

A DIFFERENT APPROACH: ASSESSING THE LEGACY OF TRACK 1.5 AND TRACK 2 ENGAGEMENTS WITH INDIA AND PAKISTAN

ZACHARY S. DAVIS, EDITOR



Center for Global Security Research
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Production Editor/Technical Editor: Kristine Wong Cover Design: Tom Reason Layout: Tom Reason

This work was performed under the auspices of the U.S. Department of Energy by Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory in part under Contract W-7405-Eng-48 and in part under Contract DE-AC52-07NA27344. The views and opinions of the author expressed herein do not necessarily state or reflect those of the United States government or Lawrence Livermore National Security, LLC.
ISBN-978-1-952565-26-7 LCCN-2025905539 LLNL-MI-871569 TID-82635-25

Dedication

Dedicated to the memory of Michael Krepon.

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Commodore C. Uday Bhaskar (Ret.)

Commodore C. Uday Bhaskar, director of the Society for Policy Studies in New Delhi, retired from the Indian Navy in early 2007 after 37 years service—and has the rare distinction of having headed three think tanks. He was previously director of the National Maritime Foundation (2009 - 2011) and earlier with the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses in New Delhi in 1989 where he also served as a senior fellow and deputy director (1996-2004). Later, he was the officiating director of the Institute until late 2005. Subsequently, he was appointed the member-secretary of the Government of India's Task Force on Global Strategic Developments, which prepared a report for the Prime Minister of India.

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Davis began his career at the Congressional Research Service at the Library of Congress and has served with the State Department, Congressional committees, and the White House National Security Council. Davis was group leader for proliferation networks in LLNL's Z Program, professor at the U.S. Naval Postgraduate School, and senior advisor at the National Counterproliferation Center in the office of the Director of National Intelligence. He is the author of numerous government studies and reports on technical and regional proliferation issues. He leads a project on Strategic Latency focused on the national security implications of advanced technologies. His recent book *Above Scorched Skies* is a fictional account of a border conflict in South Asia that escalates to a major war in space.

Davis holds a PhD and an MA in international relations from the University of Virginia and an undergraduate degree in politics from the University of California at Santa Cruz. He enjoys surfing and tai chi.

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Brig. Gen. Feroz Khan (Ret.)

Feroz Khan is a research professor in the Department of National Security Affairs at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, California. He retired as a brigadier general after serving with the Pakistani Army for 30 years. He served domestically and abroad with numerous assignments in the United States, Europe, and South Asia. He has experienced combat action and command on active fronts on the line of control in the Siachin Glacier and Kashmir and served along the Pakistan–Afghanistan border. He last held the post of the director of Arms Control and Disarmament Affairs within the Strategic Plans Division in the Joint Services Headquarters, which is secretariat of Pakistan's National Command Authority.

Among his academic degrees, he holds an MA from the Paul Nitze School of Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins University in Washington, DC. From 2001—2003 he was a visiting scholar at the Center for International Security and Cooperation at Stanford University; the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington, DC; the Brookings Institution at the Center of Nonproliferation Studies in Washington, DC; and the Cooperative Monitoring Center at Sandia National Laboratories in Albuquerque, New Mexico. In 2003 he joined the Naval Postgraduate School, initially as a visiting professor and has continued to serve as a lecturer and research professor since then. Brig. Feroz Khan has published many articles, book chapters, and papers. He also regularly participates in numerous security-related national and international conferences and seminars. He is the author of *Eating Grass: The Making of the Pakistani Bomb* (Stanford University Press, 2012) and *Subcontinent Adrift: Strategic Futures of South Asia* (Cambria Press, 2022).

Adm. Richard Mies (Ret.)

Admiral Mies completed a distinguished 35-year career in the U.S. Navy. He commanded U.S. Strategic Command for four years prior to his retirement. As commander in chief, he was directly responsible for the command and control of the nation's strategic nuclear forces supporting the national security objective of strategic deterrence.

Admiral Mies has held both U.S. and Allied commands at senior military levels. His decorations include the Defense Distinguished Service Medal, Navy Distinguished Service Medal, Defense Superior Service Medal (two awards), Legion of Merit (four awards), National Intelligence Distinguished Service Medal, Meritorious Service Medal (two awards), Navy Commendation Medal (four awards), Navy Achievement Medal, and Secretary of Energy Gold Medal.

He has completed postgraduate education at Oxford University, the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University, and Harvard University. He holds a master's degree in government and international relations, an honorary doctorate of law from the University of Nebraska and was a distinguished graduate of the Naval Academy.

His professional education includes the flag officers' capstone course, the program for senior executives in national and international security at Harvard University, and the joint flag officer warfighting course.

Following retirement from the Navy, Admiral Mies served as a senior vice president and deputy group president of Science Applications International Corporation and as the president and CEO of Hicks and Associates. Presently, he serves as the CEO and president of the Mies Group as well as the Chairman of the Strategic Advisory Group for U.S. Strategic Command, co-chair of the Nuclear Energy and National Security Coalition, chairman of the Pennsylvania State University Applied Research Laboratory Advisory Board, chairman of the Oak Ridge National Laboratory National Security Sciences Directorate Advisory Board, and is a member of the Board of Governors of Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory.

Adam Radin

Adam joined LLNL in 2016 in the Counterterrorism Program within International Assessments/Z Program. Prior to joining LLNL, Adam served at the Department of Energy in Washington, DC for five years as an intelligence research specialist with an additional three years at Department of Defense. Adam received his Bachelor's degree at the University of California, Berkeley and received his master's degree at the Naval Postgraduate School (NPS) in Monterey, California, with a focus on South Asia. At NPS he also traveled throughout South Asia arranging and managing Track 2/1.5 meetings and assisted in research on a variety of strategic topics. Since Adam's time at the NPS until now, he has focused on counterproliferation and South Asian security issues.

Andrew C. Winner

Andrew C. Winner is an adjunct professor at Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies Europe in Bologna, Italy. He is a retired professor of strategic studies in the Strategic and Operational Research Department at the Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island. He was department chair from 2013-2019. His research focuses on deterrence/coercion, European security, South Asian security, and counterproliferation. He has designed and led a range of U.S. and international wargames and tabletop exercises for sponsors ranging from OSD/Policy, OPNAV, NAVEUR, NAVCENT, NATO MARCOM, the U.S. intelligence community, and DTRA.

At the Naval War College, he was director of the Indian Ocean Studies Group. Prior to the Naval War College, he was at the Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis working on Department of Defense issues ranging from Nordic/Baltic security to nuclear deterrence and counterproliferation. For over a decade, he held positions at the U.S. Department of State where he worked on NATO enlargement, arms control in Europe, nonproliferation, Persian Gulf security, arms transfer policy, and security

assistance. He also worked in the Office of the Secretary of Defense on European security including on the U.S. delegation to the Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty negotiations. He is co-editor of *The Indian Ocean and U.S. Grand Strategy: Ensuring Access and Promoting Security* (Georgetown University Press, 2014). He is also the co-author of *Indian Naval Strategy in the 21st Century* (Routledge, 2009).

Winner holds a PhD from the University of Maryland, an MA from the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies (Bologna, Italy/Washington, DC), and a BA from Hamilton College.

Foreword

Admiral Richard Mies (ret.)

Candid discussions with foreign counterparts are always useful for fostering deeper understanding in international affairs. As such, Track 1.5 and Track 2 dialogues are initiatives to complement official government Track 1 discussions, build understanding, and develop relationships to help inform decisionmaking. As a longtime participant in these discussions, I have reached the conclusion that they are a critical tool to avoid dangerous misunderstandings and forge shared perspectives. This is probably most true relative to engaging with the newer nuclear-armed states like India and Pakistan—two countries which do not benefit from the decades of dialogue and arms control agreements that have characterized the interactions between members of the P5, particularly the United States and Russia.

For nearly three decades, the National Nuclear Security Administration, the Naval Postgraduate School, and the Center for Global Security Research at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory have sponsored Track 2 and particularly Track 1.5 dialogues that are focused on issues of national security (with particular emphasis on matters of nuclear security). While official discussions occur in Track 1 meetings, Track 1.5 and Track 2 dialogues afford an opportunity to engage counterparts in candid and more frequent discussions to serve as a bridge to the fewer and more constrained Track 1 discussions. This engagement ecosystem is designed to support informed decisionmaking for all parties and to seek opportunities to reduce risks.

As a retired nuclear submariner and former commander of U.S. Strategic Command, I have been privileged to participate and lead many of these discussions with current and retired officials and leading experts primarily from India and Pakistan, along with occasional representation from other South Asian countries. I have found these dialogues quite productive, and my South Asian colleagues clearly see them as an important channel of communication as well.

The evolving security environment in South Asia poses enduring challenges for the United States, India, and Pakistan. New domains of conflict, competition, and new technologies are adding complexity to these matters. Increasingly, the role of China influences the security outlook for the region and the world. The engagements covered in this volume have been focused on various aspects of nuclear security and the complex issues of deterrence. We have experimented with different formats, venues, and agendas, including complex wargames involving key figures.

This volume examines the record of these engagements and offers insights from some of the central participants in the South Asia program. Exploring our shared concerns about the nature of the strategic competition occurring in and around South Asia enables us to better understand the motivations, intentions, plans, and policies

that are guiding decisionmakers in Washington, New Delhi, and Islamabad. Many other organizations conduct similar Track 1.5 and Track 2 engagements. It has long been my view that the lessons learned and insights from those engagements are most valuable when they are shared among the expert community. The purpose of this volume is to share our Track 1.5 and Track 2 experiences in order to make them as useful as possible to decisionmakers in the United States, South Asia, and the global community for managing the challenges ahead.

Preface

Michael Albertson

Track 2/Track 1.5 engagements are tricky balancing acts. Above all else, the engagements must be useful and relevant to government officials participating in Track 1 dialogues. They cannot, however, overlap—nor can they get too close or too far away from official policy dialogues so as not to risk being curtailed. They must be meticulously planned and organized. Yet even well-choreographed events can be at the mercy of geopolitics or personalities outside of their control. They must have a core of participants over the years to maintain continuity and note subtle issue shifts, but they also must welcome in new participants to foster a younger generation of experts and avoid groupthink and disconnection. They must be always evolving and growing or risk growing stale and dated—but must never divert too far away from their designed purpose.

I had the great privilege to attend one of these dialogues between American, Indian, and Pakistani participants in May 2024, where I spent a number of days observing a dedicated group of experts who were fully engaging (both formally and informally) on nuclear-related issues. All were deeply aware of the importance and history of the dialogue, dived into their roles over a complex multi-day wargame, and carried on the conversation into dinners and receptions. Insights were generated. Connections were strengthened or created. A new generation of expertise is emerging. In short, it was a dialogue that was done well, and those are growing scarcer in these more complicated geopolitical times.

After the meeting, I talked with CGSR's Dr. Zachary Davis about getting some of this experience and knowledge down on paper. The value in this compendium is due to his hard work, and the time and effort the authors of the chapters and their collaborators in these efforts have spent over the decades pursuing a dialogue in this field. The hope is that this publication will demonstrate the value of these efforts and serve as the foundation for those who come after to build upon.

I have three interests behind this volume. The first is to capture this moment in time within this particular dialogue, as I believe the publication will be useful in capturing the thoughts of those who have worked over the years in these dialogues between American, Indian, and Pakistani experts. Some stocktaking is likely needed in order to determine what to do next, as looking back is often helpful in seeing where to go next. There are lessons to be learned, both in terms of successes and failures in these discussions between experts from these three countries. There are also lessons that readers outside the region can take away from this dialogue for their own Track 2/Track 1.5 engagements.

The second reason was to build on the success of an earlier publication done here at CGSR, a December 2020 Occasional Paper titled *Taking Stock: U.S.-China Track 1.5 Nuclear Dialogue*,¹ and fashion this monograph as a complementary volume to that series. The curtailment of the U.S.-China Track 1.5 process in 2019 led CGSR to convene a group of the dialogue's participants to review and take stock of two decades of nuclear-focused dialogue, better understand the existing bilateral strategic military relationship, and identify emerging problems and opportunities to improve that relationship. This conversation proved to be enormously fruitful, as participants were able to document the ebbs and flows in the U.S.-China dialogue over time, to think about where Track 1/1.5/2 dialogues fit into the bilateral relationship, and how these dialogues might be beneficial moving forward. It has proven to be one of our most requested and read publications, and quiet U.S.-China conversations on nuclear issues have since resumed at the Track 2 level.²

The final reason, and perhaps the hardest to articulate, is the cautionary tale of the challenges in bilateral Track 1/1.5/2 dialogues in my own region of expertise, between the United States and Russia. Seeing a challenging but vibrant nuclear dialogue in person put into sharp contrast the state of bilateral dialogue between U.S. and Russian experts. While quiet Track 2 dialogues remain and prove to be useful discussions, they lack the official dialogues to support and drive concrete policymaking. At the official level, these dialogues have been mostly curtailed, made hostage to broader geopolitical events, and failed to grow beyond well-worn talking points and adapt to changing circumstances. For those thinking about how to reconstruct a viable and useful dialogue mechanism in the future on these important issues with Russia, perhaps a comparative analysis would yield some insights.

Please enjoy this publication, and thank you again to the authors for their time and contributions.

1 Brad Roberts, ed., *Taking Stock: U.S.-China Track 1.5 Nuclear Dialogue* (Livermore, CA: Center for Global Security Research, 2020). https://cgsr.llnl.gov/sites/cgsr/files/2024-08/cgsr_us-china-paper.pdf. Accessed November 13, 2024.

2 Greg Torode, Gerry Doyle, and Laurie Chen, "U.S. and China hold first informal nuclear talks in five years," Reuters (June 21, 2024). <https://www.reuters.com/world/us-china-hold-first-informal-nuclear-talks-5-years-eyeing-taiwan-2024-06-21/>. Accessed November 25, 2024.

Great Expectations: The Role of Track 1.5 and Track 2 in International Relations

Zachary S. Davis

When sharing my experiences participating in semi-official interactions with my Indian and Pakistani counterparts, people often ask, “What is the difference between Track 1, Track 1.5, and Track 2?” The answer is that official government-to-government meetings with foreign government officials take place at the Track 1 level, where official communications are exchanged and documented. Track 1 is where diplomats convey government policies and positions. Track 2 usually involves people who do not represent their governments and are free to say whatever they think. Track 2 meetings most often involve scholars and former officials who express their opinions and research findings but are not necessarily guided by government policy.

Somewhere in the middle, between official Track 1 and free flowing Track 2, lies Track 1.5. This hybrid form of back-channel communication usually involves current officials who are not acting in their official capacity, former officials who maintain their connections to government circles, and trusted insiders who advise governments on their areas of expertise. Track 1.5 participants are guided by current government policy positions and explicitly report the outcomes of their meetings to official channels. Participants apply their expertise and experience to explain their government’s policies and the reasoning behind them. Track 1.5 meetings are conducted with strict adherence to Chatham House rules, which allow participants to discuss the ideas and positions expressed in the meetings, but prohibit public identification of attendees or attribution of comments made in confidence. This is important to facilitate the free exchange of ideas without fear of retribution for unvarnished statements. Some of our interactions have surpassed the usual diplomatic characterization of “free and frank exchanges.” Participants are encouraged to report back to their governments to enrich policymakers’ understanding of foreign perspectives.

Track 1.5 meetings are typically less constrained than Track 1 but more focused than Track 2. The idea is that candid, policy-informed conversations can support Track 1 efforts to solve big international issues. A wide range of Track 1.5 engagements focus on countries, regions, and issues. There are Track 1.5 programs focusing on Russia, NATO, China, Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. This study focuses on Track 1.5 engagements focused on nuclear weapons in South Asia.

These essays review the legacy of government-sponsored Track 1.5 engagements between the United States, India, and Pakistan on nuclear policy, strategy, doctrine, force structure, deterrence, crisis management, escalation, and nuclear security. Experts from the United States, Pakistan, and India have met dozens of times over the past 20-plus years with our Indian and Pakistani colleagues to discuss the reasoning

behind nuclear decisionmaking. The May 1998 nuclear tests by India and Pakistan marked an important milestone for the operationalization of Indian and Pakistani nuclear forces and provoked renewed nonproliferation efforts by the U.S. government. Track 1.5 sought to inform all three governments about current and evolving thinking about nuclear risks in the region and beyond.

The path for Track 1.5 has not always been easy. U.S. efforts to constrain Indian and Pakistani nuclear development evoked resistance that naturally affected our Track 1.5 meetings. Candid discussions revealed deep differences. This was understandable because our meetings examined the underlying thinking behind U.S., Pakistani, and Indian nuclear strategy and doctrines. The American team shared lessons learned from the U.S. experience from the Manhattan Project to the present day, including hard lessons about nuclear safety, security, and crisis management. Indian experts explained the rationale for bringing their bomb out of the closet to establish a “minimum credible deterrent.” Pakistani colleagues shared their anxieties about India’s Cold Start doctrine and the need to rely on nuclear weapons to deter India’s superior conventional forces from invading their territory. Both expressed optimism about the stability of nuclear deterrence in South Asia. The chapters in this volume assess the value of these interactions over the past two decades.

There are multiple government-sponsored Track 1.5 programs for South Asia. Some of us have participated in several of these, which focus on different aspects of South Asian regional security. While our focus is nuclear, other Track 1.5 and Track 2 engagements focus on different but related aspects of regional security, including terrorism, maritime issues, border security, water resources, and many other issues. Admiral Richard Meis, who has participated in several of these efforts, argues that the combined effects of multiple Track 1.5 efforts are hard to assess. What is the net impact of these behind-the-scenes efforts to build understanding in support of improved relations? How do we measure success? Admiral Meis offers his ideas about ways to maximize the cumulative effects of Track 1.5 engagements.

The effects of Track 1.5, however, extend beyond their formal diplomatic contributions. How do we measure the friendships that have been forged, the illuminating conversations, intellectual associations, family connections, and shared experiences that grow from these meetings? The chapters by Adam Radin and Chris Clary recall the career paths and regional expertise that have sprung from their early career involvement in Track 1.5 meetings, first as research assistants and now as established experts. Track 1.5 serves as an important training ground for next generations to learn their craft—not only the facts of South Asian history and policy, but also how to conduct sensitive engagements and interact at a high level.

Of course, we all see the world differently. Indian, Pakistani, and American participants bring vastly divergent perspectives to the issues. The chapters by Feroz Khan and Uday Bhaskar highlight the different attitudes that Indians and Pakistanis bring to Track 1.5 meetings. Does Track 1.5 work best when Track 1 relations are good and running smoothly, or when bilateral relations face serious obstacles? Many

of us believe that Track 1.5 is most valuable when Track 1 is struggling and new ideas are needed to kickstart problem solving at the official level. Others view Track 1.5 as useless when Track 1 is stymied by seemingly insurmountable obstacles. Feroz and Uday recall the changing expectations that Pakistan and India brought to our Track 1.5 meetings.

One of the most valuable outcomes of the South Asia Track 1.5 nuclear dialogue has been the interactions between Indian and Pakistani participants. In addition to our bilateral meetings between the United States and its South Asian partners, trilateral meetings provide opportunities for Indian and Pakistani strategic thinkers to communicate directly with one another. This has been especially important considering the paucity of direct communication at the Track 1 level, especially on nuclear issues. Track 1.5 provides a venue for clarifying positions, clearing up misunderstandings, and explaining priorities. Getting India and Pakistan to discuss nuclear policies directly has been one of the most valuable benefits of Track 1.5, even if progress has been disappointingly slow. Despite the lack of progress in arms control, the personal interactions between Indian and Pakistani experts, especially among younger generations, at least lays the groundwork for future negotiations, should they ever occur.

