

Post-1998 Track II Diplomacy Between India and the USA: An Indian Perspective

Bhabani Mishra

Abstract

The paper discusses Track II Diplomacy between India and the United States with a special focus on the post-1998 period. Its scope is limited to Track II deliberations that have relevance to foreign policy issues. An effort has been made to assess the efficacy of Track II exercises on the basis of certain parameters developed for this study.

The findings of the study are based on the responses received from some experts in this field in India during direct interviews with them. Thus, the paper provides an Indian perspective.

— * —

Introduction

Track II or non-official diplomacy has gained considerable attention in recent years as a mechanism for conflict resolution and peace building between countries. The phrase 'Track II' was coined by Joseph Montville of the Foreign Service Institute in the year 1982 to describe methods of diplomacy that fell outside the formal governmental system. According to him, Track II diplomacy is "unofficial, informal interaction between members of adversary groups or nations which aims to develop strategies, influence public opinion, and organize human and material resources in ways that might help resolve their conflict".¹ Dr Louise Diamond and Ambassador John McDonald who later expanded non-official interactions into nine tracks define Track II as "the realm of professional non-governmental action attempting to analyse, prevent, resolve, and manage international conflicts by non-state actors."² However, current practice of Track II methods are neither limited to its narrow scope of conflict resolution nor limited to the members of adversary groups or nations. It has been utilised meaningfully to enlarge common grounds between the countries. This is especially true of Indo-US Track II practice.

The practice of non-official diplomacy originated in the US. Its history dates back to the year 1959 when Norman Cousins at the invitation of the President Eisenhower, conceived the idea of the Dartmouth Conference that served as a successful tool for Track II dialogue between the US and the USSR for many years to come. Perceived success of Track II in West Asia² (Oslo Peace Process) and Asia-Pacific (CSCAP)³ encouraged expansion of this process in the 1990s to other parts of the world including South Asia. The present paper does not deal with these efforts and its scope is limited to Indo-US bilateral Track II diplomacy with special reference to the post-1998 scenario.

There exists a lot of misconception about the exact meaning of Track II diplomacy. In an attempt to clarify the confusion it is important to understand that not all non-Track I activities are Track II. Track II is something that remains in close proximity of Track I to justify its relevance and hence its survival. Therefore, people-to-people contact, cultural exchanges, student exchanges, which are normally referred to as Track II activities are in reality not Track II. Similarly, back channel diplomacy (Niaz Niak and R. K. Mishra negotiations) cannot be considered Track II diplomacy due to its secretive way of functioning. Track II diplomacy can be defined as a process practiced by the countries which perceive it as a useful mechanism for confidence-building and exploring and enlarging common grounds with an intention of furthering their relations with their counterparts in a positive direction.

Objectives of Track II Diplomacy

- Conflict reduction and resolution through communications, interpretations and relationships.
- Reducing tension/anger/fear.
- Enlarging common grounds vis-à-vis issues divergent in nature.
- Enhance/influence Track I thinking and action by freely exploring 'options' and enabling formal negotiations.

Modalities for Track II Interactions

- *Seminars, conferences, workshops:* These fora can effectively be used for identifying problems and finding solutions for them; exploring joint strategies in handling issues/conflicts; arriving at common points.

- *Visits of scholars and experts:* If blessed by the government, these prove more effective in influencing Track I thinking and action. They mould public opinion; help change image of the country (through lectures, speeches, talks, etc.)
- *Media Imagery:* Writings in newspapers and television interviews. These can be effective tools in shaping public opinion and moulding it in favour of a country, especially in democracies.
- *Policy Studies:* Developing policy studies on issues that governments have not yet had time to address. Redefining policy issues so that policy-makers might see them in their own light and find new ways of resolution.⁴

Indo-US Relations

Before discussing the Track II diplomacy between India and the US, it is necessary to consider the existing between these two countries.

Summary of Present Indo-US Ties

- India and the United States have come out of the box of ‘neither enemies nor friends’ status and “freed themselves of the limiting confines of Cold War ideologies”.⁵
- India through its official and unofficial diplomacy as well as through its policies has been able to convey to the US that a country of its size, population, democratic nature, economy and market potential, human resource, and its geo-political relevance could be of considerable importance to the US in fulfilling its global agenda. The recent developments in Indo-US relations, be they in the field of technology, defence, or fighting against terrorism, reflect this fact.
- Following the previous point, the most important achievement for India over the last decade was to convince the United States that India has more to offer to the world if perceived as a power beyond South Asia and more particularly, independent of its relations with Pakistan.
- Nuclear non-proliferation as an issue (although very much in the Indo-US agenda) has taken a back seat compared to other issues such as economic (trade and commerce) and social (HIV/AIDS) issues, promoting democracy, etc.

