Logic Behind Track Two Diplomacy in Managing Intractable Conflicts in the Democratic Republic of Congo

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Abstract

The dynamics and causes of conflicts in the twenty-first century are many and multifaceted. The primary objective of this research was to investigate the rationale behind Track Two diplomacy in resolving intractable conflicts in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The research design was based on Structural Functionalism theory and had a case study research design. The sample population was those experts in foreign relations, security and development. Qualitative responses were collected through the purposive sampling method, providing more in-depth information and more accurate research results. A key informant interview guide was used to gather primary data, and books, journals and periodicals were used to acquire secondary data. The research conclusion is provided in the form of a narrative. The study determined that Track Two diplomacy offered an avenue of communication other than the official one, which entails unofficial dialogue or informal communication that may prove vital in managing an intractable conflict, as was experienced in the Congo. This paper, therefore, concludes that there is a Track Two diplomacy option that can be employed to deal with intractable conflicts in the Ituri Province, Democratic Republic of the Congo. This outcome is only possible when some particular problems are resolved, like finding adequate funds and organizing the Track Two projects into the formal peace frameworks. In this study, the researcher suggests that the interested parties should endow Track Two diplomacy, should be adequately resourced, should be aligned with formal diplomacy and should also be sensitive to matters of local context to be effective in dealing with intractable conflicts.

Keywords: *Peacebuilding, Track Two Diplomacy, Ituri Province, Intractable Conflicts.*

Introduction

Track Two diplomacy is premised on the thought that the conflict can be reduced by making people meet and communicate at the interpersonal and communal level to build trust, understanding and cooperation instead of depending on the official state level of relationships. Decades of the protracted conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and especially in Ituri Province have shown the ineffectiveness of traditional interventions, which rely on state capacities (Track One). The nature, tendencies and dynamics of the intractable conflicts in the twenty-first century are multiple and varied. Montville (2016) states that intractable conflicts are characterised by long-lasting, recurring (cyclical), complex and costly dynamics, both in terms of human lives and resources. Consequently, some of these intractable conflicts have profound effects on states, institutions and individuals.

The prevalence of intractable conflict shows that ideological differences are no longer the leading cause of conflict. Instead, ethnic identity and the distribution of resources are now the primary sources of violence, especially in the African context. Sutphin (2014) suggests that in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), perceptions and security postures are more likely to be redefined when regional elites see such changes as benefiting their own interests, rather than as a favour to external actors. According to Bruce (2014), Track Two activities typically involve influential academic, religious and non-governmental organisation (NGO) leaders, as well as other civil society actors, who can interact more freely than high-ranking officials can.

Stein (2018) argues that track-two dialogues are an indigenous process that is essential to their success. Intractable conflict in the Great Lakes Region (GLR) is characterised by prolonged, violent actions by state actors or communities in response to harmful conditions or cultural hardships. According to Sutphin (2014), the so-called Track Two diplomacy is neither governmental nor non-governmental, but rather informal, as it refers to unofficial contacts and activities of non-governmental actors, sometimes referred to as non-state actors. Marcucci (2019) has reported that decades of violent conflicts, unrest and humanitarian challenges have spilt over to the GLR and several neighbouring states. The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is still experiencing recurrent conflicts, and that is why there is a proliferation of arms.

Monsembula (2024) notes that the United Nations reported the population of internally displaced individuals in the DRC to be at an all-time high of 6.9 million people. The humanitarian crisis caused by the cyclical violent conflict in the DRC that has claimed the lives of millions over the last three decades is only getting worse (Marcucci, 2019). This is why, in this intractable conflict, it appears that the management efforts do not help in managing the conflict, even with the application of available popular conflict-reconciliation techniques.

