

## **November 2021**

### **The ACRS Working Group Oral History Roundtable**

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#### **Summary:**

On 3-4 November 2021, on the heels of the 30th anniversary of the 1991 Madrid Conference, the James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies (CNS) and the Nuclear Proliferation International History Project (NPIHP) at the Wilson Center hosted a virtual roundtable as part of their 1990s Arms Control and Regional Security (ACRS) Working Group oral history project. The event convened around 20 former ACRS delegates from key regional and extra-regional states for an in-depth exchange on their personal recollections from the ACRS process. In four sessions, which were conducted virtually over two days, participants revisited: the genesis of ACRS; the format and process of the ACRS Working Group; fault lines and inflection points during ACRS; and its successes, failures, and lessons learnt from the process.

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Middlebury Institute of  
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*James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies*

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## **The ACRS Working Group Oral History Roundtable**

Hosted by the James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies (CNS)  
& the Nuclear Proliferation International History Project at the Wilson Center

**3-4 November, 2021**  
**Via Zoom**

On 3-4 November 2021, on the heels of the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1991 Madrid Conference, the James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies (CNS) and the Nuclear Proliferation International History Project at the Wilson Center hosted a virtual roundtable as part of their 1990s Arms Control and Regional Security (ACRS) Working Group oral history project. The event convened around twenty former ACRS delegates from key regional and extra-regional states for an in-depth exchange on their personal recollections from the ACRS process. In four sessions, which were conducted virtually over two days, participants revisited: the genesis of ACRS; the format and process of the ACRS Working Group; fault lines and inflection points during ACRS; and its successes, failures, and lessons learnt from the process.

Please find below a transcript of the discussions, which was generated from the Zoom recording of the event and lightly edited for clarity.

**Participants**

**Ziad Abuzayyad**  
Head of the Palestinian Delegation

**Fred Axelgard**  
Member of the U.S. Delegation

**Joseph Draznin**  
Member of the Israeli Delegation

**Robert Einhorn**  
Head of the U.S. Delegation

**Aly Erfan**  
Member of the Egyptian Delegation

**Nabil Fahmy**  
Head of the Egyptian Delegation

**Karim Haggag**  
Member of the Egyptian Delegation

**David Ivry**  
Head of the Israeli Delegation

**Bruce Jentleson**  
Member of the U.S. Delegation

**Ariel Levite**  
Member of the Israeli Delegation

**Dennis Ross**  
Member of the U.S. Delegation

**Donald Sinclair**  
Member of the Canadian Delegation

**Jill Sinclair**  
Head of the Canadian Delegation

**Shimon Stein**  
Member of the Israeli Delegation

**Süha Umar**  
Member of the Turkish Delegation

**Michael Yaffe**  
Member of the U.S. Delegation

**Conveners**

**Kian Byrne**  
Wilson Center

**Chen Kane**  
Center for Nonproliferation Studies

**Hanna Notte**  
Vienna Center for Disarmament and  
Non-Proliferation

**Christian Ostermann**  
Wilson Center

**Observers**

**Tomisha Bino**  
United Nations Institute for  
Disarmament Research

**Karim Kamel**  
Carnegie Corporation of New York

**Lia Swiniarski**  
Center for Nonproliferation Studies

**Tricia White**  
Center for Nonproliferation Studies

## Opening Remarks

### **Christian Ostermann**

Dear distinguished guests and colleagues, welcome to this critical oral history workshop on the history of the Arms Control and Regional Security (ACRS) Working Group, co-organized, co-sponsored by the James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies, and the Woodrow Wilson Centers History and Public Policy Program. We are deeply honored by and very grateful to all of you for taking the time to join us today and tomorrow, and in prior interviews to reflect on the history and lessons of an unprecedented and important, but in many ways largely forgotten and at least under studied, multilateral process of arms control and security in the Middle East.

My name is Christian Ostermann. I'm a historian of contemporary international history and I direct the Wilson Center's History and Public Policy Program. In that capacity, I also co-direct the Nuclear Proliferation International History Project at the Wilson Center. I will serve as your moderator today.

Before I turn the Zoom Room over to Dr. Hanna Notte to give a brief overview of the project, let me thank Hanna and Dr. Chen Zak Kane of the Center for Nonproliferation Studies for a really amazing partnership over these last two years. They are leading experts on security in the Middle East, and they have, the two of them, have really undertaken much of the work that went into preparing and designing this workshop and project. I would also like to thank the Carnegie Corporation of New York, which has generously funded this research project, and more generally has been a vital supporter of policy relevant research in this larger field. Our thanks to Karim Kamel, who I think is in the Zoom Room, who has been our lead at Carnegie and who really forged the CNS-Wilson partnership. I want to note that there are very few foundations who support policy relevant historical work, and so my hat off to Karim and his colleagues for recognizing the importance of this type of research. We would also like to thank Mike Yaffe, a former member of the US delegation who has been extremely helpful in guiding us through some of the available documentation. And I would like to recognize my team, especially Kian Byrne, who has done the heavy lifting in assembling a documentary archive on the ACRS process, that along with the record of this meeting, will be a starting point for future policymakers and scholars to assess and reassess the significance of the working group.

Let me recognize the presence of some of the former heads of delegation: Bob Einhorn, General David Ivry, Minister Fahmy, Abdullah Toukan, and Ziad Abuzayyad. Some of them will be joining us later on today. Again, we're very honored by your and your former delegation members' presence today. We are also mindful that important members of the ACRS process have already passed away, and that we are unlikely to be able to reconvene this group in this composition again, which makes today's gathering a very special, unique, and yes, historic event.

I will say a word about the methodological approach that underpins today's meeting in a few minutes. Let me at this point, note that the event is being recorded with the intention to publish the transcript and to encourage you to stay, we hope a few minutes longer, if you can, we have a lot of ground to cover. And we think we might need a few more minutes, if necessary, so we would greatly appreciate if you can bear with us. With that I'll turn it over to Hanna. The Zoom room is yours.

### **Hanna Notte**

Thank you very much Christian, also a warm welcome from myself. My name is Dr. Hanna Notte. I'm a senior research associate at the Vienna Center for Disarmament and Non-Proliferation. And together with my colleague, Dr. Chen Kane, we've been working on this project for the last two years, so welcome from us as well. Thank you so much to the Wilson Center to our colleagues

there for conducting this project with us, for taking it on, and believing it can be done. Thank you also from us to Mike Yaffe, who provided a significant amount of archival documents to underpin our research. And also thank you from us to the Carnegie Corporation of New York and Karim, who is present with us today, for believing this project can be done and is worth trying.

I want to say just a few words on the project and keep it really short so that we can get the discussion going. The project was conceived back in 2013, when it appeared that there were prospects for a regional arms control dialogue and negotiations. And at that time, it seemed almost reckless that there was no full account of the only prior process, the ACRS process, that it could inform such negotiations. Now of course, ACRS happened at a very particular time, in very particular circumstances, on the heels of the end of the Cold War and the first Gulf War amid unprecedented US power, and indeed great optimism on all sides, that a new security architecture for the Middle East was viable. Of course, many papers and articles have been written on ACRS, including by those who directly participated in the process, yet there is no comprehensive account of ACRS that is based on the recollections of all parties that participated. And that fact, plus the fact that no official records had been taken during the ACRS negotiations, really meant that for us when we started this project, it was rather challenging to put together a complete and accurate timeline of ACRS. We still attempted to do so, and we want to thank all of you who already commented on our timeline or provided additions, and we continue to welcome feedback that you might have on the ACRS timeline.

Now, just a few words on this oral history project. As part of this effort, over the last year, we conducted around 40 interviews individually with diplomats who participated in the ACRS negotiations, many of whom are present on the screen with us today. We interviewed diplomats from Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Palestine, the United States, and also from Australia, Canada, India, the Netherlands, and Turkey. And we really want to thank all of you who agreed to participate in these interviews. Currently, we're in the process of augmenting all this interview data with hundreds of documents that we received from Mike Yaffe, in order to build a comprehensive account of the ACRS process. And we also hope to get additional archival material documents from the Bush and Clinton presidential libraries. But currently, this process is slightly delayed due to the pandemic.

With all that being said, what is the purpose of the roundtable today and tomorrow in the context of this effort? Well, having spoken to most of you individually about your personal recollections of ACRS, today and tomorrow, we really want to focus on gaps and areas of friction that emerged from these ACRS narratives. Focused, together with you, on moments where we felt that additional clarification from your side, or discussion among you, would really assist us in complementing our oral history account. And the four sessions today and tomorrow have been designed with this purpose in mind. So today in the first session, we will focus on the inception of ACRS and states' objectives in joining the process before discussing the format and structure of ACRS. And then tomorrow, we will move on to discuss substantive fault-lines, inflection points during the process, as well as achievements and lessons learned from the ACRS experience.

Just finally, a few quick words on what you can expect after this roundtable. The documents that we collected are still very much under review, nothing has been published. For any archival documents on ACRS that would be published any personal information on ACRS delegates would of course be redacted from those. Christian will say a few more words on how these documents will complement the Wilson Center's Nuclear Archives. And then regarding the interviews that some of you conducted with us, if you consented to have your interview published, we will share with you for your final approval a transcription of that interview. And you can expect to hear from us in that regard in January or early February. The transcript of today's and tomorrow's discussion will be published as well. And we will write a final analytical report in which we will summarize

our research and findings on the ACRS process. And with that, I pass it back to Christian Ostermann. Thank you.

### **Christian Ostermann**

Thanks, Hanna. Just a quick word, as I mentioned on the procedure today and tomorrow, what we plan to engage in today and tomorrow is what we call critical oral history, a special kind of interview methodology that brings together eyewitnesses, former officials in this case, from many sides of a given historical episode to jointly reflect on the subject, to fill in gaps in the documentary record, or gaps where the documentary record leaves off. And to provide richer texture to the historical narrative. You all take center stage, the few scholars present here today are here to observe and to ask questions through me, on those issues they and other scholars are still wrestling with. But fortunately for you, what is not going to happen is that we will be getting long statements by scholars.

The critical part in critical history includes the documents which we hope will stimulate recollections and ground our discussions. We have shared some of them with you and others that we have gathered have also informed some of the questions. We have held, the Wilson Center has held, co-sponsored, similar events on a number of key historical episodes, such as the Cuban Missile Crisis, (if we run out of time, I will share with you some memories of what it was like to have Fidel Castro as a participant in such a meeting), the fall of Détente, the Congo crisis, and the Polish martial law crisis of 1980-81, just as examples.

I want to emphasize that the critical in critical history does not mean to imply that this exercise is about criticism or assigning blame to any of the historical actors. It is about understanding more fully a crucial piece of history, about allowing scholars and analysts to have empathy for the perspectives of the various parties to the process, that is to be able to put us and future scholars as best as we can in the shoes of the historical actors, that is in your shoes. This is why your testimony is so important today, and why it takes center stage.

Today is also an experiment. We have never done this kind of critical history conference in a virtual setting, so please bear with us. There may be technical hiccups, we hope there won't be, but we ask for your patience.

A few ground rules: I will start off with some questions that scholars want to understand further, but I really hope that fairly quickly you will engage with each other in a conversation. Please use the "raise hand" function in the zoom functionality to indicate if you would like to respond to a question, you will be put in a queue, and I will call on you. If you have trouble with the "raise hand" function, try to indicate your interest in speaking in some other ways. All of my colleagues will be watching the screen and we will try to recognize you. Once you've spoken, please lower your hand in the zoom functionality and mute yourself. It will help if you keep your microphone muted, while others are speaking.

Please try to put yourself into the shoes of your former selves, almost 30 years younger. What is really critical, is for us to understand your views, decisions, motivations, feelings at the time. Somebody mentioned yesterday in the pre-meeting with some of you, the word "archaeology" and it's in some sense very appropriate, we would like to uncover your views back in the first half of the 1990s. We ask you to dig through all your experiences and insights since and try to speak as best as you can, without the knowledge of hindsight. When you do speak from hindsight, intentionally, this might be, in fact, necessary sometimes, especially in the final session, please try to indicate so. If you could try to be specific, as specific as possible. We greatly appreciate references to specific people, events, moments, places, and documents. If you could provide dates or timeframes, if possible, I may sometimes follow up to ask you to negate such, if possible. As I mentioned, these sessions are not about criticism or blame, right or wrong, but about

understanding. And of course, we're interested in differences in views of the delegations at the time in the tensions and differences within delegations, just as much as we're interested in areas of agreement, please try to reflect on them as these views presented themselves to you at the time. Finally, given that we only have two hours, please be brief and succinct. And my apologies in advance, as I try to steer us through this very ambitious agenda.

Any questions right now? If not, then I think we will go right into the first session.

## **Session 1:**

### **Revisiting Madrid and its Aftermath—Understanding the Genesis of the ACRS Working Group**

#### **Christian Ostermann**

This session will consider how the ACRS working group came to be, what expectations and specific objectives different parties held going into the process, and what contextual factors enabled the process to take off. So, the question is: what did your country, your government, why did your country, your government decide to participate in ACRS? What objectives did your country hope to achieve through ACRS?

Perhaps we could hear from some of the heads of delegation on this first, to the extent they are present. I understand General Ivry, I think you wish to say something. So let me call on you first. What was Israel's goal joining the ACRS process? How did those goals change or evolve from your perspective? And how did Israel prepare for ACRS internally? General Ivry?

#### **David Ivry**

Oh, thank you, Chris. First, it is really a pleasure to join your virtual meeting, some of good colleagues of mine, reminding the nice days, interesting and challenging days of the time. And some of them used to be good people, so it's a pleasure to meet them again. Myself, I'm just, one sentence about it: I passed 87 lately, and I'm going to leave Boeing at the end of this year, trying to get some time of my own.

Let me first get to the first question about the goals. First, major goal for Israel is to try to get peace with some neighboring country as much as we can. And this was of course in the 90s even more crucial, and we saw that maybe ACRS are going to give some chance to make some progress on this process. Of course, it wasn't such that it's directly discussion on negotiation peace. Actually, we saw the other Working Groups, which came out of the Madrid Conference, I mean, the Working Groups on water, economy, refugees, and others, as much more attractive, and much more of the potential for getting better results. And we have been a bit skeptical about ACRS. But later on, I must say, we came up, this was a change, to try to understand, mainly on regional security, we have a lot of chances here as well.

We have to understand that the first, we had to see what the geopolitical situation was over there, and who is joining ACRS. And the major point is who didn't join ACRS. And Syria, Iraq, and Iran, which are major countries, which have impact on the security, regional security, didn't join ACRS. And this means all what I can say by now, the regional situation was such that even after a Gulf War, or Desert Storm which it used to be called, and after having 41 rockets shot against Israel, Israel was with anti-gas masks every night for several weeks. And every night we had some rockets falling on Tel Aviv and Haifa. We've been after the Iran-Iraq War, which have been ... Halabja with chemical attacks. We've been in the process in Syria testing of chemicals warheads and beginning to build up a big amount of Scud missiles, chemical warheads, so it was in some way

not very easy to discuss chemicals-free-zone, if I can say so. Beyond it, the Palestinian issue hasn't been solved yet, it came later on to the Oslo agreement.

But what we understood, very much, that many countries in the region had the same concerns, have the same interest from a security point of view, like Israel. And this was because Iran and Iraq was out of the game. In general, the international conventions, like CWC, BWC, and others have been such that Israel wasn't very much keen to get into it. In spite, we've been under some requests coming from the United States to try to join in as much as we can. But our experience with the UN is such that we have been getting much more resolutions against Israel about anything which was international than any other country or even more than all the other countries together. And so that international conventions are not really one which we can afford getting in. So really the idea was the regional issue. In the regional process, we didn't have Iraq, Iran, and Syria, which means that if you don't have 100% of the countries joining in, you cannot take the risk, because one of the countries of those can have the, the means, I mean, weapons of mass destruction systems, which can be risking Israel.

So this was, in some way, the background. When we go into regional security, we found that we have quite a lot of items, which we can even consider and try to make the region much more safe, like prevention centers, like building on big exercises like search and rescue, and others which we'll be talking about it. So I would say, beginning wise, on arms control, we didn't have too much expectation that we can go very much farther. On regional security, we understood, beginning wise, that we can do something, and later on this was a change, we had been even more keen to improve and to get much more options for regional security. And by this, I mean the prevention centers, and search and rescue, and centers like airstrikes and others, we can assist each other. So this I would say the goals have been such: first, ACRS can assist the process of peace in the Middle East, we have to give the background for the other working groups on water, and refugees, and the economy, to make it such that they can have all the options to make the progress. We can make much more regional security, much less on arms control. This is about the goals.

### **Christian Ostermann**

Thank you very much. Let me see if we can bring in others into the conversation as I see that Bob Einhorn has raised his hand, and I know we expect our Egyptian colleagues to join us shortly. So let me, if I may, General Ivry and we'll get back to you, and give the microphone to Bob Einhorn.

### **Bob Einhorn**

Christian, thank you and thanks CNS and the Wilson Center for leading us down the path of memory lane. It's great to see friends and colleagues on the screen. For some of you, it's been 30 years. And you know, there's a risk here that we're going to get into, a kind of a Rashomon kind of situation. You remember the great Japanese film, Rashomon: different participants tell their subjective version of the situation and you have these conflicting narratives. But we'll see how much common memory we have. This session deals with the origins and my remarks will really be an introduction to Dennis Ross who really played a key role in getting this started. Dennis, correct me if I'm wrong, but I have a distinct memory of a meeting you convened. Dennis was a key advisor to Secretary Baker and head of the policy planning staff, and Dennis convened this meeting. And I think it was kind of, it was toward the end of the First Gulf War, or soon after.

And the idea was, you know, after this conflict, it's important to begin thinking about future of security in the Middle East. And I think Dennis and others were really trying to conceptualize this notion of bilateral peacemaking between Israel and key neighbors, but also having a multilateral process that would complement and support the bilateral peacemaking process. And that, for me, that was really the origin. I was a foot soldier at the time and helping Dennis and Bill Burns and others plan, you know, the Madrid Process and the multilaterals, and so forth. But I see that as a key, a key origin. David Ivry talked about participation, and that was a key. It's a key constraint.

And we'll talk about this, I think today and tomorrow. Of course, Syria and Lebanon were invited to participate in the multilaterals, they chose not to. Libya, Iraq, and Iran were not invited. But, you know, it's obviously constrained in dealing with any of these issues, including the nuclear issue in the region, when you had, you know, Libya, Iraq, and Iran, and Syria, all of whom had nuclear weapons aspirations, not at the table. And we can talk about, you know, the limitations that imposed on the process.

