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The Crisis in Myanmar: Are there Roles for Track Two Diplomacy?

The Ottawa Dialogue Policy Brief series is intended to stimulate discussion around key issues in the field of Track Two Diplomacy. They are published three times a year and are written by leaders in the field. The third Policy Brief of the series is written by Dr. Peter Jones, Dr. Min Zaw Oo, and Dr. Julia Palmiano Federer with the financial support of the International Development Research Centre. The authors of each Policy Brief are entirely responsible for its content. The authors can be contacted at: peter.jones@uottawa.ca, mzo@mips-mm.org, and julia.palmianofederer@uottawa.ca.

Introduction

The situation in Myanmar is tragic. Events since the coup of February, 2021, have set back the prospect of a peaceful transition of power by many years. This paper will assess the situation in Myanmar, with particular reference to the question of what role may be played by unofficial peacemaking (Track Two Diplomacy, broadly defined) in helping to end armed violence and conflict. Section one explores what Track Two Diplomacy is, or rather, the variety of things that it is, as a background. Section two explores the background to the peace process and the current situation in Myanmar, with particular reference to the obstacles to the resumption of the peace process. Section three considers what role, or roles, Track Two could play in this, and at what levels of dialogue. Section four makes policy recommendations (summarized below) as to how the international community might support such dialogues. As will be seen, the key issue is that the breakdown of the formal peace process(es), and the increasing polarization of society means that the diverse elements of Track Two may be increasingly at odds with each other unless a major effort is made to overcome, or at least mitigate this.

Section One: Track Two Diplomacy

Before exploring how Track Two diplomacy could be useful in the current situation in Myanmar, it is important to consider briefly the history of the field and its key issues. Informal discussions between influential private citizens who seek to move official diplomacy towards peace and the resolution of conflicts have been around for many years. An early example of such dialogues were the conventions in the 19th and early 20th Centuries, which saw concerned citizens from across Europe gather regularly for well-intentioned discussions of ways to reduce tensions.[1] A more specific example were the largely secret attempts of private but highly influential individuals, such as Albert Ballin, to stimulate quiet official diplomacy aimed at reducing the tensions and naval arms build-ups of the day.[2]

The forerunner of what we today call "Track Two Diplomacy," began in the 1960s, and is largely credited to John Burton. He sought a conflict resolution method which would go beyond the realist-inspired International Relations theories of the day by bringing together influential, but non-official citizens of countries in conflict for a special kind of facilitated dialogue. Labelled,

Recommendations

⇒ To provide quiet Track 1.5 and Two technical support to EAO signatories of the NCA and also to the talks going on between the EAOs and the *Tatmadaw* (who are currently engaging in different levels of dialogue);

⇒ To provide Track Two and Track Three technical support to CSOs and political parties inside Myanmar who are seeking to broaden the space for dialogue and include voices and groups not traditionally represented in elite level peace talks.

⇒ To provide technical and other support to the NUCC, in which multiple EAOs, political parties and CSOs are trying to reach common ground on issues related to the post-SAC era.

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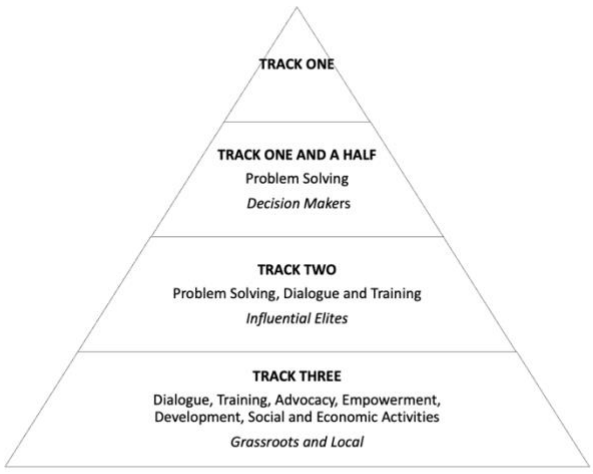
"Controlled Communication," these dialogues, usually facilitated by a third party, were designed to engage the participants in an attempt to uncover and address the underlying causes of the dispute.[3] Burton's workshops were not simply well-intentioned attempts to stimulate dialogue, as most private diplomacy initiatives had been to that point. Rather, they were the purposeful application of a specific social science-based facilitative methodology by a trained practitioner. Instead of proposing solutions, the role of the facilitator is to help the parties in conflict come up with their own proposals and solutions, based on a joint analysis. A key element of this is to shift the discourse from a bargaining one to a "problem-solving" approach; a discussion in which the people in conflict increasingly take the view that the issue between them is not a difference in positions to be bargained over, with each side seeking an advantageous settlement, but rather a mutually held "problem" which they have to try to resolve together. These dialogues gave birth to a field which has developed significantly. It has gone by several names over the decades, but the one which stuck was given by Joseph Montville; "Track Two Diplomacy." [4]

There are now many different kinds of Track Two, each with its methodologies and adherents. One area in which the field has seen much growth and debate is over the question of the "levels" of Track Two and the appropriate uses of each. Briefly, there are generally acknowledged to be three broad "levels" of dialogues which take place under the broad rubric of "Track Two."[5] These levels are not absolute; dialogues can exhibit elements of more than one, and dialogues may also drift between them over time. Also, some authors have posited the existence of more than these three, though they are in some ways talking about the same thing with different names.[6] The structure and relationship between the Tracks may be represented as follows:[7]

Figure 1



Adapted from Figure 1.2 in Jones, P., *Track Two Diplomacy: In Theory and Practice*, (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2015), p. 22

The first level (though this is not meant in a hierarchical sense of precedence) are dialogues involving officials acting in their "private capacity," or non-official but very closely connected people who are present with the knowledge of their authorities. These "Track 1.5," dialogues are a deniable pre-negotiation at which the sides are exploring whether scope may exist for formal talks.[8] Often, these talks involve parties who refuse to officially recognize each other, or have issues which they refuse to discuss officially. Track 1.5 dialogues usually take place under an academic or other non-official body in order to create a level of deniability and intellectual freedom which is often not present during formal negotiations. An example of Track 1.5 would be the Oslo talks at which Israelis and Palestinians met under the auspices of a Norwegian Government supported nongovernmental organization (NGO). These discussions began as a Track 2 process, but evolved to Track 1.5, and then Track 1, as officials joined.[9] Another example is the dialogue between leaders of the African National Congress and influential Afrikaner South African citizens, which helped to produce the formula that led to beginning of the formal process to transition to majority rule in South Africa.[10]