The DRC has become a victim of decades of wars and violence. Due to an example, Ituri Province has witnessed an increase in arms. However, intractable conflicts in Ituri are ongoing struggles that could have been solved or mitigated through diplomatic efforts (William, 2015). The DRC continues to experience ongoing confrontations; an example is the case of Ituri Province, where a continuous conflict has been ongoing. Nevertheless, the impact and efficiency of Track Two diplomacy in addressing these entrenched conflicts are under-researched. The sphere of conflict resolution identifies additional restrictions to traditional diplomacy, which informal intermediaries are well-equipped to overcome. According to Sutphin (2014), the aftermath of incompetent, bloody national elections in the Democratic Republic of Congo in December 2023, brutal conflicts between the armed forces and the insurgents, the most notable being the March 23 Movement (The M23) and the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), persist in the eastern DRC.

M23 is the leading ethnically Tutsi rebel group, which is connected with the governments of Rwanda and Uganda. The unyielding war might have been averted or reduced through the application of track two diplomacy, which is an informal engagement of members of hostile groups or countries to develop strategies, influence the mass media and mobilise both human and material assets to aid in the resolution of the conflict. However, conventional reconciliation methods have not been effective; it is unclear how and whether track-two initiatives can be utilised to address the peculiarities of this scenario. Although there have been a lot of

peace settlements and formal interventions, the violence always prevails, as witnessed by frequent ethnic conflicts, militia activities and displacement cycles.

The United Nations (2024) states that there are more than 6.9 million internally displaced persons in the DRC, which indicates not only the inability to eradicate the causes of interethnic war but also the ineffectiveness of the currently existing peace mechanisms. Although Track Two diplomacy has been steadily recognised to complement the use of formal peace efforts, its application in the DRC is still patchy and not institutionalised enough. Lack of coordination to have players well organised among the official and unofficial actors, lack of financial and logistical sustenance and proper integration into the national peace structures have affected its effectiveness. This situation has not been the case as yet, and this has led to the realization of the transformative nature of Track Two activities that entail religious leaders, civil society, academics and local mediators. This loophole brings out a very important fact: despite the evolution of peace work, the DRC still witnesses systemic instability because of the underutilisation, underfunding and undercoordination of informal peace processes with the official diplomatic activity.

The paper, thus, aims at delving into the logic of Track Two diplomacy within the parameters of deep-rooted conflicts in the DRC, the operations of informal mechanisms within the peace architecture and the larger understanding of the peace architecture. It takes into consideration both the theoretical and the practical learning on whether Track Two diplomacy can be a viable complementary strategy to the Track One process in the provision of sustainable peace within conflict-prone regions, including Ituri Province. The study had this specific purpose to review the conceptual base of Track Two diplomacy and its potential application to solving the intractable conflicts in the DRC. It further discussed the way and the contents that the Track Two diplomacy has been practiced in the DRC.

The research also assessed the opportunities and challenges of Track Two diplomacy in supplementing Track One peace efforts in Ituri Province. By fulfilling these goals, the analysis contributes to a broader discussion of the concept of peacebuilding, as it situates Track Two diplomacy within its structural and institutional context in the DRC. It also provides empirical insights that can inform policymakers, practitioners and scholars seeking to strengthen hybrid peace frameworks that combine official and non-official approaches.

Literature Review

This section provides a critical review of the available scholarly literature on the challenges and opportunities of using track two diplomacy to manage intractable conflicts in the DRC. Joseph Montville is credited with being the first to use the term "Track Two diplomacy" in his search for a word that encompassed the unofficial efforts made outside of governments that brought about a diplomatic resolution of conflicts (Marcucci, 2019). Montville felt a need to define or label the distinction between action, which was government-to-government and that which was people-to-people (William, 2015). In its original conception, Track Two or citizen diplomacy refers to citizens discussing issues that are usually reserved for official negotiations.