Let me, just a word of, and I want to hear from Dennis on this, but just an anecdote that involves David. I think at the first meeting, plenary meeting of ACRS, and I think Dennis was the Chair at the time, David gave some introductory remarks, and said, "It was it was a bit strange, we were talking about the most sensitive issues affecting the national security of all the participants, and yet, no one on the other side of the table will shake my hand." And then Dennis, or Mike Yaffe, or Fred Axelgard--somebody can remind me--but one member of an Arab delegation then crossed over in front of everybody else and shook David's hand. It was a very, it was a poignant moment, and I think broke the ice, and that stands out as a critical memory for me. Anyway, this is to help Dennis get his thoughts in order.

**Christian Ostermann**

Great, Ambassador Ross, anything you'd like to add? At this point?

**Dennis Ross**

Yeah, yeah I would like to. Excuse my voice, I actually have a cold, you can actually get a cold and not have COVID. So, I don't have COVID, but I do have a cold. So my voice may or may not hold up.

First, let me just...Bob is right. Bob may have been a foot soldier, and then he became a General. So, what happened was, I was asked to think about how to shape the process by Secretary Baker during the war to focus on okay, what are we going to do after the war, and we knew we would pursue a bilateral approach to negotiations. But we also understood that we had Arab states join with us in fighting against Iraq. Many of them, in a sense, could rationalize that. We thought if they could rationalize doing that, they could also rationalize taking a role and playing a role in terms of peacemaking. So the idea was to create a bilateral process between Israel and its Arab neighbors, and also to create a multilateral process, but the idea of the multilateral process was to widen the orbit of peacemaking. But not only to widen the orbit of peacemaking, it was also to try to deal with the sources of instability in the region.

So we ended up creating five different working groups. One was Arms Control and Regional Security, which is the one everyone here is addressing. There were others, Environment, Water, Refugees, and Economic Development. All five of these were geared, in our eyes, towards what would allow us to bring all the Arab states into working groups with Israel, and deal with what were regional sources of conflict and instability. So obviously, arms control and regional security was a prominent element here. I had been heavily involved, and Bob was as well, with the arms control discussions with the Soviets. And so the idea was, can we draw lessons from that? We also felt we had the Soviets now actually acting as a partner, they became Russia very quickly in the beginning of this process, and Russia hosted the initial organizing meeting for the multilaterals. And the whole, the logic here was also to try to draw from what was then, it wasn't yet OSCE, but the CSCE process. What could we do? What lessons could we learn from that? How could we draw on- built into that was the very essence of confidence building. Again, not as a vehicle for producing peace, but as a vehicle for changing the context in which we might be pursuing peace. How can we begin to build a set of relations between those who've never had relations?

So these were kind of the conceptual points of departure. I do remember what Bob describes as-I don't remember who it was who walked over and shook David's hand, but I remember it quite

vividly because I remember saying, “well, here’s our first confidence building gesture.” And again, the confidence building in the arms control, drew from our experiences with the CSCE process, and with discussions with the Soviets. So these were kind of the conceptual points of departure. And I recall, the very first meeting we had, I recall giving a talk to launch it. And again, it tried to put in perspective, this is not a substitute for the bilateral process. But it’s also something that shouldn’t have to wait until the bilateral process has produced agreements. And if we can proceed in terms of reducing the risk of conflict, we’re also supporting the very idea of negotiating end of conflict peace agreements between Israel and its neighbors. So these were really the points of departure and I’ll just add one last point.

Before the Gulf War, our approach had been to try to create a dialogue between Israel and Palestine for the territories. The Israeli government, at that time led by Prime Minister Shamir, was not prepared to deal with the PLO. We, by the way, had suspended our dialogue with the PLO. We had launched a dialogue at the very end of the Reagan administration, but we suspended it in June of 1990, because there was a terror act attempted in Tel Aviv. Abu Abbas, who sat on the executive committee of the PLO, claimed credit for it, we communicated to Arafat that either he would condemn this act, or he needed to suspend Abu Abbas from the executive committee of the PLO, he refused to do so. So our focus was very much on creating a dialogue pre-Gulf War between Israel and the Palestinians for the territories. After the Gulf War, we widened the aperture, we said, okay, it can’t just be an Israeli-Palestinian discussion, it has to be in Israeli-Arab state discussion, and it has to not just be Israel and its immediate Arab neighbors, we want to widen the orbits. So in the aftermath of this war, we want to bring in Arab states who are not Israel’s immediate neighbors, but who are part of the region and who we want to be part of this discussion. So those were, that was actually what laid in mind, the very idea of launching this.

### **Christian Ostermann**

Great, thank you. That’s very helpful. You mentioned the Russians, I do want to put on the record that we invited former Russian participants but couldn’t get them to participate. I do want to call on Ziad Abuzayyad, as well, and we’re waiting for Minister Fahmy, but I think I sort of cut off, not intentionally, General Ivry midstream. So let me sort of for a moment give you a chance to complete your statement before we bring in others into the conversation as well.

### **David Ivry**

Okay, you are asking about how did Israel prepare for the ACRS negotiation? Well, first, we didn’t have an NSC at that time, we actually established it in 1999. But at the time, there were no National Security Council in Israel. And they thought maybe I, as being the one which used to have the JPMG, which is a joint political military talks with United States, JSOC, and other strategic dialogues, which we had as a country with other countries, so they selected me to be the head of the mission, because it’s not normal, that the Minister of Defense is leading a kind of a mission of this kind. And of course, it was mainly coming from Ministry of Foreign Affairs, or National Security Council. We had, the Working Group had been established, and we had a working group, interministerial working group which included many people in Israel. Preparing the sessions myself, I must say, once I got into the idea, despite being a long time in the Minister of Defense, it was really a new area for me. I mean, nonproliferation is a different language in some way. And you have to get into the culture of this kind of thinking and even speaking, and I had a very good assistant, Eli Levite, which is now sitting here, and Uzi Arad, which had been very good teachers for me, and assisting me on all the ways, I must say.

But what we had, we did all the kind of meetings preparation before the kind of meetings we had, and always we came up with conclusion, and I brought it to approval to the Minister of Defense, or the Prime Minister depending on what was the case. Normally, we used to get an approval, because we knew the policy, we knew what related to arms control our restrictions from our point of view, and how far we can go in security, regional security issues. Over there, we got actually a

free hand. So we had a preparation, preparing it with all kinds of items, and then normally used to try to get a meeting with the heads of the United States delegation one day before the meetings to try to give them our briefing about what are the limits which we can go through, restrictions, and even speaking about new ideas, to get into the discussion, and some of the ideas was such that if Israel is going to put it on the table, it will (not) very easily have been accepted, but if it's going to come from United States delegation it's going to be even better. Doesn't mean that everybody is going to accept it, but at least it's going to be beginning wise to be accepted much easier.

So this was the way, we have some of the ideas, we had some ideas. And it's again, it was mainly for regional security. And my assistant, even now, some of the ideas are good to any kind of region in the world, it can be used everywhere and it can be done a better and safer region in other countries as well. So this is about the preparation. And the achievement, I must say because this is the last one, or I would say the, to the process as well. I think it was an excellent idea to have the education process beginning wise by presenting us with the Russia-United States negotiation, and all kinds of processes before. It gave us a lot of ideas, and it gave us a lot of understanding on the process. Because it's not only decision, process is sometimes more important than the way which has adjusted. So I think it was very, very good methodological way of doing it, we learned quite a lot in itself, I must say, learn more than others about it. And that's why the achievement have been even easier. Now, in spite of what we had, all the work we did, which had a lot of good results, in my opinion, but totally we didn't have any results out of the ACRS in some way. But personal relationship, confidence building measures which have been in my opinion very high, and Bob Einhorn mentioned, my statement about handshaking, I can tell you the story from my standpoint.

When I wanted to go to the coffee on the break, I couldn't make it. Beginning wise, everybody was going aside, and I could go to coffee, first one and easy one. Towards the end of the process, I had to always, on the way to discuss with some people, I couldn't make it to the coffee on the break, any break. So, personal [inaudible] and some make it much easier, in my opinion to the end of it, it has some impact on the peace on the Middle East, because people understand that the other side wants to have safety as well. They want to live in a good living for everybody. Once you're not meeting people, you cannot do it.

### **Christian Ostermann**

Thank you. Thank you. That's very helpful. We're going to focus on the educational approach a little later in the session. Wonder if I could call on Ziad Abuzayyad from the Palestinian delegation for some sort of initial reactions to what you just heard. If you could please unmute yourself, please unmute yourself first.

### **Ziad Abuzayyad**

Well, first, thank you very much for organizing this event. It's good to see the people we met 30 years ago and see how we changed and we became more gray and younger than we were. I'm happy to see all these friends, and I wish you all the best. To talk about the issue itself. Our impression on the Palestinian side was that the multilateral talks were created as one of the things which were used to convince Shamir to join the peace talks, because Shamir was asking for negotiations with all the other countries, and not only with the Palestinians. And the multilateral talks became to convince him that through or within the frame of the multilateral talks, you will have the opportunity to speak with all the Arab countries. So this was our impression, I don't know if this is right or wrong. Maybe Dennis knows better than me on this thing. But our impression was that the multilateral talks were only to satisfy Shamir and convince him to join the process. Now I want to go back to your question why we, the Palestinians, why we joined the multilaterals.

First of all, when we joined the multilaterals, we were not a country. We were struggling to find a place for ourselves within the countries in the region, and this is on one hand. And on the other

hand, we were starting bilateral negotiations with Israel. And we hoped that these bilateral negotiations would lead to a Palestinian state and if the bilateral negotiations will lead to the creation of a Palestinian state, why should we miss this opportunity by sitting on the table when people speak about regional security arrangements, to protect our interests, and to be part of the regional security arrangements even before the creation of the Palestinian state. So, on one hand, we wanted to protect our interests. On the other hand, we wanted to be recognized and treated as an equal partner in this process, as a state, as a country. Now, looking back after 30 years, unfortunately, the bilateral talks did not come to a conclusion. And the Palestinian state was not created, because we are still under the Israeli occupation. And the chances for creating a Palestinian state are shrinking and becoming almost unrealistic. Because the continued Israeli settlement activities and the occupied territories, excuse me?

**Christian Ostermann**

We're going to get to the legacies and consequences later on in the session.

**Ziad Abuzayyad**

No, no, no I'm answering your question why we joined the process. And I'm not trying to speak about other things, I'm just trying to say why we joined the process, we joined the process, because we thought that we will have a state. Now we did not have that state. And ACRS where stuck somewhere and started jumping in the same place because of things which we may discuss tomorrow or another session. Many of the people here, they know why we did not proceed in the ACRS and they became a sort of repetition. There was an educational process, on one hand, and there were fruitless arguments about confidence building measures, about the nuclear weapons, about all this stuff. So, I'll stop at this. And before I finish, I may excuse myself to leave before the end of this meeting, because I have something to do, and I have to do my prayers before the sunset.

**Christian Ostermann**

Understood, of course, let me focus a little bit more on the preparatory stage and want to pose a question to Dennis Ross, actually inspired by Fred Axelgard. How much tension or worry was there on your part waiting for Saudi Arabia to deliver the Gulf states' participation in the multilaterals? Was there a quorum of Arab States needed to get the process started? I wonder if we could dig in on this a little more.

**Dennis Ross**

We had in the run up to the Gulf War, there were eight trips the Secretary of State took to the region. And the reason I'm giving it as background is that on the third trip, the Saudis suddenly suggested to the Secretary that they wouldn't be a part of the negotiating process. Now, this is after the Gulf War, and the eight trips that ended up getting us, excuse me, to Madrid. And in the aftermath of that, of that visit, which was a big disappointment, and Baker was quite tough in his meetings, in response to this, literally saying, "I guess it's okay for you to hold our coat, while we go and we actually do the fighting. The fact is, you know, what am I supposed to tell the President of the United States that you're not going to- it was fine for us to fight for you, but it's not fine for you to join us in peacemaking." In the aftermath of coming back, I suggested to the Saudi ambassador, why don't we have the Gulf Cooperation Council states, why don't we have them as observers at the conference we'll put together and you obviously, being a very significant player there, you can represent. You can be the representative of the GCC, which that was a compromise that was then accepted.

So, I give this as a background because the whole idea was that we would try to keep the Saudis involved via the GCC. Since on their own, they weren't prepared to be there as a standalone actor. Our focus throughout was to try to maximize the number of Arab states that would be involved. We knew we would not have Syria, because Assad treated the multilaterals as being something, not only that Israel wanted, but that was a form of normalization, and he said, I can't have

normalization take place when my territory is still under occupation. So we knew we wouldn't have him. Saddam Hussein was a given we wouldn't have him. And it was also given we would have the Iranians who aren't Arabs, but we did not consider, you know we saw there was little prospect of trying to include the Iranians.

So, an answer to Christian's point, our focus all along was to maximize the number. And if we had to be creative in terms of how we maximize the number, we were prepared to do it. Now, we ended up with Oman, playing a major role in this process, actually being prepared to host you know, being prepared to host meetings you know, discussions on water, and even to have the development of a facility. So, we did get Gulf states to participate individually. But our vehicle for the Saudis, at least initially, was for them to be representing the GCC. And I do, I guess I don't recall now, but I do think we had Saudi participation. Others may remember that better than me. But I think we did have Saudi participation, at least through that form, but I may be wrong. But that was how we sought to get their inclusion. And that that did bring them to, to Madrid.

### **Christian Ostermann**

Thank you, very helpful. Anyone else like to react or to make an intervention at this stage as we're talking about the inception of the process? Yep. Süha? If you could use the raise hand function that will help. But we recognize you.

### **Süha Umar**

Let me say a few words, as you said, we should talk about how we saw the situation and why we get involved in the process, or the initiative. To tell the truth, we, I personally, and we as Turkey, we are outsiders, to the process. We never thought that we belonged to the Middle East. And we deliberately and very carefully tried to stay out of the context of the Middle East, including the context which was introduced by our Israeli friends, a new definition of the Middle East, starting from the Atlantic Ocean, and ending up in Central Asia. But being a country which this way or other ruled more than 500 years in the region, we thought that we knew a little bit more than all the others put together. But this is not and was not important. Again, what was important, as far as I saw the situation 30 years ago, as you said, the initiative seemed to be a very good one, and a very clever one. And the regional, and the world situation, in our opinion, seems to be again, suitable for a try to see if we could achieve something in the regional context as far as security is concerned. I'm leaving the arms control, as David put it, aside for the time being because it was something much more specific and in my opinion was too early for the regional countries to discuss.

This is how we found ourselves in Moscow. In fact, the five working groups were established not in Madrid but in Moscow. And despite the fact that my colleagues from the ministry was thinking that we had very little to contribute to the process, I personally thought that we could be of some help, at least in ACRS, because we had vast experience in CSCE, as Dennis put it, as some other countries had, and also in arms control matters, especially in the CFE. So, we thought if we could share our experience and thoughts and what we gained from the experience in Europe, this could help the regional countries to find a way to create a better atmosphere in the region, which could, in turn, help create a better regional security situation.

The most important point, in my opinion, I'm saying, I'm talking in a way in a personal way, because to tell the truth, in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkey, nobody was very much willing to get engaged in this process, believing that it was too technical, and we had very little to add or help. I had another idea. What I saw, the region was lacking confidence. I used to call it: there was not a lack of confidence, but there was a crisis of confidence in the region. And this crisis of confidence was not only between Israel and the Arab countries, but also among the Arab countries themselves. So if we could eliminate, or at least just eliminate a bit, this crisis of confidence, and then again, another important point, if we could achieve all these countries

talking to each other, not maybe always, but most of the time, this could help create this new atmosphere in the region.

So, I remember, most probably David will also remember, in Moscow, we volunteered to do something in the ACRS group and even lead this group. And just following that Moscow meeting, David and his team, they came to Ankara. And we try to tell them what we had in mind, and how we were planning to contribute to the process. Also, we thought that, if not, among all the regional countries, some of the regional countries, in my opinion, were in a better shape in getting into a kind of conversation or relationship, which could lead the way for other countries too. These are, for example, Jordan and Israel. And we gave them the example of Turkey and Bulgaria. At that time, Turkey and Bulgaria had much developed and furthered relationship, even among the CSCE countries. And all of these put together, we thought that Turkey could contribute to this process, and for others to decide if this belief of mine was true or not, David and others could easily tell if we achieved this something. Thank you very much.

**Christian Ostermann**

Thank you. Thank you very much. David Ivry?

**David Ivry**

I agree very much with Süha. So I must say that one of the outputs of the original security ideas was such that we understood that we can do an even safer region, without or not related to the Palestinian issue. And this was in some way, didn't - hasn't been accepted by the partners because of the commitment for the Palestinian issue. My opinion, it's a big mistake. If we could make a safer region, it could impact or influence all the processes with the Palestinians. Once you're talking with neighbor country, once you have the kind of centers, it can make an influence. And this was a mistake, in my opinion, not to accept any of those kinds of regional security because of the not being achieved the peace with Palestinians.

**Christian Ostermann**

Thank you. I think we're circling nicely on this early phase. I'd like to press Dennis a little bit more on the question of how, what kind of assurances were needed to get the regional states to the negotiation table at ACRS?

**Dennis Ross**

It's a good question. I honestly don't recall us having to enter into any deep discussions on assurances that we had to provide to get them to come. It's true that many of them, you know, in advance of this many raised concerns about not wanting to get ahead of the bilaterals. And so, you know, I don't- It's not that we gave any kind of formal assurances, but I think it certainly influenced, I think the initial presentation, I recall making, taking account of some of the concerns that we had heard from some of the Arab states. And so I recall, again, putting special emphasis on this isn't to take the place of the bilaterals, we recognize that the ability to make real progress here is going to be affected by progress in the bilaterals as well. But we also don't think we should wait, given the fact that there are things that we can do that can enhance stability, reduce the risk of conflict, and, you know, we want to pursue that.

So I don't, I mean, maybe there were some discussions. I just don't recall them, other than receiving, you know, hearing some concerns. And then just saying, "Look, we know the real flowering, this is likely to only take place if there's been real progress in the bilaterals. And we'll acknowledge that this can't take the place of bilaterals." I think that was, I mean, I guess maybe the main point was this, there was a concern on the part of some of the Arab States to not look like they were rushing ahead, even when there wasn't peace yet. And, you know, our point was, we recognize that concern, but that's not a reason not to begin these kinds of discussions. And I think the other thing to bear in mind, this was a US that was seen as being really at sort of the

zenith of its powers. And there weren't a lot of states in the region who wanted to be saying no to us. So it's not like we required a major effort to go and persuade them and give them assurances. We listened to their concerns and found ways to address them, not in terms of any kind of formal assurances, but just to acknowledge the concerns, even as we weren't prepared to allow that, prepared to prevent us from being prepared to go ahead.