- The relationship is yet to take a definitive shape and is still evolving.⁵

Relevance of Track II in Evolving Indo-US Relations

The utility of Track II in the context of India and the USA has often been questioned on the ground that it is needed when countries are in adversarial positions, which is certainly not the case between them. Therefore, why should Track II be a part of Indo-US diplomacy? Some analysts even believe that Track II was important during the pre-Pokhran II period due to the nuclear stalemate that existed between the two countries, in which Track I could not make desired progress.⁶ As a result, Track II was augmented to serve this purpose. In an attempt to counter this view, the author believes that this assumption of Track II taking over from where Track I failed and working on it, although serves the original meaning of Track II, but it is completely based on the traditional, narrow definition of Track II, which is confined to conflict management only. If looked at from a broader perspective, Track II mechanisms could effectively be used for enlarging common grounds and exploring joint strategies between the countries. Many analysts rather believe that Track II could prove very useful in the context of Indo-US relations due to many reasons. These include the following :-

- India and the United States are two vibrant democracies where public opinion plays a very important role. Unlike in other authoritarian countries, agreement at Track I level between India and the US needs to be firmly supported by majority public opinion for its sustenance. The CTBT debate in India was a case in point. Parallel engagement at Track II level helps minimise this gap by creating a conducive atmosphere for wider interaction.
- India and the US have divergent views on many issues; for example, WTO-related issues, nuclear non-proliferation and global disarmament, and environmental issues. But at the same time both countries are willing to reach common ground. This common agreement can only be reached by making one understood by the other. Engaging each other in informal dialogues provides ample scope to understand each other's viewpoints, discuss and debate these issues freely and frankly, which sometimes cannot take place in formal diplomatic discussions due to many reasons.⁷
- Track II diplomacy provides a platform for longer hours of discussion, which is not possible in formal official negotiations. Governments

discuss issues of the day. There are some issues that are complicated and complex in nature and require special kind of expertise. Our bilateral trade issues are of this nature. Track II provides good opportunity for such detailed discussions by experts.⁸

- It provides scope to discuss sensitive issues like Kashmir and Pakistan, which are sometimes restrained from formal discussions to maintain official decorum.⁹
- It enables the participants to think outside the box.¹⁰ (Innovative thinking). If pursued diligently, it might suggest new ways of breaking the US policy barrier vis-à-vis India.
- It enables the government to send feelers, which may not be politicking otherwise and can deny it if need be.¹⁰ (Deniability).
- This mechanism provides an opportunity to both the governments to know outside government views of each other which help them plan long-term strategies.¹⁰

Case Studies of Indo-US Track II Efforts: Post-1998 Period

After Pokharan II Indo-US Track II activities after Pokhran II have taken place in two different ways:

- 1 Unilateral Track II Initiatives:
 - a. At the individual level;
 - b. At the organisational level.
- 2 Bilateral Track II Dialogues:
 - a. At the organisational level

Individual Level Track II Diplomacy

The nuclear tests conducted in May 1998 by India angered the United States and it was reflected in the statements of the US Administration and in the media reactions, both electronic and print. It was a delicate situation where the US Administration and the strategic community, especially the non-proliferation community, had a high level mistrust of India. That was the time when the Indian Mission in the US had an exceptionally tough time in the history of Indo-US relations looking for support to counter anti-India propaganda and justify its action.¹¹ A conscious effort was made by the Indian Mission in Washington to undo the ill-effects of this propaganda by engaging

people who understood India's security concerns and perceived them objectively.

Dr Henry Kissinger, former US Secretary of State, expressed his views on CNN on May 13 saying that India lived in a troubled neighbourhood and if he were in the position of the Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, he would have done the same thing.¹² His words carried weight in the Republican circles and it influenced the opposition's view and encouraged other opposition members to speak on the same lines. Soon after the President of the Republican National Committee, Jim Nicholson gave more or less the same view as the Government of India. He said, the Administration should have known that it was in the BJP's manifesto. "We have not taken India's security concerns on board".¹² Former US National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brezsinski, and the Dalai Lama (he has a lot of influence on some Congressmen) gave helpful statements. Former President Jimmy Carter gave another statement in favour of India and India could manage to get both Republican and Democratic support. Richard Haas, Director, Foreign Policy Studies, The Brookings Institution, as early as May 14, 1998, came out with a balanced view in *The Washington Times*. He said although the timing of the tests was a surprise to the US, it was in consistence with India's prior position, i.e., longstanding refusal to sign the NPT, and its reservations on the CTBT, and the political agenda of the BJP.¹³ Therefore, it only made India's nuclear weapons status more explicit. He further suggested that isolating India would not serve United States' economic and strategic interests and hence the US should go for minimum economic sanctions.¹³

An analysis of the statements of the people close to the power circle, who countered propaganda against India, provide considerable evidence that these views later were reflected in the Administration's stand when the US Assistant Secretary of State Karl Inderfurth made a statement during his briefing on India and Pakistan on June 26, 1998. He said in the briefing, "I would like to make a fundamental point. While we do not accept the rationales given by India and Pakistan for testing or possessing nuclear weapons and believe that the tests have diminished their security, we must continue to recognise that as sovereign nations, both India and Pakistan have legitimate security concerns and interests, and we must bear that in mind as we move forward. We have far too many national interests at stake to do anything other than engage under these terms".¹⁴ The talks between Jaswant Singh and Strobe Talbot, which started on June 11, 1998 would have influenced

American thinking on it. At the same time, the impact of views outside the government also deserve recognition.

