Rethinking Track Two Diplomacy:

The Middle East and South Asia

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I. Introduction*

Lengthy conflicts in the Middle East and South Asia have led to a perpetual search for mechanisms to reduce and ultimately resolve their disputes. Because official contact among the conflicting parties is often tense or non–existent, unofficial policy dialogue, or 'track two' diplomacy, has gained currency in conflict resolution circles. Such dialogues, it is said, can address issues and propose ideas that would be unthinkable through more formal diplomatic channels. Their popularity and growth demonstrates the value placed on them by a wide variety of actors. Foundations, non–governmental organizations, universities and governments – mostly based in the West – have poured financial and human resources into track two dialogues in order to contribute to conflict resolution. Hundreds of unofficial dialogues have been taking place across the Middle East and South Asia involving large numbers of academics, diplomats, policy analysts, NGO activists, journalists and parliamentarians, creating nascent trans–national policy communities focused on a variety of regional security issues.[1]

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1)   This study assumes a broad definition of security, extending beyond military and strategic issues to areas like economic development, water, the environment, and social reform. While many regional security dialogues focus on regional arms control, the notion of cooperative security – which many of these dialogues advance - implies the need to view security more comprehensively.

What are these dialogues about, and what purposes are they serving? How can we make an assessment about the effect these activities have on regional relations and ultimately conflict resolution? The current literature on track two diplomacy – mostly limited to the conflict resolution field and not taken up by mainstream international relations research – offers largely positive assessments and overstates the impact of such dialogues. Much of this literature emphasizes the psychological dynamics of track two dialogues, particularly the claim that such exercises can transform the image of the adversary, or humanize the 'other,' and thus lead to new relationships conducive to the resolution of deep–seated conflicts.[2] On the other end of the spectrum, one encounters either neglect of such activities in mainstream international relations research (since such dialogues rarely lead to tangible policy outcomes or adjustments) or skeptical assessments from policy practitioners who see little concrete results from such unofficial endeavors and little impact on official policy or track one negotiations. Missing are sober assessments of both the promise and the limits of track two dialogue and a different understanding of its purpose.

Recognizing the limits of track two regional dialogues should not lead to the erroneous conclusion that they are insignificant. Effective track two dialogues can shape how elites, and later the public, view the problems causing conflict and generate a new menu of ideas to address such problems. In other words, one can maintain a negative image of an adversary but still, through a dialogue process, alter views about the value of cooperation. The French–German reconciliation process after World War II – the case that is often cited to underscore the importance of institutionalized dialogue and cooperation in conflict resolution – did not begin with a sudden French realization that they 'liked' Germans. It began because the French viewed cooperation with the Germans, particularly in an institutionalized multilateral

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2) Examples of such literature include: John W. McDonald, Jr. and Diane B. Bendahmane, eds., *Conflict Resolution: Track Two Diplomacy* (Washington D.C.: Foreign Service Institute, 1987), although this volume also contains contributions which point to several limitations of track two diplomacy, such as Harold Saunders' chapter 'When Citizens Talk: Nonofficial Dialogue In Relations Between Nations,' pp. 81-87; Vamik D. Volkan, Joseph V. Montville, Demetrios A. Julius, eds., *The Psychodynamics of International Relationships Volume II: Unofficial Diplomacy at Work* (Lexington: Lexington Books, 1991); John Burton and Frank Dukes, eds., *Conflict: Readings in Management of Resolution* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990). Louise Diamond and John McDonald even suggest that '... Track Two is extending the peacemaking mode far beyond conflict resolution to the uncharted territory of planetary healing.' in Diamond and McDonald, *Multi–Track Diplomacy: A Systems Guide and Analysis*, Occasional Paper No. 3 (Iowa: Iowa Peace Institute, June 1991), p. 44. Davies and Kaufman's more recent edited volume on the subject focuses more on the civil society building potential for track two diplomacy than on the psychological impact on the participants, but like previous works also provides a generally optimistic account of such activities and places them squarely in the peace building realm. See John Davies and Edward Kaufman, eds., *Second Track/Citizens' Diplomacy: Concepts and Techniques for Conflict Transformation* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002).

framework, as in their national interest. 'Humanizing' the enemy came after, not before, the resolution of the French–German conflict, and only after many decades of regular, institutionalized cooperation. Indeed, changing calculations about the value of cooperation with one's adversary is among the most valuable roles for track two dialogues. Such dialogues are thus best viewed as social processes whereby problems and responses to them can be defined by influential groups, leading to the *potential* for greater regional cooperation and perhaps other policy shifts over time.[3]

In order to better appreciate this potential, the common association of track two dialogues with immediate tangible outcomes like the resolution of bilateral conflict needs to be reassessed. At present, many analysts and practitioners associate track two dialogues with the most notable case in the Middle East, the Israeli–Palestinian track two talks at Oslo in the early 1990s.[4] The Oslo model suggests secret bilateral back channel talks with the specific objective of resolving a conflict between two adversaries. While this is certainly an important model for conflict resolution, this is not the only model. In fact, many track two dialogues do not resemble an Oslo–type process at all.[5] Unlike the Oslo model, regional track two dialogues are usually not intended to have an immediate influence on track one negotiations.

Instead, many unofficial dialogues are either bilateral or multilateral attempts to address or simply to define regional problems. The goal of such efforts is usually not formal conflict resolution through contributions to a peace settlement, but rather conflict management, tension reduction, confidence–building and the formation of regional or sub–regional identities that allow actors to frame and approach problems in similar and preferably cooperative ways. This is particularly true in security–related dialogues, which are often regionally based and seek to create a cooperative regional security

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3) Some conflict resolution analysts, like Harold Saunders, have long recognized this role for track two dialogues. See, for example, Harold H. Saunders, 'When Citizens Talk: Nonofficial Dialogue in Relations Between Nations. In his more recent work on 'circum–negotiation,' Saunders argues that unofficial policy dialogues (or 'public dialogues') are an important component of reshaping the larger political environment in efforts to move peace processes among conflicting parties forward. See Harold H. Saunders, 'Prenegotiation and Circum–negotiation: Arenas of the Peace Process,' in Chester A. Crocker and Fen Osler with Pamela Aall, eds., *Managing Global Chaos: Sources of and Responses to International Conflict* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1996), pp. 419–432.

4) For an analysis of the negotiating process at Oslo, see Dean G. Pruitt, 'Ripeness Theory and the Oslo Talks,' *International Negotiation* 2, 2 (1997): 237–250. For the larger political context leading up to Oslo, see David Makovsky, *Making Peace with the PLO: The Rabin Government's Road to the Oslo Accord* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1996) and Mohamed Heikal, *Secret Channels* (London: Harper Collins, 1996).

5) Nadim N. Rouhana makes a similar observation regarding the role of unofficial dialogues, although he uses the term 'unofficial intervention' to characterize the problem–solving workshops sponsored by third parties to address ethnic and national conflicts. See Rouhana, 'Unofficial Intervention: Potential Contributions to Resolving Ethno–national Conflicts,' in Jan Melissen, ed., *Innovation in Diplomatic Practice* (New York: Palgrave, 1999), pp. 111–132.

framework. Indeed, such dialogues can be viewed as an important component of 'region–building.'[6]

Consequently, track two regional dialogues can serve as 'socialization' and 'filtering' processes whereby extra–regional concepts and norms are discussed in a regional context and potentially become localized and adapted to a regional environment.[7] If filtering at the regional level proves successful, track two dialogues can legitimize new ideas and improve the prospects for such ideas to reach official policy circles and influence official security policy – and even difficult bilateral or regional peace processes – over time. Viewed this way, we reach a middle–ground between unrealistic expectations of track two directly solving regional conflicts or leading to grand policy adjustments and overly skeptical assessments questioning whether such efforts have any value at all.

