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Interview with Michael Moodie

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Summary:

Michael Moodie is a former US diplomat. He served as a member of the US delegation to ACRS.

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Michael Moodie, United States**Oral history interview conducted by Miles Pomper on Zoom on September 22, 2020****Miles Pomper**

So as I told you in the email, just to refresh your memory, we're doing a project with the Wilson Center, looking at the history of the ACRS project. And sort of looking at the various kind of decision-making processes at the individual, organizational, national decision-making levels that took place during the process behind them. This will be put together in both written material and oral histories that will be on the Wilson Center website, I mean you've probably seen some of those. So this is, you know, this is, I think this would be a very interesting project and very useful for people especially. Unfortunately, some of the people who are involved in this are getting on in years, and I want to record this while they're still around.

Michael Moodie

I'd be one of those I'm afraid to say.

Miles Pomper

Oh, you're just getting younger every day.

Michael Moodie

Oh, right. Right.

Miles Pomper

So, we'll have to start with just a couple of basic things so that they will be on the recording. Could you give your full name?

Michael Moodie

Michael Moodie.

Miles Pomper

Okay. And could you give us a sense of the dates that you were involved in the talks? I know, you weren't so much in the delegation. But in terms of when you were involved in the issue area in the in the government particularly. I'd appreciate it.

Michael Moodie

I was involved in the effort from, at the, the initial phases of it. I was, at the time, the Assistant Director for Multilateral Affairs at the US Arms Control Disarmament Agency. The Multilateral Affairs Bureau was responsible for non-nuclear negotiations. So we didn't do anything much in the nuclear arena. But we had responsibility for the European security negotiations that were focused on the treaty for unconventional forces in Europe, conference and security building measures, open skies and other agreements, kind of the second part of the portfolio was the work at the conference on disarmament. And at that time, that was dominated by the Chemical Weapons Convention end game negotiations. And then the third part of it was a more multilateral dimension, especially focused on the work, the disarmament work at the United Nations. So we had responsibility for things like leading the First Committee, during the UN General Assembly, responses and variety of other multilateral negotiations that might be going on. So it was logical for ACDA, given the significant multilateral work that this particular bureau had done and this team, who knew a lot of the participants from their engagement in US forums and other places, that they would be a key part of the development planning and then execution of the ACRS effort, when it was decided to go ahead with that. And so while I was not a member of the delegation, in a formal sense, I was involved in it in terms of the more senior level, looking at policies, some of the policy decisions and execution and doing some personal negotiations, or making phone calls for things like that to try to help the process along.

Miles Pomper

Great. Thanks. So can you talk a little bit about why, the US government and, you know, it's President Bush at that time, decide to join and kind of help launch the negotiations?

Michael Moodie

I think there were several reasons that a lot of which had to do with the context of the time. In a way the period of the senior Bush administration was in many ways the golden age of arms control, in terms of the amount but variety of arms control agreements that were secured during the Bush administration, not just in the nuclear area, but all of the European security work. Things like the Arms Trade Register was adopted by the United Nations, the Chemical Weapons Convention, ultimately was signed as the ACRS process was beginning as well. And there was progress on the Biological Weapons Convention at its five-year review meeting.

So there was enormous support for arms control, in part created by the fact that the Soviet Union had given way to the Russian Federation, and Russia at that time was not, it seemed, did not seem to be the competitor, or the sort of negative voice in those arenas. And it was, in part that change in the political construct and complexion of Russia at the time, that sort of opened up new opportunities. So I think that was one of the factors that was involved. The second factor was the war in Iraq. And the challenge that the war in Iraq represented, not only in terms of the military situation on the ground to the forces that were in Iraq, but also questions related to Iraq's weapons of mass destruction programs, the threats that those represented, or the fact that we had to confront the existence of those capabilities that Iraq had developed, in part coming out of the war they had with Iran. And that was a very specific example of a challenge in the context of a little bit of a change of focus in the WMD space, because of the Iran-Iraq war, and what Iraq was doing, where the nuclear dimension of the WMD problems, did not dominate everything.

