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Multitrack Diplomacy and the Geneva Initiative

Supervisor

Ch. Prof. Marcella Simoni

Second Supervisor

Ch. Prof. Matteo Legrenzi

Student

Alice Bono

Matriculation Number 822217

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*Thanks to my Professor, who has not once let me down.
Thanks to my family, who has constantly encouraged me.
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Abstract: Despite the efforts of state-led negotiations, the Israeli-Palestinian peace process is still at stake. Several factors destabilize the negotiations. Strong perception bias and deep-rooted, long-standing animosities and a constant exposure to violence constitute a barrier to dialogue, which in turn exacerbate impediments to peace. The complexity of different socioeconomic and political contexts in which the conflict unfolds, just as the lack of concerted efforts, would prevent the sustainability of any substantial achievement. While official diplomacy proved inefficient, when not ineffective, alternative diplomatic instances involving diverse actors might better influence the overall peace process. The present research focuses on such activities, adopting the concept of unofficial diplomacy as main object of analysis. The concept is an umbrella descriptor encompassing the variety of forms of interaction between nations and a broad range of actors, venues, objectives and methods to achieve peace. The thesis highlights the different conceptualizations of the issue, building on an interdisciplinary approach upon previous and concomitant research in the areas of sociology, psychology, law and conflict resolution studies. In a later stage, through the lenses of the gathered knowledge, the Geneva Initiative (2003) case study is contemplated. The case study critically questions to what extent and to which conditions unofficial diplomacy can actually impact the first track, subsequently the overall peace process.

Keywords: unofficial diplomacy; intractability; public peace process; Geneva Initiative;

Introduction

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is one of the lengthiest and more reported upon in scholarship and media. More than a century old, it is characterized by deep-rooted animosities and by mutual and severely distorted perceptions on the accounts of the parties involved.

Albeit numerous, the diplomatic efforts carried out over its course, under formal auspices or less formal ones, have ultimately proven ineffective in settling the conflict and promote peaceful resolutions.

The historical and national narratives permeating the public discourse in both parties are partisan, in such a way that their views are limited, hardly capturing the complexity of the conflict as a whole. Likewise, the citizens and audiences informed by and participating to the same discourses and narratives, including analysts that are not directly involved in the conflict, accordingly reflect widespread prejudices. As a result, the analyses are too often biased, assessing the issue from pre-conceived positions and stemming from individual or particular interest groups. To day, there exists a scarce comprehensive, functional, multidimensional conflict analysis, essential to overcome the impasse and address conflict dynamics.

Amid the multiplicity of endeavours attempting to explicate such intractability, elements of social psychology have shed light over the gaps left by the fields of international relations with respect to peacebuilding and conflict resolution.

Aside from the quest for sovereignty and control over the land and its resources, the conflict is by now driven by identity-related traits. Clearly, extensive psychological and material costs on both sides have had destructive consequences on the efficacy of the overall peace process.

Psychological implications born by intractable conflicts inform the societies involved, eventually alienating them. Continued exposure to violence and mutual hatred generates a vicious cycle whereby bellicose outcomes become the bases for the rationale of the conflict.

Properly addressing obstacles to peace should imply a break in the dynamic of reciprocal causation, putting an end to the blame-game and the conflict's zero-sum nature. In this respect, unofficial initiatives, as opposed to more formal instances, brought about by private citizens, NGOs, academic institutions, enterprises and third party actors have proven effective in creating the much needed communicative spaces among the disputants, differing in scope and impact.

i. Object of the study

Object of this research is that of examining the so-called unofficial diplomatic phenomena¹ that have occurred within the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict – thereby evaluating their potential, and the conditions under which they

¹ While the term “unofficial diplomacy” may appear as a contradiction in itself, since diplomacy is always intended as an official activity, its unofficial expression has long been object of academic interest, initiated by Montville and Davidson (1981) and Montville (1987), and lasting up to the moment of writing. For a thorough discussion on the topic, see chapter two, *The Multiple Tracks of Diplomacy*.

can succeed or fail. In particular, it considers one such instance of unofficial – or, in this case, second track – diplomacy, the process that led to the drafting of the Geneva Accord (2003).

The thesis identifies and analyses the characterizing and manifold features of unofficial diplomacy; it then develops a general analytic framework, in order to isolate the critical dimensions that influence the effectiveness of such enterprises.

ii. Methodology

The research is designed to rely primarily on the analysis of secondary sources. It also draws on interviews with unofficial negotiators, as well as on desk and archive based research of data. Secondary sources include books, journals and where possible grey literature, tertiary documents, published reports, etc.. The nature of this thesis also demanded a focus on qualitative library research.

iii. Problem statement and objectives

In the case of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, official diplomacy attempting at providing solutions to end belligerency, has proven thus far ineffective.

On the other hand, unofficial diplomacy seemingly bears potential in assuaging and overcoming barriers to peace. As a matter of fact, according to its non-binding nature, unofficial diplomacy allows more freedom of manoeuver to participants in exploring mutual concerns. Those who take part to formal

negotiations usually operate through positional stances, bargaining in order to maximize their gains; contrarily, the lack of protocol and coercive means consent to address hindrances related to uniquely human dimensions of the conflict.

Even so, neither unofficial diplomacy has yet been capable of bringing about an end to the ill-famed conflict.

Objective of this research is (i) to explore the actual potential of unofficial diplomacy, understanding the extent of its impact on the official diplomatic track, by (ii) outlining the conditions under which such impact occurs.

iv. Structure of the thesis

The thesis is structured around three main parts. In the first section, I provide a theoretical framework, exploring the underlying concepts, upon which the discourse will be built. This includes exploring the main characteristics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, notably its deep-rootedness and intractability, outlining key peace impediments and reviewing the literature scrutinized.

The second section provides a non-exhaustive analysis of unofficial, multi-track diplomatic phenomena. It traces the definitions and features presented by such enterprises, as they were put forth by their authors. In a second stage, it investigates the dynamics that promote or hinder their success and overall impact over the official channel.

The third section of the work is comprised of a case study examination. The same scheme is hereby applied, as to analyse whether previous findings fit or not the process that led to the drafting of the Geneva Agreement.

A final section draws the conclusions of the overall study, highlighting the conditions and implications of the whole discourse; these suggest that opening further communicative spaces is necessary for a fruitful conflict transformation.

1. The Israeli Palestinian conflict: a theoretical overview

Contemporary armed conflicts show drastically different features if compared to their modern predecessors, or even to the majority of the 20th century's wars. As the Conflict Barometer index produced by the Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research (HIK) pointed out, while the number of conflicts has not shrunk, present-day conflicts seem to be driven more by a wider range of actors. Interstate conflicts, disputes waged by two or more states, seem to be gradually decreasing. Inversely, intrastate conflicts, conducted between non-state actors and national governments or between groups coming from within the boundaries of a defined state, are intensively accruing².

This phenomenon may be seen as reflecting the changing paradigms of global geopolitics. Conflicts were once locked in the ideological grids of the Cold War and constituted the natural outburst of the power relations between the US and the Soviet Union. Now, they depend on the shimmering boundaries of ethnic, religious, and regional identities (Lederach, 1997).

The fields of international relations and conflict resolution have not been spared by this structural shift.

International diplomacy is rooted and emerged from the state system, and based itself on a set of assumptions that proved to be scarcely adequate to

² In 2014, the HIK calculated 347 intrastate conflicts, whereas interstate conflicts amounted to 77. As in preceding years, internal conflict composed about the 80 per cent of the whole of global conflicts. See Conflict Barometer 2014, available at http://hiik.de/en/konfliktbarometer/pdf/ConflictBarometer_2014.pdf (accessed February 15, 2015).

address the shifting nature of contemporary conflicts. State-led diplomacy traditionally assumes that groups in conflict act in accord to a hierarchical power system, and that they follow national interests rather than psychological and sociological elements. Clearly, this is not always the case.

When these assumptions demonstrated to be unsatisfactory in describing reality, other streams of thought gained presence among academics and diplomatic practitioners. In fact, over the last three decades an increasing relevance has been awarded to unorthodox conflict resolution efforts, including those carried out by non-state actors.

These two phenomena, the transformation of the geopolitical paradigms, and the corresponding changes in the international relations fields, however correlated, have both influenced and shaped the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

While often justified on the basis of ideological finalities and animated by nationalist sentiments on both sides, it takes place in a complex set of identities that constitute its basis and fuel. In fact, under the current conditions, to state otherwise would mean reducing it to a set of official positions on problematic issues.

To understand and transform a conflict, the immediate interests and concerns of its parties unquestionably must be taken into account, but a standard formula for conflict resolution does not exist. For these reasons, any attempt to critically think around a solution must necessarily consider the uniquely human dimensions of the conflict. As it will be shown before, this is a necessary but not sufficient condition.

This chapter aims at acknowledging in detail the nature and peculiarities of this conflict, drawing on its psychosocial elements in addition to its more evident characteristics. The latter are, of course, more exactly identifiable.

1.1 Israelis and Palestinians: deeply divided societies

According to the categorization suggested by Wallensteen and Axwell (1993)³, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can be considered an intermediate armed conflict (with more than 25 deaths in one year) often escalating into war (more than 1,000 deaths in a given year).

As other conflicts in the post-Cold War era, the primary issue of contention concerns governance, or the pursuit of autonomy and self-government over the region and its resources.

Although the first prodromes date back to the end of the 19th century, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict sprang in the mid 20th century around the contested territory of historical Palestine. Zionism on one side and the Palestinian national movement on the other collided over the right to self-determination, the control of its land, and governance.

Escalated in an interstate war involving the neighbouring Arab States and Israel in 1948, since the Six Day War the conflict became increasingly intra-state

³ The researchers have outlined three categories for appraising armed conflict, by death tolls, locality and issues: (i) *minor armed conflict* – conflict between armed forces, with at least one of the two being a state, having witnessed less than twenty-five casualties in a given year; (ii) *intermediate armed conflict* – at least one thousand deaths have occurred during the course of the conflict, with at least twenty-five having occurred in a given year; (iii) *war* – at least one thousand deaths have occurred in a given year. See Wallensteen, P. and Axell, K. (1993) Armed Conflict at the End of the Cold War, 1989-1992. *Journal of Peace Research*, 30(3), 331-346.

and communal, with Israeli military forces occupying and expanding its control over the remaining Palestinian territories.

Yet, the divisions are not merely political or territorial: both religious and cultural concerns fuel animosities on the two sides. “Israel's minimum requirements exceed the Arabs' maximum concession and vice versa” (Bar-Tal, 1998, p.36), making it impossible to find a feasible solution addressing both parties' legitimate needs and expectations. Continued exposure to negative perceptions powered hatred and fear, giving birth to a sociological dynamic of reciprocal causation (Lederach, 1997) and a strong ethos of conflict (Bar-Tal, 2000; Bar-Tal, Sharvit, Halperin, and Zafran, 2012).

As a matter of fact, the response mechanisms within the cycle of violence and counter-violence become the cause for perpetuating the conflict, especially where the involved groups have experienced mutual hatred over the decades and for generations (Lederach, 1997). In this sense, socially constructed identity has demonstrated to be a potent driver of violence. Within the conflict, social cohesion mechanisms and identification are necessarily narrower, giving space to deeper divisions. Divisions generate in turn hatred and fear for the nearby “other”, fuelling in turn violence, thus aggravating the original divisions.

Parenthetically, one of the effects of exacerbating identity boundaries is to strengthen unity within the parties of the conflict, so that polarization and sharp distinctions become functional for internal cohesion and useful tools for leaders to maintain political unity.

Apart from its political contrivances, and as a result of the continued repetition of the above-mentioned sociological cycle, the conflict is now “naturally” lodged in a long-standing relationship, which creates deep-rooted perceptions of enmity

and fear. Coupled with the contingency of the enemy being potentially next-door, the perception of the opponent is especially vulnerable to propaganda, particularly at grassroots level, where access to information is lower.

1.2 On the intractable nature of the conflict

Crucial feature of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is that of being intractable, or protracted. According to Kriesberg (1993) and Bar-Tal (1998), intractable conflicts are

'characterized as protracted, irreconcilable, with vested interests in their continuation, violent, of zero-sum nature, total, and central. They are demanding, stressful, exhausting, and costly both in human and material terms. Societies involved in this type of conflict develop appropriate psychological conditions which enable them to cope successfully with the conflictual situation' (Bar-Tal, 1998, p.22).

They have identified seven typical features characterizing intractable conflicts:

1. **Protraction** – intractable conflicts endure for at least one generation; the sides involved have not managed to resolve the dispute, but have accrued mutual aversion.

2. **Irreconcilability** – the sides involved perceive mutual ambitions as opposite and irreconcilable; furthermore, each side's goal is envisaged as crucial for its own survival.

3. **Interest in endurance** – since the sides involved presume an indefinite continuation of the conflict, they enable vast investments on military, economic and psychological fields; on a later stage, these same ventures further contribute in obstructing the resolution, nurturing the conflict instead.

4. **Violence** – cycles of violence and counter-violence, varying according to frequency and intensity, fuel reciprocal rivalry and foster warfare; trauma, terror, refugees spillovers are but common features.

5. **Zero sum nature** – intractable conflicts nature is perceived by parties engaged as a zero-sum game, i.e. one side's gain necessarily reflects the other's loss, and vice versa.