Recognising the fact that the nuclear tests had created enough antagonism in the US to spoil the earlier improved bilateral relationship, India took all necessary measures — both official and unofficial Track II methods — to reach out to the Administration as well as the wider public in the US to make India's security concerns well heard. While Jaswant Singh and Strobe Talbot were engaged in intensive official dialogue, the Government of India sent many individual delegates bearing high credentials to carry messages across.¹⁵ These individual delegates were provided access to high-level policy-makers through India's Mission in Washington and were also engaged in dialogues with former diplomats, think tanks, members of the business community and academia of the US.¹⁵ Although the Ministry of External Affairs declined to comment on this, it was revealed through other sources that this initiative helped a great deal to clarify India's position and helped clarify many controversial issues in a comprehensive manner.¹⁶

Organisational Level Track II Efforts

The 1998 nuclear tests created such an urgency amongst the think tanks in the US and in the strategic community there they were eagerly looking for answers to a huge number of questions such as, why did India do the tests when it did; whether India would conduct more tests; would it go ahead with deployment of nuclear weapons; what were India's security concerns; would India's nuclear weapons programme have any security implications for the United States, etc. The US Administration was not in a position to address its public demand as far as these issues were concerned, because Jaswant Singh-Strobe Talbot talks had just started and were yet to yield concrete results. The Government of India could not possibly reach out to the wide audiences in the US through the formal diplomatic channel. Hence, many academic and research institutions like Brookings, Carnegie, RAND Corporation, Stimson Center, Asia Society, Center for Security and International Studies (CSIS), Center for International Trade and Security (CITS) in the University of Georgia, Center for International Security and Arms Control (CISAC) in the Stanford University, American Enterprise Institute, Monterey School of Non-Proliferation, and others, hosted a number of seminars and conferences to find answers to their queries.

The Stimson Center was initially critical of India's nuclear tests but moderated its stand sometime later. The Brookings Institution was more forthright and the first one to raise its voice against economic sanctions and suggested that the US should have a multi-layered approach towards this issue. The RAND Corporation quite rationally and professionally analysed India's nuclear posture. That it was fed into the US Administration is evident from the fact that the author of the RAND Study, *India's Emerging Nuclear Posture* (Ashley J. Tellis), later joined the US Administration as the Chief Adviser to Ambassador Robert Blackwill. The Asia Society could not possibly take any position but it created many fora for interaction and invited Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee to address a distinguished audience in its premises in New York in one of the fora in September 1998. Rockefeller, Alton Jones, Carnegie, CSIS, CITS, CISAC initiated several dialogues in which the Indian business community, academia, journalists, and strategic thinkers participated and articulated India's viewpoints that led to a situation where US participants found themselves better informed and felt the need to rethink their stand vis-a-vis India. That perhaps had an impact and later we saw some moderation on the US attitude towards India's nuclear tests.

Apart from these efforts, the post-1998 period witnessed a range of sustained Track II dialogues (some of these are still continuing) involving some organisations from both the countries. These dialogues are the following:

- IDSA-NDU Strategic Symposium
- NIAS-USNAS Dialogue
- IPCS-Brookings Dialogue on Indo-US Relations
- NIAS-Asia Society Strategic Dialogue
- CII-Aspen Indo-US Strategic Dialogue
- CII-Carnegie Endowment Trade Dialogue

IDSA-NDU Strategic Dialogue: The end of the Cold War motivated India and the US to re-examine their relations with each other, which prompted the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) to initiate a non-official dialogue through the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA) with the National Defense University (NDU). Lack of progress in Track I vis-à-vis the nuclear issue necessitated this set of Track II, success in which could not be achieved either.¹⁷

There have been eight meetings so far since the starting of the Dialogue in the year 1989. The focus of these discussions was arms control and nuclear non-proliferation. Although the discussion centred around arms control and nuclear non-proliferation, regional security, global systemic issues, India's 'Look East Policy', Indo-Pakistan relations, arms control and nuclear non-proliferation critically came up repeatedly and became a major stumbling block.