According to Shepherd (2022), "William Davidson, a psychiatrist, first put the term Track Two diplomacy in print for the first time to refer to the actual or potential conflict that can be resolved or eased by appealing to human capabilities to respond to goodwill and reasonableness." In 1989, the American Academy of Arts and Sciences hosted the first of a series of conferences that brought together Arab and Israeli participants to discuss possible solutions to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Monsembula, 2024). According to William (2015), Track Two diplomacy regained much interest in 1991 when the Soviet Union collapsed, leaving diplomatic institutions like the United Nations, forged in an era of great-power conflict, poorly suited to keeping the post-Cold War peace. Policymakers are beginning to consider Track Two diplomacy with renewed interest. The concept of Track Two diplomacy makes a critical contribution to peace processes by providing the unarmed actors with an opportunity to voice their position on the conflict. Similarly, the participants may have difficulty gaining access to protected or neutral zones or moving freely within rebel-controlled territories. In addition, many Track Two practitioners are often unaware of the realities and pressures of the policy and diplomatic

worlds and not particularly adept at framing their efforts to make them accessible to hard-pressed officials (William, 2015).

The Track I players must be willing to give Track II (used interchangeably with Track One and Track Two) activities space. This is meant figuratively, rather than literally (though finding suitable space is also an issue). In repressive environments where certain forms of assembly, speech and action may be prohibited or punished, the safety of participants must be carefully considered. Stein (2018). notes that, "people who engage in peacemaking are often regarded as traitors by members of their own communities. According to Monsembula (2024), understanding the local history of Track II activities can help determine which new activities are both possible and likely to yield results. However, suppose one or more track II processes have gone poorly in the past (increasing rather than diminishing hostility between groups, or taking much time without making significant progress). In that case, the local community and/or the parties to the conflict may be distrustful of proposals for new Track II activities.

Mwagiru (2006) argues that Track II activities can help ameliorate this kind of situation in two (or more) ways. First, track II actors can work quietly through back channels to ensure that the interests and demands of an illegitimate party are clearly understood and brought to the negotiation table. Second, they can work to convince the illegitimate parties that talking is more likely to advance their interests than violence. Therefore, most of the existing literature is conceptual or draws on data from other regions, indicating a need for empirical data from stakeholders in the DRC context. William (2015) notes that a related problem or challenges in using track two diplomacy occur when too many track II activities or processes have happened in the past or are currently underway. Often, many track II actors converge on a single high-profile problem location, and many of these actors attempt to recruit local people to participate in their programs. According to Shepherd (2022), such a surfeit of attention can have several negative consequences.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in Structural Functionalism Theory, which views society as an integrated system where various components, such as institutions, norms and actors, work together to maintain social order and stability. When applied to the situation of the DRC, this framework can be used to comprehend the interaction, complement or conflict of various societal organs, including religious institutions, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), community elders and local leaders in responding to conflict in interrelationship with formal state mechanisms.

However, when relationships between interconnected structures strive for balance within a polarised social system, from a functionalist viewpoint, Track Two diplomacy is an informal process that bridges the gaps of formal (Track One) diplomacy. Non-state actors intervene when state institutions, the foreign ministry, or official peace committees are ineffective in managing intractable conflicts and restoring balance through dialogue, trust-building and reconciling the affected communities. For example, religious actors can act as moral stabilisers, NGOs can act as service providers and mediators and traditional leaders can act as protectors of social cohesion. These factors constitute a chain of stabilisation, functions which have the overall purpose of restoring the equilibrium that has been broken in the situation by the long-term conflict. On the other hand, if these so-called organs do not coordinate or have a role overlap that lacks clear communication, dysfunction will persist throughout the system, creating instability.

Structural Functionalism is thus correct when it is applied, as far as its potential to explain the relationship between interventions on the micro level and the community's peace structures at the macro level exists. Constructivism would better define the identities and meanings of actors as socially constructed, and Conflict Transformation Theory would involve relational and attitudinal change. However, Structural Functionalism would be more appropriate for illustrating the institutional interaction and the interdependence of the system in the peace architecture of the DRC. This theory sheds more light on the functioning of Track Two diplomacy as part of the larger social system, bridging the gap between the state and society by rebuilding or strengthening the roles of institutions that foster peace.