6. **Totality** – intractable conflicts may tackle a multiplicity of issues (identity, religion and culture, territory and resources, economy, etc.).

7. **Centrality** – societies involved in intractable conflicts develop societal beliefs that enable their members to perceive reality predominantly through a bellicose prism, and thus act accordingly.

According to the authors, it is argued, such properties pertain only the most extreme cases of intractable conflict. Presumably, because conflicts diverge in intensity, severity and scope, the less extreme ones will present only some of the above-mentioned virtues.

In what concerns the case of our interest, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it can be effortlessly assumed that it adheres completely to such features, albeit they may have varied in extent and duration since its origins, depending on cases. In particular: it is a **protracted** conflict, since it has persisted for almost one century, dominated by high levels of **violence** exacting a severe human cost on

both sides, military and civilian; resolving enterprises have revealed fruitless, the two societies are strictly alienated from one another, politically, psychologically and physically. With radically **opposite** goals, unwilling to make concessions ultimately seen as necessary for own survival, the conflict is indeed perceived as **zero-sum**; to advance such goals, and because the dispute is expected to last indefinitely, both Israelis and Palestinians have made military, economic and thorough psychological **investments**, which in turn hinder its resolution. Contentions concern a **plurality** of issues, ranging from the control of the land and its resources, auto-determination and sovereignty, economy, identity clashes, etc. The conflicting parties have thus accumulated mutual hatred, prejudice and enmity for an important period of time: in this way, the societies involved in such an intractable conflict encounter great difficulties in changing those perceptions and beliefs that ultimately maintain the conflictual imperatives. As a matter of fact, members of Israeli and Palestinian societies have **internalized** the values and preoccupations deriving from having to constantly deal with a state of warfare, as reflected by their cognitive repertoires (Bar-Tal, Raviv & Freund, 1994).

Particularly because of the psychological implications that an intractable conflict solicits in the societies engaged, and in light of the above-described aspects, its members end up developing the means necessary to cope with the situation. In order to ensure their survival and mobilization, they had to adapt, namely espousing beliefs and abilities both at the individual and collective level. These “societal beliefs”, as Bar-Tal defines them, are

‘cognitions shared by society members on topics and issues that are of special concern for the particular society, and which contribute to

the sense of uniqueness of the society's members' (Bar-Tal, 1998, p.27); 'on the one hand (they) strengthen the society to help it cope with the conflict as such, but, on the other hand, they also constitute a certain psychological investment in the conflict and thus perpetuate its continuation' (Bar-Tal, 1998, p.24).

Shared societal beliefs generally provide a prevailing meaning to a society. They may address specific characteristics or issues, and are likely to bear ontological implications for its adherents: in fact, "the society's hegemonic state of consciousness is generated by this ethos, equipping members with the justification and motivation to act in concord within the societal system", (Bar-Tal, Raviv, Raviv and Dgani-Hirsh, 2009, p. 95). Thus, in cases of severe and prolonged conflicts, a society needs to respond to specific challenges posed by the specific condition in which it exists. Part and parcel of the bellicose cognitive repertoire are: the justness of one's own goals; the centrality of security; a strong delegitimization of the adversary; the strict adherence to positive self-perception; the sense of victimization; unity and patriotism; own wish for peace.

Such beliefs are mostly interconnected and integrate each other: in order to justify their own goals and standpoints, alienated societies tend to abide by only one perspective, theirs; over time, each side has embodied principles that inform its behavioural patterns, assumptions and intentions, displaying strong resiliency towards the delegitimized opponent (Bar-Tal, 1998).

Thus, however sustaining societies that are deeply divided to manage existence in a severely intractable conflict, such mechanisms concurrently provide the rationale for the dispute to persist, and even deepen. Informed by these beliefs, the psychological dynamics of the Palestinians and the Israelis have

“provided a foundation on which members of each society constructed their respective reality and then have only served to widen the divide between them” (Nets-Zehngut and Bar-Tal, 2007, p.5).

Undeniably, this self-perpetuating cycle does not leave space for an easy reconciliation, whereas outlining such dynamics might reveal a fruitful enterprise. The process of resolution of a conflict, be it protracted or not, usually relies on formal negotiations; these are key aspects for technically addressing a dispute. Nonetheless, the ontological sides of the conflict should be likewise solicited, in order to allow a shift in the behavioural patterns of the disputants through the mutual legitimization, to be followed by a reconciliation process.

In his conflict resolution pyramid⁴, Lederach defines three levels of society and the respective peace-building approaches. The peak represents the top leadership, i.e. military, political, religious, highly visible and potent leaders; the middle relates to mid-level leaders, i.e. people from various strands of society that are connected to the top leadership, yet maintain connections with wider publics along the pyramid; at the very base of the pyramid, in its widest section, is indicated the grassroots leadership, representing the masses; in settings of protracted conflict, the latter is typically characterised by a survival mentality.

Whereas traditional negotiations usually involve only the top leadership, a proper conflict transformation should comprise the three levels and the related peace-building enterprises. A serious, concerted effort might bridge the gap between official, formal, traditional talks, and the legitimate needs and perceptions of the societies in question.

⁴ John Paul Lederach, *Building Peace – Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies*, 1997, pp. 37- 43.

1.3 On the conflict analyses

As seen above, the Arab-Israeli conflict, and its dominating bilateral dispute, the Israeli-Palestinian one, is one of the clearest instances of what constitutes an intractable conflict (Kriesberg, 1993; Bar-Tal, 1998, 2000). Over its duration, numerous endeavours have been undertaken to bring together the needs of the two parties and open communicative spaces (from Oslo in 1993 to the Israeli Peace Initiative in 2011). Until now, there is still a vivid debate about the details of what can be acceptable, for different segments of both societies.

In fact, the conflict has witnessed some of the most considerable peacebuilding efforts ever recorded. During the past two decades, both sides' and international civil societies have invested in conflict resolution and transformation, carrying out nonviolent, people-to-people, peaceful activities.

On the one hand, as Hänsel argues, there are more than enough theoretical top-level (official diplomacy) proposals for peace and reconciliation, and they all have failed in bringing reconciliation. On the other hand, middle range and grassroots (civil-led) peace initiatives are seemingly likewise failing to alter positively the conflict (Hänsel, 2010).

Such activities have certainly granted valuable and important changes, but their overall contribution has not impacted as to meaningfully shift the conflict trends. What is undoubted, is that during this very same period of peace ventures, the Oslo process has collapsed, the fence was and still is being erected, the settlement expansion persists, the grip of occupation hardened, the situation in Gaza has but worsened, just as cyclical violence and terror escalations keep on occurring.

On the political and public level as well, little evidence suggests that the peace process is receiving the necessary support. As a result, mistrust and demonization of the other have intensified, and the Israelis and the Palestinians remain far apart in their respective views and expectations, more alienated and segregated from each other than they were in the 1990s.

Even in cases when an agreement seemed at hand, other factors hindered the resolution process. The complexity of the different social, economic and political contexts in which the conflict unfolds, together with a lack of concerted effort, have prevented the sustainability of any substantial achievement.

Furthermore, reiterated regional issues foster regional instability: security needs, water disputes, economic underdevelopment and constant refugee crises are all relevant examples.

Thus, notwithstanding the fact that the Israeli-Palestinian one is almost a century old conflict, one of the most scrutinized and reported upon in history, “old enough to have produced a series of theoretical solutions” (Hänsel, 2010, p.13), just and lasting peace still appears to be a utopian achievement.

Its length and complexity throughout the decades is at the origin of a prodigious abundance of analyses. Indeed, the main question relies in the multitude of narratives feeding opinions, policies and everyday realities.

As a matter of fact, the preponderance of the existing analyses is strongly biased, which means it is assessed from pre-conceived positions; but it is also very limited, which means it springs from the rationale of the individual or group producing the research, therefore questions only particular scopes of the conflict (Jacobsen, 2009). Consequently, there exists a scarce comprehensive, functional,

multi-dimensional conflict analysis, which is in turn necessary to address the peace stalemate and the conflict dynamics.

Since the discourses inquiring the nature of the conflict emerge from partisanship or limitedness, the stakeholders possess a likewise partisan and partial perspective. This results in actions and policies that do not affect meaningfully the peacebuilding process, or at least in a way to avoid a relapse of conflict mechanisms, failing to transform them.

According to Jacobsen (2009), even within the peace camps, a lack of common understanding, coherence and cooperation has often produced fragmented, overlapping and contradictory efforts, undermining the positive effects that could have impacted the conflict strategically.

1.4 Peace obstacles

In order to succeed in achieving reconciliation between the Israeli and the Palestinian societies, through the establishment of a peaceful relationship, obstacles to peace must first be addressed. As repeated attempts and failures have demonstrated since the beginning of the peace process in the 1990s, the conflict cannot be settled by merely relying on formal negotiations, provided that issues preventing the disputants from reaching a solution are overcome. Unless these obstacles are not acknowledged and managed, stability will remain a utopian goal, or – at best – its success and extent will persist unpredictable and limited.

Much literature is concerned with the impact of psychological impediments,

the challenges stemming from the reciprocal perceptions and behaviours vis-à-vis belligerency. (Kelman and Cohen, 1976; Kelman, 1987, 1998, 2008; Rouhana and Bar-Tal, 1998; Bar-Tal, 1998, 2000, 2001, 2007; Montville, 1987, 1991a, 2006; Maoz, 2000, 2004; Pearson, 2001; Bar-Tal and Teichman, 2005; Shemesh, 2012; Ron and Maoz, 2013). Some of the core obstacles include the historical and cognitive dimensions of the contention, the political differences between the two sides, and the disparities in the balance of power. Bearing this in mind, peace building ventures prove to be an arduous enterprise in the context of Israeli-Palestinian relations.

Peace deterrents are different in nature as they can be strategic, political, psychological or structural. Nevertheless, they are intimately interconnected, often overlapping since all respond to the intractable nature of the conflict (Bar-Siman-Tov, 2010). Some of these obstacles do not just thwart peace, but as already mentioned, they allow and perpetuate conflict mechanisms.

Strategic and political obstacles apply to the opposite interests of the two sides involved, particularly to the core issues: Jerusalem, borders, refugees and settlements. Both societies envisage such issues as sacred values, thus have demonstrated great unwillingness and widespread objections to any form of compromise.

Protected values, in turn, draw their legitimacy from the ethos of a population, its historical narratives and societal beliefs. Psychosocial obstacles inform methods of selecting and processing information, thereby leading to biased perceptions of reality. Collective memory and socially constructed beliefs strongly influence the general opinion of a society. Under circumstances of prolonged and profound rivalry, differences among the disputing parties are

magnified, further impeding an impartial dialogue (Bar-Tal & Teichman, 2005). Alienation between the two societies strengthens when religious, cultural or ideological dimension is added to the conflict. This process provides its adherents with moral justifications, further explaining the very limited eagerness to make any concession.

Psychological, religious, cultural limitations can take a variety of forms, namely the demand for acknowledgement of historic injustice, victimization complexes and a strong culture of denial (Tzoreff, 2010).

Key sources in the formation of national identities are peoples' narratives. Whereas national narratives refer to self-determination, territoriality and right to the land of a people, meta-narratives draw on shared beliefs, the ethos of a society. Identity disputes may stem from narratives conflicting with one another (Auerbach, 2010). Admittedly, a peaceful setting could not be reached, unless the past is not addressed. By outlining the distinction between national and meta-narratives, Auerbach suggests that the latter is not subject to bargaining: because they are intimately related to identity, any attempt to reconcile the meta-narratives of the two sides would only exacerbate hostilities.

This is especially true, when it comes to structural divergences separating the two societies, namely the strong imbalance in the distribution of power and the fulfilment or not of identity aspirations. However, it is argued, the convergence of the different national narratives may help developing a shared basis, laying the foundations for a peaceful relationship to flourish.

In settings of intractable conflicts, religion can also be a strong hindrance to a peaceful settlement: in cases in which it has a certain weight, i.e. dominates public discourses and is a strong part of identity, it can influence radical activities that

hamper diplomatic efforts. Furthermore, contentions over control of holy sites render compromise unlikely.

Finally, socially constructed barriers are also of salient consideration in that they inform decision-making and deliberation processes, which in turn reflect real, physical obstacles to peace: the continued settlement expansion, the quest for security, the territorial subjugation, the consequent lack of geographical coherence. These all reinforce the intractability of the conflict and hinder its resolution.

The range and complexity of the above-described obstacles to peace, be they of psychological, political or strategic nature, suggest that the way to peace is ill-fated: not just a settlement is highly unlikely for the time-being, but it is also liable to discourage the prospect of achieving peace and bring about renewed cycles of violence.

1.5 Overcoming obstacles

Among the reasons why the peace process have collapsed, and related attempts have failed, it has been argued that psychosocial dimension have not been properly addressed, including the collective memories and the sources that feed it. There is a widespread discussion in conflict resolution literature concerning peace barriers and how to effectively overcome them: as proponents of structural causes would focus on political, justice-related issues to overcome the dispute, whereas proponents of psychological explanations suggest the necessity to overcome mutual misperceptions and delegitimization.