However, the May 1998 tests ended this debate. There was no meeting during 1998-2001. The meeting was resumed in 2002 in Washington. Although the focus was on broader issues such as energy security and terrorism, besides nuclear risk reduction, it did not yield desired results because the general feeling of the establishment in India as well as in the US was that the importance of IDSA-NDU dialogues is diminishing.¹⁸

NIAS-USNAS Dialogue: This dialogue process started in 1999 and was held bilaterally between USA and India with two groups of people, i.e., US National Academy of Sciences and the National Institute of Advanced Studies (NIAS). These two groups have met four times so far — twice in India (NIAS) and twice in America (Washington).¹⁹ What was noteworthy in this dialogue was that it largely avoided any reference to the NPT. The focus of these meetings was an issues related more to technology such as thorium utilisation (the US earlier had strong views against thorium utilisation), US proliferation concerns (i.e. FMCT, CTBT) and allied subjects. Matters having a purely political bias took a back seat which gave the impression to our scientific community that the US was beginning to appreciate the progress India had made in various fields of atomic energy, space and defence in particular and science and technology in general.²⁰

Despite the impact of this dialogue in terms of showcasing India's science and technology potential and making the US aware of it, the dialogue could not break much ice as far as policy-making was concerned. Since the issues discussed focussed on science and scientific affairs and were far removed from policy-making, the discussions did not contribute much towards breaking the present policy barriers and hence influence foreign policy-making.²¹

IPCS-Brookings Dialogue on Indo-US Relations: Institute for Peace and Conflict Studies, New Delhi, and The Brookings Institution, Washington D. C., jointly organised a series of dialogues after Pokhran II, 1998. Mr P. R.

Chari, Director, IPCS and Prof. Stephen Cohen from Brookings were the two main actors of this series of dialogues. IPCS-Brookings had three sets of meetings: the first one was held in New Delhi during March 6-7, 2000; the second was in Washington during February 14-16, 2001; and the third and the last one in New Delhi on October 17, 2002. Besides core issues of non-proliferation, the dialogue focussed on many peripheral issues such as Indo-US common geopolitical interests (Central Asia and oil, Gulf security and energy-related issues), weapons of mass destruction, etc. IPCS felt that it would be useful to focus on common geopolitical interests and discuss peripheral issues where both countries have joint stakes, to see what was the thinking on common interests of both the countries rather than restricting to only bilateral Indo-US relations.²²

The IPCS-Brookings dialogue did not bear much fruit due to the fact that IPCS-Brookings team could not create the right atmospherics to yield the desired results.³³

NIAS-Asia Society Dialogue: The first NIAS-Asia Society Dialogue was convened at NIAS, Bangalore in March 2002 followed by another meeting in June in Pocantico, New York. The Indian team was led by Dr Roddam Narasimha, Director, NIAS while the US team was led by Harry Barnes, of The Asia Society, a former US Ambassador to India. The dialogue focussed on a wide range of issues from counter-terrorism to energy security and civil space and nuclear technology. There was a “serious effort by both sides to work out specific items that could add content to Indo-US relations such as building up technical cooperation, examining commonalties of interest in West Asia as well as East Asia, stabilizing Central Asia.”²⁴

Although, many participants observed that the atmosphere improved in a forward looking way for a congenial Indo-US dialogue, some of the reservation of the past still remained. This was felt during discussions on some sensitive areas like Pakistan and J&K. However, India’s concerns were well understood by the American interlocutors. In fact, further discussions relating to Pakistan became the most useful subject for the group’s work. Some notes for practical purposes were drafted by the two working groups and sent to the MEA separately. There could be a possibility that some of the input might have influenced Government of India’s thinking vis-à-vis Pakistan. However, in overall terms, meetings of this nature do take time to produce tangible results and need to be pursued with patience.

The most important drawback of this dialogue was that while it was acknowledged and appreciated by the Government of India, it did not have a similar impact on the US Administration. This might be due to the US team lacking the presence of the so-called heavyweights who were close to the power circle and hence could influence the Administration's thinking.²⁵ NIAS had tacit support of Track I in its endeavour,²⁶ but the efforts of The Asia Society were not commensurate with those of the prior. The dialogue could not be carried forward due to paucity of funds on the part of The Asia Society.²⁷

CII-Aspen Strategic Dialogue: The idea of having a meaningful broad-ranging bilateral dialogue was born from the conversation between Mr. Tarun Das, Director-General, Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) and Dr Philip Zelikow, Director, Aspen Strategic Group (ASG). This India-US Strategic Dialogue was convened in January 2002. The first meeting was held in Udaipur followed by another in August 2002 in Aspen, Colorado. The third and the latest meeting was held in Washington D. C. in October 2003.

