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Evaluating the Contributions of Track-Two Diplomacy to Conflict Termination in South Africa, 1984–90*

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This article evaluates the political impact of three non-official, track-two initiatives aimed at resolving the conflict in South Africa. Meetings between white South Africans and the African National Congress (ANC) in the pre-negotiation period from 1985 to 1990 produced direct, substantive inputs into official, track-one decisionmaking regarding negotiations, as well as indirect inputs into public opinion and party politics bearing on questions of negotiated settlement. Track-two talks are credited with changing the political risks and rewards of official talks by legitimizing the negotiation option and desensitizing each side's constituents to talks with the enemy, by building latent support for track-one negotiations, by furthering incentive-creating political polarization over the issue of negotiation, and by encouraging the formation of liberal, pro-negotiation political parties and NGOs. Track-two talks prepared each side for track-one negotiations by clarifying conflict goals and post-conflict policies; by exploring common ground; by developing cadres of officials with experience in dialogue, some of whom developed a bureaucratic stake in an official negotiation process; and by communicating preconditions for track-one talks. The ANC and government each sought to use track-two talks to divide and weaken the other. A sense of South African identity emerged during track-two dialogues which reduced threat perceptions among white participants who communicated with central decisionmakers, and helped create a sense of negotiation possibility complementary to decisionmakers' sense that negotiation was necessary.

'One of our strongest weapons is dialogue' –
Nelson Mandela

Introduction

The unofficial meetings between international and inter-ethnic adversaries known as 'track-two diplomacy' (Montville, 1987) deserve, according to their respective proponents and detractors, either much credit or else hardly any for achieving official,

track-one, political agreements. However, due in part to methodological challenges, scholars to date have provided little systematic evaluation of the effects of track-two interventions on conflict termination and 'no empirical evidence that [unofficial intervention] has contributed or can contribute to the resolution of ethnic conflict' (Rouhana, 1995: 268).

A difficulty in evaluating either individual meetings or the cumulative impact of ongoing efforts is that 'there are often too many independent variables and possible interaction effects' (Ross, 2000). Independent variables in the South African case included revolutionary international

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changes, notably the end of Soviet military involvement in southern Africa, which permitted resolution of the conflict over South Africa's colony, Namibia, and South Africa's disengagement from the Angolan War. In the mid-1980s, black-led resistance and government repression spurred foreign disinvestment. Economic stagnation and chronic political instability widened cleavages in white electoral politics. In 1987, the far-right Conservative Party (the CP – formed in 1982 by a breakaway faction of the ruling National Party, NP) replaced the liberal Progressive Federalist Party (PFP) as the official parliamentary opposition. In 1989, F. W. de Klerk ousted P. W. Botha, first as leader of the NP and then as president. This article traces how track-two contacts interacted with these macro-political processes and contributed to achieving an official agreement between South Africa's NP government and the opposition African National Congress (ANC).

The universe of meetings that might be considered track-two diplomacy in the South African case is large – several dozen took place in the 1985–90 period. However, many were consultations or briefings between the ANC's leadership in exile and leaders of ANC-aligned organizations within the country. Such meetings would not qualify as track two, according to one of the criteria offered below, since the participants did not belong to adversary groups. Other contacts fall outside the scope of track two because no specific political solutions or programs for action were debated. Nor does this study consider the government's dialogues with representatives of anti-apartheid organizations within South Africa, since these were often part of government efforts to bypass the ANC in a negotiation process. (Internal organizations also lacked a mandate to discuss a political settlement.) Rather, the study analyzes three initiatives chosen for the significance of their impact on official decisionmaking: the 1985 meeting in Zambia

between business executives and ANC leaders; the 1987 encounter in Dakar, Senegal, between ANC officials and dissident Afrikaners; and the covert meetings in England beginning in late 1987 between ANC officials and Afrikaner academics with links to government officials.

These meetings can be considered track-two diplomacy, since they were explicitly intended to further conflict resolution by improving understanding and relationships between groups, by humanizing adversary groups through face-to-face meetings, and by preparing the ground for official negotiations by exploring, in an unofficial and informal setting and without commitment, underlying issues and possible solutions (Diamond & McDonald, 1996: 2). They differed from 'secret diplomacy', such as imprisoned ANC leader Nelson Mandela's discussions with government officials, although the ANC and government did use the meetings in England to arrange a covert official initiative. They also differed from the go-between activities of bridge-builders like H. W. van der Merwe and Richard Rosenthal, who sought, unsuccessfully, to arrange direct government-ANC meetings (Rosenthal, 1998; van der Merwe, 2000).

Characteristics of Track Two in South Africa

The meetings in the South African case were essentially bilateral, since the government and the ANC's desire to control the timing and substance of talks tended to preclude third parties, who 'would invariably come with their own agendas' (ANC, 1989: 2). In 1984, for example, ANC leaders rebuffed a proposal by British and South African academics for a 'problem-solving workshop' for ANC and government officials because 'informal discussions . . . between ourselves and members of the National Party, in their personal capacities, do not require any

mediation' (ANC, 1984a: 1). The ANC, despite refusing H. W. van der Merwe's facilitation offers and skeptically viewing such initiatives as 'tentacles thrown by the enemy', was nonetheless spurred by his overtures to 'prepare for the possibility of being confronted with talks' and to take seriously van der Merwe's contention that there were high-ranking NP members who sought contact with the ANC (ANC, 1984b: 5).¹

Initiatives that *were* facilitated by third parties, including the businessmen-ANC and Afrikaner intellectuals-ANC meetings, departed from the model of facilitation in 'interactive conflict resolution' (Fisher, 1997). The groups in all the track-two meetings were asymmetrical, since the ANC side, as loyal members of a political organization with well-coordinated policy positions, addressed their interlocutors with one voice, while those who met with them were typically self-selected and less unified.