Wargames have been a particularly effective way to promote nuclear learning. Tabletop exercises, or TTXs, provide learning experiences for experts to explore crisis scenarios, test assumptions, and examine how strategic theories might work in practice. Our South Asia Track 1.5 wargames have focused on deterrence stability, war avoidance, escalation, nuclear redlines/thresholds, nuclear accidents, and war termination. Professor Drew Winner has been a driving force behind the tabletop exercises and shares his perspective on their purpose, value, and potential.

Planning and executing a Track 1.5 meeting involves extensive planning, preparation, and logistics to move participants scattered around the world to a meeting location. Behind every Track 1.5 engagement there are proposals, budgets, invitations, reservations, visas, flights, hotels, pickups, dropoffs, agendas, and many other essential components. Cancellations, complications, and delays are inevitable. Anna Davari takes us behind the scenes to describe the often-hidden ingredients of successful Track 1.5 meetings.

Past, Present, and Future

While unofficial, back-channel diplomacy is not new, South Asia Track 1.5 reached new levels in the late 1990s and expanded as tensions grew and nuclearization advanced. Responding to these trends, a cadre of American experts approached the U.S. government to support a series of discreet, candid, and often personal interactions about regional security and nuclear risks. Building on years of scholarly knowledge and military/diplomatic/intelligence experience, experts at the Naval Postgraduate School, the Near East South Asia Center, and other institutions brought together select groupings of scholars, think tank specialists, and former officials

from all three countries for intimate, closed-door discussions about nuclear topics. Bilateral meetings set the stage for trilateral meetings and TTXs. We hosted field trips to nuclear sites to discuss lessons learned from the history of nuclear competition and conducted mock inspections of retired missiles. We debated—across tables, over dinners, and during long walks. Even when we did not agree, we developed thoughtful understandings of each other’s positions and conveyed them to our governments. We were—and still are—careful not to exaggerate our influence on policy. There is a shared understanding that we are communicating government-approved narratives.

Did Track 1.5 make a difference? Nuclear dangers have not receded. Deterrence has endured, although the stability of the nuclear balance in South Asia remains questionable. U.S.-India relations have advanced, while the U.S.-Pakistan relationship continues the roller coaster it has been on for decades. India-Pakistan relations are tense and there has been no progress on arms control. Moreover, the growing shadow of China on the region creates new challenges.

Most of us believe that now—perhaps more than ever—Track 1.5 and Track 2 provide an essential conduit for clear communication about the changing security dynamics of the region and the world. The so-called “three body problem” of deterrence in South Asia mirrors the global competition between the United States, China, and Russia. Deterrence is becoming more complex. Will it hold? What are the risks, and how can they be managed? These questions demand our attention at every level—Track 1, Track 1.5, and Track 2. Official Track 1 diplomacy uses the levers of national power to avoid and manage nuclear risks wherever possible. Track 2 exchanges should advance our scholarly knowledge of the increasingly complex deterrence dynamics in the region and the world. Bridging the gap between these two cultures is the job of Track 1.5 and its unique blend of semi-official and semi-academic interactions. We look forward to new ideas from the next generations of practitioners and scholars to advance the cause of peace and stability.

Assessing South Asia

Track 2: An Indian Perspective

C. Uday Bhaskar

This essay is a broad review based on my personal recall of some Track 2/1.5 initiatives related to India and the United States in the strategic domain. It broadly focuses on deliberations over major security and foreign policy issues. These observations span a period of the last four decades and include a variety of India-Pakistan dialogues enabled by the United States in the early 1990s.

The central issue that Zachary Davis has encouraged me to focus on is the United States-supported Track 2 and Track 1.5 activities related to the U.S.-India bilateral relationship and the troubled history of India-Pakistan relations. This is my net assessment of the value of these efforts and their influence on Indian and U.S. policy.

In my view, Track 2/1.5 initiatives were generally successful in relation to the policy outcomes of the India-U.S. relationship, even in light of the nonlinear manner in which the relationship has advanced. The primary contribution of Track 2/1.5 was to irrigate longstanding impediments within the estranged bilateral ecosystem. A recall of the texture and content of the Washington-Delhi relationship is illustrative. However, with respect to Pakistan, the needle barely moved, and the old chestnuts have just gotten older and more intractable over the decades, despite many years of Track 2/1.5 efforts.

Early Track 2 Efforts

At the political level, the Reagan years enabled a review of the troubled U.S.-India relationship and the October 1981 Cancun North-South summit could be identified as a significant punctuation. Then-Prime Minister (PM) Indira Gandhi had her first meeting with President Ronald Reagan and this has been described as an icebreaker in the frozen relationship. Retired diplomat G. Parthasarathy (then serving at the Indian Embassy in Washington), who was present at the meeting between the two leaders, recalls that President Reagan told his aides that he found the Indian PM to be “charming and reasonable” and that he was “misled” about potential points of friction.

Given the animosity that clouded India-U.S. relations in the Nixon years and Indira Gandhi’s anxiety about the “foreign hand” damaging Indian interests, a high-level political signal was required to remove some of the estrangement in the bilateral relationship and Cancun was the catalyst. Academics and diplomats familiar with the fine print of the relationship with whom I have discussed this issue concur with this conjecture and a tacit U.S. government nod opened the doors to Track 2 interaction. The engagement initially included Professors Selig Harrison, Stephen Cohen, Harold Gould, and Ambassador Dennis Kux, among others.

Carnegie Endowment for International Peace-Institute for Defense Studies and Analyses

The earliest U.S.-India Track 2 activity in my recall was the week-long November 1984 meeting in New Delhi focused on superpower rivalry in the Indian Ocean, where a group of experts from the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (CEIP) and the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA) gathered for the discussions. The proceedings of this meeting were shared in the public domain as policy recommendations on the eve of the June 1985 visit by Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi to the United States. Subsequently, the papers were published in *Superpower Rivalry in the Indian Ocean*, edited by Selig Harrison and K Subrahmanyam, in 1989.³ Four decades later, many of the issues discussed in these early meetings still shape the policy agenda. For example, the maritime domain now referred to as the Indo-Pacific and the rise of China are illustrative of this dynamic.

Retired diplomats played a major role in steering these Track 2 dialogues. Eric Gonsalves and K.S. Bajpai are cases in point. In the late 1980s, Mr. Gonsalves had retired and became the director of the India International Centre (IIC) in Delhi. In 1989, he convened a Track 2 dialogue with the University of California at Berkeley. On the Indian side, the participation of Mr. K. Subrahmanyam (a.k.a. Subbu), a former director of IDSA and a senior civil servant who had a long stint in the Defence Ministry and considered to be the doyenne of strategic studies in India, warrants special mention.

IDSA-INSS

In 1990, the Indian and American governments determined that it was worth investing in a more substantive Track 2 dialogue, one that was closer to what we now call Track 1.5. The two institutes identified to pursue this were the INSS (Institute for National Strategic Studies) which was part of the NDU (National Defence University) in Washington DC, and IDSA in Delhi.

In December 1990, when the Cold War was in its final phase and the United States was preparing for Desert Storm, a major Track 2 event between IDSA and INSS/NDU occurred in Khadakwasla near Pune on the premises of the National Defence Academy (NDA). The directors of the two institutes were Air Commodore Jasjit Singh (IDSA) and Dr. Al Bernstein (INSS), respectively. What was significant was the senior level of previous Track 1 participation on both sides. From the Indian side, apart from two highly regarded strategic experts—K. Subrahmanyam and former Army chief General K. Sundarji—a number of senior officials from the Ministry of Defence, External Affairs, and the military joined in their personal capacity. The level of participation on the U.S. side was even more “heavyweight,” with officials from DOD, State, Energy, and the PACOM commander participating, also in their personal capacity. My recall of

³ Selig Harrison and K. Subrahmanyam, *Superpower Rivalry in the Indian Ocean: Indian and American Perspectives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

names includes Henry Rowen, Admiral Chuck Hardisty, Teresita Schaefer, and George Tanham, among others.

The Khadakwasla meeting laid the foundation for an extended Track 2 and 1.5 bilateral engagement that has continued to the present day. Notable Track 2 takeaways include George Tanham's seminal monograph on India's strategic culture that encouraged the Indian security community to grapple with complex post-Cold War strategic issues.⁴

Operation Desert Shield and the emphatic U.S. military victory in the first Gulf War in 1991 heralded the end of the Cold War, which concluded in a dramatic but anomalous manner with the tearing down of the Berlin Wall and Boris Yeltsin atop a tank symbolizing the internment of the Soviet Union. By this time, it was evident that some degree of military and security "liberalization" was taking place in Delhi under the sagacious stewardship of PM Narasimha Rao.

The Indian military was beginning to interact with their U.S. counterparts and this was a significant step for both nations. The Kicklighter proposals normalized the launch of military-to-military interactions which started with the navies.⁵ These proposals were developed in 1990 during meetings between Indian Army Chief General S. Rodrigues and Lt. Gen Claude Kicklighter, the army commander at the U.S. Pacific Command. They suggested a framework for the armed forces of the two countries to meet and promote exchanges, as well as to identify areas for potential cooperation.

Malabar, the first India-U.S. bilateral naval exercise kicked off in 1992, has grown progressively in scope and the number of participants. One could argue that this was the genesis of what later became the Quad. The supporting Track 2/1.5 "irrigation of the ecosystem" benefited from the Indian naval chief at the time, Admiral L. Ramdas, who would occasionally participate in IDSA deliberations. He took special interest in two central topics—bilateral cooperation with the United States and the nuclear issue. Ramdas met with Subbu informally and directed me (as the naval representative at IDSA) to keep him apprised about any major Track 2 deliberations. I have been involved in numerous Track 2/1.5 engagements ever since.

Business Executives for National Security (BENS)

A little-known Track 2 initiative originated with the U.S. corporate sector. In early 1997, an American business delegation from the NGO Business Executives for National Security (BENS) arranged a visit to India and IDSA agreed to coordinate the visit. What initially seemed like just another foreign delegation coming to India acquired a different texture when then Indian ambassador to the United States, Naresh Chandra, met with Subbu and Jasjit and indicated that this was more than a routine visit—and that the PM would also meet with the BENS team led by Stanley Weiss.

4 George K. Tanham, *Indian Strategic Thought: An Interpretive Essay*, R-4207-USDP, Rand Corporation (1992). <https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/reports/2007/R4207.pdf>. Accessed November 12, 2024.

5 For more on these proposals, see Manjeet S. Pardi, "The Indo-U.S. Defence Relationship: Prospects and Limitations," in Rajesh Basur et al., eds., *India's Military Modernization: Challenges and Prospects* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 230-258.

I was the sherpa from the Indian side and tasked to plan the BENS visit with the U.S. Embassy, which was ably led by Ambassador Frank Wisner and Raphael Benaroya, the India expert assisting Mr. Weiss. The BENS delegation consisted mainly of CEOs of major U.S. companies seeking business opportunities in the newly liberalizing Indian economy. None of them had ever visited India.

The 1997 BENS visit to Delhi was a major success. The team met with many layers of Indian society, including the Ministry of Defence and the top brass of the Indian military. They also met with PM Gujral. The takeaway that Weiss conveyed to the PM was that the real India story was not being heard in the inner circles of the DC Beltway. Mr. Gujral suggested that Weiss should tell the story in his widely read column in the *International Herald Tribune*.

Weiss recalled the background to the lead story in the September 26, 1997 edition of the *Calcutta Telegraph*, which read: “Why did the U.S. President Bill Clinton, undoubtedly one of the busiest heads of state, seek a meeting with the Indian Prime Minister, I.K. Gujral, in New York at the United Nations? The answer is a four-letter word: BENS. Business Executives for National Security.” Track 2 had made headlines.

A personal recollection illustrates the intangible, nonlinear outcomes of Track 2/1.5 initiatives. With the India-U.S. official relationship frozen after the May 1998 Indian nuclear tests, Delhi was exploring various options for India to reach out to Washington, and BENS was in the right place at the right time to play an invaluable role. Ambassador Naresh Chandra recounted later that he asked Stanley Weiss to arrange a non-official preliminary meeting with key U.S. officials from State and the Department of Defense (DOD). The Indian MEA sent Mr. K. Subrahmanyam and me as the first of four such teams to engage with U.S. officials in the fall of 1998. Others involved included J.N. Dixit, Jasjit Singh, and C. Raja Mohan.

After meetings in DC, Subbu and I visited New York and Boston and engaged with think tanks, business leaders, and academia to convey the Indian rationale for the nuclear tests. This was part of the irrigation process that helped remove some of the poison from U.S.-India relations.

To their credit, the political leadership on both sides (Clinton and Vajpayee) and their senior ministers (Strobe Talbott and Jaswant Singh) engaged in the historic “four legs of the elephant” negotiations and crafted a rapprochement soon after the Kargil War of 1999. Despite the nagging issue of U.S. and UN sanctions, in which my friend and the editor of this volume were deeply involved, the Clinton visit to India in early 2000 was a huge and enduring success. The tentative engagement between the two prickly democracies laid the foundation for high-level strategic dialogue between India and the United States.

Aspen Study Group-Confederation of Indian Industry

In the 10 years between 1990 to 2000, a once arid and prickly bilateral ecosystem was increasingly receptive to new initiatives. In retrospect, I would flag the contribution of the U.S.-based Aspen Strategy Group (ASG) as a significant Track 2 effort. As it

evolved in scope, the ASG deliberations sowed the seeds for major breakthroughs in the U.S.-India relationship, including the 2005 civilian nuclear agreement.

Towards the end of President Clinton's second term in 2000, the ASG conceived of a major Track 2/1.5 effort to take what was then a fledgling strategic relationship to the next level. ASG drew participants from former officials with past senior-level policymaking experience, think tanks, academia, industry, and the media. Members of the U.S. Congress and Indian members of Parliament were also invited to join the discussions.

On the Indian side, the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) led by Tarun Das partnered with the Aspen Institute. They decided to keep their meetings quiet, hence there is little in the public domain regarding what was discussed in these gatherings. In January, a meeting of Indian and American thought leaders in Udaipur collaborated to build on the Clinton-Vajpayee rapprochement. The CII and Aspen leadership instructed them to "think big." The U.S. participants included heavyweights such as Henry A. Kissinger and Joseph Nye, among others. The Indian delegation included well-known industrialist Ratan N. Tata, Tarun Das of CII, former cabinet secretary and ambassador to the U.S. Naresh Chandra, former IDSA director K. Subrahmanyam, and Jayant Prasad, the senior official from MEA.

Indian participants recall the Udaipur meeting as being very helpful in broadening the bilateral strategic and security dialogue. They agreed that defense ties had the potential to emerge as a big win for both countries. The ASG discussions were particularly valuable for reviewing the fine print related to U.S. export controls and how they could be rendered more enabling to allow for expanded commerce with India.

One of the former officials noted that having Henry Kissinger among the U.S. participants at the Udaipur meeting sent a powerful signal to Delhi about American intent, given that then-Secretary Kissinger had led the charge in 1974 to place India under what Delhi perceived to be a "technology apartheid" regime. It was evident that the U.S.-India Strategic Dialogue was steadily gaining traction and this was reflected in the annual Aspen meetings.

The follow-on Aspen-CII meeting held in Jaipur in early 2005 was particularly significant. The U.S. side was led by Professor Nye and the Indian team by Ambassador Naresh Chandra. Government officials were present in their personal capacity, fitting the definition of a Track 1.5. George W. Bush was beginning his second term and there was considerable attention being paid by the White House to the relationship with India and its relevance for the emerging geopolitics of Asia. On the Indian side, PM Manmohan Singh was well aware of the need to build on the Vajpayee-Clinton rapprochement. In retrospect, he may have known the time was right for big initiatives.

Indian participants at the 2005 Jaipur meeting recall the deliberations as very productive and included various formulations to address nuclear issues. Some believe that the seeds of the July 2005 India-U.S. civilian nuclear cooperation agreement originated with the Jaipur deliberations, which itself was made possible by the successful irrigation of India-U.S. relations by a number of Track 2/1.5 efforts since 1990.

The Utility of Track 2 in Reconciling Views on Nuclear Policies

Despite the eventual transformation of India-U.S. relations, the nuclear nettle has bedeviled the bilateral relationship. Differing attitudes towards the 1974 Peaceful Nuclear Explosion and especially the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty created longstanding tensions between Delhi and Washington. Nuclear export controls exacerbated those tensions. Then the Cold War ended without a shot being fired and consigned the Soviet Union to the annals of history, leaving the United States as the sole hegemonic power. The George H.W. Bush administration's swift victory over Iraq and the liberation of Kuwait in January 1991 seemed to reinforce the perception that the United States stood alone at the apex of world power. Yet, the India-U.S. bilateral relationship was still stuck in the past.

Nuclear nonproliferation was a major U.S. policy objective, and Washington viewed India as an outlier that had steadfastly refused to sign the NPT as a non-nuclear weapon state. The Clinton administration in its first term (1993-97) made non proliferation a policy objective and pressured India to curtail its nuclear progress. When Washington accused India of surreptitiously preparing to carry out a nuclear test in 1995, the administration renewed pressure on Delhi to sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). With such discord at official levels, what help was Track 2 or Track 1.5?

The May 1998 Shakti nuclear tests plummeted India-U.S. relations to new lows, with sanctions imposed under the aforementioned Nuclear Nonproliferation Act (NNPA) deepening the rift. Yet by March 2000, U.S. President Bill Clinton was addressing a joint session of the Indian parliament in New Delhi and received a standing ovation. This extraordinary *bonhomie*—less than two years after the May 1998 tests and India's crossing the nuclear Rubicon—led some to believe that Track 2/1.5 held significant potential for mending fences. Soon after the nuclear tests, an increasing array of Track 2/1.5 engagements addressed the contentious nuclear issues in support of Track 1 diplomacy.

The George W. Bush presidency (2001–2009) and the tenure of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh (2004–2014) brought a remarkable transformation in U.S.-India ties and the resolution of nagging nuclear issues. The signing of the civilian nuclear agreement of 2005 that later evolved into the passage of a formal civil nuclear cooperation agreement under section 123 of the Atomic Energy Act in September 2008 paved the way for India to be accorded exceptional status as a state with nuclear weapons but without joining the NPT. Here too, a flurry of government and NGO-sponsored Track 2 and 1.5 engagements played an important role in sorting through and irrigating contentious issues related to the nuclear agreement and the civil nuclear cooperation agreement passed by the U.S. Congress.

Knowledgeable individuals from both sides participated in a variety of Track 2 and 1.5 engagements aimed at finding common ground on nuclear issues. This was an extraordinary achievement for both nations. And while it may be true that official Track 1 diplomacy did most of the heavy lifting, Track 2 and Track 1.5 provided valuable irrigation services for the prickly national security ecosystems that were both more

attuned to finding reasons not to cooperate. This turn of events in India-U.S. relations was an example of Track 2 and 1.5 clearing the way for Track 1 to achieve mutually beneficial objectives.

