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The U.S.-Iran Track II Dialogue (2002–2008): Lessons Learned and Implications for the Rockefeller Brothers Fund's Grantmaking Strategy

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Executive Summary

From 2002 through 2008, the Rockefeller Brothers Fund (RBF) supported a Track II dialogue involving influential American and Iranian citizens, co-organized and co-facilitated with the United Nations Association of the United States of America (UNA-USA), under the able leadership of Ambassador William Luers. Recognizing that the U.S.-Iranian relationship presents perhaps the most important and troubling foreign policy challenge facing both countries, the Track II dialogue was launched in December 2002. The dialogue took place over a period of six years, during which participants held 14 meetings, most of them in Stockholm, Sweden. A core group of Iranian and American participants attended all meetings. A detailed report was drafted after each meeting. The dialogue group wrote one joint paper, *The U.S.-Iran Relationship: Breaking the Stalemate*. Three pieces by American dialogue members were published in the print media.[1]

Pre-meeting consultations were held with American officials and post-meeting briefings were conducted in both the United States and Iran. Ongoing consultations between team members were also conducted during the periods between dialogue sessions. American co-conveners met on a regular basis with Iran's U.N. permanent representative and briefed him about the dialogue meetings. A small group of American participants traveled to Iran and met with Iranian officials, and some American participants also met with high-ranking Iranian officials, including Iranian presidents and foreign ministers, when they visited the United States. The project also organized four roundtable discussions for U.S.-based Iran analysts. This important initiative had demonstrated impact yielding lessons for the RBF and other funders interested in supporting Track II.

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to examine the RBF's experience with the practice of Track II dialogues in light of other experiments with similar dialogues both as a conflict prevention and management tool and as an important component of a peacemaking strategy.

The research methodology involved a review of all meeting reports and publications and an analysis of 11 semi-structured interviews conducted with dialogue participants, former U.S. officials, and experts in U.S.-Iran affairs.

The paper is divided into four sections:

- A brief overview of Track II literature
- Analysis of the U.S.-Iran Track II dialogue (2002 to 2008)
- An evolving strategy for RBF support for Track II activities
- Future RBF Track II funding

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[1] W. Luers, T.R. Pickering, and J. Walsh, "A solution for the US-Iran nuclear standoff," *The New York Review of Books*, March 20, 2008; W. Luers, T.R. Pickering, and J. Walsh, "How to deal with Iran," *The New York Review of Books*, February 12, 2009; W. Luers, T.R. Pickering, and J. Walsh, "Iran, Iran, Iran," *International Herald Tribune*, January 16, 2009.

Literature Review of Track II Diplomacy

Joseph Montville coined the term "Track II diplomacy" in 1981. Track I is official diplomacy carried out by government representatives. Montville defined Track II diplomacy as: " … unofficial, informal interaction among members of adversarial groups or nations with the goals of developing strategies, influencing public opinion, and organizing human and material resources in ways that might help resolve the conflict."[2] Since then, the definition has broadened to include all nongovernmental, unofficial and informal dialogues between non-state actors including business contacts, citizen exchange programs, advocacy work, and/or religious contacts.

Track II diplomacy has become an increasingly important part of the evolving international political landscape. Private foundations, nongovernmental organizations, and universities are involved in these types of activities and have devoted significant resources to them.

This paper will focus on a subset of Track II diplomacy that, as described by former U.S. State Department official Hal Saunders, involves citizens in "policy-related, problem-solving dialogues in which 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." [3] In some cases, an outsider third-party team convenes the dialogue and facilitates the discussions. In other cases, dialogue participants also serve as facilitators.

Participants in these dialogues maintain regular communication with policymakers so that the ideas explored in unofficial settings can influence the policymaking process. Thus, purely academic conferences, citizen exchanges, or encounters among adversarial parties in existing international forums would not constitute Track II dialogue activities as defined here.

History of Track II

Following World War II, a private group called "Moral Rearmament" organized a number of retreats involving prominent French, German, and British citizens with the aim of promoting reconciliation among these societies. In the Asia-Pacific region, an international nongovernmental organization called the Institute of Pacific Relations managed an unofficial and ongoing dialogue in that region from 1928 to 1961.[4]

Two efforts shaping early Track II approaches in the United States, The Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs and the Dartmouth Conference, opened important communication channels between the United States and the Soviet Union at the height of the Cold War. The U.S.-USSR Dartmouth Conference brought together respected and well-connected private citizens for informal structured discussions for more than 30 years. These dialogues contributed to several policy breakthroughs that were carried back to the official level and led to successful arms control

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[2] J.V. Montville, "The arrow and the olive branch: A case for Track Two Diplomacy," in *Conflict Resolution: Track Two Diplomacy*, ed. J.W. McDonald and D. Benhamane (Washington, D.C., Foreign Service Institute, U.S. Department of State, 1987).

[3] H.H. Saunders, "Officials and Citizens in International Relationships: The Dartmouth Conference," in *The Psychodynamics of International Relationships*, V. Volkan, J. Montville, and D. Julius (1991), 49.

[4] P. Jones, "Canada and Track Two Diplomacy," Canadian International Council, December 2008

negotiations.[5] In 1995, Pugwash was awarded a share of the Nobel Peace Prize for its work (including Track II) in promoting disarmament during the Cold War years.

Track II peacemaking involves a vast array of processes. Most are used to pave the way for official negotiations. This review focuses on the four types of Track II processes that have most relevance to the UNA/RBF U.S.-Iran Track II dialogue: John Burton's "controlled communication," Herbert Kelman's "interactive problem-solving workshop," Hal Saunders' "sustained dialogue," and Ron Fisher's "interactive conflict resolution."

In the mid-1960s, John Burton and his colleagues at University College London developed a process to help resolve a dispute between Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia. The resulting model, labeled "controlled communication,"[6] consists of informal small-group workshops involving mid or relatively high-level, unofficial representatives of contending parties locked in protracted identity-based conflicts. These workshops are chaired and moderated by a neutral third-party team of scholar-practitioners with a deep understanding of conflict dynamics and processes in general, and excellent facilitation skills. At the beginning of the workshop, the parties are invited to share their analysis of the conflict from their perspectives and, during the open discussions that follow, the third-party team introduces concepts and interpretation for analysis by drawing comparisons with other conflict situations. According to Burton, the workshop facilitators do not need to be deeply familiar with the conflict or the conflict region. The goal of these workshop discussions is to move the participants from a hostile stance toward each other and the issues, to a more open and creative frame of mind that allows for the development of innovative solutions to problems.