**Christian Ostermann**

Yes, thank you. You raise the implication anyways, the role of the Russians. I wonder if you or any of the participants would like to address the importance of Russian co-sponsorship of the process and getting it going?

**Dennis Ross**

I can, I'll say something about that.

**Christian Ostermann**

Yeah. Okay.

**Dennis Ross**

We were extremely mindful that, especially President Yeltsin was quite jealous of the Russian prerogatives to look like they were still a superpower. And I don't mean to diminish that, this was a this was a genuine concern of his. And, you know, we felt it was important that they be part of this. I recall very vividly meeting him with Secretary Baker, and not long after Russia had emerged as an independent state. And we knew everything they were contending with, and even raised the idea that if it was, you know, that the plan had been for Russia to host the first meeting of the multilateral, at least the first organizing meeting of the multilaterals in Moscow. We were mindful that this might be difficult to do given everything that was going on at the time. And I recall Baker saying to him, "Look, if it's not convenient for you, we don't have to have the meeting in Moscow." And Yeltsin came back immediately insisting that the meeting would take place in Moscow as scheduled. I think it was January 1992, or the end of December 1991. I guess it was January 1992. And I mean, it was like, it was almost an insult even to suggest that they wouldn't be able to host. And Baker was very quick to say, "No, absolutely. We want you to we just, we certainly want to be mindful and respect what are your needs and your priorities and whatever this is, we're very pleased that you would be prepared to host it."

I would just say one other thing. We felt at the time, the Russians we were dealing with, you know, there was a real dramatic change in terms of how they wanted to work with us. This was not the old Soviet Union, even, you know, obviously things had changed under Gorbachev; this was not like in the previous era. The Russians wanted to play the role here, and they wanted to be constructive. They saw this as a platform to show they were a superpower still. But it also meant they understood they had responsibilities. So their approach to this was extremely practical, and many of people that I'd worked with in the Foreign Ministry were real professionals, and they took pride in being able to develop ideas. And so the fact that they wanted to play this role was something that we welcomed, we just didn't know, honestly, if they were up to it, given what was tremendous chaos and turmoil within Russia at the time.

**Christian Ostermann**

Thank you very much. Let me call on, I think, Fred, you had a question or intervention. I saw your hand raised. And we are being joined as we speak by Minister Fahmy who I'd like to get on the record for this first session as well. But Fred, quick intervention?

**Fred Axelgard**

You know, Dennis. Just the idea of the Russian involvement, the thought about them going in, but I think the regional players, also their reaction to having the Russian involvement was, I think,

quite significant certainly, as we moved into the practical discussions and used the background of US-Soviet negotiations to inform our negotiations. And again, referencing Süha's points, Turkey's experience in the CSCE and other negotiating arrangements, it made it a richer and I think more credible, and then way more sustainable process overall.

**Christian Ostermann**

Thank you very much. Bob Einhorn, you had raised your hand?

**Bob Einhorn**

Yeah, just a comment on the Russian role. And I don't want to take too long because Nabil has joined and we want to hear his account of the origins of ACRS. But yes, I mean, this was inviting them to be co-chair was kind of deference to their sensibilities at a very difficult time in their history. And several of the participants welcomed the Russian role. But this was not an equal co-chairmanship. The Russian Foreign Ministry, you know, was reorganizing itself, they simply didn't have the resources to play as active, a real active role. And I think, and others on the call can comment, but I think most of the participants saw this as a US-chaired operation, that most of the ideas, initiatives came from the United States. And just another short anecdote: at the Doha plenary meeting, the Qatari Foreign Minister wanted to have a big gala dinner, and he wanted to have a kind of a platform at the, you know, elevated platform where he would dine with the United States co-chair but not the Russians. He didn't want the Russians there because they were not significant. And I spent a day and a half trying to persuade him that this would be a terrible embarrassment. It would be a blow to US-Russian relations if he denigrated the Russians that way; he finally relented. But in his view, this was a US-chaired operation.

**Christian Ostermann**

Thank you. I wonder if others agreed and I noticed, Süha, that you had raised your hand, too. But I do want to go to Minister Fahmy, who has joined us. Welcome to this workshop and conference, we have been talking about the inception of the ACRS process, about various countries' objectives going into the process. And I would like to give you the chance to talk about Egypt's perspective in, on the launch, and the beginning of the ACRS process.

**Nabil Fahmy**

First of all, thank you very much. It's very nice to be with you, old friends, or colleagues, or let me rephrase that long-standing friends and long-standing colleagues, you all look much younger. Let me try to respond to you. But again, just to be very candid, as you've known me to be, I'm going to give you what I think it was. It may not be the full picture, it's really the Egyptian picture at the time. It won't be necessarily my personal opinion, but it will be the government opinion, which I think is more important at this point. Don't forget that the normalization process started way earlier than that with the Egyptian-Israeli agreement. And it started, but it didn't really take off. The idea was presented to us during the negotiations that we need more than conflict resolution, we actually need to understand what peace will look like. And I'm summarizing it, David, feel free to correct me if I'm wrong. The Israelis told us just by way of size, "We're much smaller. So we want to feel more confident that peace is real peace, not simply conflict resolution."

Anyway, it didn't really kick off in the Egyptian-Israeli agreement, mostly because what we had told our Israeli colleagues, it's not going to kick off until there's movement on withdrawing from other Arab territories. Now jump a decade, and you go into Madrid, and the idea that working groups, multilateral ones, should couple the bilateral ones to visualize the meaning of peace and create some realities, emerged again, and we weren't surprised by it. Although it was a rather ambitious project all together. I remember that we were originally told that there will be three working groups, Environment, Water, and Economics, if I'm not mistaken. And then, given the fact that we are a major country in the region, and we had been at war every six and a half years for decades before that, security was very prominent in our mind, especially arms control.

So we suggested that we wanted also to add an arms control working group. Our language would have been disarmament. The American language tended to be arms control, but that's an ideological discussion we can discuss later. And then I'm not, I don't know, but I assume that probably the idea of regional security came in from Israelis. But I don't know that. What I do remember, however, is the naming of these groups and their establishment went all the way until the beginning of the opening of the Madrid Conference. And I remember being in a room with Foreign Minister Moussa, with Secretary Baker at the time, and I know Dennis was in the room as well as possibly some others, when we were discussing the absence of the Syrians, or the Syrians don't want to participate. And actually it might be a bit before that. Anyway, we were in a meeting with the American delegation with the Secretary and with Dennis, and there was some hesitation on agreeing to the two additional working groups, arms control and refugees, but then Baker said, "If we're going to try to establish peace, these are issues of concern to these guys, we do the five working groups." That's essentially how I recall the establishment of the working group.

### **Christian Ostermann**

Thank you, just Dennis does this accord with your recollections? Does this fit? Thank you very much, Mr. Fahmy.

### **Dennis Ross**

The only thing I would say is, we had internally decided, for sure, on the three. We had already discussed internally that we probably needed to have an arms control working group and regional security just because we just fought a war. We knew there would probably be some sensitivity on the Israeli side, if we raised the issue of the arms control and regional security. So it wasn't as if we weren't going to propose it. But we wanted to kind of test the waters generally, before we proposed all of it. The fact the Egyptians raised this provided a good reason for us to go ahead. We, you know, a lot of this was kind of testing the waters to see what the traffic could bear. But I would say we had, we knew we were going to have some kind of security working group, what we chose to name it, how we were going to build a focal point around it, that was still, I think, in the works. But we very much, again, this process was informed by the lessons from CSCE, and how could we draw on it. And the whole experience with the, then the Soviets also was informing us. So I think it's, what Nabil says is fair, just to you know, to put it in context. Nabil, the reality is, it was a good suggestion you made and you were pushing on an open door.

### **Christian Ostermann**

Thank you so much. I think that's a great exchange. Could I ask if any of the members of the Israeli delegation would like to react to this? Any thoughts on the working group establishment? I'm not seeing any hands. In terms of my team, anyone, am I missing anyone? If not, any members of the - actually, let's go back. I want to go back to Süha. Actually, I would love to have Minister Fahmy's sense of this as well, recognizing that we're practically at the end of this first session. And I do want to kind of switch us to look at the format and choreography of ACRS which will take up some of these issues. But Süha, on the role of the Russians and the importance of the Russian role in this process, also, in light of what Bob Einhorn was saying just earlier, let me call on you for a brief intervention.

### **Süha Umar**

Thank you very much, Christian. Just in fact, I don't remember any crucial role on the part of the Russians as far as the ACRS group is concerned, I have no idea about the other groups. But from the very start, I think it was a clever idea to include the Russians in the multilaterals, and even giving them a prominent role in the multilaterals. In fact, what I remember, while the ACRS was established in Moscow, it was January 1992, there was a steering committee. And the steering committee was established by the Americans and the Russians, and especially the American friends of ours were very jealous of their role in the process. And they carefully kept, for example,

Turkey out of it until when the ACRS process all of a sudden came to a very bad end, and the American friends of ours, again, came to us and asked us if we could organize a meeting in Antalya to revive the process which we agreed and tried to do our best, and there were two Antalya meetings. In my opinion, all these meetings added, which, in fact these Antalya meetings led to what we now call, still call, second track meetings.

So, but one thing which Dennis Ross mentioned, I'm afraid the biggest mistake on the part of the Americans was to believe that they were the only superpower, and they would continue to be the only superpower on Earth, which, in the near future, after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact, in a very short time proved not to be true, and especially when Putin came to power. But still, these thoughts or approaches, in my opinion, did very little harm to the ACRS process. The ACRS process, I'm sure we are going to discuss further the details, as I said yesterday at the - if I may put it - get-together, was a very successful experience and process, which could have been much more helpful if the situation had not been changed in a very short time when most of the, especially after Netanyahu and everything that has happened in the region. Thank you.

**Christian Ostermann**

Thank you. Thank you. Before we switch to the next panel, I would love to hear Minister Fahmy's sense of the Russian role and what having the Russian co-sponsorship added or did not add to the process at the beginning stage?

**Nabil Fahmy**

Sure. Look, let me put it this way, the American role was imperative. The Russian role could be useful. The politics at the time were Russians were not going to be conclusive factors in the process, but their presence for us was useful for, I'm going to be very candid, I think you had an American president and an American Secretary of State, a team that was rather unique in its determination to try to change the Middle East with the least possible effect of American domestic politics on their decision making process. They were ready to take on America's domestic politics to pursue America's foreign policy interests. And I say this because it was really the best formula if you're looking for the American team, as an Arab. As an Arab, let's also be realistic, America has always been much closer to Israel on security issues, than to Arabs, especially on the Arab-Israeli conflict area. Therefore, having the Russians there were useful because it balances a little bit the American position, having the Europeans there were useful because it balances a little bit. And I say this in the positive sense. It gave room to America and gave room to us to argue a lot of details that would not have been in our favor as Arabs, if it was only Egypt and America or the Arabs and America. Not because America is bad or is good, it's because the domestic politics don't favor the Arab position. So, we were not going to throw our bets on Russia. But having them there was useful.

**Session 2:**

**Reflecting on the ACRS Working Group Format and Choreography**

**Christian Ostermann**

Thank you. Thank you. That's very helpful. With that, and with this sort of being the warm-up session, in which, hopefully, most participants got to intervene - and I will involve others shortly - we'd like to move on to kind of a second set of topics: the group format and the choreography. We've already talked a little bit about this, but this session will consider questions related to format and process including the working group format, the role of extra-regional participants, the division of issues into conceptual and operational baskets, if you recall, the frequency and location of the ACRS meetings, as well as the decision making by consensus and diplomacy on the margins of the meetings. So, the first question, really, what were your thoughts on the structure

of ACRS? Did you find the procedural division into plenary meetings, intersessional working groups, and seminar style approaches conducive? Let me call on Bruce Jentleson perhaps to chime in here, but you know, others, please feel free to raise your hands and we'll bring you into the conversation. Bruce?

**Bruce Jentleson**

Yeah, thanks Christian. I mean, I actually didn't join in until the first part of the Clinton administration in '93. So, the design, you know, was set by then in the implementation and modification stage. My own sense of it from that, and from having studied it and others like it was that it, you know, it took a functional approach, right? And as I think a number of people, Dennis and others said at the beginning, the idea was to find out where there were shared interests, despite the larger differences. And in the ACRS process, as we go along, I think into tomorrow, you know, there was an array of issues that were allowed, like the naval issues proceeded more quickly than the others, because you had the working groups, which was consistent with what happened going back to the late 60s, early 70s in the Cold War, you know, with search and rescue incidents at sea, being an area that the United States and Soviet Union had, it was not intrusive, less political, able to keep out of the media and other parts, aspects too.

So, there was a certain amount of functionality to it. I mean, we can talk about where we think there were particular problems and stuff. And at the same time, I know, when I was in the State Department, there was cross coordination with the other working groups to get a sense for what was happening. But I actually consider it to be an effective design and with your longer term implications here to think about where the region might go in the future, really has some implications there. So that's the point I make, I think, it was a highly functional approach that when there'd be other differences it could still allow the subgroups to try their best to, as David said at the beginning, to build relationships as well as to make progress, or at least to talk about making progress, and then sometimes actually make progress operationally.

**Christian Ostermann**

Could I press you a little bit, what do you think were the limitations of this approach as to, you know, others that might have been chosen?

**Bruce Jentleson**

Well, you know, we had different views before about where, you know, how far the multilaterals could go in relation to the bilaterals. And I remember one of the little ditties that was around the State Department was we had to say at least one step behind the bilaterals. And then, of course, when the bilaterals went, you know, either backwards or stagnated in the latter part of the 1990s, that was even more of a problem. Whether or not, you can make arguments on both sides, whether or not you can develop shared interest. I do think that the political context of the time and all the countries that that was necessary, and in some ways it was, you know, being able to jump through the window of opportunity when it opened, which what often happens is, "Oh, my goodness, we got a window of opportunity, let's start thinking about what to do," right? And I thought that was useful. And to the extent that some of the naval exercises went ahead, you know, with the Canadians, I don't think they're here with us yet, but they'll talk more to that, I think that was in early '94. That demonstrated being able to, you know, take advantage of windows of opportunity when they opened up. So, I don't think there was any other way of getting out in front of the bilaterals in the 1990s. That's my sense.

**Christian Ostermann**

Thank you. There are two - Ah, Süha, yes?

**Süha Umar**

As we are talking about how the ACRS proceeded, and how it works, let me add two small points. From the very first day, we realized that there were two important fears on the part of most regional countries, one was to be dragged into something without really wanting to do it. The second was to give up too much without getting anything for it. So, to avoid these two fears, or to address these two fears, especially on the part of the Arab countries, I remember we introduced two concepts, which were very well known to more or less everybody now listening to me, from the CSCE and the CFE. One was the rule of “set aside” - agree on a text or on a measure and put it aside for the time when it could easily be, or it could be implemented. The second was, “nothing is agreed until everything is agreed.” So, these two concepts, in my opinion, made it very easy for all the participant in the ACRS group to get involved in a fruitful dialogue and to agree on many texts. Very positive steps were taken with this, for example, the search and rescue operations. And these were all, these were agreed thanks to these concepts because nobody thought that even if they agree to text, they will not be obliged to implement it.

**Christian Ostermann**

Thank you.

**Süha Umar**

I think seminar type of work was also important, it is just like children playing. As if everything was unofficial, although it was official. So, people were more relaxed, more willing to discuss or get into a conversation or discussion with the other parties thinking that if they say or do something, it wouldn't come back to them as an obligation. Thank you very much.

**Christian Ostermann**

Thank you, this is perfect, Süha. This is exactly what I wanted to focus on: these two important procedural decisions on the kind of informal seminar style nature and no records taken, as well as the “nothing is agreed until everything is agreed.” Who came up with these two procedural ideas, important as they were? Süha? Anyone else?

**Süha Umar**

Well, I'm not so sure about the seminar type approach, but I can easily say that the two “set aside” and “nothing is agreed everything is agreed” approaches were introduced by Turkey.

**Christian Ostermann**

Thank you, anyone else recollect on how these two procedural items were introduced? Who introduced them?

**Dennis Ross**

I would just say one thing, the “nothing's agreed until everything's agreed” was the guiding principle for us in the bilateral negotiations. So, it wasn't particularly surprising that that should also be applied to the multilaterals.

**Christian Ostermann**

Thank you. Eli, did you - you're muted. Did you want to join?

**Ariel Levite**

Yeah, well, yes, just to say those two principles in a slightly different formulations were Israeli demands that were worked out with the Americans ahead of the launch event in Moscow. We insisted that there would be no record because we were expecting the whole thing to be a campaign against Israel. And we felt that the only principle that we needed to have to protect us in the process would be the things would have to be agreed by consensus, because we thought that the Arab delegations would gang up on us. And unless there was a consensus rule of the nature that

also pertained in other processes, and so on, we will be too exposed. So that's where it was formally agreed between us and the Americans and then became, and clearly we have studied precedents, so those were not outrageous demands and so on.

But Christian, if already, if you already pointed the finger at me, I want to highlight one issue, because I think it has a bearing on the structure of the process. What Dennis said in his remarks reflected a huge American ambivalence what they wanted to accomplish with the process. One of them was to create a favorable atmosphere for the bilaterals, but not get in their way, and so on. And one was to address acute, real problems of the Middle East. Okay, so what happened was, here was a process that was vacillating between trying to make real progress and running away, or running ahead of the bilaterals overshadowing them, and in some ways, even complicated problems there. And so, I think that level of ambivalence there was so evident in what Dennis had said in his opening remarks, is what haunted ACRS throughout the time and I think ultimately brought its demise. And this whole division of this process and so on, were all tactics to move ahead, but not to really to move ahead much, to create a favorable atmosphere but not to overshadow, to avoid having to pay a heavy price to actually move, and so on.

So this genuine desire that some of us manifested, to deal with the acute problems of the region, be they water, or refugees, or environment, regional security, and so on, were all sidelined by the desire not to overshadow the bilaterals. Which were - the US was not the only one that didn't want to overshadow bilaterals. I think you've heard from Nabil that there was, their desire as well. And so, to me, the structure had its own logic for all kinds of operational reasons, but at the end of the day was driven by the constraints imposed by not just, not running with the analytical issues or the educational issues ahead of the practical ones, and so on, but to have all the working groups coordinated through the steering committee, and the steering committee coordinated with the bilaterals. So the shackles were put on it, at every conceivable level, to make sure that it doesn't run very far. And so where momentum was beginning to develop, David Ivry and others have mentioned a few of those areas, particularly driven by the energy of some of the extra regionals, someone held us back, or some others held us back, even when the principle was upheld, that not everyone has to take part, and those who want to stay on the sidelines, are welcome to stay on the sidelines, if you wish to speak geometry, to use the European expression.

