

## **WHAT IS MULTI TRACK DIPLOMACY?**

A freedom fighter, struggling against the military occupation in his land, is encouraged by a religious-based peace mission to try another approach. He puts down his weapons and opens a centre for conflict resolution, to mediate local disputes and promote dialogue and non-violence. A village elder, with modest financial help from an international agency, arranges a traditional ceremony of reconciliation to re-integrate child soldiers who committed atrocities, under duress, against their own families during a recent civil war.

**M**id-level community and political leaders attend a series of facilitated discussions with their counterparts across the communal divide of their conflict. Several years later, many are in important government positions, and ideas generated in those conversations begin appearing in the political discourse. An influential journalist meets with his colleagues from 'the other side' of an ethnic conflict in an NGO-sponsored dialogue, and subsequently refuses to use stereotypical or derogatory language about 'them' in his news coverage. A rural affairs specialist working for a relief organization in the developing world, after attending a training program in conflict resolution, mediates a successful agreement to a chronic dispute between pastoralists and agriculturalists.

Multiply these story many thousand times over, and a picture of multi-track diplomacy in the late 20th century begins to emerge. People from all walks of life and wielding influence over various sectors of their society, find myriad ways to promote peace in settings of violent conflict. Working at different levels of social organization, from the political to the institutional to the social, these individuals, and the organizations and institutions through which they operate, are the visible manifestation of the multi-track approach.

Many who step forward as local peace builders in their own communities are influenced by third party actors, a growing force of professionals and private citizens who design and implement programs of peace-building or conflict prevention, management, resolution and transformation in places of conflict around the world. In some cases, these individuals become so committed to the practice of peace-building that they themselves become professionals or para-professionals in the field, creating institutions of their own and operating as catalysts and third parties to others.

Only short while ago this body of peace-builders hardly existed. Now they are legion, operating out of university programs, mediation centres, democratization institutes or conflict resolution NGOs. They are associated with citizen diplomacy initiatives, with religious groups, with business or professional associations or with political parties. They come from humanitarian relief and development agencies, from human rights organizations, from grassroots women's networks or from prestigious think tanks. They may be psychologists, lawyers, sociologists, activists, political scientists, journalists, public servants, artists, organizational consultants, government officials, academics or

housewives. In short, the community of peacebuilders actively working throughout all levels of society, from the top down and the bottom up, in places of ethnic and civil conflicts around the world, has mushroomed, and multi-track diplomacy is flourishing.

Why this should be so is a topic that could reasonably be considered in an article by itself. Here, however, we will start from the present and look forward, identifying the challenges to global security in the 21st century, and the possible ways in which multi-track diplomacy might make a contribution in the world of the new millennium.

### *A Look at the World of the 21st Century*

Multi-track diplomacy, then, enters the 21st century as an established presence; a systems approach to peace-building that embraces a large network of organizations, disciplines, methodologies and venues for working toward the prevention and resolution of violent conflict around the world. It has its success stories, told elsewhere in this book, and its best practices; its challenges and edges for growth.

To understand how multi-track diplomacy might play a role in the world of the 21st century, it is necessary to examine some of the trends in world affairs that are looming on humanity's horizon as potential threats to global security in the coming era. Let us examine eight of these trends in some detail:

1. *The Globalization of Violence*

The benefits of globalization that have so affected our communications and economic systems have also been available to those forces in the world bent on destruction, greed and violence. With increased access to world-wide markets, the internet, cellular communication, international banking facilities and other tools for moving information and resources across great distances at high speed, those involved in such nefarious pursuits as drugs, the illegal arms trade, the sex trade, terrorism, gambling, money laundering, the black market, racketeering and other such nasty past times have been able to be more effective in their own endeavours, and to take advantage of the increase in power and reach that comes with working together. The illegitimate industries, like their legitimate counterparts, are cooperating, consolidating and diversifying their interests, forming a shadowy infrastructure that covers the globe, de-stabilizes vulnerable systems, and thrives on chaos. Many of these actors are involved behind the scenes in conflict situations, benefitting from the continuation of the violence while having no direct interest in the particulars of that conflict. Though they will never come to the table as part of any formal peace talks, their power is great, especially in certain high political circles without whose connivance they could not operate.