The second generally acknowledged "level" is a set of dialogues involving influential, but non-official participants. They seek to explore whether new approaches to the conflict may be possible. They are somewhat more "removed" from official diplomacy than Track 1.5, and therefore afford greater freedom to explore ideas. Whereas Track 1.5 dialogues are usually intended primarily, if not solely, for official audiences, Track Two dialogues can be directed at officials, or at public opinion, or both. They can involve a wider range of people, including those who have never held official positions but are influential more broadly within society. They may be intended to explore and comment on proposals and ideas known to be close to official positions in order to see if movement may be possible to nudge governments closer, or they may be intended to see if entirely new approaches to the conflict can be developed which will influence a broader re-thinking of attitudes. Dialogues of this type may therefore be thought of as existing on a spectrum. Many different types have been suggested over the years, ranging from "Inter-active Problem Solving," to "Inter-active Conflict Resolution," to "Soft Track Two," to "Circum-negotiation."[11]

Finally, a set of activities exist at a level known as "Track Three."[12] These are concerned with trying to change the reality of the conflict on the ground by engaging civil society and other advocacy groups in activities aimed at developing their capacity to challenge prevailing interests. This can take many forms; for example, capacity-building and training to enable disenfranchised groups in conflict-societies to participate more effectively in peace processes, with the intent of broadening these processes away from their "elite" level bias. Importantly, there is an element of advocacy about Track Three which is usually absent from Track 1.5 and Track Two. Whereas the latter generally take the view that it is for the participants in the dialogue to develop ideas and proposals, and that the facilitator is not there to inject policy ideas or imperatives into the discussions, Track Three is often significantly oriented towards a more activist role.

Beyond the issue of the "levels" of Track Two, four inter-locking areas of concern have pushed to the fore in the peacemaking field, and have also profoundly affected the field, particularly at

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the "Track Three" level. The first of these is the question of how to make a peace process more inclusive and less focused on the needs and perspectives of elites in conflicting societies and those of outside interests. While it has been known for many decades that peace agreements which fail to take into consideration the needs of all segments of society are less likely to endure, the current push to make peace processes more inclusive may be said to date back to the UN's landmark document on peacemaking after the Cold War, *An Agenda for Peace*, launched in 1992.[13] Many others have since taken up this issue.[14] A second aspect of this debate is known as the "local turn" in peacemaking, which posits that outside actors should not dominate a peace process as they bring their own concerns to bear on the discussions; concerns which may not be in the best interests of local populations. Many who have been working the field have noted that a partnership between outsiders and local actors is often most effective.[15] Thirdly the field is increasingly debating the role of informal peacemaking actors as agents of norm promotion or diffusion. For some scholars and activists, it is imperative that non-official peacemakers use their agency to promote norms in areas such as human rights, economic and social justice, protection of the environment and so forth. For others, this approach carries dangers, most notably that the norms being promoted are usually Western-originated and may not travel well.[16] Finally, the question of gender in peacemaking generally, and Track Two specifically, is now an issue of great discussion. This follows on from a key United Nations Resolution, UN Security Council Resolution 1325 of 2000, and from studies which show conclusively that conflicts affect women and children disproportionately and that peace processes which fail to actively include women and their concerns are much less likely to lead to enduring agreements.[17]

Another way to categorise different types of Track Two dialogues is to speak in terms of the influence they seek to have on the conflict itself; whether they seek to **manage**, **resolve** or **transform** it. Conflict management takes the view that the conflict is not amenable to proposals to bring it to an end. Instead, the focus is on engaging in a long-term process aimed at "managing" the conflict in hopes that this will reduce violence and lay the stage over time for efforts to end the conflict. "Conflict resolution" dialogues take the view that the time has come to develop ideas and proposals aimed at bringing about a final resolution of the conflict. It is important to note that the participants in Track Two dialogues can be well ahead of official positions; in other words, they can take the view that the time has come to begin developing resolution proposals even if the official positions are not close to this. Finally, there is a type of dialogue known as "conflict transformation." Such dialogues often take the view that the official diplomatic process is inherently flawed, as it represents elites who have created the conflict and often have interests in keeping it going. For this reason, conflict transformation initiatives often seek to empower groups, views and interests who are not represented in their societies as a means of laying the stage for the transformation of the underlying situation. In many respects, while Track 1.5 and Track Two recognize that the structure of the conflict (the governing elites and their preferences) is a given which must be worked with over time, Track Three dialogues seek to change that structure through projects aimed as much at advocacy as at dialogue.[18]

Another area which has seen much discussion in the study of Track Two, and conflict resolution generally, and which is particularly germane to this paper, is the question of when it is most propitious to launch a Track Two dialogue. Are there objectively identifiable moments when these dialogues might have the most impact? How are these moments identified and acted upon? Once such moments are identified, how do Track Two dialogues gain "entry;" how do those who convene and moderate such discussions begin them and see the ideas generated by them gain a foothold in mainstream discussions and diplomacy. This is a complex set of issues, but it is critical. Two major theories have been developed over the years.

The first is called "ripeness," and is a set of propositions aimed at identifying the moment when some people on either or both sides are moving towards a view that the costs of fighting on do not promise a gain which can be justified.[19] This situation is known in the literature as a "Mutually Hurting Stalemate." Such stalemates are generally held to occur at moments when the fighting is about to seriously escalate, or is just coming off a high boil. In both circumstances, ripeness theory posits that some protagonists may be willing to reassess the value of going on.[20] It is the task of those promoting dialogue to gain access to these individuals and persuade them to enter into exploratory talks to see if proposals can be developed which might influence the situation. This is another key element of ripeness, and is known as the development of a sense that that there may be a "way out" of the stalemate. The second concept is called "readiness." It focuses on the psychological willingness of credible individuals to be prepared to engage in exploratory conversations, regardless of whether the broader situation may be in a mutual hurting stalemate or not. In these kinds of dialogues, the objective is to see if ideas can be developed which may help to bring about a growing sense that alternatives may be possible. In this way, readiness can help lead to ripeness by developing a sense that a different future is possible.[21]

Dialogues begun under the concept of ripeness often search for proposals or formulas which will help lead to a "breakthrough" that will take advantage of the growing sense of a need for change. Ripeness is thus, in the words of one if its critics, an act of "cherry-picking;" of finding moments that are objectively ripe and then swooping in to help the parties develop an agreement. This denies the importance of dialogue itself as a tool for bringing together people to help them to realise new ways of looking at the conflict. Others note that ripeness, though it seeks to suggest a predictive value, only really works when a conflict is viewed in retrospect and the elements of ripeness become evident.[22] Track Two dialogues begun under the rubric of readiness, on the other hand, accept that changes in official positions are some way off. They seek to bring together credible people for dialogue with the objective of developing proposals which show that alternate futures are possible, even if acceptance at the official level of those futures may lie in the future. The hope is that such efforts will show that compromise is not impossible. In this sense, such dialogues help to create one of the key elements of ripeness; the

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perception of a way out.[23] All this said, generalizations require care, as Track Two in practice often defies the categorizations which are so easy in theory.

