, identities and social interactions, in addition to material abilities, help create international politics. Constructivists argue that a state's actions are continuous processes that are shaped by ongoing interactions between state actors, international organisations, experts and civil society. Constructivists hold that state behaviour is shaped by continual interaction between state actors, international organisations, experts and civil society actors, as opposed to realist perspectives which focus on military power and national interests. Track II diplomacy is a forum for unofficial dialogue that can help in norm diffusion, confidence-building and a progressive shift in state preferences; in the context of disarmament. Discussions with a wider group of scholars, former diplomats, scientists and policy makers help create common understandings which can then have an impact on formal diplomatic negotiations.

The study also draws on the theory of Liberal Institutionalism, which highlights the role of international institutions, cooperation and interdependence in mitigating conflict and building collective security. Track II can be complemented by institutional avenues that are facilitated by international organisations and multilateral forums, with the aim of developing policy ideas, technical knowledge and confidence-building measures.

The other theory that is of significance is Multi-Track Diplomacy Theory by John McDonald and Louise Diamond that suggests that diplomacy is a process of collaboration between the governments, academia, business, media, religion and civil society. These actors are not independent, but rather work together to help manage conflict and foster international cooperation. In this context, Track II diplomacy is a supplement to official diplomatic negotiations.

The notion of Epistemic Communities is another theoretical support for the study. Epistemic communities are groups of professionals who have established and recognized knowledge and competences in certain policy fields. These communities shape the political landscape by researching and developing technical expertise and making policy recommendations that impact the decisions of governments and by helping to reach international consensus on a range of complex security matters, such as arms control verification, nuclear safeguards and chemical weapons compliance. These theoretical approaches provide a foundation for understanding how unofficial diplomatic engagement can help nurture international norms, enhance institutional cooperation and advance formal disarmament negotiations in a world with growing interconnectedness.

V. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The current research uses a qualitative research method to understand the track II role. Diplomacy in the field of international disarmament (1991 - present). The approach used in the study is descriptive and analytical research to gain insight into the development, effectiveness and analysis of the study. The role of unofficial diplomacy with regard to the contemporary relevance in the context of global security governance.

The study is primarily based on secondary sources of data. Information has been collected from peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, reports published by international organisations such as the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA), the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), policy papers issued by think tanks, conference proceedings and official treaty documents. These diverse sources provide a comprehensive understanding of both theoretical developments and practical applications of Track II diplomacy in international disarmament.

The study is limited by its reliance on secondary data and publicly available sources, as many informal diplomatic interactions remain confidential and are not comprehensively documented. Consequently, the analysis focuses on documented evidence of Track II initiatives and their observable influence on formal disarmament processes. Despite these limitations, the methodology provides a systematic and reliable framework for evaluating the contribution of Track II diplomacy to international peace, security and global disarmament in the post-Cold War period.

VI. EVOLUTION OF TRACK II DIPLOMACY (1991-PRESENT)

In 1991, the Cold War came to an end. The demise of the Cold War in 1991 brought a significant change in the international security environment. The collapse of the USSR put an end to the ideological rivalry between the two powers and paved the way for more cooperative relations regarding arms control, confidence building and disarmament. In addition to formal diplomatic dialogue (Track I diplomacy), informal dialogues were growing in importance and would involve academics, scientists, retired diplomats, military experts and civil society organizations in the discussions on complicated security issues. They were what is often called 'Track II' diplomacy, a way of innovating policy, building trust and cooperation outside the framework of official negotiations.

In the early 1990s, Track II diplomacy was a supportive element to discussions on implementing the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START I) and subsequent talks about START II. Highly proficient talks between US and Russian academics, military officials and retired government bodies kept the lines of communication open amid shifting geopolitics. The Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, the Stimson Center, other university-related research and analysis centers gained significance as venues for furthering the design of verification mechanisms and trust-building measures.