Assessing the Value of Track 2 and Track 1.5

Each government and the key officials on both sides would have differing perspectives about the utility and added value of Track 2 and Track 1.5 efforts. To that extent, it would be difficult to accurately gauge the cumulative impact of all these initiatives. The ones I cite here were large-scale efforts conceived to put India-U.S. relations on a better footing for the future. Other Track 2/1.5 dialogues have focused on specific aspects of the relationship, such as nuclear cooperation, deterrence, and strategic stability. Some have tried to address India-Pakistan relations and have floated ideas for arms control and confidence building measures between the nuclear rivals. Others have addressed the role of China in South Asia and competition in the evolving maritime domain. A steady stream of scholarly Track 2 meetings over the years have no doubt produced great insights and fostered many enduring friendships. Track 1.5 meetings have channeled those insights to decisionmakers. In my view, the broadly focused, high-level engagements recalled here have had the most influence on the course of events. For the future, I remain optimistic that these mechanisms will be useful in sorting out discordant issues that will undoubtedly arise in the future.

Assessing South Asia Track 2: A Pakistan Perspective from Enthusiasm to Paranoia

Brig. Feroz Hassan Khan (ret.)

Pakistan's approach to Track 2 and Track 1.5 has vacillated from enthusiasm to skepticism to outright paranoia. There exists a rich history of engagement with Pakistan encompassing both positive and negative experiences. Pakistani academics and participating former officials acknowledge that Track 2/1.5 engagements brought rich dividends in terms of a better comprehension of strategic affairs, as well as an improved understanding of foreign perceptions about Pakistan. Most participants agree that Track 2/1.5 dialogues enhance their prestige and expose them to new insights and opportunities. Moreover, Track 2/1.5 proceedings have brought together Indians and Pakistanis and fostered personal friendships and mutual respect that counteracts the legacy of mistrust and suspicion that divides the Indian subcontinent.

However, despite years of positive experiences, Pakistani officials have grown skeptical. In their view, Track 2 and especially Track 1.5 are useful only if they complement official government Track 1 positions. They increasingly demand unified positions on all national security issues. While in the past military officials encouraged Track 2/1.5 participation, Pakistani officials—especially the nuclear bureaucracy—consider diverse, independent views to be contrary to national interests. Over time, Pakistani participants, especially former officials, have been dissuaded from attending Track 2/1.5 events. Nevertheless, it is my personal observation that there is tension between those who continue to value Track 2/1.5 and those who view them as undesirable.

This paper evaluates Pakistan's changing perspective on Track 2/1.5 engagements based on my three decades of experience, both as a participant and as principal investigator. The first section examines the initial enthusiasm phase and explains Pakistan's expectations and outcomes from Track 2/1.5 engagements, especially during periods of warmth in relations with India and upswings in relations with the United States. The second section covers the causes of disappointment and growing skepticism, especially in a period when tensions with India were high and Islamabad's relations with United States and the West were backsliding. The third section explains the transition from skepticism to frustration, increasing intolerance for dissent and non-acceptance of widening debate on strategic issues. The final section is my net assessment of the value and impact of Track 2/ 1.5 and offers a prognosis for future engagements.

The Enthusiasm Phase

Pakistan's shifting skepticism and enthusiasm towards Track 2/1.5 engagement dialogues derives from two historical phenomena. The first is the tendency

towards skepticism drawing from the Mughal era and the colonial period that was characterized by palace intrigues, political betrayals, and conspiracies which affected the mindset of South Asian society. Pakistanis often suspect conspiracies or hidden intent, even behind good faith initiatives such as our Track 2/1.5 programs. Yet, they are still eager to participate and appreciate opportunities to be included in foreign activities. From my perspective as a South Asian myself, these attitudes are rooted in the culture and traditions of the British colonial legacy. London prioritized sending top British civil servants and military professionals to British India to study the history and local culture. British military officers in India were viewed as soldier-scholars who were “brave on the battlefield and wise at the campfire.” They sought to earn the respect of the tribes and peoples they studied on the Indian subcontinent, especially in the areas that now constitute Pakistan.⁶ Throughout the 20th century, senior Pakistani military officers followed this tradition by proudly engaging in intellectual activities, writing books on military history and strategic affairs. The military career of young officers—including this author—advanced under the influence and admiration of such traditions. Track 2/1.5 interactions were a derivative of such a culture and were considered a platform for exchanging ideas, assessing the intentions of others, testing the robustness of one’s own policies, and a means for back-channel messaging to allies and adversaries.

India-Pakistan bilateral Track 2s began with the Neemrana Dialogues in 1991. This engagement involved former diplomats, military officials, and academics who attended with the backing of their respective governments.⁷ In this regard it fit the definition of what we now call Track 1.5. Both countries were in the early stages of developing nuclear capabilities and both were embroiled in major military crises, including the 1984 Golden Temple Sikh Crisis, the 1986-87 Brasstacks Crisis, and the 1990 Kashmir Crisis. Additionally, amid fears that India was planning preventive strikes on Kahuta Laboratories to destroy Pakistan’s nascent centrifuge facilities, India and Pakistan had signed a formal agreement not to attack each other’s civil nuclear facilities as well as several bilateral military confidence building measures.⁸ The Neemrana Track 1.5 dialogue had a rich agenda and seemingly flourished in spite

6 Stephen P. Cohen describes the character of the two armies as they evolved after Partition in his two books, *The Indian Army: Its Contribution to the Development of a Nation*, 2nd edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990) and *The Pakistan Army*, 2nd edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

7 Samir Ahmad, “Track-Two Dialogue in the India-Pakistan Context,” Institute of South Asian Studies, National University of Singapore, ISAS Brief No 408 (February 23, 2016). https://www.isas.nus.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/media/isas_papers/ISAS%20Brief%20No.%20408.%20Track-Two%20Dialogue%20in%20the%20India-Pakistan%20Context.pdf. Accessed May 24, 2024.

8 The Agreement on Non-Attack on Nuclear Installations was signed in December 1988 and in April 1991 India and Pakistan signed two military CBMs, “Agreement on Advance Notification on Military Exercises, Maneuvers, and Troop Movements” and “Agreement on Prevention of Airspace Violations and for Permitting Overflights and Landings by Military Aircraft.” See <http://www.stimson.org/2012/confidence-building-and-nuclear-risk-reduction-measures-south-asia/>.

of regional tensions, growing concerns over proliferation, and the approaching end of the Cold War.⁹ It was the calm before the storm.

Track 2 and 1.5 expanded throughout the 1990s, with worldwide think tanks engaging Islamabad-based think tanks primarily on nonproliferation and regional security issues. At the time, Islamabad was experiencing a sense of abandonment by Washington, a close Cold War ally and partner in defeating Moscow's invasion of Afghanistan. This partnership was replaced with sanctions for Pakistan's nuclear development. From a Pakistani perspective, its nuclear capability was absolutely essential to offset India's conventional force advantage and would not harm anyone else. Pakistan's initial interest in Track 2/1.5 was to promote the cause of liberating Kashmir from India and secondarily to address the nuclear sanctions under the Pressler Law that cut the supply of U.S. weapons in 1990. However, U.S. think tanks sought to engage Pakistan on a wide range of issues shaping the post-Cold War environment, including the Clinton administration's initiatives on arms control and non-proliferation such as the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), Fissile Material Control Treaty (FMCT), and strengthening global export control regimes. These issues were not high on Islamabad's list of priorities but provided opportunities to engage with U.S. experts.

Track 2/1.5 exploded after the 1998 nuclear tests. Official and unofficial delegations poured into Islamabad to discuss South Asian nuclear issues. Private foundations funded a variety of dialogues, workshops, and seminars focused on "the most dangerous place in the world." How would nuclear deterrence in South Asia affect regional stability and global world nuclear order? Two contrasting developments within a year of the nuclear tests provided more grist for the mill. First, the dramatic signing of the Lahore Agreement in February 1999 created a promising structure that raised hope for regional détente, stability, and conflict resolution. Second was the antithesis of hope that was the Kargil conflict—a short, intense border war on the Line of Control in Kashmir in the summer of 1999. These two opposing trends forecasted the strategic future of the Indian subcontinent and dominated Track 2/1.5 interactions.¹⁰

Pakistan's main interest in Track 2/1.5 was to mitigate nuclear test sanctions and promote a "strategic restraint regime" agreement with India that would free Pakistan from an unwinnable arms race. However, Washington's growing affection towards India dampened enthusiasm for these discussions. Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott led the official (Track 1) engagements with India and Pakistan but was increasingly viewed as tilting toward India and pressuring Pakistan.¹¹ After the Kargil war in 1999, Pakistan lost favor with Washington and hopes for the "strategic restraint

9 Pia Malhotra, "India and Pakistan: Need for Creative Solutions?" Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies New Delhi (March 5, 2010). https://www.ipcs.org/comm_select.php?articleNo=3068. Accessed November 12, 2024.

10 Feroz Hassan Khan, *Subcontinent Adrift: Strategic Futures of South Asia* (New York: Cambria Press, 2022).

11 Strobe Talbott, *Engaging India: Diplomacy, Democracy and the Bomb* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institutions Press, 2004).

regime” waned. As the U.S. courted India as a counterweight to China, Pakistan gravitated to China as its main strategic partner. Track 2/1.5 engagements could not change the direction of this emerging strategic realignment. Track 2 could frame the issues, but Track 1.5 was at a loss to offer policy options.

The September 11, 2001 terror attack changed everything. Pakistan was suddenly at the center of world politics. General Musharraf overthrew the civilian government of Nawaz Sharif following the Kargil military crisis in 1999 and declared martial law. With Track 1 operating in a frenzy of activity, Track 2/1.5 was once again in vogue. There were big issues of war and peace to discuss. In addition to the war in Afghanistan, the India-Pakistan military standoff in 2001-2002 and exposure of the A.Q. Khan proliferation network roiled the waters. Track 2 and Track 1.5 mushroomed, including several initiatives sponsored by the U.S. government. In particular, Peter Lavoy, a professor and South Asia specialist at the Naval Postgraduate School (NPS), developed a Track 1.5 program to engage top regional experts from Pakistan, India, and the United States to share their perspectives on the developing security environment in the region. Those experiences are documented in several volumes written by the participants in those early engagements.¹²

Most of the Track 2/1.5 events during this period focused on two main issues: the war in Afghanistan and nuclear stability. Against the backdrop of unprecedented cooperation on counterterrorism cooperation, disagreements about Pakistan’s support of the Taliban and their proxies made for some frank discussions. Nuclear issues provided a rich menu that included robust exchanges about nuclear and conventional doctrines, command and control, safety and security of nuclear weapons, crisis management, arms control, and confidence building measures. These bilateral U.S.-Pakistan Track 2/1.5 meetings mirrored ongoing Track 1 interactions and gave both U.S. and Pakistani participants opportunities to convey their assessments to their respective policymakers. Participating in Track 2/1.5 built on the tradition of soldier-scholar skills and expanded to include current and former civil servants as well as academic scholars in wide-ranging discussions with friends and adversaries about Pakistan’s vital national interests. Perhaps most importantly, the Track 2/1.5 forums provided opportunities for aspiring young scholars to learn about and contribute to discussions about military issues that were not often open for debate beyond official military and government circles. The post 9/11 period was something of a renaissance for intellectual advancement on national security issues for Pakistan, with Track 2/1.5 leading the way.

12 Two edited volumes were published from the Naval Postgraduate School Track-II Engagement on India- Pakistan crises. Peter R. Lavoy, ed., *Asymmetric Warfare in South Asia: The Causes and Consequences of the Kargil Conflict* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Zachary S. Davis, *The India-Pakistan Military Standoff: Crisis and Escalation in South Asia* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

From Disappointment to Skepticism

Within a decade, however, enthusiasm began to fade. Pakistan expected more concrete results from its status as a major non-NATO ally, and the growing American preference for India proved fatal for U.S.-led Track 2/1.5 engagements. After the U.S.-India nuclear deal (codified by the Hyde Act of 2008), Pakistanis began to resent the legitimization of India's nuclear weapons program while Pakistan was relegated to the proverbial proliferation doghouse. The exposure of the A.Q. Khan network in 2004 dominated Track 2 and Track 1.5 and left little room for broader discussion.¹³ Tensions over Afghanistan, the U.S. military operation that killed Osama Bin Laden, the accidental killing of Pakistani soldiers on the Afghani-Pakistani border (Salala Incident) and the shootout in Islamabad involving a U.S. intelligence operative (Raymond Davis) soured U.S.-Pakistani relations on every level. On nuclear issues, Pakistan's response to India's controversial Cold Start doctrine involved development of short-range tactical nuclear weapons (TNWs) such as the Nasr/ Hatf-9 and the declaration of its "full spectrum nuclear deterrence" strategy. At a time when these developments merited serious expert discussion, the overall environment made Track 2/1.5 much more difficult.

The negative atmosphere caused skepticism within official Pakistani circles. Nevertheless, Track 2/1.5 engagements continued, even if they were mainly viewed as a forum to convey Pakistani grievances. Our U.S. government sponsors continued to value both Track 2 and Track 1.5 as important venues to discuss nuclear security and risk reduction issues, especially the implications of TNWs for strategic stability. Prior to Pakistan's introduction of TNWs, nuclear Track 2/1.5 discussions revolved around deterrence stability and the implications of India's Cold Start doctrine that most experts believed would cross Pakistan's redlines for survival and resort to nuclear use. The Indian army planned to wage a short, intensive cross-border punitive invasion of Pakistan, but terminate operations before crossing Pakistan's nuclear threshold. In response to Cold Start, Pakistan asserted its full spectrum strategy, with explicit threats to use nuclear weapons on its own territory to repel any Indian crossborder assault. Experts agreed that this mismatch of doctrines posed significant risks of nuclear escalation.

In this phase of U.S.-Pakistan Track 1.5, U.S. experts shared their experiences with TNW deployment challenges in the Cold War. Track 1.5 was better suited to discussions about sensitive topics. These discussions addressed the inherent risks of TNW and the blurring of the distinction between warfighting and deterrence. Pakistani participants took seriously the American experience and shared their knowledge with stakeholders in Pakistan. Building on these bilateral Track 1.5 meetings, we developed a series of Crisis Simulation Tabletop exercises (TTXs) that involved former military, diplomatic, and academic experts from India and Pakistan to experiment with different scenarios

¹³ Pakistan's bilateral Track II dialogues with India turned bitter after the Mumbai terror incident in November 2008 affected bilateral relations between India. Only U.S.-led Track II initiatives continued that provided a forum for interaction between the two countries.

of deterrence and crisis escalation. The TTXs (which are described in the chapter by Andrew Winner) transformed the nature of Track 1.5 and provided startling findings for everyone involved. Many participants have told this author in private that they had not fully understood the risks of escalation and challenges of nuclear employment until they participated in our Track 1.5 events, especially the TTXs.

Even as official skepticism grew, Pakistan continued to participate. On the U.S. side, the Obama administration engaged Pakistan in strategic dialogues at the Track 1 level, including the nuclear security summits that lasted until 2016. In Pakistan, there was a forlorn hope for a U.S.–Pakistan nuclear deal that would legitimize Pakistan’s nuclear program, as had been done for India. In Track 2/1.5, we discussed a possible “grand bargain” that would bring Pakistan into the Nuclear Supplier Group in exchange for restraints on Pakistan nuclear and missile growth. Various Track 2 forums, including one at Stanford University, attempted to draft a roadmap for “normalizing” Pakistan’s nuclear program by separating its civilian and military programs along the lines that had been drawn for India. These efforts collapsed as official circles in Pakistan grew increasingly dubious about American intentions.¹⁴

The arrival of the Narendra Modi administration in India in 2014 deepened skepticism about the prospects of improving Pakistan-India relations. Internal political unrest in Pakistan did not encourage honest dialogue with the Americans, much less Indian nuclear experts. Track 2 reflected the increasingly confrontational perspectives in New Delhi and Islamabad. Track 1.5 was subject to even more negative attitudes. When the Trump administration stalled the strategic dialogue to focus on Pakistan’s role in Afghanistan, it accentuated Pakistan’s growing sense of isolation. The Pakistani nuclear establishment grew more critical of Track 2 and Track 1.5 and acutely sensitive to U.S. criticism of its nuclear policies.

The New Era of Paranoia and Control

Pakistani authorities value Track 2/1.5 as complimentary to Track 1. Thus, if Track 1 faces difficult obstacles, they expect Track 2/1.5 to reflect those problems. As a result, Pakistani nuclear authorities decided to monitor and control Track 2/1.5 interactions. Moreover, they threatened to penalize participants who diverted from the official narrative or were critical of official Pakistani policies. This included senior Pakistani military and diplomatic officials who had participated in Track 2/1.5 for many years.¹⁵ Old resentments about U.S. nonproliferation policies and sanctions on Pakistan resurfaced. American think tanks and individuals with long experience with U.S.–Pakistan relations were viewed as hostile to Pakistan. Even more disappointing,

14 The Stanford Track 2 U.S.–Pakistan Dialogue was held from 2012 until 2018 with several iterations. The initiative was led by former Secretary State George Shultz and Secretary of Defense William Perry with a group of top former officials and experts. The broad-spectrum agenda covered three baskets of concerns: war in Afghanistan, nuclear and military issues, and economic cooperation.

15 A flag rank retired Air Force officer on the faculty of National Defense University, Islamabad was sacked from his job after he was reported to have expressed dissenting views on a Track 2 dialogue.

some Pakistani security officials began to view Track 2—and especially Track 1.5—as an instrument to obtain classified information about Pakistan’s nuclear secrets. Far from supporting Track 1 by enriching understanding and exploring opportunities to advance relations, Track 2/1.5 was seen as a threat that had to be controlled.

Not everyone in Pakistan agreed with this xenophobic approach to Track 2/1.5. Internal politics and especially leadership changes within the nuclear bureaucracy encouraged hardline attitudes which stood in contrast with the traditions of soldier-scholar engagement with the outside world. A new generation of officials promoted a culture where holding diverse views on nuclear issues was deemed unpatriotic and not tolerated. Free thinking scholars were viewed as untrustworthy. What was the benefit of “Track 2 dialogues broaching subjects that were not openly discussed in Pakistan and/or considered exclusively the domain of current or selective former military officers and like-minded diplomats.”¹⁶ Another official perspective was that Track 2/1.5 dialogues encouraged critical analysis that weakens public confidence in the value of nuclear deterrence and undermines the military’s exclusive control of nuclear policies. Authorities also feared that open debate exposed flaws in strategic thinking and raised difficult questions about resources and priorities. Pakistani nuclear establishment imposed a policy of “forced consensus” on strategic issues.

Gradually the concerns of the Pakistani nuclear establishment turned into paranoia that the world was out to get them. Participation of former officials was subjected to control, including demands for official clearance before attending Track 2/1.5 meetings. Even academics were dissuaded from attending Western-sponsored Track 2 events. Certain Western organizations and think tanks were blacklisted, and several highly respected U.S scholars on South Asia security and nuclear issues were denied visas to visit the country. Restrictions were imposed on Pakistani think tanks who now needed clearance from authorities to engage with western officials.