However, it is clear that a more comprehensive approach allows for a deepened understanding of the conflict; likewise, a multi-layered, more holistic approach might impact more meaningfully both the systemic and the relational obstructions to peace. Developing and systematizing processes targeting the full range of needs of the disputing parties, psychological, sociological, political, cultural, economic, etc., is therefore paramount.

Both societies should reassess their own, currently held beliefs by considering alternative ways of conceiving the conflict, eventually transforming it in a later stage.

Given its current state, the conflict is damaging the needs and aspirations of both Israelis and Palestinians, impeding the accomplishments of neither ones' goals, and inflicting costs that are far greater than the costs demanded by a compromise for achieving piece. Moreover, such approach requires that both sides rethink the risks implied in avoiding addressing, thus enable, conflict resolution.

As previous peace ventures have demonstrated, it is essential that the public spheres adhere and back such initiatives, for the absence of a concerted effort might prevent the whole enterprise from bearing any successful results. Therefore, all layers of society should be equally galvanized, first and foremost by legitimizing and creating progressive support to the peace process.

Social transformation is indeed needed, but power-informed processes to acknowledge and enforce it are likewise necessary. Thus top-level discourses and legitimization efforts should occur concurrently, with the related bottom-up and top-down processes buttressing one another: on the one hand legitimization of the "other" is provided by the political process, as well as support for bottom-up

activities; on the other hand, the latter bestows the required validity and relevance.

Such measures bear the potential to boost and amplify peace-building efforts within the two societies, thereby providing an opportunity to confront issues too complex, and up-to-date mostly avoided, for formal negotiations.

1.6 Official diplomatic efforts

Since the Madrid conference in 1991 and the ensuing breakthrough of Oslo, several attempts to bring about reconciliation have been carried out, sponsored by a wide range of actors and mediators. Quite a number of peace plans, guidance, proposals have flourished, all contriving to put an end to violence and return to the negotiating table, or at least provide a framework for the talks to take place.

Although at varying extents, they all offered potential, yet have only produced limited results, periods of fragile stability befall by degenerating tensions and, ultimately, a relapse of the conflict.

As already mentioned, in light of its intractable nature and because of the many complexities born by the conflict, a peaceful settlement continues to appear a highly unlikely outcome. Provided that essential dimensions of the dispute are addressed, a strategic and systemic approach is needed to bring the parties to terms.

1.7 Non-official diplomatic efforts

Unofficial diplomatic efforts have emerged in the last decades accompanying official power-informed diplomacy; it may be a valuable complementary tool, particularly in intractable settings, where identity-based conflicts have proven reluctant to formal peace-making enterprises. As a matter of fact, distinct from their official counterpart, multi-tracks diplomacies generally assume that the conflict cannot be settled unless the fundamental roots that nurture it are confronted; thus, it admits more freedom of manoeuvre, backing sustained and sustainable contacts among the disputants.

Essential features of sub-official diplomacy approach is the necessity, for the disputing parties, to overcome the zero-sum thinking that informs their understanding of the conflict, in order to reframe it on a shared, mutual basis. In this way, unofficial instances bring about the potential to catalyse perception alterations, that in turn are unavoidable for the negotiation process to take place.

1.8 Literature review

Seeking to explain the increasingly diverse range of unofficial diplomatic phenomena and actors, innovative works have emerged, challenging the assumption that diplomacy is exclusively the state's prerogative. There exist an extensive variety of unofficial diplomatic instances, which have in turn sprouted an equally extensive set of theories and concepts. Appreciating the potential of such activities might just be the reason of this theoretical blossoming.

The concept of “Track-II diplomacy” was first introduced by Montville and Davidson (1981), to identify a set of diplomatic activities as opposed to “Track-I diplomacy”, i.e. the official one. Originally, the term targeted the interactions performed by private citizens or groups from the opponent sides, aiming at “developing strategies, influencing public opinions, and organizing human and material resources in ways that might help resolve the conflict” (Montville, 1981, p.162).

As unofficial diplomacy grew over time, the theory was both expanded and refined, in order to capture its breadth and variety. Besides the term Track-II, other terms proliferated: to name but a few, “Multitrack diplomacy” (Diamond and McDonald, 1991, 1996), “Interactive Conflict Resolution” (Fisher, 1997), Sustained Dialogue (Saunders, 1999, 2001), “Track-one-and-a-half diplomacy” (Nan, 2004, 2005), or “Track-III diplomacy” (Chigas, 2007).

These expressions ascertain a mixed set of activities including different actors. For instance, track three diplomacy identifies activities that aim at bringing together conflicting parties at the grassroots levels. On the other hand, track two and track one are more institutionally characterized, with highly politically influential and government personalities taking part in the activities.

Up-to-date, the concept of unofficial diplomacy is an umbrella descriptor encompassing the variety of forms of interaction between nations and a broad range of other actors, venues, objectives and methods for advancing the same aim: a sustainable, mutually-beneficial peace across all areas of activity. Undoubtedly, most scholars agree that it refers to types of diplomatic efforts that are conducted below the official governmental level.

According to Handelman (2012, p.164), “Track-II diplomacy is an

unconventional method of diplomacy involving unofficial dialogue between ‘mid-level’ elites” and citizens from both sides, its goal being “to clarify outstanding disputes and to explore the options for resolving them in settings or circumstances that are less sensitive than those associated with official negotiations” (Agha et al., 2003, p.1).

The unofficial diplomacy approach is corroborated by a few assumptions. The first implies that unofficial diplomacy activities focus on cultivating the relationship between the parties through communication and mutual understanding, by lessening anger, fears, and misunderstandings (Montville and Davidson, 1981). This infers that improving the emotional management of the conflict for the direct stakeholders is a key factor in overcoming the psychological impediments that hamper sincere dialogue. Were the performance to reveal successful, the affected parties may be more likely to consent to negotiate at an official level, thereby flaring a virtuous process based on shared interests (Kelman, 1987; Montville, 1991a; Saunders, 2001).

Secondly, the unofficial nature of such process is of equal significance. As a matter of fact, it allows the parties to explore mutual opinions and responses in a non-compulsory fashion (Montville and Davidson, 1981; Kelman, 1995; Lederach, 1997; Agha et al., 2003; Handelman, 2012).

The third assumption ascertains that diplomatic methodologies, official and unofficial tracks, should take place alongside each other (Fisher, 2006). Unofficial activities are not intended to replace official government diplomacy, but instead often aim at integrating the political debate of the higher levels. Such integration ideally happens *via* a process of assimilation that affects the grassroots and the middle-range levels, to later reach policy-formation environments. In this

process, perception of the other gradually mutates, eventually allowing greater space to dialogue and reconciliation.

Fourthly, the role of third parties differs in relation to their engagement within diplomacy: while third parties within the official kind usually dispose of coercion tools, those involved in unofficial diplomatic activities do not, or often miss them. This means that the latter are necessarily revolving to facilitating and educational roles.

1.9 Main actors, main purposes

In such assets, the third party assumes the role of a facilitator whose task is “to provide the setting, create the atmosphere, establish the norms, and offer occasional interventions that make it possible for such a process to evolve” (Kelman, 1992, p.65). Similar enterprises necessitate the involvement of other actors, to provide their financial or technical backing. Such third parties are often non-governmental organizations, conformingly coping with conflict resolution or peacebuilding activities (Chigas, 2007). Nevertheless, also states may figure among third parties in the framework of unofficial diplomatic instances, delivering logistic provisions and advice. One such example is the case of the Norwegian involvement in the Oslo talks in 1993, or the Swedish involvement in the Stockholm talks in 1994-1995 (Agha et al., 2003).

Theoretical treatment of unofficial diplomacy phenomena, the literature has showed, presents two main features: while the first addresses the types of participants and third parties involved in the process, the second refers to the

main aim of the activity. Similar attentiveness to the progression of the field has allowed a more extended definition of unofficial diplomacy, in order to appreciate the definition of participants and purpose of the different instances.

As many scholars have pointed out, diplomacy happening below the official level is framed as an intervention of non state actors along with attorneys not officially holding office, yet are “close enough to the centre of power to have some sort of influence over decision makers, political elite and/or public opinion” (Kaufman, 2002, p.187). Thus, involved participants may strongly differ in levels of influence: from the top-leadership – policy advisors, parliament members –, through the mid-level influence – public figures, academics, political activists –, to grassroots leaders – students, local leaders, community developers (Rouhana and Kelman, 1994; Lederach, 1997; Davies and Kaufman, 2002; Fisher, 2006; Cady, 2013).

Stressing the concept of participants’ abilities to gain access to policy-making circles, in order to engage and influence one’s political leadership, many scholars seem to agree on the general objective of unofficial diplomacy as a process eventually devised to affect the political process of the conflict resolution (Diamond and McDonald, 1991; Kelman, 1995; Maoz, 2000; Kriesberg, 2001; Voorhees, 2002; Fisher, 2006). Hence, such interventions are not designed to achieve an agreement or appreciably impact policies (not at least in the short term), but rather to address the nature itself of the relationship between the parties, grounding an adequate political atmosphere encouraging negotiations (Lederach, 1997; Kaufman, 2002; Kriesberg, 2002; Kelman, 2008).

In defining more specifically the purpose of the process, Agha, Feldman, Khalidi and Schiff, (2003) have offered a more nuanced description,

distinguishing between “hard” and “soft” track two talks (Agha et al., 2003). On the one hand, “soft” track two talks aim at mutating beneficially and in the long run the relationship among the disputing sides, whereas “hard” track two talks facilitates and foresees political agreements between governments. Furthermore, while in “soft” track-two processes, participants “may indirectly contribute to the formation of new national political priorities and policies” (Agha et al., 2003), in “hard” track-two diplomacy, participants feel free to “discuss sensitive issues that can not be addressed in a formal setting, with the aim of reaching a political agreement or understanding that will be acceptable to the conflicting parties” (Agha et al., 2003).

2. The Multiple Tracks Of Diplomacy: An Analysis

The nature and configuration of official negotiating processes in the international arena often tempers the possibility for parties to come to the negotiating table. Here, bargaining is fundamentally positional (Martinez and Susskind, 2000), in that negotiators bear already attentively crafted instructions, certainly not open to revision.

Indeed, they are not supposed to contradict the stated position. Evidence in such sense can be inferred in the experiences of Harold Saunders and John McDonald as U.S. government officials. They have both repeatedly attempted to promote less official interventions among the official circles, on the basis that this would have brought about important contributions. Yet, constrained by the rigidness of the Cold War, they have historically encountered resistance in interesting the U.S. foreign affairs community.

Among the main reasons, it is argued, lies the risk that any exchange might be misread as a commitment (Agha, Feldman, Khalidi and Schiff, 2003). This in turn entails a communicational risk: were official negotiators too collaborative and open in exploring alternative instances or sharing personal observations, they would exceed the limits of their role. Their actions might even lead to accusations from their respective constituencies of “selling out” to the other side (Chigas, 1997; Chataway, 2002).

Finally, both sides' top leaderships vindicate the last word on any negotiated agreement. Such limited flexibility has impeded the development of solutions able to meet the basic interests and necessities of conflicting sides (Susskind, Chayes and Martinez, 1996; Saunders, 1985; Kelman, 1987, 1996, 1998, 2008; Pearson, 2001; Fisher, 2006). Formal negotiators represent and act on behalf of their constituencies; concomitantly, if not previously consulted and taken into account, the same constituents may not acquiesce.

Similarly to an electoral-governing dichotomy, and process, negotiators are pressured to get a better deal than what they had been instructed to. In a context of rigid zero-sum game like the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, this often translates in being excessively harsh and uncompromising, thus endangering the viability of negotiations and the possibility of implementing the results, particularly on the weaker side.

Failing to produce a balanced and reasonable result and agreement or failing to engage the grassroots into the peace process generates consequent "difficulties selling the outcome to those who ultimately must abide by, if not internalize, its relevant provisions" (Pearson, 2001, p. 279). The case of the intractable Israeli-Palestinian conflict emphasizes the great necessity for civil society involvement (Lederach, 1997; Jacobsen, 2009; Aggestam and Strömbom, 2012).

Troubles dominating protracted, intractable disputes such as the one under discussion, inform the societies in which they lodge, providing the logic bases for the contention to endure and strengthen. Such issues often render the conflict not ripe for solution merely via official negotiation (Saunders, 1985).

It is precisely in light of these limitations that quite a number of informal dialogue processes have emerged. As Kelman has observed (1996), second track

experiences have proved a valuable tool for the bargaining process: prior to negotiations, they aim at creating a positive climate, conducive to productive discussions; during the negotiations, they facilitate the identification of intractable questions, too complicated to be brought on the table, as well as addressing current resistances to the negotiating process; finally, in the post-negotiation phase, they may prove instrumental in ensuring the enactment of the adopted decisions and sustaining the achievements attained.

As previously mentioned, under the umbrella term of unofficial diplomacy venues a number of manifold initiatives and events finds place. While the term unquestionably refers to diplomatic activities performed at a non-official level (and this often is their defining feature), in practice it discloses a multifaceted set of phenomena, varying according to their objectives, actors, methodologies, activities and outcomes.

In an attempt to comprehensively express this variety and provide a conceptual overview of such phenomena, the following chapter will trace an overview of the broad-spectrum of unofficial instances and their relative definitions, as their inventors have put them forth. Subsequently, it will trace their main effects over the official channel in the framework of the peace process, highlighting the factors that thwart or foster their success.