As this general review of the field demonstrates, the term "Track Two Diplomacy" covers a multitude of different types of dialogues, each with different objectives. In turning to the situation in Myanmar today, the question is thus not so much what may be the role of Track Two, broadly defined, but what could be a *variety of roles* which different types of Track Two could play at different levels of society. As part of this, it is necessary to recognise that actors at different levels of Track Two in Myanmar may not always be easily able to work together; those promoting quiet, elite-level Track 1.5 dialogues meant to bring together those in power for the exploration of ways to manage the situation will not always be well-viewed by activists at the Track Three level who seek to advocate actions that will transform the situation in that country. Section Three of this paper will consider that question and explore what types of dialogues may be useful at various levels. Before that, however, we must explore the background of the peace process and the present situation on the ground in that country.

Section Two: The present situation in Myanmar - how could a peace process be resumed?

The peace process in Myanmar has evolved throughout the decades.

Peace Process and Track 1.5 under the Military Junta (1988 to 2011)

Burma, then Myanmar, was imbued with ethnic and ideological armed conflicts since the country restored independence from the British Colonial Rule in 1948. The military's coup of 1962 effectively ended the country's path to post-colonial democracy and eradicated institutions that supported democratic governance. The military, also known as the Tatmadaw, set up the Burmese Socialist Program Party (BSPP) to rule the country under a socialist one-party system that crippled an economy that was once characterized as "the rice bowl of Southeast Asia." The demonetization of major currencies in 1987 exacerbated the suffering of the public and led to a nationwide mass uprising in 1988 triggered by the student movement on university campuses. The military launched another bloody crackdown, resulting in thousands of deaths, and installed a military junta to rule the country from 1988 to 2011.

The junta, which had infuriated the Burman majority after the bloody crackdown, saw an opportunity to make peace with ethnic armed organizations (EAOs) which had been fighting the central government since the independence in 1948. The leaders of the military government laid out the parameters of its version of the peace process as being mostly comprised of a network of ceasefires with the EAOs. These EAOs were allowed to keep their controlled territories and weapons while they engaged in income generation activities, many of which were natural resource extraction, drug production and smuggling, and other illicit activities. However, the regime refused to discuss political settlement with EAOs and insisted that they should wait for the next government to seek political solutions because the military junta was a transitional government by nature.

This framework of a ceasefire-focused peace process was a hard sell to many observers. But a total of 40 armed groups did agree on such deals under the rule of the military junta. During the tenure of the junta's peace deal from 1989 to 2011, only two groups broke ceasefire while the rest remained in the deal. How did a notorious junta with little political legitimacy reach and maintain ceasefire deals for over two decades? Answering this question may help us understand the role of Track 1.5 and Track Two dialogues that served as the tools to pursue and implement the peace process under military rule.

The main actors of the peace process were not inclusive. The junta talked only to EAOs, effectively excluding groups that were driven by ideology. The military regime also refused to talk to alliances or multiple groups. The negotiations were only bilateral between the regime and single armed groups. There was no multilateral negotiation. The regime also did not consider pro-democracy opposition forces led by Aung San Suu Kyi as dialogue partners in its peace process, let alone the grassroots or civil society. The structure of the peace process was very centralized and rigid on both sides. Since both sides in these discussions were led by military leaders, grassroots or non-military individuals carried little or no role in the dialogue. The process was elite-centric.

However, a few steps initiated by the regime made the process more viable. First, the powerful Military Intelligence (MI), led by Gen. Khin Nyunt, took ownership of the peace process. This step was crucial in separating the implementation of the dialogue process from the rigid military culture towards a more flexible engagement with EAOs. The MI reached out to businesspersons from minority ethnic areas as intermediaries to shuttle between the regime and EAOs. Once they had established contacts, the MI sent a few representatives to initiate pre-negotiation before the official negotiation commenced. Both sides then exchanged proposals, especially on demarcation issues, to review before the next negotiation session. Even after the deal was reached, the MI assigned dedicated non-policymaking officers to maintain regular contact with EAOs in the peace deal. These liaison officers engaged with leaders of the EAOs to resolve tensions during the ceasefire implementation. The EAOs made special requests through these liaison officers to reach out to the military's decision-makers. Occasionally, decision-makers and senior leadership of the Tatmadaw met the leaders of the EAOs to engage in more sustained negotiations if a difficult matter arose. "I visited the UWSA Headquarters every month," said a former Tatmadaw liaison officer who was assigned to liaise with the United Wa State Army (UWSA), the largest EAO in Myanmar. The Tatmadaw's liaison system inadvertently created a viable platform for Track 1.5 dialogue during the bilateral ceasefire negotiations and implementation.

Unfortunately, Senior General Than Shwe, the leader of the regime, disbanded the MI and arrested Gen. Khin Nyunt in an internal power struggle in 2005. This distorted the established Track 1.5 confidence-building mechanism. The Military Security

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Affairs (MAS) replaced the MI with new personnel in the peace process who had little experience in dealing with the EAOs. "They were condescending and threatening to us," said a senior leader of a UWSA who met the MAS's representative during a negotiation in which the Tatmadaw forced the EAOs to transform into Border Guard Force (BGF) in 2009. Some major EAOs decided to expand their strength and armaments around this period in response to a deteriorating sense of confidence in the prospect of negotiations with the military regime.

Although the junta held the controversial election in 2010 under the auspices of the 2008 Constitution that allowed the military to hold 25% of seats in the parliament, the peace process remained frozen until the new government was inaugurated.

Peace Process and More Tracks under the USDP-led Government (2011 to 2016)

The government, led by the pro-military Union Solidarity Development Party (USDP), came to power in 2011 after the controversial election. Both the international and Myanmar public viewed the USDP government as the extension of the military rule in the beginning. But the regime made unexpected moves that surprised most observers by releasing Aung San Suu Kyi and other political prisoners, suspending the construction of a controversial dam project with China, inviting exiles to return to Myanmar, and making announcement to commence a new peace process in August 2011.