When explaining the findings, this theoretical approach demonstrates that Track Two diplomacy in Ituri Province facilitates a state of equilibrium by enabling unofficial communication between conflicting parties, thereby complementing Track One diplomacy. However, when there are resource limitations or a lack of coordination, dysfunction is created, and more instability is also observed. Thus, Structural Functionalism provides not only a framework for explaining how Track Two mechanisms operate within the larger peace system but also for diagnosing where systemic imbalances hinder sustainable conflict management.

One needs to understand who all the parties are, what the issues are, what the conflict dynamics are and what has been done (and by whom) to address the issues over time. Intractable conflicts often have lengthy and complex histories, which further complicate their present realities (Cottey & Foster, 2004). Multiple parties are usually involved in the conflict, and multiple track II actors (some from within the country, others from outside) are present, all working on related but distinct aspects of the problem (Chinyanganya, 2005). The literature suggests that the concept of track two diplomacy originated in the belief that war can be avoided if people initiate contact to foster friendships and understanding.

Methodology

This study employed a case study design. Case studies provide rich raw material for advancing theoretical ideas. Additionally, this study employed quantitative research methods. The study area was the DRC, a country in Central Africa (Bruce, 2014). It is the 11th largest and second largest in Africa and the world, respectively. The study was carried out among professionals in the security, peace and development field, as they were qualified and experienced in the area of peacebuilding and national security. These people were sampled as a cross-section of practitioners and policymakers involved in the conflict management process as key informants who could give insights into the nature of Track Two diplomacy to deal with intractable conflicts in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). A purposive sampling approach was employed to maximise the variation of the sample and to ensure that the participants whose opinions were diverse, yet relevant, were used. This approach was especially useful in collecting detailed and qualitative data from a comparatively small yet informative population.

The respondents were chosen on the basis of their professional activities within the scope of peace and security programs and their capability to critique the Track Two diplomacy. Purposive sampling was required in this study because of the nature of the study and its objectives, as stated by Kothari (2004). The study design used was a qualitative research design and this offered a chance to take an in-depth analysis of the phenomenon being studied. The main data source was the Semi-Structured Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with books, peer-reviewed journals, official reports and other periodicals as the secondary data source. This blend of data content provided a solid foundation for triangulating data and an appreciation of the struggles and prospects of carrying out the Track Two diplomacy approach in resolving intractable conflicts. A pilot test of the interview guide was done to enhance the data collection tool and to find out the possible constraints.

Data analysis was done utilizing descriptive, document and content analysis. The qualitative data collected during the interviews were interpreted by transcribing them, coding them and analysing them by themes to find new patterns and themes. The findings were discussed and presented in the format of a story with verbatim quotes of the respondents. The data was organised and processed with the help of the Statistical Package of the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 25 and frequency was coded, or descriptive summaries were developed to enhance the accuracy and systematic analysis.

Throughout the course of work, the researcher followed ethical standards and institutional rules as required by the National Defence College (NDC). Data collection was preceded by obtaining ethical approval and permission for the research. All the participants were asked about verbal informed consent and no problems with confidentiality were identified. Respondents' identities were protected and all sources of information were duly acknowledged.

This section examines the logic of Track Two Diplomacy in Managing Intractable Conflicts in the DRC, with a specific focus on the case of Ituri province. This comes at a time when the country needs to negotiate a cease-fire and a political solution. A flurry of first-track and official diplomatic efforts was pursued to convince the government, rebel movements and regional states to negotiate and implement a cease-fire agreement. The Track Two had challenges managing diverse perspectives and interests on both sides of a conflict, as Track Two dialogues may not always fully represent all viewpoints.