Track II diplomacy was expanded to multilateral disarmament activities in the mid-1990s. The negotiation of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) in 1996 was greatly facilitated by scientific collaboration and expert consultations to build understanding of verification technologies, monitoring systems and international compliance mechanisms. Also, technical experts

and scientific communities helped to incorporate provisions of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) into force in 1997 and engaged in discussions on verification procedures, inspections and the destruction of chemical weapon stockpiles.

After the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001, the international security agenda expanded to incorporate issues of non-state actors, weapons of mass destruction and illicit trafficking. Thus, the concept of Track II diplomacy was broadened to encompass nuclear security, export control and counter-proliferation efforts. Through regional and international forums and informal dialogues among experts, governments were able to better comprehend emerging threats and to foster cooperative security measures.

In the first two decades of the twenty-first century the role of Track II diplomacy was further institutionalized with the involvement of think tanks, international organizations, policy research institutes and civil society networks. Expert consultations, strategic dialogue and academic exchanges have been continued in discussions on the Moscow Treaty (SORT) in 2002 and the New START Treaty in 2010. These unofficial meetings provided an opportunity to discuss policy options free from the political restrictions that often hinder official negotiations.

Another major aspect of Track II diplomacy in the 2010s was the humanitarian side of the equation of nuclear weapons. Civil society groups, especially the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), used to rally public opinion, humanitarian arguments and scientific evidence in their efforts to change international opinion. These culminated in the adoption of the Treaty on the Prohibition of nuclear weapons (TPNW) in 2017, which shows how the non-state sector has been able to influence global disarmament norms.

In modern times, Track II diplomacy has been broadened to cover new technologies that create new threats to international security. Policy challenges are emerging in the context of cyber weapons, AI in military systems, autonomous lethal weapons, hypersonic missiles and militarization of outer space, which can develop before formal diplomatic institutions. These new fields are now subject to expert dialogues, academic cooperation and multi-stakeholder consultations, which are all crucial to the creation of international norms, confidence-building measures and governance structures.

Overall, the development of Track II diplomacy since 1991 reflects a gradual shift from being something that complements the static form of confidence-building diplomacy to the dynamic form of modern-day global security governance. Track II diplomacy does not stand in for formal diplomacy, but it does help to communicate, provide innovative policy ideas, and help build international cooperation and understanding to secure sustainable disarmament and global peace.

VII. CHALLENGES

Though Track II diplomacy is increasingly a part of the international security governance landscape, it is characterized by a number of structural, political and operational obstacles which restrict its utility on the issues of global disarmament. Although unofficial diplomatic efforts serve as excellent forums for discussion, confidence-building and policy innovation; they are also subject to elements which cannot be controlled by them.

The return of the great game of the powers is one of the biggest challenges. Strategic competition is now more important than cooperative arms control and has taken over. After the cooling down of relations between the USA, the Soviet Union and China, strategic competition has gradually replaced cooperative arms control. Sustained dialogue has grown more challenging due to political mistrust and Track II efforts have limited impact on official policy-making. Several bilateral arms control treaties have been suspended or weakened, limiting the informal diplomatic dialogue.

A major difficulty is also the introduction of new military technologies. New international legal and institutional structures are not meeting the pace of cyber weapon development, AI, ALWS, hypersonic missiles, quantum technologies and the militarization of outer space. These technologies are different than traditional arms control, as they are more complex and combine technical, ethical, strategic and multidisciplinary aspects. Track II diplomacy has helped experts to discuss these topics but there have been few developments in achieving consensus among states.

Track II diplomacy is also not binding, and so has less real impact. The suggestions presented in the unofficial dialogues are persuasive but do not have a legal mandate. Their implementation fully relies on the ability of governments to put into practice these concepts in the formal negotiating process. As such, many innovative proposals continue to be discussed on the academic and policy level but never make it into binding international treaties.

Another significant challenge is a lack of resources. The vast majority of the Track II programs are funded by university, think tank, philanthropic and international donors. Interruption of dialogue processes, research partnerships and longer-term confidence-building measures due to irregular funding is often the case, especially in developing countries.