This dialogue brought together a select group of leading Indians and Americans for discussions on wide-ranging issues such as foreign policy and its domestic context, policy barriers and technology transfer, geopolitics, energy security, terrorism, world economy and globalisation, promoting democracy and democratic values, better governance, etc.²⁸

Participants agreed that India would be one of the major powers that would play a significant role in shaping the world of the 21st century. It was suggested that India's influence and prospects of getting closer to the global power circle depended on achieving durable peace and good relations between India and Pakistan as well as India and China. Working together for the security of Persian Gulf would be vital for both India and the US.²⁸

Terrorism, cyber security and information technology, as well as biotechnology were some other subjects that were focussed on for better Indo-US collaboration.

The CII-Aspen initiative has been considered useful and productive as far as both the governments are concerned. One of the participants explained the success of the Dialogue as, "getting heavyweight Americans and binding them for a three-day continuous talk is not a small thing. Unless they (Americans) see something happening they will not be wasting their time."

The fact that the US team was led by Dr Henry Kissinger and Indian team by Amb. Naresh Chandra provides enough proof that the CII-Aspen Dialogue had the potential to impact government thinking of both sides. This was reinforced by the presence of American Ambassador to India Robert Blackwill and Mr. Jayant Prasad, Joint Secretary, Americas, Ministry of External Affairs throughout the meeting.

Another noteworthy feature of the CII-Aspen Dialogue was that very careful attention was given to the composition of the teams. The CII team was selected in consultation with the MEA.²⁹

CII-Carnegie Endowment Trade Dialogue: This dialogue is an offshoot of the CII-Aspen Strategic Dialogue. While discussing strategic issues during the Aspen meeting, it was recommended by the group that there was a greater need to commence an unofficial trade dialogue to discuss WTO- related issues in a free and frank manner, and discuss specific issues that need longer hours of discussion and special expertise. It was also realised that in all multilateral fora such as GATT, WTO, etc., policy-makers talked on behalf of the stakeholders. Industries who are the real stakeholders do not get adequate chance to express their viewpoints.

With this in view, CII-Carnegie started a trade dialogue in November 2002. So far, they have had three meetings, out of which two were held through video conferencing. The last one was held in February 2003. Trade unions, academia, and various other interest groups had been consulted to create the ground for the dialogue. The composition of the Indian team showed that it had representation from both large-scale and small-scale industries. Media, legal experts, and academia also were included in the team to provide a democratic touch to the representation. The important feature of this set of meetings was that there had always been participation of Track I, from both the countries (Ministry of Commerce and Office of the USTR) which authenticated the fact that the proceedings of the meetings were providing inputs to the governments. Many of the participants feel that the present CII-Carnegie Dialogue has potential to play an important role in supplementing the official trade dialogue that was launched in November 2001.

The issues on the agenda for discussion are:

- Doha development issues
- WTO issues

Participants realised that there was great opportunity for Indo-US collaboration in R & D our knowledge-based in industries, i.e., information technology and biotechnology, if Indo-US divergence various policy issues was minimised. Unless such divergence on addressed satisfactorily, it would be hard for both the parties to arrive at common understanding on the issues. This could only be done through dialogue, from dialogue to understanding and from understanding to cooperation and collaboration. This kind of dialogues provide fora for both countries to address each other's concerns and apprehensions regarding many issues such as anti-dumping, steel quota, GSP given to India (India's concerns), IPR protection, FDI ceiling and market access barriers that exist in India (US concerns), etc.

Although it is too early to expect any tangible results from this dialogue, some symptoms of positive understanding are noticeable. For example, as one participant claims, "It has helped India to express and make the US acknowledge its concern over possible US patent monopoly and its resultant effect on its poor population in case India plans to provide patent protection to the US Pharma industries".³⁰ Another participant said, "India has signaled to the US that its repeated mention of the Chinese example is not appropriate for India because unlike authoritarian China, India is a vibrant democracy where domestic political interests, and stakes of the civil society are taken into consideration while framing broader economic policies. It was well acknowledged by the US". Another noteworthy feature of this dialogue is that a working group has been formed to work on an idea of entering into a Free Trade Agreement which both groups are willing and anxious to work for. The CII is hopeful that if the sustainability of this dialogue with its current vigour is taken care of, sooner or later it will yield results.

Evaluating Indo-US Track II Diplomacy

For evaluating the present Track II diplomacy between the two countries the following parameters have been used: -

Effective Coordination Between Track I and Track II

Track II efforts can be effective if they get filtered down to the government, which is the implementing authority. Much of it depends on the readiness of Track I to take interest in Track II. It is a two-way process of briefing and debriefing between Track I and Track II that helps maintain coherence between

the two bodies. Unfortunately, in India there is no churning interaction between the Government and outside experts. Three reasons for this are worth mentioning here as they affect effective coordination between Track I and Track II in India: -

Firstly, the Indian system does not allow interchangeability between Track I and Track II. It does not have a tradition of people moving back and forth from think tanks to policy-making and vice-versa as it is the case in the United States.