This paper will seek to demonstrate this middle–ground role by drawing on examples from security–related dialogues in the Middle East and South Asia. The paper begins with a discussion of definitional issues related to the concept of track two diplomacy. The next section turns to the question of why the Middle East and South Asia are useful examples and, more generally, why a regional approach to track two diplomacy is constructive. The paper then reviews several roles for track two dialogues, drawing on examples from both regions. The following section examines a series of limitations, which significantly impede the ability of track two dialogues to influence regional security thinking and policy in new directions. The conclusion summarizes the paper's central claims and suggests a number of policy lessons.

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6) Reference to this specific term can be found in Iver B. Neumann, 'A Region–Building Approach to Northern Europe,' *Review of International Studies*, 20, 1 (1994), although more recent policy–oriented studies have also drawn on this concept. See, for example, Martin Ortega, 'Conclusion: 'Region–building in Europe and across the world,' in Martin Ortega, ed., *Global Views on the European Union*, Chaillot Paper No. 72 (Paris: Institute for Security Studies, November 2004), pp. 117–128.

7) On filtering, see Amitav Acharya, 'Culture, Security, Multilateralism: The 'ASEAN Way' and Regional Order,' in Keith Krause, 'Cross–cultural Dimensions of Multilateral Non–Proliferation and Arms Control Dialogues: An Overview,' *Contemporary Security Policy*, vol. 19, no. 1 (April 1998), pp. 55–84.

II. What is Track Two Diplomacy?

The broadest definition of track two diplomacy refers to interactions among individuals or groups that take place outside an official negotiation process. Thus, while 'track one' refers to all official, governmental diplomacy (bilateral or multilateral), track two describes all other activities that occur outside official government channels.[8] As Louise Diamond and John McDonald explain, track two refers to 'non–governmental, informal and unofficial contacts and activities between private citizens or groups of individuals, sometimes called 'non–state actors''.[9] John McDonald offers a similar definition, suggesting that track two is informal and unofficial 'interaction between private citizens or groups of people within a country or from different countries who are outside the formal governmental power structure.'[10] However, these types of definitions are so broad that any non–governmental

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8) Although the term track two did not enter common usage until the mid–1980s, similar ideas and practices had been discussed long before, particularly in the conflict resolution community of scholars and practitioners. For example, Nathan Funk cites several studies that have drawn on similar concepts (e.g., citizen diplomacy, public diplomacy, unofficial diplomacy, non–official mediation, analytic problem solving) in Funk, *Theory and Practice of Track II Diplomacy: Impact and Dynamics of the Search for Common Ground in the Middle East Initiative*, Ph.D. dissertation, American University, 2000, p. 26.

9) Diamond and McDonald, *Multi–track Diplomacy,* p. 1.

10) John W. McDonald, 'Introduction,' in McDonald and Bendahmane, eds., *Conflict Resolution: Track Two Diplomacy,* p. 1.

activity could constitute track two, including business contacts, citizen exchange programs, advocacy work, or religious contacts.[11]

In contrast, this paper focuses on a subset of unofficial activity which involves professional contacts among elites from adversarial groups with the purpose of addressing policy problems in efforts to analyze, prevent, manage and ultimately resolve inter–group or inter–state conflicts. As Harold Saunders suggests, track two diplomacy involves citizens who engage in 'policy–related, problem–solving dialogue' where they may discuss 'elements of the overall political relationship, solutions to arms control problems, resolution of regional conflicts, issues of trade policy, or other areas of competition'.[12] Saunders distinguishes this type of interaction from 'people–to–people' diplomacy where the objective is solely 'getting to know the other side' and developing personal experiences with one's adversaries (such as student exchanges) rather than finding solutions to problems.[13] For the purposes of this study, track two diplomacy is thus 1) related to policy and 2) consciously organized problem–solving exercises.[14]

That said, such dialogues – particularly in the regional security area – are not 'hard' track two exercises where the objective is to help governments negotiate political agreements, which is essentially the Oslo model. Rather, such exercises are usually engaged in 'soft' track two discussions, which 'are aimed at an exchange of views, perceptions, and information among the parties to improve each side's understanding of the others' positions and policies.'[15] However, even 'soft' track two exchanges are policy–related and ultimately aim to address and solve problems.[16]

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

12) Saunders, 'Officials and Citizens in International Relationships: The Dartmouth Conference,' in Volkan, Montville, and Julius, *The Psychodynamics of International Relationships*, p. 49.

13) Saunders, 'Officials and Citizens in International Relationships', p. 50. Also see Rouhana, 'Unofficial Intervention.'

14) These distinctions are based on Herbert C. Kelman, 'Interactive Problem Solving: The Uses and Limits of a Therapeutic Model for the Resolution of International Conflicts,' in Volkan, Montville, Julius, *The Psychodynamics of International Relationships*.

15) For this distinction between 'hard' and 'soft' track two diplomacy, see Hussein Agha, Shai Feldman, Ahmed Khalidi and Ze'ev Schiff, *Track-II Diplomacy: Lessons from the Middle East* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003), p. 3. Diplomacy analysts have also observed that diplomacy is not just about producing outcomes (as in 'hard' track two negotiations) but also about representing and shaping identities. See Paul Sharp, 'For Diplomacy: Representation and the Study of International Relations,' *International Studies Review*, Vol. 1, Issue 1 (Spring 1999), pp. 33-57.

16) In this way, regional track two dialogues more closely resemble Saunders circum-negotiation concept than a more formal pre–negotiation process because they are contributing to changing the overall political environment in which peace processes operate rather than serving as forums to prepare the groundwork for specific negotiations and treaties. On this distinction, see Saunders, 'Prenegotiation and Circum–negotiation.' On prenegotiation, see Janice Gross Stein, ed., *Getting to the Table: The Process of International Prenegotiation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989).

Moreover, track two participants are expected to have some communication with government policymakers (many participants are often influential former government officials, active and retired military personnel, think tank specialists, and journalists) so that the ideas discussed in the unofficial setting have the prospect both to reflect and to filter into the thinking of official policy circles. Unlike track two processes in other regions (such as South East Asia), neither the Middle East nor South Asia have formal institutional channels where government officials can be briefed on such activities. Rather, such communications usually take place informally, as unofficial elites either brief relevant officials through personal connections or write opinion pieces and articles reflecting the thinking that emerges from such discussions. Occasionally, participants in track two dialogues later assume official government positions and have the ability to draw on their track two experiences to influence official policy.

Thus, purely academic conferences, citizen exchanges or encounters among adversarial parties in existing international forums would not constitute track two activities as defined here. In the sense that the participants have considerable access to the official policy process through links to important policy circles, such a conception of track two dialogue resembles what some call 'track one and a half.'[17] This study thus defines track two diplomacy as *unofficial policy dialogue focused on problem solving where the participants have some form of access to official policymaking circles*.