While both sides at the Dakar conference sought to influence public opinion in South Africa, and publicized the meeting accordingly, participants in the more elite and substantive Afrikaner intellectuals-ANC meetings avoided publicity because of each side's vulnerability to criticism from hardliners opposed to official-level negotiation. Recourse to secret contacts is also understandable, given government and ANC attempts to exploit splits in each other's camp. Appearing to negotiate also risked dividing each side internally and undermining mobilization efforts. As a senior ANC analyst noted,

at an activist level . . . there are deepseated suspicions about 'talks' of any kind with the enemy. There is a pronounced tendency to regard talks and armed struggle as excluding alternatives. . . . Developments like the Dakar Conference sometimes lead to a naïve optimism, that liberation is around the corner and that the struggle can be abandoned. . . . people are weary and grab at straws. (ANC, 1987g: 2-3)

Within the ANC, track-two initiatives were viewed with suspicion by leaders of the 'armed struggle'. After the second ANC-Afrikaner intellectuals meeting, guerrilla leaders Chris Hani and Joe Nhlanhla criticized Thabo Mbeki, who had led the ANC delegation. At a meeting of the National Working Committee (NWC), at which Mbeki was not present, Hani asked on whose authority Mbeki had entered into such discussions, commenting to general acclamation that

It is very disturbing that a member [of the National Executive] leaves to hold discussion with Afrikaner intellectuals without prior consultations. . . . We record our extreme displeasure that Comrade Thabo has unilaterally gone to London without any consultation and without a mandate from the NWC. (ANC, 1988a: 1-3)

Nhlanhla objected that meetings were taking place 'without any consultation let alone coordination. There are more and more workshops being organised which involve people from home. There is a loss of control' (ANC, 1988a: 1-3).

Since ANC participants were typically senior officials, such meetings might be considered 'track one-and-a-half' rather than track two. Nevertheless, while the ANC side attended as ANC representatives, they did so in an explicitly non-official capacity, rather than as negotiators. White participants in the meetings had no official standing, as befits the track-two definition from Diamond & McDonald (1996) above. However, they had social and professional constituencies inside

¹ Van der Merwe was instrumental in arranging an unprecedented interview by a reporter from *Beeld* with ANC leaders in December 1984 in which the pro-government newspaper advocated talks with the ANC. Van der Merwe also tried to bring ANC leaders together with NP MPs Leon Wessels and Waynand Malan, as well as with a group of Stellenbosch University students and, separately, with Stellenbosch professors Willie Esterhuyse and Sampie Terreblanche. The Botha government blocked all these initiatives.

South Africa and, frequently, access to official decisionmakers. They could thus potentially influence government policymaking, or shape white opinion, or both. In the 1980s, South Africa's political system had democratic features, if only for whites, so parliamentary politics and white public opinion could affect government policy toward the ANC.

Scholars have noted that novel settings can overcome communication-inhibiting conflict norms and promote learning and new ideas (Kelman & Cohen, 1986: 337). The meetings took place in exotic settings – a Zambian game lodge with elephant and other animals grazing nearby, a West African island historically used in the slave trade, and country estates in England. The meetings all included substantial social interaction, with participants typically dining and drinking alcohol together. Informality and equal status between groups fostered interpersonal bonds and trust. A distinctive element of South African track-two initiatives, detailed below, was participants' shared identity as South Africans and their pre-existing cross-cutting professional and social ties, which facilitated a degree of friendship and intimacy.

Track-Two Influence on Track One

Rouhana (1995: 258) calls for explicit theorizing about the linkage or 'transfer' between track-two meetings and track-one conflict resolution processes. Track-two influences on track-one negotiations can be considered, first, in terms of processes that increase decisionmakers' sense of negotiation possibility. Perceptions of possibility can increase as perceptions of threat to one's own group's national existence decrease. The case study tests the proposition that track-two dialogues can produce a sense of shared identity among participants that reduces their sense of threat from the adversary group, and that participants may then convey reassuring impressions

to central decisionmakers, or discuss them in public fora.

Second, dialogues authorized by decisionmakers may reduce threat perception through their 'exploratory function' (Rouhana, 2000: 313), in which participants can gauge the acceptability of specific proposals, as well as a 'verification function' in which each side checks the consistency of the other's positions. Informal contacts thereby contribute to the goals of 'pre-negotiation', involving 'a joint search for co-operative . . . solutions' (Zartman, 1989: 4), and can provide decisionmakers with evidence that common ground exists on which to build a negotiated agreement. Requests for clarification during track-two contacts can also prompt the parties to refine and add content to vaguely formulated goals and policies. Beyond verification and clarification, adversary groups may use talks tactically to gather information, or strategically to probe for exploitable divisions on the other side.

Third, track-two meetings may enhance decisionmakers' sense of negotiation possibility by contributing to shifts in public and elite opinion, as well as shifts in electoral politics, that change the calculus of political risks and rewards in favor of negotiation. Public track-two talks can desensitize constituents to the concept of dialogue with the adversary and create latent political support for negotiation (Rouhana, 2000: 317–318) that increases the political feasibility of official, track-one talks. In democratic political systems, public controversy surrounding track-two meetings can also contribute to political polarization – erosion of support for parties in the middle of the electoral spectrum in favor of parties further to the right or left – which can create incentives for the status quo-oriented governing party to negotiate with insurgent groups in order to preserve its own political centrality.

Shifts in electoral politics can result when politicians with track-two experience

form dovish parties (such as South Africa's Democratic Party and Meretz in Israel) specifically to promote a negotiated settlement with the adversary. Reports from track-two meetings tend to reinforce the plausibility of liberals' central contention – that a negotiated settlement with the adversary can be achieved on terms preferable to the conflict's continuation. Track-two dialogues with the ANC made liberals' arguments more convincing to moderate whites, and, together with the increasing costs of conflict, such as financial sanctions, drew votes from the governing NP. Eroding domestic support pushed government leaders like de Klerk toward the Democratic Party's position on negotiation in order to maintain the NP's electoral plurality (Lieberfeld, 1999a: 88).

Fourth, pre-negotiation contacts can strengthen negotiation-oriented leaders intra-organizationally. Track-two veterans, including Thabo Mbeki and Jacob Zuma (currently South Africa's president and deputy president), advocated within the ANC for a strategic emphasis on negotiation, rather than armed insurrection, and also brought their track-two experience to subsequent official talks. Track-two meetings can fulfill a 'preparatory function', enabling a smoother negotiation process (Rouhana, 2000: 317), as representatives from opposing sides gain familiarity with one another's points of view in advance of official negotiations. Participation in multiple meetings helped develop cadres of ANC officials adept at interacting with Afrikaner elites. On the government side, several members of F. W. de Klerk's cabinet who had met informally with ANC leaders during the pre-negotiation phase went on to become official negotiators (e.g. Gerrit Viljoen, Kobie Coetsee, Roelf Meyer, and Leon Wessels).