2. *The Breakdown of Systemic Integrity*

All kinds of systems are losing the strength and certainty of their boundaries at the end of the 20th century. Cells cannot hold their integrity, as new viruses and diseases pose epidemic threats to large populations. Environmental systems cannot maintain their ability to function properly, as species necessary to the balance of nature die out and the natural world becomes polluted beyond its ability to either sustain or purify itself. Families fall apart; moral systems degenerate; educational systems in some places lose

their capacity for operating as learning centres and become, instead, warehouses for the social control of desperate children. Economic systems that have sustained great prosperity over time dissolve in an instant, erasing the possibility of a decent standard of living for millions of people anytime in the near future. Political systems disintegrate, leaving thugs, ad hoc militias and greedy despots in charge of whatever patches of land they can hold by force and threat. Whole nations disappear into the chasm of chaos, or seem poised to do so momentarily.

3. *The Rise of Rogues*

Partly as a result of this disintegration of integrity, rogue individuals and nations are emerging in record numbers. People and institutions that function outside any traditional boundaries of law, persuasion or sense of the common good are establishing their capacity to operate across established boundaries at will. Narco-terrorism, nuclear terrorism, the threats of germ and biological terrorism, private armies under the control of warlords and profiteers, maverick states that respond not at all to international pressures or sanctions - these manifestations of uncontrollable, dangerous rogue forces pose untested threats to the world and its institutions of civilization.

4. *The Depletion of Natural Resources*

Both a cause and an effect of some of the phenomenon already described, the degradation and depletion of earth's natural resources are posing a major threat to the sustenance and stability of life on the planet. Water, oil, land, forests and breathable air are in increasingly short supply, and reserves of precious minerals necessary for the continuation of modern technology are dwindling. The imbalance of overpopulation with the means to sustain life has already contributed to some of the past decade's worst conflicts, such as in Rwanda. The hole in the ozone layer, global warming and the poisoning of the oceans, direct results of our industrial and economic systems, are, in turn, contributing to the very breakdown of systemic integrity we discussed earlier.

5. *The Institutionalization of Polarization*

While there have always been factions and differences in human society, the deepening of polarization as a norm of social, political and economic interaction has become apparent in the last decade. In the U.S., the two main political parties have descended into an entrenched adversarial relationship in which bipartisanship and cooperation are increasingly rare. The North and the South, the developed and the developing worlds, are still deeply divided over power and resources, and the distance between the economic 'haves' and 'have nots' in many countries is growing, and dangerously so. With intensified polarization comes extremism. Throughout the latter part of the 20th century, we have witnessed the threat to regional and global security posed by the rise of nationalistic and religious extremism. As these movements attain power, stature, and resources -such as in the case of the Taliban in Afghanistan, the far-right wing in Israeli politics or, the BJP/Hindu nationalist party in India- they become woven more thoroughly into the fabric of modern life. Less on the fringes, where they can be ignored, they have migrated to the centre of our world screen, where the threats they pose are highly visible - and highly volatile.

6. *Challenges to the Nation State*

As empires fall, political boundaries change, and ethnic groups gain access to arms and world attention for their causes, the familiar system of nation states which has ordered the global political and economic systems for so long is being tested from all sides. With

between 5,000 and 10,000 different ethnic groups in the world, and only 185 member nations of a UN which affirms in its Charter the right of self-determination, the stage is set for potential conflicts. At both ends of the spectrum, from consolidation to disintegration, the nation state system is facing challenges. As Europe seeks its union, Quebec seeks dis-union. As the Czech Republic and the Republic of Slovakia find a relatively easy way to separate, the Kurds, the Chechens, and the East Timorese have not been so fortunate. The new millennium will require humanity to be creative in designing ways that peoples and national groups can experience the dignity and integrity of their identity while simultaneously maintaining the unity and viability of a world order based on law and mutual respect.