The government set up a new peace architecture called Myanmar Peace Center (MPC), run by technocrats, including former exiled opposition members. The MPC was financed by international donors as a semi-government organization rather than a government institution run by civil servants. This setup effectively detached the MPC from bureaucratic red tape and an entrenched centralized decision-making culture. Consequentially, the MPC staff was able to meet with representatives of EAOs, civil society organizations, diplomats, and other various stakeholders, without constraints from the rigid bureaucracy. The technocrats from the MPC met with EAOs before, during and after negotiations in an unstructured setting. They exchanged information, shared perspectives, and sought solutions on pending negotiations. While some meetings were facilitated by trained personnel from both sides, most of the meetings were not self-facilitated by the participants. This period marked the most prolific Track 1.5 dialogue in Myanmar history. From 2011 to 2015, there were over 3,000 both formal and informal meetings between the representatives of the government and various stakeholders, mostly members of EAOs. As the result, fifteen armed groups signed bilateral ceasefires, and eight of them signed Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA). A total of 36 agreements were made between the government and EAOs from 2011 to 2015.

This period also witnessed the growth of Track Three peace dialogues organized by civil society organizations (CSOs) involved in the peace process. Their goals were often transformational and advocacy driven, as they sought to place new issues onto the agenda of the peace process. Various CSOs set up the Civil Society Forum for Peace as dialogue platform to coordinate CSOs in the peace process and bridge their advocacy for human rights and other issues into the mainstream peace process. Despite this effort, advocacy-driven Track Three dialogue was limited in its impact on the mainstream peace process. It was clear that the Tatmadaw and the EAOs were little interested in what the CSOs were proposing.

The Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) became a new peace architecture after 2015. The agreement stipulated two institutions: Joint Ceasefire Monitoring Committee (JMC) and Union Peace Dialogue Joint Committee (UPDJC). The JMC was

Acronyms

- ⇒ AA/ULA: Arakan Army/United League of Arakan
- ⇒ ABSDF: All Burma Students' Democratic Front
- ⇒ ASEAN: Association of Southeast Asian Nations
- ⇒ BGF: Border Guard Force
- ⇒ BSPP: Burmese Socialist Program Party
- ⇒ CBO: Community-based Organization
- ⇒ CNF: Chin National Front
- ⇒ CPRH: Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw
- ⇒ CSO: Civil Society Organization
- ⇒ EAO: Ethnic Armed Organization
- ⇒ IED: Improvised Explosive Device
- ⇒ JICM: Joint Implementation Coordinating Meeting
- ⇒ JMC: Joint Ceasefire Monitoring Committee
- ⇒ KIA: Kachin Independence Army
- ⇒ KNPP: Karenni National Progressive Party
- ⇒ KNU/KNLA: Karen National Union/Karen National Liberation Army
- ⇒ LDU: Lahu Democratic Union
- ⇒ MI: Military Intelligence
- ⇒ MNDAA: Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army
- ⇒ MPC: Myanmar Peace Center
- ⇒ NCA: Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement
- ⇒ NGO: Non-governmental Organization
- ⇒ NLD: National League for Democracy
- ⇒ NRPC: National Reconciliation and Peace Center
- ⇒ NUCC: National Unity Consultative Council
- ⇒ NUG: National Unity Government
- ⇒ PDF: People Defense Force
- ⇒ RCSS: Restoration Council of Shan State
- ⇒ SAC: State Administration Council
- ⇒ SAZ: Self-Administered Zone
- ⇒ SSPP: Shan State Progressive Party
- ⇒ TNLA/PSLF: Ta'ang National Liberation Army/Palaung State Liberation Front
- ⇒ UN: United Nations
- ⇒ UPC: Union Peace Conference
- ⇒ UPCC: Union Peace-making Central Committee
- ⇒ UPDJC: Union Peace Dialogue Joint Committee
- ⇒ UPWC: Union Peace-making Working Committee
- ⇒ USDP: Union Solidarity and Development Party
- ⇒ UWSA: United Wa State Army

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responsible for overseeing joint implementation of the ceasefire aspects of the agreement, and the UPDJC was mandated to jointly oversee and implement political dialogue, especially the Union Peace Conference (UPC) to craft a final peace settlement. The 2015 election was mostly free and fair in front of both domestic and international observers and resulted in the National League for Democracy (NLD's) landslide victory that enabled it to form the NLD-led government.

Peace Process and Dialogue under the NLD-led Government (2016-2021)

The NLD government inherited the NCA from the USDP's administration. The NCA defined the JMC and UPDJC as two core joint institutions to carry out the implementation of the agreement. The NCA also stipulated the creation of a Joint Implementation Coordinating Meeting (JICM) as the ultimate deadlock-breaking body among top policymakers from both sides. The JICM is a purely Track One dialogue. However, the JMC and UPDJC were the platforms that could facilitate dialogues between Track 1.5, Track Two, and, to a limited extent, Track Three. The participants of the JMC and UPDJC included representatives of the government, parliament, Tatmadaw, political parties, and civil society. The structure of the NCA was designed to broaden various tracks of dialogue in both ceasefire implementation and political dialogue.

Unfortunately, there were setbacks that diminished the potential of the dialogue tracks in the NCA implementation. The NLD-led government formed the National Reconciliation and Peace Center (NRPC) as the main platform to drive the peace process forward under the framework of the NCA. The NRPC, unlike the MPC, was originally intended to fill an all-in-one function. This institution would make the government's policies on the peace process, negotiate with the EAOs, and provide technical support to the implementation of agreements. Under the USDP's administration, these three functions were separated into three levels of institutions. The Union Peace-making Central Committee (UPCC), which included the president and commander-in-chief, was the ultimate decision-making body of the government on the peace process. The Union Peace-making Working Committee (UPWC) was tasked with negotiating with EAOs. The Myanmar Peace Centre was set up to provide technical support.

However, the NRPC included only a mid-level senior officer from the Tatmadaw. The NRPC was not an effective policy-making platform, unlike the UPCC, because decision-makers from the Tatmadaw were not there. The government set up the Peace Commission, subordinate to the NRPC, with the intention that it should reach out and negotiate with EAOs. But the Peace Commission did mostly outreach, and little negotiation. There was no setup equivalent to the MPC to provide technical support to the decision-makers and negotiators. Consequentially, the number of Track 1.5 and Two meetings was reduced significantly. There was little pre-negotiation while the policymakers from the government and Tatmadaw rarely met to make concrete negotiation decisions. Although both sides convened the Union Peace Conference four times from 2016 to 2020, the points agreed there did little to make both sides happy with the implementation of the NCA. The peace process was frozen to some extent after the end of 2019 while the JMC became defunct in most of its functions, and the UPDJC was not institutionalized in the way originally envisioned in the NCA. The progressive realization was the basic concept of the NCA to build confidence in the peace process. Since there was little progress to be realized, the confidence of the parties involved waned.