Finally, track-two meetings, along with track-one diplomatic contacts, can help insurgent groups avoid insularity and

fanaticism. Face-to-face engagement with the communities whose interests an armed revolutionary group claims to represent tends to inhibit the rebel group from indiscriminate terrorist activity. Debate with potential supporters or constituents, such as the white South Africans whose active support ANC leaders sought, can expose insurgents to 'other ways of thinking, other estimates of the probability of success, and a different perspective on their actions' (Richardson, 2000: 15).

The various contributions of track-two contacts in South Africa are listed in Table I. Chronologically, shifts in political risks and incentives to negotiate are longer-term processes. Contributions to track-one agendas and channels are usually more proximate to initiation of official talks, while pre-negotiation exploration of common ground and clarification/verification are intermediate-term processes. In the South African case, semi-official pre-negotiation began with the late-1987 Afrikaner intellectuals–ANC meeting (and with Mandela's initial contacts with government officials at about the same time). These talks occurred about midway between the ANC–business executives' meeting of 1985 and de Klerk's initiation of official talks in February 1990.

Business Executives–ANC Meeting in Zambia (1985)

During the mid- and late-1980s, contacts between white South Africans and ANC officials in exile intensified in tandem with the political crisis in South Africa. A six-hour meeting on 13 September 1985 brought a group of four business executives and three journalists from South Africa together with ANC President Oliver Tambo and five high-ranking ANC officials. Zambian President Kenneth Kaunda organized the encounter, along with Hugh Murray, editor of the business magazine *Leadership SA*. The ANC had

Table I. Track-Two Functions in South Africa, 1984–90

<i>Changing political risks and rewards</i>	<i>Pre-negotiation of conflict issues</i>	<i>Preparation for track-one talks</i>
Legitimizing the negotiation option	Strategic probing, efforts to	Developing cadres of
Breaking taboo on talks with	divide adversary	experienced negotiators
the enemy	Clarifying, refining own policies	Promoting diplomatists
Building latent support for	Exploring common ground	intra-organizationally
official talks	for negotiation	Deciding preconditions for
Stimulating pro-negotiation		track-one talks
NGOs and political parties		Using track-two channel for
		covert track-one talks

its headquarters in Zambia's capital, Lusaka, and President Kaunda was a key supporter of the ANC.

The meeting took place two months after the South African government imposed a state of emergency in response to the township uprisings. The cutoff of international capital in response to the uprisings and to government repression particularly threatened the mining industry, which relied on infusions of foreign capital to finance operations. Anglo-American, South Africa's most prominent corporation, directly and indirectly controlled roughly 50% of the Johannesburg stock exchange. In the mid-1970s, Kaunda's government had nationalized a majority interest in Anglo's Zambian mining operations, and Anglo officials feared the same could happen in South Africa in the event of an ANC-led revolution. In April 1985, ANC guerrillas bombed Anglo headquarters after the company laid off 14,000 workers. Anglo executives also feared that a mineworkers' union allied with the ANC might disrupt mining operations with strikes.

The Businessmen and Journalists' Side

Anglo's chairman, Gavin Relly, led the group from South Africa. Relly had directed Anglo's Zambian operation when it was part-nationalized. He also presided over the South Africa Foundation (SAF), a pro-business lobbying

group that sought economic liberalization through social and political reforms. In meeting with the ANC, Relly sought 'to establish a relationship between the wealth-producing sector and a new African economic policy' (Relly, 1994).

SAF chief executive Peter Sorour accompanied Relly, as did Zac de Beer, a former liberal member of Parliament from the PFP, who returned to politics as a leader of the Democratic Party (DP) in 1989. De Beer was an executive director at Anglo and former head of Anglo's Zambian operation, in which capacity he became acquainted with Kaunda. Participant Anthony Bloom's business, Premier Milling, exported flour and cooking oil to Zambia and was part-owned by Anglo. Anglo gave *The Sunday Times*, of which it was part-owner, an exclusive scoop on the meeting in the English-language press.

While government policy rejected negotiations with 'terrorists', no law forbade meeting ANC officials outside the country. Seizing the passports of leading industrialists on whom the economy depended was politically risky. Bloom (1998) noted, 'We could be dismissed as politically naive, but we ran large businesses – we couldn't be accused of treason'.

The ANC Side

ANC President Oliver Tambo was accompanied by Thabo Mbeki, his political secretary and speechwriter. Mbeki had spent 23

years in exile as an ANC activist. His father, Govan, a founder of the ANC's guerrilla forces, Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK), was then in prison serving a life sentence.

Three months before meeting the businessmen, the ANC held a major congress in Kabwe, Zambia, and resolved:

There can be no meaningful negotiations with the enemy whilst he feels strong. Military and other forms of pressure must therefore be exerted on the enemy until he feels the pinch and sues for peace talks not out of choice but out of necessity. (ANC, 1985a: 1)

ANC leaders considered 'talks' a means of enhancing the 'democratic forces' and weakening and demoralizing the regime. While 'talks' were to be used to divide the enemy, 'negotiations' were, in the 1980s, still largely understood in the context of nationalist struggles in Algeria, Vietnam, and, closer to home, Mozambique and Angola: negotiation of the terms of surrender at the climax of a revolution.

Moreover, South Africa's government was committed to a strategy of severe repression that indicated no willingness to negotiate with the ANC. Despite Communist ANC members' not inaccurate belief that the businessmen's main objective was 'the saving of capitalism', implying their retention of 'the means of production' (South African Communist Party, 1986), delegates at Kabwe authorized meetings with the businessmen and with liberal members of Parliament, affording Tambo a limited mandate for negotiation. While ANC officials belonging to MK and the South African Communist Party (SACP) eventually participated in these meetings, Tambo reportedly told Relly afterward that he had feared that meeting the businessmen risked making ANC members think the leadership had gone soft and would hurt the ANC's status as a liberation movement, and that only Kaunda's personal intercession persuaded Tambo to hold the meeting at all (Relly, 1994).