7. *Changing Power Blocs*

The fall of the Soviet Union and the rise of the United States as the single superpower in the world is not the end of the story. Far from it. Much is in play in Europe, with the evolution of the European Union and NATO, and in Asia, with the awakening of China to its potential for power in the world. Turkey, poised between East and West, could shift its sizable weight in one of several directions, not all of which bode well for security in Southeastern Europe. The disintegration of Russia could lead to any number of scenarios in which powerful entities might rise from the ashes of that state so recently a major player in world affairs. These are but a few examples of the shifts that are taking place - seismic shifts- in relative strength, alliances and relationships as old and new nations flex their muscles and take or lose advantage on the world stage due to some of the other phenomenon previously mentioned.

8. *The Traumatization of the Human Family*

Millions of people around the planet are suffering massive trauma from recent wars and associated famine, displacement and destruction. As civil wars increasingly target women and children, and group massacres, large scale atrocities and rape become common weapons of war, large populations are profoundly wounded, in body, mind and spirit. In some countries, whole generations are debilitated, especially in those places where child soldiers have formed the backbone of the fighting forces. In others, the psychological debilitation is already moving into the second, third and even fourth generations. Post Traumatic Stress Disease (PTSD) is probably the most widespread disease on the planet. This means that many places in conflict remain vulnerable to political manipulation and ongoing cycles of violence, as the people are lacking the personal strength and inner resources to resist the forces that call for retribution and revenge.

### ***Implications for Multi-Track Diplomacy***

These trends present a sober picture indeed of the world of the 21st century. The realm of multi-track diplomacy, as one small player in the global drama, exists within this context, yet brings a perspective, a commitment and a set of methodologies that are at humanity's leading edge for dealing with these most difficult issues. In fact, I would go so far as to suggest that the work of peace-building is at the forefront of our planet's evolutionary journey in these times.

The very dangerous conditions described in the section above arise from, and thrive in, a worldview and set of assumptions about the world as a place of separation. Separative

consciousness sees duality and difference as opportunity for superiority, dominance and control, and breeds materialism, greed and violence. For many centuries the dominant western world organized its political, social and economic systems on this basis. The general breakdown in the global (and environmental) environment we are seeing now can be understood as the natural ripening of the inherent seed of destruction in the separative worldview, for when only the parts are seen, without reference to the whole, duality will play itself out in struggle, contest and conflict indefinitely.

We live at a time when large numbers of people on the planet are discovering that there is another worldview, a holistic or unitive view, that acknowledges the parts as inherently inter-related and part of a larger innate wholeness. Beyond the duality we share a common human experience, a common spiritual source, and a common capacity for connecting through that source to ways of being that will honour both the diversity and the unity in the family of life. The world is living through a major period of transformation, as the bankruptcy of one worldview becomes apparent, while the new worldview is still in its infant stages. This produces both the potential for chaos and the potential for great creativity. The peacebuilders of the world, and the multi-track approach to peace in particular, because of its systems orientation, carries that creative potential and is, therefore, a vehicle for humanity's evolution into a new state of consciousness.

In addition to these obvious activities, multi-track diplomacy can face the unique challenges of this transformational period in seven quite specific ways:

1. *Maintaining Flexibility in the Face of the Unknown*

The state of world affairs is, as we have seen, in a period of great flux. Many events that we can reasonably anticipate may or may not occur. Others that we have not considered may happen tomorrow. A single event of biological terrorism, for instance, could easily change the face of life on this planet as we know it. A single expansive move by China, or new confrontation in the Balkans or the Middle East, could re-configure political relations for many years to come. The truth is, peacebuilders need to be prepared to move in several directions at once, both responding to whatever opportunities present themselves for positive and effective work for peace, and also being pro-active in turning challenges into opportunities. To maintain this flexibility as a whole field of endeavour requires greater reflexivity, discourse and coordination among theory builders and practitioners from all parts of the world.