2.1 Comprehensive Definitions of Alternative Negotiation Activities

As mentioned before, we owe the definition of Second Track Diplomacy to Montville and Davidson. They have been the first in 1981 to operate a distinction between government-to-government negotiations, i.e. track one, and efforts carried on by unofficial, nongovernmental professionals, i.e. track two. In their work, unofficial diplomacy referred to a very broad set of actions, that is those performed by non-state actors with the objective to “developing strategies, influencing public opinion, and organizing human and material resources in ways that might help resolve the conflict” (Montville, 1991b, p. 262). Their conceptualization was then very broad, including from advocacy enterprises to cultural exchanges (Montville and Davidson, 1981).

While the distinction between track one and track two proved groundbreaking for the field of conflict resolution, it was still too broad to describe its reality: to label all unofficial activities under one simple denomination did not capture the complexity or breadth of unofficial diplomacy.

Following the growing trend of the time, the theory of unofficial diplomacy grew both more specific and extended, to elaborate on second track diplomacy and include other conceptualizations such as Interactive Conflict Resolution, (Kelman, 1996), multi-track diplomacy (Diamond and McDonald, 1991, 1996), track one-and-a-half diplomacy (Nan, 2004, 2005), track three diplomacy (Chigas, 2007), or the distinction between “soft” and “hard” track two talks (Agha et al., 2003).

Interactive Conflict Resolution

Pioneered by John Burton, a former Australian diplomat and International Relation scholar, Interactive Conflict Resolution is a problem-solving workshop. As early as 1965, Burton brought together representatives of the Malaysian and the Indonesian governments, whose territorial disputes had precipitated into war. Through the facilitation of secret discussions, Burton endeavoured to ease tensions, raising trust and disbanding mutual misjudgements between the competing parties. The following year's negotiated agreement was a direct result of the proposals emerged in the workshops, eventually ending three years of conflict.

Burton's breakthrough stirred a wide range of analogous interventions by scholars and practitioners: Herbert Kelman's "problem-solving workshops" notably figure among these, defined as "a specially constructed arena for developing new insights and shaping new ideas that can then be exported into the political process within each community" (Kelman, 1996, p. 102).

Largely a social-psychological approach, the Interactive Problem Solving technique has been put forth and used to initiate contact and dialogue between non formal and informal but potentially influential citizens involved in deep-seated, intractable conflicts. These discussions prioritize the psychological dimension over the political, in that they engage the disputing parties in a joint examination of their own conflict, ideally addressing mutual human needs dimension, mutual restraints and concerns, before moving to concrete, formal negotiations (Kelman, 1996; Fisher, 1997). In conceiving the diplomatic process "as a mix of official and unofficial processes", Kelman contends that

“opportunities for interactive problem solving – in the form of problem-solving – are a necessary and integral part” (Kelman, 1996, p. 103).

The unofficial setting delivered by such workshops consents a private, safe channel for both conflicting sides to “produce new ideas about the future relationship between the two communities that could be repeatedly and immediately tested against both parties’ perspectives” (Rouhana and Kelman 1994, p. 162). Thus, in light of its informal and confidential nature, the exercise provides an environment for the disputants to interact freely and test ideas in ways that otherwise “normal” settings would not allow.

Once contact is established, the desired outcomes may be cleared. Generally, a third party facilitates interactions by setting up ground rules: 1) meetings are confidential, as well as discussions are off-the-record; 2) exchanges should be open and honest; 3) unless commonly established as an explicit goal, there should be no expectations that an agreement will be reached; 4) participants taking part in the talks are expected to focus on analytical discussions rather than placing blame on the other; 5) the third party is only a facilitator, not a mediator; (Bercovitch and Chalfin, 2011).

Many unofficial workshops between Israeli and Palestinian representatives have applied this technique, even when there was little or no contact at all between the parties. As Kelman maintains, such activities have succeeded in reducing in-group preconceptions and out-group discrimination among the participants, nurturing in turn a sense of improved intergroup interactions. In fact, it has been argued that the continued series of these workshops, particularly in the early 1990s, have paved the way for the 1993 Oslo Declaration Of Principles (Kelman, 1998; Aggestam, 2002).

Multi-track Diplomacy

Louise Diamond and ex-US Ambassador John McDonald independently addressed the concept, coming to expand Track Two to include conflict resolution professionals, businesses, private citizens, and the media. However, their conception of unofficial diplomacy still leaned toward official diplomacy, with non-governmental tracks operating to mutate the direction of Track One.

In 1991, ten years after Montville's definition, Diamond and McDonald increased the number of tracks, adding religion, activism, education/training/research, and philanthropy. The tracks have also rearranged in order to break the hierarchic framework and construct a systemic approach. As they argue, no track is more important than the others, since they all concur to affect the conflict resolution process. Thus, Multi-track Diplomacy can be defined as a systemic model of interstate relations, whereby nine societal domains of activity interact to affect peacemaking and peacebuilding processes. The Diamond-McDonald framework incorporates the following tracks:

- *Track 1* – Government to government diplomacy. Track one is the official method of governments to resolve conflicts, with its strengths and limits. It is the realm of official diplomats, and the place of power-related, positional bargaining;
- *Track 2* – People to people, where people are intended as non-governmental professionals in the field of peacemaking and conflict resolution. Track Two includes NGOs and professionals that explicitly address the issue of conflict management and resolution in their actions;
- *Track 3* – Business. The economic advantages of peace are increasingly

being included in the analyses for conflict resolution. Track three includes both tangible effects of conflict and potential benefits of peace, stressing the importance of economic opportunities, fostering international friendship and understanding and creating informal channels of Business to Business and Business to Customer communication;

- *Track 4 – Private Citizens.* Track four includes all the activities carried out as personal initiatives of individual citizens. It can be simulated diplomacy, exchange programs, voluntarism, special interest groups going beyond the lines of the conflict;
- *Track 5 – Research, Training, and Education.* This track includes all peacebuilding activities related to pedagogy and learning. Research is connected to university programs think tanks, and specialized research centres. Training comprises both sectorial activities for peacebuilding practitioners (i.e. in the field of negotiation, mediation, conflict resolution) and trainings targeted at people from both parties of the conflict. Analogously, education ranges from kindergarten through PhD programs covering conflict analysis and the peacebuilding process and educational activities that cross the conflict borders;
- *Track 6 – Activism.* Track six includes advocacy initiatives covering pressing political issues such as social and economic justice or human rights. It also includes advocacy from special interest groups;
- *Track 7 – Religion.* The track refers to those actions that allow dialogue between faiths, and peace-oriented activities for spiritual and religious communities;
- *Track 8 – Funding.* Track eight includes the actions carried out by

foundations and philanthropists that aim at providing resources for the other tracks;

- *Track 9 – Communications and Media.* This track refers to information, and how the public opinion is shaped both internationally and in loco. Journalism, movies, videos, the arts and radios are part of this track.

Sustained Dialogue

Harold Saunders' conception of the multilevel peace process is based on his many years of experience in the official, but also in the unofficial, negotiation instances. In light of his familiarity with the matter, he asserts that the mere negotiating process between representatives to reach agreements is far from sufficient for effective peacemaking (1999). He argues, instead, that a shift in relationships among the disputing societies must take place.

He understands an overall peace process as composed by four different yet strictly intertwined streams: 1) the *official process*, where the top leadership, governments or international organizations operate to restructure the political setting securing agreements; 2) the *quasi-official process*, where unofficial actors associated to the official process relate to issues in a way to foster and support negotiations at the official level; 3) the *public peace process*, that sees unofficial actors bringing together prominent adversaries in sustained dialogue, in order to analyse the bellicose relationship, breeding the common will to change it and later develop ideas for pushing the peace process forward; 4) *civil society*, where citizens and non-governmental organizations work in an extensive field of

realms, in order to cut across the lines of the conflict, reactivating those strengths that have been neglected by the destructive conflict. Requiring a great deal of coordination, Saunders posits that the identification of the multi-layered nature of a peace process demands a clear strategy for addressing all process arenas in a complementary fashion (Saunders, 1999, 2001).

The Distinction between “soft” and “hard” Track-II Talks

Clearly, all unofficial diplomatic activities aim at bringing change in the perception of the parties, reducing tensions and facilitating discussion. It is important to underline that they may have very different ambitions. The study of the Middle East experience has pointed to an important distinction in typology regarding unofficial talks, distinguishing between “hard” and “soft” talks (Agha et al. 2003, p.1-5).

Soft talks include those activities that intend to provide general conditions for improving mutual understanding, e.g. through the exchange of views, information or expectations. Soft talks target the social and human dimension of the discussion, trying to leverage on perception and public opinion to bring about change. Hence, they are relationship-oriented, since they point at the relationship healing in the long run.

Contrarily, on the other hand, hard talks entail a closer participation of official and political entourages. They are short-term policy-oriented, in that they are used to break obstacles to dialogue and reach political results, such as agreements or formal understandings. In this case, the informal nature of unofficial talks is the

device that allows overcoming the limitations imposed by Track One diplomacy. E.g., 1995 Stockholm talks are considered a “hard” second track venue, since they “aimed to reach closure on the most difficult and hypersensitive issues at dispute between Israelis and Palestinians, such as the future of Jerusalem, Israeli settlement, and the fate of the Palestinian refugees” (Agha et al., 2003, p.89).

Track One and a Half Diplomacy

In addition to the nine tracks of multitrack diplomacy, there is another typology of negotiation that eludes categorization. When official representatives interact in an unofficial way, their interfacing can be termed Track One-and-a-half Diplomacy.

A methodology widely adopted globally, its definition owes much to the work of Dr. Susan Allen Nan, who described it first as “the long-term unofficial facilitated joint analysis among negotiators, LUFJAAN for short” (Nan, 1999, in Mapendere, 2006, p. 69). In a series of articles, Nan defined it as unofficial interactions occurring between formal representatives of states, as “diplomatic initiatives that are facilitated by unofficial bodies, but directly involve officials from the conflict in question” (Nan, 2005, p. 165).

A more precise and operational definition of Track One-and-a-half is the one suggested by Mapendere, who describes it as a

‘public or private interaction between official representatives of conflicting governments or political entities such as popular armed movements, which is facilitated or mediated by a third party not representing a political organization or institution. The aim of such

interaction is to influence attitudinal changes between the parties with the objective of changing the political power structures that caused the conflict'. (Mapendere, 2006, p. 69).

The definitions given by Mapendere and Nan are congruent about the participants of the actions: facilitators and third parts are private citizens, but the conflicting parties here consist of governmental officials acting in non-official capacity. As Böhmelt reasons,

'this track, although being categorized as unofficial intervention, can combine the strengths of both track one and track two to a certain degree, but potentially also suffers from their weaknesses. On one hand, track one-and-a-half efforts can influence actors' relative power, as it partly relies on resources and power capabilities provided by official parties, even if it is not driven by governmental agendas. On the other hand, track one-and-a-half may be able to establish a track two-like private and non-public environment' (Böhmelt, 2010, p.169).

The advantages of introducing the additional denomination of Track One-and-a-half Diplomacy are not just theoretical: for a long time official diplomats have scoffed at peacebuilding initiatives endeavoured by unofficial actors, labelling them as politically naïve and interfering with national interests (Fisher, 2006). At the same time, track two practitioners have often blamed the arrogance of official diplomacy for their inability to transfer their results along the leadership chain (Saunders, 1985).

As a response, Track One-and-a-half attempts to overcome the methodological hiatus between Track one and Track Two, making the most of the two tracks' strengths. Visibility and flexibility are some of its main advantages. Concurrently,

though, the risk of political interference is higher.

Track Three Diplomacy

Track Three Diplomacy refers to those unofficial diplomatic activities performed at grassroots level to promote peace in violent settings. Just like Track Two diplomacy, these works aim at constructing a positive, productive environment across broken relationships and deep polarizations instigated by the conflict. Track Three Diplomacy assumes that altering public perceptions can bring about peace, overcoming negative prejudices and connecting people across conflict lines.

This bottom up approach usually adopts pedagogical and psychological methods to rebuild social capital in affected local communities. In this sense, the micro local framework is seen as a reflection of the macro situation. For these reasons, Track Three targets the totality of the communities involved and includes a wide range of activities. Art venues, social events, musical and gastronomic initiatives, peace education, interreligious dialogue, are all used as frameworks to bring people together and work on collective experiences or traumas.

In his “Building peace: sustainable reconciliation in divided societies”, Lederach (1997) underlines the difficulties that grassroots initiatives present. Since the number of people to reach is quite extended, such activities are often limited to the creation of points of contacts between people, rather than involving them in a comprehensive program. Moreover, populations affected by conflicts

often live a state where survival and satisfaction of primary needs are their major concerns, and peace-building and conflict resolution efforts might not be perceived as a priority.

Parallel Informal Negotiations

Presented as “an alternative – or complement – to more traditional second track diplomacy”, (Martinez and Susskind, 2000, p. 571), the concept of Parallel Informal Negotiation draws primarily from the problem-solving workshop model and likewise second track venues. By merging certain elements, such as the relative freedom of manoeuvre in exploring ideas in a relative safe setting and finding a common ground through the enhancement of mutual trust and recognition, it aims at bridging official diplomacy with the “easy” context of the unofficial instances; at the same time, it differs from second or lower tracks in that the targeted participants are negotiating officials, partaking in their official capacity (as opposed to unofficial venues in which high-ranked profile participants do engage in similar talks, but they do so in their simple civilian capacity).