### **Christian Ostermann**

Thank you. Thank you, Mike, Mike Yaffe. Please unmute yourself, yeah.

### **Michael Yaffe**

Christian, you know, like Bruce, I actually joined a year later after ACRS had started, and so many of the processes were already in place. I would say there was another template that I would add to Süha's. And the third one was that whatever was agreed was also, when it came to implementation, that it would be voluntary. And so that, in this case, the country I remember often saying it, and making sure the text added to this, was Saudi Arabia. They were very, very careful about wanting to appear, I think in this case, particularly in exercises or in domains with Israel, as well. So there was another guiding principle: participation in the activities was voluntary.

### **Christian Ostermann**

Thank you, any other, anyone else would like to react to this question of the procedure or principles? Mr. Fahmy? Yes.

### **Nabil Fahmy**

Yes, I think one has to take into consideration that you had different groups of countries participating there, countries like Egypt and Israel that had a history between each other with strong areas in their own rights over and above whatever relations they had with others. And I'm

talking here about Arab-Israeli countries, mostly. And you have other countries, like some of the Arab countries who did not have a relationship and did not even recognize Israel, at the time. Logically speaking, I wouldn't even expect them to agree to something before they got to the phase of being able to get into a contractual agreement with the Israelis. But let me say the following, in all honesty, we didn't pay much attention to the procedure, because logically, if you're talking about arms control, you can't force arms control issues, you can't force security issues on anyone. It has to be: those who want to participate, participate and those who don't want to participate, don't. But in our delegation, frankly, we didn't focus at all, if the proposals made sense they passed for us quite quickly.

Let me also add another point. We did not frankly, they for us as Egypt, that could be the case for some Arab countries, we did not link multilaterals with the progress in the bilaterals. We linked the progress in the multilaterals with the different committees. We did not expect the multilaterals to go much further than the bilaterals, where they did Ahlan wa Sahlan [welcome]. But our problem was that each group of us had a particular focus on some aspects of the multilaterals. So, when you see one group, one working group moving quickly, the other not moving at all, that became a sensitivity. But we weren't, frankly fixated on linkage between bilateral and multilateral. I assumed, I suppose, I'm pretty sure that Palestinians would have been worried about that, especially in regard to their working group on that particular topic.

A third point I'd make, we tried everything at ACRS, all the different things. And we didn't try them - again Dennis and Bob correct me if I'm wrong, or anybody on the American team - I don't think a big structure was laid out. And we simply went from one phase to the other, we just played it by ear, what worked today, we went on from one point to the other. Where we had a problem, frankly, and I say this, quite honestly and candidly, where we had a problem was that each one of us was at a different level, different state of peace and war. We weren't at war with anybody. So, we could present to you a comprehensive picture of what we wanted for the security for the region. The Israelis were at peace with us, but we're still at war with some other countries in the region. And other countries in the region were at war with the Israelis. So, they by nature would be more hesitant about going too far. And I close with this point, I remember presenting a paper at the very beginning of the Washington talks, if I'm not mistaken, which was a comprehensive action plan for how you deal with arms control; everything from unilateral measures, voluntary measures, right through to agreements. And Dennis told me to calm down, slow down because nobody, the others aren't yet ready to get into that level. So ACRS-

**Christian Ostermann**

Minister-

**Nabil Fahmy**

--not on format, it failed on substance, the format was marvelous.

**Christian Ostermann**

We're picking up a lot of static through your microphone, and I want to make sure we get all of what you say on the record, so I don't know if there's something that can be done. So that's why I'm interrupting. Dennis, anyone else, quick reaction? Just before, I'd like to actually get to a bit of a different question in terms of the choreography, that is the educational approach. You know, using discussing lessons on regional security from Confidence Building Measures in the European theater and US-Soviet dynamics, it's been alluded to already. I wonder if, what you thought at the time, to what extent this was a useful approach, and looking back, if you thought this was, was instructive? Would anybody like to comment on that? No? Uh...

**Dennis Ross**

Bruce has his hand up. So let him come. I would just say that for us, this was, you know, this was a point of departure. I mean, we had had these experiences, and we were, the question was, could we, in a sense, transfer those experiences and begin to apply them to the Middle East. After all, what we had done in the arms control area didn't resolve a conflict. It was obviously trying to reduce the risk of that conflict. It was trying to stabilize it. So we did see it had some merit here. I do recall, Nabil's right, I do recall, talking with him at the opening of the Washington talks after he outlined what his approach would be. And I said it was much more ambitious than we could pursue at this time. He was also right, I think, in terms of saying a lot of what ended up happening was you, you go ahead where you can go ahead.

One thing I would say about what Eli has said. There were inherent constraints. But it wasn't so much that we were consciously trying to prevent the multilateral from getting ahead of the bilaterals. We had no expectation that there would be those who would want to push ahead. The Israelis might want to push ahead, if they found their partners who were ready to push ahead. We were all for it. We had expectations that there would be other Arab partners who would deliberately try to slow it down, because the sensitivity of not getting ahead of the bilaterals. So, the context was not necessarily one that we designed not to get ahead of the bilaterals, but the context helped to explain that would be the reality. And here the whole idea of launching this was to see, how can we contribute to reducing the risk of conflict? How can we create connections where none existed before? How can we draw lessons from our own experience with the arms control process with CSCE, that, in a sense, helps us create a new baseline in terms of peacemaking?

**Christian Ostermann**

Thank you. Bruce?

**Bruce Jentleson**

Yeah, on your question on the educational aspect, Christian, I mean, as someone who, you know, is coming in and out of government, but spent most of my career in the academic world, I thought this and again, not having been part of the design of this, this was a very effective cross fertilization. I mean, if you think about it, we spent a lot of time, you know, during the Cold War, there are an awful lot of studies done - whether it's by academics, or RAND or think tanks, or inside the government - about different instances of deterrence, you know, what could you learn from the Taiwan Straits crisis for another, or the Cuban missile crisis, or etc. And it sort of combines the generic issue, that every region does have its own regional security issues that require some regional efforts, not just external major powers, with the specifics. And to see the participants, because I think it was done in a very effective way, if it was done too academically people's eyes would have glazed over. You know say, this may apply to us, this doesn't, this is what Argentina and Brazil did, this applies, this doesn't. And it's very useful.

We do it in a lot of other policies, the foreign aid community does this I know in the State Department, a lot. You know, again, not always successfully, but it's an important part of it, dealing with political violence. So I think there's a big lesson to be learned here, because my own sense, and others may disagree was that it added value to the direct focus discussions by having some lessons and somebody could say, well, that worked for them. But when we're for us with these, in these reasons, now to say, oh, there's an insight here, and nothing surgically extracted from one region to another, but this is how we could kind of learn from that and learn from this and do that. So I think, you know, it's a very valuable - it was, I think, was valuable in this process, and it should be used even more broadly, in other kinds of situations.

**Christian Ostermann**

Thank you. Bob?

**Bob Einhorn**

Yeah, I don't have much to add to what Dennis and Bruce have mentioned, there was a kind of you call it an educational phase, I sometimes called it the show and tell phase where, you know, United States, Russia and others who involved in CSCE processes, extra regionals share their experience. And David Ivry has mentioned earlier that he found this educational phase very, very useful. And I think that, you know, there was a transition, I call it the kind of the regionalization of the ACRS process. And it was reflected in venues as well, the early venues were outside the region, Washington, Moscow, and so forth. And then gradually you had important meetings in Cairo and Tunis, and Oman, and in Doha, and elsewhere in the in the region. But I think it was necessary to go through the educational phase, because most members in the region did not have the background, didn't have this toolbox of security building measures drawn. I think they had to be acquainted with that. And over time, they, you know, members of the region gained a lot of confidence, and more and more was taken on by members of the region themselves.

**Christian Ostermann**

Thank you. Thank you very much. Fred?

**Fred Axelgard**

Just very briefly, an anecdote that, I think corresponds to what's been said. At the end of the first ACRS plenary in Washington, I remember Dick Clark was in the chair at the time, I think was the last morning. And that had been a series of seminars, if you will, and I think Lynn Hansen, whom Süha mentioned earlier, had made a presentation. His counterpart, I forget the gentleman's name in the negotiations in the 70s, 80s had also made a presentation. Anyway, the last morning, Dick kind of looked around and commented on the lack of participation, lack of discussion. In my mind, I'm thinking he said, there's been a lot of sitting on hands the last few days. He's a little bit blunt. Dick was never that diplomatic. But the representative from Kuwait - and I think her background was, I think she had been in Geneva, so she was one of those members of the Arab delegation to have some background in arms control - but she stood up and very bluntly said this, "none of this pertains to us. This is not it's all very interesting. But really, it isn't, this isn't us," again, capturing what Bruce was just saying. And then Dick responded, "Well, what is you? What do you want to hear?" And she, out of that came a series of suggestions that kind of became elements for the ongoing agenda. And so I think the educational process, in one hand has the educational advantages, also became a target to shoot at. And if we all, it was, it turned kind of a tactical moment on Dick's part, I think, to try and elicit input that would help sustain the process. Again, all in the spirit of: we were making it up as we went along, as Nabil pointed out. It was functional, in that sense, very functional. We just came to what was doable and acceptable at the moment and went from that.

**Christian Ostermann**

Thank you. I'd like to get Nabil's reaction to the educational approach, as well. But let me sort of turn to an additional aspect that maybe can be worked into your question as well. That is the split of the working groups into two baskets, the conceptual and the operational basket. If you could talk a little bit about - this is not just for Mr. Fahmy - about your view of the implications of that split, and what was the logic behind it? Who initiated it? Do any of you recall that? And let me sort of first turn to Nabil Fahmy. Please unmute yourself.

**Nabil Fahmy**

There I am. Well, again, as I mentioned earlier, we were sort of on second or third gear going into the work of ACRS, while others, Arab or Israelis, were on first or second gear for their own security reasons, for their own political reasons. So for us, we wanted to jump into concrete issues from day one. I honestly don't remember, I'm embarrassed to say this, I don't remember who suggested conceptual and operative. But our inclination was always towards what is actually practically

useful. Now, the educational question. It was nice, occasionally, to listen to this stuff, and it was useful, frankly. But when there were no - the longer the actual negotiations kept getting postponed, and all we could do is educational stuff, or for that matter, the occasional confidence building exercise, the more frustrated we became with educational stuff. It wasn't meant to be a process of educating governments, it was meant to be a process of moving towards arms control, and then as you do that, learning from experiences of others. We felt after a while, that the objective of ACRS was, okay, let's just get everybody to get to know each other, develop relationships, but not really get into arms control. And so, we started getting more disinterested in the whole process.

**Christian Ostermann**

Thank you. Anyone else on the basket split? Do you recall any details on that, how that came about? Any recollections on how that worked? Implications of that for the process? No? That's okay. So, let's move. Süha? Okay. And Mike, maybe.

**Süha Umar**

One, one point. As far as I remembered, this split was due to the fact that some subjects were much more delicate than the others and could easily block the way for developing the other subjects, such as Code of Conduct. Code of Conduct was a very delicate subject for the region. So if we keep on talking on all of the subjects in the same place, and in the same way, then some operational issues could be delayed and made much more difficult. This was, as far as I remember, the reason why there was this split.

**Christian Ostermann**

Thank you. Bob or Mike?

**Bob Einhorn**

Just briefly, I mean, the different expertise, when you got into, you know, maritime measures, or communication measures, or military exchange measures, you really needed to have specialists involved. Whereas if you got into, it was Süha, you mentioned, some more delicate issues, more controversial, more political, you needed, you know, people at a more general level, and that's how it worked out in the drafting of this declaration of objectives and guidelines, and so forth. This wasn't a matter for technical specialists, and so this was put in the conceptual basket. And you had, you know, more senior members of the delegation working on that. So, it made very good practical sense to divide between conceptual and operational.

**Christian Ostermann**

Mike? And, you know, if General Ivry has a view on this, I'd be very curious as well. But Mike, go ahead.

**Michael Yaffe**

Yeah, that's the way I understood it. I sort of thought, you know, the progress in writing this statement of principle, as it went through its various iterations, became very prolonged, and took up a lot of time. And so I think that started the notion of saying we should try to maybe have separate meetings that we focus more on these conceptual issues. And they will be much more at a diplomatic level. But then we also had enough discussions on a lot of the confidence building measures and an eagerness to say, can we go forward in moving ahead with some of the confidence building measures, particularly by taking texts that were already agreed and speaking in the context of US and the Soviets, the Canadians and the Soviets on INCSEA, and take those texts and work with those same texts, and basically changing names, changing numbers as people felt fit. And that just required a separate amount of time to do that. And so, I think at that point, the notion came up to saying we should have two different baskets.

**Christian Ostermann**

Thank you. I don't see that David Ivry has his video on. So, let me - Fred? Yeah.

**Fred Axelgard**

Just really quickly. One way to think of it, too, is you had meetings where there were military people, and then Foreign Ministry people. The military people come to the technical meetings, the Foreign Ministry people do the conceptual. The idea of drawing in military participation into a setting like this was I think seen as really pretty valuable. Dennis has left, but maybe Bob can answer. The idea of fronting the maritime topics, I am kind of interested in knowing where that came from, because we got a lot of mileage out of the incidents at sea stuff, and the search and rescue discussions. And I just wondered, I, in my mind over the years, I've had the idea that was Dennis's idea to put those forward. And it gave, you know - the naval aspect of the military conflict and Middle East has never been that great. So to work in an arena that was the source, historically, a source of tension. Anyway, just thoughts that others might respond to - I'm not sure that any of what I've said is that accurate - but we did get a lot of mileage out of the maritime stuff. And it was kind of maybe counterintuitive, in a sense.

**Christian Ostermann**

Thank you. I'd like to call on General Ivry on, on this particular question of the baskets.

**David Ivry**

We've been very much encouraging the kind of separation of the baskets. I don't think the idea came out from us, but I think in negotiation, discussion among the people along the way, we came up to it because, on any operational aspect or idea that came up, always somebody came up with a conceptual issue, why not to do it. So, to try to give what Süha said, actually this is the concept of the issue means, operational can be without the conceptual idea behind it, can be very much useful in the region. Conceptual always is quite complicated to come up to a kind of agreement on a consensus with all the others - operational is much easier. That's why the separation of it, make it the operational side, much more effective, much more practical. And we made a lot of movements out of it because of it.

**Christian Ostermann**

Thank you. I'd like to - we're just about out of time, and we don't want to go much beyond the time that we've set originally. But there's one final question I'd like to put on the table for all of you to see who would like to respond. That's the question of domestic decision-making processes throughout the ACRS process, you know, the different internal processes when it came to the national ACRS delegation. Which ministry led the delegation? What authorities the delegation was given to make decisions? Inter-agency work prior to and after the meetings? And then deciding how to proceed? Were there differences? And most importantly, how did you (perceive) at the time, the different ways that the other delegation functioned, that these differences posed constraints, influenced the process, shaped the process? So the importance of the domestic internal decision-making process, and especially how you viewed this as a factor in the ACRS process? Would anyone like to react to that? Don't see any hands up. Yeah. Mr. Fahmy? Yes.

**Nabil Fahmy**

Yes, I would. I actually love that question. Let me put it this way. We had clear macro instructions, all the way up to the top, what we could do as a delegation. I headed the delegation at the time. And we basically had a free hand to push as far as we could within that context. Now, that being said, the interesting part of this question really is, it's easy to talk macro, but it's not easy to talk micro. So, when we started to look at the details, I would turn back and talk to my delegation, all of whom I had dealt with during the years because I've been dealing with disarmament for a while, and they would deal with me very formally. Asked them a question, they answered. Asked another question, they don't answer. So I finally, after one of these sessions, I pulled them back and I said,

“Guys, you need to give me answers to the questions.” And they literally said, “We have to get authorization to give you the answers to these questions. We don’t have the liberty to respond to a question.” That’s the structure of how they work as a military.

So what we did was, I needed to be prepared for the negotiations. It wasn’t about changing our structures, what we did was, between every session we would host simulations. I would be the devil’s advocate. I’d be the one with all the nasty questions, I was the one saying no, all the time. And I would come up with as many issues as I could with our delegation. They would write them down and go and get authorization on all these micro issues. So, when we came to the meetings after that, frankly, it was a marvelous delegation because they were responsive, in real time, to all the questions. But that really, again, I had relations with all of these guys before, so it was easy to find the way to do there, but our structure was, military stuff is the military. And the foreign ministry, if we wanted to do our grand design issues, we need to go to the president, but ACRS never got that far. But I enjoyed the work, although the result was rather disappointing, but I’m very proud of our team.

### **Christian Ostermann**

Thank you very much. Again, I’m hoping David Ivry is still with us because he mentioned the strange fact that MoD was actually in the lead rather than MFA. But for the moment, let me go to any of the other participants who are on. Süha? Would you like to comment on this? I mean, you already referenced this in your remarks early on. So if you could talk a little bit about the dynamics within the Turkish delegation, and also your view of the others as a factor in how ACRS unfolded.

### **Süha Umar**

First of all, let me make a confession. Listening to Fahmy, I envy him, because he had a lot of people behind him preparing for the meetings, which was not my case. I was alone, and nobody cared what I was doing and why I was doing this. So maybe they had confidence in me, or they were afraid of getting involved in, in their view, such a technical and complicated matter. But only once I had an argument with someone in Turkey, and he was a colleague of mine in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and he thought what I did was based on a political decision, and my part, my section was not or should not take political decisions, because he was responsible for the Middle East affairs, but we settled for a friendly solution for that also. In fact, we were aware, and feeling that most of the delegations were working as a team with other parts of their country, the MoD, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and in some cases, some other parties too. And in my opinion, this was a good way of proceeding because it could make everything easier for the ones who are going to discuss or negotiate in the group. And they would feel much more secure than, for example, myself. But on the other hand, the issues we were dealing with, in my opinion, did not necessitate so large an involvement within any country. So more or less, we were discussing things. Maybe I should put it that way, in connection also with the with the educational aspect, which Fahmy also referred to. We were, in fact, most of us, sharing our experiences with the regional countries. I’m talking about talking for the outsiders like Turkey, we were not in a position to discuss something which could affect also our country. We were just sharing our experiences, and giving examples, so that the regional countries who were directly involved would directly benefit from or will be affected, could derive lessons from our experiences. Countries like Turkey. Thank you very much.