2. *Recognizing Healing as the Key to Transformation*

Because of the profound human trauma discussed earlier, and the brokenness of many systems, healing and reconciliation are critical aspects of any multi-track diplomacy process. New and sustainable peace systems must take into account the mending process that comes with acknowledgement of the harm done, apology and forgiveness when possible, completion of mourning, and healing at the individual and group levels. One of the greatest challenges facing peacebuilders today is not just how to engage individuals in this type of healing, but how to engage whole systems, and especially the leadership, for unless humanity learns how to heal itself, the trauma will condemn us to repeat the same cycles of violence from generation to generation.

### 3. *Building the Infrastructure for Peace*

The forces of war have an existing infrastructure that enables them to mobilize and actualize their aims

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- they have armies and arms suppliers; transportation, commerce and communication systems; banking, taxing and other funding methods; media, education and propaganda systems; and government ministries, clans, villages, political parties and other entities capable of taking action. The forces of peace have little of this. We have come a long way in recent years toward developing organizations and networks that can serve as vehicles for carrying and coordinating peace-building activities, with an accompanying research, education and media capability as well. Much more needs to be done to create both a human and an institutional infrastructure for peace-building, in order to concretize these methods and approaches in social, political and economic systems that can both stand on their own and work together toward a shared goal. In addition to such institutions, we need the capacity to move money, materials, people and technologies rapidly and efficiently to

wherever needed on the planet. In this way the transformation of consciousness is assisted by building alternative structures so that as the old collapses, there is something in place to sustain that which is being birthed.

### 4. *Taking the Holistic and Positive View*

One of the hallmarks of a multi-track approach is the capacity to see the whole, and the inter-relationship of the various parts. We know that development and peace are mutually interdependent, for instance, and that democratization requires the capacity for conflict resolution and problem solving at a group level, so we see the natural interface of several disciplines. This kind of relational awareness is critical to building peace systems, for it encourages the kind of connections, bridges, alliances and networking that are essential to the ongoing support of the change process. Stepping back and seeing the whole picture, especially that of the evolutionary moment in which we stand, allows us to hold the gate open for a new range of possibilities. It also allows us to affirm the positive view that, despite all the problems in the way, peace is indeed possible. In this way we energize the potential rather than the despair, and keep hope, that precious and fragile flame, vibrant and alive.

### 5. *Making Peace From the Inside Out*

People whose life is given to peace-building, whether as outside third parties or actors within conflict systems, are generally motivated to service, and as servers, may be prone to work themselves beyond the point of balance. Certainly working in war zones, with wounded people and in tense and violent circumstances can produce symptoms of secondary trauma, compassion fatigue and burn-out. Because multi-track diplomacy is a systems approach, in which even the intervenor is part of the system, and because it is a multi-level approach, in which the personal level is just as important as the inter-group level, those involved in this field have the opportunity to use our own technology with ourselves, becoming agents of peace in our being as well as in our doing. When we are taking the time to integrate what we teach about peace in the outer domain with our deep experience of peace within, we can be much more effective, at the individual and at the

institutional levels, in two ways: we are clearer and stronger channels for the outer work when we take time to reconnect with our own inner source of peace, and we are better models for others, showing by our presence as much as by our actions that peace is a viable and dynamic state.