Secondly, 'bureaucratic ego', 'we are the experts' kind of an attitude, as many experts pointed out, holds the establishment back many a time in acknowledging Track II efforts, although the outcome of Track II is used in preparing the groundwork for a suitable cause.

Thirdly, the usual complaint one gets to hear from the government officials is that sometimes Track II participants are not aware of the contours of the relationship between the countries and in the process create contradiction rather than complementing Track I initiatives. On the other hand, frequent and meaningful interaction between policy-planners and think tanks in the US enable Track II participants to handle their situation in a better manner.

Composition of the Team

Having people who are closer to the power circle helps Track II become more effective. Closeness to the power circle provides the participants a fair degree of reliability for their views. Their opinions carry more weight than those of others. This is probably one of the reasons why the CII-Aspen Dialogue was treated the way it was. One is aware of the political influence Henry Kissinger, Mr. Ratan Tata and Ambassador Naresh Chandra have vis-à-vis their governmental sphere to make their views heard.

Secondly, representation of people from different walks of life equips the team with varied expertise and knowledge base while giving it a democratic feel, that proves useful in a democratic system like India. But this inclusive composition of a team is not free from drawbacks. There exists a possibility where intra-group rivalry is reflected in their viewpoints. This is not a healthy practice when Track II efforts are pursued to achieve a common goal. Thus, it is necessary to set prior rules to work homogeneously while considering inclusiveness of a group to avoid the drawback.

Subjects of Discussion

Subjects of Track II discussion should go along the national interests and government agenda. In other words, it should be contemporary. The ‘not so successful’ result of the NIAS-CISAC, Academy of Sciences Dialogue could probably be attributed to the fact that it focussed on purely science and scientific affairs and was far removed from policy-making. The CII-Aspen, CII-Carnegie, and to a limited extent the NIAS-Asia Society dialogues have been acknowledged by the establishment because they all discussed issues that were there on the Government agenda. Moreover, Government of India realises that especially at a time when industry-Government combination plays an important role in deciding the agenda for discussions such as high-tech trade, venture capital, information technology, bio-technology, dual use US goods and technology etc., the CII has a major role to play.

Timing of the Dialogue

The purpose of Track II is best served when it precedes Track I and prepares the ground for Track I meetings. This happens normally when the official channels are not open for communication; as in the case of, Track II intervention in bringing Israel and Palestine to the negotiating table. This is not the case between India and the US. Indo-US Track I deliberations are far ahead of Track II these days.³¹ Is there any role that Track II can play in this situation? A majority of the experts interviewed by the author suggested that the Track II activities would be useful in the present context as they can supplement Government’s bilateral discussions on issues that require lengthy and protracted deliberations, and special expertise and involve a certain degree of unpleasantness. They also provide constant feedback to the Government and also educate the US that has very little expertise and understanding about India. Track II is considered useful also for educating US policy analysts about India.³² Many Track II visits have been sponsored by the Government to serve this purpose.

When the two governments are engaged in a formal dialogue, whether strategic or economic, they have less time for discussing peripheral issues that have relevance or sometimes are regarded as the basis of the core issue. The case in point could be globalisation and the opening up the economy and Indo-US divergence regarding this. Track II activity like the CII-Carnegie and the CII-Aspen dialogues explain the contours of the Indian societal system, democratic structure, the governance system, and the law and order system,

which helps the US strategic community understand India's dilemma better and helps clear misperceptions and misconceptions to some extent.

Manner in which the Meetings are Organised

The major objective of Track II diplomacy is confidence building and this objective cannot be achieved if the participants do not get enough time to talk and meet in an informal way. Nine-to-five across-the-table meetings do not provide enough scope to the participants to get close enough to influence each other. An informal setting, for example, meeting over lunch and dinner, enable participants to get frank with each other.

Funding

While Government funding enhances Track II effectiveness, the credibility is in question and the activity is sometimes dubbed as an extension of official dialogue. Similarly, foreign financial support to conduct Track II exercises is viewed suspiciously and hence considered less credible. Contrary to this view, many Track II practitioners believe that funding does not impact on the outcome of the meeting if the participants are committed to their own national interests.

Outcome of the Dialogue

The outcome can be categorised into the following groups:

- Agreement to talk again: This shows the parties are not yet fully informed about each other, but interested to know each other better.
- Understanding each other's dilemma.
- Desire to arrive at a common understanding.
- Working towards arriving at a common understanding.
- Unpacking complex issues, i.e., making inroads into policy-making.