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

III. The Middle East, South Asia and a Regional Approach

The Middle East and South Asia pose interesting cases because they share a number of conflict characteristics and regional security threats. Both regions have also experienced similar types of track two security dialogues since the early 1990s, activities that in each case were initiated from outside the region.[18] One of the most apparent commonalities between the regions is that both involve parties disputing territory and sovereignty – with religious and nationalistic undertones – in competitive and dangerous security environments. The dominating bilateral disputes (the Indian–Pakistani dispute over Kashmir and the Israeli–Palestinian conflict over the West Bank and Gaza) overshadow other regional security issues and make the discussion of a broader regional security agenda more difficult. As a result of such disputes, these regions contain populations who mistrust the intentions of their adversaries and produce extremist groups opposed to political compromise. Terrorism is a constant threat and source of disruption to peace processes in both cases, leading to hardened positions and less willingness to engage and compromise with the adversary. Despite lengthy peace processes to resolve the core issues of their conflicts, neither region has yet succeeded in resolving such disputes.

To make matters worse, both regions include nuclear powers and face a weapons proliferation problem and a competitive arms racing environment,

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18) The external initiative for such efforts contrasts to sub-regions like the Asia Pacific, where regional parties have initiated multilateral regional dialogues, particularly Japan.

with offensive military postures and high defense budgets. Common regional challenges beyond the military realm also threaten regional stability, such as multiple water disputes, economic underdevelopment and refugee crises.

Moreover, concern about conflict is not hypothetical; these regions have engaged in numerous wars over the past half–century and remain in a volatile state today. Both regions also include politically unstable and vulnerable regimes, making cooperation and conciliatory actions more difficult. Seemingly mundane logistical problems in organizing regional dialogues, such as obtaining visas and reasonable airline connections, also pose real barriers to cooperation. Furthermore, neither region has communicated well the existence and nature of track two dialogues to the broader public, although South Asian dialogues have made more progress in this area, particularly as the 1998 nuclear tests in India and Pakistan raised more public awareness about security issues like proliferation and led to the formation of civil society groups focused on such issues.

Another area of commonality are similar 'cultural' barriers to the acceptance of Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) given the adversarial and zero–sum environment in which cooperation efforts take place.[19] The zero–sum environment that pervades both regions makes the promotion of CBMs difficult, particularly as they are often viewed as a 'foreign import' based on the East-West experience during the Cold War.[20] Indeed, mutual suspicion of CBMs that are generated in the West and a low sense of regional ownership are common to the Middle East and South Asia. That said, some analysts question whether a realist oriented security elite and a zero–sum environment preclude acceptance of CBMs and regional arms control. For example, although India's strategic elite are either realists or believe international politics is about exploitation and inequality, there is no reason that a 'realist world–view should prevent arms control. It did not do so in the Soviet–US relationship.'[21] Indeed, India has agreed to a number of CBMs with both Pakistan and China.[22] The same assessment can be applied to the Middle East, where the security elite generally subscribe to realist beliefs but are not always adverse to CBMs and arms control, as the experience of the official multilateral regional arms control working group (ACRS) in the 1990s suggests.[23] Still, although not impossible, the competitive security

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19) On the role of culture in helping to define security interests, see Keith Krause, 'Cross–Cultural Dimensions of Multilateral Non–Proliferation and Arms Control Dialogues: An Overview,'pp. 1–22.

20) See Michael Krepon, 'A Time of Trouble, A Time of Need,' in Michael Krepon and Amit Sevak, eds., *Crisis Prevention, Confidence–Building, and Reconciliation in South Asia* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1996), p. 7.

21) Rajesh M. Basur, 'Nuclear Weapons and Indian Strategic Culture,' *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 38, no. 2 (2001), p. 183.

22) Basur, 'Nuclear Weapons and Indian Strategic Culture.'

23) On ACRS, see Bruce W. Jentleson and Dalia Dassa Kaye, 'Security Status: Explaining Regional Security Cooperation and its Limits in the Middle East,' *Security Studies* vol. 8, no.

environment makes the acceptance of CBMs and regional arms control more difficult in both regions.

Finally, the dominant powers in each region – India and Israel – have traditionally resisted multilateral regional security forums and have instead preferred bilateral or trilateral forums (in the Middle East case, with American mediation). India's and Israel's reluctance to engage in multilateral forums stems from concerns about smaller parties 'ganging up' on the dominant power and the ability of such forums to become a source of outside pressure.[24] Taken together, the significant similarities of the Middle East and South Asian security environments suggest an interesting and appropriate point of comparison.

The similarity between these regions does not suggest, however, that we should completely ignore their contrasting historical, social and political contexts. A stronger culture of democracy in South Asia, for example, despite the vulnerability of Pakistan to military leaderships, is an important difference that could potentially influence how well security cooperation filters into regional thinking.[25] The stronger cultural ties and similarities between South Asian states, including adversaries like India and Pakistan, also suggest more potential for publics to pressure governments toward accommodating positions if a favorable political context emerges. Such cultural similarities and societal pressures are missing in the Arab–Israeli context.

Another apparent difference is the existence in South Asia of a formal regional institution to support regional cooperation, the SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation).[26] Although this forum has largely addressed areas of functional cooperation (such as trade, telecommunications, the environment, energy, and water) and has to date avoided sensitive security issues, the institution still includes the key parties involved in the central dispute dominating the regional security environment. The existence of such a forum at least allows for the development of a regional security discourse and possibly the expansion of cooperation to traditional security areas. SAARC has also provided a venue for critical bilateral discussions on the

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1 (1998), pp. 204–38 and Dalia Dassa Kaye, *Beyond The Handshake: Multilateral Cooperation in the Arab–Israeli Peace Process* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), Chapter 4, 'Regional Security Cooperation,' pp. 76–109.

24) See Krepon, 'A Time of Trouble, A Time of Need' and Gowher Rizvi, *South Asia in a Changing International Order* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1993), p. 154.

25) However, both India and Israel stand out in their regions in terms of their levels of political and economic development, leading to similar asymmetries that make regional cooperation more difficult.

26) The SAARC was established in 1985 and includes the seven South Asian states: Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. On SAARC see Rizvi, *South Asia in a Changing International Order*, especially Chapter 5, ''Swords into Ploughshares': Cooperation among Antagonists,' pp. 147–162. For a critique of SAARC's limited focus on technical issues, see Kant Kishore Bhargava, Heinz Bongartz, Farooq Sobhan, eds., *Shaping South Asia's Future: Role of Regional Cooperation* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1995).

sidelines of its meetings, such as the meeting between Indian prime minister Atal Vajpayee and Pakistan's President Pervez Musharraf in January 2004 that began the current peace process between the two countries.[27] A regional institution like SAARC thus provides the potential for unofficial regional security discussions to filter into official thinking and institutional structures.

In contrast, since the freezing of the official multilateral Arab–Israeli peace process in the late 1990s and the breakdown of its Arms Control and Regional Security (ACRS) working group in 1995, the Middle East has had no comprehensive regional security forum, although recently discussion has begun again about re-establishing such a process, particularly at the sub–regional level focusing on the Gulf states.[28] But without a regional forum that includes a key party involved in the region's core political dispute and which will affect the security perceptions of the entire neighborhood (i.e., Israel), real progress toward regional security cooperation and greater stability will prove difficult.