6. *Creating New Pathways for Shifting Consciousness*

A colleague, Robert Fuller, once spoke about finding ‘a better game than war.’ Peacebuilders taking a multi-track approach are engaged in this endeavour. We know that the ‘war option’ is a lose-lose game; we come offering a better way, a way that goes even beyond win-win toward the transformation of the consciousness that would allow us to build truly just and peace-able societies. Because the methods and pathways for this shift are inherent in the principles and practices of peace-building with a holistic view, we occupy a position in the world analogous to the early road or railway builders. We are opening the paths, setting the tracks in place, laying down the rails, making clear the direction that will shape the future of our planet. Our tools -methods for cooperation, creative joint problem solving, reconciliation, prevention, dialogue, mediation, negotiation, and communication, among others- are the tracks that we are setting down, so people will be able to transport themselves across old territory in new and better ways. As with all road building, once we open a path, more and more travellers will use it, especially if it carries them to where they want to go. The ways of thinking and acting we are inviting people into is a different, and a better game than war, and our work makes it possible for people in large numbers to make that shift. Knowing this, we can be more intentional about it.



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7. *Empowering Peace builders for Local Action*

Multi-track diplomacy invites everyone into the game of peace-building. It says that there is a place and way that people from any sector of society can make a contribution to peace. Those of us engaged in travelling to places of conflict to make interventions there realize that building peace is primarily a local task. What we can offer is to give people a view and a direct experience of what is possible, help them do what they want to do faster and better, and perhaps strengthen their capacity to use appropriate tools and skills. We

can motivate, catalyze, inspire, instruct, facilitate, encourage, support, assist, demonstrate, and convene. We can present possibilities, open minds to new ways of thinking, and cheer people on as they take charge of changing the systems they live in. We can articulate theories and best practices provide a safe space where people can meet 'the other', or elicit inner individual and cultural wisdom about peace and conflict resolution. What we can never do impose our solutions on others, or build their new systems for them.

Our power to empower is perhaps the most important role we can play in the 21st century. The more individuals who feel empowered to work in their own systems for peace and conflict transformation, the closer the world comes to that critical mass that will allow for a massive leap in consciousness, allowing new processes for peace that were previously unimaginable to become normative, and easy.

Exercising our power to empower means generating more stories like those shared elsewhere in this book, building a base of success from which we can all learn and draw. It means enabling people to have that critical understanding of what true power is, the very opposite of the power of domination and control that characterizes war systems. Ultimately, exercising our power to empower means that the next article written on the role of multi-track diplomacy will have infinitely more peace builders -like those mentioned in the very beginning of this article- to showcase as examples of those engaged in the courageous act of creating viable, sustainable peace systems on this precious planet we all call home.

### **CITIZEN DIPLOMACY**

In situations in which official, diplomatic communications between countries or between a government and an insurgent group have broken down, unofficial channels can often operate effectively. The terms "track two" or "citizen" diplomacy refer to unofficial contacts between people—usually ordinary citizens— which can later pave the way for official "first track" or "track one" diplomacy.

As originally conceived by Joe Montville, the term "track two diplomacy" refers to private citizens negotiating topics that are usually reserved for official negotiations—the formal resolution of an ongoing conflict or arms reductions, for example. Over time, however, the term has come to be used more broadly: to encompass processes such as problem-solving workshops, dialogues, cultural and scientific exchanges, traveling artists, sports teams, or any other contacts between people whose groups are currently engaged in an intractable conflict. John McDonald and Louise Diamond invented the term "multi-track diplomacy" to convey the sense that there are many ways to bring people together in addition to official negotiations. They list nine tracks:

- 1) official (track one) diplomacy;
- 2) unofficial, yet professional conflict resolution processes,

- 3) international business negotiations and exchanges,
- 4) citizen exchanges (such as teacher exchanges),
- 5) international research, education, and training efforts,
- 6) activism,
- 7) contacts and exchanges between religious leaders and followers,
- 8) international funding efforts, and
- 9) public opinions and communication programs.

The value of such unofficial contacts between opposing sides is that they can often de-escalate a conflict before any official negotiations can do so. These contacts can build bridges between people, increase trust, and foster mutual understanding. They can serve to correct misperceptions and unfounded fears, and can reverse the trend toward dehumanization and the entrenchment of enemy images that often occurs in escalated conflicts. Often the de-escalation that results from such contacts is necessary, before official negotiations will be considered politically possible.