Chemical weapons, biological weapons became a little bit more of a concern to policymakers at that time. And I think the fact that they confronted those capabilities during the invasion of Iraq, and the war with Iraq, that that had a contribution to it. The third factor, I think, had to do with the recognition that this may be an opportunity for the Middle East to make progress in promoting a more stable, secure region, not just the toppling of Saddam Hussein in Iraq, but things seem to be a bit more fluid. And I think people just said here, in this context, where there is such momentum being built up for arms control kinds of things. This may create new opportunities, that changes the balance power a little bit. And so I think there was the hope that this combination of developments would create an opportunity for the states themselves to be involved to sort of break through what had been a pretty icy stalemate in terms of the security situation in the region. You put all of those things together, the fact that the United States and the Soviet Union were the most experienced at Arms Control, and the associated measures like confidence building. It was logical for them to kind of pull it all together and try to make things happen

Miles Pomper

You use the word hope, hope that this would be a good time for the Middle East with all these other developments. What were your expectations at the beginning of the process? I mean, were you, how hopeful were people, or I should say not just you, but the US government as a whole, from your perspective?

Michael Moodie

I don't think that people expected necessarily that there would be a breakthrough early on. I think the desire was to create a process that would be able to lead to some small steps at the beginning - in the way that the engagement itself between the United States and the Soviet Union contributed to progress, the progress that was made- just by creating the personal dynamics among the participants getting to know one another, better understanding their perspectives on their issues, and that this would lay a foundation for things to continue. That may have been a wrong approach, looking at it, in hindsight, because of some of the issues that were major contributors to the ultimate lack of success of the process. But I think that people were hopeful, in light of the positive environment that they seemed to be in, and the chance for participants to seize an opportunity to be able to do something.

But I don't think that the expectation, we or anybody, was there were going to be these remarkable breakthroughs right away, that it would be a long-term process that built incrementally, ultimately, to something. It was also, I think, appreciated that this was going forward in the context of the ongoing Arab-Israeli tensions and the lack of resolution on the issues on which they had been going back and forth since essentially in 1948, certainly 1967. So they, that part of the environment was a little

less conducive, and I think dampened expectations in the sense that that was, how those things worked in tandem, was going to be a difficult part of the process to manage.

Miles Pomper

You said you were involved in sort of the policy side of things, not so much on the delegation itself. What was your impression of the people on the delegation, you know, were these people that could really tackle these issues, and then sort of move them forward? What was your view of the composition of the delegation?

Michael Moodie

The US delegation, in particular, I think that they were all pros, certainly speaking to the active contingent who participated in it. They were people with significant multilateral experience at the UN at the Conference on Disarmament. Maybe even in the context of the negotiations on the Treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe, they knew a lot of the participants, especially from the work they would do at the UN first committee, where to the extent that the delegations who also were participating in ACRS, had any kind of major interest in and were active in first committee related affairs. And there were some they knew well, they had good relationships with them, they had worked with them. And I think that was true of other members of the US delegation, as well. State, maybe less so in DOD. But I think the State and ACDA people they had, there was a kind of group of people that did the multilateral affairs, arms control, national security or arms control. And so there was a lot of experience. And I think, overall, we had a very good team.

Miles Pomper

What about the people that you were negotiating with, the other people in the region and so on, how much kind of expertise and knowledge was there?

Michael Moodie

That varied among their delegations, there were some delegations who led and whom other delegations would follow, in part because they too, were very experienced in some of these areas. A good case in point for the Egyptians, Nabil Fahmy was the head of their delegation, he had been, he was at the time, I think an advisor to the foreign minister on these kinds of issues. Our folks had worked with him a lot when it came to first committee activities, which always would do something on the Middle East situation, it was a time where, because again, I think people talked about opportunities, there was no talk more broadly about, maybe this is now the opportunity to create a weapons of mass destruction free zone in the Middle East and beyond.

Some of the others had significant experience in dealing in multilateral arenas on these kinds of issues which some of the other delegations did not, then like another delegation and leader of the delegation who would also fit into that category was Abdullah Toukan of Jordan, who was at that time Scientific Advisor to the king. He too was experienced in multilateral fora working on these kinds of issues. So there were some participants in the whole mix of people who were very experienced. Some of the Israelis also who had been active, if not a formal member of the Conference on Disarmament had been active, for example, as an observer regarding the Chemical Weapons Convention negotiations in Geneva, so they were experienced to some extent, as well.

But then there were others where the experience level was not really very significant. And I think that was one of the reasons that the initial efforts in the process focused on education or raising awareness among the some of the participants as to the value of confidence building measures and what they could accomplish and what was involved in some of these things, which is why I think you see an emphasis in the first few sessions on that kind of, let's all have a common foundation here and an understanding of what we're trying to do and what tools we have available to us to do that.

Miles Pomper

So in a sense you had some people like Nabil Fahmy, who are clearly expert on these issues, and then a whole bunch of other people that you kind of had to build in the way of experts, in a sense.

Michael Moodie

Yeah, the Gulf countries, for example, had not been particularly active in arms control, or multilateral arenas, like the UN first committee. They became involved in it, but without the same level of experience, certainly that, that the US and Russia has brought to the table, but also some of the other national delegations as well.