Not everyone in Pakistan agreed with the clampdown on strategic thought. The Foreign Ministry, other branches of the military, progressive thinkers, former officials, and former scientists rejected the campaign to stifle debate. They argued that the official policy of control and disengagement constituted self-inflicted isolation and harmed Pakistan’s position in global affairs. In some cases, Pakistani institutions found themselves issuing contradictory guidance, with one approving engagement and another opposing. In some instances, senior former officials were forced to return from attending Track 2/1.5 meetings after they had received clearance from one authority only to be denied by another.¹⁷ The trend, however, was clear; Pakistan was shutting down its longstanding and highly valued involvement in Track 2/1.5.

16 Author discussions with several former nuclear establishment officials in knowledge of the policy. Many told me that it was personality driven to maintain control over choices of participants and even driven by jealousy and envy.

17 In one particular case, a senior former civil servant was summoned to return midway from a journey to attend a Track 2 event. In another case, a former military officer was asked to decline participation on arrival for the event.

Net Assessment: The Future of Track 2/1.5 Engagements with Pakistan

The domestic situation within Pakistan is far from stable. There is widespread public resentment over governance, the economy, and the credibility of state institutions. Yet, Pakistani society has repeatedly surprised everyone with its resilience. Despite efforts to control and silence public voices, Pakistani citizens still have multiple platforms to express their views. Next-generation scholars are defying efforts to control them by writing papers, publishing books and articles, and speaking at webinars. There is intense competition for scholarships at foreign universities and fellowships with U.S. think tanks. Young scholars still seek opportunities to participate in Track 2/1.5 events, including our Track 1.5 meetings and TTXs. Pakistani scholars have described their participation in Track 2/1.5 as a “transformative experience” and the event organizers as “invisible architects” for supporting an informal strategic community from both Pakistan and India.¹⁸ Indeed, Indian and Pakistani participants at Track 2/1.5 have forged valuable relationships, despite ongoing tensions between their governments. This constituency of young South Asia nuclear analysts may be the primary achievement of decades of Track 2/1.5 engagements.

It seems clear to the wide strategic community in Pakistan that efforts to control strategic thought is counterproductive and results in dangerous isolation. In this age of information and social media, efforts to impose an official state-sanctioned narrative on nuclear issues is delusional. Forcing Pakistani think tanks to be echo chambers of groupthink makes them irrelevant, and stifling the voices of the next generation of scholars breeds contempt and frustration. Gagging the respected perspectives of former officials and serious scholars creates resentment, disaffection, and ultimately dissent. As a result of these trends, Pakistan’s strong traditions of a strategic culture that once promoted scholarly pursuits is disappearing and taking with it the prospects for future Track 2/1.5 dialogues with the United States.

From an international perspective, remaining disengaged from an advanced nuclear-armed country in a conflict-prone region is an undesirable option. The world wants to engage with Pakistan. However, accepting official demands to control the agenda and participation not only prevents the free exchange of ideas, but rewards the machinations of those who want to silence independent thought and impose an outdated official narrative. Disengagement, however, leaves a void in the effort to understand the risks and dangers inherent in nuclear weapons, no matter who possesses them, and leaves the final word on these topics to unrestrained media speculation. In my view, articulation of Pakistani policies, strategic thinking, and rationale for its strategic programs is best initiated by Pakistani experts. Track 2 and Track 1.5 remain the most robust avenues for communicating Pakistan’s strategic interests to U.S. and international audiences. It’s not too late to open the doors to the new soldier-scholars and the huge pool of talented young scholars to engage the world anew on the strategic challenges of our times.

¹⁸ Rabia Akhtar, “Invisible Architects: The Agency of Third Parties and its Structural Impact on the Indo-Pak Nuclear Dyad” (University of Lahore), unpublished manuscript shared with this author.

Developing Expertise Through Pakistan

Track 2: Lessons Learned and the Way Forward

Adam Radin

I entered the South Asia nuclear weapons conundrum as a 24-year old with nearly no knowledge on South Asia historical dynamics and constantly looking like a deer caught in the headlights. Working as a research assistant at the Naval Postgraduate School (NPS) from 2005-2007 thrust me into a unique era of U.S-Pakistan relations due to the Global War on Terror. Both sides perceived that strategic interests were aligning, at least at the moment, which cracked the door open to expanded dialogues on nuclear weapons and South Asian strategic stability. Pakistan, still fresh off its international embarrassment of the A.Q. Khan proliferation network, was likely eager to engage in rehabilitating its image. The United States had overarching concerns of a developing nation growing its nuclear weapons stockpile in an unstable environment.

I knew little of this at the time, but in hindsight the dialogues, canned talking points, frustrating lectures and circular arguments, and especially the side conversations were a crash course in the Pakistani nuclear weapons *raison d'etre*. Over the course of my years at the NPS helping in the planning, note taking, and report writing, these dialogues allowed me to pick up quickly on Pakistan's rationale for credible deterrence against its perceived Indian existential threat. Additionally, behind all the justifications for why they had a nuclear weapons program and willingness to hear us explain our lessons learned from the Cold War, the undercurrent of a transactional U.S.-Pakistan relationship was always present, no matter what the topic.

This was heard firsthand with meetings in preparation for the Track 1.5 discussions with Pakistani officials in Islamabad. I was suddenly participating in preparatory meetings with heads of the Pakistan's Strategic Plans Division (LTG Khalid Kidwai), the Director of Inter-Services Intelligence (at the time General Asfaq Pervez Kayani), academics at Quaid-e-Azam University, officers at Pakistan's National Defense University, and former and current Pakistani government officials. Additionally, we were meeting with U.S. government officials from the Department of State to include the U.S. Ambassador to Pakistan, the Department of Defense, and the Department of Energy. All of this led to what was the most surreal experience of my career, having my birthday celebrated with former President Pervez Musharraf (see image) and attempting (with my boss at the time) to convince him to go on Jon Stewart's *The Daily Show* to promote his soon-to-be released autobiography. Little did we know that we would succeed—but that is a story for another time.

All of these experiences with participating in Track 1.5/2s were transformational for my professional life. In no other instance could I quickly understand the complexities of Pakistan's strategic arguments than through hearing it directly from their spokespersons. Even after I left NPS, I continued to participate in multiple Pakistan Track 1.5/2s as an observer and found them consistently revelatory.



The author celebrating his birthday with the President of Pakistan, General Pervez Musharraf

Granted, while many of the statements and discussions followed consistent patterns, at a minimum, knowing the public-facing arguments are important, and nuanced changes in responses from questioning can be revelatory. To this day, lessons that I learned from these Track 1.5/2s are still the foundation of my understanding to the South Asia strategic dynamic.

With these lessons in mind, I was asked to examine the history of Pakistan Track 1.5/2 dialogues by reviewing conference reports and interviewing key participants and contributors to these events. My findings below explore what the U.S. government gains from these dialogues, the pro and cons of these events, and how can we continue to engage in the absence of consistent Track 1 dialogues. Below you will find the results of this study.

Key Findings

Over the past 40 years, Pakistan has continued to develop and expand its nuclear weapon program to include a wide range of nuclear weapons and delivery systems. The United States has seen Pakistan's nuclear weapon program as a potential national security threat—whether through concerns over Pakistan's nuclear security vulnerabilities, the potential for an Indo-Pakistani conflict escalating to nuclear weapon use, or longer-range nuclear-capable missiles that could target U.S. interests. The United States has employed multiple carrot-and-stick strategies over the past four decades in an attempt to rein in the Pakistani nuclear program. Part of this strategy has been the use of both official government-to-government interactions (i.e., Track 1 dialogues) and unofficial, typically academic dialogues hosted by think tanks or universities (i.e., Track 2 dialogues), as well as Track 1.5 dialogues wherein current and former government officials participate on an unofficial basis (see sidebar).

The United States has used each type of forum with the distinct goals of 1) influencing the debate within Pakistan on the costs and dangers of expanding its nuclear weapon program; 2) better understanding Pakistan's nuclear doctrine, conflict escalation expectations, and warfighting plans; and 3) inducing Pakistan to prioritize safety and security in its thinking about deterrence and strategic stability. This report evaluates the record of these Track 1.5 and Track 2 engagements from the perspective of the value provided to the U.S. government. Although it is unrealistic to expect that Pakistan's stance on nuclear developments would change significantly in the near term, providing alternative approaches and fostering debate may eventually affect Pakistan's evolving interpretation of deterrence and the role of nuclear weapons in its national security policy.

Starting with the renewed United States–Pakistan partnership after September 11, 2001 (9/11), U.S. policy focused on issues of nuclear security, and we urged Pakistan to improve security in connection with the global war on terrorism. These concerns were amplified by the A.Q. Khan scandal, which illustrated Pakistan as an irresponsible nuclear steward. From 2001 to 2011, these issues were the focus of Track 2 interactions, despite Pakistani assurances that its weapons and materials

were secure. Pakistan had two primary objectives for nuclear-weapon-related Track 2 engagements: (1) repair the damage that the A.Q. Khan proliferation network inflicted on Pakistan's reputation and project Pakistan as a responsible nuclear steward, and (2) justify its nuclear weapon program as essential to Pakistan's survival against an existential threat from India.¹⁹ From at least 2011, Pakistan has focused on crafting and controlling its narrative of minimum credible nuclear deterrence against India—despite arguments that its expanding nuclear weapon arsenal poses a variety of risks for proliferation and stability.

The United States and Pakistan are experiencing a lull in these Track 1.5/2 dialogues on nuclear weapon issues, largely due to the broader downturn in United States-Pakistan relations, but also because key Pakistani military leadership figures harbor deep suspicions about the intent and purpose of these engagements. However, this downturn is likely cyclical, and eventually the dialogues may restart as key military officials lose influence or retire. Both sides have found value in unofficial dialogue and have expressed the desire to reengage—especially as opportunities to interact on Track 1 issues are rarer than ever and highly constrained when they do occur.

Assessing the Lessons Learned

Through interviews with current and former U.S. Track 1.5/2 organizers, participants, and observers, as well as via review of conference reports from these exchanges, we found useful insights about the strengths and weaknesses of the dialogues and gleaned recommendations about how to improve them for the future, which we summarize as follows:

- Overall, a majority of individuals interviewed found that Track 1.5/2s are most effective when there is a lull in most official Track 1 engagements. During such lulls, Track 1.5/2 venues offer the only forum for strategic issues to be discussed. While it is clear that Pakistan has not abated its nuclear weapon development, the Track 1.5/2 dialogues on nuclear and strategic issues have allowed the United States to debate Pakistani assumptions, present counterarguments, and influence the debate within Pakistan.
- The nature of the exchanges varies according to participation, whether bilateral between the United States and Pakistan or also including Indian experts. Valuable insights have come from both variations. All of those interviewed agreed that these dialogues provide valuable insights into Pakistani and Indian thinking about nuclear weapons, and undoubtedly they have introduced important considerations on a variety of topics, including some that are very difficult to explore adequately in a Track 1 context.

19 F. Khan and D. Wueger, "United States Pakistan Strategic Partnership: A Track-Two Dialogue for Long-Term Security Cooperation," Conference Report Notes (December 2015).

- Additionally, these exchanges have evolved over time. The Pakistani Strategic Plans Division (SPD) initially embraced Track 1.5/2 fora after 9/11 but became increasingly distrustful as United States-Pakistan relations soured. Rather than keeping lines of communication open, some in Pakistan grew to believe that Track 1.5/2 should reflect trends in the overall relationship. For example, at Track 1.5/2 meetings SPD sent representatives that delivered prepared remarks and contentious narratives that undermined open discussion, according to participants and organizers. Pakistani experts are divided on the value of nuclear dialogues.
- Individuals interviewed for this project noted that many of the topics raised with Pakistan in Track 1.5/2 are “negative issues.” Specifically, nuclear weapon safety, security, use control, and terrorism issues have dominated these fora, leading many Pakistanis to believe that they are being lectured to or being influenced to change their policies.

Key Strengths of Track 1.5/2s

We found the following useful insights about the key strengths of Track 1.5/2 fora based on our review of conference reports and interviews with forum organizers, participants, and observers:

- Track 1.5/2 United States–Pakistan bilateral fora continue to be one of the limited open venues that the United States has to engage Pakistan on nuclear and strategic issues. These engagements, while dependent on the broader United States-Pakistan relationship, can help address incorrect assumptions made on both sides and allow each side to air grievances and challenge the existing strategic narrative. Additionally, these fora allow the U.S. side to test and explore certain concepts, such as confidence building measures and arms control discussions at a nonattribution level.
- In the last several years, the dialogues that garnered new insights and utility were those that included both Pakistanis and Indians. A series of tabletop exercises (TTXs) tested the common refrain that India and Pakistan know and understand each other better than anyone else and do not need outside help to manage their nuclear rivalry. These TTXs used realistic scenarios of potential nuclear use to test assumptions about deterrence thresholds and nuclear use.

The Way Ahead: Confronting Pakistani Distrust, New Topics to Consider, and How We Reengage and Influence

Among all the participants interviewed, there was consensus that Track 1.5/2 dialogues, at a minimum, illuminate assumptions that both sides have about Pakistani views on nuclear weapons. In addition to providing insights into Pakistani thinking about nuclear deterrence, safety, security, use control, and crisis management, these

dialogues also provide opportunities to reinforce U.S. policy positions and share (within appropriate security and export control guidelines) unclassified perspectives and literature regarding U.S. experiences. Such perspectives can potentially promote counterarguments toward unwise nuclear weapon developments that may permeate the Pakistani national security community. However, it will continue to be a challenge to engage the next generation of Pakistani arms control thinkers given this enduring distrust of the United States among the Pakistani military and government.

What Are New Topics to Consider or Previous Topics to Revisit?

After reviewing numerous dialogue-report conclusions and suggestions aimed at charting the way ahead—along with interviews for this project—several potential future topics are worth exploring, some of which have been discussed in the past and others that are novel. Assuming Pakistan is open to restarting these events, these topics could help revitalize Track 1.5/2s in conjunction with strategic nuclear issues, or they could be exclusive events. These topics include the following:

- Since we have covered cautionary tales of the past and they have not been absorbed by the Pakistanis, how do we discuss Pakistan's new nuclear weapon systems along with what they mean for future strategic stability in South Asia?²⁰
- With the introduction of new nuclear weapon systems in South Asia and Pakistani fears of a quick Indian conventional strike, we need to work through escalation and deescalation off ramps in future iterations. The consensus is that the international community will have less time to react and events will be accelerated, so these off ramps need to be played out.²¹
- One idea that has been proposed but has not been accepted by Pakistan is to formulate consequence management topics that would be less susceptible to canned, SPD-prepared talking points. Such topics could include an accidental nuclear-weapon detonation scenario or an attack on a nuclear power plant.²²

How and With Whom Do We Reengage?

Track 1.5/2s have generally included recently retired military officials, current and former policymakers, and academics. The inclusion of recently retired military officials from Pakistan usually provides the most relevant information on current strategic issues; however, the restrictions placed on them by SPD could continue to

20 Private communication, in-person interview conducted by author in Washington DC with former U.S. government official and current Track 2 participant (April 7, 2019).

21 Private communication, in person interview conducted by author in Washington DC with former U.S. government official and current Track 2 organizer (May 8, 2019).

22 Private communication, in-person interview conducted by author in Washington DC with former U.S. government official and current Track 2 organizer (April 7, 2019).

hamper their participation and contributions. Pakistan lacks any type of independent disarmament community, and there continues to be few youthful approaches to challenge the existing Pakistani nuclear weapons narrative. Given the challenge to counter the military's grasp and broaden the debate, interviewees provided suggestions on how and with whom to reopen these engagements:

- A recent India–Pakistan TTX included young academics who were able to interject new concepts of warfare, such as cyberattacks, that had not been considered or understood by individuals on both sides.²³ Continuing to add these new concepts of warfare into these engagements will likely require participants who are more knowledgeable on the subject matter and thus expand the expertise available to debate escalation and deescalation ladders. In these instances, these TTXs illustrated how much Pakistan and India differ in their thinking about the use of nuclear weapons and how they lack tools to defuse crises.
- The TTX events are constructed around separate United States–Pakistan and United States–India bilateral workshops that build conflict scenarios based on accurate depictions of Pakistani and Indian thinking and planning. These bilateral meetings are important for gaining buy in from South Asian experts and encourage them to offer genuine perspectives, but they also highlight that each country disregards each other's red lines, as well as understand each other very poorly.

Key Weaknesses of Track 1.5/2s

Based on interviews with U.S. Track 1.5/2 organizers, participants, and observers and on what conference reports indicated from these exchanges, we found the following useful insights about the weaknesses of the dialogues:

- In the last several years, Pakistan has restricted who participates in these engagements, which at times can limit the overall openness that the participants can provide in terms of free-flowing debate.²⁴ Several U.S. participants suggested continuing to push for a broader array of participants, including former or current Pakistan policymakers not controlled by the military, and to encourage a younger generation of Pakistani academics to possibly inject different viewpoints in the discussion. This approach, however, would move in the direction of Track 2 and away from Track 1.5.
- Because Pakistan increasingly restricts individuals invited to participate in Track

23 F. Hassan Khan, D. Wueger, A. Giesey, and R. Morgan, "South Asian Stability Workshop 2.0: A Crisis Simulation Report," Naval Postgraduate School, Number 2-16-001 (February 2016), p. 35. <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/36740682.pdf>. Accessed November 8, 2024.

24 Private communication, in-person interview conducted by author in Washington DC with former U.S. government official and current Track 2 organizer (April 9, 2019).

1.5/2 dialogues, the engagements can become limited in terms of the free flow of relevant information.

- U.S. government sponsors have used social media as another means of engaging South Asian scholars to facilitate advanced research on strategic stability and risk reduction issues. These include YouTube videos, online courses, and workshops with journalists. These methods have shown success in reaching a broad audience and have helped spur conversations and debates on arms control and nuclear doctrine issues.
- Several U.S. organizations have tried novel approaches to reach a broader audience by using video conference events. As a supplement to traditional engagements, these novel approaches are potentially useful.²⁵

Conclusion: Manage Expectations and Continue to Influence the Debate

If Track 1.5/2 engagements reemerge (with or without Track 1 to help inform), it will largely be up to the Pakistan Army and especially the leadership of the Strategic Plans Division to decide whether they continue Pakistan's reluctant approach to these engagements, or reopen the lines of communication. Those who see value in Track 1.5/2 remain hopeful that new leadership will embrace these methods to help improve United States–Pakistan relations and more specifically find common ground on strategic issues. Providing a menu of options, whether through traditional dialogues or virtual engagement, and continuing the TTXs could play an important role in building trust and laying the groundwork for renewed cooperation. Efforts such as continuing to explore Indian–Pakistani confidence-building measures and to initiate arms control discussions will be important for expanding Pakistan's deterrence perceptions. Significant changes in Pakistan's strategic calculus on nuclear and strategic developments may not be achievable in the near term, but continuing to provide alternative approaches and foster genuine debate, especially involving new generations of Pakistanis who are more familiar with untraditional forms of conflict, may eventually pay dividends in the evolution of deterrence and nuclear weapons policies in Pakistan.

²⁵ Ibid.

