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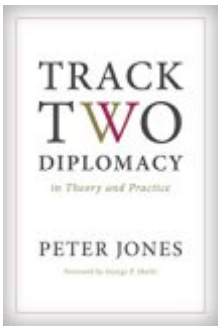
Peter Jones. *Track Two Diplomacy in Theory and Practice.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015. 256 pp. $85.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8047-9406-0.



Reviewed by Jason Quinn

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Commissioned by Seth Offenbach (Bronx Community College, The City University of New York)

Prominent statistician W. Edwards Deming is often credited with saying that "the most important things cannot be measured." If this is true, then the role of Track Two processes in reaching sustainable settlements in protracted group conflicts is most important. Yet, as Peter Jones points out in *Track Two Diplomacy in Theory and Practice*, the topic is severely understudied. Due precisely to their unofficial, unheralded, secretive, and diffuse nature, Track Two processes resist observation and operationalization, and academics have generally shied away from studying them for those reasons. Relatedly, government officials and practitioners are rarely able to comment with candor on the details and importance of what unfolds in Track Two processes, assuming they are even aware of the influence of Track Two processes. Previous coverage of Track Two processes has been far too simplistic, and Jones's new book will surely complicate the way that officials, practitioners, and students see Track Two processes and Track Two actors—in a good way. The picture that emerges from the book is one in which Track Two processes are seen as not merely activities that can be helpful at times to first track actors, but rather as processes that constitute indispensable spaces where the kinds of personal and relational changes necessary for reaching lasting agreements in violent conflicts very often take place.

Jones begins the book by describing the activities commonly attributed to Track Two processes and Track Two actors, although Jones appears to be less interested in defining Track Two processes as he is in pointing out what previous definitions leave out or misconstrue about them. None of the previous definitions are wrong per se: Track Two processes often include and do not include many things. Jones's account suggests that a prototypical Track Two process is one that consists of a small, informal group containing influential conflict actors from each side who engage in sustained dialogue of a problem-solving nature, with the goal of addressing psychosocial aspects of the conflict in order to develop novel options for moving negotiations forward. While I agree with Jones that no definition can capture all Track Two activities

and that successful peace building requires some movement away from conflict resolution approaches that excessively focus on elites, I am partial to the view that actors in a Track Two process must have meaningful ties to the actors involved in the official negotiations. Having worked for several years in a project that provides research support on peace agreement design and implementation to Track Two actors, I differentiate Track Two processes from civil society activities more generally by the ability of Track Two processes to influence the official negotiations.

The theoretical contribution of the book, in my view, is mostly prescriptive, that is, it offers guidance to designers of Track Two processes and provides useful linguistic tools for organizing the complexity of Track Two processes. I think Jones adequately situates the topic within the relevant literature without dwelling too long on the efforts of realists, liberals, and constructivists to pigeonhole Track Two activities to conform to their theoretical visions of how the world works. The book does not advance a novel Track Two theory that can be evaluated by its ability to explain variance in a particular criterion; it does contribute to a small set of meaningful theoretical debates.

In the chapter "Where Theory Meets Practice," Jones engages several debates in the academic literature with an emphasis on how his experiences in Track Two processes as a Canadian government official and scholar-practitioner inform these debates. He examines the proper role of third-party involvement in negotiations, the notion of conflict ripeness, and theories of reconciliatory change. Jones's view of the proper role of third parties in conflict negotiations is a quite different and far more modest view than the one obtained from reading studies on negotiation, written by political scientists, in which strong third-party guarantees on security and agreement enforcement are seen as the most important factor determining whether a conflict produces a lasting agreement or not.[1] Drawing at length from the work of Harold H. Saunders on the role of sustained dialogue in conflict negotiations (***Sustained Dialogue in Conflicts: Transformation and Change*** [2011]), Jones believes that the proper role of a third party is to act as a facilitator, providing a safe space where the conflict actors are encouraged (pushed) to engage in sustained dialogue with the goal of generating a shared understanding of the conflict, its causes, and the feedback loops that have perpetuated it. It has been noted that rarely can conflict actors themselves effectively brainstorm on alternatives to the present situation or even accurately communicate their true beliefs in the absence of a structured process.

Relatedly, Jones attempts to situate Track Two activities and goals within a wide range of paradigmatic "theories of change." In a Track Two context, theories of change refer to the different ways in which conflict actors are able to move away from mutually exclusive zero-sum narratives of the past toward a jointly constructed, shared narrative. Theories of change are important as they greatly inform and influence how a Track Two practitioner conducts his or her work. Ultimately, Jones does not formally endorse any particular theory of change, although he seems fond of John Paul Lederach's approaches to conflict transformation (***Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies*** [1997]). At the same time, Jones softly reject notions that Track Two should be about activism, implying a level of overlap between conflict transformation approaches and activism that I think is a bit overplayed: Lederach strongly emphasizes the necessity of de-politicization.

Next, Jones launches into the debate on conflict ripeness and the proper timing of negotiations, implying that "ripeness" does not refer to anything real or objective. I agree that the notion of ripeness only makes sense if we conceive of direct violence as resulting from the unfolding of structural factors that must reach some tipping

point in a linear process before their effects begin to change psychosocial beliefs. However, notions of ripeness begin to fall apart to the extent that conflicts are generated from psychosocial beliefs from the very beginning. If inter-group violence results mostly from subjective beliefs that create self-fulfilling prophesies, then conflicts are always ripe for settlement. Here I am not implying that grievances are merely social constructs. Rather I am referring to how ethnic entrepreneurs and partisans, with a vested interest in maintaining the conflict status quo, promote in-group cohesion and out-group demonization by exploiting existing group inequalities in political and economic standing. Conflict transformation approaches, in my view, seek to transcend group chauvinisms and social categorizations in an effort to construct a shared understanding of what has happened and how the parties have gotten to where they are.

Readers interested in practice will get the most out of the sections on problem-solving workshops, the key tool of Track Two according to Jones. The problem-solving workshop is not a one-time event, argues Jones, but a long-term series of meetings designed to produce practical ideas while psychologically transforming the participants. Sustained dialogue in a problem-solving workshop is as much about understanding one's own beliefs as understanding the beliefs of one's rival. The successful facilitator must have an innate talent for getting people to speak their minds in a constructive way that fosters mutual comprehension. It is a rare talent, and watching someone use it in a group setting can be a profound experience. I witnessed Saunders engage conflict parties in a meeting of the Nepal Transition to Peace Team (NTTP), a Track Two process led by Lederach at the Kroc Institute at the University of Notre Dame, and have become more and more intrigued with this method. Jones lays out the basic rules of the workshop process but does not provide a recipe that all processes must follow in order to be successful, or even to be defined as Track Two.

Despite Jones's own claim that one cannot learn how to be an effective third-party facilitator in a Track Two process purely from reading, interested parties can start with this book. Those interested in negotiations in general (and not just Track Two) will find Jones's arguments on the functioning and importance of Track Two processes insightful. Although Jones's Track Two projects involve interstate dyadic disputes, I found the approach of the book appealing and quite relevant to someone primarily interested in civil war negotiations.

Note

[1]. Barbara F. Walter, "The Critical Barrier to Civil War Settlement," *International Organization* 51, no. 3 (1997): 335-364; and Stephen John Stedman, Donald S. Rothchild, and Elizabeth M. Cousens, eds., *Ending Civil Wars: The Implementation of Peace Agreements* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002).

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