Process and Substance of the Meeting

Kaunda chaired the session at his presidential lodge. He emphasized that it was not possible for decisions to be taken; rather, the aim was mutual learning and exploring common ground (Bloom, 1985: 2–3). Tambo suggested that the delegations, which initially sat on opposite sides of a table, should mix themselves up, rather than face each other like opponents. The mixed seating continued during lunch, adding to the fraternal atmosphere, as did Tambo's request that they use first names.

In the unstructured discussion that followed, the businessmen asked whether ANC economic policy envisioned state control and nationalization of industries. The businessmen stressed that political progress depended on economic growth, which capitalism could most effectively produce. The businessmen and journalists challenged the 'armed struggle', suggesting the ANC adopt a moratorium on violence. They also stressed the need to avoid bloodshed and destruction of infrastructure during the period of reform before power-sharing took place. De Beer raised white fears of black domination and possible constitutional safeguards. ANC members supported individual rights, but were opposed to group rights, which they considered anti-democratic and which contradicted the ANC's non-racialism (Bloom, 1985: 22).

The very cordial rapport between the groups impressed the businessmen, who experienced significant dissonance between their expectations and the people they found. Relly termed it 'one of the nicest days I've ever spent', noting that, 'Although [MK leader] Chris Hani was billed as the leader of the ferocious forces . . . he was a sweet chap. We couldn't get him into the right category at all' (Sampson, 1987: 194). Bloom (1985: 28, 30) reported

a total lack of aggression, animosity or hostility towards us. . . . the initial round of

introductions was almost like a reunion. . . . It is difficult to view the ANC group as hard-line Marxists or bloodthirsty terrorists who were interested in reducing South Africa to anarchy and seizing power with a hatred of whites. Without in any way wishing to be seduced or hypnotized by the occasion, I believe that they are people with whom serious negotiation can be undertaken and with whom a certain amount of common ground could be found. I would unhesitatingly support any initiative to get the South African government and the ANC into contact with each other.

The participants' mainly Christian background provided one element of common South African identity and undermined the stereotype of ANC leaders as committed Marxists. Tambo, who had studied for the ministry before becoming a lawyer, led the group in saying grace over lunch. Kaunda stressed the participants' shared identity as South Africans and averred, 'The things which men have in common are God-made, whereas the things that divide men are man-made' (Bloom, 1985: 2).

Significance and Follow-up

In retrospect, Relly (1994) considered the meeting 'much more of a watershed than any of the participants intended', noting, 'I've been blamed ever since for opening the floodgates of international business to deal with the ANC'. Bloom (1998) concurred that the meeting 'breached the dam wall'. While branding the businessmen disloyal, the government, by not intervening, indicated that business leaders, at least English-speaking ones, would likely not face reprisals for meeting with the ANC. The meeting was well publicized among the English-speaking readership of *Leadership SA*, and among the mass readerships of *The Sunday Times* and *Vaderland*.

For the ANC, the meetings indicated that it was being taken seriously as a potential government-in-exile. ANC leader Aziz Pahad (1994) considered the businessmen's visit a

signal that 'captains of industry had shifted from a position of "We are not interested in what's happening" to "This is now affecting us; we have to get involved"'.

Most ANC participants attended subsequent track-two meetings. Mbeki, in particular, focused his work as head of ANC information on liaisons with South African whites. Shortly after the meeting in Zambia, the ANC established a Department of Legal and Constitutional Affairs. Participants Pallo Jordan and James Stuart, along with Mbeki, formed a subcommittee of the ANC National Executive on negotiations and constitutional guidelines. The committee's internal memo on negotiations noted the pitfalls of talks, but legitimized talks and negotiations as a form of 'struggle' and recommended that the ANC immediately set up a constitutional think-tank (ANC, 1985b). An ANC constitutional subcommittee was duly created and, after indicating in 1986 and 1987 that it would introduce a bill of rights, produced draft constitutional guidelines in mid-1988. This renewed focus on constitutional issues responded to the discussions with the businessmen and with PFP leaders.

On the businessmen's side, Relly, Bloom, and other English-speaking business leaders publicly called for the end of statutory racial discrimination. However, shortly after the meeting, Relly characterized the gap between liberal reformists and ANC revolutionaries as 'a chasm'. With only passing reference to the encounter, Relly (1985) argued against sanctions, nationalization, and the credit cutoff, and endorsed the government demand that the ANC unconditionally abjure violence.

The paucity of concrete outcomes was in part a reflection of business's continued suspicion of the ANC's socialism and of the Communists among its leadership, as well as business leaders' preference for negotiations with black leaders inside the country. Although the financial crisis of mid-1985 motivated the businessmen's initiative, few

were resolved enough to publicly contradict the government's portrayal of the ANC as a terrorist gang. ANC guerrilla actions, such as the bombing of a shopping center just before Christmas 1985, also hardened white opinion and inhibited continued contacts.

The Dakar Conference (1987)

The Dakar Conference brought 61 predominantly Afrikaans-speaking intellectuals together with a delegation of 17 ANC officials for a three-day encounter in the Senegalese capital. With few exceptions, the group from South Africa were dissidents who supported parties to the left of the NP, or, in some cases, the extra-parliamentary opposition. Their attendance at Dakar expressed not only rejection of government conflict policy, but also support for negotiation with the ANC.

Conference Convenors

Shortly after the businessmen's 1985 visit, parliamentary opposition leader Van Zyl Slabbert, who had been briefed by Bloom and de Beer, traveled to Lusaka with other PFP officials to meet with ANC leaders.² Slabbert (1998) described this first meeting between MPs and the ANC in exile as 'an extraordinary revelation', noting, 'I just became very impressed with . . . how we had been indoctrinated'. A few months later, Slabbert and fellow PFP leader Alex Boraine, a former president of the Methodist Church of South Africa, resigned from Parliament and created Idasa (Institute for a Democratic Alternative for South Africa) as an institution that sought to bring together the parties in the conflict. Although Idasa plausibly claimed political non-alignment, several Idasa officials were linked with the ANC-allied United Democratic Front (UDF) and even, clandestinely, with the ANC.