Parallel Informal Negotiations ascribe to the off-record nature, or as its authors have defined it, “non-attribution rule”, typical feature of unofficial diplomacy at large: participants are given relative freedom of brainstorming ideas, in that they do not have to justify themselves or be affiliated to any specific individual or party. Such initiatives, Martinez and Susskind argue, should take place concomitantly with concurrent formal processes, with neutral facilitators.

In what concerns the arenas in which such method should be deployed, and because it has only been tested within environmental and economic issues, it remains unclear whether it may be a suitable option for addressing unsettled armed conflicts.

2.2 Key Factors Analysis

Undoubtedly, tracing the history of the different tracks of diplomacy cannot lead to the identification of general lessons or a formula for their adoption or success. Each initiative is usually developed around contextual needs and peculiarities and aims at reaching particular, contextual achievements.

It would therefore be misleading to take an analysis of such initiatives as the basis for universal deductions or even replications of the activities. Nevertheless, it would be equally erroneous to maintain that nothing can be learnt from the successes and failures of unofficial diplomatic activities. Overcoming first-track hindrances, fostering dialogue, opening communicative spaces between the disputants have all played an important role in the wide range of developments that took place in the last decades.

Such rationale is largely based on a social-psychological perspective, which maintains that conflict is essentially a socially constructed, thus subjective, process (Kriesberg, 1993, 2001; Bar-Tal, 1998). Whilst such reasoning does not deny the realist assumptions that actual differences in interests trigger intergroup conflict, it confers a certain degree of importance to human interactions: once commenced, the perceptions, attitudes and stances profoundly

inform, and subsequently determine, the course of the divergences, thereby creating self-perpetuating cycles of violence and continued relapses of malign mechanisms.

The following section attempts to capture some of the most significant features and insights that can be inferred from the unofficial instances described before. In particular, it will try to outline what are the key criteria and factors that may lead to relevant outcomes over the official diplomatic level.

On the Third Party Sponsorship

Spontaneously flourished initiatives are relatively correlated to higher levels of success and satisfaction among the disputants (Aggestam and Strömbom, 2012). Nonetheless, this is not the case for the majority of the unofficial diplomatic enterprises endeavoured to-date. Which, on the contrary have usually been initiated, conducted and concluded by third parties (Agha et al., 2003).

The success or failure of the initiative may depend on an adequate provision of resources, a suitable setting and the sense of distance that sponsors deliver (Böhmelt, 2010). When it comes to situations in which the sponsor happens to be a government, it can also provide valuable protection if participants face security threats. Furthermore, an external sponsor shields the participants from the difficulties of daily pressures.

Given the intractable nature of the Israeli-Palestinian relations, the intervention of a third party has not only been desirable, but often also a necessary condition for the enterprises to take place. It is therefore crucial for the

facilitator to draw either on the scientific knowledge of the conflict and its roots, as well as on the use of social skills: specifically, in order to assist the parties in advancing an analytical sight, a sponsor must play a delicate role, motivating participants and improving mutual openness, but without disregarding the accuracy of communications, the importance of intractable questions that inform the disputants' beliefs and assuring a sustainable regulation of the interactions.

This does not mean that third parties should be standard mediators: the higher level of neutrality and the lower their degree of intrusiveness, the more trustworthy would be the venue's outcomes. In fact, an agreement or an understanding derived by unprompted impulses bears a greater impact according to the level of ownership of its contractors.

As opposed to formal negotiations, one of the main virtues of unofficial diplomacy stands in its accommodating nature. Undeniably, the rigidity and formal regulations that stiffen procedures during track one discussions are here abolished. In order to build confidence between the third party and the participants, the role of the former should be defined at the outset of the activity. However, such role is not fixed and may instead vary, becoming more or less operative according to the track in which it functions and the group dynamics it generates. Indeed, third parties may be merely sponsors, technical facilitators, or, when necessary, active interveners in the talks (Fisher, 1997).

As a consequence, they adapt their strategy in compliance with the developments engendered by the interactions between the conflicting sides.

On the Participants

Albeit an extensive variety of activities seems to fall under the umbrella term of unofficial diplomatic instances, it is commonly held that they are somehow expected to spawn valuable outcomes to the macro-level: they are not meant to achieve a final settlement, but rather to solicit reconciliation through the establishment of a relationship between the disputing parties, creating the adequate political atmosphere encouraging and inducing negotiation, eventually affecting the political process of conflict resolution (Lederach, 1997; Fisher and Keashley, 1991; Kelman, 1996; Bercovitch and Chalfin, 2011). Hence, participants may differ according to the nature of the occurrence, i.e. in which track it unfolds, and to the specific purpose it presents at its outset.

Seemingly, for the desirable outcomes to be injected to the formal level, a proper conflict transformation should comprise and engage all levels of society and the related peace-building oriented enterprises: indeed, the capability to sway effectively the respective leadership is essential to bring the results from the second to the first track (Fisher, 2006). Thus, people from various strands of society that are connected to the top authorities, yet maintain connections with wider constituencies, have proved of crucial importance in such process. Finally, the negotiated agreements are actually reached between official negotiators.

On the other hand, the role of civil society should especially not be underestimated (Aggestam and Strömbom, 2012). In violent long-standing identity informed conflicts, shifts in attitudes and respective societal beliefs have to “result in a perceptual shift that supports the decision to enter negotiations” (Bar-Tal, 1998; Kelman and Cohen, 1976; Fisher, 2006, p.70).

Efforts made at formal levels should be pursued along with a defined strategy to stir support in public opinion for peace making; conversely grassroots and mid-level pressures should coagulate around specific policies, for such strengths would otherwise be dispersed. As John Paul Lederach has reminded,

'constructing a peace process in deeply divided societies (...) requires an operative frame of reference that takes into consideration the legitimacy, uniqueness, and interdependency of the needs and resources of the grassroots, middle range and top level', (Lederach, 1997, p.60)

and these aspects of both or all sides of the conflict must be compiled in the equation.

On Secrecy

Whilst secrecy is not a binding prerogative of unofficial talks, the parties may decide whether, and to what extent, these should remain subject to confidentiality. In the framework of the problem-solving workshops confidentiality is a crucial feature for the implementation of the talks: in this way, participants may freely explore issues that would be more difficult to address publicly, but also have the possibility to maintain independence from official channels, avoiding the risk of being misguidedly exchanged as expressing committal views. Covertness notably allows the endorsement or the continuity of a dialogue when this is absent from official agendas, but also guarantees its participants' physical safety when this may be threatened. Additionally, secrecy in Track one-and-a-half and Track-II instances may play a crucial role, in that

such venues allow governments to test ideas without prior or explicit commitment.

Here, Second Track venues function as shield for constitutional leaderships, avowing a certain degree of political manoeuvrability with either side's participants: e.g., the initial confidentiality of the Oslo process allowed the compliance of both Rabin and Arafat, in that they met mutual disposition to deal in a secure, non-binding, controlled channel.

On the Modus Operandi

As previously noticed, informal instances should be as free of restrictions as possible. This is not intended to diminish the importance of the procedural framework, but if set by consensus the agenda seems to function at its best. Similarly, as the activity unfolds and proceeds, rules of conduct should remain subject to revision.

Differently from formal negotiations, parties engaging in unofficial occurrences often need to define a mutual understanding of the purpose of the exercise, while at the same time acknowledging that eventual shifts in directions may take place along the way. Depending on the initial aim of the exercise, a clear plan may be of more or less importance: e.g., talks that point at accompanying and complementing formal negotiations tend to present more imperative intentions and timing; contrarily, "soft" exercises, e.g. those fostering dialogue and mutual understanding, may initiate with a less detailed intent, to be better defined as the exercise advances.

A similar distinction can be made over the number of participants. Quite understandably, the ideal number should be kept low: a small group can better progress and create its own participatory practices, as well as encouraging positive personal interchanges. However, when the group intends to influence directly the formal track, this consideration is more important. When instead it works with more modest ambitions, it can usually function well even with a larger pool of participants.

In both cases, the establishment of relatively strong interpersonal relations is crucial to the emergence of an unofficial diplomatic community, with potentially positive effects even beyond the physical and chronological limitations of the enterprise. Very often participants acquire a broader understanding of the situation from it, and develop more accommodating perspectives.

Other questions concern the qualities of the participants, who should be selected (or self-selected) to generate the greatest impact. Ideal candidates are committed to the task and ready to make deals: dealing with the “enemy” implies a relatively high level of risk, and quite a good dose of creativity and problem-solving skills.

This does not necessarily mean that good participants are moderates or peaceniks. In fact, gatherings between straightforward “doves” might prove more disruptive than useful, creating artificial environments with no added value with respect to public statements; on the other hand, a dialogue between the more radical wings of the two fields has never occurred within the conflict (Browne and Dickson, 2010).

The representation of political views within the unofficial diplomacy conceals in fact a paradox: political homogeneity fosters dialogue and favours good

outcomes, but without a sincere confrontation between discordant parties, a dialogue is almost useless. “Hardliners” should therefore be encouraged to participate and subscribe to a common ethos and a common purpose.

On the Transfer Effect

A general understanding of the main purpose of unofficial diplomacy at large holds that it is a process eventually conceived to affect the political process of the conflict resolution (Diamond and McDonald 1991, 1996; Kelman 1987, 1995, 1996; Fisher, 2006; Agha et al. 2003). A great deal of attention has been reserved to participants’ access to policy-making leaderships, in that they may yield transfer effect on issues examined during the informal talk to wider segments of the respective societies. E.g., in 1986, in the framework of the problem solving workshops, a group of Palestinian and Israeli participants contrived a set of three letters involving Israeli Prime Minister Peres, PLO Chairman Arafat and King Hussein of Jordan. The project was conceived and developed during the talks, as were the letters and the plan: Peres would have invited Arafat and King Hussein to a conference on reconciliation, though having acknowledged the responses before sending the invitations. Ifat Ma’oz, among the Israeli participants, took the proposal and conferred with Peres and his advisors, Uri Savir and Yossi Beilin, to put the plan forth. Eventually, because of the wariness vis-à-vis the PLO and domestic constraints, Peres desisted. Even though such proposition remained unaddressed, it is a relevant example in that it illustrates how transfer may occur, and unofficial tracks may impact or simply push the course of the formal ones. In

spite of its apparent failure, such case ascribes to the combination of instances that have paved the way to the Oslo Declaration of Principles, occurred seven years after this episode.

The mechanism of transfer occurs when the outcomes of an unofficial exercise are conveyed over other levels of the involved societies. Clearly, the width of the transfer effect depends largely on the kind of track in exam, i.e. mostly on the targeted participants. This means that the hierarchic level and the connectedness of the participants are highly relevant for the initiative to produce relevant outcomes, just as civil societies may or may not back top-down peace initiatives if not galvanized.

Fisher refers to targets of transfer as “political leaders, negotiators, governmental-bureaucratic constituencies, public-political constituencies”, whereas mechanisms of transfer range from “personal contacts, briefings, conferences, writings, speeches, (to) interviews”; the mechanisms of transfer comprise “cognitive changes in the view of the conflict and the other party, cognitive products such as new directions or options, relationship changes among participants that evidenced some influence on the wider relationship” (Fisher, 2006, p. 74). Similarly, Agha et al. (2003) maintain that officials and representatives may participate to Track Two discussions, acting though in their informal capacity. Ideally, then, an initiative is initiated and unfolded to shift mutual perceptions through the facilitation of an analytic sight, leaving the blame game aside; supposedly, participants will later “inject the ideas that emerge from the process into the political debate and decision-making within their respective community” (Rouhana and Kelman, 1994, p.160).

Although consensus seems to exist over the importance of the ability of influencing decision-makers, some see an additional macro-level recipient of equal relevance in civil society, or the grassroots level (Davies and Kaufman, 2002; Lederach, 1997).

On Coordination

Albeit working towards the same broad goal, i.e. achieving peace, formal and informal tracks remain two well-separated realms. The absence of interaction, as Fisher ascertains, is mainly due to the importance of preserving the independence of the different tracks, alongside the concomitant assumptions and modus operandi that inform them (Fisher 2006; Agha et al. 2003).

Nonetheless, mediating activities, even if occurring along different tracks, have revealed the potential that a proper multiparty approach could bear to conflict resolution, if coordinated in a complementary fashion. Notter and McDonald have well elucidated the potential brought about concerting actions, notably as it pertains to intractable conflicts:

‘Track Two practitioners recognize that success in their endeavors contributes to a climate ripe for Track One leaders to get to the negotiating table and begin to formally resolve existing differences. In situations of deep-rooted conflict, the formal ratification of peace treaties is clearly only one step toward a lasting peace. Track Two, particularly when it takes a multi-track approach, not only can support the efforts of Track One, but can play an important role in its own right. Grass-roots projects facilitate the much needed “bottom-up” peace potential’ (Notter and McDonald, 1996, p. 35).