The rising tension between the Tatmadaw and the civilian government was another predicament in the peace process. The government and the Tatmadaw did not achieve an agreement as to the kind of federalism they would concede to the EAOs in five years of discussion. The Tatmadaw was reluctant to cooperate in the peace process, perhaps for the reason that the NLD-led government might claim credit upon the success in crafting a peace settlement. The tension boiled up a few months before the general elections since the Tatmadaw continuously charged the government and Union Election Commission with irregularities in the voter list. The NLD won another landslide election victory in the 2020 elections and set its course to form the government on 1 February 2021 when the first session of the parliament was set to convene. The Tatmadaw launched a coup in the early morning of February 1st and detained the president, Aung San Suu Kyi, other NLD leaders, and prominent activists. The coup reversed the course of democratic transition in Myanmar and ground the already rambling peace process to halt.

The Dialogue Potential under the Coup d'etat Environment

The coup has significantly altered the political, social, and economic lives of the public and their perception of the peace process. The military established the State Administration Council (SAC) with 11 members, including civilians, as the executive governing body on February 2nd. The new authorities filed criminal charges against Aung San Suu Kyi, State Counsellor, accusing her of violating the export and import law, for allegedly possessing unlicensed communications equipment used by her security detail. President Win Myint was charged with violating the Natural Disaster Management Law for greeting and waving at a passing NLD convoy in September 2020, thereby violating rules against election campaigning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The public responded to the coup with a mass uprising, known as "the Spring Revolution" after a week of the coup. The protests were the largest demonstration ever against the military. The military initially claimed that they would hold new elections in one year but later extended the period of emergency rule by the constitution for another two years, pledging to hold an election in August 2023. But most people are not interested in the new election, and call for the recognition of the 2020 election results and handover of power to the elected government.

The military's brutal crackdown has so far killed over 1,100 mostly peaceful protesters, and over 6,600 people have been arrested, charged, or sentenced in seven months, according to the Assistant Association for Political Prisoners.[24].The oppression has caused a huge swell of antipathy towards the military among the majority Burmese population and led to a call for armed revolution nationwide, in cooperation with EAOs. Armed clashes

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have re-erupted in some ethnic states, especially in Kachin, Kayah and Kayin states. The de facto ceasefire with the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) in the north has waned after the KIA seized a strategic hill from the Tatmadaw in March 2021. The Brigade 5 of the Karen National Union (KNU) in the southeast has launched new attacks against the Myanmar military since March 2021. The Chin National Front (CNF) in Chin state, northwest and the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP) in Kayah state, in the southeast, also have increased armed clashes with the Tatmadaw after the coup.

The elected members of parliament responded to the coup with the formation of the Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH) to symbolize the opposition's parliament. The CRPH formed the National Unity Government (NUG) as a parallel government that consists of elected members of parliaments and some leaders of ethnic minorities. However, the minorities criticized the CRPH and NUG for being dominated by the NLD members, and consequentially, the more inclusive National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC) was formed as an inclusive de facto assembly to bring voices opposed to the SAC regime.

In addition, thousands of urban protesters have fled to border areas under EAO control to receive military training, in order to establish new armed forces to fight the regime in urban areas. Over 350 localized armed groups, called People Defence Force (PDF) in general, were established to launch military strikes against the SAC regime nationwide. According to information released by the SAC, during the period from February 1 to September 9, the country experienced 2,390 IED explosions, 799 targeted killing of unarmed civilians, 406 attacks on education facilities, and 386 attacks on private economic properties. Probably less than 20% of PDFs are under the direct control of the NUG while most of them operate independently. **This development points to the very worrying fact that the violence has been decentralized in Myanmar's post-coup environment.**

The NUG called for a nationwide armed uprising on September 7, cementing the major shift in the country's civil opposition movement from a reliance on non-violent struggle to violent means. The number of bombings targeted killings and armed attacks has increased steadily after the NUG's war declaration, while the SAC forces launched a crackdown on rural and urban rebellions against the new-age rebels. Some diplomats have officially called for reconciliation and resolution through political dialogue in response to the NUG's declaration. However, they have been surprised by angry responses posted on social media by supporters of the NUG. The opposition charged that this would be the last struggle to topple military rule. **There are increasing worries that the space for dialogue between civil society leaders and the regime is disappearing.**

At the same time, and despite the escalation of violence, there remains the potential for dialogue between the ruling SAC and the EAOs. The SAC claimed to uphold the NCA as one of its political objectives when it abdicated the NLD-led government. Perhaps, the SAC does not want to fight the war on multiple fronts when it is facing a crisis nationwide. The SAC has at least realized that it must maintain peace with the EAOs. On the other hand, none of the EAOs has officially declared that the ceasefire has collapsed; neither have they claimed to be going to war with the SAC, despite the growing number of armed clashes with some EAOs after the coup. The pattern of armed clashes between EAOs and SAC appears to be controlled escalation that stops short of high-intensity violence. Some EAOs may be buying time to replenish their strength and the NUG's fighting forces before they can strike the SAC on multiple fronts. Many older EAO leaders have openly voiced calls for de-escalation of tension and dialogue, knowing that nationwide violence would wreak havoc on the public and on their own constituencies. **What seems to be happening, therefore, is a disconnect between the EAOs and CSOs in terms of their respective willingness to talk to the coup leaders. This could have significant implications for how Track Two, broadly defined, will be able to interact with the emerging situation in Myanmar.**

The SAC has formed three levels of committees to reach out to and negotiate with the EAOs. The National Solidarity and Peace-making Central Committee (NSPCC), chaired by the commander-in-chief, is the decision-making body of the new peace architecture. The National Solidarity and Peace-making Working Committee (NSPWC) is mandated to negotiate with the EAOs. The National Solidarity and Peace-making Coordination Committee (NSPC) is supposed to provide outreach functions and technical support to the main peace architecture. However, the NSPCC and NSPWC are bulky bodies and do not meet regularly. Lt. Gen. Yar Pyae plays a critical role in all three committees and his associates led the efforts to reach out to and negotiate with the EAOs.

In the meantime, different forms of Track 1.5 dialogue continue between the SAC and EAOs. Some EAOs, including the United Wa State Army (UWSA), the strongest EAO in Myanmar, did not want to tangle in the post-coup conflict; their goal is to maintain the status quo. The representatives of these EAOs and NSPC maintain contact, especially to tackle the Covid-19 outbreak in their controlled areas. The representatives of ten groups that signed the NCA also met with the NSPC members in low-key informal meetings because the groups decided to suspend official negotiation with the SAC after the coup. Additionally, some individual EAOs maintain communication with the SAC after the coup for the sake of keeping the ceasefire alive. A Yangon-based CSO occasionally organized informal meetings in a form of Track Two that include individuals close to the SAC and EAO decision-makers. Considering all constraints, the NCA and existing bilateral ceasefires are the most promising Track 1.5 and Two platforms to strengthen dialogue between the SAC and EAOs.