Expanding Knowledge Through India

Track 2: A 20-Year Assessment

Christopher Clary

When I started as an intern (in 2000) and then a research assistant (2001) at the Stimson Center in Washington DC, I had not heard of the phrase “Track 2” before. That omission in my practical education was soon rectified, however. A large part of my work at Stimson for the next two years was coordinating and executing a series of India-Pakistan Track 2 events with U.S. participants as facilitators. That was the beginning of a career where Track 2 gatherings have punctuated my life. For more than two decades, I have participated in one or two track 2 gatherings a year. This pacing is hardly exceptional—if anything it might be somewhat restrained—compared to many Track 2 participants. Yet it has been sufficient to give me a certain vantage on the Track 2 endeavor. Since I started at a young age, it has been more career defining for me than for others—who often take up the Track 2 circuit after their retirement from government service or following their attainment of academic laurels. In my career, Track 2 participation began before both my short stint in government service and prior to my pursuit of a PhD and an academic professorship.

Drawing on those experiences, in this essay I seek to situate the Track 2 endeavor as it pertains to the security issues of South Asia. During my career, I have seen that endeavor shift in its emphasis and composition in ways that I will attempt to describe in this chapter. After all, Track 2 is a format and that format can be employed by event organizers toward various ends. The participants, structures, and ends of Track 2 events have shifted repeatedly based on my limited vistas over these last two-plus decades. Finally, I turn to lessons learned and benefits gained from these multifarious efforts. While Track 2 efforts have likely accomplished less than many might have hoped, they have offered benefits more than compensatory for their modest costs.

Track 2 in South Asia: An Incomplete History

The idea that other channels of communication between states other than purely government-to-government ties could meaningfully advance diplomacy is an old one, but its current form is an outgrowth of a set of institutions and ideas that gained prominence toward the end of the Cold War. I will focus my discussion on elite-centered conceptions of Track 2, which privilege academics, media commentators, and especially retired government or military officials. Yet it is important to mention that sometimes people-to-people initiatives, occasionally referred to as citizen diplomacy, also receive the Track 2 title, even as they will not receive much attention in my account.

By the 1980s, many commentators had concluded that recurrent international meetings of scientists from the Western and Soviet blocs—named the Pugwash conferences based on their first meeting location in Nova Scotia—to discuss nuclear disarmament helped lay the foundation for late Cold War breakthroughs in arms control and reduction.²⁶ This idea would have sufficient currency to result in Pugwash and its living co-founder, Joseph Rotblat, receiving a Nobel Peace Prize in 1995.²⁷ The Pugwash vision of a second track of diplomacy sought the painstaking construction of an alternative ideational framework of mutual security that could bypass the stale thinking of official channels. In this vision, experts who were somewhat removed from the demands of politics but knew their technical domain could generate an epistemic community that could share knowledge and beliefs about how global politics functioned.²⁸ Eventually these beliefs might flow back to key decisionmakers at which point they might transform national policy.²⁹

Yet there was always another conception of Track 2 diplomacy that exists alongside the more activist and utopian vision. In this vision, Track 2 diplomacy does not seek to supplant the official channels. Rather, it seeks to advance national interests through quiet deliberations. Formal government-to-government talks produce too much media glare and even covert government-to-government talks suffer from the weight of official views that might one day face scrutiny from domestic hawks or powerful security establishments. Track 2 diplomacy can seek to explore difficult topics that official channels have difficulty discussing honestly. In one vision, then, Track 2 discussions seek to transform conceptions of national interests while another Track 2 discussion aims to advance those interests through unofficial dialogue.

A final important influence, in my view, on the Track 2 initiatives in South Asia were a series of highly fruitful meetings to understand the conduct and contours of the 1962 U.S.-Soviet Cuban missile crisis. Through a set of techniques that they would call “critical oral history,” James Blight and Janet Lang found that through gathering relevant policymakers with direct experience of an historical event alongside subject matter experts and permitting them to share their recollections and question each other, they could meaningfully advance the understanding of the event. That shared understanding, in turn, might ameliorate misperceptions or missteps in future crises.

26 Matthew Evangelista, *Unarmed Forces: The Transnational Movement to End the Cold War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999).

27 Richard W. Stevenson, “Peace Prize Goes to A-Bomb Scientist Who Turned Critic,” *The New York Times* (October 14, 1995). <https://www.nytimes.com/1995/10/14/world/peace-prize-goes-to-a-bomb-scientist-who-turned-critic.html>. Accessed November 8, 2024.

28 Peter Haas, “Introduction: Epistemic Communities and International Policy Coordination,” *International Organization* 46, no. 1 (1992), pp. 1-35, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/i327218> (accessed November 8, 2024); Emanuel Adler, “The emergence of cooperation: national epistemic communities and the international evolution of the idea of nuclear arms control,” *International Organization* 46, no. 1 (1992), pp. 101-145, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/i327218> (accessed November 8, 2024).

29 Thomas Risse-Kappen, “Ideas do not float freely: transnational coalitions, domestic structures, and the end of the cold war,” *International Organization* 48, no. 2 (1994), pp. 185-214. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/i327227>. Accessed November 8, 2024.

Blight and Lang's initiative began with just U.S. participants, but expanded to former Soviet ones as the Cold War ended.³⁰

While their aims and methodological underpinnings differ, Track 2 initiatives are characterized by their structure. A 1987 essay by Joseph Montville, who is commonly attributed as having coined the "Track 2" moniker, captures most of the characteristics that are associated with Track 2 efforts today.

Usually a workshop is held at a neutral site, most often a third country, away from workaday interruptions. Representatives of adversary groups and the third party or facilitator groups reside together there, usually in a hotel or resort, for a period of three to five days. Participants meet in plenary session and sometimes break up into small working groups. They take meals together and go as a group to pre-planned recreational events—tours, concerts, plays, and special dinners at noteworthy sites. Throughout the workshop, ample time is available for delegations to caucus and for individuals to meet one-on-one. Significant conversations take place among participants as they sit together on buses or boats or simply stroll around a tourist site.³¹

Track 2 initiatives are distinct from diplomatic back channels, which also can involve academic experts, journalists, or retired officials. Back channels typically involve a very small number of individuals, oftentimes just one or two, who are serving as a partially deniable conduit for official deliberations. Track 2 gatherings are larger affairs, sometimes involving individuals who may be involved in back channel dealings. In further contrast to established back channels, Track 2 participants often stress that they are not serving as a conduit for official deliberations, even when they are assumed to be doing so.

From the beginning of Track 2 initiatives, governments have been interested in controlling them. Governments consequently have various ways to encourage or discourage participation. One way for a government to signal acceptability of a dialogue—while also keeping that dialogue from veering too far from established parameters—is to send one or more government representatives to participate or merely observe. By convention, this has come to be referred to as Track 1.5, since it is neither purely official (Track 1) nor unofficial.

The first South Asian Track 2 event of which I am aware long predates my active participation in such events. In discussions of U.S.-India defense ties, though, many accounts and some old-timers mentioned that renewed explorations of defense partnership began at the end of the Cold War when the U.S. National Defense University invited a group from India's Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses to Washington DC in 1989. This was then reciprocated at an event held in Pune, India,

30 James G. Blight and Janet M. Lang, "Burden of Nuclear Responsibility: Reflections on the Critical Oral History of the Cuban Missile Crisis," *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology* 1, no. 3 (1995), pp. 225-264. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1207/s15327949pac0103_1. Accessed November 8, 2024.

31 Joseph V. Montville, "The Arrow and the Olive Branch: A Case for Track II Diplomacy," in *Conflict Resolution: Track Two Diplomacy*, John W. McDonald, Jr. and Diane B. Bendahmane, eds. (Washington DC: U.S. GPO, 1987), pp. 9.

in December 1990.³² By the third iteration of the event in 1992, the number of official government representatives seems to have matched or exceeded the nominally non-governmental ones, but government representatives appear to have been present in each of these early meetings.³³ Of note, the assistant secretary of defense for international security affairs headed the U.S. delegation while India's defense secretary headed the Indian delegation when they met in northern Virginia in 1992. As best I can tell, this forum ceased to gather—or at a minimum ceased to receive as much policymaker attention—later in the decade, perhaps because the Clinton administration was more focused on nonproliferation issues in its India ties.

By the time I began working as a young professional on South Asian security issues in 2000, overwhelming attention had shifted away from forging U.S.-India ties to instead contemplating new nuclear dangers in South Asia following the reciprocal overt nuclear tests in 1998 and the Kargil war in 1999. The suspension of normal India-Pakistan diplomatic relations in the aftermath of the December 13, 2001 terror attack on the Indian parliament provided further motivation for these Track 2 channels given the loss of most official tracks.

My earliest Track 2 events were explicitly focused on gathering esteemed Indian and Pakistani participants together to consider crisis and escalation pathways as well as confidence-building measures that might foreclose the worst possibilities from arising. From 2000 to 2005, I was involved in multiple rounds of distinct Track 2 initiatives hosted by the Stimson Center (funded by the Nuclear Threat Initiative, then anewly sponsoring entity), the University of Birmingham (funded by the British Foreign Office), and the U.S. Naval Postgraduate School (funded by the Defense Threat Reduction Agency).

At least one U.S. participant in one of these gatherings, Scott Sagan, had participated in Blight and Lang's Cuban Missile Crisis workshops and referenced their import in motivating his support for India-Pakistan Track 2 discussions. Some of these events were scenario driven, though these scenarios were short of the multi-round crisis simulations and wargames that would become more common in later years.³⁴

While some of this work was explicitly forward looking (such as that associated with my time at Stimson seeking to consider potential crises), other initiatives focused mostly on possible policy solutions (the Birmingham series as I recall was focused intensely on potential confidence-building measures). Still other work emphasized collaborative study of the recent past in order to learn lessons to be applied to the future: most notably large projects at the Naval Postgraduate School on the 1999

32 See Inder Malhotra, "Indo-U.S. Ties: Need to Concretise Resolves," *The Hindu* (April 11, 2001).

33 Institute for National Strategic Studies, *The United States and India in the Post-Soviet World: Proceedings of the Third Indo-U.S. Strategic Symposium* (Washington DC: National Defense University, 1993).

34 Michael Krepon and Ziad Haider, eds., *Reducing Nuclear Dangers in South Asia*, report no. 50 (Washington DC: The Henry L. Stimson Center, 2004).

Kargil War and the 2001-2002 military crisis, which produced two academic volumes based on participant contributions.³⁵

I went to work in government in 2006, by which time Track 2 energy had shifted. With official dialogue between India and Pakistan restarted, and U.S. policy toward South Asia officially de-hyphenated, Track 2 attention followed Track 1 interest. Now meetings were held to energize a nascent but promising bilateral U.S.-India relationship and stabilizing a troubled but important U.S.-Pakistan one. While there remained Track 2 attention with U.S. participation focused on nuclear dangers in South Asia, those events became a smaller portion of the overall mix of meetings in a given year.

My time in government also helped reinforce to me the Rashomon-like quality of the Track 2 enterprise. During my time in the Pentagon, I gained visibility on many topics, but if anything lost visibility on what was occurring in Track 2 dialogues. Perhaps my State Department colleagues had better visibility, but I am skeptical. My sense is foreign governments, at least the Indian and Pakistani governments, invest more energies into sustaining visibility into Track 2 dialogues, but that sense has somewhat weak evidentiary basis. Very few people in New Delhi, Islamabad, or Washington have visibility on more than just a handful of the dialogues ongoing at any time, which means any one person's sense of the overall energy in the Track 2 space will be fragmented and incomplete.

As an American, I had understandably less visibility on those tracks run by entities based outside the United States. Those could be purely bilateral Track 2 initiatives for India and Pakistan, such as the Neemrana Dialogue that began in 1991, but which has suffered many fits and starts. Similarly, India-Pakistan Track 2s organized by non-U.S. entities also are more interested in Indian and Pakistani participants than inviting American ones, and hence my visibility has been quite limited. Prominent examples include the Chaophraya Dialogue jointly organized by the Jinnah Institute and the Australia India Institute since 2008 (which gets its name from its recurrent Bangkok venue) and the Ottawa Dialogue which began in 2009 (and has tended to have more American participants than Neemrana or Chaophraya).

Sometimes, I have observed that one or both countries have been hesitant to permit direct Track 1.5 talks but have been willing to permit conversations along the sidelines of a bigger Track 1.5 multilateral forum. The Institute for International Strategic Studies' Muscat Dialogue has reportedly played this role in recent years.³⁶ In many ways, this reflects a concrete manifestation of a related trend which is that the Indian government (and by extension the Track 2 or 1.5 dialogues which it is inclined

35 Peter R. Lavoy, ed., *Asymmetric Warfare in South Asia: The Causes and Consequences of the Kargil Conflict* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Zachary S. Davis, *The India-Pakistan Military Standoff: Crisis and Escalation in South Asia* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

36 Rezaul Laskar, "India, Pak Officials Joined Muscat Event in September to Encourage Engagement," *Hindustan Times* (October 20, 2022). <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/india-pak-officials-joined-muscat-event-in-september-to-encourage-engagement-101666204541007.html>. Accessed November 8, 2024.

to look upon with favor) has been more interested in multilateral dialogues than purely bilateral ones. Now we have a language of mini-, pluri-, and multilateralism to describe these meetings, which can be gargantuan Track 1.5 productions or smaller, more carefully curated gatherings. Sometimes the host nation seems to welcome the opportunity to use modest sponsoring funds and visa facilitation work as a way to achieve outsized influence. The German Marshall Fund's India-Europe-U.S. trilateral dialogue in Stockholm, Sweden, was an early and successful example of a large, but not vast, multilateral gathering.

For conference organizers, multilateralism has an added advantage of insulating the event from catastrophic failure in the event that one of the participating delegations is encouraged not to attend at the last minute by their government as a way to express displeasure. This displeasure has at least two varieties in my experience. The first is displeasure that Track 2 forums are mucking about in areas that the governments should handle in Track 1 exclusively. In this variety, Track 1 dialogue would be permissible, but there is a perceived loss of status and/or control where one of the implicated governments wants to cancel Track 2 as a means to encourage Track 1 talks. The second variety is displeasure where one of the implicated governments wants to discourage all dialogue along all tracks to show displeasure. Late minute pressure campaigns seek to trigger a failed conference and annoy the organizers.

One trend in my two-plus decades, then, has been multilateralism. Still another has been the shift away from using the Track 2 settings to merely talk about a problem but focus discussions instead through the use of wargames or crisis simulations. Now I have noticed that even multilateral gatherings are frequently folding in such exercises. Since these crisis simulations tend to be longer, with additional downtime for the participating delegations so that the organizers can plan responses to the participant "moves," this in some ways returns structurally to the earlier days of Track 2 when longer conferences with considerable downtime were the norm.

Lessons Learned and Paths Forward

What has this endeavor produced? First, I should reemphasize that while there is a Track 2 "circuit" that draws on overlapping pools of talented people who are willing to travel—and who possess sufficient ties to their governments to be perceived as influential—there is not one Track 2 endeavor but many. Each sponsor, organizer, or participant has some different value proposition and a distinct issue agenda that motivates them. Let me discuss the benefits I have perceived in four different settings: India-Pakistan, U.S.-India, U.S.-Pakistan, and multilateral forums involving India.

For India and Pakistan, Track 2 dialogues have likely contributed to small wins. The 2007 agreement to reduce the risk of nuclear weapons accidents appears to be one such possible win. It is hard to attribute any idea to Track 2 discussions alone, but proposals for better and focused procedures to prevent accidental or inadvertent escalation have been mainstays of Track 2 conversations, reflecting institutions and

agreements that the United States and Soviet Union established after their most dangerous Cold War crises.

I cannot prove but I suspect that Track 2 dialogues, especially wargames and crisis simulations, have helped convince Indian participants that large-scale Army operations cannot be the military coercive instrument of choice in a future India-Pakistan conflict. Beginning in the 1980s, a tension emerged between India's increasing investment in massive armored strike corps alongside India's nuclear weaponization.³⁷ Could full-scale ground war be compatible with nuclear deterrence? After 1998, Indian Army thinkers came up with a set of arguments: that limited war was possible and perhaps made easier by initiating operations from a "cold start." They made this case cogently in India and abroad. Gen. Ved Malik (ret.) and Brig. Gurmeet Kanwal (ret.), especially the latter, were frequent participants in Track 2 dialogues and advocated for these views. They sought to persuade outsiders that India was serious (and in so doing bolstered deterrence if they convinced the listeners). Many audiences, however, identified concerns with these proposals and countered that large-scale ground operations were inherently escalatory in nuclearized contexts and that this escalatory risk outstripped the likely benefit of such operations. It is notable that in the last two serious military crises of 2016 and 2019, either very limited ground raids or standoff air strikes were the preferred military instruments. Both of these options had been well hashed out in Track 2 dialogues over the last two decades as being dangerous, but less dangerous than large-scale ground operations.

Additionally, India and Pakistan Track 2 dialogues have helped preserve the relationship from a total communications shutdown during periods of heightened antagonism. In these instances, they have been used as a channel to express anger but also offer the possibility of re-normalization. Track 2 dialogues have been less successful in forging a path to re-normalization, and the spade work there has been in the government-to-government lanes. Yet they have sometimes been a useful signal that a path out of the woods exist, even if the details of the path are delineated in back channel or formal talks elsewhere.

This traditional role for Track 2 of improving troubled bilateral relations between competing states is atrophying in the India-Pakistan context. This weakening occurs at a time when diplomatic, economic, and cultural ties are also attenuating. Many Indian hawks increasingly perceive Pakistan as a client state of China (perhaps with an enabling role by a naïve United States). Why talk to a troublesome Pakistan when the source of the problem lies elsewhere? This view dramatically understates Pakistani agency and resilience to outside pressure in my view. This view also misses the fact that Track 2 ties—alongside and complementary to diplomatic, economic, and cultural ones—can achieve their most consequential results when they are building a constituency that views the rivalry in fundamentally new terms. When old policies are

37 Christopher Clary, "Personalities, organizations, and doctrine in the Indian military," *India Review* 17, no. 1 (2018), pp. 100-121. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14736489.2018.1415283>. Accessed November 8, 2024.

struggling with strategic circumstances, policymakers will cast about for new ideas. For all its inefficiencies, Track 2 can still produce new ideas to motivate a positive agenda for cooperation when leaders seek to advance it.

Very different challenges confront the U.S.-India Track 2 effort. For the last five years, the government-to-government ties have advanced so quickly that Track 2 has often struggled to keep up with the Track 1 progress. This is often raised as a criticism in Track 2 forums by participants who are more plugged in; in many ways, this is a fair criticism. Track 2, they say, should creatively lead rather than be less imaginative than Track 1. Yet I have come to view Track 2 as the vehicle for friendly partnerships serving several simultaneous functions—only one of which is to brainstorm for the future. For friendly partnerships, Track 2 forums also serve as a way to diffuse knowledge more widely from those closest to their respective governments to the chattering classes that train the next generation of students, spread knowledge about these issues via the media (such as through television news interviews), and write books, articles, and op-eds. Governments tend to want to control information tightly, but then complain that no one knows about the good work they are doing. Press releases and joint statements are not enough, and Track 2 forums are part of a healthy partnership ecosystem. One role they have in an emergent partnership such as the one between India and the United States is to reinforce often muted Track 1 statements of concern about the behavior of the other. Sometimes academics, journalists, and retired officials can better say, “This is a real problem,” than can officials who often seek to postpone or suppress confrontations.