Findings

The conceptual foundations of Track Two diplomacy in managing conflicts

81% of the respondents stated that track two diplomacy consists of informal dialogues among actors such as academics, religious leaders, senior officials and non-governmental organisation officials that can bring ideas and new relationships to the official process of diplomacy. This finding aligned with Stein (2018), who pointed out that, "since the emergence of Track Two diplomacy, a form of informal and unofficial dialogues between conflicting parties facilitated by scholar-practitioners, scholarship on the field has grown exponentially." Originally conceived as a discreet complement to Track One official negotiation between armed actors in conflict, 5% of the respondents regarded Track Two diplomacy as having become an established and professionalised form of broader conflict resolution. Specific scholarship on Track Two has occupied the liminal space between theory and practice, in which theoretical propositions are often born out of observations from practical and conceptual applications in empirical cases.

Analysing how Track Two theories reflect these paradigms can provide deeper insights into the field's conceptual and theoretical evolution and its future direction. The remaining 4% of the respondents opined that Track Two initiatives are an established part of peacemaking policy and practice and the definition of Track Two has expanded to cover a greater range of activities. The findings aligned with similar authors, since in a complex and decentralised peace and conflict landscape, large-scale national dialogues (Wallensteen, 2002) and large-scale parallel processes that feature the inclusion of civil society actors (Mitchell, 2014) are also understood to include Track Two actors, especially within a multi-track peace process setting.

The study established that a comprehensive review of this field requires an appreciation of the underlying paradigms of conflict resolution theory and practice within which Track Two diplomacy is situated. Early scholarship on Track Two diplomacy, emerging during the Cold War and the immediate post-Cold War period, from the 1970s to the early 2000s, was primarily shaped by strategic bargaining models, rational actor assumptions and game theory. Mitchell (2014) states that the second generation of Track Two literature reflects the advent, growth and upheaval of the liberal peacebuilding and conflict management paradigm that began in the 1990s and gained momentum between the 2000s and the 2020s. Into this predominantly positivist landscape, Track Two introduced a distinctive social-psychological perspective that emphasised the relational and socialised dimensions of intractable conflicts, thereby carving out a unique theoretical niche within conflict resolution literature.

In this generation, Track Two theories expanded to include more sophisticated notions of multi-track processes and focus on how outcomes within Track Two initiatives can be transferred to Track One official processes or political processes writ-large.

Mechanisms and practices of Track Two diplomacy applied in the DRC context

Track Two diplomacy in the case of the DRC made a vital contribution to the official peace process by providing unarmed actors with the opportunity to express their positions on the conflict. The de facto partitioning of the country during the war hindered, if not entirely prevented, contact between civil society organisations from the occupied zones. The unofficial track-two diplomatic efforts conducted outside the DRC provided civil society groups with a platform for interaction and engagement (Aggarwal et al., 2023).

These initiatives enabled the unarmed civilian corps to coordinate their programmes better and organise themselves into a stronger voice.

The findings of the study align with Mitchell (2014), who stated that the ongoing conflict in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo has cost approximately six million lives since 1996, making it one of the deadliest conflicts in world history. Finally, the fighting is stimulated by ethnic and geopolitical rivalry between the DRC, Rwanda, Uganda, Burundi and other non-state armed forces. This conflict has displaced more than five million Congolese and this has continued to create a cycle of poverty and militarisation.

Kenya, the United States and its allies must work closely with the DRC and other neighbouring nations to end the war and establish a platform on which a peaceful future for the region can be achieved. The unrest present in eastern DRC may be a triggering factor leading to a Great Lakes crisis that may spill over to Rwanda, Uganda and Burundi. Ignoring this conflict now could cause considerable instability in Central and East Africa later, opening the door for Chinese or Russian influence or for the Islamic State. In 1998, the intervening forces did so under the auspices of the Southern African Development Community (SADC); this time, it is the EAC's turn.

Challenges and opportunities of Track Two diplomacy in complementing Track   One peace efforts

53% of the respondents pointed out the main problems in Track Two diplomacy for these conflicts, such as the lack of power to influence official decisions, the chance of hurting the official talks, problems with getting visible results, and the difficulty of dealing with the different internal views in the opposing parties. The data not only support the idea of the presence of limitations in the informal communication methods, but they also support the general caution among scholars, represented by Wallensteen (2002), who states that the best way to resolve conflicts is by having a strategy that is consistent through all levels. He points out that the unofficial activities should be performed in such a way that they are in sync with the official (Track One) diplomacy and also be related in terms of public perception to be effective, particularly in situations where suspicion and animosity are strong.