On the other hand, many members of the civil society opposition movement composed of various ethnic and political backgrounds are engaging in dialogue with each other, but not the *Tatmadaw*, under the platform of the anti-government National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC). This is a significant effort to consolidate the opposition voices into a single position that is agreed by some EAOs, NLD in exile, and CSOs. The EAOs thus play a pivotal role in both dialogue spaces as they seem able to talk to both the SAC regime and the civil society opposition. The EAOs can thus potentially bridge the dialogue between the SAC and the NUG-led opposition movement. However, the shrinking political space inside the country means that grassroot-based Track Three

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dialogues may need some time to revive in Myanmar, if they ever can. Another dialogue space is political parties inside the country. Some political parties are trying to convince both sides to resume dialogue-based solutions. The SAC regime is willing to engage with the political parties because the election in 2023 may not have any sensible meaning if the SAC cracks down on the parties. Most political parties, despite their feeble voices, are willing to engage in dialogue among themselves and other opposition forces.

Table 1: Conflict and Dialogue Mapping

Actor	Actor	Conflict Status	Dialogue Status
State Administrative Council (SAC)	UWSA (FPNCC)	Bilateral Ceasefire	Regular contact; non-active dialogue
	NDAA (FPNCC)	Bilateral Ceasefire	Regular contact; non-active dialogue
	SSPP (FPNCC)	Bilateral Ceasefire	Occasional contact; non-active dialogue
	TNLA (FPNCC)	Non-ceasefire; unilateral ceasefire by the SAC; occasional fighting	Non-active contact and dialogue
	MNDAA (FPNCC)	Non-ceasefire; unilateral ceasefire by the SAC; occasional fighting	Non-active contact and dialogue
	KIA (FPNCC)	Non-ceasefire; unilateral ceasefire by the SAC; frequent fighting	Some extent of contact; non-active dialogue
	AA (FPNCC)	De Facto Ceasefire; no fighting	Regular contact and some extent of dialogue
	KNU (NCA-S)**	NCA signatories; frequent low intensity fighting	Regular contact; non-active dialogue
	RCSS (NCA-S)	NCA signatories; no fighting	Regular contact; non-active dialogue
	PNLO (NCA-S)	NCA signatories; no fighting	Occasional contact; non-active dialogue
	DKBA (NCA-S)	NCA signatories; no fighting	Occasional contact; non-active dialogue
	Peace Council (NCA-S)	NCA signatories; no fighting	Occasional contact; non-active dialogue
	ALP (NCA-S)	NCA signatories; no fighting	Occasional contact; non-active dialogue
	ABSDF (NCA-S)	NCA signatories; no fighting; actively cooperating with the NUG	Occasional contact; non-active dialogue
	NMSP (NCA-S)	NCA signatories; no fighting	Occasional contact; non-active dialogue
	LDU (NCA-S)	NCA signatories; no fighting	Occasional contact; non-active dialogue
	CNF (NCA-S)	NCA signatories; frequent fighting; actively cooperating with the NUG	No contact
	KNPP	Bilateral ceasefire; frequent fighting; coordination with local PDFs	Some contact through intermediatory; No active dialogue
NUCC***	Some EAOs are officially involved, and some are involved behind the scenes.	Groups sent their representatives to join the discussion. But the NUCC is still far from a consolidated body that represents all group.	Active dialogue; NUCC as a dialogue platform
SAC	NUG and PDFs	Outlawed; active fighting	Not recognized as dialogue partners
SAC	Political parties	Mixed relationship: most parties shun the SAC	Some dialogue with some parties

Federal Political Negotiation and Consultative Committee (FPNCC) is a political alliance of the UWSA, NDAA, SSPP, TNLA, MNDAA, KIA, and AA.

** Signatories of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement.

*** National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC) was established after the coup to seek a common position among various opposition group

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Section Three: What role(s) could Track Two play in the current circumstances in Myanmar?[25]

The current situation in Myanmar is thus extremely complex, and the stakes are high. Since the political and economic waves of reform that occurred starting in 2011 under Thein Sein's quasi-civilian government[26] and reached a high in 2015 with the election of Aung Suu Kyi and the signing of the NCA, those in Myanmar addressing the multiple fronts of conflict converge on the need for "homegrown" approaches that put those living in Myanmar in the driving seat of design and decision-making in political processes.[27] This principle is even more critical, especially in the current environment. Mainstream peacemaking approaches and programming support that prioritize highly "architecturalized", public-facing formal peace processes[28] are currently not politically appropriate. In contrast, there are several principles of Track Two that could help address the complexity and highly sensitive nature of peace process dynamics in Myanmar.[29] First, Track Two is often characterized by its informality and flexibility, which is critical in navigating the ethical, political and logistical space in which warring actors get together in a climate of negative trust, both with each other and with the broader public. Second, in the wake of the coup, the term "dialogue" is currently met with, at best, suspicion and, at worst, vitriol. A large measure of the flexibility around Track Two is its ambiguity of labelling – such initiatives do not need to be called a 'dialogue' if it is not conducive or fitting for the current environment in Myanmar.

That being said, any analysis of the situation which Track Two could play in Myanmar must confront the fact that there is now a deep disconnect between the roles that Track 1.5 can play, and those which now seem open to Tracks Two and Three. As illustrated in Section 2, informal dialogues have been an important feature in past iterations in Myanmar's peace processes, in no small part due to the "illegality" of EAOs under the Unlawful Associations Act.[30] Major inroads aimed at building trust in the nascent days of the NCA process were only possible because leaders such as U Aung Min (USDP government appointed negotiator and seen as a de facto "insider" mediator of the process) and the leadership of key EAOs such as the KNU and KIO were able to meet under the pretext of informal meetings and build trust.[31] From 2011 onwards, a small group of Myanmar "early movers"[32] such as the Myanmar Egress and facilitators from nongovernmental organizations such as the Euro-Burma Office helped facilitate and organize informal meetings. These were integral to creating the foundation of mutual trust and respect needed to move forward in creating or renewing ceasefires bilaterally, and, eventually, moving towards a "nationwide ceasefire" that presented an unprecedented opportunity for peace.[33]

The practice of informal meetings between key EAOs and government actors in the context of the NCA negotiations took place less frequently under the NLD-led government that favoured a much more formal and bureaucratic approach. Myanmar peace process actors and civil society organizations supporting the process witnessed a swift change in the advancement of the implementation of post-agreement mechanisms. While critical institutions like the Joint Ceasefire Monitoring Committee were established as a result of the NCA, analysts and those close to the process lamented the need to have such informal pathways of dialogue to move forward in a climate of eroding trust, increasing clashes and the crisis unfolding in Rakhine state.[34] Importantly, Track Two often features facilitation, but does not require that such third parties be international actors outside the process, such as in more formal UN-led processes that do not fit the Myanmar context. Track Two processes can be facilitated by "insider"[35] facilitators that may or may not be supported and/or assisted by external actors. External actors can play important roles financing such initiatives in a flexible and easily adaptable manner. Experience has shown that external actors can also serve as "convenors" when local actors cannot do so, due to the politics on the ground. In this way, local and external facilitation of Track Two can be complementary.[36] Therefore, understanding the past success and potential that informal meetings hold in Myanmar, we outline ways in which different forms of Track Two could frame various options in Myanmar.