However, they are cautious in pronouncing the simplicity of association between the two tracks:

‘The interrelationship between the tracks can be a sensitive one. (..) Often the rejection of a multi-track plan by officials at the Track One level can preclude project implementation. When there is acceptance or support, however, there can be much-needed mutual aid. Track One, on the other hand, should be kept informed. Track Two practitioners must recognize that if their initiative is successful, they will probably have to coordinate their activities with Track One. It is governments, after all, who are responsible for negotiating, signing, and ratifying treaties and other formal documents that may be needed to seal the unofficial, successful initiatives’ (Notter and McDonald, 1996, pp. 35-36).

As to maximize the efficacy of interventions, Crocker et al. suggest (1999), an adequate distribution of roles among the different interveners, according to their leverage and resources, is bound to increase chances for peace: specifically, if operating in a concerted approach, the parts may complement each other’s efforts in raising concurrently public support, political backing, building strong peace constituencies and providing with the resources necessary.

In this sense, Fisher and Keashley (1991) have developed a model of third party intervention, to address the idea of consequent and complementary interventions: they indicate that different types of third party mediation are effective at different stages of a conflict, and that deploying accordingly mediators’ assets in a sequential manner may leverage comparative advantage, assisting conflict resolution and prompting peace.

Strimling goes further, by arguing that “intermediary cooperation – encompassing various level of communication, coordination and collaboration –

is necessary to realize the inherent complementarity of many official and private intermediary efforts” (Strimling, 2006, p.92).

On Limits and Effectiveness of Tracks of Diplomacy

In the past few decades, planned contact interventions between conflicting groups have played quite an important role in attempts of improving intergroup relations and achieving peace and reconciliation. Various informal diplomatic initiatives committed to transform a dispute by addressing the nature of the relationship of the opposing sides have taken place along the multiple tracks of diplomacy, directly influencing the official one or simply laying the ground for future coexistence between the local civil constituencies (Aggestam and Strömbom, 2012).

On the one hand, an increasing recognition of the potential complementarity between formal and informal instances is gaining momentum, triggering debates questioning the possible outcomes of effective cooperation among the various third parties; at the same time, policy-making leaderships take good care in keeping their independence.

As previously noticed, depending on the case, unofficial activities, a clear distinction can be operated among the different instances: those that explicitly aim at changing the course of the official process, or “hard talks” on the one hand, and the activities broadly aiming at embracing and altering societal beliefs, or “soft talks” on the other. Clearly, when measuring the impacts of the two instances over the official one, the first appears relatively easier. However, as

discussed above, addressing the psycho-sociological nature of the conflict is equally of crucial importance: in fact, as Saunders has well asserted, “government sign peace treaties, but only the people in conflict can make peace” (Montville, 2006, p.20).

Thus effective transfer processes should occur, in order to sanction interaction with the enemy and repair or establish relationships at all levels of deeply divided societies. In considering Diamond and McDonald model of interstate relations (1996), whereby nine societal domains interact to affect peacebuilding, it may prove a very useful tool in soliciting transfer effect: whereas third party actors generally belong to the second or fifth track (non-governmental professionals in the field of peacemaking and conflict resolution or research training practitioners and educators/academics), participants may belong to any of the nine tracks, since they are embedded with their societies and the people who comprise them.

Lack of coordination between the various domains of the involved societies may render unofficial conflict resolution initiatives limited in usefulness. In order to avoid such risk, it is of crucial importance to manage to re-knit the fabric of the society at all levels, from the grassroots to the political leadership, cross-cutting the lines of conflict. For this purpose, formal and informal interveners should coordinate across the tracks of society to establish a sustainable peace-oriented infrastructure for change. If applied inclusively, the coordinated effort of these actors may prove the real driver of change.

3. The Geneva Initiative

3.0 Introduction

In order to provide explanations to the success and failure of unofficial diplomacy enterprises, it is crucial to provide a thorough analysis of their development and processes, as well as their relationships with the societies they addressed and the official diplomatic paths they affected.

Accordingly, this chapter is dedicated to the analysis of one of such endeavours, the Geneva Initiative. Also known as the Geneva Accord, the Initiative is a draft permanent status agreement to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. After two years of semi-secret talks, it was finalized in October 2003 and officially launched in December 2003.

Among other instances, the Geneva Initiative presents peculiarities that allow the testing of several of the key factors presented in the previous chapter. First and foremost, it produced a breakthrough document that, first in its kind and until now, is the only detailed draft of agreement for an Israeli-Palestinian peace treaty to which a joint Palestinian and Israeli group was willing to commit.

Its aim has explicitly been that of producing a resonant example of how an agreement is possible, against the violence and the long-standing intractability of the conflict. As a consequence, its impact in the field of official diplomacy and on public opinions has been more than relevant, to the point that it influenced the strategies and decisions of the two governments, particularly the Israeli one. In

its emulation of the first track diplomacy, it came very near to providing a diplomatic solution, notwithstanding that it was not the case.

The chapter undertakes a detailed analysis of the initiative, starting from its historical background and providing a quick review of the document contents. Even so, more than the issues it draws on, that in themselves would be worth a separate analysis, the chapter deepens into the conditions, the actors and the process around which the initiative unfolded. The subsequent analysis concerns its participants, its purpose, the role of the sponsoring third party, secrecy, and the modalities of discussion. In a third section, it analyses its effects over the societies of Israel and Palestine, both at the grassroots and at the official level. Finally, it collects the findings to conclude that the Geneva Initiative is an atypical case of unofficial diplomacy, and this affects both its success and its failure.

3.1 Historical background

The Geneva process can be inserted in a wider diplomatic process that dates back at least to the beginning of the century.

In July 2000 US president Bill Clinton initiated the negotiations that were known as the Camp David talks. The approach of the talks was based on a package agreement, meaning that “nothing was considered agreed and binding until everything was agreed” (Sher, 2002). The core issues discussed during the talks included territory, Jerusalem, sovereignty over the Temple Mount, refugees and right of return, security, and settlements.

Notwithstanding the efforts of the parties, the summit ended on the 25th of July with no agreement reached. A Trilateral Statement was instead issued, defining a set of common principles to guide future negotiations. By the end of September of the same year, the Second Intifada began, aggravating the prejudice and violence between Palestinians and Israelis.

Nevertheless, another attempt at restoring the negotiation process led Clinton to sponsor another summit in Taba in January 2001. The US president proposed non-negotiable conditions for negotiations (the Clinton Parameters), which ranged over issues similar to those of Camp David, from territory to refugees.

Just like the previous venue, the Taba talks were concluded without an agreement having been reached. Against the backdrop of the Intifada, the negotiations came to a standstill, at least until 2003.

The failure of the previous negotiations and the escalating intifada reinforced the perception that the *other* was unwilling to reach an agreement or unreliable in implementing it.

The process that led to Geneva aimed precisely at deconstructing this misconception. By remedying to the failure of the previous negotiating venues, it intended to demonstrate that there was indeed a partner on the other side, and a viable solution could effectively be reached.

A final version of the Geneva Agreement was presented to the public in October 2003. The document was the result of almost three years of secret discussions between two groups of prominent Palestinians and Israelis. The Palestinian delegation was headed by the then Palestinian minister of Information and Culture Yasser Abed Rabbo, while the Israeli delegation by the former MK Yossi Beilin. Both leaders had participated in the Taba talks, and

believed that through further efforts it would have been possible to generate a model permanent status agreement.

Such a document was to be presented to their respective publics, and would constitute a proof of the feasibility of a settlement, notwithstanding the political deadlock of the newly elected Sharon administration and the peaking Intifada (Beilin and Rabbo, 2003). At the time, Arafat was successfully isolated by the Israeli Government, in that he refused to endorse the cessation of terrorist acts from the Palestinians. This was explicitly demanded as a precondition for negotiations, and Arafat's rejection was perceived as symptomatic of his unwillingness to commit to dialogue.

As a matter of fact, a dialogue had started even before Sharon was elected PM in March 2001, as Beilin and Rabbo had met in East Jerusalem in February 2001. As Beilin recalled,

'On a winter day in February 2001, a few days after Ehud Barak's defeat in the special elections for prime minister, I met with Yasser Abed Rabbo, Palestinian minister for culture and information, in the al Quds editorial offices in Jerusalem's Atarot industrial park. This was a continuation of a corridor discussion between us during the Taba negotiations of January that year. Abed Rabbo was convinced that the primary mistake at the Camp David summit, where he also participated, was to raise the Jerusalem question at the beginning of the negotiations, rather than at the end. As for Taba, he felt that if only we had had a few more weeks, we could have completed the framework agreement for peace. We agreed to try and continue the effort that began at Taba--this time informally, without obligating anyone but ourselves. We wanted to prove to ourselves that a final agreement was feasible, to prove to the peace camps on both sides that there is a partner and a plan. Against a backdrop of despair,

lack of faith and growing violence, we believed that a model permanent agreement could revitalize the Israeli peace camp (which had not even bothered to participate in the elections a few days earlier) as well as the somnolent Palestinian peace camp'. (Beilin, 2003)⁵

By then, both leaders held official positions; after the Israeli elections, however, Beilin had resigned from his position as Minister of Justice.

After the first one, a series of meetings took place in Ramallah, Japan, South Africa, London and Jordan, gradually including other figures from previous negotiating teams, such as Ghaith al-Omari and Daniel Levy⁶. In the months that followed, Palestinian officials, Israeli public activists, academic scholars, authors, and MKs from the moderate left and centre joined the negotiating group, to help drafting the model agreement.

On the 12th of October 2003, the last meeting in Jordan saw the participants signing a cover letter for the Swiss Minister of Foreign Affairs. Attempting to raise awareness about the model agreement, the peace plan was widely publicized in the month that ensued: every household in Israel received a copy of the agreement, and it was published as well on Palestinian newspapers. The Accord was made public officially on the 1st of December 2003, presented in a ceremony in Geneva, comprising approximately 400 Israelis, Palestinians and international figures. Hence, the name of the initiative.

⁵ Yossi Beilin – *The Eighth Day of Tabá* (2003)

⁶ Ghaith al-Omari was a legal advisor for the Palestinian negotiation team throughout the permanent status negotiations (1999–2001); Daniel Levy was a senior policy advisor to Yossi Beilin and part of the Israeli negotiation team in Oslo II and in Tabá.

The Agreement

The Geneva document is long and detailed draft of a model permanent status of a possible peace agreement between the State of Israel and the to-be-recognized State of Palestine⁷. It differs from the previous peace proposals in that it is not a plan for resuming to negotiations, e.g. Bush's Roadmap, neither it is a set of principles upon which a settlement could be based on, e.g. the Arab Initiative or the Ayalon-Nusseibeh statement of principles. Based mainly on the Clinton bridging proposals, it draws on ideas formulated in the Taba talks. It develops around a defined set of principles and issues. In particular:

1. *Definitiveness*. Through the agreement, the two parties declare themselves satisfied, the conflict is officially settled, putting an end to all future claims;

2. *Mutual recognition*. Through the agreement, the two parties recognize "the right of the Jewish people to statehood, and the right of the Palestinian people to statehood"⁸; as a result, pledging non-interference in each other's internal affairs, the State of Israel is recognized by the Palestinians, conversely the State of Palestine is eventually officially recognized;

⁷ For the full text of the Geneva Accord – Draft permanent status agreement, see <http://www.geneva-accord.org/mainmenu/english> (accessed February 15, 2015)

⁸ As affirmed in the preamble of the Geneva Accord.

3. *Borders and settlements.* A final and indisputable border is marked on a detailed map. As such, the Jewish settlements beyond the Green Line, the Jewish neighbourhoods of Jerusalem and security-related territories surrounding Ben Gurion International Airport are to be annexed to the State of Israel; as a result of annexation of land prior to 1967 borders, Israel is to cede land to the Palestinian state, based on a 1:1 ratio, i.e. the territories have to be of equal quality and quantity; a permanently open corridor, to be under Israeli sovereignty but administered by the Palestinians is to connect the two parts of the Palestinian state; border control of the Palestinian state shall be under the authority of the Palestinian Security Force, jointly with the MF;

4. *Jerusalem.* The city of Jerusalem shall be the shared capital of both states, to be divided on a demographic basis: this means the sovereignty of the two states shall be exercised on their own population, i.e. Jewish neighbourhoods under Israeli sovereignty and Arab neighbourhoods under the Palestinian one, with each state holding its capital in its sovereign part; the two municipalities are to be connected and coordinated by numerous committees; the Palestinian state is to retain its sovereignty over the Haram al Sharif/Temple Mount Compound, and shall be responsible for its security; the Jewish state is to retain sovereignty over the Western Wall; free access to holy sites shall be provided, regardless the sovereignty to which it is subject; an international group comprising the IVG shall monitor and verify the actual implementation of the measures outlined for the Compound;

5. *International supervision.* The establishment of an Implementation and Verification Group⁹ (IVG) is foreseen in order “to facilitate, assist in, guarantee, monitor, and resolve disputes relating to the implementation of the agreement”¹⁰. Security guarantees to the parties shall be ensured and provided by a Multinational Force (MF), part and parcel of the IVG, to be deployed in the state of Palestine; furthermore, the MF shall monitor the withdrawal of Israeli forces and protect the territorial integrity of the Palestinian state;

6. *Refugees.* Practical arrangements are set to provide a complete resolution to the Palestinian refugee problem. U.N. Resolutions 194, 242 are acknowledged; besides a compensation for “refugeehood and for loss of property”¹¹, refugees may choose among four options¹²: (i) return and repatriation within the borders of the Palestinian state, (ii) return to the state of Israel, (iii) resettlement in third countries, or (iv) in present countries, at their “sovereign discretion”; provisions and their implementation constitute the final settlement of the refugee question, and all claims connected with it;

⁹ The Implementation and Verification Group shall be comprised of the Quartet members and other parties – to be decided upon – if so agreed by Israelis and Palestinians.