² Slabbert was motivated by black community leaders' assertions that the ANC was their legitimate representative.

Slabbert and Boraine organized the Afrikaner dissidents' July trip to Dakar to meet a multiracial delegation of ANC intellectuals. ANC members sought to 'educate the Idasa group about the policy, strategy and character of the ANC and . . . to get the group to commit itself to action oriented toward . . . the strategy of the liberation movement' (ANC, 1987a: 2). In accord with the ANC goal of having the Idasa group commit itself to action, ANC members successfully revised the Idasa group's initial agenda, moving until last the nature of the post-apartheid government and economic structure, on which ANC positions were only vaguely formulated (ANC, 1987c: 4).

Process and Substance of the Meeting

Slabbert and Mbeki were conference co-chairs. Sensing that the Idasa group, like the businessmen, sought to 'learn about the ANC and . . . to obtain certain guarantees and assurances about the course of struggle and about post-apartheid South Africa', Mbeki, an African, declared in his initial speech, 'I am an Afrikaner', and stressed, 'We need white support' (ANC, 1987c: 6). ANC members affirmed that blacks and whites shared a South African identity. Some ANC delegates who were fluent undertook extended debates in Afrikaans during the plenary sessions. At one point, Essop Pahad of the ANC linked the ANC's armed struggle with Afrikaners' own revolutionary tradition and quoted a Boer War-era poem on the Afrikaners' anti-imperial struggle and their losses in British concentration camps.

The ANC's non-racialism impressed the Idasa-led group. Tommy Bedford, a former captain of the Springboks, the South African national rugby team and an important cultural symbol for Afrikaners, later told reporters that the ANC appreciated the 'permanence' of white South Africans: 'They feel we belong here, and see us as Africans with white skins' (*Daily Dispatch*, 22 July 1987).

ANC leaders had decided that the white participants should not be allowed to isolate themselves at Dakar, and relationship-building between groups occurred over drinks at the hotel bar. Such informal moments were often more impressive than the in-conference discussions, PFP MP Peter Gastrow (1998) noted, 'because you couldn't put up a front all the time, and we were together for 18 hours a day, for several days'. A shared sense of danger also brought the delegations closer. During the conference, the Idasa group heard reports of participants' families being harassed back home, and of South African security forces' assassinations of two senior members of the ANC's guerrilla wing.

The groups issued a joint declaration calling for negotiation and labeling the government the principal obstacle to progress. All agreed that it was vital to increase pressure from the white community since the state would only negotiate under pressure. The joint recognition of the ANC's importance for conflict resolution and the call for the unconditional release of political prisoners, as well as legalization of opposition organizations, accorded with the ANC's goal of co-opting the Idasa delegates into supporting basic ANC positions. In Slabbert's retrospective judgement (2000: 103), the ANC was 'infinitely more accomplished than we were as politicians. . . . We were novices and like putty in their hands'.

ANC–Elite Afrikaners Meetings (1987–90)

Elite Afrikaners, including several with ties to the NP government, and to the Afrikaner Broederbond (League of Brothers) – a secret ethnic organization whose leadership had long controlled mainstream Afrikaner politics, culture, and business – held a series of six meetings in England with senior ANC officials between late 1987 and F. W. de Klerk's February 1990 announcement that opened the way to official talks. The Broederbond,

whose chairman, J. P. de Lange, had met unofficially with Thabo Mbeki and other ANC leaders in New York in June 1986, sought to control what its leaders saw as an inevitable trend toward power-sharing so as to safeguard the political, economic, and cultural interests of Afrikaners and of whites generally. As shapers of Afrikaner opinion, the Broederbond executive could prepare the broader membership, the most politically potent sector of the white public, for negotiation with the ANC (Afrikaner Broederbond, c. 1986).

Convenors of the Meeting

The meetings in England were organized by executives of Consolidated Goldfields (Consgold), a British mining firm whose principal holdings were in South Africa. Consgold Vice-Chairman Humphrey Woods had unsuccessfully tried to set up meetings between the ANC and South Africans close to the government in the mid-1980s. In early 1987, Consgold consultant Fleur de Villiers, who also worked for Anglo-American, contacted Willie Esterhuysen, professor of political philosophy at Stellenbosch University, on Consgold's behalf. Esterhuysen's work with the Urban Foundation connected him with the progressive business community. He had been a Broederbond member and, most important, had access to P. W. Botha, to whom he had been a political adviser. The president's daughter had also studied with Esterhuysen at the university (Esterhuysen, 1998). On the ANC side, Tambo and Mbeki sought to add more politically influential Afrikaners to the circle of those with whom the ANC had contacts. The initiative led to the first substantive 'proximity talks' between the ANC in exile and the South African government in that they combined discussion of security and the political process with a focus on the specific content of future negotiations (ANC, 1987f: 1).

National Intelligence Service (NIS) officials contacted Esterhuysen shortly after

he began preparations for the meeting and requested that he report on it. Esterhuysen agreed, while also receiving permission to inform the ANC of his NIS contacts.³ The committee that debriefed Esterhuysen included NIS chief Niel Barnard, who also led the government team that began meeting secretly and separately with Mandela in prison in May 1988 (Sparks, 1995).

By 1987, Esterhuysen had left the NP and joined Worrall's Independent Movement. He enlisted fellow Stellenbosch professors Sampie Terreblanche and Willie Breytenbach, who both had formerly held government positions and who retained close, informal government ties, for the Consgold-sponsored meeting in Henley, England, on 1–2 November. The ANC team included Dakar conference veterans Aziz Pahad, Tony Trew, and Harold Wolpe. All were members of the London office's Political Research Discussion Group and of Oliver Tambo's President's Committee, led primarily by Thabo Mbeki.