Some may suggest drawing on the South East Asian experience, arguing that the more advanced regional cooperation through the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and more recently the Asian Regional Forum (ARF)[29] provide better models for regions like the Middle East and South Asia than, for example, the European experience of highly institutionalized regional cooperation. Certainly some aspects of ASEAN, particularly the emphasis on personal contacts, informality, and consensus–building rather than formal institutionalized decision–making,[30] could provide some important lessons for both the Middle East and South Asia. The popularity of the term 'ASEAN way' suggests a degree of independence at establishing cooperative mechanisms that are viewed as legitimate within the region rather than externally imposed. Such success at establishing an indigenous process could provide important lessons for attempts to create enduring regional cooperative structures in other areas that are also sensitive to the application of overtly Western concepts.

But ASEAN's avoidance of core security issues and general aversion to public discussion of security threats and contentious bilateral disputes (or

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27) For background on the current peace initiative and an assessment of its prospects, see 'India and Pakistan Engagement: Prospects for Breakthrough or Breakdown?' Special Report by the United States Institute of Peace, No. 129 (January 2005).

28) See, for example, the special edition of *Middle East Policy* that is devoted to this subject, Vol. XI, No. 3 (Fall 2004).

29) The ARF, established in 1994, expanded ASEAN's agenda to the security realm (and widened its membership to the larger Asia–Pacific region) as it introduced Western strategic concepts like CBMs, deterrence, arms control, transparency and verification into regional discussions. Some analysts suggest that track two activity related to ASEAN supported the creation of the ARF and the idea of a multilateral regional security structure. See, for example, Jürgen Rüland, 'The Contribution of Track Two Dialogue towards Crisis Prevention,' *ASIEN* 85(October 2002), pp. 84–96.

30) See Acharya, 'Culture, Security, Multilateralism.'

intra–state tensions and conflicts) does not apply well to regions like the Middle East and South Asia where such issues cannot be avoided. Official contacts among ASEAN leaders also never posed the same types of problems as occur in both the Middle East and South Asian contexts, where official contacts are often tense and at times non–existent, making unofficial dialogue even more critical. But most significantly, the security environment in South East Asia is different than either the Middle East or South Asia in one very important respect: all ten South East Asian nations have acceded to a Southeast Asian Nuclear Weapons Free Zone (SEANWFZ). With India's and Pakistan's nuclear weapons programs out in the open since the 1998 testings and Israel's widely acknowledged nuclear capabilities (despite its formal policy of nuclear ambiguity), neither region appears close to a nuclear weapons free zone agreement. In this sense, the security environment and security dilemmas in the Middle East and South Asia are far more similar.

Indeed, the discussion of regional comparisons implicitly raises another important issue: the regional level of analysis. As I discussed above, track two dialogues are not just about resolving narrow bilateral disputes among adversaries, as important as such efforts are; they are also about creating a regional context through which important security issues affecting a larger region (including regional peace processes) can be discussed and addressed. In this sense, track two dialogues, particularly multilateral security forums, are part of region–building exercises to establish regional norms and institutions.

International relations research is increasingly turning to regions as an important level of analysis through which we can examine inter–state and trans–national interactions.[31] Security dynamics differ across various regions while the impact of globalization plays out differently across different areas of the world.[32] Whether scholars are focusing on material interdependencies and externalities which help define and limit a regional context for analysis or on the development of regional identities or security communities where a common 'we feeling' can define a regional unit, international relations research is recognizing the importance of examining this level of analysis.

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31) For examples, see Barry Buzan and Ole Waever, *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Dougles Lemke, *Regions of War and Peace* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); David A. Lake and Patrick M. Morgan, eds., *Regional Orders: Building Security in a New World* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997); Louise Fawcett and Andrew Hurrell, eds., *Regionalism in World Politics: Regional Organization and International Order* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); Etel Solingen, *Regional Orders at Century's Dawn: Global and Domestic Influences on Grand Strategy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998); Emanuel Adler and Michael Barnett, eds., *Security Communities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); and Dalia Dassa Kaye, 'IR Theory and the Study of Regions,' unpublished manuscript.

32) See Buzan and Waever, *Regions and Powers* on this point, especially p. 13.

In terms of policy prescription, some argue that regional cooperation can provide a source for stability and conflict prevention.[33] Others suggest that with the inevitable decline of American hegemony, more attention needs to be paid to regional solutions for world order.[34] Some argue that a cooperative regional security environment can assist the internal process of political reform within nations located in volatile areas.[35] Indeed, in terms of the central security dilemmas facing regions like the Middle East and South Asia, regional cooperative security structures may prove more effective in addressing such challenges than existing global structures given both regions' sensitivity to outside influence and pressure. For example, in the Middle East, Israel is much more likely to engage its neighbors on the issue of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in a regional rather than global context given its refusal to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the general consensus in Israel that the NPT has proven ineffective. Still, global and regional security regimes need not be mutually exclusive, and may prove mutually reinforcing if global regimes place pressure on regional actors to organize their own forums for regional security cooperation.

Moreover, the view that improved regional cooperation can also improve regional economic development by increasing global investment – a perception shared by policy elites in both the Middle East and South Asia beginning in the 1990s – also suggests the prescriptive value of improving and supporting multilateral regional cooperation. Viewing regions in this way suggests that track two regional security dialogues may be critically important venues to begin the discussion of reshaping regional security relations and establishing or improving existing regional security structures.

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33) See, for example, Amitav Acharya, 'An Asian Perspective,' in Martin Ortega, ed., *Global Views on the European Union*, pp. 93–102.

34) See Charles A. Kupchan, 'After Pax Americana: Benign Power, Regional Integration, and the Sources of Stable Multipolarity,' *International Security* 23 (2), 1998, pp. 40–79.

35) See Ronald D. Asmus, Larry Diamond, Mark Leonard, and Michael McFaul, 'A Transatlantic Strategy to Promote Democratic Development in the Broader Middle East,' *The Washington Quarterly* 28, 2 (Spring 2005), pp. 7–21.

IV. Roles for Security–Related Dialogues

This section will outline in more detail the particular roles track two regional dialogues can potentially play in shaping regional relations and the construction of regional security structures. However, it is important to reiterate at the outset that in practice, few regional dialogues reach the more ambitious goal of changing security perceptions to the point where official policy also changes, leading to the resolution of long–standing conflicts. Most track two security dialogues play more modest roles, largely influencing the thinking of the elites who participate in such discussions and laying the groundwork for long–term policy adjustments. To better understand the scope of regional security dialogues, it is useful to conceptualize their roles as a staged, largely sequential process. For the sake of clarity, I will divide these stages into three parts:
1) Socialization of the participating elites;
2) 'Filtering' of externally generated policy ideas to the local environment;
3) Transmission to official policy.

Socialization of Participating Elites: Creating a Constituency for Regional Cooperation

The initial stages of track two dialogues usually entail a socialization process, whereby outside experts, often from Western governments or institutions, organize forums to 'teach' regional actors security concepts based on

experiences from their own regions.[36] This stage is largely focused on influencing a small group of influential policy elites to think differently about regional security and the value of regional security cooperation. The idea is to target elites who have access to official policymakers and who would over time convey such ideas to the official level and to the larger public. The assumption of such dialogues is that small groups of well–connected elites specializing in security issues are the essential trigger for broader shifts in official security policy. That said, actual policy change at later stages is unlikely to come without wider domestic support.