The concept of Track 1.5 could play, and already is playing, a critical role as a way to frame contact moving forward among key EAOs that are already involved in various forms of contact and dialogue with the SAC. But the broader methodology behind the problem-solving approach that underpins traditional Track Two initiatives could also be beneficial in trying to uncover a path forward in the current constellation of conflict, especially since the formal peace processes that characterized previous phases of the NCA negotiations between 2011-2015 (e.g.: the Myanmar Peace Centre and the National Reconciliation and Peace Centre) are not currently viable. Track Two then could create a critically-needed conceptual and physical space between key actors informally, discreetly and flexibly. Such initiatives do not need to be housed under a particular institution or in a particular place. Furthermore, as number of new actors are in decision-making roles, such as the political bloc known as the NUCC as well as of course, the NUG, Track Two offers a concrete way to bring such actors (within different configurations) together quietly. Lastly, Track Two allows room for manoeuvre among "early-movers" that are taking extremely big political and personal risks by engaging in contact and dialogue with each other. Track Two provides opportunities for contact, especially for actors in which more formal engagement presents even greater moral or political dilemmas.

Bearing in mind what seems to be a widening gap between the goals of the EAOs to keep a Track 1.5 space alive between themselves and coup leaders, and the sense amongst CSOs that such dialogue is not appropriate, Track Two and Three concepts can also play a critical role in supporting the civic space in Myanmar to achieve its own aims. In this, dialogues could complement and support ongoing initiatives organized by Myanmar's resilient, creative and mobilised civil society space. It would have to be recognised, however, that such dialogues, particularly if they focus on assisting the CSOs in their goal of toppling the regime, may contradict the objectives of Track 1.5

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dialogues aimed at maintaining spaces for dialogue with the coup leadership, mentioned in the previous paragraph.

An approach focused on supporting Track Three would thus seek to place Myanmar civil society actors in the driving seat of political change and envisioning their role in the future of the country. The Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) has pivoted the protest and resistance environment in Myanmar in unprecedented ways, as civil society organizations (CSOs) and community-based organizations (CBOs) across the country are mobilising, organizing, resisting and creating spaces for new visions of the future. Amidst the dire security situation, banking crisis and the flight of the majority of the international peace architecture from the country, such a Track Three approach could complement existing initiatives and provide informal forums for dialogue and communication for actors working on addressing the root causes of conflicts. For instance, as many civil society movements have been oppressed, paused, disbanded and or gone underground, informal engagement creates pathways to helping conflict resolution, peace and reconciliation CSOs continue doing critical work addressing the political and developmental root causes of conflict. Support for Track Three at the civil society level in Myanmar need not focus on supporting CSOs that are engaged in violent opposition to the coup. As the CDM movement has showed, women and youth spaces in particular can no longer be criticized as "token" forms of inclusion. Young people in Myanmar will play a critical role in determining the outcome of the current impasse between the regime and the broader public that does not endorse a military regime that continually imposes violence on its population.[37] Engaging with politically-minded youth actors in discreet forums, or offering platforms to voice real grievances may prevent future fracture amongst all the different resistance movements that are quickly gaining number and ground across the country. Moreover, large-scale and long-term "dialogue" at the Track Three level will be integral on account of long-term trauma that diverse communities all over the country are experiencing.

Lastly, Track Two's approach to systems-thinking and different initiatives operating on different tracks allows for greater complexity and allows space for of many different people with different markers of identity (ethnicity, religion, gender, location, age) to engage with each other in an informal space. Such spaces are central for the CSOs and CBOs at the Union, state and township level to envision a way forward.

Section Four: Policy Recommendations

For outside actors considering how to usefully engage in the situation in Myanmar, the broader concept of Track Two offers many possibilities. But it will be necessary to carefully consider what kind of Track Two they may wish to support or engage and at what level. Scope exists for efforts which could contradict each other and make the situation worse. For example, the Civil Society space features a large and growing number of actors, but many of them have very limited reach or credibility. A high degree of local knowledge of the complex and ever-evolving situation will be necessary to understand which groups to "invest" in. Outsiders can distort a peace process by conferring legitimacy upon actors who otherwise would not be able to achieve it. Moreover, there are critical logistical issues. The collapse of the banking system, and sanctions against the transfer of funds to organisations within Myanmar, mean that a certain degree of "creativity" may be required in terms of how support will be extended to groups.

That being said, we envisage three broad ways in which Track Two could play useful roles. The first two posit support at specific "levels" of the conflict (Track 1.5, Track Two and Track Three), while the third calls for support to an effort to bring the levels together. Importantly, these ideas should be seen as necessarily at odds with each other. A subtle and nuanced policy could see support being extended by various actors to the different levels simultaneously in order to achieve aims which would, ultimately, be complementary.

1. There seems to be scope to support Track 1.5 discussions already taking place between the military and the EAOs. These discussions seem oriented towards seeing if a version of the pre-coup status quo can be achieved which allows the EAOs to continue to enjoy some level of functional autonomy. Support to these discussions will necessarily have to be discreet and to accept the notion that a fundamental change in the government of Myanmar is not necessarily what is being sought in these talks; what is being sought is to prevent a breakdown of the situation such that the military regime and the EAOs would engage in large-scale fighting. While this outcome would not satisfy the desire of many citizens of the country for the emergence of a democratic Myanmar, the outbreak of serious fighting between the government and the EAOs would be disaster for the country and result in widespread civilian suffering – as both the government and the EAOs seem to recognise, thus far, at least. Such a resumption of widespread fighting would also "justify," in its own mind at least, the retention of power by the military for many years to come. These Track 1.5 discussions are happening already because both sides value them, but assistance might be quietly provided to them, if requested, by neighbouring countries, NGOs specialised in this work or regional bodies, such as ASEAN.