Process and Substance of the Meeting

Michael Young, head of Consgold communications and corporate affairs, and formerly political adviser to British Prime Ministers Douglas-Home and Heath, chaired the meeting, which, the two sides agreed, was not about negotiations.⁴ Privately, however, the

³ As of the third meeting (which was the second that Mbeki attended), Esterhuysen and Mbeki tried to address ambiguities over authorization by establishing a covert, semi-official channel, a 'meeting within a meeting' that took place without the knowledge of other Afrikaner participants. Esterhuysen relayed the content to the NIS, which passed it on to Botha, while Mbeki communicated with Tambo and the ANC leadership. In both meetings, the Afrikaner and ANC participants maintained that they 'should not be understood to be negotiating but simply exploring possibilities for common ground' (ANC, 1989: 3).

⁴ Young had previously met Tambo, Mbeki, Zuma, Aziz Pahad, and other ANC officials in London in June 1986 as part of a series of meetings, beginning with the 1985 businessmen's initiative, between ANC leaders and representatives of banks and industrial corporations with major holdings in South Africa. George Soros, who afterwards helped fund the Dakar Conference, attended the London meeting, as did Anthony Bloom.

ANC group surmised that the Afrikaners were reporting to 'people within the security establishment' for whom they were serving an 'emissary role' (ANC, 1987e: 1). The ANC group perceived 'a crucial lack of clarity about [the Afrikaners'] status, and representativeness, who their constituency was or who they would reporting back to', yet they believed that the Afrikaners 'represented a section with considerably more political influence within the ruling bloc than . . . those who had been at Dakar' (ANC, 1987f: 1).

While the Dakar group had sought first-hand information about the ANC, or to persuade it to abandon armed struggle, the Afrikaner intellectuals sought 'information about how the ANC would react to various possible moves by the state and especially the release of Govan Mbeki and, then, Nelson Mandela' (ANC, 1987e: 2). (The government released Mbeki three days after the Henley meeting.) Trew reported that the Afrikaner group saw itself 'less as representative of forces crossing from the ruling camp to the mass democratic movement however tentatively, but rather as bridge-builders and go-betweens' and that the Afrikaners considered the meeting 'a first step in what could become a negotiating process' (ANC, 1987f: 3,1).

The Afrikaner group declared that they had a way of sending messages that would be taken seriously at the highest levels of government. After Breytenbach backtracked by stating that the Afrikaner group had no mandate and could not communicate with the security establishment about the meeting, Esterhuysen resolved the issue by saying that he would communicate the meeting's substance to Broederbond Chairman J. P. de Lange, who would pass it on to the security chiefs (ANC, 1987e: 8).

The Afrikaners told the ANC that for the State Security Council (SSC), the government's most powerful decisionmaking body, 'there were certain necessary conditions for negotiations, and that [the SSC] considered

these largely in place'. They asked whether the ANC was willing to negotiate accommodation of 'white rights' (particularly control over education) and whether the two sides could create a climate for negotiation by coordinating the government's release of ANC prisoners with a positive response by the ANC (ANC, 1987f: 5).

The Afrikaner group told ANC members that their meeting would not have been possible before 1987, since

it would have been interpreted as 'violence paying off'. Today with the re-establishment of stability [under the State of Emergency] the position has changed. . . . What is at issue now is for the regime to find a way of releasing prisoners without losing face, without stoking white fears about violence and without giving the CP the opportunity to make capital out of the release and what the response of the ANC will be. (ANC, 1987e: 7)⁵

Esterhuysen led five more groups of Afrikaner establishment figures to meetings in England before de Klerk released Mandela and unbanned the ANC. Meetings continued after February 1990. Afrikaner participants were mainly business leaders, and the talks shifted from political and security issues to economic policy. Additional meetings also familiarized the ANC with Afrikaner elites, and vice versa.

Cabinet minister and former Broederbond chairman Gerrit Viljoen had also met with Mandela in prison in 1988 and 1989. Viljoen (1994) assessed that these contacts, which were covert track one, rather than track two, 'worked against demonization', in that 'the ANC's reasonableness and lack of

bitterness came across. It was clear that their priority was not to destroy their opponent'. F. W. de Klerk, himself a Broederbond member, received reports from Viljoen and from the Broederbonders who met with ANC leaders, and was briefed by his own brother, Willem ('Wimpie'), a member of the Broederbond executive whom Esterhuysen recruited into his group as of its third meeting, in August 1988. These reports stressed the ANC's willingness to negotiate, its decreasing commitment to 'armed struggle', and its willingness to handle minority rights, i.e. of whites, with sensitivity (W. de Klerk, 1998). According to Wimpie de Klerk,

the essence of my message was 'Look boys, everything is okay. We can do business with the ANC. They are not that radical. They are willing to negotiate. They are willing to compromise. They see the Afrikaners as an indigenous part of the South African population. They are not that dangerous.' (Sparks, 1995: 80)

NIS officials and ANC leaders also used Esterhuysen's channel to arrange direct talks, apparently the first ever, in early September 1989 (Sparks, 1995: 113). Following this meeting, NIS directors reported to the new president that the ANC was prepared to negotiate.

Analysis and Conclusions

Effects on White Public Opinion

The impact of track-two meetings on white South Africans was amplified by their prior ignorance of the ANC, owing to government censorship. André du Toit (1998) noted, 'We were living in a situation where the ANC was banned and its leaders excluded. . . . It changes everything if you've never heard from major intellectuals in the ANC. Afterwards, you can't think about the ANC in the same way again.'

After Dakar, many of the Idasa group engaged in public speaking and informal

⁵ At least two aspects of the South African case inspire reformulation of the 'hurting stalemate' concept, which posits that negotiation is likely when the more powerful side begins to lose ground: first, the government side agreed to negotiate only after it regained control of its deteriorating security position, and second, competition from the NP's main domestic rival, the CP, significantly influenced the NP's attitudes toward negotiation (Lieberfeld, 1999b).

discussions with constituents, colleagues, families, and friends. Du Toit (1998) recalled that he and others did 'a whole series of debriefings and house meetings'. Since elite Afrikaner society is intimately related, a participant's assertion that 'virtually everyone knew someone who went to Dakar' (du Preez, 1998) is perhaps not greatly exaggerated.