The most crucial function during the socialization period is education, such as the creation of an arms control expertise among a select group of policy elites. In the Middle East and South Asia, regional expertise and knowledge of basic arms control concepts were limited before the 1990s. Now, there are large communities in both regions familiar with such concepts because of track two dialogues. As one observer of South Asian arms control dialogue notes, 'Academics, bureaucrats, and even military personnel on both sides are in the process of forming an incipient 'epistemic community.''[37] In the Middle East, projects like the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research's (UNIDIR) arms control handbook and training courses on technology needed for verification of arms control agreements have also contributed to a common knowledge base on regional arms control.[38] A project sponsored by The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) that focused on the creation of a regional security regime involved numerous regional experts.[39] Indeed, a prominent Egyptian involved in the project believes the SIPRI report had a major impact on regional thinking and that a future regional security structure after peace (i.e., after the conclusion of Arab–Israeli bilateral treaties) will depend largely on the ideas developed by such projects.[40]

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36) On this type of socialization, which is based on powerful actors trying to spread their own ideas and norms to others in the international system, see John Ikenberry and Charles Kupchan, 'Socialization and Hegemonic Power,' *International Organization* (Summer 1990). On the notion of 'teaching' norms to international actors, see Martha Finnemore, *National Interests in International Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996).

37) Sumit Ganguly, 'Mending Fences,' in Michael Krepon and Amit Sevak, eds., *Crisis Prevention, Confidence–Building and Reconciliation in South Asia* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1996), p. 14.

38) See United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR), *The Potential Uses of Commercial Satellite Imagery in the Middle East: Workshop Report* (Geneva: United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, 1999) and Steve Tulliu and Thomas Schmalberger, *Coming to Terms with Security: A Lexicon for Arms Control, Disarmament and Confidence–Building* (Geneva: United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, 2000).

39) The final outcome of this project is reflected in Peter Jones, *Towards a Regional Security Regime for the Middle East: Issues and Options* (Stockholm: The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 1998).

40) Author interview with Egyptian security analyst, January 22, 2001, Cairo.

Second, during the socialization process, the regional parties gain a better understanding of mutual threat perceptions. For instance, an Israeli participant in track two dialogues found value in learning more about the domestic politics, constraints and 'unofficial public opinion' of Arab societies thorough such forums.[41] Similarly, an Israeli academic participant noted that his contact with Iranians in unofficial settings increased his sensitivity to their threat perception of Israel and felt that their fears of Israeli attack sounded genuine.[42] Of course, the reverse is also possible, in that perceptions of an adversary can actually appear worse upon further contact than participants initially thought. For instance, one Israeli participant found that an encounter with a Syrian in an unofficial dialogue only underscored how far apart the parties were and convinced him that the gaps were unbridgeable, a view he did not hold going into the process.[43]

Third, socialization of regional elites involves not only teaching participants about CBMs based on other regional contexts (particularly the US-Soviet and European experiences), but also engaging the parties in their own CBMs, particularly in less contentious areas like maritime cooperation.[44] The India–Pakistan Neemrana track two dialogue was sponsored by the US government and explicitly modelled on the US–Soviet Dartmouth process in an effort to, in part, 'design and popularize a nuclear restraint regime.'[45] Many of the Middle East dialogues have similarly brought Arabs and Israelis together to discuss a variety of regional CBMs, such as pre–notification of troop deployments, verification agreements, incident at sea and search and rescue maritime cooperation.

Fourth, socialization targets not just general security policy elites but also military elites in attempts to create trans–national military dialogues and common understandings. Indeed, some track two dialogues in the Middle East have specifically targeted military elites and many South Asian dialogues include participants with military backgrounds, albeit usually retired officials where links to current official policymakers may be tenuous. In both the Middle East and South Asia, military elites play a crucial role in the formation of security policy. In many countries in these regions, it is difficult to separate military from civilian elites at high levels of government, underscoring the need to influence the military community for any future changes in security policy, including the formation of regional security cooperation.

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41) Author interview with Israeli analyst, January 17, 2001, Tel Aviv.
42) Author interview with Israeli academic, January 18, 2001, Tel Aviv.
43) Author interview with Israeli official, January 18, 2001, Tel Aviv.
44) On maritime CBMs in the Middle East, see David N. Griffiths, *Maritime Aspects of Arms Control and Security Improvement in the Middle East*, Policy Paper #56 (San Diego, CA: Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation, June 2000).
45) Sundeep Waslekar, 'Track–Two Diplomacy in South Asia,' ACDIS Occasional Paper, University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign (October 1995), p. 5.

All of these functions play an important role in efforts to create a constituency supportive of regional security cooperation. Although we find evidence of the creation of such communities in the Middle East and South Asia, the impact of such groups beyond the small circle of those who participate in them is debatable, and raises questions regarding the ability of such dialogues to influence broader public attitudes and security policy.

Filtering: Making Others' Ideas Your Own

Because of the typical model of externally initiated track two dialogues in other regional settings, we see that after a period of socialization regional elites seek to transform such processes into their own and adapt them to the local environment. As one observer of such dialogues notes, '…they [track two dialogues] have shown a remarkable ability to refine and tailor concepts and ideas to suit the local security environment…second–track processes have served as 'filtering mechanisms' for approaches to regional security cooperation developed in other parts of the world…'[46] Indeed, the ability to 'filter' outside concepts to the local context is critical to the success of track two dialogues; without regional and domestic legitimacy, track two dialogues cannot influence security policy even in the long run. Needless to say, this stage is much more difficult and we find less evidence of movement in this direction, although South Asia has made more progress in recent years.

Still, cases from other regions, such as South East Asia, suggest that such progression is possible and desirable. For example, proposals for creating a regional security structure in South East Asia (ASEAN explicitly avoided security issues) initially came from external parties. Specifically, Canada and Australia proposed a European model of cooperation based on the CSCE/OSCE – the idea was to create a CSCA (Conference on Security and Cooperation in Asia). However, regional actors perceived such models as too Western and proposed another model – the ASEAN Regional Forum, or ARF – which gave the cooperative structure more legitimacy. While the ARF is far from a perfect forum for regional security cooperation, the idea of creating an indigenous regional forum free from the stigma of outside intervention provides a useful lesson for other regions at less advanced stages of regional cooperation. This is particularly true for the Middle East, as South Asia has already begun to move in this direction with the creation of the SAARC.

Without the filtering of external ideas to the local environment, there is little chance to eventually influence official policy because new cooperative security postures will not be accepted domestically. Thus, this stage involves widening the constituency favoring regional cooperation beyond a select number of policy elites to the larger societal level, through the media,

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46)   See Amitav Acharya, 'Culture, Security, Multilateralism,' p. 76.

parliament, NGO's, education systems, and citizen interest groups.   In practice, this stage has often posed the weak link in track two dialogues, as there has been little translation of the ideas developed in regional security dialogues to groups outside the socialized circle of elites involved.

The key element in such transmission must be the creation of a discourse that frames issues in ways that show how cooperation can benefit the interests of participating parties. Essentially, long–standing security policies need to be re–framed in the public debate for security policy to shift. For example, a discourse could suggest that the source for regional conflict is not the malign intentions of the adversary but rather the perception of insecurity the adversary also feels, leading to a security dilemma and the potential for accidental war. Conflicts can be framed in a way that shows that cooperation in areas like arms control can bolster, rather than undermine, a nation's security. The idea at this stage is to use track two dialogues and their participants to spread ideas and create regional structures that transform the notion of regional cooperation into a regional idea serving regional interests, not an extra–regional imposition serving the interests of others.