Building on and expanding Burton's work, and focusing mainly on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Herbert Kelman developed the "interactive problem-solving workshop," which is:

> " … An academically-based, unofficial third-party approach, bringing together representatives of parties in conflict for direct communication. The third-party typically consists of a panel of social scientists who, among them, possess expertise in group process and international conflict, and at least some familiarity with the conflict region …. We try to facilitate a process whereby solutions will emerge out of the interaction between the parties themselves. The task of the third-party is to provide the setting, create the atmosphere, establish the norms, and offer the occasional interventions that make it possible for such a process to evolve."[7]

These workshops are neither a substitute for official negotiations nor do they serve as rehearsals for negotiations. They are meant to *complement* negotiations.

The workshop begins with separate pre-workshop sessions with each side to build familiarity within the national team and understanding for the third-party. The joint interaction begins with each side expressing its views of the conflict and its underlying concerns, fears, and needs; then, through facilitation and analysis provided by the third-party, it moves toward discussion of the overall shape of a solution as well as resistances and constraints and means to overcome them. Initially, these workshops were one-time events. More than 50 such workshops were conducted over a 20-year

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[5] G.E. Schweitzer, *Scientists, Engineers and Track Two Diplomacy: A Half-Century of U.S.-Russian Inter-academy Cooperation*, Washington, D.C.: National Research Council of the National Academies, 2004.

[6] R.J. Fisher, *Interactive Conflict Resolution*. (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1997).

[7] H.C. Kelman, "Interactive problem solving: Informal mediation by the scholar-practitioner," in *Studies in International Mediation: Essays in Honor of Jeffrey Z. Rubin*, ed. J. Bercovtich (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 167-168.

period. Ultimately, Kelman and his colleague, Nadim Rouhana, developed a continuing workshop involving the same group of participants and then a joint working group that met in continuous sessions with interim work on difficult political issues.[8]

Saunders and his colleagues codified the term "sustained dialogue" to describe a five-stage dialogue process that focuses on exploring the nature of the relationship between the conflicting parties, jointly developing scenarios to improve the relationship, and moving toward the final stage of acting together to solve substantive differences.[9] Sustained dialogue was developed in a spin-off activity from the Dartmouth Conference known as the Inter-Tajik Dialogue (ITD). Initiated in 1993 in the midst of the civil war in Tajikistan, ITD was designed as a dialogue with a dual agenda: to discuss specific problems at length and to increase understanding of the dynamics in the relationships that caused the problems.[10] ITD played a significant *unofficial* role in the different phases of the peacemaking process in Tajikistan:

- First, it paved the way for negotiations (1993 to 1994). This period ended in April 1994 with the launch of the official U.N.-mediated negotiations in which three ITD members were delegates.
- Second, it provided a parallel venue to the official negotiations. Between 1994 and 1997, ITD members focused on the elements of a political process for national reconciliation.
- Third, it assisted in the transitional period for establishing a commission of national reconciliation (1997 to 2000). Four ITD members became members of the Commission on National Reconciliation (CNR), which was entrusted with overseeing the implementation of the peace accords.
- Fourth, it promoted and strengthened civil society institutions in Tajikistan (2000 to 2006).

In 1997, Fisher identified this developing professional field as *Interactive Conflict Resolution* (ICR) to emphasize that effective and constructive face-to-face interaction among representatives of the parties to the conflict is required to understand and eventually resolve complex inter-group and international conflict.[11] The role of the third-party is facilitative and diagnostic, rather than directive or prescriptive. Participants are influential opinion leaders who carry weight in their societies and have the ear of decision makers. ICR's ultimate goal is to transfer the change that occurs in the small group discussions to the official Track I process so that it has a broader society-wide effect. ICR assumes that subjective aspects of the conflict, such as misperceptions, hostile attitudes, and miscommunication must be improved and that relationship issues such as mistrust, adversarial orientations, and frustrated basic needs must be addressed in order to move toward true transformation of the conflict. Proponents of ICR see it as having a unique potential as a pre-negotiation method and, more broadly, as an avenue to peace-building in divided societies.

It is worth noting that the field of Track II is fluid and its terminology is far from fixed. Susan Allen Nan described Track one-and-a-half (or Track 1.5) as unofficial dialogue in which most participants are government officials acting in a private capacity and facilitated by an unofficial third-party. These

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[8] H.C. Kelman, "Contributions of an Unofficial Conflict Resolution Effort to the Israeli-Palestinian Breakthrough," *Negotiation Journal* (1995), 11, 19-27.

[9] H.H. Saunders, *A Public Peace Process: Sustained Dialogue to Transform Racial and Ethnic Conflicts.* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999).

[10] R.M. Slim and H.H. Saunders, "Sustained dialogue in Tajikistan—From civil war toward civil society," *Accord*, January 2001.

[11] R.J. Fisher , *Interactive Conflict Resolution.* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1997).

meetings usually take place in strict secrecy.[12] Others have talked about *hard* Track II vs. *soft* Track II.[13] The objective of hard Track II is to produce an agreement. Soft Track II focuses on broad discussions whose objectives are to familiarize the participants with each other's perspectives about the conflict without necessarily leading to an agreement on the substantive issues.

The Impact of Track II

Track II literature analyzes the impact of unofficial dialogue on the conflicting parties, the issues, and the conflict environment, as summarized in Figure 1, below.

Figure 1. Track II Impact: Participants, Issues, and the Conflict Environment

Participants	Issues	Conflict Environment
Educates participants about new concepts, especially Track II activities focused on arms control	Parties gain a keener understanding of each other's perspectives about the conflict in general and the issues in conflict	Bolsters forces in society that favor conflict resolution
Reduces mutual stereotypes	Options for new solutions are formulated and tested	Disseminates new ideas about the conflict and ways to resolve it to the public, thus helping to achieve a broader reformulation of the conflict
Changes the "enemy" image	Assists in identifying the boundaries of agreement and margins of disagreement	Changes societal beliefs about the adversary
Increases differentiation of the other side	Insights gleaned from Track II discussions help expand officials' understanding of the issues	Creates networks of change agents
Induces a better understanding of mutual threat perceptions (especially in Middle East-focused Track II dialogues)		Generates momentum for policy change
Builds trust between participants		Creates an enabling political environment for the launch of Track I diplomacy
		Builds trust between parties

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[12] S.A. Nan, "Track One-and-a-Half Diplomacy: Contributions to Georgia-South Ossetian Peacemaking," in *Paving the Way: Contributions of Interactive Conflict Resolution to Peacemaking*, ed. R.J. Fisher (New York: Lexington, 2005).

[13] H.S. Agha, A. Feldman, A. Khalidi, and Z. Schiff, *Track II Diplomacy: Lessons from the Middle East*. (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2004).