Meetings produced more differentiated views of the ANC's membership and goals. After attending Dakar, a mainstream political scientist wrote:

While the government-controlled media in South Africa, in typical Orwellian fashion, depicted the ANC as a monolithic organisation firmly under the control of the South African Communist Party, Dakar proved differently. . . . After Dakar I consider myself better informed on the structure and policies of the ANC and am more confident to transfer my impressions and understanding . . . to my immediate constituency. Thus, in a real sense, Dakar has contributed to a more informed corporate and student constituency. (du Pisani, 1987: 10)

Dakar was a media event, covered by two US television networks, Britain's ITN, and a contingent of international and South African print and radio journalists. South African media also covered follow-up controversies, such as the attack by right-wing demonstrators on a group of Dakar attendees on their return to Johannesburg. Shortly after the conference, police in the Pretoria-controlled Ciskei murdered an Idasa regional office director, Eric Mntonga, in apparent retaliation for the Dakar initiative.

The conference also provoked secondary debates over efforts to stifle participants' public comments. After Professor Johan van der Westhuizen (1998) spoke about the conference at the Pretoria Press Club, university officials prohibited him from addressing campus meetings. President Botha made a speech in Parliament excoriating an Afrikaner church official, Theuns

Eloff, who was forced to leave his congregation.

Media coverage of NP officials' public condemnations of participants amplified the conference's impact. Government allegations of ethnic betrayal helped polarize white politics. Eloff, for example, was a conservative church official and former leader of a prominent Afrikaner student organization. While Botha's attack pushed some congregants to repudiate Eloff, others were moved to support him and thereby to question government policy toward the ANC (du Preez, 1998; Eloff, 1998).

The Dakar conference also led to the creation of an alternative Afrikaans newspaper, *Vrye Weekblad*, which, editor Max du Preez (1998) recalled,

ran profiles on ANC leaders: names, families, children. It was not a big, widely read paper, but it had more impact through setting the news agenda for papers like *Beeld* and *Burger*, whose staff couldn't ignore what *Vrye Weekblad* was reporting on.

How much Dakar changed white opinion regarding negotiations with the ANC is difficult to gauge. Pre-Dakar surveys indicate that only a minuscule percentage of white voters favored negotiating with the ANC (van Vuuren, 1987: 28). Although this attitude persisted after Dakar, evidence that Dakar desensitized whites to talks with the ANC can be adduced from the comparative lack of controversy over a follow-up conference a year later. This time, still during the state of emergency, a smaller Idasa-led group met in West Germany with ANC and SACP leaders, including Joe Slovo – perhaps the figure most reviled and feared by whites. By Idasa's 1989 conference with the ANC in Paris, an event similar in scale to Dakar, the Afrikaans press and public were tolerant, if not accepting. Du Preez (1998) contrasted the responses:

There was an over-the-top reaction to Dakar: For about two to three weeks it dominated the political debate. There was a national hysteria, and then a kind of numbing effect. . . . From

1987 to 1989 there was a gradual process of acceptance: The people who had gone to Dakar were still there, and . . . people who hadn't gone felt a bit left out.

Even NIS Director Neil Barnard (1994), despite viewing unofficial contacts as potentially harmful to the government's own pre-negotiation initiatives, conceded that meetings like Dakar built a reservoir of latent readiness to accept the ANC as a legitimate participant in a negotiated settlement and 'played an important role in psychologically preparing the grassroots of this whole process [of starting negotiations]'.

Inputs into Government Decisionmaking

Barnard's NIS, which reported directly to the president, conducted post-conference interviews with several Dakar participants, including Slabbert. The general message NIS officials received was that ANC leaders, though dangerous, were also pragmatic and rational, and should be brought back (Giliomee, 1998; Schlemmer, 1998; Slabbert, 1998).

Barnard (1994), however, opposed Dakar-type 'citizen diplomacy' since 'there was no way that we as a government were going to be prescribed by clerics, academics and the private sector as to how we should conduct the political business of this country'. He and P. W. Botha considered unauthorized track-two contacts a nuisance that could interfere with their own strategic agenda, which included splitting 'moderate' ANC nationalists from ANC communists.

The government also rejected unofficial contacts because of the right-wing CP's allegations that the NP, by not stopping the conference, had softened toward the ANC. In Parliament, the CP censured the government for not punishing participants (*Port Elizabeth Herald*, 29 July 1987). Given the CP's capacity to attract the votes of conservative Afrikaners, the NP could not appear to tolerate the meeting.

While the Dakar group were mainly elite

dissidents who did not represent mainstream Afrikanerdom, they were not marginal or purely eccentric figures. At a time when the government hoped to discredit the ANC and to cultivate an alternative black leadership inside South Africa, Dakar and subsequent track-two meetings, to the ANC's satisfaction and the government's distress, helped legitimize the ANC as a negotiation partner and 'contributed to the intellectual weakening of the ruling group and to an increased polarisation among Afrikaners' (Haski, 1987).

The public controversy surrounding meetings contributed to the polarization process, in which the right-wing CP used reports of track-two meetings to attack the NP government for being too permissive, while the liberal PFP and its successor, the DP, used the meetings to argue that the government was overlooking real possibilities for negotiation. In the 1987 and 1989 elections, the NP responded by accusing its PFP/DP rivals of being soft on the ANC. The DP's founders – Dennis Worrall, Waynard Malan, Zac de Beer, and Wimpie de Klerk – had each previously participated in track-two meetings with the ANC, and the NP in 1989 attacked the DP with a poster featuring a photograph of a prominent DP leader engaged in a track-two meeting with ANC and SACP leaders. Nevertheless, the NP in 1989 lost support among Afrikaners to the CP on the right, while the DP eroded the NP's base among English speakers and progressive Afrikaners. Since gaining ground among conservative Afrikaners was a futile prospect, de Klerk, shortly after the election, shifted toward negotiation with the ANC, to outflank the DP, the NP's competitor on the left, and to maintain the NP's narrow electoral advantage (Lieberfeld, 2000: 26).

De Klerk and his cabinet's conviction that elite Afrikaners and the broader white public would tolerate policy reversal toward the ANC allowed the government to take the leap of negotiations with the enemy.

Although whites' tolerance for negotiation was based on the mistaken assumption that it would not produce an ANC-controlled government, the NP leaders in late 1989 could sense that a politically crucial reservoir of white support existed (Terreblanche, 1998).