¹⁰ See Art. 3.1.i of the Geneva Accord.

¹¹ See Art. 7.3.i of the Geneva Accord.

¹² In the Accord, the Permanent Place of Residence choices are actually five: the “return” to the Palestinian state is comprised of the state (i.e., within the agreed borders) or to those “areas in Israel being transferred to Palestine in the land swap, following assumption of Palestinian sovereignty”; see art. 7.4 of the Geneva Accord.

7. *Security.* The two sides acknowledge the mutual right to live peacefully, within secured and recognized borders; the state of Palestine shall be non-militarized, but with a strong security force for civil order and border control; Israel shall be permitted to use Palestinian airspace for military training; Israeli forces shall maintain a small security force along the Jordan Valley, plus two early-warning systems in the West Bank the Palestinian Security Force, subject to control and monitoring of the MF, is to be limited in type and number of weapons allowed.

3.2 Analysis

The following analysis examines five features of the process that led to the Geneva Accord, namely the participants who took part to the enterprise, its purpose, the third party involvement, the secrecy and the modus operandi.

Participants

Traditional track-two definitions concerning the participants (Diamond and McDonald, 1991, 1996; Rouhana and Kelman, 1994; Rouhana, 1995; Lederach, 1997) do not seem to comply with the position of those involved in the Geneva process.

With respect to the spectrum of dialogue groups – starting from grassroots meetings, moving through semi-formal representatives to end with the formal

first track – the characteristics of the negotiators in the case of interest were heterogeneous (Rouhana and Kelman, 1994; Lederach, 1997; Davies and Kaufman, 2002; Fisher, 2006; Cady, 2013; Benziman, 2014).

In fact, the most striking feature of the negotiating group were the differences between the Israeli participants and the Palestinian ones. Although the Palestinians made clear that they were engaging in the dialogues in a personal, private capacity, their group included ministers, deputy ministers, senior officials, some of them holding key positions in the Palestinian Authority at the time.

On the contrary, the Israeli delegates were prominent figures in their society, but were not holding official roles within the government: they were public activists, academics, authors, previous ministers and MKs from the opposition on the moderate left and centre (Klein, 2004a, 2007).

Whilst these participants seem to transcend the traditional boundaries of the concept of track-two diplomacy, the adjusted track-two variant suggested by Agha et al. (2003) could function as explanatory tool, whereby participation to such initiatives may also comprise governmental and official representatives, provided that these act in their individual capacity. Yet, the question pertaining the participants' actual access to official leadership still remains unsatisfied with respect to track-two definitions.

Several standpoints on second track stress on the importance of participants' ability to enjoy access to the governing elites or capability to influence their thinking (Agha et al., 2003; Fisher, 2006). In what concerns the Geneva case, though, the Israeli participants in general, and Yossi Beilin in particular, were not enjoying access to governmental leadership, neither were they able to influence its thinking. The Office of the Prime Minister was merely informed of the

discussions taking place during their first phases, and PM Sharon ignored their contents (Schiff, 2010).

On the other hand, the Palestinian delegation was conducting negotiations with the support of the Palestinian Authority and its then chairman Arafat, who recurrently met with key participants during the early phases of the process. According to Klein, senior Palestinian officials including Saeb Erekat, Abu Mazen and Abu Ala were apprised of the developments of the talks either by the Palestinian participants, either by Beilin himself. Although the Palestinian participants holding official roles had declared they signed the agreement in their private capacity, “without the approval of the Palestinian leadership these individuals would not have been able to take such a dramatic step or even to have engaged in the Geneva negotiations” (Klein, 2004a, p.1).

It seems that the decision to give the blessing to the initiative was the result of an evaluation of Erekat, Abu Mazen and Abu Ala, that Sharon-led government would have not endorsed any dialogue with the PA. Instead, they hoped that the Geneva Initiative would counterbalance Israel’s official policy by granting indirect legitimization to Arafat as a partner for negotiations (Klein, 2007).

Hence, the asymmetry between the two groups is noticeable in comparing their access to the respective formal leadership and their behaviour in relation to the leaderships themselves.

Purpose

Most of the literature on unofficial diplomacy argues that informal contacts

between the conflicting parties aim at improving – if absent, even establishing – a durable relationship through the exchange of information (Montville, 1991a; Saunders 1985, 1999; Rouhana and Kelman, 1994; Lederach, 1997; Bar-Tal, 2000; Pearson, 2001; Aggestam and Strömbom, 2012), in order to eventually affect and adjust the mutual (mis)perceptions.

The convenience of unofficial stances lays in the autonomy it acknowledges to those involved, and the subsequent freedom of manoeuvrability in dealing with sensitive issues, too difficult to tackle in formal tracks.

However, the purpose of the Geneva process was much more ambitious: on the one hand, it did actually point at affecting the respective publics' opinions, since it attempted at persuading them that there is indeed a partner with whom a solution could be sought; on the other hand, in light of the absence of first track interactions, it endeavoured to offer one such solution.

Besides, the initiators of the initiative had previously taken part to official negotiations, and were firmly convinced of the fact that an agreement could be reached despite the failure of such talks. In point of fact, the Geneva Initiative was a continuation, and a completion, of the previous negotiations, whose goal of conducting problem-solving negotiations was that of constructing a win-win solution that would be later incorporated into a model agreement.

Third party involvement

As described under other concerns, the Geneva Initiative can be considered atypical even in the involvement of a third party. Despite the original sponsors

comprised of a variety of governments and NGOs, the main guarantor was the Swiss government, through its Minister of Foreign Affairs, Micheline Calmy-Rey. The government provided financial and technical sponsorship to the initiative.

Contrarily to most unofficial diplomacy enterprises, it had not been foreseen or initiated by a third party: instead, the fatherhood of the initiative is to be attributed to its participants and main architects, Yossi Beilin and Yasser Abed Rabbo. Both of them were part of the negotiating teams at Taba. After its failure, they felt that, had they had more time, they could have eventually managed to reach an agreement. They thus decided to secretly persevere in the negotiation in an informal manner. The Geneva Initiative can therefore be considered as a spontaneous instance among the various cases of unofficial diplomatic activities, in that it was conceived and brought forth by its own creators.

As a matter of fact, in spite of the detrimental political and psychological contingencies of the second intifada, they set off to demonstrate that dialogue and concrete achievements were at hand's reach. In this sense, the role of the Swiss government has been necessary but relatively negligible: given the degree of autonomy and the expertise provided by the pool of participants, its role was confined to financial and logistical support.

Not intending to diminish third party's significance, in this particular case the Swiss government acted as mere facilitator, restraining from getting actively involved in the formulation of the actual content of the document (Benziman, 2014). The behaviour of the Swiss emissaries had positive effects on the venue's trustworthiness: its reputation and neutrality, the support it garnered from the EU, and the low degree of intrusiveness granted a greater impact over the agreements.

Secrecy

As discerned in the previous chapter, secrecy can be a useful device to grant both freedom and safety to the actors involved in the negotiation. Among the advantages it is able to deliver, it gives the participants the ability to freely address and discuss questions that could be otherwise be upsetting or awkward to be disclosed publicly.

The Geneva Initiative is no exception, at least in its first phases. In fact, although since its inception it was meant to diffuse its outcomes to the public, the negotiations were kept hidden to general audiences until October 2003. The initiative followed a process of gradual disclosure as long as the participants' pool expanded, and more people came to be directly or indirectly engaged in its activities (Klein, 2007).

From a political point of view, the secrecy of the understandings provided advantages to different stakeholders. The unofficial negotiators were able to shield themselves from public inquiries, avoiding the duty of justification with the public and the media, and eluding the accuses of expressing committal views with the "enemy".

Modus operandi

The Initiative presents several features that distinguish it as a peculiar instance, unique in its gender. Some principles and procedures adopted by the participants during the negotiation, in particular, contribute to this uniqueness, and can be considered factors relevant to its success.

The Geneva process, as conforming to the nature of unofficial diplomacy, was free from protocol restrictions. As such, the partakers were free to engage in the discussions without having to follow procedures and regulations, other than those set through their own mutual consensus. In fact, once the purpose of the talks had been outlined, the participants were able to autonomously define a framework under which the colloquies would unfold.

Because most of the participants (starting from their leaders) had previously taken part to official bargaining instances, the departing points for the discussions were those hitherto left unattended. As a matter of fact, it was no secret that the strategy endorsed by Beilin and Rabbo foresaw picking up what the Taba talks left off in January 2001, or as the Israeli leader explained,

'We never stopped talking to each other. It is not a couple of months, it is three years. Immediately after the end of the Taba negotiations, that was January, 2001, Yasser Abed Rabbo, who was then the Minister of Culture and Information, and myself, the Minister of Justice, talked about the situation. Our belief was that had we had more time and better circumstances, we could have concluded the job and had an agreement'. (Kreisler, 2003)¹³.

The identification of a model permanent status agreement, besides being an objective *per se*, has constituted a political goal for the Geneva Initiative. By proposing an example of successful diplomacy and of a feasible negotiation process, the group sought to obtain recognition from both conflicting parties and from the international community. Under this perspective, the negotiators operated similarly to “hard” track two initiatives, *de facto* operating within the

¹³ Harry Kreisler interviews Yossi Beilin in *Conversations with History* – “Searching for peace in the Middle East: a conversation with Yossi Beilin”. Institute of International Studies, UC Berkeley.

shade of (an albeit absent) track one diplomacy.

Furthermore, the degree of ownership over the regulations and the contents achieved along the whole process make the understandings more poignant, shedding light on the level of awareness that is required from diplomats to fully perform and achieve results. Indeed, the participants grew conscious of their own limits and redlines, and their relations with the opposite side's tenets (Beilin, 2003). Therefore, they did not just mutually develop a problem-solving attitude, but also realized that an agreement requires a certain degree of entrepreneurship and willingness to commit.

Surely, an increased awareness of the opponent's perspective does not necessarily imply that a solution is easily accessible (Ron and Maoz, 2013). Benziman (2014) speaks in terms of a "dilemma" in which the parties are supposedly caught into: they can either accept the conditions of an all-encompassing, extensive discussion, and deal with the psychological questions that underlay the on-going conflict; alternatively, they can rationally choose not to address such aspects and attempt to reach an agreement nevertheless.

The process that led to the Geneva Agreement was framed in-between the two options: "the framing of the meetings enabled a seemingly open dialogue, while at the same time aiming at a concrete end: a signed agreement" (Benziman, 2014, p.83). By purportedly avoiding emotionally and historically-informed points, it enabled a more practical, fruitful dialogue.

On the other hand, it sincerely addressed all core issues of the intractable Israeli-Palestinian conflict, most prominently the refugee issue and Jerusalem. As the Israeli leader declared,

'We did not dwell on narratives, mutual recriminations and

assigning responsibility for the past. We did not ask one another to forsake dreams. We sufficed with solutions. All the question marks, all the historical quarrels, all the United Nations decisions that we wasted long years interpreting in our different ways--all these are answered, resolved, and realized in the agreement we reached'. (Beilin, 2003).

The meetings were structured in a way that stressed the importance of previous achievements, in order to create a sense of accomplishment for the single participants, and foster a sense of unity between the two sides.

Yet, positive reinforcements were not the only mechanism deployed to facilitate an agreement: heavy pressure was put on the participants to realize that failing to reach an agreement would mean failure of peace itself. Such a defeat would have served to peace opponents on both sides to prove that there was no reliable partner on the other side, and thus any dialogue would have been impossible.

3.3 The effects of the initiative over public opinions and governments

As it is understandable, after its release the Initiative catalysed strong debates and reactions in both societies. The reactions differed according to the societal and political divisions, ranging from extreme opposition to an enthusiastic support.

Some common features can be sketched for the responses obtained by the appearance of the agreement, as well as the most important differences that occurred.

At the grassroots level, strong hesitancy to support the agreement was inferred in both parties. Nevertheless, according to the polls the Israeli public opinion was more enthused by the agreement than the Palestinian one. Analogously, at the governmental level there has been reluctance to overdrive public opinion and endorse what Arafat called the “peace of the brave”¹⁴. As it will be illustrated, for the Israeli government this reluctance brought to take drastic initiatives.

The Palestinian reaction

Immediately after its signature, the Palestinian Authority expressed a cold support for the Geneva Accord. The same Yasser Arafat, who was aware of the meetings, underlined the unofficial nature of the document but at the same time reasserted the will of the Palestinian Authority to achieve peace. Similarly, Ahmad Qurei’, at the time Prime Minister of the PA, stressed the informality of the initiative (Yehoshua, 2003).