Recommendations

- ⇒ To provide quiet Track 1.5 and Two technical support to EAO signatories of the NCA and also to the talks going on between the EAOs and the Tatmadaw (who are currently engaging in different levels of dialogue);
- ⇒ To provide Track Two and Track Three technical support to CSOs and political parties inside Myanmar who are seeking to broaden the space for dialogue and include voices and groups not traditionally represented in elite level peace talks.
- ⇒ To provide technical and other support to the NUCC, in which multiple EAOs, political parties and CSOs are trying to reach common ground on issues related to the post-SAC era.

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Those seeking to be active in support of dialogue in this space would have to have a high degree of tolerance for supporting dialogue which features those who have committed acts of violence and human rights violations from both sides. Furthermore, insofar as the coup leaders and the EAOs have their own well-established agenda, those who might provide support to these dialogues will have to be willing to step back and allow the main actors to play out their talks with little outside direction or interference. The use of Track Two as an instrument to encourage inclusivity or broader "norm diffusion" will thus be difficult, if not impossible, here. These dialogues would also necessarily be more about helping specific groups in their efforts at *managing* the conflict, rather than about engaging groups interested in *resolving*, or even *transforming* it.

2. There are also interesting possibilities for support to Track Two and Track Three in Myanmar. These would be more directed towards supporting different actors in the civil society space whose objectives vary, but are more necessarily oriented towards transformational objectives, such as the ending of the military regime and its replacement with a democratic national government. The more vociferous of these groups are increasingly prepared to countenance, if not advocate and engage in, violent resistance to achieve this objective. Some outside actors may find it difficult to support them for this reason.

But there are many groups who eschew violence and who can be supported in their attempts to peacefully seek social and political change in the country, even in this very difficult time. Many of these groups may be active at local levels around the country, rather than nationally, and may be active in terms of such objectives as promoting the inclusion of women and youth in efforts to address underlying causes of the fighting in their specific region or sub-region. Such groups can be offered support in the form of training in local mediation techniques and so on. Support for these groups is often necessarily on a long-term basis, with little concrete to show for it for some time in terms of the firm "deliverables" sought by some funders. These types of projects would thus take a longer-term view of "ripeness" as used in the field, one more oriented towards the concept of "readiness." They are also much more about empowering groups whose agendas are "transformational" in their goals with respect to the conflict. International NGOs who specialise on these questions may be positioned to provide some assistance in terms of training and other forms of support. Governments who have made support for the promotion of norms such as gender involvement in peace processes and human rights may also be positioned to help. Caution will have to be exercised, however, as receiving support from outside bodies could place the CSOs working in these areas in the cross-hairs of the Tatmadaw on trumped up charges of being "agents" of foreigners.

3. Finally, it is important to note that, while the image being created in this paper is one of a disconnect in Myanmar between the objectives of Track 1.5, on the one hand, and Tracks Two and Three, on the other, this does not necessarily have to be so entirely. Perhaps most interestingly, scope for useful dialogues may exist not so much between the military government and its various opponents, but rather between the different groups who are themselves opposed to the coup. As Section 2 of this paper pointed out, the Myanmar peace process has seen many years of "divide and conquer" tactics by the military regime, as it sought to play different groups, levels, religions and ethnicities against each other. This may be happening now, as the EAOs and the government are prepared to discuss ways of coexistence, while many broader civil society groups are not prepared to accept the continuation of the present regime.

An alternate approach to dialogue could thus seek to provide support to bring together opponents of the coup at different levels. Such a dialogue, or set of dialogues, would be necessarily difficult to achieve and its results uncertain. If, however, the leadership of the EAOs and of different civil society groups who are opposed to the coup could be brought together to explore whether their objectives might be congruent in some ways, this could have a significant impact on the military regime and on the situation. If this could be achieved in informal dialogue, then the existing National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC) may become a viable instrument by which the presently disparate levels and groups of the opposition could consolidate their efforts towards a peace settlement.

Of course, the primary impetus for such a dialogue will have to come from the actors themselves; it would be naïve to imagine that outsider actors could make this possible if those engaged on the ground do not wish to meet. But there is ample evidence from the world of Track Two of cases where the provision of support (either in terms of experienced facilitation assistance, subtle and quiet encouragement, or even simply financial support) at a critical moment brought together groups who had not and would not meet previously. NGOs and other international organisations in the Track 1.5/2 space who specialise in providing advice and support to such discussions may be able to assist local actors in organising these dialogues.[38] It is important, however, that local actors lead the process. Outsiders supportive of these goals may provide expertise and funding, but the provision of these could be used by the Tatmadaw to point fingers of improper outside involvement.

Conclusions

This paper has reviewed the field of Track Two, discussed the history of informal dialogue in Myanmar and considered what might be done in today's, difficult circumstances. The paper finds that a nuanced approach is necessary; one which recognizes that different "levels" of dialogue, involving different actors and agendas, will likely be necessary. While the goal of Track Two, as a field, is to promote dialogues which bring together different levels and interests in societies in conflict in what is sometimes called a multi-track effort (one where the different tracks act in a manner where their efforts complement each other), the present situation in Myanmar seems pointed in the opposite direction. Those interested in "conflict management" oriented Track 1.5 dialogues involving key groups, such as the EAOs and the military government, may well have goals that are not the same as those interested in supporting Track Two and Track Three civil society actors in Myanmar whose desires are to fundamentally "transform" the situation.

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Of course, these various dialogues at different levels will likely go on anyway, and there will be outside intervenors who will be willing to support them. Perhaps a way forward, however, and one that might just help to lay the foundation for a real dialogue over the future of Myanmar, would be a dialogue which sought to bring together those opposed to military government, at various levels, to see if a national agenda could not be forged. This will not be easy, but the informal and discreet nature of Track Two may make it the place to explore whether it is even possible. In the meantime, efforts to support local actors who are seeking to achieve grass-roots levels change across Myanmar at the Track Three level could also go forward and would be fully consistent with this effort.

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About Ottawa Dialogue

Established in 2009, Ottawa Dialogue is a university-based organization that brings together research and action in the field of dialogue and mediation. Guided by the needs of the parties in conflict, Ottawa Dialogue develops and carries out quiet and long-term, dialogue-driven initiatives around the world.

About MIPS

MIPS is a “think-and-do-tank” focusing on peace and security issues with an aim to promote a peaceful transition to democratic federal union in Myanmar. MIPS was set up in 2017 as a research institution to support Myanmar’s peace process and continues to maintain the largest conflict monitoring dataset in Myanmar.

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