Track II has had an impact on the official Track I process as well (see Figure 2), especially in active conflict situations, and at different stages of the conflict management process. The literature focuses on three stages during which Track II can play a significant role in the official process:

- Pre-negotiation phase, prior to the launch of official talks between the parties;
- Negotiation phase, after an official negotiation process is launched with or without mediator assistance; and
- Post-agreement phase, after an agreement has been signed by the conflicting parties and the conflict has entered a post-violence peace-building stage.

Figure 2. Track II Role: Pre-negotiation, Negotiation, and Post-agreement

Pre-negotiation	Negotiation	Post-agreement
Explore the feasibility of Track I	Sustain momentum for negotiations	Disseminate information about the agreement
Open new channels of communication	Offer a venue for exploring stalemated issues and testing new ideas	Iron out implementation details
Help draft Track I negotiation agenda	Bring in new constituencies into the discussions (e.g., civil society)	Develop constituencies in support of the agreement—move from cold to warm peace
Offer an alternate route to talks when official channels fail or are suspended	Focus on psychological obstacles to an agreement	Focus on reconciliation, peace-building activities
Serve as a kind of intellectual reserve capacity for governments	Provide a venue for training parties in negotiation skills	

Two issues are emphasized in examining connections between Track I and Track II: (1) coordination between Track I and Track II activities and among Track II activities; and (2) the transfer of Track II results into Track I.

Nan's work provides a comprehensive study of coordination between conflict resolution interventions. She defines coordination as " … the variety of ways conflict resolvers consciously attempt to make their own individual efforts more effective together as interconnected pieces of a larger peace process."[14] She identifies five types of coordination: (1) information sharing about the conflict and the peace process, (2) information sharing about the conflict intervention itself, (3) resource sharing, (4) collaborative strategizing, and (5) collaboration through partnerships. The most

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[14] S.A. Nan, "Complementarity and coordination of conflict resolution efforts in the conflicts over Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Transdniestria," Unpublished doctoral dissertation. (Fairfax, VA: George Mason University), 372.

involved form of coordination is collaboration through partnerships that engage multiple actors as a team in developing and implementing concrete initiatives that would not be possible without consultation and coordination.

The issue of transfer is often discussed at two levels: intrinsic to the dialogue itself and measured by how the dialogue participants have changed their personal attitudes about the conflict and the parties in the conflict; and extrinsic to the dialogue and measured by how ideas generated inside the dialogue process influence the public policy realm both at the official policymaking level and in the larger society. Kelman put it best, " … the relationship between the micro-process of the workshop and the macro-process of conflict management or resolution."[15]

Official attitudes about Track II and its role can create obstacles to coordination between Track I and Track II interventions and to the transfer of results from a Track II process into the official arena. Cynthia Chataway interviewed a sampling of former U.S. diplomats about their perceptions of Track II.[16] Despite a lingering feeling of resentment toward Track II actors who were perceived by many as "meddlers," many of her interviewees spoke of a potential complementarity between the two tracks, with Track II focusing on dialogue, analysis, and problem solving that could play a useful role pre- and post-negotiations. The idea of Track II working in parallel with a Track I negotiation process received less support. While they maintained that only official negotiations can structure a peace agreement, the former diplomats argued that Track II is best positioned to address the deeper psychological obstacles to peace agreements such as historical grievances, fears, and issues of mistrust, and to help build the broader constituencies in support of a peace process.

Analysis of the U.S.-Iran Track II Dialogue Process (2002 to 2008)

At the outset, it is important to emphasize two distinctive features of the U.S.-Iran Track II dialogue:

a. Unlike other Track II dialogues that operate in the presence of some kind of a Track I process, this dialogue was established when there was no formal U.S. relationship with Iran and there had not been since diplomatic relations were severed in April 1980 after the Islamic Revolution and the taking of hostages at the U.S. embassy in Tehran. This made the effort particularly challenging but also of greater potential significance.

b. Unlike other Track II dialogues dealing with Iran, the U.S. participants in the UNA/RBF dialogue consistently were given access to high-level U.S. policymakers in the White House, State Department, and Congress.

Planning for the UNA/RBF dialogue began in the fall of 2001 with the first meeting eventually taking place in Stockholm in December 2002. Two events earlier that year further inflamed the mistrust between the two countries and forced delays in the scheduling of the first meeting. According to Iranian participants in the dialogue, President Bush's "Axis of Evil" speech on January 29, 2002, and his "Statement to the Iranian People" on July 12th strengthened the view in conservative circles in Tehran that despite U.S.-Iranian tactical collaboration in Afghanistan after 9/11, the United States remained Iran's "real enemy." Many Iranian reformists have argued that these statements by the U.S. president weakened the reformist cause and undermined President Khatami's standing vis-à-

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[15] H.C. Kelman, "Interactive problem solving: Informal mediation by the scholar-practitioner," in *Studies in International Mediation: Essays in Honor of Jeffrey Z. Rubin*, ed. J. Bercovitch (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

[16] C.J. Chataway, "Track II diplomacy from a Track I perspective," *Negotiation Journal,* July 1998.

vis competing Iranian power centers. Reformists found themselves under attack by elements that accused President Khatami and his allies of being used by the Americans. As an Iranian participant in the first dialogue meeting asserted, " … it was this sense of disappointment and betrayal, more than a perception of any deliberate effort to manipulate Iranian politics that emboldened conservatives and angered Khatami." Khatami saw the "Axis of Evil" speech as "the negation of the reform movement."

Nevertheless, the dialogue persevered for six years despite the confrontational political context that dominated U.S.-Iran relations during that period. Following Ahmadinejad's election in August 2005, the Iranian participants' access to decision makers became limited. The Iranian participants made several attempts to recruit prominent and influential Iranian conservatives to join the dialogue, in order to make it more reflective of the dynamics of Iranian politics, but without success. It seemed that conservative leaders were unwilling to take the political risk. Language barriers may also have constrained participation. In September 2007 at a private meeting in New York, the Iranian Foreign Minister informed UNA-USA and the RBF that the Iranian government had decided to suspend all Track II activities while it reviewed its strategies for dealing with the United States. Two additional informal meetings of Iranian and U.S. Track II participants were convened in November 2007 and February 2008 with limited participation on both sides. In retrospect it is clear that the election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as President of the Islamic Republic in the summer of 2005 dramatically altered the political context and required a significant adjustment to the UNA/RBF project, focusing less on direct Track II dialogue and more on influencing the public and policy debate in the United States.