Evidence suggesting that filtering is occurring includes the creation of new regional institutions or structures supporting cooperative security concepts, joint regional papers proposing new ideas for regional cooperation, discourse on regional security issues at the broader societal level (such as in parliament or the media) and cooperative regional projects initiated by regionals themselves. In South Asia, for example, several institutes and networks specializing in South Asian regional issues formed during the 1990s, such as the Regional Center for Strategic Studies (RCSS), the South Asia Center for Policy Studies (SACEPS), the Coalition for Action on South Asian Cooperation (CASAC), the International Center for Peace Initiatives, the Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies (IPCS) and the South Asia Network of Economic Research Institutes. Such institutes and networks foster a sense of regional ownership and identity by sponsoring regional projects, connecting scholars from across the region and serving as information clearing houses.[47] Track two dialogues like the India–Pakistan Neemrana process have led to joint research papers, including one policy paper on options for Kashmir that was presented to the Indian and Pakistani governments.[48]

There is also evidence that in South Asia, the 'dialogue process has, over the years, broadened its base in terms of participation,' with many efforts including previously excluded societal groups, like women, youth and parliamentarians.[49] A regional summer school on arms control and

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47) For a more detailed review of such institutions, see Waslekar, 'Track–Two Diplomacy in South Asia.'

48) Navnita Chadha Behera, 'Forging New Solidarities,' in Monique Mekenkamp, Paul van Tongeren, and Hans van de Veen, eds., *Searching for Peace in Central and South Asia* (Boulder: Lynne Riener, 2002), p. 217.

49) Behera, 'Forging New Solidarities,' p. 229.

reconciliation targeting young regional strategists, journalists, officials and scholars has proven particularly successful at broadening and legitimizing regional support for track two activities.[50] Indeed, one scholar of South Asia track two suggests that such dialogues have made regional involvement in conflict resolution efforts 'prestigious' as such activity is no longer perceived as just a Western concept.[51]

In the Middle East, evidence of regional filtering is less apparent. Although some joint studies supporting cooperative security concepts emerged from track two dialogues, the Middle East still lacks regional centers focused on regional security issues, although some attempts have been made in this direction.[52] Some regional actors did initiate track two dialogues of their own, such as an Egyptian–sponsored trilateral (Egyptian, Israeli, Jordanian) effort – but through the umbrella of an Egyptian–born American professor at DePaul university – focused specifically on the nuclear issue. While this group included influential members of strategic studies institutes in each respective country and thus had the potential to create regional institutional links, the group quickly raised suspicions and resistance among Israeli officials. The Israelis believed the Egyptians were using the forum as a way to 'drive a wedge between Israeli academics and their government' on the nuclear issue, which undermined the legitimacy of the groups' work in terms of its ability to present a neutral forum for dialogue on regional security.[53] The participation of only three regional actors, albeit important ones, also limited the ability of the group to create a regional forum for security dialogue. Moreover, unlike recent developments in South Asia, very little progress has been made in the Middle East context to broaden unofficial dialogues to other segments of society. Discussion of nuclear capabilities and their implications is still a taboo subject even in open societies like Israel. Although some track two projects have targeted journalists in the Middle East, such as a project supported by Search for Common Ground, most security–related dialogues are limited to a familiar circle of strategic elites.

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50) Two well–known Western South Asian scholars, George Perkovich and Stephen Cohen, started the summer school in the early 1990s. See Waslekar, 'Track–Two Diplomacy in South Asia.'

51) See Waslekar, 'Track–Two Diplomacy in South Asia,' p. 8.

52) The official ACRS process established a regional security center in Amman, but due to the breakdown of the official process and the general regional tension, the center was unable to begin functioning as planned. An American university sponsored a project to create an Association of National Security Centers but such efforts have fallen short of the creation of a regional center focusing on security issues as exists in South Asia.

53) Agha, Feldman, Khalidi and Schiff, *Track–II Diplomacy: Lessons from the Middle East*, p. 131. According to this source, the Israeli government was so disturbed by this group that it tried to convince the US government to stop funding the project.

Transmission: Turning Ideas into New Policies

The ultimate stage for track two activity is the transmission of the ideas fostered in such dialogues to tangible shifts in security policy, such as altered military or security doctrines, lower defense budgets or new regional arms control regimes. Neither the Middle East nor South Asia has reached this stage, although ideas discussed in track two settings have contributed to a variety of CBMs currently underway in the official Indian–Pakistani peace process, even if fundamental security postures are unchanged.

A critical element in successful transmission of track two ideas is not only the ability of the socialized elites to disseminate their ideas to a wider audience and change public discourse. Another key factor is the existence of a policy 'mentor'[54] (an official policymaker) who takes on such ideas and has the power to transfer concepts into actual policy. Of course the stage has to be set before an official mentor can succeed in executing new policy, including preparing the public domain for the shift and working within a hospitable regional climate where the level of violence is relatively low. In other words, it must look advantageous for the official mentor to pursue cooperative policies at home and abroad; the ideas a mentor is willing to take on must be politically possible and useful.

One of the most notable examples of unofficial dialogues reaching this stage of development is the US–Soviet arms control experience. Indeed, numerous East–West arms control dialogues introduced notions of 'cooperative' and 'mutual' security, concepts that formed the core of security socialization efforts in other regions.[55] As analysts of such processes explain,

> …perhaps the most important legacy of the East–West CSBM experience was a modification of the Western *realpolitik* tradition… as a result of the process of negotiating a range of CSBMs with the Soviet Union, the Western policy–community came to believe that security is 'mutual'…[56]

This radical shift in security thinking and the creation of an unprecedented arms control experience did not emerge from a black hole; rather, it began with unofficial dialogues among groups of experts which created an 'epistemic

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54) On this concept of 'mentors' to support track two dialogues, see Agha, Feldman, Khalidi and Schiff, *Track–II Diplomacy: Lessons from the Middle East.*

55) See Keith Krause and Andrew Latham, 'Constructing Non–Proliferation and Arms Control: The Norms of Western Practice,' in Keith Krause, 'Cross–cultural Dimensions of Multilateral Non–Proliferation and Arms Control Dialogues: An Overview,' *Contemporary Security Policy*, vol. 19, no. 1 (April 1998), pp. 23–54.

56) Ibid, p. 33.

community' of arms controllers[57] who were able to reach a broader political audience (bureaucracies, parliament, interest groups) supportive of cooperative security concepts.[58] Leaderships on both sides (or policy mentors) found such concepts politically useful and desirable and thus co–opted the agenda for their own needs, leading to the formation of arms control regimes and, ultimately, the end of US–Soviet conflict. Some have argued that track two US–Soviet dialogues, such as the so–called Dartmouth talks, created new concepts (such as 'complex interdependence' and 'common security') that, because of regular Soviet participation, eventually became part of Gorbachev's 'new thinking.' [59] Other analysts have claimed that unofficial transnational movements of scientists and academics as developed through dialogues like the Pugwash Conference played a role in influencing Soviet ideas and ultimately ending the Cold War.[60] The purpose of this illustration is not to settle the debate on who 'won' the Cold War, but rather to demonstrate the potential of unofficial dialogues to create new concepts and relationships that can, over time and in a ripe political environment, significantly shift security thinking and practice among longstanding adversaries.