Influences on ANC Policy

Track-two contacts prompted ANC leaders to devote more attention to exploiting divisions among whites through 'political work' within the white community. After Dakar, even the SACP publication *African Communist* (1987: 10) endorsed the strategy of winning whites' support for majority rule, declaring unambiguously that 'No achievement of the liberation movement has been more important than the splitting of Afrikanerdom'. Aziz Pahad judged the conference a success in that the Idasa delegation had been 'overwhelmed' and had accepted the ANC's centrality in a solution and the necessity for armed struggle (ANC, 1987a: 4). The ANC assessed that proposed follow-ups to Dakar would allow the ANC to 'put across its perspectives directly and intervene in the debates in the white community' (ANC, 1988b: 6). ANC political analyst Tony Trew advocated more meetings like Dakar 'but with an expanded base of white participants', and noted the need to explain ANC policies and strategies, rather than simply declare them (ANC, 1987a: 4).

The success of Dakar reinforced the influence of diplomats like Mbeki, who specialized in ANC contacts with Afrikaners close to the government. ANC leaders who emphasized insurrection and mass mobilization were less well disposed toward the conference. SACP leader Joe Slovo, however, participated in an Idasa-sponsored meeting with white academics and journalists, including several Dakar veterans, the following year. By then, most of the ANC's highest officials had met delegations of white South Africans.

Although ANC leaders considered track-two initiatives a means of widening divisions in the enemy camp (ANC, 1987d), the meetings also influenced the ANC. For example, in response to the questions put by their interlocutors during track-two meetings, ANC leaders concretized the sweeping principles of the 1955 Freedom Charter and the espousal of a 'mixed economy' (ANC, 1987b: 10). Frene Ginwala (1994), a close assistant to ANC President Tambo, noted that

South African businessmen [were] coming to see us. Whites [were] coming to Dakar. . . . The ANC [was] trying to address the concerns that are being expressed [with] publication of a Bill of Rights. People from home were asking questions about where do we stand? We couldn't just talk about 'liberation'. We had to start putting content to the future. So you began to see that content emerging in our statements.

Track-two meetings and diplomatic contacts generally also prompted the ANC to specify its preconditions for negotiation. The 1989 Harare declaration, the ANC's most detailed statement of such preconditions, was in part a response to track-two meetings. According to Pahad (1994),

the major meetings taking place outside the country . . . led eventually to what happened in Harare and then [in] 1990, Groote Schuur [the site of the first track-one meeting], which had a lot of precedent prior to that.

Specific ANC policy declarations regarding economic and constitutional policies also reduced whites' sense of uncertainty and lowered the risk involved in legalizing the ANC and in beginning official talks. Pahad (2000) noted that unofficial meetings helped the ANC understand

what the fears, insecurities, concerns were. . . . Unless you have contact with various sectors from inside – church leaders, business leaders, trade unionists – you could not formulate policy in the end which would reflect the given realities. The reason why we survived in exile was precisely because of that sort of contact.

Scope of the Conclusions

Track-two meetings began relatively late in the South African conflict, more than eight years after the 1976 Soweto Uprising re-established the ANC at the forefront of political resistance. From the 1960s to the mid-1980s, there was no track-two activity. When white South Africans finally sought dialogue with the ANC, however, they were not meeting members of a distant and hostile group. Resolution of the South African conflict certainly derived from adversaries' relative power, as realist theories would predict: for F. W. de Klerk (1998), the collapse of communism meant that the ANC had 'lost the sting in their tail' due to loss of Soviet and east bloc military patronage. Yet track-two meetings consistently highlighted participants' shared identity as South Africans and contributed significantly to lowered threat perception and to increased willingness to negotiate, thus upholding a constructivist interpretation of conflict resolution since shared identity is a socially constructed relationship (whose absence is a critical distinguishing feature of the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, for example).

The South African case highlights the utility, and perhaps the necessity, of an expansive civil society for effective track-two diplomacy. NGOs like Idasa significantly accelerated longer-term processes of attitude change among the government's white constituents. Track-two processes in South Africa were typically sponsored by a private sector capable of independence from government policies: the most significant contacts with the ANC were organized by mining firms, Anglo-American and Consgold, that feared nationalization of the investments they had literally sunk into South African soil. The efficacy of unofficial initiatives also derived from the limited but significant degree of journalistic independence and professionalism in the country, which prompted some journalists to publicize track-two events and

attendant controversies (van Heerden, 1998).

The influence of the elite Afrikaners and Broederbonders on NP leaders, most of whom were members, highlights the interconnectedness of South Africa's elites and the centralization of government decisionmaking. On the ANC side, President Oliver Tambo's unchallenged authority protected negotiation-oriented leaders from attacks by those in the ANC who favored insurrectionist strategies.

As Kelman suggests, unofficial initiatives are successful in so far as they contribute to changes in the political cultures on each side in ways that make the parties more receptive to negotiation. Such outcomes include 'the emergence of a sense of possibility'; 'belief that at least some elements on the other side are interested in a peaceful solution'; 'greater awareness of the other's perspective'; 'initiation of mutually reassuring actions'; 'a shared vision of a desirable future'; 'exploration of ideas for the overall shape of a solution to the conflict'; 'exploration of ideas for moving the negotiations forward'; and 'development of "cadres" with direct experience in communicating with the other side' (Kelman, 1996: 12-13). Track-two contacts in South Africa had all these effects. In the four-and-a-half years from September 1985 to February 1990, such contacts made limited but significant contributions to the pre-negotiation process in South Africa. The case study specifies inputs into negotiation decisionmaking from track-two participants' communications with central decisionmakers and track two's indirect inputs through shifts in electoral politics and public opinion. Although the degree to which these inputs influenced the decisions to negotiate cannot be stated precisely, and despite the difficulty of tracing interaction effects, track-two talks can be judged to have enhanced decisionmakers' sense that a negotiated resolution was possible in terms of both strategic goals and domestic politics. This perception was an essential complement to

decisionmakers' sense – deriving from macro-level factors, such as the end of the Cold War and demographic and economic pressures on the government side – that negotiation was necessary (Lieberfeld, 1999a).

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