The Dialogue

It took one year of preparation to get the dialogue off the ground. It was very important for the Iranians to have UNA-USA as an organizer, because this offered a multilateral context, and the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) as a neutral and impartial host. At the outset, both sides agreed that each side would assemble its own team. The Iranians asked that the Americans not include Iranian-Americans in their group.

Each of the dialogue sessions followed a rather standardized agenda, beginning with an examination of the political developments in each country, and including discussion of U.S.-Iran bilateral relations, and an exchange of perspectives on a host of regional issues—including Iraq, Afghanistan, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, terrorism including Iranian support for Hizbullah and Hamas, and the Iranian nuclear file. Each gathering concluded with a discussion of next steps, specific agenda items for the next meeting, and future directions for the dialogue.

As is often the case with Track II processes, the interim period between meetings was as important to the value of the process as were the joint meetings themselves. The American team enjoyed access to very senior U.S. policymakers and regularly briefed officials in the State Department, the National Security Council, and the Congress. The organizers also maintained close communications with high level representatives of the Iranian government. Throughout the dialogue process, UNA-USA and RBF organized roundtable sessions bringing together Iranian-American scholars, policy analysts, and officials from the U.S. government. Four such roundtables were organized in May 2004, February 2005, January 2006, and November 2007. The purpose of the roundtables was to engage a wider spectrum of experts, civil society organizations, and officials in the debate about the U.S.-Iran relationship.

Figure 3 summarizes the dialogue activities conducted during the 14 meeting sessions and in the interim periods. A chronology of all activities appears in the Appendix.

Figure 3. Dialogue Activities

Dialogue Meetings	Interim Periods*
Examined the political domestic developments in each country	Briefed U.S. officials
Discussed the relationship between different centers of power	Gave congressional testimonies
Engaged in a mutual examination of political needs	Briefed the two U.S. presidential campaigns
Identified areas of potential collaboration; framed areas of competition	Met with Iranian officials
Brainstormed new policy ideas and reframed them	Organized NY-based roundtables
Wrote joint paper	Held regular intra-group meetings
Organized expert presentations	
Conducted a scenario-building exercise	
Involved congressional members and staffers in meetings	

*Activities undertaken by U.S. dialogue members

Success metrics are hard to establish in Track II dialogue activities given the fluid nature of the decision-making process, the numerous official and unofficial actors who are involved with every policy issue, and the difficulty in establishing a cause-and-effect relationship between an idea or activity generated within the Track II dialogue process and a particular decision on a key policy issue. One way to evaluate a Track II dialogue is to measure its activities and achievements against stated objectives and substantive products.

Achievements Measured Against Stated Objectives

According to the U.S. co-conveners, the dialogue objectives were to:

- Open a communication channel
- Develop a working level of trust within the group
- Learn from each other about their respective societies
- Learn about Iran more broadly and about the nature of its decision-making process

- Generate ideas that have some practical applicability
- Communicate insights to key decision makers both in the United States and in Iran

The mere fact that the dialogue was launched despite the antagonistic attitudes prevailing at the time in both American and Iranian official circles, and that it continued over a period of six years, is an achievement in itself.

Interviews with American and Iranian dialogue participants confirmed that trust was established inside the dialogue group. As one Iranian participant noted, "Over time, we became so close to each other that trust was developed between us." An American participant also remarked, "In the first meetings of the dialogue, Iranian participants were extremely reluctant to put anything on paper. The very fact that they were willing to consider and then become involved in the drafting of a joint paper was an indication of trust-building with the Iranians."

Because of the lack of a sustained diplomatic dialogue between the United States and Iran for the better part of the past 30 years, this unofficial dialogue gave U.S. participants an inside look at Iranian politics and Iranian society. It provided a unique opportunity to gain insight about the Iranian decision-making process and the different power centers in the Islamic republic. They learned that the Iranian regime is not monolithic; that different power centers hold different views on various policy issues.

In interviews, the Iranian participants indicated that their internal meeting reports were shared with high-level officials in Tehran, including the office of the Supreme Leader, the president, foreign minister, and other officials who were involved with U.S.-Iran relations.

The U.S. team had several opportunities to discuss the Track II dialogue with Iranian officials. As noted, the U.S. co-conveners met with the Iranian U.N. representative on a regular basis and briefed him about the dialogue deliberations. Some U.S. participants met with Iranian officials, including the foreign minister, who visited the United States. Three of the U.S. participants also visited Iran as tourists and in their capacity as Track II dialogue participants. While in Tehran they also had an opportunity to meet with Iranian officials to discuss the dialogue. Nearly all of the U.S. participants were invited to meetings with President Ahmadinejad during his visits to New York for U.N. General Assembly sessions.

The U.S. team had continuous access to high-level U.S. decision makers. As one American co-convener put it, "They always listened to us." According to some interviewees, the briefings with U.S. officials helped change their image of Iran as a monolithic entity. When the dialogue started, one U.S. participant noted that the U.S. administration believed that Iran was on the verge of implosion, "We presented a different picture to them, a picture of a regime that is strong, here to stay for the foreseeable future, and we convinced key official players that this was the case."

In terms of the process by which analyses, strategies, options, and frameworks generated inside the Track II dialogue are communicated to both decision makers and the wider U.S. body politic, this dialogue put in place a comprehensive system of transfer mechanisms. These included both substantive products such as the meeting reports, a joint paper, print media articles, extensive policy briefings, and congressional testimony.

Both Iranian and American participants believe that the dialogue had significant symbolic and educational value for policymakers in Tehran and Washington. American participants were told by government officials on numerous occasions that the analysis and insights generated through the

process were of direct value in policy discussions. On the Iranian side, input from the process was given fairly serious attention during the Khatami presidency if less so in the early years of the Ahmadinejad government.

Substantive Products and Achievements

Key products included unpublished detailed meeting reports of the dialogue sessions, a joint policy paper, three published articles, four roundtable sessions designed to share insights and analysis with the wider policy community, and testimony before key congressional committees.

<u>Joint policy paper</u>

At the outset, the Iranian participants were understandably reluctant to join in producing any written products from the dialogue. But at the fifth dialogue meeting (January 2004), one of the Iranian participants suggested that the two teams draft a joint paper outlining the major points of the dialogue and a strategy for U.S.-Iran engagement which could be delivered to both governments.

A first draft based on input from both sides was discussed at the group's sixth meeting in March 2005. The draft accurately presented the differing points of view of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the United States on a number of key issues. A subsequent draft was discussed at the group's seventh meeting (June 2005). A final text was approved in August 2005. It was then disseminated in both English and Farsi versions to select policymakers in both Washington and Tehran. It was the focus of a high-level discussion with senior State Department officials and U.S. dialogue participants on September 1, 2005.