Miles Pomper

Great. So let me go back to the US side for a little bit. You talked about clearly kind of a professional group of people on the US side who've done a lot of these negotiations before. Could you talk about, a little bit about as far as you could see the dynamics within the US team, how do different agencies relate to each other?

Michael Moodie

I think people, people put forward Brent Scowcroft's NSC as a model for how to do it in some cases. And I think there's a reason for that. And it showed in the way the administration did its arms control work more broadly, including this. They were very clear that this was to serve the president's agenda, and they were going to make things happen, but they did it in a way where they facilitated, the NSC members facilitated interagency interaction on these things. And given that there was so much going on in the arms control arena at that time, it seemed to me that at all levels of the government, from the people on the delegations and, and the kind of action officers through the process all the way up to the top, there were very good institutional dynamics and, and a lot of cooperation, it wasn't always perfect. And there were, it was a, in a general sense, in part because of this was much truer with respect to the chemical weapons negotiations than, than some of the others.

But it did kind of, you could anticipate if there was going to be a difference, there would be sort of DOD and the Energy Department on one side, and maybe State and ACDA on the other. But it wasn't a deep cleavage. And it certainly didn't limit interagency collaboration, in a forum, like the one that the ACRS was, because ours in a sense, our immediate stakes, did not have the potential institutional impact that say, outcomes in CWC negotiations for DOD and DOE. And so they were less in a sense, less vested in it. And that facilitated the cooperation because we shared the objective of trying to move the people who were most directly affected towards a common space where they could start to build the kind of environment that everyone hoped would ultimately result from the effort.

Miles Pomper

You talked about, you know, the NSC role, they were quite helpful in this situation, as in other times, it might not have been as conducive. Can you talk a little bit about what they did that was different or unusual?

Michael Moodie

Well, first of all, it was a very effective group of people; they themselves were first class people with experience and understanding. But I think what they were very effective at doing was managing disagreements in the interagency. And in that process, when you couldn't come to a consensus, it would move up. And they would make it very clear that unless the interagency participants came to a common understanding and a common position, they were going to make the decision. And everybody then had to live with that and march with that, and so. And sometimes they did. But they were also very good at saying go back to the table one more time. And let's see what we can get up, get out of this. And they were very good working with the people who were sort of leading their respective institutional teams, in the interagency process, they worked with them very effectively, to help them bring their own delegations or their own institution around to a common position that then everybody could carry forward.

Miles Pomper

In that process, my understanding is that, early on, ACDA was somewhat of the lead agency. And at some point, the State Department kind of took the lead, is that right?

Michael Moodie

I think that's probably true, because the ACDA people were seen to have the multilateral, more multilateral experience than others, including the people at State, especially with some of the participants who were leading delegations or part of

delegations that were participating in this. So I do think that ACDA was in the lead on this at the beginning. And then it ultimately shifted over to State but that was, I think that happened later, maybe after the change in government when the new team came in. And, and I was out of that, at that, at that point. But a good example was when they had the early plenary session in Washington. I think it was either the first or second session. The US government sponsored a reception. And the reception was held in the ACDA director's office for all of the delegations. Or at least the heads of the delegations. And if you recall, that was the office in the old State building before it was renovated. That had been the Secretary of State's office back in the 1940s. So people like...

Miles Pomper

Cordell Hull?

Michael Moodie

Yup, Hull and the others. And it's very impressive. And it actually turned out to be a very useful thing to have happened, because I noted and others commented as well, that the plenary session that began that was held before the reception was very formal, and very stiff. And the people were reading their talking points and their policy positions and things like that. They had the reception. And then it was quite a different mood the next morning, within the conference room in terms of people feeling more comfortable with one another. And that it was just a better atmosphere, I think that emerged out of that social event. And that was a very positive view that was a very positive development, at least in terms of getting the process started.

Miles Pomper

And I guess, a lot of the discomfort at the beginning, which was the first time a lot of these...

Michael Moodie

Exactly, sat down with an Israeli, I think in some cases or, no, they were in the same room and the Palestinians were there. And it was just a very unusual event and mixture of people that many of them had not experienced before. So I think there was a degree of wariness about it going in. And that was reflected in the formality of the opening statements, but it got a little bit easier after that.

Miles Pomper

Who is the leader of the US team in delegation during this time?

Michael Moodie

I can't remember actually, I think it was probably formally somebody from State, but I think a lot of the people working the dynamics and interactions with people were the active team, at least initially, but I can't; I'm sorry, I can't. That's one of those things that's shrouded in the mists of time that I can't remember.