For U.S.-Pakistan ties, Track 2 initiatives sadly reflect a fraying relationship. They have been an important forum, in my view, for Pakistani participants to convey their desire—which appears sincere in my view—not to be relegated to only a Chinese client state. They have also served as a forum for U.S. participants to express their concerns about terrorism and nuclear weapons in Pakistan. Here, too, Track 2 can underscore Track 1 messages which are often seen as instrumental by Pakistani audiences. U.S. concerns about instability in Pakistan are sometimes dismissed as part of some larger agenda. Track 2 provides a space and contributes to building trust that helps separate instrumental messages from sincere ones. Track 2 has been inadequate to overcome the widening chasm between the United States and Pakistan. Today, U.S.-Pakistan Track 2 may have a much more modest aim of preserving seeds of trust and cooperation that might grow when soil conditions become more favorable in the future.

Considerable energy now is going into multilateral forums, some of which have the effect of putting India and Pakistan in the same room, while others have the goal of putting India in the room with other U.S. partners in Asia. These initiatives seek to break out of ruts in bilateral (U.S.-India, U.S.-Pakistan, India-Pakistan) gatherings alone, and the introduction of new participants does help in that regard. Yet there is a corresponding loss of intimacy and efficiency as events must grow larger to

accommodate multilateralism. The net benefits justify the endeavor, but in my view it would be a mistake to jettison the bilateral forums.

The pure policy accomplishments of Track 2 are modest, but they have achieved another task: cultivating and preserving the human capital that advances the relationship between countries. Any gathering will have a mix of individuals who are closer and those who are less tight with the governments of the day. Sometimes the participants' relative ignorance originates due to having closer ties to their government's political opposition, in which case Track 2 forums can help keep the opposition informed and ready for a return to service. In years past, India's M.K. Narayanan and Pakistan's Mahmud Ali Durrani and Sartaj Aziz were present at Track 2 events that I attended. These individuals were viewed as being informed but thoroughly retired. However, all three men would later rejoin their governments at the senior-most levels when domestic politics shifted.

For the U.S. side, Track 2 discussions have been a talent incubator in my view. Sometimes Track 2 has supplemented experience and knowledge gained in earlier government service, such as the case with Peter Lavoy and Neil Joeck, who were frequent Track 2 participants prior to their return to more senior government positions later in their career. Sometimes Track 2 helps cultivate a nascent policy interest, which seems to have been the case with Vipin Narang before he was appointed to a senior nuclear and space policy role in Pentagon during the Biden administration. The track record of more junior worker bees is also notable on the U.S. side. Several of the former research assistants who I worked alongside in these Track 2 journeys have gone on to play important roles across the U.S. government. I am aware of multiple U.S. government international lawyers, directors and senior directors for the National Security Council staff, and at least one State Department special representative that started, like me, with a job that involved setting out name placards in overseas conference rooms.

Conclusion

Life rarely involves small investments yielding huge payouts. Instead, most of life involves modest efforts yielding modest rewards. My sense is that Track 2 endeavors follow this pattern. It is possible that they can occasionally cause transformative change, as they did with ideas about European security toward the end of the Cold War. More frequently, however, the Track 2 effort achieves smaller results: signaling a less hostile way forward in competitive relationships, identifying a positive agenda for cooperation, highlighting some potential dangers, and diffusing that knowledge to individuals who go on to government service or interact with policymakers.

In my assessment, the net benefits from Track 2 endeavors have been positive. For a relatively low cost, a set of overlapping communities has been created that has occasionally seeded the Track 1 discussion with ideas for cooperation. I can think of few negatives that have spilled from Track 2 to Track 1.

Burdened by history, relationships are not easy to change. At the same time, Track 2 forums are not magic. They do not make hard work easy. As we chart a way forward, we are dragged relentlessly back by a wide and strong current toward the old way of doing things. If we scan the horizon and assess only scant progress, that assessment is correct, yet the implication of that orienteering is not to cease rowing, as to do so ensures we will never reach the destination.

How to Optimize Track 2 Success?

Gillian Gayner

Track 2 dialogues are utilized across a wide variety of policy issues, regions, participants, and stakeholders. Even when looking at a niche issue such as nuclear deterrence in South Asia, there is diversity across the spectrum of Track 2 initiatives that serve different policy communities, bureaucracies, think tanks, and academia. Approaches to Track 2 are adjusted according to the objectives of the organizers. Some government and private sponsors use these dialogues to maintain channels of communication across borders when engagement at the official level is nonexistent or insufficient. Others focus on the relationship-building element of Track 2, which can form bonds between influential communities and cement institutional ties that are essential to advancing shared policy goals. Many of these dialogues also help create and sustain policy debates within foreign governments, including by building foreign constituencies in service of policy objectives. Still others see Track 2 engagements as a means of learning, influencing, or workshopping a specific proposal. Track 2 can advance any or all of these objectives.

Washington has seen an explosion of Track 2 initiatives in recent years, each on a mission to tackle the most pressing foreign policy issue of the day. For example, the shift in the U.S. government's focus from sub-conventional warfare to great power competition coincided with an uptick in Track 2 dialogues launched amongst allies and partners with the objective of ironing out differences to better coordinate against competitors. Without a doubt, these dialogues play a critical role in international relations. They diversify the means through which policy issues can be analyzed, workshopped, and addressed—and expand the breadth of invested constituencies.

However, there is unrealized value embedded in the expanding and complex nature of the Track 2 universe. On the one hand, diversity and dispersal amongst these engagements can be beneficial. Different stakeholders have different interests, so the people in the room, the approach taken, and the overarching objective of each dialogue will vary. A bit of healthy competition helps fuel creativity. But the increasingly dispersed nature of the Track 2 universe can encourage a “do-it-yourself” mentality that fails to appreciate the complex dynamics often embedded in Track 2 environments, and risks mishaps that have negative downstream effects for other players in this space. This chapter reviews some of the lessons learned that have accumulated through years of trial and error that can help optimize the success and return on investment of these engagements.

Planners should consider the following in order to optimize the success of Track 2 engagements for the benefit of the policy community: 1) choose participants wisely, as nothing is more predictive of success than having the right people in the room;

2) enhance cross-institutional coordination both for efficiency and honing of goals and messaging; 3) maximize policy relevance; and 4) develop cumulative insights to forge a path forward.

Choose Participants Wisely

The success of Track 2 dialogue is contingent upon having the right people in the room. This is particularly important considering that small groups often translate to more productive dialogue, and with fewer people, individuals have more influence over the direction of the conversation. Planners are most successful when they are highly intentional about who is invited—no matter how perfectly planned and executed the dialogue may be, a Track 2's value is primarily derived from who participates. Of course, each engagement is unique in its objectives and approach, and the makeup of the participants will vary accordingly. Nonetheless, there are some key considerations regarding the composition of the group that have widespread applicability.

Participants may come with diverse backgrounds and experiences, but in combination they should represent the key contours of the policy debate in their respective countries. Organizers can indulge limited debate of unorthodox ideas, but if the majority of the discussion diverges from the mainstream, the potential for policy impact declines. Participants should also be well positioned to influence thinking amongst policymaking constituencies and well respected in those circles. Organizational affiliation is particularly relevant in this sense, and it will vary significantly depending on the countries involved. For example, the military may be the most influential constituency in one country, but in another it may have little to no authority. Participants must also have the trust of their respective institutions to speak freely and openly to international counterparts to advance national interests—and, just as importantly, be willing to do so. Nobody benefits from regurgitating talking points. Having the trust of their home institutions is also critical to participants' messages being internalized and considered afterwards. Personality also matters, especially when it comes to each participant's sincerity and willingness to look past—or work through—disagreements. If everyone in the room agreed on everything, there would be no need for dialogue, and Track 2 engagements can be easily sidelined by overly adversarial attitudes.

Balance is a crucial factor in the success of a Track 2 in a number of ways. First, there is balance in terms of the number of people from each country—if representatives from one country are over- or under-represented, the conversation can be skewed. Balance of seniority is also important. The most senior representative of each contingent should have a counterpart of rough equivalence. Depending on the nature of the engagement, balance between academics and practitioners should also be considered. Participants with hands-on experience, including military and diplomatic service, add enormous value—but so do thought leaders and advisors who have the ear of decisionmakers and shape policy debates in their respective countries.

Enhance Cross-Institutional Coordination

As the Track 2 universe expands and diversifies, there has been a notable rise in overlapping efforts. The policy community benefits from this—networks of overlapping institutional ties, the development of expertise across various engagements, and additional opportunities for information-sharing and influencing constituencies contribute to a robust intellectual environment. The more niche policy topics, including nuclear deterrence in South Asia, draw a relatively limited group of credible participants, making some overlap inevitable. However, despite the amount of learning that has taken place, there are countless missed opportunities for cross-institutional coordination. Whether it be drawing on lessons learned from other Track 2 efforts or engaging with diverse stakeholders across government, civil society, and academia in advance of a dialogue, these practices can support planners in navigating sensitive topics, identifying valuable invitees, and avoiding repetition or oversaturation. The number one rule of any Track 2 dialogue is to do no harm, and cross-institutional coordination is the best way of managing this risk. Efficiency and effectiveness demand benefiting from lessons already learned, both inside and outside of government.

A former colleague once offered the following experience that exemplifies the importance of cross-institutional coordination. She was planning a tri-lateral Track 2 dialogue that involved panel discussions on a specific emerging technology. Unbeknownst to her, during the planning of the event, the U.S. interagency was gearing up to announce a key policy initiative directly related to this emerging technology, which was also intended to shape the dynamics between the three countries that were to be represented at the dialogue. After the agenda, participants list, and presenters were set, she set up consultations with a few key stakeholders. In these consultations, she learned about the upcoming announcement. It was clear that this would have enormous implications across all aspects of the engagement—the tenor of the conversation, the ability for participants to attend and engage, etc. The focus and objectives of the dialogue would be largely overcome by events. Further, interagency actors expressed concern that the timing of the event could give the false impression that the two were coordinated, creating issues for the presenters who would not want to give the impression that they represented official viewpoints. With this new information, my colleague pivoted, and she was able to come up with a contingency plan. Without this cross-institutional consultation, her dialogue would not only have been lacking in terms of its policy relevance and objectives, but it would have created a messaging problem that could have been easily avoided.

Track 2 must be constructive and avoid exacerbating contentious issues. This is especially essential for government-sponsored Track 2 meetings that are intended to support policymakers. Government organizations focused on the same or similar issues can, through regular dialogue, avoid repetition, mixed messages, or oversaturation. All too often, dialogues that are virtually identical happen one after the other, where coordination could have allowed them to build off one another, de-conflict invitees, or share lessons learned. This is not to say that engagements that

are similar to one another are necessarily superfluous—while the topicality may be similar or even identical, different lines of effort can reach different audiences and important issues may demand a multi-pronged approach. But threads in one dialogue can be pulled in another, and repetition of mistakes can be avoided. We do not have to reinvent the wheel.

Maximize Policy Relevance

There can be a thin line between dialogue for the sake of dialogue—an exchange of ideas—versus a dialogue specially designed to support policy. While the exchange of ideas often touches on key policy issues, the effect on actual policy, especially in the near term, can be limited. Participants that are accomplished scholars may not have access to government circles. A dialogue that is policy relevant also consists of an exchange of ideas, but those exchanges serve to support policy in a more direct way. U.S. policymakers value the perspectives of foreign experts, and foreign governments can benefit from deeper understanding of U.S. policy goals. One method that planners use to design policy relevant dialogues is to employ a mix of both government and non-government participants. This mix is what distinguishes Track 1.5, which occupies the space in between Track 1—official dialogue—and Track 2—unofficial dialogue.

These engagements directly support Track 1 efforts by bringing in officials—as funders, consultants, or direct participants—who are in some way involved in official dialogues. Planners coordinate directly with interagency actors to ensure the topics of discussion, expertise in the room, and overarching objectives align with policy goals and interests. The participation of government officials makes these engagements relevant and ensures that the insights generated will be digested and incorporated into the official government ecosystem, both at home and amongst foreign policymaking circles. This is especially the case when Track 1 engagement faces stubborn obstacles—or is nonexistent—and policymakers must lean on external channels to drive change.

At the same time, the inclusion of non-government participants alongside official viewpoints allows for a more candid and far-ranging discussion, where speakers are not confined to cleared diplomatic talking points. Non-government participants include influential constituencies that are critical to policy discussions, including senior retired military and civilian leaders, influential non-government policy advisors, and respected strategic scholars. These participants can draw from their personal interactions with officials to reflect institutional viewpoints that are not simply scholarly in nature but tied directly to official thinking. These ties also provide a direct channel for lessons learned from each dialogue to make their way back to policymakers. One of the most notable examples of the role of Track 1.5 dialogue was the negotiation of the Oslo Accords between the Israelis and Palestinians in 1993. The secret Oslo channel was established under the auspices of the Fafo Foundation—a Norwegian non-governmental research institute—and Israeli and Palestinian academics developed an

unofficial draft agreement in the first phase of negotiations before talks moved into official channels.

Develop Cumulative Insights

As Track 2 dialogues continue to gain recognition as a valued tool, outputs from these dialogues—such as reports of key findings—accumulate. These reports are carefully distributed to stakeholders to achieve maximum return on investment and policy impact, especially to those at the heart of policymaking; in the United States, Track 2 dialogue planners regularly share reports with the National Security Council, the Departments of State, Defense, and Energy, and international diplomats. Foreign participants are encouraged to write and disseminate their own after-action reports. This is a critical element of optimizing success. However, after these reports are disseminated in the aftermath of an engagement, they are archived and, more often than not, never looked at again.

These accumulated reports are where the Track 2 universe holds most of its unrealized value. There are significant revelations that could be available through the performance of Track 2 “net assessment” exercises. Net assessment traditionally refers to the “comparative analysis of military, technological, political, economic, and other factors governing the relative military capability of nations.”³⁸ However, in this context, net assessment would be used to describe a comprehensive analysis of long-term dynamics. A Track 2 net assessment would involve analyzing tranches of key takeaway reports across space and time. It could reveal critical insights that help forge a path forward by enhancing understanding of key trendlines, sticking points, and crucial gaps. Of course, such an assessment would respect the anonymity of participants and sponsors and would reveal only important insights into the issues for which the Track 2 was designed.

Another benefit of Track 2 net assessment is that it can help address the conundrum of return on investment. Track 2 is an important and widely endorsed policy tool, but there are real challenges to identifying impacts when the engagements are largely focused on intangibles such as developing institutional relationships, moving the policy needle over time, or building a more nuanced understanding of another country’s priorities and concerns—all of which are difficult to measure. However, by analyzing engagements cumulatively across time and space, net assessments can reveal nuanced trendlines that may not be otherwise available to policymakers. In other words, this is an added “return” that develops after years—sometimes decades—of investment. To be fair, a net assessment might also provide insights into why engagements have not produced the desired results, and thus

38 U.S. Department of Defense (DOD), *DOD Directive 5111.11 Director of Net Assessment* (Washington, DC: Office of the Chief Management Officer of the Department of Defense, 2020), p. 9. Accessed November 22, 2024.

should be altered or discontinued. In either case, a net assessment of Track 2 dialogues provides the opportunity to reveal shifting dynamics and insights over time.

Getting the Most Out of Track 2

The integration of Track 2 dialogues into the policymaking process is a highly welcome development, and one that has already paid dividends. Official dialogue can be rife with posturing and overcaution, and often held hostage to the broader state of diplomatic relations between counterparts. Track 2 plays a critical role in international relations through its ability to cut through these barriers and foster an environment of candid, productive conversation. Nonetheless, the relative informality of Track 2 compared to Track 1 should not be taken for granted. These engagements must be carefully considered and coordinated to prove worthwhile, and planners can benefit from integrating tried and true methods. Through choosing participants wisely, enhancing cross-institutional coordination, maximizing policy relevance, and developing cumulative insights, policymaking circles can optimize the success of Track 2 dialogues for the benefit of the international community.

What Are the Ingredients of a Successful Track 1.5/2 Engagement?

Anna Davari

Every Track 1.5/2 engagement starts with an idea or problem set, one that has proven elusive at the Track 1 official level. Track 1.5/2 engagements serve as an inroads, a means to make measurable progress on difficult topics. As discussed in other chapters, Track 1.5 can be viewed as semi-official due to government sponsorship and participation by trusted insiders acting in a non-official capacity. Track 2 may have some government funding but is generally less constrained by policy guidance and more open to theoretical considerations. My experience is with the South Asia Track 1.5 dialogues focused on nuclear policy, strategy, doctrine, force structure, deterrence, crisis management, escalation, and nuclear security; topics that are sensitive but critical to U.S. interests in the region. However, the ingredients of success apply to other regions and topics.

Previous chapters discuss what we have learned, how regional participants view these engagements, and how these engagements have meaningful impacts on U.S. policy. This chapter focuses on the mechanics of how to transform Track 1.5/2 meetings from initial concepts to in-person interactions. The work that goes on behind the scenes can make or break a Track 1.5/2, and success depends on the organizational team, comprised of the sponsor, the implementing organization, and the logistics team.

The Necessary Ingredients

It all begins with an idea which can come from a sponsor who sees a policy objective that can be advanced at the Track 1.5/2 level, or from an enterprising specialist implementer who sees a gap in U.S. government (USG) policy knowledge and seeks to fill it. Implementing organizations come in a variety of shapes and colors, from USG institutions, to universities, labs, and think tanks. Sponsors for Track 1.5 are most often USG agencies such as the departments of Defense, Energy, and State, based on their equities in a particular area of interest. Our focus has been nuclear security in South Asia. Once a sponsor and implementing organization are synergized, the real work begins.

At the outset, these groups work together to develop a budget, estimating labor costs for the content and logistics team, travel costs for this group and the regional participants, event location costs, contract costs, and overhead expenses. Never once has an event gone exactly as planned, and it is important to build some cushion into the budget for unexpected eventualities. When building a budget, it is essential to consider how many participants will be in attendance, where are they coming from, the class of airfare for participants (everyone wants business class), and the

amount of the honorarium, if any. These arrangements can be tricky and often require negotiations to arrive at mutually acceptable plans.

When a sponsor agency selects an implementing organization, they must ask the following questions to determine if the implementor is well suited to the task.

- Do they know the topic and the relevant U.S. and regional experts?
- Can they successfully bring the right people to an event?
- Can they deal with unavoidable bureaucratic roadblocks?
- Are the necessary authorizations (i.e., interagency agreements, MIPRs, for example) in place that will allow funding to flow between the sponsor and the implementing organizations? If not, it can take six months or more to get those in place.
- If funding needs to go on a contract vehicle for event logistics, is there an umbrella agreement in place (like an IDIQ) that will allow for funds to be placed on a task order? If not, it can take the better part of a year to get a contract in place depending on where one is in the fiscal year. For example, many organizations do not allow for contract actions to occur after July (unless there is a justifiable emergency). Normal contracting procedures typically do not restart until after the start of the fiscal year (October 1st), and often can be further delayed as new funds are set up for the year.

Once the sponsor has selected an implementing body, key issues include the selection of participants, the agenda, and the location for the meeting.