The paper reflected the dialogue deliberations both in style and substance. It moved from problems diagnosis, through scenario development, to analysis of opportunities for U.S.-Iran engagement on the specific issues in contention, and concluded with a prescriptive approach for a diplomatic framework between the United States and Iran modeled on the 1972 Shanghai Communiqué signed by China and the United States.

The joint paper served a number of purposes:

- It enabled each side to gain insight into the other's thought process;
- It challenged existing pre-suppositions about what was important to each side;
- It developed participants' skills of collaborative thinking, thus contributing to trust-building;
- It clarified the boundaries of disagreement and illuminated areas of overlapping national interests;
- It provided a non-threatening format for presenting new ideas to officials;
- It provided the U.S. participants with the opportunity to develop a language to present proposals and ideas that address U.S. concerns without being inflammatory to the Iranian side.

Track II dialogues do not usually move easily into a joint action mode. This joint paper attests to the level of trust that was built within the group. It also provides a foundation for official negotiators to build on in the future.

<u>Published articles</u>

The decision to publish two lengthy articles in *The New York Review of Books* and an op-ed in the *International Herald Tribune* was not a result of discussion among Iranian and U.S. participants in the dialogue but rather the initiative of three of the Americans, William Luers, Tom Pickering, and Jim Walsh who concluded that some of the concepts discussed in the dialogue should be more fully developed and disseminated in the U.S. in order to stimulate public debate about possible diplomatic solutions to the nuclear standoff. In any confidential Track II process, a decision to "go public" is a sensitive one that raises at least three threshold questions: when is the timing right for a public initiative? What is the appropriate venue? What should be disclosed?

In this instance, the authors concluded that given the lack of public knowledge of the details of the nuclear dispute and options for its diplomatic resolution, it would be useful to contribute to a wider public debate of the issue separate from but in parallel with the dialogue process.

Roundtable sessions

The roundtable sessions served four functions:

- They created a dialogue space in the United States for a wider spectrum of academic experts and representatives of political and public constituencies to debate the issues that lie at the heart of the U.S.-Iran relationship.
- They tested the ideas generated in the Track II dialogue in a wider context.
- They helped develop new proposals for dealing with intractable issues in the U.S.-Iran nuclear file.
- They helped foster a political atmosphere in this country that was conducive to a new relationship between the United States and Iran.

The roundtables also brought together individuals, including other RBF grantees, who were involved in other Iran-focused projects, thus creating communication channels among different efforts designed to influence U.S. policy toward Iran.

Limitations of the U.S.-Iran Track II Dialogue

Interviewees, including dialogue conveners and participants, cited four key limitations to the Track II dialogue process.

The first was the complicated political environment in which it was operating. At the time the dialogue was launched, the U.S.-Iran relationship was burdened by a 30-year history of antagonistic relations between the two countries and a very weak fabric of contacts between the two societies. Hardliners in the Bush administration and Congress strongly resisted a dialogue with Iran. Similarly, Ahmadinejad's election totally changed the political context for Track II, strengthening the hand of the Iranian hardliners who worried that a dialogue with the West might undermine their power base. As one Iran expert noted, "There was no buy-in at the highest Iranian official level for Track II." In this milieu, the U.S. dialogue conveners continuously tried to make the case for direct negotiations between the two governments as well as exchanges between various political and public constituencies.

A related and second limitation mentioned by several interviewees was the absence of a formal, Track I diplomatic process to which Track II could connect. As one American convener indicated, "Track II has less utility if not connected to Track I." But in this regard, it seems that the dialogue was as successful as it could possibly have been given the policies of the U.S. and Iranian

administrations at the time. The dialogue provided a serious channel for correcting misperceptions on both sides, a space for trying out ideas and reframing them, and it helped relieve tensions. Despite the absence of a formal diplomatic dialogue between the two countries, the UNA/RBF Track II dialogue had far more influence on U.S. policy deliberations than most Track II dialogues, which are often far more academic in nature. There was ongoing communication with high-level U.S. officials and regular engagement with members of Congress and their staff. Often, questions raised by U.S. policymakers were addressed within the dialogue and answers were communicated back.

A third limitation lay in the asymmetry between the two participant teams in terms of expertise, political representation, and access to decision makers. While the U.S. team included an experienced senior core of former diplomats, representing diverse political perspectives and enjoying access to high-level decision makers, the Iranian team consisted mostly of academics with good connections to the Khatami government but limited experience negotiating with Western diplomats. After the election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in August 2005, Iranian officials resisted numerous requests made by the American conveners to add members to the Iranian team with direct connections to the new government. But, as one American co-convener rightly pointed out, "There is no 'ideal Track II' possible when there is virtually no relationship. We identified counterparts that would work with us—there were no others."

A fourth constraint on the dialogue was a lack of connectivity between different forms of Track II interventions. The UNA/RBF dialogue occurred without connection to other forms of U.S.-Iran engagement. But the obstacles to a U.S.-Iran relationship exist at different levels of the political process in the two countries. They are rooted in historical grievances, fears and misperceptions, in "demonizing" narratives, and in conflicting interests. Hence, the need to contextualize a Track II dialogue within what Hal Saunders refers to as the "multilevel peace process."[17] This multilevel peace process operates in four interconnected arenas: (1) the official process involving representatives of governments working on securing agreements; (2) the quasi-official process, in which unofficial groups closely linked to the official process work on the issues under negotiation; (3) the public peace process, involving sustained dialogue aimed at generating the will to change the conflictual relationship and to generate action scenarios for moving the peace process forward; and (4) the civil society arena, where citizens and nongovernmental organizations work on different aspects of the relationship for the purpose of reweaving the fabric of peaceful and working relations.

Though the U.S.-Iran Track II dialogue put in place mechanisms for the transfer of learning to a variety of U.S. audiences, particularly other RBF grantees, it lacked connections to other unofficial interventions because of the inability for U.S. and Iranian organizations to conduct academic, cultural, or athletic exchanges, civil society work, or other types of citizen to citizen engagement. In the absence of a broader context of U.S.-Iran contacts, the conveners of the UNA/RBF dialogue concluded that they would concentrate on influencing U.S. and Iranian policy in an effort to set the stage for direct formal negotiations between the two governments.

As the RBF contemplates future Track II involvement in other issue and conflict areas, it should consider coordinating among different types of Track II activities and connecting Track II to Track I whenever possible.

The Evolving Track II Strategy of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund

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[17] H.H. Saunders, "Prenegotiation and circum-negotiation: Arenas of the multilevel peace process," in *Turbulent Peace: The Challenges of Managing International Conflict,* ed. C.A. Crocker, F.O. Hampson, and P. Aall (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2001).