30% of the respondents held that since Track Two is not controlled governmental entities, they can hardly exercise their authority to make agreements or to coerce the parties to abide by the agreements, which may, therefore, undermine the effectiveness of their conversations. Thus, when Track Two negotiations drive up public offers or lines that are not congruent with governmental policies, it may complicate and even spoil formal peace negotiations. Mitchell (2014) asserts that establishing trust and understanding in deep-rooted conflicts can be time-consuming and, therefore, one may not realise quick outcomes from Track Two initiatives.

From the research data, 16% of the respondents reported that there were issues with Track Two discussions, as they can be exposed to the scrutiny of the masses and may be misinterpreted by the media, which can additionally complicate negotiations and affect the safety of the participants. The challenge in applying these strategies was that there should be proper communication. Besides, with very sensitive subjects of a conflict, a person may feel tension and even potential failures in the process of dialogue, a situation that demands a tight hand and practical skills in conflict resolution.

The implementation efforts on Track Two are normally characterized by many crises due to the fact that they demand high financial outlay and logistical assistance that is not easily accessible when there are protracted fights. Care must also be taken to ensure that the Track Two initiatives are consistent with government goals and do not harm official diplomacy. The focus on the personal relationships and the personal knowledge of the participants on the opposite sides of the conflict.

Conclusions

Track Two emerged as an outcome of a new social-psychological approach to peacemaking, which developed in the 1970s and 1980s, particularly towards the end of the Cold War. This paper concludes that Track Two

diplomacy is also a relevant complementary factor in addressing intractable conflict in Ituri Province through informal dialogue and trust-building processes, thereby enabling official peace processes. Its influence, however, is constrained by other factors, such as the inability to hold formal authority and the necessity to liaise with Track One diplomacy. The paper discovered that, despite the opportunities, including appealing to civil society and discussing the problems informally, all of them can be fulfilled only when specific challenges are overcome, which include finding sufficient funds and aligning Track Two efforts with formal peace structures.

In the digital age, cybersecurity issues underscore the role of diplomacy in addressing evolving security threats. Track Two is not a familiar field of the social sciences. It is intrinsically interdisciplinary, which cannot easily be categorised, although it wants to find its place within academia as a scholarly and rigorous field. Track Two diplomacy is a subject area where theory informs practice, or the reverse holds, but no case is so general that one can generalise theoretical principles beyond a point. The Track Two diplomats are often academics themselves who are interested in building the academic profession in the course of their practice and are also conscious that their activity often necessitates a reworking of conventional scholarly norms (such as on topics such as confidentiality versus openness). To sum it up, Track Two diplomacy is not a panacea, but Track Two processes may provide essential assistance to official peace processes. Nevertheless, they should be adequately staffed, well-organised and employ formal diplomacy, while also being conscious of the nuances of the local environment to achieve this. These findings are used to build the subtlety of the idea behind peacebuilding, which proposes that a Track One/Track Two strategy would work better in protracted conflicts, such as the one in the Ituri Province of the DRC.

Recommendations

To complement Track Two diplomacy, this paper recommends a deeper diplomacy to improve the use of multilateral diplomacy. This is a strategy that entails countries working together with international bodies like the United Nations to solve international problems. Ensure that you are a diplomat and a negotiator by promoting honesty and peaceful discussion in discovering a mutual interest with other countries. Adopt a diplomatic strategy to form and build relationships with key diplomats and achieve a high level of consistency in negotiation.

Track Two diplomacy would perform best with budgetary support, as economic concerns in diplomacy are often dependent on complex relations among interests, trade imbalances and differences among nations. Diplomats must juggle domestic economic interests with international collaboration in negotiating trade agreements, addressing currency manipulation and mitigating the impact of economic sanctions.

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