Selecting the Right Participants

When selecting regional participants, organizers must consider if potential participants have relevant and recent experience along with ties back to their government. A crucial piece of Track 1.5 (in contrast with Track 2) is the ability of the participants to back brief their governments after the event. Absent this, organizers have no guarantee that outcomes from the event will reach the intended audience. It is important to know in advance if there are interpersonal or inter-service conflicts amongst potential participants that could affect their performance during or after the event. This is particularly relevant in South Asia, where the politics of nuclear policy are complex. While participants in Track 1.5 meetings are supposed to act on their own behalf, and not as official representatives of their governments, they are often understandably cautious about criticizing government policies and must be afforded flexibility to avoid putting themselves in difficult positions. Similarly, political affiliations are important to consider if a participant's views will be reflective of the

current party or parties in power. This is where regional- and country-specific expertise are critical.

Similar considerations need to be made when selecting American participants. Do they match the regional participants in rank? If a regional participant is a retired four-star general, it is important to have equivalency on the American side. Is there any interpersonal history that could positively or negatively affect interactions? Is there a balance of military/civilian, male/female, and academic/implementer that the sponsor is aiming for? Will the personalities work well together—both as an American delegation and in discussions with regional participants? Do the American participants have credibility with their South Asian counterparts, perhaps in connection with prior service in India and/or Pakistan? We have benefited from having U.S. participants with extensive time in country and who have also earned the respect of their Indian and Pakistani counterparts. It is critical that American Track 1.5 interlocutors actively listen to the foreign delegates and do not press controversial topics to a point where open discussion is repressed.

The alchemy of interpersonal relations at a Track 1.5 is like a dance, with the interactions of the players balanced to ensure open yet probing discussions. While it can be useful to surface underlying tensions and controversies, it is also important to find common ground on which to build continuing engagements. Blowhards and self-centered individuals can ruin a Track 1.5.

Building the Concept Paper and the Agenda

Once you have the basic building blocks in place, it's time to develop the concept paper and the agenda. What does the sponsor want to talk about during this event? How sensitive are the topics? Are there any specific words or topics that should be avoided? Can you work around sensitivities and still facilitate thoughtful discussions? These are some of the considerations that should inform the concept paper and the agenda.

The concept paper outlines the topics you wish to discuss. It should be concise and easily understood by all participants. It is typically written by experts from the implementing organization and distributed to all participants in advance to establish a common understanding about the scope and substance of the proposed meeting. When building the agenda around the concept paper, additional considerations must be taken into account, such as assigning your participants to appropriate topics according to their status and background. Senior members of the military and diplomatic services often expect prominent speaking roles, and more junior experts can often inject new ideas into the discussion.

At least a month prior to executing the event, participants should be provided with event content information to ensure they are adequately prepared. Typically, the content team provides the concept paper, agenda, and any read-ahead documents prior to the event. During the event, it is helpful to have a folder of event-related

documents, including the event paper, agenda, and participant biographies available for reference.

Logistics, the Key to Success in War and Peace

Logistics is your secret weapon, and the person who manages your logistics can make or break your Track 1.5 event. The logistics director/coordinator is the primary person with whom participants will interact prior to arriving. Their professionalism, problem-solving ability, and cross-cultural sensitivity is critical to setting the tone for a positive engagement.

Selecting a location for the event is key. When selecting a location, consider the following:

- How long will it take domestic and international participants to get to the location? Do any of the participants have mobility concerns that would make the location a challenge?
- How simple or difficult is the visa process? If travelling to a European country, does it require a Schengen visa (which requires additional approval time)? Are all participants eligible for a visa in that country? Does the organizational team or sponsor have connections to U.S. personnel in country to assist with visa expediting?
- Is the location friendly to international participants? Will they face any difficulty going through customs upon arrival? Is the location sufficiently neutral for all parties in attendance?
- What will it cost to get participants to the location? Do flights fit within the budget?
- Would a secluded event site be preferred, effectively keeping your participants together even outside of meeting hours, or is a more metropolitan location preferred?
- Is there a theme to the event that might be supported by the location? For example, if the event has to do with maritime issues, a port city with significant naval history might be considered.
- Are sufficient event sites available (considering both lodging requirements and the conference space)? Will your meeting coincide with the height of tourism to that location? Will rooms within per diem be available? What will the weather be like during the event?
- Does the conference room fit the needs of your event? Will there be any disruptive

events occurring in nearby conference rooms, such as construction or another meeting?

- Are there any religious holidays (either among participants or at the location you will be holding the event) that need to be considered/planned for?

These considerations can have a big impact on the event. The participant's experience can affect their openness and willingness to engage in the event. Our team experienced (and overcame) more obstacles than could be contained in this volume, but some of the more memorable complications include shifting an event to the opposite side of the globe one month prior to the event due to the inability to obtain visas. Another involved the hotel placing our event next to a conference room that was hosting team corporate building exercises that included drumming, among many other loud and disruptive activities.

Once a location has been selected (with a backup location in case things go sideways), the planning process includes these key tasks:

- Soliciting requests for information (RFIs) from potential hotels, including the event dates, room block information, conference room requirements (table skirting, room setup, and easels, for example), technological or audio/visual needs (such as microphones, internet, and a projector), meals, local transportation requirements to any outside events, transportation from the airport to the hotel, and welcome reception (if hosting one).
- Scoping trip to the event site: If the team hasn't previously held an event in the desired location, a pre-event scoping trip should be considered. While much information can be gleaned from the internet, visiting prospective hotels in person is highly desirable. You might find that the guest rooms have terrible noise insulation, or the hotel is located next to a construction site. Perhaps the hotel looks great in pictures but is outdated when viewed in person. The conference room may be too small (or too big) for your event size. If your event requires a formal dinner or welcome reception, the logistics team can sample a few restaurants, ensuring they are able to meet all dietary restrictions and have a space appropriate for the meal.
- Soliciting participant information, including passport information, travel routing preferences, preferred title or salutation, dietary restrictions, personal data required for travel, and if any family members will be joining attendees at the event. Note: It is important to transmit all personally identifiable information (PII) in accordance with required security procedures.

Attention to detail helps to avoid a multitude of preventable problems. For example, with passport information, not only are you able to assist with booking flights, but the logistics team can also cross check passport expiration dates with visa requirements. Many countries require at least six months of validity to issue a visa. Knowing if family will be joining is necessary for room booking (single/double/multiple occupancy) and planning for group meals. Many participants have religious or cultural dietary considerations. I once requested that a restaurant change some of its artwork (it was primarily a steakhouse and prominently featured portraits of cows) to avoid offending Indian participants in attendance. Another participant had a deadly peanut allergy for an event being held in Thailand where the cuisine heavily features peanuts. We worked with the catering staff to avoid any inadvertent cross-contamination.

Reimbursing participants presents many potential difficulties, many of which can be avoided. If your contract allows, it is preferable to have a dedicated logistics company pay directly for airfare, rather than having individual participants book their own itineraries. This ensures participants don't incur high upfront costs, that the class of airfare booked is appropriate, and all U.S. government airfare rules are complied with (Fly America, etc.). Either the logistics team can reimburse remaining allowable expenses (in compliance with the Joint or Federal Travel Regulations) after the event, or you can provide participants with a cash payment for their per diem on site so they have spending money. (Remember to deduct any meals included during the event.) It is optimal for the logistics company to pay the bill for group dinners, which avoids the awkwardness of separate bills and the task of sorting out who ate what.

Purchasing travel medical insurance for your participants is a relatively low-cost protection against any medical contingencies that could arise. We learned this the hard way during an event in the Middle East when a participant had a serious medical emergency resulting in an extended stay in a hospital. In such a scenario, the question of fiduciary responsibility can arise, as the individual is attending an event on behalf of the USG and financial obligations may be unclear. It is also helpful to know in advance about U.S. embassy-approved hospitals in the area. Not all hospitals accept international insurance plans.

Does your group include any new mothers? If they are still breastfeeding, they may require additional accommodations. Some countries have unclear rules regarding transportation of breast milk, and it is worthwhile to research those rules (as much as possible) ahead of time. While U.S. protections for breastfeeding unfortunately do not hold abroad, it is important to support new mothers as they return to the workforce.

As the event nears, there are additional planning factors to consider.

- Scheduling individual transportation from the airport to the hotel location and communicating that information to the participants. It's important to let people know if any other participants will be in the car, where they should meet the driver, and provide contact information for the driver should they be unable to locate them.

- Communicating logistics information to the participants. This should include information about meals, attire, weather, hotel address, conference room location, reimbursement policies and procedures, return transportation information, and any restrictions on photography, posting on social media, or speaking with the media about the event.
- Printing any documents for the event, including the agenda, event paper, and participant biographies, along with table tents, posters, name badges, and mini-table tents for any formal meals during the event.

Event Execution

Your logistics coordinator will be the face of your event and should arrive one day early to the event to greet all participants upon arrival. This allows the coordinator to deliver a welcoming information from the organizers such as logistics and the final event agenda. Having a friendly face greet your participants in the middle of the night can help set the tone for the event. Any way you can make the participants feel more welcome and comfortable will only contribute to positive outcomes. In addition, the coordinator can conduct a walk-through of the conference spaces with hotel staff and make any last-minute adjustments and set up a communication plan with the hotel event coordinator should any questions or concerns arise during the event.

Hosting a welcome reception on the evening prior to the event start date is a great opportunity to break the ice, meet any unfamiliar faces, and build comradery among participants. Inviting family members to join (which comes at the cost of the attendee, not the event organizers) helps facilitate a friendly environment and can create ties between both participants and their spouses and/or families. Bringing name badges to the welcome reception helps avoid confusion or embarrassment that could occur from not remembering a participant's name or rank.

It is beneficial to have a representative from the logistics and content teams arrive to the meeting space at least an hour early the morning the event is scheduled to begin. They can ensure the table is set up in the appropriate configuration (such as a board room or U shape, for example), microphones are working, and table tents and event folders are set in their proper places. If your event includes military personnel, expect them to be early (and not just five minutes early). Conversely, there are some cultures that view time as more fluid and, in those instances, you might plan on tardiness.

Depending on your event location, participants may have traveled long distances to reach their destination. In such a scenario, while federal travel regulations allow for either rest on arrival or rest during travel, starting the event a bit later allows participants additional time to adjust to jet lag. It is helpful to remind participants of any rules at the beginning of the event, including any bans on photography, recording, posting on social media, speaking with media outlets, and any confidentiality requirements such as Chatham House rules. The latter requirement is essential to ensure free discussion without fear of repercussions.

During the event, the logistics coordinator guides participants to lunch locations, provides airport transfer information, coordinates local transportation to any off-site events, and works with the hotel staff to troubleshoot any catering, room, or IT issues. After the close of the event, the logistics coordinator sees off the participants and closes accounts with the hotel. Again, having a friendly face to say goodbye ensures a positive experience from beginning to end. Ensuring a smooth reimbursement process on the back end is one last way you can provide a positive experience for all involved, ensuring that participants will want to participate in future events.

Finally, a post-event hotwash meeting with only U.S. participants is a great way to gather opinions on how the event went, review any sidebar discussions that may have occurred, identify the key takeaways from the event, and examine any lessons learned for future events both from a content and a logistics perspective.

Following Up, Staying Connected

After the event, the content team typically will develop either a formal report and/or a briefing document to communicate what was learned to the sponsoring organization. The readout document summarizes key takeaways and policy-relevant observations that are directly relevant to the mission of the sponsoring agency, keeping in mind the confidentiality levels set out for the meeting. In practice, this means not identifying participants by name, but rather identifying them by their organizational affiliation and country of origin (e.g., “a high-ranking American civilian leader” or “a senior retired American military officer”).

The sponsor and the organizational team identify which other organizations should be briefed after the event, who should conduct the briefings, and if the report should be disseminated to any other U.S. government organizations. Often the sponsor will want the implementors to brief other agencies about the outcomes of their Track 2/1.5 engagements.

Finally, and perhaps least exciting, is cost reconciliation. All travel vouchers from regional participants need to be processed with receipts (as necessary, defined by the JTR or FTR) to ensure all expenses are allowable according to federal regulations. Once the vouchers have been paid, the labor costs have been incurred, and all contractual obligations are fulfilled, any remaining funds can be de-obligated and returned to the sponsoring organization. Efficient and accurate cost accounting builds trust with the sponsor and makes it more likely they will look favorably on proposals for future Track 2/1.5 projects.

Like so many things in life, Track 2/1.5 is a team sport; success depends on people working together. The ability of the sponsor, logistics, and organizational teams to conceptualize and execute large meetings of high-level experts on sensitive topics is intended to promote mutual interests and understanding. Supporting this unique form of informal diplomacy requires careful planning, teamwork, and a bit of luck.

Wargaming Crises in South Asia: Reviewing the Record

Andrew Winner

In March 2013, our series of Track 1.5 discussions added wargaming to its portfolio of encounters with our South Asian colleagues. Out of concern for how the meeting might be perceived by both participants and observers, we called it a crisis simulation or crisis stability workshop. Over the course of the six wargames that have taken place as part of these discussions, they have had varying names, from tabletop exercises to crisis simulations. However, the key difference between these and other meetings or discussions that were part of this Track 1.5 was that participants played decisionmaking roles in national teams and had to make decisions and react to the consequences of those decisions and those of the other participants.

Starting in roughly 2011, our U.S. Track 1.5 sponsors and organizers began to think about adding wargames to the mix. The reasons for this were twofold. First, the series of dialogues described in other chapters in this volume began to get a bit stale. Despite changes in some participants and topics, the format of presenting papers or having roundtables or panel discussions had, on some points, reached a stasis. Participants had their talking points down, they knew how to avoid uncomfortable discussions, and less new ground was being uncovered and explored. Second, a number of developments in the political-military space in South Asia raised issues that the sponsors and organizers thought might be usefully addressed using wargames. In particular these included the Indian development, or at least public discussion, of new operational concepts for conventional warfare dubbed “Cold Start” and Pakistan’s response. In addition, Pakistan was upgrading its nuclear capabilities, including the reported development of tactical nuclear weapons to counter perceptions of Indian conventional superiority in certain situations.

The discussion among the sponsors and organizers of the Track 1.5 about the initial wargame covered many of the issues that are common when wargames are conducted within the U.S. government or when wargames are used as a methodology for academic research. The overarching question ahead of a wargame or any analytic enterprise is: What is/are the objective(s)? Once those are identified, then the second question becomes whether a wargame is the right method for addressing those objectives. If that question is answered generally positively, then one can move on to questions of how to specifically design the game to provide the best chance that the game or tabletop exercise (TTX) will meet those objectives. A wargame would not pursue a different set of objectives than the overall Track 1.5 dialogue, but it would focus more clearly on a limited set of objectives, partly to help with the design of the wargame.

Before designing and proposing the first game, the sponsors and organizers discussed objectives and potential risks of undertaking this new format. The interaction

of two developments in the South Asia region— significant changes in conventional operational concepts and changes in nuclear capabilities and concepts— were thought to be worthwhile for exploration and consistent with what wargames do well. For the purposes of the wargames run in this Track 1.5 dialogue, one definition by scholars/ practitioners is useful: “...wargames are interactive scenarios which immerse human players who make decisions in accordance with given rules and react to the consequences of their choices.”³⁹ Dennis Callan, a longtime expert on wargaming from the Naval War College, also provided a good definition of a wargame that shaped thinking about using games in this situation: “The creation of a moving context within which the players are required to MAKE DECISIONS, for the purpose of having a worthwhile conversation and gaining insight on tactical, operational, or strategic issues.” Key to both of these definitions for the games in this series are the ideas of interaction, immersion, reacting to other players, and dealing with consequences.

Like other aspects of the Track 1.5 dialogues, our wargames were designed to undertake mutual (including for members of the control team) exploration and learning. Wargames are poor methods for proving a particular point or validating a policy or operational concept. This has been a major consideration over time in games run for U.S. government sponsors at the Naval War College— that is, that the game did not prove or validate a point of view or a military plan. It was important that this point was emphasized to players and remembered by the game designers and members of the control team. Some players came to the game understanding this due to their own professional experiences with wargames. For others, the concept of gaming was new, and it was important to reiterate those points before, during, and after the game. There is no right answer or preferred outcome. Even those who had significant experience with wargames or TTXs (both in the experience of Naval War College Track I games and this set of Track 1.5 games) needed the reminder at times. Game experiences are dynamic and unpredictable.

Game Design

All games in this series followed the same basic game design. Players were divided into two teams (India and Pakistan) with players performing as senior civilian and military decisionmakers in their respective governments. The control team played the roles of all other countries in the world as well as providing the moves of—and information on—sub-state actors and activities such as domestic and international economics and politics. While the control team responded in all instances where player teams reached out to other countries, by and large it tried not to have actions by outside powers be determinative of outcomes. The games were so-called move-step games with some intra-move communications added in later games. Team moves were adjudicated by subject matter experts who were members of the control

39 Erik Lin-Greenberg, Reid B.C. Pauly, and Jacquelyn G. Schneider, “Wargaming for International Relations research,” *European Journal of International Relations* 28, no.1 (2022), p. 86. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/13540661211064090>. Accessed November 8, 2024.

team. Teams were able to take actions in four areas of national power: diplomatic, information, military, and economics. Within military moves, teams had templates and order of battle for each service, plus a separate one for nuclear/strategic forces in order to provide more detail on their military actions.

In addition to team moves, each team was instructed at the beginning of the game (but after being briefed on the geopolitical scene and the crisis trigger) to predict what the other team would do in broad terms. We asked each country team for a “high” and a “low” option of how they expected the other team to respond. The control team did not define what “high” or “low” was; it left this to the teams to decide. This was a variant of an element of U.S. military planning where planners are asked to anticipate what an opponent’s most likely and most dangerous responses might be to planned actions. These predictions were shared with control and only revealed to the other teams at the final game plenary, where they were used to foster discussion.

First Attempt—Will this Work?

The first wargame in the series, a crisis simulation exercise, took place March 2013 in Colombo, Sri Lanka. The participants in the game were divided into three groups: an India team, a Pakistan team, and a control team. The control team consisted of the game sponsors, designers, and other U.S. subject matter experts on the region and wargaming. The two country teams consisted of players drawn from senior military retirees from the country in question as well as civilian policy analysts or former officials.

All games were held under the Chatham House rule.⁴⁰ While this was also the case with other events in this series of Track 1.5 dialogues, this rule and the underlying concept of trust among the participants was particularly important when it came to a wargame. In a game format, the players made “moves,” meaning that they made decisions/took actions. If those actions were attributed to particular and identifiable individuals, it could cause problems for that person with their current or previous place of affiliation. It could be interpreted as representing current policy or a predictor of possible actions of that country in a similar situation in the future—even though in game materials it was made clear that this was not the case. Game decisions do not represent official doctrine or policy.

In addition, and particularly in the first game, there had to be trust developed among participants and the scenario developers/game designers/control team if the game was to be successful and if there was to be the potential for future games. In this first game, this was helped in part because some of the senior retired military players on both the India and Pakistan team had played wargames during their careers. While one or the other team may have considered an element of a control-developed scenario or adjudication to be more or less plausible, they were willing to

⁴⁰ When a meeting, or part thereof, is held under the Chatham House Rule, participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, may be revealed.

go along for the sake of the game and a shared view of objectives for the game. Their mantra was “don’t fight the white,” which referred to the control team (often referred to as the “white” team in games where countries are identified by color rather than name). We needed the country teams to buy into the scenario.

The objective of the initial game was to gain a better understanding of escalatory dynamics in South Asia under the nuclear overhang. Some understanding among players already existed based on real-world events since 1998 (and some would argue, before) in which some of them had played a role. Others studied and wrote about these instances and had participated in previous Track 1.5 dialogues about them. However, projecting forward, the game was designed to add practical, conceptual clarity to those historical experiences and theoretical analyses.