The RBF's engagement in the U.S.-Iran Track II dialogue as a co-convener, participant, and funder was highly unusual for a foundation. As one Iran expert noted: "The RBF's role was beneficial both for substantive and instrumental reasons. Instrumentally, the RBF and Stephen Heintz (RBF president) are more knowledgeable than other funders about the topics under discussion and developed personal stakes in the project; substantively, having the funder at the table adds legitimacy and gravitas on the U.S. side both because of the Rockefeller name and because it is a foundation."

In assessing the Fund's overall Track II grantmaking strategy, there are four issues to consider: (1) Track II methodology and the RBF's mission, (2) the RBF's funding strategy, (3) success criteria, and (4) exit criteria.

Track II and the RBF's Mission

There is a natural fit between Track II and the RBF's mission. The RBF's Peace and Security program reflects a long-standing concern for global interdependence as well as for principled, farsighted, and collaborative U.S. global engagement. Since 2003, the Fund has focused its Peace and Security grantmaking on two factors that are believed to be key to advancing global problem solving: 1) the content and style of U.S. global engagement in the face of new perils and opportunities; and 2) the strength and quality of relationships between Muslim and Western societies.[18] The modus operandi for RBF funding has always been to leverage its relatively modest grants budgets to create momentum for action and change around public policy issues. The Fund often operates as a catalyst and partner. Its projects involve different stakeholders from the government and policy arenas to civil society and the grassroots community. It has significant reputational capital as a trusted and responsible institution. Its network includes key players in the U.S. government, the United Nations, the policy analysis community, and the nonprofit sector.

Historically, Track II dialogues have played a valuable role in peace and security issues. Track II initiatives can be a cost-effective means of creating momentum and the conditions for negotiation and dialogue between protagonists in regions that are critical to U.S. national security and international peace. Under the right circumstances, and targeting the right set of challenges, Track II can be a good example of high-impact strategic philanthropy. The RBF has already established a footprint in the Track II dialogue space and has acquired a fair degree of expertise in this field. In addition to its financial resources, the Fund can bring valuable human and intellectual resources, at both the board and staff levels, to any future Track II involvement.
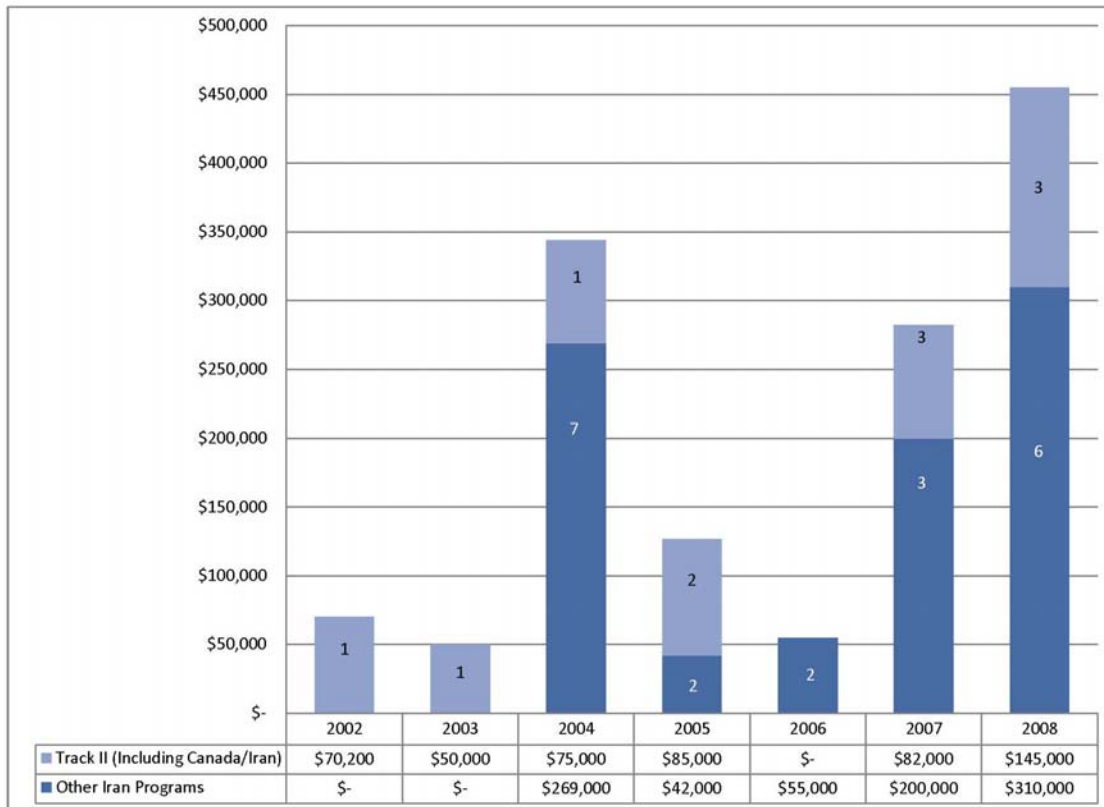
The RBF's Funding Strategy

The RBF's Track II funding strategy must leverage its modest financial resources, incorporate the lessons learned from the U.S.-Iran Track II dialogue, and put the RBF's board and staff expertise to use as it considers support for, and participation in future Track II efforts. In the U.S.-Iran dialogue, the RBF held multiple roles. In addition to the dialogue process, it funded a cluster of projects which helped expand the knowledge-base in the United States about Iran and U.S.-Iran relations, opened additional communication channels between the United States and Iran, and brought other American constituencies into the U.S.-Iran policy debate. In 2008, approximately 11 percent of the Fund's

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[18] For further information about Peace and Security grantmaking from 2003 to 2008, please see "Peace and Security Program: Promoting Mutual Respect and Understanding Between Muslim and Western Societies: Review 2003–2008: Evaluation and Proposed Guidelines." The report is available at www.rbf.org.

Peace and Security budget was allocated to U.S.-Iran focused projects, including modest funding for Canada-Iran Track II efforts that also included some U.S. participation (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. RBF Funding on U.S.-Iran Relations: Track II vs. Other Iran-focused Programming

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Track II (Including Canada/Iran)	$70,200	$50,000	$75,000	$85,000	$-	$82,000	$145,000
Other Iran Programs	$-	$-	$269,000	$42,000	$55,000	$200,000	$310,000

Building on its experience with the U.S.-Iran dialogue, any future RBF Track II initiatives should be structured around a sustained, multilevel process involving a wide range of constituencies, multiple points of transfer between Track I and Track II, and coordination mechanisms among multiple Track II activities focused on the same relationship or set of issues. With the Track II dialogue as the "center of gravity," the process should also include other activities focusing on different aspects of the relationship, and involving partnerships with local actors.