### **Christian Ostermann**

Thank you very, very much. I think unless there’s anyone else would like to add, I think I’d like to bring this session to a close. We’ve had a fairly intense two hours. Tomorrow, we’re going to get to the meat of the discussion, to some of the thorny issues, to the fault lines and inflection points and of course, the successes, failures, and lessons learned. So I think I’d like to conclude today with my thanks to all of you for joining us. I hope you can join us tomorrow we’ll be joined by additional other participants. We’re hoping for a really fantastic discussion tomorrow. In the

meantime, thank you stay safe, and we appreciate your willingness to engage on this important matter. Thank you.

### **Session 3: Emerging Fault Lines and Inflection Points**

#### **Christian Ostermann**

Welcome back everyone. Distinguished guests and colleagues, friends, welcome back to day two of this Critical Oral History Workshop on the History of the Arms Control and Regional Security Working Group organized by the Center for Nonproliferation Studies and the Wilson Center's History and Public Policy Program. We're very grateful that all of you have joined us today and taking the time to engage on what we think is an important historical case study.

My name is Christian Ostermann, I direct the History and Public Policy Program at the Wilson Center. I will serve as the moderator today, supported by my colleagues, Dr. Hanna Notte and Dr. Chen Zak Kane at the Center for Nonproliferation Studies who will help monitor the discussion and make sure we get everyone on the record to the extent they would like to speak. Just a couple of preliminary notes. One sort of technical issue that is if you could use the raise hand function in Zoom, it will allow us to make sure we call on you. It actually puts you into a queue. And we can call on you in turn. If that somehow doesn't work, I think some of the older versions of zoom might have trouble with that, feel free to indicate in some other way that you'd like to speak and my colleagues in Washington and elsewhere will help, will let me know. We very much want you to speak up and engage. This is all about you, the testimony of the former eyewitnesses, former officials from many sides of the process involved in ACRS.

Today's session will be tricky. That's even trickier than yesterday because yesterday we were really talking about the inception, the design, the initial sort of choreography, and procedure of the ACRS process. It was perhaps easier, in some ways to do what I had asked everyone to do at the beginning, to put yourself back 30 years into the shoes of yourself 30 years younger, with perhaps more hair, perhaps more youthful enthusiasm, perhaps a little less wise and benefiting from the hindsight of history that you all now have. So this is really a key to this process, to this critical history process, as we call it, to dig through all historical baggage and hindsight and experience since those early 1990s, to get at some of the perceptions, motivations, feelings, decisions at the time. The trickier part today will be that we will also be talking in the second part of this morning's conversation about some of the lessons learned and about, you know, how to move forward. And there obviously, we hope you will also rely on hindsight and your experience and your insights as leading diplomats and experts in this area. But for a moment, if we could take you all back to the early 1990s.

#### **Christian Ostermann**

Today will really be about the larger question of the success and the failure of the ACRS process. We're going to look at some of the fault lines, some of the thorny issues that beset the process, some of the inflection points and turning points, the external events that impacted the process. And then in the second hour move to lessons learned. And my colleague, Hanna Notte, will join me in co-leading that session. We wanted to, before we get to some of the central themes that we've broken, this discussion about the fault lines, we wanted to get back a little bit to the question about the domestic decision-making processes throughout ACRS. We talked about that, we touched on that at the very end of the session, yesterday, and I wanted to just give a chance to - I think the US delegation and members of the US delegation - to reflect for a moment on, you know, the internal process, within the US administration on this. I wonder if, Bob, you'd like to reflect on the process there, and how the internal dynamics within the administration supported but also hindered the process there.

**Bob Einhorn**

Okay, Christian, I'll say just a couple of things. But I think you'll want to hear from Dennis on it. Dennis had a senior, you know, was one of Secretary Baker's main advisors and then carried through into the Clinton administration, so he'd have the best perspective. You know, in this transition in US administrations, I didn't sense at least from my level much difference. It was a very, you know, very sympathetic handover at least as far as the work of ACRS and the broader peace process was concerned. So I don't think domestic politics really had a big impact. But again, this is from my perspective, but maybe you all better hear from Dennis on this.

**Christian Ostermann**

Okay. Let's turn then to Dennis. Yeah?

**Dennis Ross**

I agree with Bob. You know, the Clinton administration, first of all, they asked me to stay on, on a transitional basis, and then subsequently, they made me the envoy. The reason for asking me to stay on, on a transitional basis, was in no small part because there was a sense that the whole Madrid process was very important. They didn't want, you know, to drop the ball as it were, and they wanted continuity on this. President Clinton himself was extremely enthusiastic about pushing the broader approach towards peace. He met for the first time Rabin as prime minister, as president and Rabin as prime minister, in March of 1993. The focus was not on the multilateral process, the focus was on what can be done bilaterally. But those of us, people like me, we obviously saw the multilateral process as being an integral part of the overall Madrid approach, an integral part of the effort to promote peace. And the fact that you had Rabin, who, again, might have been the priority, might well have been bilateral, meaning the bilateral process, but he clearly saw the virtue of this. And, you know, from my vantage point, even though I didn't stay heavily involved in the multilateral process, given what were the demands of me, the fact is, this process worked until Netanyahu came in. I'm not saying this as a criticism, I'm saying it is a historical fact. And when it became clear that there was much less prospect for the bilaterals, then it became harder to sustain the multilateral process.

**Christian Ostermann**

Okay, thank you. Anyone else? Süha, would you like to chime in?

**Süha Umar**

Two small points. First of all, I cannot talk about the domestic policies having an impact on the Middle East Peace Process or on ACRS, but the public opinions, especially in some countries, were, in my opinion, very much had an effect on our impact on what could be done in both bilateral and multilateral. The second thing is, well, what Dennis said about the, if I may put it that way, one of the biggest fault lines was the coming into power of Netanyahu, which affected very adversely the bilaterals first, and, of course, had very important spillover effects on the multilaterals. Thank you very much.

**Christian Ostermann**

Thank you. Bruce, you had raised your hand.

**Bruce Jentleson**

Yeah. And consistent with what Bob and Dennis said. So I was on the policy planning staff as my involvement in this. And at the time, the head of policy planning was Ambassador Sam Lewis, who everybody knows had a very long and distinguished career in the Middle East. And the sense we had and then coordinating with people like Dan Kurtzer, you know, who was the DAS over the Middle East Bureau was, on the one hand, you know, to the extent that some support was needed for United States for major initiatives, it really wasn't there. Because, as Dennis said, the priority was on the bilaterals. As I said, yesterday, you can make progress as long as you stay at least one

step behind the bilaterals. But there wasn't opposition. And in some ways, it fit with sort of the broader thrust of the Clinton-Gore foreign policy, working with Russia, taking security seriously, but in ways that were, you know, trying to get the whole CBMs, CSBMs kind of thing going. So, the "non-support" wasn't opposition, it was basically, "You all have running room. And anything you can achieve would be great. But if you come up with major things that would complicate things in our priority of the bilaterals, that's not what we really want to happen." I kind of saw it as sort of a, you know, net positive environment for the kind of work that ACRS was trying to do. And then it did [inaudible] out of government by the time Netanyahu came to power. And all those efforts that, you know, I think our Canadian friends and others to keep ACRS going in those years, were a lot harder because it had changed in so many ways, you know, the whole Oslo process started to really not make significant progress. So that was my sense that we would, I would say that on the US side, and in the Clinton years, people were supportive, but, you know: "Don't come to us for major investments in political capital."

**Christian Ostermann**

So that's interesting. I would like to just push a little bit and I know that Shimon Stein and Aly Erfan have also raised their hands but, there's been some sense on the part of some people we've talked to that there was, yes, some initial enthusiasm, but that there were really misplaced expectations, poor planning, and mediocre execution, largely by the US State Department team, as someone put it to us, "the US displayed some political enthusiasm and bureaucratic preparation for getting the process off the ground, but then there was a considerable ambivalence and equivocation on what US administration wanted to get out of it. Very little thinking and how to carry it forward once it really got running, no more than modest bureaucratic inertia in sustaining it. And especially as the US kind of reoriented towards Europe, and the bilateral tracks were sapping the remaining interest in Middle East issues." Is that, do you think that's a fair characterization?

**Bruce Jentleson**

I mean, I'll tell you, my-

**Christian Ostermann**

Bob is shaking his head. Go ahead, Bruce.

**Bruce Jentleson**

I'll tell you, my colleagues can too. I mean, I kind of got over that. I mean, I think it has to do with different expectations of what the US role should be, which should be from different players. You know, for the point of view of what the US interests were, there were limits to what we thought ACRS could achieve and what the requirement of investment would be. For example, if it meant pressuring certain parties to ACRS to do things that might get in the way of higher priority of working with them on bilaterally - so I think what you have and what came out yesterday, is different parties have different expectations about what the pace could be, what its value was in the overall Middle East strategic scenario. So to me, it's fair as a criticism representing a different national interest, but at least my expectations were not - I mean, you know, there were mistakes made, I'm not trying to be an apologist. I never had expectations that this would be a super high priority for the White House, nor felt like I could ever make the case that it should be.

**Christian Ostermann**

Great.

**Dennis Ross**

Just let me, just on this. There's no question that the President was highly enthused with the idea that we would end up literally with like four different peace treaties. So the focus was, his focus was clearly on the bilaterals. My attitude, obviously, was once I became the negotiator in the

summer of June of 1993, my attitude was okay, that's my priority. But I also had the sense, look, the people who are for us, who are going to be involved in working these, the multilaterals, they can do just fine without our intervention. So let's give them a license and running room. Number one, I think the way Bruce put it, if there was an issue there, that could complicate the bilaterals we didn't want that to be the case. But we also felt in a lot of respects, the lower the profile is, the greater the likelihood you could begin to institutionalize it.

So there was a sense, if we put too much focus on this, it's going to produce some blowbacks from those who say it's going to detract from what they think should also be the priority. You know, giving this a lower profile, but allowing professional people to work it can create a set of relationships that kind of build a network and allow you to make practical progress. So, you know, I think that explains a lot. Bruce hasn't noticed that it's true, you'll recall that the whole theme of the Clinton administration to begin with was "it's the economy stupid". So, you know, when it came to this, there were as I said, there were five different working groups, the arms control and regional security was just one. The economic one might have had somewhat more interest, but I'd still say in general, the approach was, "we have professional people from our side, who are involved in each of these groups. Let's give them a license to do it. If issues come up, we can always address them." But giving, allowing a lower profile and professionalism to take over actually may sustain this in a better way. That was, I think, it.

**Christian Ostermann**

Great, thank you very much. Shimon Stein has his hand raised, if you could, please unmute yourself.

**Shimon Stein**

I thank you very much. First of all, it's nice to see some faces which I haven't seen since time immemorial. And anyway, I hope that all of them are doing well. I raised my hand because I will join all those Netanyahu bashing guys whenever they come, and whatever they say about him and I am the last one to support him. But to make the connection between the collapse of ACRS and Netanyahu is a vast exaggeration. I think that we have seen the ACRS coming into the stage that ACRS has reached in '95, and the reasons - and since being part of that process from the beginning from '89, 1993 in Washington, and from there on in the ministry - I think that the Netanyahu factor had for us played almost a zero, because of the ideological difficulties and the problems that the ACRS discussion, negotiation, whatever you want to call them have reached. And you could see that coming before Netanyahu came into office. And I would say even till this day, 30 years later, but with some caveats, that those so-called ideological differences in approaching arms control, regional security, and proliferation are still with us. So, I think that putting too much on Netanyahu is not doing the whole reason for the collapse a favor. Thanks.

**Christian Ostermann**

Thank you. Aly Erfan, welcome, and you've got the floor.

**Aly Erfan**

Thank you, Christian. I apologize for not coming, for not showing up yesterday. I'm in the unfortunate position of being a Program Director in the university and I have 45 students who think I'm responsible for everything they do and everything that happens to them. Also, I sometimes get caught up in other things. Good to see everyone, good to see that everyone is looking younger. I think I know why Eli didn't show up. Christian, one of the things that happened to us 30 years on is not only hair changing, but we get a bit confused, a little bit confused as to where the question is now. It's sort of mutated along the way. So I will make a few general remarks as far as I understood from the different interventions from Bob, Bruce, Dennis, Shimon just now, and others. First of all, the general question is why ACRS failed and whether it failed. Well, ACRS was not the only process that failed. The entire Madrid Peace Process failed, with only one

exception, the peace treaty between Israel and Jordan, otherwise everything else failed: on the Palestinian track, on the Syrian track, and the other multilateral working groups never came to full fruition. So, while ACRS had its own dynamic, and I agree with Shimon on that, while ACRS had its own dynamic, let's come to terms with the fact that the 1991 process did not succeed.

Secondly, whether ACRS totally failed depends on what you define success and failure, and as Bob and Mike and Shimon and others will testify, there was a post-ACRS process which I would say did some very good, produced some very good results. We were just a few minutes ago looking for Peter Jones, and Peter and Jill and other Canadian friends did a very good job introducing something that is out there. So ACRS had a momentum that proceeded, and I shouldn't forget Steve Spiegel and his work, so there is a body of work out there. And if you look at the body of work as the result of ACRS, I'd say it's quite impressive and I'll get to that maybe in, at later stage in the discussion. And I agree with Shimon that I would actually, I mean in general, not just with regards to - yes, Shimon, believe it or not, I sometimes agree with you, We're 30 years on, so now we can agree on a few things. If I put the Netanyahu incident, election, in context, not that I want to dwell on it, but I would say that dynamic started with the assassination of Rabin rather than the election of Netanyahu. I would say the turning point was the assassination - from that perspective, not from the ACRS perspective - but the turning point for the Peace Process was the assassination of Rabin, which brings me to my last point, assessing the entire process from '91 onwards, and again, the entire Middle East, the Madrid Peace Process context. This process was not in a vacuum, it was part of a context. And as the context changed, and as the context mutated, the process got hit, found opportunities in some areas, but also got hit in other areas. And I guess at a certain point in time, the tension was too much. And the context pressured the process too strongly. It gave way. Notwithstanding, of course, that ACRS had its own dynamic, but I'm looking at the entirety of the picture. I'm sorry, if I've confused you even more.

### **Christian Ostermann**

No, no. Thank you. It's quite all right. You, in fact, sort of anticipated one key question we'd like to address, and we'll come back to that in terms of inflection points and outside factors affecting the ACRS process. And I'd like to get everybody to comment on kind of turning points. And, you know, in some sense, when was the decision to give up on ACRS? If you can hold that, and think about that for a moment, I'd actually like to break down this question of failures and successes of the ACRS process a bit, and first get to a key dynamic that we're really interested in hearing from you about - how you understood that dynamic and how it affected the process - and that is arms control versus regional security. What was your country's understanding of the relationship between the sequencing of arms control and regional security in the ACRS negotiation? It's obviously a big question, but a really central one. Who'd like to speak on that? Yeah, Süha sure, get started. And then Shimon. Yep.

### **Süha Umar**

Shimon, go ahead.

### **Christian Ostermann**

Okay, let's give Shimon the question.

### **Shimon Stein**

I mean, it's an interesting question. But I guess I would turn back to Bob Einhorn and Michael Yaffe, whoever on the American side, because it's an interesting question: what comes first, arms control or regional security? As I said, I was, at the beginning, not at headquarter. But the discussion about the naming of the group whether we will do the regional security, and arms control second, is an interesting one. And I wonder whether Bob or Dennis can comment on the decision to name the working group "Arms Control and Regional Security", and not vice versa, "Regional Security and Arms Control".

**Christian Ostermann**

The American colleagues, any recollections on that decision and on the sequencing, the relationship between the two? Hm. Dennis, I see you smiling.

**Dennis Ross**

Yeah, I mean, sometimes one can read too much purposefulness into these decisions. You know, the idea of arms control and regional security, we didn't look at these as two competing objectives. I think when we decided to name it arms control, first of all, we had been heavily involved in negotiations with the Soviets and then the Russians, and so the idea of having established arms, you know, having arms control discussions was kind of a natural thing for us to think about. What did we learn from that process in terms of confidence building? I think we had very much in mind the idea of, how can we reduce the risk of conflict? And so, arms control was kind of a natural, but we also had just fought a war. So, you know, it's not like we thought, let's think about the relative weight of arms control versus regional security. We thought, okay, arms control and regional security, regional security, because we just fought a war, arms control, because we're trying to see if we can reduce the risk of conflict and deal with some of the sources that contribute to instability, obviously, in the military area. But the other four working groups were also designed to deal with, how do we improve, you know, some of the sources of conflict? How do we address some of the source of conflict in the region? So at least from my perspective, I wouldn't exaggerate that this was a very conscious decision that we're creating the weight of arms control versus regional security, and I just don't recall that being really part of the discussion. Honestly, I don't recall spending a lot of time coming up with the title.

**Christian Ostermann**

Yep. Bob?

**Shimon Stein**

Well, you're the one responsible for the title-

**Christian Ostermann**

Hold on, hold on, Shimon hold on, let me give the floor to Bob, who had his hand raised, and then I'll let you ask your question.

**Bob Einhorn**

Yeah, we shouldn't make too much of the title. I forget, frankly, how we came up exactly with that title. But it's less important than the conceptual differences that existed from the outset of the other process. In the US view, you know, we have to take into account the starting point for this process. The starting point was a situation where, as Dennis says, in the wake of a major armed conflict, but a situation where only one Arab state in the region had diplomatic relations with Israel. It was, we talked yesterday about these awkward opening steps in the process, where the countries of the region were not prepared to talk about regional security issues right away, but we began with this educational process of sharing experience that took place outside the region. So, it was a question of taking baby steps, and the US, I think, was sympathetic with the need to progress slowly, gradually to build confidence all the way. Now, the difference, you know, the main protagonist within the region about this approach were Egypt and Israel. And the Israelis, Shimon and other Is... - I don't know if other Israelis have joined the call, but they can explain the Israeli perspective - but it was clear that the region wasn't ready for formal arms control measures, in the Israeli view, the region was not ready to tackle the nuclear problem, and so forth, but needed to build confidence, build some trust, and to start slow.