The first game was set in the near future, which was the year 2018 at the time. We provided the teams with orders of battle for their forces and an initial briefing to give them a sense of the state of world politics, especially in their region five years in the future. We also provided each team with a private, tailored briefing that provided political guidance. They then were reassembled in a plenary session where the control team briefed players about a “trigger event” that began the crisis (in this case a terrorist strike in India about which there was significant disagreement about the degree of state involvement in the attack). The playing teams then separated and developed their country team “move.” The teams played three moves that unfolded over nine game days (two actual days). The control team began each move by asking the teams to plan for a set number of days, but during adjudication, the control team often “stopped play” before the full moves of each team were completed. The reason for this was that the control team found that a particular intersection of team moves was such that it was best for achieving game objectives to stop the game at that point to adjudicate significant interactions and then turn the game back over to the teams for their next move.

Game play escalated quickly into a full-scale conventional war and ended with the Pakistan team preparing to release warheads to its Strategic Forces Command, readying nuclear launchers for possible battlefield deployment, and signalling resolve through public statements and missile tests. After the three moves, the teams were assembled in a plenary session with the control team moderating where the team members discussed their moves, rationales, and what their perceptions were of the other teams moves and motivations. The plenary discussion was, in a word, intense. Players got emotional in ways that were rarely seen in other types of Track 1.5 events in this series. The players challenged assumptions and decisions that lead to war and escalation.

One of the strengths—and risks—of wargames is their evocative nature. Players become invested in actions in ways that are rarely the case in regular discussions. Players may also draw stronger conclusions from games than other types of analysis or interactions, even though those games may not be as valid in a scientific way

as other types of policy analysis.⁴¹ Players in games of this sort often go away with vivid recollections and strong reactions to game play, potentially leading them to overemphasize the analytic value of the game. In this case, the game designers/control team attempted to counteract this both at the outset of the game during the overview briefing and in the plenary session at the end of the game, emphasizing to players that this represented “one game, one set of players, and one time”—a useful but not at all definitive take on a future crisis such as the one posited by the scenario and played out by the teams.

The intensity and emotional component of the game, as well as the sheer volume of work involved for players and control team members, was an important lesson in this first game. The game designers/control team adapted in future games in recognition of these pressures and limitations. One lesson was that the players were in a very intense situation with time limits for drawing up moves and serious issues to confront, and yet those same players were essentially volunteers. They could and should not be “driven” the same way, for example, that serving military officers ordered to a game at either the Naval War College or the Naval Postgraduate School (or their Indian or Pakistani equivalents) could be. Similarly, the volume of material developed by each team during moves that required adjudication and feedback by the control team led to some very long nights.

It took until after the next game to make some significant changes to both the schedule and how the control team handled adjudication. One reason for the delay was the excitement among the organizers and designers of how well the first game had gone, meaning that the players played seriously, were engaged by issues, and everyone appeared to walk away with some important insights. The game sponsors and designers wanted to have another game to build on the first game’s perceived success and did not want to tweak the formula too much after the initial success. We made two main changes after the Istanbul series (discussed below). One was providing more down time for players between moves, with games structured so that players worked on one move per day, not two. This, of course, means that the games now take a longer amount of time, which has its own constraints in terms of costs for accommodation/meals and how much time players have available to participate.

A second big change in future iterations was an attempt to shift to more of an open intelligence game. In the first several games, some information was provided to all teams in the form of a “CNN brief”—basically world news of current events. The control team also provided private or exclusive information to each team consisting of intelligence or operational information. This led to a significant amount of work for control in a short amount of time, including determining what would be known publicly and what would not, which required the creation of three separate back briefs after each move, including team-specific intelligence updates. This also led to some long

41 Robert Levine, Thomas Schelling, and William Jones, “Crisis Games 27 Years Later: Plus C’Est Déjà Vu” (May 1991), Rand Corporation, P-7719. <https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/papers/2006/P7719.pdf>. Accessed November 8, 2024.

hours and late nights for control. Ultimately, we determined that the differences that private information made to team deliberations and moves was not significant enough to warrant continuing making three separate briefs, so we minimized team-only private information in future games (although some still remained).

This short summary of findings about the substance of each game here and below are the views of the control team. They draw on what the players did, what they said in plenary sessions, and the interactions of the teams with each other and with any other states or non-state actors played by the control team. The players almost certainly walked away from the games with their personal findings and views, but they shared some at the plenary session, even if they kept some views to themselves. Of course, we on the control team may not have characterized those views correctly.

In the first game, despite declared intentions on the part of the Indian team to conduct limited punitive strikes for a terrorist attack, military mobilizations that each side deemed necessary and defensive quickly led to escalation across both land and sea. By the end of the game, the Pakistan team was preparing to release warheads to its Strategic Forces Command, readying nuclear missile launchers for possible battlefield deployment, and conducting nuclear signalling through missile tests and public statements. What did we learn?

The control team's findings from the game, reflected in part by the players in the plenary session, were that enduring rivalry, chronic mistrust, and entrenched threat perceptions encouraged what turned out to be excessive military actions during the crisis and through the war. Neither side accurately predicted the other side's actions in their high/low templates. Limited war for India was a full-scale war for Pakistan, and the combination of India's conventional preponderance and team moves such as declaring a maritime exclusion zone (MEZ) were perceived as acts of war by the Pakistan team. India's conventional force advantages in certain areas incentivized the team to employ these forces maximally and early in a crisis, pushing an escalation spiral as Pakistan responded in ways that made discussion of deescalation or war termination difficult. As the war escalated both horizontally and vertically, the Pakistan team faced intense pressure to lower its threshold for nuclear signalling and use.

Building on Success and the Next Generation

Following the Colombo game, we held two games in 2014 in Istanbul. The first was a crisis-initiated game with similar senior playing teams as in Colombo that attempted to focus more closely on deployment and employment decision making challenges of tactical nuclear weapons in the battlefield. The reason for this focus was the then-newly announced Pakistani battlefield nuclear weapons on the Nasr short-range missile weapon system. The second was a similar game played with a younger cadre of civilian analysts. The focus on that game was twofold. The first was to see if this younger group of analysts, most lacking in military service or high-level civilian government service, looked at the issues and took the same actions as the more senior cadre playing the first Istanbul and Colombo games. The second was to provide

this younger cadre with time and opportunity to immerse themselves in a wargame setting and learn from it—something that was less frequent for those outside of the military or government civilian circles. One of our goals has been to support independent analysis of nuclear issues, including next-generation scholars.

For the second game we began farther into the crisis, which led to some player pushback when they argued that their government would not have taken certain actions posited by the game designers/control team. The design team wanted to push the players farther into a crisis, partly because of the time required for the teams to arrive at crisis levels, and our interest in going beyond where the players were at the end of the Colombo game. This design issue has remained consistent in the entire series of games—the desire to have the players address issues that only come about further into a crisis/war versus concerns that the players would object and/or fail to play vigorously if they felt that they were put in what they perceived as unrealistic situations where actions were taken “for them” ahead of their commencing play. Ahead of each game, the design/control team discusses this issue as it relates to the game objectives for the game in question. We also listen carefully to our players’ ideas about India-Pakistan relations and the risks of escalation and channel them into the game scenarios.

Disagreements with the game designers/control about both “what came before,” the players engaged in moves and over adjudication decisions at times led to some heated but informative discussions. The same was true both in Colombo and in Istanbul when the teams were brought together in plenary session to discuss their moves, rationales, and were given a chance to directly question the other team. This was to be expected given the gravity of the topics covered in the games as well as the tendency for games to be immersive experiences. Fortunately, the players expressed their strong feelings in the most professional way during and after game play. We have been fortunate to have such knowledgeable and genial participants.

A useful element of the games that helped to mitigate strongly held beliefs and allow time for discussion outside of formal game play were the shared lunches, dinners, and social events that were built into the schedule. Casual social interaction helped emphasize the collective nature of the gaming enterprise and the shared exploratory learning experience being undertaken by all. We sat together in mixed groups at meals, sometimes formally so and other times naturally, when people broke off into smaller groups to have less-formal conversations. Despite time limits and budgetary constraints, the social events were an important adjunct to the formal gaming sessions and allowed everyone to step out of their game role and talk about family, travel, and world events. We became friends.

The next iteration was the Istanbul game which built on insights from Colombo, but added new elements drawn from real-world events and capabilities. Broadly, the game showed the difficulty of India and Pakistan in establishing a stable deterrence relationship due in part to the presence of violent extremist groups—particularly in areas that are less-government controlled in Pakistan—that can trigger crises.

The other contributor to this lack of stability was India's relative preponderance in conventional forces and Pakistan's nuclear capabilities that would be deployed and demonstrated relatively early in a war to have the desired deterrent effect. India, however, attempts to use its conventional forces in ways that achieve policy goals but neither cross Pakistani nuclear red lines nor allow Pakistan's nuclear capabilities to intimidate India from using its conventional forces. Pakistan, unaware of the limited intent of India's plans and goals, feels compelled to mobilize both its conventional and nuclear forces early in crises and wars. The dilemma explored most closely in this game was the decisionmaking and timing around Pakistan's deployment of tactical nuclear forces, their potential employment, and India's reactions. We made clear that the purpose of the games is to examine the issues at a high level, and not to elicit any sensitive information from anyone.

Military Logic Predominance

The next game was built on our experiences from the Colombo and Istanbul games. It also solidified some of the issues we had identified earlier. Entrenched threat perceptions mattered a great deal to both the Indian and Pakistani team members, who assumed that any crisis would be followed relatively rapidly with a use of force. In addition, India's perceived conventional force advantages incentivized maximum use of those advantages quickly before international actors intervened to try to stop the fighting. A third key finding was that a limited war for India constituted a full-scale war for Pakistan, which then meant that consideration of the use of nuclear weapons was on the table from early in the crisis. As conventional war escalated, the pressure to lower the nuclear threshold was high. Signalling resolve and showcasing nuclear capabilities led to situations that were ripe for inadvertent escalation. Finally, as in previous games, both sides found it difficult to approach war termination with neither side wanting to back down in part because they felt such moves could limit their options in future crises.

This game differed from previous ones as it used a direct clash between the two states as a trigger rather than a terrorist attack. Nevertheless, the game again showed significant escalation with what were thought of as simple punitive strikes leading to something closer to full-scale war. Despite initial political guidance limitations by control for both teams, the momentum generated by military operations overtook these political limitations. By the time the teams even began to discuss questions of war termination, three of the four declared Pakistan thresholds for nuclear weapons use had been crossed or were close to being crossed.

Expanding on the first two games, this game had four additional conclusions. The first was that the play by the Indian team may have been—in both this and previous games—more aggressive than might be the case in the real world. Of course, it is impossible to know what actual decisionmakers would do if faced with the scenario posited in any game. However, we assessed that the Indian team was heavily influenced by the retired flag and general officer participants who took actions that

might not have been approved by Indian civilian government officials. Thereafter, we attempted to more closely approximate actual decisionmaking by including civilian equivalents of the retired flag and general officers who had “been in the room where it happened” in previous crises to act as a counterweight to former senior military officials. This ensured that military plans and operations were approved by players in senior civilian roles.

Another finding in this game was that Pakistan’s attempts to establish intra-war deterrence using threats of nuclear use were ineffective. Again, it is difficult to know whether this would translate into the real world where the stakes are, obviously, much higher. In addition, and as discussed by the game designers/control throughout this series, there is a risk that players could be signalling resolve in the game that they wanted to carry over to the real world rather than responding only to game inputs and decisions. This dynamic could distort conclusions about deterrence and escalation.

A third issue in this game was whether Pakistan’s assertion of having four nuclear red lines was matched by India’s recognition or understanding of them. In the game, India’s conventional forces significantly degraded Pakistan’s air force and navy (through control adjudication), but the Indian team did not seem to believe that this would be a trigger for nuclear use, focusing instead on the state of Pakistan’s Army (ground forces) as a red line. Team Pakistan’s lack of response to the attrition of some of its forces also could have been a symptom of bleed-over from the real world with the Pakistan team seeking to signal to the United States (via the U.S. game control team) as well as the India players that Pakistan was a responsible nuclear weapons state and not prone to escalation. Finally, we assessed that neither side effectively integrated diplomatic, economic, and informational elements into their strategies, allowing military considerations to dominate. Again, some of this may have had to do with the composition of the teams, but it also may reflect what happens once fighting starts.

Variations and Learning

By this point in the series of wargames, both the game design/control team and some of the regional players had learned a significant amount about both gaming issues of nuclear deterrence and escalation, as well about the design and dynamics of our games. In light of this, the design/control team adapted some aspects of the game to take advantage of the learning and carry it forward. In the previous games, an initial crisis escalated to a full-scale war and the use of nuclear signalling and weapon deployments, but the games ended before players either made decisions to use nuclear weapons or could begin to engage in de-escalation and/or war termination actions. What would happen if the game continued?

In addition to formalizing player roles and directing them to approximate their roles as they would in a real world decisionmaking process, we attempted to have the teams engage more deeply in questions of de-escalation and war termination. Previous games had mostly focused on initial reactions to trigger events and

escalation at the conventional level, ending most games at the stage of large-scale conventional war and only initial engagement with nuclear weapon movements and signalling. We wanted to design a game that provided scope for at least considering de-escalation and war termination. Prior to the game, we held a workshop with analysts and former officials—most of whom were players in the games—to analyze issues of de-escalation and war termination.

To focus on de-escalation or war termination, we posited a scenario where the game would begin after a full-scale conventional war was underway. To increase player buy-in, the scenario reflected player moves in previous games. The teams were then free to take decisions that escalated, de-escalated, or kept the game at the same level of warfare as well as adjusting their national goals if they wished.

While we entered the game with an unstated assumption that the design would allow or perhaps encourage the teams to engage in de-escalation and war termination efforts, the game play was just the opposite. On both teams, military exigencies trumped diplomatic pressure or political considerations (domestic and international). Both sides saw territorial gain/loss as a key metric for measuring victory or defeat and each wanted to gain more prior to entering into talks about de-escalating the war. Starting the game mid-conflict ultimately led to nuclear use on both sides. In fact, after the control team adjudicated an accidental nuclear detonation caused by an Indian conventional strike on a deployed Pakistani tactical nuclear system, both sides conducted limited nuclear strikes. The game ended at that point due to time constraints.

This game reiterated lessons from previous games. First, the Pakistan team interpreted the Indian team's moves as initiating a full-scale war and responded accordingly on both the conventional and nuclear levels—despite the Indian team intending them as limited conventional attacks. Second, engrained threat perceptions caused aggressive military reactions. Third, India's conventional force advantages incentivized large-scale and early use to achieve decisive effects. This led to an escalation spiral and made discussions of war termination difficult. Finally, as a limited war escalated horizontally and vertically, Pakistan faced intense pressure to lower its nuclear threshold. While the Pakistan team signalled nuclear resolve largely through public statements and field deployments of delivery systems, the conventional/nuclear interaction suggests that a similar dynamic would be present if the same scenario took place in the real world.

New Technologies and Deterrence/Escalation

After the de-escalation game that ended instead with escalation, our group accepted suggestions that we should explore the potential impact of new military technologies on deterrence and escalation. In the past, we always set the games a few years in the future to encompass a wide range of possibilities for the scenarios—and also to avoid any current-day political sensibilities. We set this next game even farther into the future (five years) to allow emerging technologies to be fully integrated

into regional forces. A unique feature of this game was the ability of teams to choose to purchase and integrate new military technologies into their arsenals. In previous games, teams were provided with an order of battle based on publicly available sources. In this game they were provided a notional budget and were allowed to purchase capabilities from among three generic categories of emerging technologies: unmanned aerial vehicles, long-range precision strike (conventional in the form of ballistic and/or cruise missiles), and cyber capabilities (both offensive and defensive). Both teams chose to spend 50% of their budget allocation on cyber capabilities.

The new technology “acquisition process” built for the game led to some of the same pathologies seen in real-world defense acquisitions. Generational and educational differences, security compartmentalization, and leadership’s limited understanding of the technologies under consideration meant that technologies were selected without clear integration with military operational or national strategic plans. The two sides struggled to prioritize the new capabilities, incorporate them into existing forces, and correlate possession and potential use of these new capabilities to potential or real objectives.

The game’s outcome was strikingly different from previous games, with both teams engaging in limited kinetic/cyberattacks—and purposely not mobilizing large ground and/or naval units to control escalation. As with most games, it is difficult to control all of the variables and isolate a single variable to test its effect. In this game, however, the design/control team felt that strong and experienced civilian participation in senior governmental roles kept the escalation process in check. Under this leadership, both teams discussed more deeply potential second- and third-order effects of any particularly military actions that they might take. The civilian leaders resisted pressure from the military participants to take actions quickly and at scale.

It was unclear how much could be drawn from this game about the impact of the new technologies on deterrence and escalation in the South Asia context. Again, there are many variables in addition to the robust civilian influence in this game. Second, while the teams used cyber assets more than the kinetic assets because they felt it would be less escalatory, in the post-game discussions we learned that the participants themselves were unsure what impact these technologies would have on questions of nuclear deterrence and potential use. Finally, participants often did not have the experience or time with these new capabilities to create new operational concepts for their use. In addition, this game took place prior to some initial real-world uses of these technologies in larger-scale wars such as the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflicts of 2022 and 2023, as well as during the Russia-Ukraine war after Russia’s full-scale invasion in February 2022. As has been seen particularly in the Russia-Ukraine war, the action-reaction cycle occurs much more rapidly in wartime, meaning that the actual impact of these new technologies—and the responses to them—are likely to be unclear in very short games such as those in this series where moves were measured in hours, days, and at most weeks.

Conclusions

Each of these games, and the entire legacy of these efforts, resulted in a set of shared experiences—but not necessarily shared conclusions across the array of players and members of the design/control team. The design/control team has stayed relatively constant across these games (with some shifting sponsorship and some additions of new participants in both design and control). The conclusions or findings discussed above should be seen as those of the design/control team with input from the players as expressed in the plenary sessions that usually took place at the end of the game. Whether players took home different lessons or conclusions than those they chose to share in the plenaries, meals, or informal side sessions is, of course, unknown. We did not use formal surveys during or after the games or collect and compile data sets, nor was there a desire to come to a uniformity of views either among the players or between the players and the design/control team. The shared experience and the discussions that followed were our primary objective.

The group of game designers and subject matter experts who managed this project for over a decade tried to come to a set of conclusions after each game based on observations of game play, notes taken during plenary sessions, discussions with the players, and reviewing game materials such as the team move templates. The broad goal of this series of games was to analyze the evolution of thinking about nuclear issues—ideally in an atmosphere of caution and prudence—with the goal to greater understand deterrence and escalation issues by both the participants and the members of the design/control teams. As with all Track 1.5 events, the hope is that these lessons flow back to policymakers and inform the broader national dialogues about nuclear risks.

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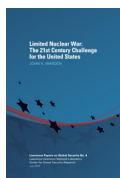
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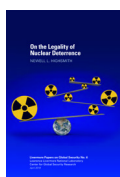
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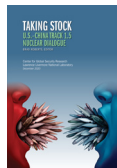
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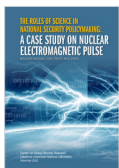
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