The RBF should focus on Track II opportunities that best leverage its resources. Track II works best in situations where the following conditions prevail:

- There is a protracted conflictual relationship.
- There are no direct relations between the parties, thus the chance of error and/or misperception is high.
- A Track I negotiation process has been launched, and it has either come to a halt and/or is not consolidated. In this respect, Track II can help bring into the process disenfranchised core constituencies and new ideas for problem solving.
- There is an identifiable base of common interests on which to build.

As always, if other funders are already involved in the area of intervention, the RBF should assess whether it can add value to the existing activities.

In the UNA/RBF Iran project the RBF played three roles: funder, dialogue co-moderator, and dialogue participant.

In any Track II initiatives there is need for a central process manager to serve as a secretariat, coordinate logistics, manage communications, and promote links between Track II and Track I as well as to other related activities. The role of process manager implies a proactive *modus operandi* in seeking out activities that complement the Track II dialogue, and mapping other communication channels between the parties, including political developments on the Track I front. In the Iran Track II dialogue, this role was expertly performed by UNA-USA.

Decisions about the RBF's role(s) in any future Track II activities should be made on a case-by-case basis. In limited situations, as with the U.S.-Iran dialogue, it may make sense for the Fund to play all three aforementioned roles. In other situations, the RBF can perform the more traditional philanthropic role as funder, providing financial support to organizations that have the credibility and a track record in the region to fulfill some or all of these functions.

The RBF's multifaceted role in the Iran Track II project was rather unusual. Serving as both funder and participant enabled the RBF to make important contributions to the substantive content of the dialogue and gave the Fund a first-hand perspective on whether the dialogue objectives were being met or not. But there are also drawbacks to this level of direct engagement by a funder:

- Being party to the political debate may constrain other grantmaking. As one interviewee indicated, "Our engagement in Track II required us not to fund projects that would damage the trust and principled neutrality that the RBF brought to the Track II dialogue table."
- A funder participating in a dialogue process might find it difficult to disengage or cease providing support if the dialogue loses momentum or if the participants seem unable to gain access to policymakers or to influence the policy process. As a principle, no Track II participant should be automatically entitled to his/her seat at the dialogue table.
- It may make it harder for the funder to maintain his/her focus on the entire field of Track II activities and to identify other grantmaking opportunities that need to be filled.
- Track II processes are labor-intensive and the investment of time in any one dialogue needs to be weighed against other opportunity costs.

It is important that the funder maintain an internal evaluation system to assess its role in a dialogue initiative. The funder must be clear about the type of Track II dialogue in which it is engaged, the nature of its role, and the success metrics to use in assessing the dialogue's achievements.

Success Criteria

Success criteria should be established on a case-by-case basis. They depend largely on the stage of official relations: pre-negotiation, parallel with negotiation (or para-negotiation), or post-agreement. If we take the pre-negotiation phase, success criteria for a Track II dialogue could be established around process, content, or momentum. Process-specific criteria would measure whether contacts are established, a dialogue is launched, the right mix of participants is involved, and participants are able to connect with decision makers. Success metrics that are content-specific would assess whether knowledge about the conflict and the other party is expanded, new ideas are generated, mutually agreed principles for negotiation are formulated, and a negotiation agenda is

designed. If success is measured in terms of promoting momentum for official (Track I) negotiations, the metrics would focus on whether the dialogue is creating a network of leaders and arming them with constructive ideas that can quickly be pursued when the political context is transformed, and whether these ideas are penetrating both official discourse and civil society.

Eventually, determining which Track II project is significant and merits funding becomes a matter of experience. By nature, Track II is a trust-based initiative. Patience is essential. In the absence of Track I, one should have modest expectations about what Track II can achieve. In any future initiatives, the RBF needs to establish clear objectives at the outset, develop the optimal dialogue design to achieve these objectives, and evaluate achievements against the objectives as the process unfolds.

Exit Criteria

In Track II dialogues, the funder should continuously ask the following questions:

- Do participants continue to have influence and access?[19]
- Are critical issues in the relationship being addressed?
- Are new ideas being generated?
- Are transfer mechanisms established between Tracks I and II? Are they functioning?
- Are there other Track II activities? Is there coordination between Track II activities?

A negative answer to any of these questions warrants concern. A major transition point in the U.S.-Iran dialogue occurred following the election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as President of the Islamic Republic. The original Iranian participants did not enjoy the same level of connection with the new government and the government failed to field a new team of participants despite repeated invitations to do so. (This limitation seems to plague all current Track II activities with Iran.) While communication between the U.S. participants and high-level U.S. officials has continued, the same could not be said of the Iranian side. Other Iran Track II activities such as the Pugwash U.S.-Iran dialogue group may have a better representation of Iranian conservative voices; it suffers, however, from lack of high-level access that the UNA-USA/RBF team enjoyed. Some interviewees asserted that the decision to conclude the dialogue process should be made jointly by both teams. Another option is to have a hiatus or to prolong the interim period between meetings rather than to terminate the dialogue. One interviewee argued that it is important to keep the dialogue infrastructure in place in case new opportunities arise once the political context changes and there is a need to revive the dialogue.

Future Track II Funding by the RBF: Four Lenses

Given the RBF's mission to help build a more just, sustainable, and peaceful world, the Fund should consider establishing a program goal of advancing responsible approaches to U.S. engagement in the wider Middle East and South West Asia, and employ Track II dialogues as a core strategy.

In deciding future Track II funding, the Fund should analyze potential projects using four lenses:

- **National Security**: Projects that address a relationship and/or conflict area that is pivotal to U.S. national security and to world peace. For example:

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[19] Assessments of access and influence must take into account matters of political culture and context. IN the Iranian case, internal channels of access were clearly preferable.

- o A dialogue between influential Americans and Europeans and moderate religious parties in South Asia.
  - o A dialogue on India-Pakistan relations. This is not unexplored territory, hence the need to conduct a serious review of prior efforts and to develop a sound strategic concept for any new dialogue effort.
  - o A U.S.-Pakistan dialogue on the future of Pakistan involving representatives of the official, nongovernmental, and business sectors.
  - o A regional dialogue about the future of Afghanistan involving Iran, Pakistan, India, Russia, and China.
- **Pivotal Place or Region**: Projects that are connected to RBF's "pivotal places."[20] Possible examples might include:
  - o A Serb-Kosovar dialogue facilitated by an international moderator team.
  - o An issue-based U.S.-China dialogue focusing on climate change negotiations between the two countries.
- **Institutional Expertise**: This would involve a conflict area in which previous involvement by the RBF gives it credibility, access to a network of influential individuals, and a knowledge base on which to build.
- **Strong Domestic Constituency in the United States**: This would involve countries with which the United States has had a conflictual relationship, part of which has been framed by domestic political constituencies including diaspora populations, e.g., the U.S.-Cuba relationship.