The Egyptians had a different perspective, and Aly can comment on that, and that was that dealing with some of these formal arms control measures, and especially dealing with the nuclear issue

could build confidence, because that was one of the major divides within the region, and therefore, you had to tackle it early on, rather than just to set it aside and never get back to it. So you know, and neither side, you know, he had his views about this. Right from the outset, they explain different philosophies toward the process. And the role of the United States and other extra territorial parties was to try to somehow, you know, bridge this difference, or if it couldn't be bridged, at least kind of set it aside. And so, we were always looking for items on the agenda, where we can, you know, give some nutritional value to either side. So if you couldn't tackle a nuclear issue, then schedule a meeting with the IAEA to talk about how you verify compliance with certain nuclear obligations, while at the same time pursuing the confidence building agenda and moving from the conceptual to the technical and the operational, and so forth. And, you know, but this difference persisted throughout the several years of ACRS work. And, toward the end, we simply couldn't reconcile these differences. And the US team, and I personally, made major efforts in the '95, '96 period to try to find some acceptable work program.

But it didn't, it didn't work. We had ideas like, "okay, we're not going to deal with what was considered the Israeli nuclear problem at the outset. But let's talk about some kinds of measures which theoretically could get at this problem, without asking Israel to undertake commitments it was not prepared to make." We tried back and forth, but it never, we could never come to terms. And because of the consensus rule, you know, at a certain point, Egypt said that it wasn't prepared to support additional meetings, whether plenary or even other intersessional meetings, unless an agenda can be worked out that Egypt could agree with, and were simply at the end, not prepared to bridge that difference.

And just one last point of, you know, Shimon has emphasized these conceptual differences, one of the main reasons why at a certain point ACRS couldn't progress. But I think another major contributing factor was concern among a number of the Arab delegations, and especially Saudi Arabia, not to go forward with an agenda to the point of kind of conceding that there was a normalized relationship between the Arab world and Israel. So, the Saudis and several of the North African Arab countries and others in the Gulf, were prepared to go along and actually to develop these various confidence building measures, whether it was in the communications, the maritime areas, or the sharing of military information, to put these ideas on paper. And that was very, very positive. I mean, you know, in the European context, developing these measures took a much longer period of time. But the problem was, they weren't prepared actually to go from having these on paper to implementing them, because implementation of these measures would suggest normalization, especially to the Saudis, and they weren't prepared to go that far. So the process kind of hit a plateau and couldn't go farther. Now, you can, you know, for the Saudis normalization was not possible without more progress on the bilateral track. And so, there was a kind of linkage between the-

### **Christian Ostermann**

What was the timing of that? At what, what point did you recognize that those differences couldn't be reconciled?

### **Bob Einhorn**

Well, you know, again I think, and Mike Yaffe can speak up on this, but it was really in the '95, '96 timeframe, when we made major efforts to try to find an agenda acceptable to all, and that failed. You know, we talk about various junctures. I think the Israeli-Jordanian peace, in, I guess, fall of '94, if I'm remembering correctly, that gave a kind of boost to the process, and a lot of the headway we made in the operational baskets was made during that period. But over time - and you can debate the extent to which Netanyahu's election contributed to this - but the progress in the bilaterals began to sag and people became more pessimistic. And I think countries like Saudi Arabia said, "as long as we're not making progress in that area, we can't support activities in ACRS that would be, that would amount to normalization." And that's one of the reasons for the demise

of the process, together with a conceptual difference between formal arms control and the nuclear issue on the one hand and confidence building on the other.

**Christian Ostermann**

Thank you very much.

**Dennis Ross**

Christian, could I just intervene for a second? Because regrettably, I'm going to have to leave in a couple of minutes. I just want to make one point on this, you know, the kind of dividing line. We happen to be having this discussion on the anniversary of the Rabin assassination. And I do think, it's not that, it is not that things changed immediately after that, because they didn't, because Netanyahu doesn't become Prime Minister until the summer of 1996. But the fact is that you had six weeks before the assassination, we concluded the interim agreement between the Israelis and the Palestinian Authority--the most important of all the bilateral agreements with the Palestinians. There was a high expectation on the Saudi side, because I was working closely with them, that we could succeed on Syria. And that did influence them, I think in terms of their attitudes. It's true, there was a conceptual divide between Egypt and Israel. But it is interesting that on the non... - on the other working groups, we began to see the real slowdown in them only after Netanyahu.

And you know, we had a very large economic process, not just a working group, but we actually had through 1996 - and Cairo hosted the last one - major economic conferences that the economic working group was connected to; 1996 was the last of those. So that's why I don't raise Netanyahu as coming in and saying, "Boy, you know, we have a different approach." But I'm raising, in terms of the assassination of Rabin begins a process, and it does have an effect over time, once Bibi comes in, on the other working groups, and it certainly has an effect, as Bob was saying, on the Saudis, who are very mindful of the Syrians at this point and trying to keep Assad in a certain place. So, I unfortunately, I'm gonna have to leave because I've got some other commitments. But I think it was very useful. I look forward to anything you write up.

**Christian Ostermann**

Thank you very much. Thank you. Mike Yaffe has raised his hand but also want to- Aly, Aly Erfan has raised his hand and Shimon, you also had a quick rejoinder. Do you? Is this still on this issue, Shimon? Or should I come back to you later?

**Shimon Stein**

Well, you can come back to me later, because I would want to still comment on the things that I find extremely useful that Bob also said, and also on Netanyahu's approach, but later, I'll wait for my-

**Christian Ostermann**

Okay, let me turn to Aly Erfan then, Aly? And then we'll go to Mike.

**Aly Erfan**

I think, Mike, I think Mike should go first, because we come to the US perspective. So let's continue doing the-

**Christian Ostermann**

-You are also very polite. Great, Mike?

**Michael Yaffe**

Thank you, Aly. Appreciate that. I guess, I want to just tap my recollection of how ACRS came to an end in a way that it started to have trouble before Rabin's assassination. And you could see this

by the way that the working group operates, so the working group is operating where it sets its agenda at the plenary sessions. And the last plenary session was in Tunis in December 1994. And we then used that as our work plan to work through the various meetings and progress that people expected within, for the year, with the next plenary to be scheduled in Paris in September '95. That plenary never happened, because we never got the consensus to go ahead, because of the conceptual differences that Bob had raised, in particular. But it basically, it had reached the point where, you know, particularly between Israelis and Egyptians, they couldn't bridge the differences. And I think some of that was also in the wake of what happened in May of '95, with regard to the extension of the NPT. And that put a lot more pressure - about the results of the NPT - put a lot more pressure back on to looking at ACRS as a way to move forward more on the nuclear, addressing the nuclear issue.

**Christian Ostermann**

And can you pinpoint, in your recollection, when you came to this turning point?

**Michael Yaffe**

So, again, it comes back to this, working through the agenda, if you will. And so that, because we didn't, we started actually planning for the 95, for the Paris plenary session, we started collecting topics. But we weren't getting there for the acceptance of going forward with it. And where we really saw it hard was, the last major meeting on any particular issue happened in Jordan in September 1994, which was a meeting to deal with establishing a charter for a regional security center, a regional center. And parties came together, we did a good job of negotiating the text for it, but then we couldn't get consensus on that text to go forward. And it was very clear that that was made contingent, conditional on making progress with regard to moving forward in addressing the nuclear issue. Then, from my recollection, after Rabin's assassination, Peres went to Cairo when he was acting Prime Minister and tried to see if he could resolve the issue, and in general, just to keep things moving forward - it wasn't just ACRS, but it was other issues - and was not able to move that forward. And I believe then, in January 1996, Bob went to Cairo, and I think after that went to Jerusalem, and I believe it was when he came back from that trip that he kind of said that it wasn't looking like we're going to be able to pursue this forward at this time. And then we went into the election process for Netanyahu.

**Christian Ostermann**

Right, Bob, does that accord with your memories just to get that on the record? Yeah, that you're nodding. Okay. I'll take that as a yes. Let me go to Shimon. And then to Aly. Shimon, you're, you're-

**Shimon Stein**

Well, I just wanted to commend Bob, because for his kind of summary of how things went at the time, and I, it's not an accident that I asked my question about regional security and arms control. Because here, already, the differences are quite apparent. Whereas for Israel, ever since and until today, the region is the prime objective, and not global instruments like arms control or disarmament. So therefore, I think that our approach was primarily on the region with the arms control part of the process, as Bob has described it, and I fully share Bob's opinion about the ripeness of the region, or lack of ripeness in addressing some issues. And I would say that, I mean, I share Aly's view that the ACRS at the end of the day was not a total failure. Because there are things that will be helpful as we, at one point, will resume the - and it is almost inevitable to happen. The question is, under what circumstances? Do we need another major clash in the region, as was the case in '91, which has then led the US, with a symbolic participation by Russia, to decide to restructure the whole region, regional security, the security structure? And the ideas that never came to fruition to democratize the region, which Baker and Bush also had in mind, but were given a veto by the Saudis who didn't want to go down that process? So there were many things that I consider to be positive outcome of ACRS, for that matter, and I think that--

**Christian Ostermann**

We'll get to those.

**Shimon Stein**

Yeah, I'm sure that we will get to those. I think that it will be interesting to hear from Aly because, at the end of the day, the Egyptians, as they saw the process unfolding, and as they saw that they will not be able to bear the outcome that they would like, then came also some other considerations by the Egyptians. And one of them, and Mike has pointed to which was key, is also the upcoming 1995 NPT Conference and the extension and the resolution that is still with us. But just to finish on two small points: I think that Michael has mentioned Shimon Peres, and Netanyahu is already mentioned a few times, but I think that Peres and Netanyahu hold different views as to the overall subject of regional security and arms control. And I can say today, as somebody who is an outsider and watch Netanyahu's approach, he is somebody who doesn't want to advocate at all discussing matters relating to arms control and disarmament. Peres, when he went to Cairo - and Mike, you will recall, he made some headlines in Israel because of some controversial statement that he made on the nuclear issue. So he is much more, he was much more open minded, as Netanyahu was, and still is, when it comes to issues which are related to arms control and disarmament. I very well, to sum up, recall Mike, the meeting in Jordan because it came apart, it became there quite clear that even within the Arab group, Jordan and Egypt had some difficulties. And I remember Abdullah Toukan and Nabil, they're having some internal fighting concerning the course that the Arab group will take. And at that time...

**Christian Ostermann**

Shimon, do you know, if the Peres statement was approved?

**Shimon Stein**

You catch me, I can't, I can't, I don't remember. But as I said, I wanted also to point out that there's also something which happened over time within the Arab group, the internal dynamic was quite interesting. Bob has pointed out to the Saudis, but over time, the Jordanians also felt that the Egyptian are kind of taking over the Arab agenda in leadership, and Abdullah Toukan, perhaps as a person couldn't sustain that notion. But whether it was a matter of personality or whether it was much higher, I can't tell you, but perhaps Aly is much more, in a better position to enlighten us on that subject.

**Christian Ostermann**

Let's go to Aly, then. He's got his, patiently, had his hand up. Thank you so much, Shimon. Aly.

**Aly Erfan**

Thank you, Christian. And just to address Shimon's last point, I have to admit, he has more brain cells than I have left because I do not recall that Jordan meeting, the Jordan [audio cuts out] that I recall that's after Tunis, actually, it was Hatem Seif El Nasr who attended, not Nabil Fahmy. And so I'm not sure what Shimon is referring to, maybe he's referring to something different. But let me go back to the initial question on how ACRS came about, A-C-R-S. And I'll agree with Dennis, who unfortunately had to leave us, I don't want to get hung up on why it's A-C-R-S not, R-S-A-C and that sort of thing. I think that one of the problems, at least I personally had with the process, since it started - I apologize for this noise, there's some construction going on next door - one of the problems I've always had with the ACRS process is getting hung up and caught up in definitions and sequences and what comes first: should there be arms control before regional security, regional security before arms control, and whether arms control is part of regional security, when you achieve arms control, you enhance security in the region? Or is it because the region is so insecure that then, therefore, one should actually get into arms control - because if the place is on fire, take the matches away from the kids.

So this is a philosophical argument that I was never very fond of but again, I don't have a very conceptual mind. I would have looked, I looked at each item in and of itself. Certainly, how it fit in the broader picture, but in and of itself. I recall some of the discussions, debates indeed I had with Bob and Mike and Fred Axelgard and Shimon and Eli and others on confidence building measures, and why should confidence building measures be only in the conventional area? Don't you need to build confidence in the field of nuclear weapons, chemical weapons, biological weapons, missiles? So this separation, division, in my view, was artificial. This was a very challenging working group to begin with. And I will remind you all, go back to the invitation letter to the Madrid Conference.<sup>1</sup> It mentions four working groups, not five. It did not include ACRS. Because until Madrid, the parties had not agreed on how to deal with ACRS. The parties had agreed on refugees, water, environmental and economic cooperation. And then it said "other issues", or something along the lines, I mean, recognizing that there are discussions going on for the fifth. So, it was a difficult working group to set up, to begin with, and for understandable reasons.

**Christian Ostermann**

We covered some of the grounds yesterday.

**Aly Erfan**

Yeah.

**Christian Ostermann**

So I kind of like to keep us focused for the moment on the issues of arms control versus regional security. Is there anyone else who'd like to - Thank you, Aly, that was really helpful. Was there anyone else who'd like to comment on this briefly, because we also want to cover a couple more questions. Yes, Jill.

**Hanna Notte**

We cannot hear you Aly.

**Aly Erfan**

Okay, can you hear me now?

**Hanna Notte**

Now we can hear you, yes.

**Aly Erfan**

Yeah. Okay. I'm sorry, I switched to another network. So what I was saying is that, I'm not sure I agree with a need for defining which [inaudible] versus the parallel approach. I never agreed to this. And as I said, confidence building measures, you can work out confidence building measures in all different areas, it doesn't have to be only in the conventional sense. But as I said, it was a difficult working group to begin with, it was a difficult, it was a challenging subject to put on the agenda of the Madrid Peace Process in general.

**Christian Ostermann**

Thank you.

**Aly Erfan**

Again, I will take you back to context. Shimon refers to the situation in Jordan, which again, I don't remember very well, but along the way, this was not the only situation. Let me remind you

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<sup>1</sup> Conveners' note: This applies to the [Israeli invitation letter to Madrid](#). All [other invitation letters](#) included a reference to the five working groups of the multilateral track.

that in the Doha - I can't remember if it was a plenary or a workshop. Jordan did not send Abdullah Toukan, they sent Nader Al-Dahabi - who was at the time the president of the Jordanian Airlines - in protest to something that happened on the bilateral track, I can't remember what it was. In Doha, we almost adopted the famous declaration, but the Saudis and the other Gulf states objected and drew a line. The countries were very eager wanting, of course, this to be the Doha Declaration, and just again, for context. So really, you cannot take ACRS out of the regional context, you cannot take it out, just as much as you cannot take the entire Madrid Peace Process out of the context. The Madrid Peace Process started because of a change of context, started because of the demise of the Soviet Union, started because of the euphoria of liberating Kuwait, and the new world order.

### **Christian Ostermann**

Okay-

### **Aly Erfan**

-No, I haven't finished, I'm sorry, Christian, I haven't finished. Let me just go to, the final point I want to make is the NPT point. When did the process collapse? When did Bob and Mike finally decide that this was not doable? I don't know, of course, the dynamic, but what I can tell you is, come '94, '95 surely the NPT, I can't recall if it was May or April, was looming, was around the corner, and this put pressure on us and on others, and it goes back to the point of confidence and trust for - I'll speak for the Egyptians, I cannot speak for others, for the Egyptians to make this blind leap of faith of an indefinite extension of NPT. You need some form of assurance, some kind of trust for us to be able to do that. The Declaration [of Principles], which I think... I don't know why everyone is avoiding talking about the declaration, because it seems to me that this was the crux of the whole thing. This is what, in my view, the success of ACRS, and definitely also equally the failure of ACRS. The idea of the declaration came up in Vienna, after Oslo. When Oslo was signed, it was seen as a very important development, and let's work on something. And I think with discussions we had, as far as I can remember, in Vienna, we went back to the [Reykjavik declaration](#), this one-liner, which sort of indicated the new spirits between the president of the US and the Soviet Union, at the time. ACRS, the declaration of ACRS is all but adopted for the exception of one paragraph. And that-

### **Christian Ostermann**

Aly, I think we lost you. Aly? Connection seems to have been lost. So why don't we go to Jill? You have your hand up on the question of arms control versus regional security. And then I'd like to pivot to a couple of other questions. Jill?

### **Jill Sinclair**

Thanks, Christian, I won't belabor any of these points. But just a couple of thoughts from sort of the non-principal player, because Canada was very much in the background, but very active. We were always conscious of this tension between kind of the regional security and the arms control piece. And I have to say, I think if I was, I hope I'm not being revisionist here, but it was always clear to us that it sort of came down to the Israeli point of view and the Egyptian point of view. And it was articulated and manifested most acutely when we got to the NPT Review Conference. So, thank you, Mike, for bringing that, because I remember living that. I remember - Don had to run off, unfortunately, but he did an awful lot of background negotiation on the ground around the NPT for that Middle East declaration that came out of that. But it was just that it was kind of an inflection point of, we knew that it was about creating the context, i.e., within the region, to enable whatever else would come out of it. And so, that was very much what we were aware of. So I can only tell you that that dynamic was present with us the whole time and everything that we did on the maritime side, or however we played into ACRS, was conscious of that tension. Over.

**Christian Ostermann**

Thank you very much. Süha, did you have anything specific on this issue of arms control versus regional security? And we try to get Aly back here, so once Aly is back online, we'll give him the floor. But does anyone else would like to comment on this specific question? We have several other folks in the Zoom room, feel free to speak up. Süha? Yep.

**Süha Umar**

Thank you very much. I was waiting for too long to say a couple of things on this specific subject. Most of the points were covered by Bob and others, Michael also. First of all, the name of the group, it doesn't matter much, but it matters a lot. From the very start, we at least, this is Turkey, thought that the arms control was too tricky and too early to deal with. Instead of it, we thought to start with regional security and confidence building, because we knew what could come up - especially the nuclear issue was very thorny and delicate. And in the end, it came up and it blocked a lot of the work of the ACRS and it is one of the, in my opinion, it is one of the main reasons why ACRS, I will not say failed, because ACRS did not fail, but what was achieved in ACRS was not put into implementation. One attempt was made, and that was the Reliant Mermaid search and rescue exercise, and it proved that what was achieved, agreed on and put aside was even more difficult when it comes to implementing it.