At the grassroots level, Palestinians proved to be in line with their representatives: By the end of 2003, 51,4% of the respondents of a survey declared themselves in contrast with the Geneva understandings, 16% did not

¹⁴ See excerpts of Arafat’s speech of the March 27th, 2002, calling on a ‘peace of the brave’ with Israel; available at <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2002/Mar-28/10559-arafat-we-want-a-peace-of-the-brave.ashx> (accessed February 15, 2015)

respond, and only 32% explicitly stated their support¹⁵. Under these conditions, it is more understandable how Palestinian officials were hesitant in explicitly endorsing a document that was clearly contested by their people.

A warmer welcome to the Geneva Initiative was provided by the Palestinian columnists, who publicly endorsed it and underlined its advantages for Palestinians. Many were quick in underlining the strategic importance of the agreement, and understood that its publication was the demonstration that that a dialogue was actually possible. Others hoped that the initiative could bring the Israeli Left to power and ultimately provide a more moderate partner for negotiation (Yehoshua, 2003).

Of course, there was no lack of critics. The harshest ones strongly opposed the initiative's take on the refugee issue, labelling it as a betrayal of the Palestinian national dream. The Palestinian Legislative Council Refugees Committee, the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine all sharply criticized the negotiators for making concessions over the right of return for the refugees.

Other criticisms regarded the legitimacy of the accord. The Palestinian Democratic Union (FIDA) asserted that the Geneva understandings did not represent the legitimate national rights of the Palestinian people. Top Hamas official Adnan Asfour moved to say that the understandings were "part of the deceiving of the Palestinian people with illusions of peace, that has gone on for so long", and refused to recognize the people who signed it as legitimate representatives of their own people (Regular, 2003).

¹⁵ See survey conducted by Nabil Kukali in October 2003. Available at <http://www.miftah.org/doc/polls/Poll115.pdf> (accessed February 15, 2015)

The Israeli reaction

According to Beilin, the process that led to the Geneva Agreement was meant to prove in the short term and against the government stand, which was not foreseeing a partner for dialogue on the Palestinian side, that indeed a partner and a plan do exist. The main goal was to inform public opinion, thereby influencing the Israeli government to return to the negotiating table to find a permanent solution to the conflict. Because both sides' participants did not believe that PM Sharon's stance would have been compliant, they sought to acquire legitimacy for the enterprise by gathering massive public pressure: the creation of domestic and international public backing was thus necessary to support the agreement as an alternative to current policy-making processes (Klein, 2007).

While dedicating to the development of the initiative, Beilin and Rabbo also took care of promoting it to prominent international figures in the US, Russia, the EU and Arab countries. Several among the international leaders encouraged them to finalize the initiative, and governments also offered their sponsorship, including Japan, Britain, Canada, Sweden and Switzerland. In October 2003 a cover letter accompanying the agreement was signed by its supporters, twenty-five signatories per side, to be sent to the Swiss Foreign Minister. The ceremony of the signatures took place on October 12th 2003 in Jordan, and saw the participation of official representatives from Switzerland, Japan, Jordan, Canada, Norway, and the EU emissary to the Middle East (Klein, 2007). Notwithstanding the keen efforts to benefit from international consensus, and the hope this might put pressure on their respective governments in endorsing the solution proposed, the events that followed the publication of the Geneva Accord suggest

that the process was instead unsuccessful in impacting proactively decision-making elites. It in fact appears that the international support for the Geneva Accord encouraged Sharon's decision to further unilateral disengagement. The appearance of the Accord in the media sparked an intense debate between the right- and left-wing camps in Israel. In the months that ensued, the architects of the Geneva process presented the Accord as an alternative to Sharon's unilateral attempts at disengagement in Gaza. Supporters of the Accord in Israel, arguing that its adoption may significantly advance the peace process towards a final settlement, were labelled by the government as subversives (Hauser, 2003; Klein, 2004c).

The government saw the understanding as a way to delegitimize Arafat's isolation, circumventing the precondition to negotiations of renouncement to terror by this imposed.

The political effects

The very first impacts brought about by the Geneva Initiative can be inferred when analysing the political conditions under which it came to be. The Road Map, consistent with Sharon's posture, was brought forth by US President Bush in June of the previous year. In September 2003, upon the collapse of the Palestinian government, Sharon came to realize that there was no partner to dialogue with, and thus implementing the Road Map was by then impossible. At the same time, his popularity was dropping in face of the poor economic and security conditions. When the Geneva Agreement was signed, the international pressure increased

over Israel and its leadership, as demonstrated by the emergence of a plethora of other peace plans. As a response to this pressure, Sharon decided to take a unilateral step towards the realization of a plan for peace of his own. In the words of the same Sharon:

'I believe that this vacuum cannot continue. The Saudi Plan, the Arab League's plan... Geneva, and plans that are popping up in Europe, and the German Foreign Minister also has a plan of his own, similar to Geneva... a flood of plans, and increasing pressure, and it is easy to put pressure to bear on Israel. So, out of all these options, I chose the option of initiating a new step'. (Schiff, 2010, p.104).

In December 2003, Sharon officially announced the start of his diplomatic initiative, the "Disengagement Plan", foreseeing the withdrawal of the Israeli army from Gaza, and the dismantling of all Israeli settlements in the Gaza Strip in 2005.

Exactly when the option of the Road Map appeared to be freezing into stalemate, Sharon produced an alternative to present to the international community and to its constituency. As a result, it was the overall peace process to be frozen: the unilateral adoption of the disengagement package prevented discussion over any other peace plan:

'The significance of the disengagement plan is the freezing of the peace process, and when you freeze that process, you prevent the establishment of a Palestinian state, and you prevent a discussion on the refugees, the borders and Jerusalem. Effectively, this whole package called the Palestinian state, with all that it entails, has been removed indefinitely from our agenda. And all this with

authority and permission. All with a presidential blessing and the ratification of both houses of Congress'. (Shavit, 2004)¹⁶.

It can be therefore suggested that the publication of the Geneva Accord reinforced Sharon's determination to carry out his disengagement plan (Arens, 2004). Ironically, the Geneva process worked against its own purposes.

3.4 Findings

As its analysis revealed so far, the Geneva process has cut a hole in the intractable nature of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, constituting a landmark against its violence and political complexity. It succeeded in demonstrating that an agreement is possible, that negotiation is feasible even when the official diplomacy is not. At the same time, the Geneva Accord was never officially taken into consideration by either party of the conflict, and did not manage to constitute the basis for official agreements.

It is possible therefore to draw some lessons from the experience, both as a positive example and as an admonishment for future endeavours alike.

The gap between the Palestinian and the Israeli representatives, in the relations held with their own policy-making elites, just as in their (in)ability to access and influence them, was paramount in the case of analysis.

Usually present in Israeli-Palestinian unofficial instances (De Vries and Maoz, 2013), such asymmetry was of crucial importance in the process of the Geneva

¹⁶ Dov Weisglass, Ariel Sharon's senior adviser, in an interview released to Haaretz, Oct. 6th, 2004; retrieved from <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/top-pm-aide-gaza-plan-aims-to-freeze-the-peace-process-1.136686> (accessed February 15, 2015)

understanding, in that the same proponents of the initiative clearly intended to galvanize their own constituencies, just as their governments. As it was demonstrated, however, this was not the case: the reluctance of both governments in explicitly endorsing the agreement, Sharon's unilateral step, and the opposition of large segments of both societies all contributed to the downfall of the initiative.

In this sense, the Geneva Initiative was not a typical unofficial diplomacy enterprise. The relationship it developed with the two governments make it more similar to a "hard" track two diplomacy instance, but the status of its participants and the way it attempted at influencing policy makers rule out the possibility to define it as such.

Its purpose was indeed to affect the fundamental problems underlying the conflict and overcome them, but its proponents (especially the Israeli ones) lacked access to leadership in order to transfer the outcomes to the first track. Moreover, because the first track was then silent, there was no recipient for such a transfer to occur: in this case, formal and informal tracks remained two disjointed fields.

This does not imply that the agreement would have succeeded had it not encountered strong political opposition from the Israeli and Palestinian leaderships. Likewise, resistance was solid in other layers of the two societies as well.

As thoroughly discussed in previous chapters, interaction among the different domains of the parties involved in an intractable conflict such as the Israeli-Palestinian one, constitute the capstone of a successful paradigmatic change.

The Geneva Initiative failed to provoke such connections, thereby strongly limiting its own effectiveness. Re-knitting a collective consciousness implies to address widespread societal beliefs that the Geneva model agreement could not, and did not attempt to confront. In light of these considerations, the whole process demonstrated that transformation needs support from a critical and diversified number of actors, building a sustainable peace-oriented infrastructure for peace.

4. Conclusions

Without claims for exhaustiveness, this thesis has portrayed the nature and the implications of Israeli-Palestinian unofficial encounters, providing insights about its functioning and impacts.

Given the specifically contextual nature of unofficial diplomatic endeavours, general lessons or universal formulas are hardly extractable from the analysis of any series of unofficial enterprises. In order to avoid broad overall generalizations, the thesis highlighted a set of key factors that are able to affect the impact of such activities on the overall peace process, both positively and negatively. Within the analysis of the Geneva Initiative, the same factors have been taken in exam and put in relationship with the effects of the process itself on both parties' policy-making circles.

One of the most striking peculiarities that differentiates one unofficial endeavour from the other is recognizable in the characteristics born by the participants involved. Unsurprisingly, the participants are potentially able to affect different layers of their societies, according to their respective status and positioning. As a matter of fact, findings have suggested that initiatives are more effective when coordinated across the whole spectrum of institutions and layers of society, rather than aggregating participants around a single sector or track. In the case of Geneva, its initial secrecy and the high specialization of its negotiating team contributed to a certain elitism of the action, that was diffused and advertised only after the completion of the model permanent status agreement.

Analysis has also confirmed the saliency of a protocol-free *modus operandi*. When the unofficial representatives of disputing parties are free to set their own communicative rules and methodologies, the interactions among them are more poignant and significant, and the transfer effect they generate is more valuable at the policy-making level. It goes without saying that the ideal degree of intervention from external sponsors and third parties should be minimum, in order to not interfere with both the participants' interactions and not to hamper the authenticity and the independency of the action as a whole.

In these senses, the Geneva process has constituted a virtuous example of spontaneous diplomatic entrepreneurship, with the Swiss government playing a certainly important, but "minor" role *vis-à-vis* the development of its process, notwithstanding the international awareness it helped in raising once it went public.

Another crucial point that has emerged from the research refers to influencing capacity of the participants over their respective political elites. Access to top leadership and decision makers, as demonstrated in various cases, is paramount in ensuring the political survival of its outcomes. As the case of interest has thoroughly illustrated, the lack of access to governmental entourages posed insurmountable challenges: excluding key governmental figures – at least on the Israeli side – during and after the debate that led to the drafting of the understandings, has eventually meant the isolation of the enterprise itself. This has in turn created a fundamental problem: in the absence of legitimacy from the above, the Geneva initiators' strategy of impacting the transformation process by circumventing the then administration were perceived as an attempt to hype an alternative government.

Findings of the analysis adhere to the notion that in a multi-track interacting system, the saliency of each track is more evident when these are coincidentally employed, in conjunction with one another's efforts. By virtue of its resilient intractability, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict should be untangled by concurrently tackling all the dimensions that inform it. The transformation of an intractable conflict could seemingly be possible, were the ventures addressing peace through agreements at first track levels, while conjointly considering the prominence of the human, psychosocial dimensions informing divided societies.

Thus, with respect to their effectiveness, unofficial tracks of diplomacy should embrace all levels of societies involved in a multi-layered fashion, in order to overcome not just the physical, but also the psychological barriers. The Geneva case study is a reminder that emphasizes the importance and necessity of the creation of an infrastructure for peace. Such infrastructure should stretch across a diverse political spectrum and extend itself to wider segments of society.

Not only top-down, therefore, but also bottom-up approaches should be equally encouraged. In fact, involving the public opinion becomes crucial in granting sustainability and feasibility of the peace proposals and results alike, stemming from unofficial initiatives, such as the one analysed. In this case, the opposition from the respective publics encountered by the Geneva understanding strongly limited its potential efficacy.

Indeed, without backing from the public, peace building efforts lack fertile ground to develop, bring about a shift in perception and enroot a different societal fabric. Given the insights inferred from the analyses, the necessity to build a strong infrastructure for peace emerges prominently. Recalling John Paul Lederach's conflict resolution pyramid, as well as echoing his words,

'constructing a peace process in deeply divided societies and situation of internal armed conflict requires an operative frame of reference that takes into consideration the legitimacy, uniqueness, and interdependency of the needs and resources of the grassroots, middle range and top level'. (Lederach, 1997, p. 60).

How to point, then, to the functionality of coordination across all areas of activities of the above-mentioned pyramid? In this regard, few lessons can be inferred: (i) on the importance of raising awareness among the publics on the meaning and implications of maintaining the status quo, by letting them envision the future inevitably brought by such a choice; (ii) raising awareness implies that sufficient communicative space should be allowed to all sides to rethink their positions and arguments. This should be primarily done simply by letting people express themselves, and freely explore each other's stances with respect to harsh questions, currently damaging both societies. In turn, this implies that social and political actions allowing such ventures should take place as well; (iii) creating a bridge between multi-track activities and the international community, thereby raising awareness about the great potential they bring about, as well as widening the pool of parties supporting reconciliation.

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