Recommendations for Future U.S.-Iran Track II Funding

All interviewees agreed that the U.S.-Iran dialogue should remain a priority given the Fund's history in this arena, as well as the expertise represented on the board and in the staff. The RBF has a comparative advantage; it continues to have remarkable access to senior policymakers in the United States and important relationships in Tehran and with the Iranian Mission to the United Nations. During 2009, the Obama administration pursued a new effort at direct engagement with Iran, working closely with the permanent members of the U.N. Security Council (P-5), the EU, and Germany. But the tumultuous aftermath of the Iranian presidential elections in June dramatically altered the context for this diplomatic initiative. On October 1st, on the margins of a P-5+1 meeting with officials of the Islamic Republic, high-level representatives of the Iranian and U.S. governments met for the first bilateral discussions in many years. At first, it appeared that this meeting may have produced a path forward on the nuclear issue and an agreement for further official dialogue but as of the time of this writing, there has been no progress on any of the issues in dispute and no further meetings of the P-5+1 and Iran. While the UNA/RBF Track II process remains suspended, the UNA project, renamed the Iran Project, and relocated to the Foundation for a Civil Society, continues to work on U.S. policy toward Iran. If diplomatic efforts are successfully revived, a new parallel Track II effort could also prove to be of significant value. The objectives of a revived or new Track II dialogue will need to reflect the volatile political environment surrounding U.S.-Iran relations. Efforts to build trust and dispel the misperceptions, suspicions, and fears that shape both political cultures will be essential.

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[20] The Fund has identified several specific locations on which it concentrates cross-programmatic attention. The Fund refers to these as "RBF pivotal places": subnational areas, nation-states, or cross-border regions that have special importance with regard to the Fund's substantive concerns and whose future will have disproportionate significance for the future of a surrounding region, an ecosystem, or the world. The Fund currently works in three pivotal places: New York City, Western Balkans, and Southern China.

Participation in a future U.S.-Iran Track II dialogue should be drawn from a wider circle of influential leaders in both societies. In addition to well respected former diplomats, the U.S. group might be expanded to include representatives of the business community as well as individuals who are close to Congress, such as former Senators and Representatives and/or congressional staff. It might also be important for the Iranian group to include representatives of the clerical establishment and individuals with close ties to President Ahmadinejad and the Supreme Leader. As one Iran expert noted, "once Iranian leaders decide to allow Track II to move forward, it will not be difficult to find an Iranian institutional partner." There could also be room for a separate dialogue involving American and Iranian parliamentarians.

Conclusion

Increasingly, Track II dialogues are becoming part of the changing international diplomatic and political landscape. Track II dialogues do not substitute for official negotiations. Given their informal, unofficial character, they should not be expected to produce major breakthroughs. However, Track II dialogues have a proven record of paving the way for official negotiations in situations where there are limited or nonexistent relations between the protagonists, generating innovative options for solutions to complex problems, and testing these ideas out in a non-threatening environment. They can also contribute to trust and relationship-building and in changing the attitudes and perceptions of the participants. Moreover, they can play a role in de-demonizing the adversary—especially in situations such as the U.S.-Iran relationship, where the two parties remain trapped by the legacies of the past. As the Fund explores Track II dialogues as a core strategy in its Peace and Security program, it is important to examine the appropriate role(s) the Fund could play given the RBF's human and financial resources. Moreover, successful Track II dialogues require a long-term, sustained financial commitment. The Fund should carefully select the one or two areas where a Track II dialogue offers prospects for meaningful impact, pursuant to periodic evaluation, and when the RBF is ready to sustain the endeavor for the long haul.

Appendix

A Chronology of the U.S.-Iran Track II Dialogue Activities

- December 13–14, 2002: Dialogue meeting
- March 7–8, 2003: Dialogue meeting
- May 21–22, 2003: Dialogue meeting
- August 28–29, 2003: Dialogue meeting
- January 22–23, 2004: Dialogue meeting
- May 19, 2004: Roundtable in NY
- February 18, 2005: Roundtable in NY
- March 19–20, 2005: Dialogue meeting
- June 9–11, 2005: Dialogue meeting
- August 2005: Joint U.S.-Iran unpublished paper, "The U.S.-Iran Relationship: Breaking the Stalemate"
- October 29–30, 2005: Dialogue meeting
- January 5, 2006: Roundtable in NY
- April 21–22, 2006: Dialogue meeting
- July 13–14, 2006: Dialogue meeting
- October 27–28, 2006: Dialogue meeting
- April 6–7, 2007: Dialogue meeting
- November 3, 2007: Dialogue meeting
- November 16, 2007: Roundtable in NY
- February 27–28, 2008: Dialogue meeting
- March 20, 2008: W. Luers, T.R. Pickering, and J. Walsh, "A solution for the US-Iran nuclear standoff," The New York Review of Books
- April 22–24, 2008: W. Luers/S. Heintz trip to Iran
- January 16, 2009: W. Luers, T.R. Pickering, and J. Walsh, "Iran, Iran, Iran," International Herald Tribune
- February 12, 2009: W. Luers, T.R. Pickering, and J. Walsh, "How to deal with Iran," The New York Review of Books

Coding:
Dialogue meeting
Roundtable
Publication
Trip to Iran

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She has been a visiting adjunct professor at Royal Roads University in Canada and at the American University of Beirut in Lebanon. She has held fellowships at the Program on Negotiation at Harvard Law School and the Kettering Foundation and is a former board member of the Institute for Global Ethics and the National Conference on Peacemaking and Conflict Resolution.

Slim holds B.S. and M.A. degrees from the American University of Beirut and a Ph.D. from the University of North Carolina. Slim has published on topics such as conflict prevention and peace-building, including "Facing the Challenge of Emerging Democracies," *Kettering Review* (April 2007); *Introduction to Conflict Resolution* (in Tajik) co-editor, (Ministry of Education, Tajikistan, 2006); "Tajikistan: From Civil War to Peace-building," in *Searching for Peace in Europe and Eurasia*, edited by Paul van Tongeren, et al. (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2004); and "The Ferghana Valley: In the Midst of a Host of Crises," in *Searching for Peace in Central and South Asia*, edited by Monique Mekenkamp, et al. (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002).