If one has to evaluate Track II exercises on the basis of these outcomes, the results of the survey³³ conducted by the author reveal that Track II initiatives between India and the US have been useful in terms of understanding each other's positions and dilemmas and trying to build confidence amongst each other. It is, however, too early and also unrealistic to expect Track II deliberations to reach the stage where they could be instrumental in simplifying complex issues that have existed since decades

between these two countries. Although the CII-Aspen initiative has been rated high in this context, Track II proponents advocate conducting more of such dialogues to market India's strength and potential and thereby penetrate into the decision-making process of the US Government.

Overall Assessment of Post-1998 Track II Diplomacy

The nature of pre and post-1998 Track II diplomacy between India and the US is very different. Lack of progress at the Government level on the issue of nuclear non-proliferation and arms control necessitated Track II diplomacy during the pre-1998 period. But during the post-1998 period both the governments were willing to talk and Jaswant Singh-Strobe Talbot talks started immediately, and after certain rounds of talks over a period of time, the official position of the governments crystallised on many issues. As a result, subsequent meetings seemed to be nothing but a reiteration of the same; each side trying to convince the other of the changes that occurred during the interim period between one meeting and the other. Government representatives, while talking had to be very cautious. There was a very narrow limit within which one could officially innovate. This augmented the need for Track II interaction between the two countries. Therefore, non-official interactions between India and the US, that were running parallel to the Jaswant Singh-Strobe Talbot talks, helped clarify US apprehensions, misperceptions and misconceptions about India's nuclear posture, future nuclear policy, India's domestic debate on CTBT, impact of economic sanctions, etc. The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) delegations ably articulated the adverse impact of economic sanctions on Indo-US relations. They succeeded to an extent in convincing their counterparts that economic sanctions were affecting the US more than India.

The entire focus of Indo-US debate in the post-1998 period shifted from nuclear non-proliferation to nuclear stability, concepts of nuclear deterrence, trade and commerce, energy security, fighting international terrorism, promoting democratic values and improving governance. Hence, the key focus was on: whether the US understood the full dimensions of India's strategic and security concerns, whether the two countries could arrive at a basis for engagement, and the geographical context of such engagement.

Taking into account the current constructive engagement between the two largest democracies in the world, especially after Pokhran II, it is evident

that Track II deliberations have been fruitful in complementing Track I activities. Recognition of India as 'more than a regional power', acknowledging India's potential to be a future power to be reckoned with, its economic and market potential, and its capabilities to contribute to world peace and security, has been a result of the effect of a symbiotic combination of Track I and Track II.

Conclusion

Track II activities are a recent phenomenon in India, which as a confidence-building mechanism is still evolving in the country. It is gaining in importance as compared to the past. Earlier, Track II activity was a matter of formality to answer the criticism that the Foreign Office and the establishment did not work in an ivory tower. Earlier, these activities were usually not taken seriously until the Government designated somebody to get something done. It was internal discussions in the Government that structured policies.³⁴

But it has been observed during a study recently conducted by the author that the present scenario is a changed one. There has been a realisation on the part of the concerned public that international relations are now far too complex and multi-faceted to be left only to the Government officials. There are so many competing interests at work, that counter each other country's interests.³⁵ This is particularly true of Indo-US relations. The shift in focus from politico-military issues to trade and commerce has brought in a kind of industry-Government coalition as far as policy shaping is concerned. Hence, the CII, FICCI and the US-India Business Council have been actively involved in the process of decision-making.

The study also reveals that think tanks in India are trying to make their presence felt in key policy deciding circles. By facilitating exchange of ideas between scholars representing think tanks and Government officials and policy-makers on key domestic and foreign policy issues, these think tanks have started asserting themselves in terms of conveying their ideas to the policy-makers. Although often overlooked, Track II efforts appear to make contributions during critical debates on key security and foreign policy issues. Their contributions during the CTBT debate in 1995-96 and in the aftermath of Pokhran II, and in the debate on WTO-related issues are a few examples. However, India lags far behind the US in terms of having an effective networking between Track I and Track II. Although the Indian governmental

structure is responsible to a great extent for this, developing and strengthening ties with Government officials is vital for Track II to succeed in its deliberations. The study suggests that India has already started working in this direction, so as to establish a cohesive combination of Government and non-Government units such as industry, business and think tanks. There still exist some critical nuances, that need to be examined and worked out prudently; for instance, the negative impact of Track II deliberations.

It is believed that constructive engagement between India (with its combined energy of Track I and Track II as mentioned above) and the US — provided the negative nuances of Track II deliberations are managed well — would prove useful and productive in removing decade-long suspicions and uncomfortable feelings and beginning a new chapter that might become beneficial for both the countries in fulfilling their national as well as global interests and aspirations.

Acknowledgement

The author thanks the two anonymous referees for their comments and suggestions on the paper.