Naturally, numerous obstacles stand in the way of such transformations. But the potential for such impact even in regions like the Middle East and South Asia is also not impossible. One observer of South Asian arms control processes, for example, suggests that the political system in India is becoming more conducive to influence from non–official circles, particularly on complex issues like nuclear arms control, arguing that 'Non–official thinking has a significant bearing on Indian strategic culture because nuclear weapons in an operational sense are little understood within Indian officialdom, and because the Indian state is in the process of becoming decentralized and more open to non–official inputs.'[61] Indeed, one unofficial dialogue, the Delhi Policy Group that has focused on nuclear reduction and the concept of minimum nuclear deterrence, regularly briefed the foreign offices in both India and Pakistan

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57) See Emanuel Adler, 'The Emergence of Cooperation: National Epistemic Communities and the International Evolution of the Idea of Nuclear Arms Control,' *International Organization* 46, no. 1 (Winter 1992), pp. 101–45.

58) See Krause and Latham, 'Constructing Non–Proliferation and Arms Control: The Norms of Western Practice,' p. 45.

59) For details related to the Dartmouth talks, see Philip D. Stewart, 'The Dartmouth Conference: U.S.–U.S.S.R. Relations,' in McDonald and Bendahmane, eds., *Conflict Resolution: Track Two Diplomacy*, pp. 21–26. On the impact of the Dartmouth process, see Harold H. Saunders, 'Officials and Citizens in International Relationships: The Dartmouth Conference,' in Volkan, Montville and Julius, eds., *The Psychodynamics of International Relationships Volume II: Unofficial Dialogues at Work*, particularly p. 66 on the Gorbachev point.

60) See Matthew Evengelista, *Unarmed Forces: The Transnational Movement to End the Cold War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999).

61) Rajesh M. Basur, 'Nuclear Weapons and Indian Strategic Culture,' *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 38, no. 2 (2001), p. 185.

about its activities.[62] Given that non–official thinking tends to favor nuclear restraint (i.e., keeping the number of deployed nuclear weapons low, avoiding arms racing with China, favoring arms control and negotiated solutions), an increased influence of this community through track two channels can over time significantly influence official South Asian security policy.

Another example of a track two process that influenced an official policy outcome is the India–Bangladesh Dialogues, which helped facilitate the resolution of the Farakka Barrage dispute between India and Bangladesh (leading to the Ganges Water Treaty), in large part because of movement of track two participants into official policy positions: '...there was an unusual and unprecedented movement of the Track Two participants to the first track of the official dialogues...from the Indian side, I.K. Gujural, who participated in the dialogue series, subsequently became foreign minister and then the prime minister of India. S.A.M.S. Kibria from Bangladesh was part of the Dhaka delegation to the first two rounds of the dialogue... and then became the finance minister of Bangladesh.'[63] However, such direct influence on policy outcomes is '...a rare phenomenon in the South Asian context.'[64]

In the Middle East, although participants on both the Israeli and Arab sides often have good informal contact with government officials,[65] the influence of such activity on official policy is also rare. Still, the development of personal relationships formed during track two dialogues can lead to some spill over to official policy. For example, one Israeli participant associated with the Likud party used his track two contacts with Jordanian counterparts to arrange meetings between Benjamin Netanyahu (before he became Prime Minister of Israel) and Jordanian officials, including Crown Prince Hassan.[66] An Israeli participant also noted how personal contacts established in track two groups allowed members of the top political echelon to pass messages or to clarify points, particularly with respect to the Palestinian track.[67] After learning of efforts to establish a regional security regime from well–connected participants in a track two project, Foreign Minister Amr Moussa of Egypt gave a speech before the United Nations General Assembly in 1997 discussing the regional security regime concept.[68] Similarly, a Jordanian

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62) Behera, 'Forging New Solidarities,' p. 213.
63) Behera, 'Forging New Solidarities: Nonofficial Dialogues,' p. 214.
64) Behera, 'Forging New Solidarities,' p. 214.
65) In an author interview with a Jordanian participant, for example, the Jordanian claimed he had given briefings on track two meetings to up to fifty Jordanian officials. Interview with Jordanian security analyst, January 21, 2001, Amman. Israeli participants of regional security track two dialogues also have strong connections to senior government officials. See, for example, Agha, Feldman, Khalidi and Schiff, *Track–II Diplomacy: Lessons from the Middle East*, p. 129.
66) Author interview with American analyst, January 11, 2001, Washington, D.C. and with an American analyst, January 21, 2001, Amman.
67) Author interview with Israeli analyst, January 15, 2001, Jerusalem.
68) Author interview with American participant, February 22, 2001, Chicago.

participant who conducted a joint study with an Israeli in a track two group on Israeli–Jordanian security issues suggested that this document affected how senior level Jordanian officials (including the former King) thought about the Israeli side and ultimately influenced the security section of the Israel–Jordan peace treaty.[69]

But examples of such direct policy influence is more the exception than the rule. To better understand why this is the case, the following section will consider some of the obstacles which prevent many track two dialogues from reaching their full potential.

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69) Author interview with Jordanian security analyst, January 21, 2001, Amman.

V. Limits of Track Two Dialogue

Obstacles to track two regional security dialogues can be found at three levels: the participating elites; the domestic contexts from which track two participants come; and the larger regional environment.

Two common problems emerge at the elite level: dialogues include the 'wrong' type of people or they include the 'right' type of people with limited influence on official policy and little legitimacy in their domestic environments. The first problem relates to dialogues that are dominated by ideological individuals who do not believe in the value of cooperation with the adversary and merely attend such forums to repeatedly state well–known and deeply entrenched positions. Often such individuals are government officials acting in an unofficial capacity but who nonetheless feel the need to state conventional positions and are much more cautious about exploring new ideas and approaches to regional security for fear of censure back home.

Elites – official and unofficial – also may enter such processes with skeptical and even hostile positions because they come from security cultures that are adverse to cooperative security ideas. Mainstream positions in regions like the Middle East and South Asia favor unilateralist and self–help notions that help foster zero–sum thinking. In such environments, it is difficult to find independent minded elites who can break out of these conceptual frameworks and who are willing to consider new ideas, such as notions of mutual security where a gain for one side can improve, rather than undermine, the position of the other.

Analysts of track two dialogues in other regions, like the Asia Pacific, have also observed that it is often difficult for track two to break new ground

because the participating elites are too connected to governments and are thus unable to introduce new ideas in such dialogues, resulting in minimal impact on security policy.[70] Similar problems emerge in South Asian dialogues, with some analysts suggesting that track two participants are often too close to government circles, leading to 'status quo' thinking and a continuing divide between those inside and outside the establishment.[71] It is even harder to find official mentors who will listen to new ideas and transmit them into actual policy, since official security elites are also exposed to a security culture emphasizing competitive thinking and operate in dangerous neighborhoods. In such environments, it is difficult for regional dialogues to support a cooperative regional security agenda.

On the other hand, the ability to find independent–minded individuals who will clearly express national perspectives and perceptions but still be open to listening to the other sides' views can greatly improve the prospects for track two dialogues.[72] However, the problem is that such individuals, usually coming from unofficial circles (academia, think tanks, NGOs) often have limited influence with official policymakers and are disconnected from grassroots groups or other broadly–based societal movements. In short, such elites are often self–selected individuals who believe in the value of dialogue and conflict resolution but who do not necessarily represent mainstream views from the societies from which they come. The converted are essentially talking to the converted. Thus, the challenge of track two dialogues is to find a core group including the 'right' type of individuals who also have influence and represent a broad spectrum of constituencies back home.