The problem of inclusion also impacts the impact of Track II diplomacy. While over time more varied communities have participated, many for a remain dominated by experts from the developed world. More Global South scholars, policy makers, women, youth and civil society groups should participate in disarmament dialogues, to make them more representative and legitimate.

Last, assessing the impact of Track II diplomacy is always challenging. Because of the secret nature of Track II discussions, it can be difficult to quantify the direct causal connection between Track II efforts and formal diplomatic efforts. However, they cannot be overlooked for their indirect roles in trust-building, knowledge sharing and norm-building.

VIII. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The present study shows how Track II diplomacy is now playing an important role in the international disarmament architecture in the post-Cold War era. In spite of the fact that negotiations are always the sole concern of sovereign states, informal diplomatic contact has been consistently helpful for international arms control, providing dialogue, policy options, technical cooperation and confidence building between conflicting parties.

The study suggests that Track II diplomacy has its greatest impact when official diplomatic talks reach a political impasse. The informal nature of interactions among academics, retired diplomats, military officials, scientists and policy experts allows for the discussion of sensitive issues that would not be allowed in formal negotiations. These conversations have been a repeated avenue for keeping communication open in times that have been geopolitically tense.

Additionally, the study finds that the scientific and epistemic communities have been a major force in the development of contemporary disarmament treaties. They have made important contributions in the field of verification, compliance, nuclear monitoring and chemical weapons inspections. It shows that the modern process of disarmament is also linked with a more specialised technical knowledge, along with ordinary diplomacy.

A new dimension of the promotion of humanitarian disarmament by civil society organisations is also a key discovery. Organizations like the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) have successfully redirected international dialogue from a 'deterrence' security-based approach to 'humanitarian' issues. This transformation is a sign of Track II actors' ability to shape both public opinion and international norms, without negotiating authority.

Overall, the results indicate that Track II diplomacy has developed from being a confidence building tool to a vital tool in today's world of global security governance. It will probably only become more relevant as international security issues become more complex and technology driven.

IX. CONCLUSION

Since the end of the Cold War, international diplomacy and global disarmament has undergone substantial shifts in its character. However, in an era of more multidimensional security threats, the shortcomings of old-fashioned; state-based diplomacy have become clearer. Track II diplomacy has become an important parallel process for dialogue, building trust between state and non-state players, establishing mutual understanding and developing innovative policy solutions in this context.

Since 1991, Track II diplomacy has played a useful role in numerous significant disarmament efforts, including the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaties (START), the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and the Treaty on the Prohibition of nuclear weapons (TPNW). With the active engagement of academics, scientists, former diplomats, think tanks and civil society organizations, Track II cooperation has contributed to technical cooperation, facilitated the development of verification mechanisms, promoted norm-building and maintained dialogue when political relations are strained.

The research also confirms that the success of Track II diplomacy is not as a substitute for official diplomatic negotiations, but as an adjunct. Track II processes foster informal opportunities for dialogue and knowledge sharing, which can help governments consider options for policy negotiations, overcome strategic suspicion and pave the way for formal negotiations. The relationship between Track I and Track II diplomacy thus is a reinforcing one, which increases the efficacy of international disarmament process.

However, the study also identifies major challenges to these unofficial diplomatic efforts, such as geopolitical competition, quick technological change, resource scarcity and the lack of oversight over the activities. More effective institutional coordination, more inclusiveness, continued financial support and improved intergovernmental and non-state actor collaboration are required to overcome these constraints.

The future will bring new challenges in the form of artificial intelligence, cyber warfare, autonomous weapons, hypersonic technologies, and space security, demanding innovative diplomatic solutions through creative approaches that go beyond the traditional arms control framework. Track II diplomacy is a flexible, inclusive, knowledge-based forum that can build international cooperation and norms for new security threats in this changing international context. To sum up, the role of Track II diplomacy, in addition to diplomatic channels, will prove critical for sustainable disarmament, strengthening multilateral cooperation, and ensuring peace, security and strategic stability in the twenty first century.

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