References/End Notes

- 1 Montville, Joseph V., *The Arrow and the Olive Branch: A Case for Track Two Diplomacy*. In John W. McDonald, Jr. and Diane B. Bendahmane, *Eds.*, *Conflict Resolution and Track Two Diplomacy*. 1996. IMTD; Washington D. C., 1996, p.9. Louise Diamond and Ambassador John McDonald expanded the conceptual paradigm of Track II and came out with nine tracks to include the contribution of the different sectors of the civil society to peace building. Since there exist no compartmentalization amongst these tracks and they overlap each other, the justification for the creation of nine tracks seems less logical to the scholar.
- 2 Diamond, Louise, and John McDonald, *Multi-Track Diplomacy: A Systems Approach to Peace*. 1996. IMTD, Kumarian Press; Washington D.C. p.4.
- 3 Simon, Sheldon W., *Evaluating Track II Approaches to Security Diplomacy in the Asia-Pacific: the CSCAP Experience*. *The Pacific Review*. 2002, **15** (2) 167-200.
- 4 RAND Corporation's study *India's Emerging Nuclear Posture in 2000* authored by Ashley J. Tellis provides a good example of it especially in the context of India and the United States.
- 5 Speech by the National Security Adviser Brajesh Mishra at Council of Foreign Relations, May 7, 2003 at <http://www.indianembassy.org/>

- 6 Interview with Deputy Director, IDSA, Commodore Uday Bhaskar, July 4, 2003; Sujit Datta, July 7, 2003.
- 7 Interview with the experts.
- 8 Interview with Dr Ashley J. Tellis
- 9 Content analyses of the responses from the interviews with the experts.
- 10 Interview with Dr Ashley J. Tellis.
- 11 Interview with the then Ambassador to the US Naresh Chandra, May 3, 2003.
- 12 Quoted by the Ambassador of India to the US Naresh Chandra in an interview with *India Abroad*, October 25, 2002.
- 13 Richard Haas, Director, Foreign Policy Studies, Brookings Institution in *The Washington Times*. May 14, 1998.
- 14 Text: Indurfurth's 6/26 Briefing on India and Pakistan, www. state.gov.
- 15 Interview with the Ambassador to the US Naresh Chandra, Former Foreign Secretary J. N. Dixit, Former Foreign Secretary S. K. Singh. Ambassador K. S. Bajpai. These individual delegates include former Ambassador to the US K.S.Bajpai, former Foreign Secretary, J.N.Dixit, Former foreign secretary S. K. Singh, Journalist and Strategic Analyst Dr. C. Rajamohan, Deputy Director, IDSA Commodore C. Uday Bhaskar to name a few.
- 16 Interview with an expert, April 2003.
- 17 Interview with Sujit Datta.
- 18 Interview with a senior official in the Ministry of External Affairs, April 18, 2003 for the Indian view; Interview with Ashley J. Tellis, Senior Adviser to the Ambassador Robert Blackwill for the US view.
- 19 1st NIAS-CISAC Dialogue: 20-22 May 1999, Washington; 2nd NIAS-CISAC Dialogue: 22-24 April 2000, NIAS Bangalore; 3rd NIAS-CISAC Dialogue: 26-28 April 2001, Washington; 4th NIAS-CISAC Dialogue: 6-8 May 2002, Bangalore.
- 20 Ramanna, Raja, *In* Roddam Narasimha, *Ed.* A Report on the Second NIAS-Asia Society Dialogue, August 2003, p.1.
- 21 Interview with a senior official in the Ministry of External Affairs, April 2003.
- 22 Interview with P. R. Chari, Director, IPCS, March 27, 2003.
- 23 A source mentioned it on the condition of anonymity in an interview, March 16, 2003.
- 24 Interview with K. S. Bajpai, former Indian Ambassador to the United States of America, April 10, 2003.
- 25 Interview with an expert, May 2003.
- 26 Ministry of External Affairs, Department of Atomic Energy, Defence Research and Development Organisation and Tata Industries Ltd jointly funded NIAS in Organising Bangalore meeting and travel expenses of the Indian team to the US.

- 27 Interview with an expert.
- 28 Interview with Dilip Chenoy, Deputy Director-General, CII, March 26, 2003.
- 29 Interview with Dr Sanjaya Baru, Editor, *Financial Express*, March 17, 2003.
- 30 Interview with an expert, May 2003
- 31 Interview with K. Santhanam, Director, IDSA, July 2, 2003.
- 32 Interview with an official in the MEA, April 2003.
- 33 The analysis is based on the responses received during the interviews conducted with experts based in India. Privacy of the respondents has been respected on request.
- 34 Interview with former Foreign Secretary J. N. Dixit.
- 35 Interview with Ambassador K. S. Bajpai.

Dr Bhabani Mishra is an Associate Fellow at IDSA. She obtained her PhD from the Centre for American and West European Studies, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. She specialises in Indo-US relations.