Still, even if such an appropriate group of individuals can be found, the participating elites may still reject a cooperative security agenda. Such elites may, through the process of dialogue and interaction in unofficial settings, develop *more* rather than less negative views of the adversary, or simply fail to buy on to cooperative security concepts. If elites take on such views, they have little incentive to spread the ideas any further and sell new policies at home. For instance, a heated exchange between an Israeli and Egyptian on the nuclear issue at one dialogue left a negative impression with an Israeli participant, who began to question the value of such activity and felt that such exchanges only hardened positions.[73]

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70) See Jürgen Rüland, 'The Contribution of Track Two Dialogue towards Crisis Prevention,' ASIEN 85 (October 2002), pp. 84–96.

71) Behera, 'Forging New Solidarities,' especially p. 227 on this point.

72) IR literature on persuasion suggests that arguing and persuasion are more likely to succeed among individuals who are less ideologically oriented. See, for instance, Jeffrey T. Checkel, 'Building New Identities? Debating Fundamental Rights in European Institutions, *ARENA Working Papers* (2000), Neta Crawford, *Argument and Change in World Politics: Ethics, Decolonization, and Humanitarian Intervention* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), and James L. Gibson, 'A Sober Second Thought: An Experiment in Persuading Russians to Tolerate,'*American Journal of Political Science* 42 (3), pp. 819–850.

73) Interview with Israeli academic, January 14, 2001, Jerusalem.

Resistance by participating elites may also arise out of resentment because outsiders are largely pushing the cooperative security agenda, even if such elites are supportive of the agenda itself. The perception of imposition from external actors to create a new regional security agenda can make regional elites uncomfortable with taking on this agenda and selling it at home to a wider audience, suggesting that form can be as critical as substance in terms of the success of such efforts. For instance, South Asian actors are sensitive about the fact that most funding for their dialogues comes from outside the region, creating 'perceptions of external interference' even if participants are genuinely committed to the dialogue process.[74]

The challenge of selling new ideas and policies back home poses a second set of obstacles to track two dialogues. Cooperative security ideas are unlikely to be popular among populations that have experienced long–standing conflicts and high levels of violence. Cooperative postures are particularly dangerous for vulnerable regimes lacking legitimacy, as domestic opposition groups can use new security policies favoring cooperation with an adversary as political ammunition against a regime, particularly if such policy shifts are associated with Western agendas. We see great sensitivity to publicizing track two dialogues in regions like the Middle East for this reason. Indeed, media leaks of sensitive track two dialogues have in the past caused such efforts to stop or have jeopardized careers of some participants.[75] While many track two dialogues would never get off the ground without operating discreetly, over time such sensitivity to public exposure poses limitations to how such processes can influence security policy. At a certain point, the ideas emerging from the discussions need to 'go public' and create a domestic discourse if a real shift in security policy is to come about.

Finally, the general regional security environment can affect calculations about whether such efforts can be introduced to a larger audience. Generally, in more favourable regional security environments (such as when track one peace processes dealing with core bilateral conflicts like Kashmir or Palestine appear to be moving forward), there is a greater chance for the development of an elite constituency favoring regional security cooperation and for exposure and acceptance at the broader societal level. Conversely, high levels of regional conflict and tension (such as periods following the breakdown of bilateral negotiations and during the absence of official dialogue among adversaries), makes the transmission of cooperative security ideas to official policymakers and the wider public more difficult. Such an environment also makes it difficult for participating elites to accept and promote such concepts. For example, the 1999 Kargil crisis disrupted non–official dialogues in South Asia while several track two activities planned in the Middle East were

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74) Behera, 'Forging New Solidarities,' p. 225.
75) For examples, see Dalia Dassa Kaye, 'Track Two Diplomacy and Regional Security in the Middle East,' *International Negotiation* 6 (2001), pp. 49–77.

postponed due to violence between Israelis and Palestinians in the fall of 2000. While the complete resolution of core bilateral conflicts is not necessary for some progress in regional security dialogues, the impression that such conflicts are advancing toward a resolution can greatly assist the potential of these dialogues to influence regional security thinking and ultimately policy. Setbacks in such processes or other destabilizing regional events (such as a regional conflict or a large–scale terrorist attack) can likewise impede the progress of track two security dialogues and limit their influence.

VI. Conclusion

Track two dialogues are neither a panacea for conflict resolution nor politically insignificant. Experiences in the Middle East and South Asia suggest that such dialogues play important roles in regional conflict resolution processes but also face significant limitations. A better understanding of both the scope and the limits of regional track two diplomacy can lead to a greater appreciation of its potential while avoiding unrealistic expectations about its ability to resolve deeply rooted conflicts among adversaries. This paper sought to illustrate this middle–ground role through examples from the Middle East and South Asia.

On the one hand, the experiences in these regions illustrate the potential of track two dialogues to influence regional security thinking and policy over time through their ability to socialize important groups of security elite and filter extra–regional ideas to the regional context. On the other hand, the experiences also demonstrate the tremendous difficulty in transferring Western ideas about cooperative security to other regional contexts. Sensitivity to the perception of Western imposition is a particularly serious problem in regions like the Middle East and South Asia, especially given the vulnerable domestic environments in which many actors operate. Continuing regional violence and tension also make progress in regional cooperation efforts difficult and at times impossible. And a security elite – particularly those in official positions – who are resistant to cooperative security concepts and more inclined toward realist, zero–sum world–views, dominates both regions. Still, despite such obstacles, both regions have succeeded to some extent in creating trans–national constituencies favoring regional security

cooperation and, at least in the South Asia case, expanding such ideas to broader segments of society. In the right political context, such constituencies could become crucial in transforming regional security relations and policies in the future.

The Middle East and South Asian experiments in unofficial regional security dialogue also suggest a number of lessons for how to improve such dialogues in these and other regions of conflict. One of the most critical lessons is the importance of maximizing a sense of regional ownership of such processes and the ideas that emerge from them. The more the building of regional security concepts comes from within the regions themselves and are viewed as valuable tools enhancing regional actors' own interests, the more effective such activities will be. Successful filtering into the regional context will also generate greater legitimacy for such dialogues among the regional publics.

Thus, interested third parties should support regional sponsorship of new track two dialogues and encourage local funding of such activities, even if the contributions are symbolic. Broadening participation in track two dialogues to different societal actors (including political parties or opposition groups perceived as hostile toward conflict resolution) will also help regionalize such processes and generate more domestic legitimacy. The Middle East could learn from recent South Asian attempts to broaden track two dialogues to other constituencies, such as parliamentarians, journalists and youth. In particular, supporters of Middle East track two projects might consider sponsoring and funding a strategic studies summer school, as has been taking place in South Asia, to specifically target the younger generation. A strengthening of regional institutions committed to conflict resolution and regional security issues in South Asia, and the creation of such centers in the Middle East, would also contribute to regionalizing dialogue processes.

Finally, more attention could be paid in both regions to educating official policymakers about the nature of track two dialogues, increasing official sensitivity about the value of such processes. More formal channels for communicating track two activity could be adopted in both the Middle East and South Asia, replacing the largely informal and ad hoc system that is currently in place for briefing officials on track two concepts. Training courses, especially for younger diplomats, would also help to cultivate a generation of leaders who may be more open to cooperative security ideas and policies and who at some point in the future may be in the position to act on such ideas.

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