If we go back to why the ACRS failed, I'm afraid there are - I need to make a correction. It was not Netanyahu's coming to power, did not affect adversely ACRS and such or the multilaterals, as it affected very adversely the bilaterals. It had a very important spillover effect, as I said before, on the multilaterals, on ACRS. Another correction: yes, the ACRS was a success until 1995. And things put aside and decided on ACRS were very important. And the whole exercise, starting from bringing together all the interested parties, make them talk to each other and make them talk to each other continuously was one of the main goals of the exercise, was achieved. And that was a great achievement, in my opinion. Also, the Israeli-Jordanian coming together, even more than with the other countries, was an achievement. It could lead to other achievements and developments, the positive developments as far as ACRS is concerned. And all of those, in my opinion, were related to confidence building, and which could improve the regional security and stability.

**Christian Ostermann**

Thank you. Thank you. I'd like to give, I think Aly's back, he was cut off in the middle of his thought. Aly, is there anything you'd like to add, briefly, because we do need to move on.

**Aly Erfan**

One last word, two seconds talking of confidence and trust. And if I were to describe, characterize the Egyptian-Israeli disagreements, I think it was over that. Egyptians, we felt that Israel is trying to wiggle out of any commitment in any sort of agreement, the Israelis suspect or do not have confidence in us, assuming that we are trying to take them down a slippery slope. So we, trust in general, I'm not talking about CBMs, but trust in general, possibly did play a part in the Egyptian-Israeli differences.

**Christian Ostermann**

Thank you very much. I want to, we need to move on to sort of the final - in fact have already been talking about some of the questions in the lessons learned in the final section. But I do want to just revisit and also ask the Americans in terms of inflection points, the turning points: the moment when you thought this was, in fact, doomed to fail. Any other, any turning points that come to mind? We've had several mentioned here. And of course, the Review Conference looms large. Any other thoughts on, kind of, key moments, key turning points in the process? From where you sat, which may well be different from, you know, the others? Anyone? Bruce.

**Bruce Jentleson**

Yeah, I'm gonna defer to Mike on some of that. Let me just make one quick point of where we've been. It really was, as Dennis and I said at the outset, arms control and regional security was a phrase, not a prioritization. You know, we now call, what was called the East Asia Bureau, the Indo Pacific. Is that prioritizing Indo over Pacific? And I think the United States did try both to - you know, a sense of our own strategic view that the region needed to deal with confidence building measures before it got to these large questions of nuclear and other kinds of weapons, but at the same time not take it off the agenda. So I feel like that was our approach, you know, basically, objectively. Now, people could disagree with that. But as has been said, it was a package, not an implicit prioritization. And the other thing, I'll say, I'll come back to this later, Christian, is that I think, as we talked about success and failure, we wanted to have a net assessment in a degrees approach, right? Because there are ways, I agree with my colleagues, that it succeeded and other ways where it fell short. So as we move into that, I'll come back on that when you get to it.

**Christian Ostermann**

Okay, well, let's, I think, unless my colleagues want to raise any other questions in this first session, we should move into the final session on lesson learned. To look at the - yes?

**Aly Erfan**

Mike has his hand up.

**Christian Ostermann**

I'm sorry, Mike. I didn't see you, I'm sorry.

**Michael Yaffe**

That's okay. Um, you know, one of the things I think we need to bear in mind is, in a broader context, defining the Middle East was a difficult problem in itself and defining it as a region was difficult. Many people don't necessarily think of it as a region with regionalism. And so the name - I wasn't there when they brought the name together - but the notion of having something that says, we are thinking together as a region, was unique, and in and of itself, an achievement. And part of that is also the recognition that parties, about how, who was in the region, who was not part of the region, and who was acknowledged formally, in a region where only one country, when it started, had normalized relations between Israel and Egypt. And so the process as it went along, I thought, not only was it an educational process, but it was also one where parties were getting used to dealing with each other. Used to many even within - and Aly, you can correct me here - but after the Egypt-Israel agreement, many Egyptian diplomats found themselves alienated within the region for quite a number of years. And here was a regional forum that was bringing all that and most of the faith back into it. And I remember some Egyptian delegates saying to me, they had never been to some of the countries and throughout the Middle East, and that this was providing the first opportunity.

But I often tell a story, and I'll tell it here, which is, I think, emblematic of the development within ACRS about one thing, which was the relationships that were developed. So when ACRS began, many of the delegations, when they wanted to address Israel, raised the question that they wanted to raise with its co-chairs - with Russia and the United States. And we would then dutifully repeat the question, and we would also repeat the answers going back and forth. Over time, countries started addressing each other directly. The last one to hold out is Saudi Arabia. And it was at the plenary in December of 1994, where we were finishing our closing remarks, as we're going around in all the countries, and said, you know, what is your summary? What is your assessment of this meeting? And so on. And each country would do it, one by one. And they were pretty performative, to be honest with you. And so people were generally milling about talking to each other, and so on. And the Saudi, it was Prince Turki at the time, got up, and during his remarks, he addressed

the question directly to the Israelis, not through the co-chairs. And I very vividly remember, everybody stopped. And it was one of those moments when you said, "wow, something different has happened here." And as I recall, and correct me if I'm wrong, but I mean many of us were there, David Ivry responded back in Arabic. And so it was another moment that kind of shook me, it took four years or so to get to that one point of having that kind of direct contact and recognition. And so that, to me, was also a turning point, to answer your question.

**Christian Ostermann**

Great. Thank you. Thank you so much. Let me bring in Hanna to kind of push - Aly, Süha, we'll get back to you shortly. But I think I'd like to give Hanna the floor to pose the questions. And maybe we'll go to Shimon, right away.

**Session 4:**

**Successes and Failures of the Process, and Lessons Learnt**

**Hanna Notte**

Thank you, Christian. And thank you for this, Mike, for this anecdote, and it's a perfect segue perhaps into a broader conversation on the successes, the shortcomings, the lessons learned from ACRS. And so, Shimon, I realize that you have to leave us in about 10, 15 minutes, if I could turn to you next and ask you, from an Israeli perspective, what were the major lessons learned in the ACRS process? And if I may, if you could go back to the time, and you could advise your government perhaps to do something differently in how it approached ACRS, what would that be with hindsight? Would you have done anything differently? We'll ask the other this question as well-

**Shimon Stein**

Ah Hanna, what kind of all-encompassing question in 10 minutes, and I haven't even-

**Hanna Notte**

Well, you have a big mind, so-

**Shimon Stein**

I'll have to think about it, if I could have to go back and make a recommendation... I think that something which perhaps was less relevant for the Egyptians - because Egypt was already in the mode of engaging on arms control, and disarmament issues, that is part of the Egyptian's diplomacy to engage on those issues - I think what the ACRS process pushed us is to take a totally different approach to the whole notion of arms control, regional security, and disarmament for that matter, because we had a very tiny community. And I think that the need to prepare ourselves had created some dynamism within the Israeli bureaucracy, which for my perspective was extremely beneficial, useful, and helped us later on bring in place the arms control and disarmament and the whole interaction, I would say, with the international community on a subject that Israel always chose not to engage and have quite a known position which we had advocated until the ACRS process started. Well, we had to create a bureaucracy, we had to shape a concept, which ultimately led to a speech which is still considered a milestone. And that is a speech that was made by my, at that time, Director General Eytan Bentsur in front of the Conference on Disarmament where Israel has laid out its approach to arms control and regional security.

Broadly speaking about lessons learned, unfortunately, I wonder whether the region - and don't forget, when we speak about it, one major event took place, and that was the '91 war. And what then, the US took away from the end of the Cold War, which was kind of setting the stage for such a process. Hadn't it been for the end of the Cold War, and the war in '91, I wonder whether we

would have been today sitting and talking about it, let alone launching the Madrid Process and the multilateral process. So the role of such a major event that had triggered a process, and the enormous engagement by the US administration, first and foremost, Secretary Baker, that is to say the role of extra regional at the time, was paramount for such a process. Because, and I don't know whether the countries of the region have already reached the stage of recognition that they don't need any extra help in order to engage of matters of national security, which was the case at that time. So without the role of extra-regionals at the time, we could not have come that far. And I pose the question whether, in order to relaunch or launch a regional process, a regional dialogue - mind you that the region, and it is unprecedented, is lacking a regional forum, where matters of security are being discussed.

I mean, you have in Asia, notwithstanding the latent problems in crisis, still forums where all the countries come together and discuss it, you have it in Latin America, you have it in Africa. And the region of the Middle East, with all the difficulties that Mike had pointed out to the definition of the region, stands out as one region without any forum to engage on regional matters. So, lesson learned, I think that we should continue and make progress on the ripeness, on the recognition that if we will not help ourselves, probably with the losing interest of the Middle East - in fact by the US, as the US is moving, shifting its strategic interest elsewhere, with Russia not playing that of a substantive role, with China that doesn't have much interest in such issues, only in the economic one - I wonder where will we get the resources in order to engage in a process that I consider to be vital on the way to reaching certain stability in the region. The final point, as important as that issue of arms control is, I think that ever since the 90s, there are few other challenges, which are facing the region that are not less urgent in terms of the region: climate, energy, water, refugees, I mean, all are really issues that the region is in urgent need to address, either by itself, or as I said, when there is no other way, by extra-regionals who recognize the importance and the interdependency between the Middle East and Europe for that matter, or some other regions.

**Hanna Notte**

Thank you for that.

**Shimon Stein**

This was also quite-

**Hanna Notte**

Yeah

**Shimon Stein**

-preliminary. If I would have time and you will revisit the issue with me sometime in the future, I might come with some other insights. Thank you very much. I found that very interesting and I was more than happy to see some faces that I haven't seen for a long time. And wish all of you good health. Thank you.

**Hanna Notte**

Thank you.

**Bob Einhorn**

Shimon, do you have to go right away?

**Shimon Stein**

Yes.

**Bob Einhorn**

Cause I have a question for you.

**Shimon Stein**

Please. For you? Always available.

**Bob Einhorn**

Thank you, Shimon. At the beginning of the process, we asked each of the delegations to submit a kind of statement, you know, long-term objectives and goals and so forth. And I thought that was a useful exercise. Now, correct me if my recollection is wrong, but Israel did not reject eventually joining the NPT. It was very clear on certain conditions that would have to be fulfilled, whether it's peace with the neighbors, the removal of concerns about certain WMD ambitions of neighbors, and so forth. But unlike India and Pakistan, which took the view that the NPT is a discriminatory treaty, we will never join it, Israel never took that view. In principle, some day, you know, when they lion lay down with the lamb and all of the rest, there could be Israeli joining the NPT and for squaring the nuclear option. That - if my recollection is correct, and if that remains the Israeli position, and I don't know if it does remain - and then this was a kind of common ground, at least, that allowed us to hold ACRS together for a while, because everyone agreed that the, you know, the goal was a Middle East without nuclear weapons. And there were different views on how you get there. But at least it was that degree of commonality which helped us in the early years. Is that a correct recollection, Shimon?

**Shimon Stein**

Well, I don't want to... Well, it's another long conversation, which I will be happy to discuss with you, Bob and others, but we did not join the NPT in the first place, unlike some other countries who have joined and violated in a flagrant manner in the Middle East, because we felt that our interest, our national security interest will not be served by joining that global instrument. So, you could theoretically say, if we reach at one point, at some point where our interests could be served under such an instrument, that Israel can consider joining it. But you can rest assured that, for the foreseeable future, it's a nonissue for any Israeli government in the coming years. And the situation has even been, as I said, exacerbated because of a number of Middle Eastern countries who have joined that instrument and had violated it, being members of that instrument, which kind of led many in Israel to even reinforce their position regarding why it is not in our interest to join an instrument that some other of our neighbors, Iraq, Syria, Iran, have joined and nevertheless took the liberty of undermining the very instrument that should have served their national interests. So the question at this stage doesn't present itself on the Israeli national security table.

**Hanna Notte**

Thank you for that. Thank you, Shimon. I do see that Eli Levite has also joined. Eli, for your information, we're now discussing lessons learned. And what, if anything, delegations, states, should have done differently. Or would do differently if they could now go back 30 years. If you want to come in on that question, you're very welcome to, otherwise we will also pose it to the Egyptian and the American delegations, for anyone who wishes to address it.

**Ariel Levite**

Thank you, I say you go with the others. I'll come in later.

**Hanna Notte**

Sure, sure. Is there anyone from the Egyptian or American delegation who would like to take that lessons learned question? Bob, sure.

**Bob Einhorn**

Well, a number of scattered thoughts about lessons learned. One lesson learned is, it's difficult to make peace, to have regional security arrangements, if the political context in the region is not right. And, you know, the Madrid process was a promising beginning. The Jordanian-Israeli peace was, it gave a boost to the process. But at the end of the day, the regional security dimension was not very hospitable. And this gets to another point about participation. You know, sooner or later, the process would have come a cropper, would have failed, because of some critical countries being absent. We discussed this a bit yesterday. But it was a kind of artificiality about the ACRS participation, you know, one of the key fault lines was on the nuclear issue where, you know, Israel's capability was the main target of a lot of concerns by other participants. But you didn't have in the room Iraq, Iran, Libya, and Syria. All of which, at one time or another, had nuclear weapons aspirations, and some may continue to have those aspirations. So it's kind of artificial to see this nuclear issue as an Arab-Israeli issue. And one lesson is, you have to have appropriate participation. Whether it's possible to get Iran and Israel around the table is another story. Perhaps look, the Abraham Accords, may provide a better context for these kinds of discussions. We talked earlier about concerns about premature normalization, you know, through confidence building implementation and so forth. Well, perhaps the Abraham Accords will provide a somewhat better context.

Another lesson, I think, is that experts working on mostly technical issues can make more headway than diplomats talking about general conceptual issues. It was one of the positive achievements of ACRS that these technical experts, whether in the communications, the maritime, or the military information exchange areas, could really make some progress. They spoke a common language; they were technical types. And I'm not sure what lesson to draw, but if there were discussions in the region on some of these functional issues, technical issues, maybe they could make more headway, whether on coping with climate change, or with the pandemic or, you know... but engaging at a technical level among specialists, I think, was one of the successes.

You know, personalities count in these kinds of processes, individuals count. You had very capable diplomats representing governments that didn't carry that much weight in the process. But they personally could have an impact because they were energetic, they were capable, and they were people of goodwill. And that to me, I mean, I remember Mike talked about, you know, it took a while for the Saudis to address Israel directly. But I remember, you know, during coffee breaks, you're looking at Israelis and Saudis kind of chatting with each other, they're joking with each other. And getting individuals together in a room, and often in informal settings, I think, can be very positive, and kind of your in-person engagement - you know, Zoom calls don't give you that opportunity, but in-person engagement does.

Shimon made a point before he left about the role of the extra-territorial, extra-regional countries. I think this was pretty indispensable. I mean, the US often takes a position, especially dealing with the Israeli-Palestinian process, that "look, you know, the regional participants have to want to do this more than the United States, more than countries outside the region." And that's true. But clearly in ACRS, it was really necessary to have a lot of the impetus from the outside, certainly the United States had a major impact. But you know, the Canadians, the Turks, the Dutch, in their particular areas, were very, very important. And at least in ACRS - whether in kind of future engagement this will be necessary, who knows.

Another, less defined lesson that I'll mention, you know, expectations have to be kept pretty modest. And I think they were in ACRS, in the beginning. But then we ran into difficulty with these, this conceptual divide on priorities and agenda. But especially in a region, like the Middle East in '91, '92, you really had to have very modest expectations, at least at the outset. I'll leave it at that.

**Christian Ostermann**

Bob, could I ask you, push you on, you talked about experts and individual personalities, sort of taking the lens, completely the other looking at the other side of the spectrum, and this sort of builds a little bit on – Hanna, feel free to chime in - on, what Dennis Ross mentioned earlier about the US keeping a low profile here. Do you see one of the failures as to engage a broader public or broader constituency in the region on the part of the US to keep this sort of at the elite level? Is that something we should think about in terms of the failures?

**Bob Einhorn**

I don't think the US adopting public diplomacy techniques to reach the populations in the region would have had a very positive effect. It wasn't our position. It wasn't the US' role to try to engage the publics in regional populations. It was for the governments themselves to do that. And I think there could have been an adverse reaction for the US trying to push its agenda with the regional country populations.

**Christian Ostermann**

Hanna?

**Hanna Notte**

Thank you. I think we should go to Aly next on the lessons learned question, and what could one do differently if given the chance to go back.

**Christian Ostermann**

Yeah.

**Aly Erfan**

Thank you, Hanna. Let me just remind you, Karim is also on the screen. So, I'm not the one speaking for Egypt and Egyptians, I'm only speaking for myself in my personal experience with ACRS. We're not doing the successes and failures, we were only looking at lessons learned. Am I right? So, okay. I think a number of things. I sort of slightly disagree with some of my friends who referred to issues being too sensitive. Actually, I think that one lesson learned is that we should not shy away from sensitive issues when we have a forum like ACRS. Why did we establish a working group on ACRS if we will not discuss ACRS? If we will not discuss sensitive issues? So long as A) it remained a voluntary forum - and which goes back to Bob's point why some who were invited did not show up, the Iraqis and the Libyans were not invited, but the Syrians and Lebanese were invited, but because of the voluntary nature, they chose not to come. So why shy away from sensitive issues when you have ACRS? When you produce a forum, a platform like ACRS, and you do not address sensitive issues, you create tension. And I think this was part of the tension that maybe at least I had - I will, again, not speak on behalf of the Egyptians. So, expectations should be managed, absolutely, but sensitive issues should be put on the table and discussed.

Another point Bob referred to, personality, which is an excellent point, I have to say. But I also add to this, be very careful with setting up regional institutions. It looks very, very interesting, and it looks like a success when you have a communication hub and a regional security center, but it eventually created tension because it created the level of competition, over posturing and symbolism and stature. Those who were involved, directly involved in the process will remember that we had to create three regional security centers: one in Doha, one in Amman or the Dead Sea, I think it was, and one in Tunis. Really, I mean, for no practical reason, I mean, there's absolutely no, when I think of any practical reason for this, other than posturing, and other than, symbolically it looks good.

Referring to the little dispute that happened between the Saudis and the countries over the declaration, you know, it's very attractive to have a Doha Declaration, of course. So maybe this

was an added element that we could have done, without at least trying to decide which center goes where and which communication hub goes where; we didn't have enough oxygen for that. If I were to advise myself what I would have done back then, two things: Number one, I would have not shied away from exploring the possibilities of deeper exploration [connection cuts out] for our weapons of mass destruction, it doesn't have to be NPT, NPT, it doesn't have to be IAEA. Me, Aly Erfan, I would rather have a regional arrangement, but anyway, I'm not Egypt. I would not shy away from exploring it in depth. And secondly, I would have created, not a parallel or a back channel with the Israelis, there is room for background, I would have communicated, add Egyptian-Israeli communication lines on many of those issues. Bob and Mike and Fred helped a lot, I have to say. But there were issues that, I think, Eli and Shimon needed to hear from us and there were things that I, and I won't speak on behalf of Nabil, but at least I would have wanted to hear from Eli and Shimon.

And going back to anecdotes, I don't know if Eli will remember this, this was Antalya, I don't know the exact year, when Süha was very kindly hosting us in Antalya. And Eli and I and others were sitting outside by the pool at night, we'd finished the meetings. And I asked Eli a question. And I said, you know, whenever any of the Arab states makes a proposal, in most cases, the Israelis would not have problems with it or issues. If the proposal comes from UAE, from Algeria, Bahrain, whatever it is, the Israelis were kind of okay with it. But once I make a proposal, or the Egyptians make a proposal, the Israeli delegation freezes the meeting, calls for a timeout, takes the proposal and tears it apart and unpacks it and looks for hidden agendas. And I said, "Eli, we're the only country around the table that has relations with you. You should be more worried about the others." And Eli said something that Shimon said, "Egyptians have for historical reasons, have a long history of diplomacy especially on arms control and issues. You have more knowledge, you have more information. So maybe there is something there that we have not seen. That we do not see." If I had built Eli and Shimon's confidence, if I had explained things more directly to Eli and Shimon, I think they would have been more comfortable with some of our proposals. Again, this is not to substitute the American channel, but a direct conversation and dialogue between the Egyptians and the Israelis would have been useful, I think. I'll come back with successes and failures if you want.

### **Christian Ostermann**

Great. I see we have, I think Bruce has his hand up. Yep. Bruce?

### **Bruce Jentleson**

Yeah, thank you. Just one comment on a personal level that Bob mentioned too. I recall, the Cairo plenary in which there was a working group up on the top floor of the later Arab Spring Tahrir Square, famous Cairo Hilton, working in a variety of issues. And we were up there working. And what we thought was smoke started wafting up to the room. And despite all the differences, everybody grabbed each other's hands and ran down the stairs. Turned out it was dry ice from the night before Ramadan and a lot of weddings happening. But it was kind of a nice personal touch at that point that people, I think, had established that and those things are always important. You know, Henry Kissinger always talks about that with his meetings with [inaudible including name]. But just a couple of points on this. I mean, I think to me, one of the most significant lessons that carries forward and that falls in the degree of success basket was the recognition that regional security, that even if there was full settlement of the bilateral, Israeli-Palestinian, other Arab issues, that was necessary but not sufficient for regional security. And again, this couldn't substitute for that, as we've said, a lot of times, but that was extremely important. And to the extent that there started to be, you know, the naval exercises the Canadians, others hosted, and really interesting documents on information sharing and confidence-building measures and the like, you know, that in turn provides a basis, I think.

A separate project in the late '90s, that Peter Jones led, as a Track 2 - I think that [document](#) still is a very good reference point, if you guys have a hold of it - about efforts to try to deal with these issues. And I was participating in that, as were others, Dalia Dassa Kaye continued to do work on this when she was head of the Middle East Program at RAND. So, I do think there is a sense of that. To me the implication is not Abraham Accords mean that you don't need the Israeli Palestinians, you do; it's simply that that's not sufficient--

**Hanna Notte**

I think Bruce froze or is it just me?

**Christian Ostermann**

No, I think Bruce just froze. Okay, I wonder if we could- There he is I think you're back, Bruce.

**Bruce Jentleson**

Okay, just real quickly, too. But every region in the world since the Cold War has upped the role of regional security organizations, institutions. You see it in the African Union, you see it even in the OAS, you see it in Europe, you see it in ASEAN, each have their own way. But I think it does speak to the need that the Middle East is going to need some mechanisms of regional security as a region. The difference, I think, is I don't think it's going to be as much of a US led enterprise as it was in the heyday of the end of the Gulf War and the end of the Cold War. I think it's not that we won't be involved, we do have an important role, but the geopolitics of the world are very different. So, people should think creatively about the role of extra-regional parties, including major powers, than simply starting to assume, well, it's up to the US to do this. I, for a lot of reasons I won't go into now, I don't think that. It's not about decline, and it's not about everything; it's just about the way that the world is changing in some very, very big picture ways. So, lessons to carry forward but not replicate what even was maybe done successfully, then it doesn't necessarily hold in its same form three decades later. And I'm gonna have to leave a little bit early, but I'll hang on as long as I can.

**Christian Ostermann**

Thank you. Karim Haggag, you've not spoken up today. I don't want to put you on the spot, but if you have any thoughts on lessons, this is an opportunity. Karim?

**Karim Haggag**

Christian, thank you. And thank you for including me. No, really nothing to add. I was very much a bystander in the ACRS process rather than a direct participant. And I'm happy to be a bystander on this call listening to the fascinating conversation. So, nothing really to add on my part and happy to defer to Aly on the Egyptian piece.

**Christian Ostermann**

Okay, thank you. Eli Levite, are you with us and want to come in now? On lessons learned?

**Christian Ostermann**

We cannot understand your Eli.

**Ariel Levite**

Can you hear me?

**Christian Ostermann**

Yes, now we can see and hear you.

**Ariel Levite**

Okay. All right. A couple of observations. And I apologize if I haven't been able to follow everyone's comments, there was a pressing Carnegie conference meeting that I absolutely had to attend. So, one observation is, I slightly beg to differ with Bob Einhorn on the role of public diplomacy. I feel that, well, regardless of whether this was a genuine excuse that was used by some of the participants of why they couldn't take some steps, or practical steps, or move forward on some issues, and so on, was because the public was holding them back; or because it was more ambitiously something that prevented some of the parties to moving ahead, because then nobody had spent any energy on cultivating public support - my sense is, this was a neglected dimension. We have made the mistake of initially being quite nervous about not wishing to have any of their efforts undertaken. I think we were proven wrong. And I think that the process more recently with the Abraham Accords, with the peace with Jordan, a couple of other things have proven us that cultivating public support - yes, there will be some opposition, but cultivating public support also will be indispensable to making the process [connection cuts] but one that I would highlight.

The second thing, I think there was a considerable anxiety about keeping records of the meetings and the discussions and so on. I think we're now paying some of the price for not having created sort of this depository of knowledge that was generated in the course of the process. This was, again, one of those insights that I derived because I think others down the road with NPT would have benefited from not just some descriptions by this person or that person, by really having seen the richness of the dialogue that has been undertaken, the perspectives that were considered, and so on. So that's the second issue that I would highlight, something that I think we often omit, not having undertaken it, not having corrected it, or not even having, after the process terminated on the official level, tried to put it all together.

Number three, my feeling is that we ought to revisit some of the principles that Süha had laid down yesterday, in particular 'nothing is agreed until everything is agreed'. I think it gets very deep to the concept of building trust. What builds trust? Is building trust something that you first have to have trust, then you can do the whole thing? Or there are some small steps that do have both practical utility as well as the symbolic relevance that ultimately help you approach the more ambitious issues? I think that we're paying the price of holding back on some of the practical steps, because they were held hostage by some bigger issues, because of a fundamental disagreement of: can one get to the real progress on the bigger issues in the absence of trust? And here, our starting point, I think Bob has alluded to it, the starting point was made behind others, there weren't even diplomatic relations. So to try and get to the heart. [Connection cuts]

**Christian Ostermann**

I think. Eli, I'm sorry, I think you got cut off.

**Ariel Levite**

In the absence of concrete [inaudible]. I'm talking about their utility as elements that help get to the core issues.

I think a fourth issue that I will quickly mention is the composition of delegations. And here, and what I mean by the composition of the delegations is, particularly, are we staffing them with people who are, whose experience is fundamentally First Committee, which has a certain expectation of what the benefits would be? Or, are we trying to get more practical people? I think that was an issue around across all of the multilaterals. But it was particularly apparent with ACRS, and I think that builds on the point that Bob had relayed, too, with respect to the subject matter experts. But it was also true of the extra-regional participation, most of which actually supported the practical aspect. So if we really were up to trying to sort through problems in the region, and trying to build confidence and trust, step by step, I think the fact that the principles

held us back from implementing them was quite, it was shooting ourselves in the foot. Let me stop. Thank you.

**Christian Ostermann**

Thank you. Thank you very much Eli. We have just a few minutes left. I think what we'd like to do, Hanna and Chen, correct me if not, is to go around and have everyone reflect on the achievements, the successes, and the failures of the ACRS process in a sort of summary way, Hanna?

**Hanna Notte**

And also to comment on anything you just heard by others?

**Christian Ostermann**

Yes, of course. Yes.

**Christian Ostermann**

Shall we go with Bruce, who's got to run, too? Bruce?

**Bruce Jentleson**

Oh, I was waving goodbye. I think I said what I wanted to contribute, I think in terms of that, I don't want to take more of people's time, but wishing everybody the best. Thanks.

**Hanna Notte**

Thank you.

**Christian Ostermann**

Excellent. Aly?

**Aly Erfan**

Thank you, Christian. You know, I'll just focus on what I think was achieved and try and inject a positive note. And maybe, initially, the fact that it happened, and the fact that it, those documents and those agreements with a few exceptions - can you hear me? - maybe we did not implement, maybe we did not sign and ratify those agreements. But the fact that we had experts sit there and negotiate and agree on incidents at sea, communication, exchange of military information, that sort of thing. I can just tell you very, very quickly, I teach a course on regional security in the Middle East. And one of the issues we definitely discuss is what Shimon referred to, that this region - and Bruce and others - this region does not have a regional arrangement. This region is incapable of taking care of itself and resolving its own problems.

And I give the students models to look at and their assignment is at the end of the semester to work on a capstone project, to produce original arrangement for the Middle East. But you have to define what the Middle East is. Iran in and out, Turkey in and out, that sort of thing. And I give them models. I give them NATO, African Union, ASEAN and OSCE. And after we go through the examination, I look in particular at OSCE and I ask them, "do you think any of this is possible in the Middle East?", and almost all of them say "no." And then, like a magician, I produce the ACRS documents. I produce the Declaration, which is not unlike the Decalogue of OSCE or CSCE back then, and I produce the work that Jill and her Canadian colleagues, other Canadian colleagues produced and all of the others and I say, "lo and behold, by the way, we did it. There was a time when we actually produced all of this, with the exception of one paragraph," which is not bad. I think this is quite successful. So, the success is that we have it, and at least I try and inject it into the future through my students. And it's out there. And when the day comes, and the day will come, we have - as Abdullah Toukan used to say - we have a full dossier that's on the shelf, and

we'll just pull it out and start implementing. So, was it a failure? Absolutely not. We did not ratify agreements, but we produced agreements. Thank you.

**Christian Ostermann**

Thanks so much, Aly, who else would like to chime in? On this question?

**Hanna Notte**

Jill raised her hand and Süha, also raised his.

**Christian Ostermann**

Yes, thank you. Jill.

**Jill Sinclair**

I'll defer to Süha, go ahead.

**Süha Umar**

Ladies first.

**Jill Sinclair**

Thank you, Süha. But just a couple of things on the lessons learned and then on, kind of, the achievements. Most people have touched on the lessons learned I would point out, but there are a couple. One is, it's about the multiplicity of fora and opportunities for engagement that ACRS produced. That model of having everything from the plenaries, through to the working groups, through to the technical groups, it provided a wide range of places where the participants could play if they wanted to. And I think that that's extremely important. People have talked about the role of focusing on the practical with experts, this is extremely important. But that leads me to my third - and I think that the key point for me is - it's vitally important to have an overarching sort of political goal and driver and process around something. But it must not become a constraint to allowing practical work to go forward. I think it was Dennis who said, you know, we gave the working groups license and running room - it didn't always feel like that. It felt that things were held hostage, and that they were constrained.

And so, we were never able to realize the fullness of the good, practical work, which I think could have continued easily. Maybe not easily, it could have continued even if the bilaterals were fractured a little bit, because there were these very working level, practical forums for cooperation, which were focused particularly on stuff that Canada was doing around, we thought humanitarian areas were... Who could be against the prevention of incidents at sea, who could be against, prevent putting together something that helped do search and rescue? So, I think those linkages to the broad political strategic intent, that's what gives it validity, and it gives it kind of the engine. But then provide that freedom for these processes to actually realize practical outcomes. In terms of the achievements, it's everything that everyone has said. But I think that one of the achievements is to capture it all and to resurface things when the context is right. And timing is everything. We talked a lot about the strategic context that even enabled the Madrid process. Well, the regional contexts, net context, now perhaps could be for some of this stuff to be reinserted - as you just said, Aly, that you've been doing in your course, to remind people that once there was stuff, and maybe the conditions are now right to bring this stuff back. Over.

**Christian Ostermann**

Thanks so much. Süha?

**Süha Umar**

Thank you very much. First of all, the achievements and the lessons. I see that the approach to ACRS was correct. The procedure adopted for the work of ACRS was also correct. So that we were

able to produce all those documents, and that were set aside, which Aly and others referred to. The implementation is another matter. What was achieved also depended on the time and the atmosphere in the region, where we missed the reality, that the time was changing, so the region was changing, the whole issue of, not the ACRS, but the Middle East Peace Process came shattering down. What was changing? The time was changing, because when we started the ACRS and the Middle East Peace Process, the region was a completely different region. And the atmosphere was completely different. The US was more or less left alone, as the only superpower. Russia was not able to be present as much as she would like to be present. But towards the middle of the 1990s, 1995, 1996, the time was already changing and so were the circumstances. [Inaudible], the Special Representative all through, person for the Middle East of Russia was as active as Dennis Ross. And the Israeli position was changing after what happened in Iraq - now the goal was Iran, the issue was nuclear. Egypt was changing. Egypt was trying to follow some issues, which were not very useful to make the work of the multilaterals and bilaterals have more progress. So we, unfortunately, I'm afraid we've missed these changes. And were not able to adapt ourselves to these changing circumstances. Still-

**Christian Ostermann**

Thank you.

**Süha Umar**

-I personally believe that, if and when the circumstances render it useful or feasible, we could all again, once again, try to do what we did 30 years ago. But for this, I'm afraid, we have to wait for some time, if not too long, after what has happened in the Middle East: with the Arab Spring and Syria, and the coming back of Russia, the US losing the title of the only superpower on earth, China and others, we have to keep all these in mind. And think about a new approach if we want to do something in the Middle East. I personally believe that we have to do something in the Middle East if we don't want the world going to a very, very difficult period, even more difficult than we are now in. Thank you very much.

**Christian Ostermann**

Thank you so much, Süha. Are there any, anyone else would like to make a comment on the successes and failures? And as a wrap-up, or are there, does anyone have any other questions for any of the other participants?

**Hanna Notte**

Mike is raising his hand.

**Michael Yaffe**

Yeah. I'm gonna, I'll be very brief. I think the fact that ACRS happened was a success in and of itself. You know, there are so many reasons why it should not have happened, in many ways. There have been things about it, particularly in this region. And the only way to test it and to see what is the ripeness for parties to do this, is to do it. And we tried. And I think that it's a shame that it didn't continue in its own way. I think that these types of ideas that are regional order, regional groups, take a long time to take hold. And I think the most difficult part we had was getting the ownership of the parties in the region for this. We still have that kind of issue. It was raised here saying, if we were to try to do this, again, what would it be like for the United States to try to do something like this? We're in a very different position now than we were in 1991, or '92. But again, it's this notion of people in the region thinking of themselves as a region and having to control that region. And ACRS was great for bringing in outside parties to help in that, but we weren't able to have enough time together to really, I think, get that sense of ownership within the region. So if we go down this path again, I think that would be one of the key things we would really have to work on. I'm gonna leave it there. I have a lot of other thoughts, but I'll provide them in another time.

**Christian Ostermann**

Bob, Bob any final thoughts?

**Bob Einhorn**

I don't want to prolong the discussion much more, Christian, just because many of the good points have already been made. Just to say, I mean, I thought ACRS was a wonderful experiment. It was very significant progress, especially at the technical level. Demonstration that a very diverse group of countries can sink their teeth into hard issues, work together and so forth. And there's certainly a crying need for building security in the region now. But can ACRS serve as a foundation for future efforts? You know, I'm a bit skeptical about that.

I share some of Süha's wariness about whether conditions can permit building on the kind of ACRS background. So I am, I don't know, you know, some of the positive conditions that existed back then no longer exist. You know, the dominant role of the United States in the world and the region that really no longer exists. The Madrid process provided a kind of organizing principle for ACRS; you no longer have a single organizing principle like that to bring countries together. And now you have a multiplicity of actors, you no longer have the binary conflict between Arabs and Israelis, you have a variety of very complicated regional disagreements, so how to cope with all that? So, I am skeptical, I think it's worth considering how it can be built on and keeping open minds about the future. But I am, you know, I can't say I'm terribly optimistic about making any headway, at least under current conditions.

**Süha Umar**

Chris, may I say?

**Christian Ostermann**

Of course.

**Süha Umar**

I forgot to mention, when I refer to the changing conditions, circumstances in the region, in 1995, in 1996, the US desperately tried to revive the multilaterals. I'm, firsthand, informed on these efforts. On the other hand, there was competition. Competition from whom? The competition was coming from Russia. And then even more important than that, competition was coming from the EU, the European Union. I remember one case, when the US was trying to revive the multilaterals, the French were trying to do the same. And that was not in the benefit of the US effort. So, we have to keep all these in mind. And I agree with Bob, maybe the circumstances are not right. And the time is not ripe. The actors have changed a lot, but for the future, we have to be prepared. And we have to push very hard to change the circumstances, again, towards what they were at the time we tried to do something, in ACRS in the beginning of 1990s. Otherwise, I repeat, we have to be prepared to face a situation which might not be very beneficial to any one of us, be it from the region or out of the region. Thank you very much. And thank you for inviting people to this meeting. And I'm very glad to see all those faces, which I was nearly about to forget.

**Christian Ostermann**

Thank you. Well, unless there any other interventions?

Bob said ACRS was an experiment. This virtual oral history conference was an experiment as well. I think it had its challenges, but also, I think, its successes, much like the ACRS process. We're incredibly grateful that you hung in with us for these two days. And really, really appreciate everyone's contribution and time. We will keep you informed as we bring the research for this project to an end over the coming months. We're happy to have additional pictures - I should remind everyone, if you have pictures in your database, please send them to us. We'd like to include them in the larger archive, and perhaps the report that will be one of the products of this

overall process. Thank you again to all of you, to Carnegie Corporation for supporting us, most importantly to Hanna and Chen, really the guiding spirits behind this effort, but also to my team in Washington that has helped with the technical side. Thank you all. Stay safe. We're adjourned till next time.

Thank you.