Miles Pomper

Oh, sure, we'll be able to find it elsewhere, but appreciate it. Do you, do you recall any kind of, I mean, I guess some of these people had dealt with the region beforehand. But was there any kind of instructions in terms of cultural training in these kind of negotiations, that maybe people who had been, you know, in the arms control world or in others, but not particularly dealing with the region, sort of got going forward?

Michael Moodie

Not that I can recall, I don't remember having any training or awareness raising up certain do's and don'ts and things like that, if, if I was doing some playing that maybe was not quite on target, one of the people from the active team would pull me aside and say, yeah, you know, they really don't like that or something to that effect. So that might happen. But I can't recall any institutional team wide training or cultural sensitivity enhancement that the people involved in it had to participate in.

Miles Pomper

And you mentioned this in the Washington plenary, were there, at that meeting, were there any people that you remember from that you hadn't met before and that you got sort of a strong impression from?

Michael Moodie

I had not. I had heard a lot about Abdullah Toukan. And the favorable impression that our team had with him, because of their work with him, but I had not met him at that point until, until the reception in the office and then watching the session the next day. He was one of the people who struck me as somebody to whom other members, leaders of other delegations turned to as someone from whom to take their lead in terms of how to do it. Because one of the things that I think was also clear was that even among the Arab states, they didn't necessarily share a common agenda. And maybe that was part of the ultimately, part of the problems that led to the lack of success was there were multiple things going on, because the ACRS was also in the context of the bilateral efforts that were going on Israel-Palestine, Israel-Egypt, Israel-Jordan, I think the Israeli-Jordan treaty came up was signed at some point during the process, '93 maybe. But not everybody shared the same approach or interests. And in fact, I think, ultimately, one of the criticisms was that, in a way, it was all about the Arab-Israeli peace process. And if participants had other regional concerns, maybe with someone other than Israel, that didn't seem to get into the agenda or get any kind of serious consideration, and that may have ultimately kind of made them less interested, because I don't know that all of the delegations cared equally about, about Israel, and the problem that it may have represented, they all I think we're, we're committed to UN resolutions 242 and 338. But on a day to day basis, they may have been less concerned about Israel than some other situations.

Miles Pomper

Can you give me an example of what you're thinking?

Michael Moodie

I don't know that the participants from North Africa, other than Egypt, may have been more concerned about Libya, who was not at the meeting, than they were about Israel. I think there was some considerable concern about Iran, especially after the Iran-Iraq war. Iran was not invited to participate. But they may not have agreed to come in any case, even if they had been, but I think Iran was a concern at that point to a lot of people. But the agenda wasn't just shaped with that in mind, necessarily. It was, in many ways, really about having the ACRS complement what was happening at the bilateral level and trying to keep those things in step. And it may have lost some of the actual regional character that perhaps many of, at least some of the participants had hoped it would have.

Miles Pomper

Great. So if it's okay, I'm going to go through some of the specific times in the chronology of the process that I sent you a copy of, and some specific questions on that and then we'll get to some more general questions again. So I want to talk a little bit about coming, sort of coming out of the, I guess, the Madrid Conference and then the Washington plenary. Do you know how the process occurred to kind of create these five multilateral working groups? And who initiated that?

Michael Moodie

I can't recall that. Because we were focused on the arms control security stuff from the very beginning. That was going to be our, our mandate, we recognize the importance of it, but who put it together or who led that? I don't recall. Now, I'm sure I'm going to be fuzzier on the details than the general.

Miles Pomper

30 years, you get a break, I think. Do you know why arms control was kind of put into separate basket, a separate group?

Michael Moodie

Because I don't think the other issues necessarily fit well with them. It certainly didn't fit with the water issue or the economy. And it was a dimension of the nature of the environment, it was a big part of the environment that had manifested itself a year or two before with what had happened initially, between Iran and Iraq, and then the Gulf War following on that. It clearly was a, there were security issues there, there had been already the initiative to create a nuclear free or WMD free zone in the region, there was this sort of momentum behind arms control as an important tool for perhaps securing a more stable environment there. So I think that there, there was a good rationale for taking one of the groups and focusing on it in that way, separate

from the other baskets that had complex, complex dimensions already anyway. So to link arms control, or put it in with something else may not have served either the arms control part of it, or the other part of it particularly well.

Miles Pomper

And so, after these working groups came out, the US and Russia, I guess, were kind of the lead, co-leaders of the process - do you know, why and how that happened?

Michael Moodie

I think they were the ones who jointly formally initiated it, I think the one of the early organizing meetings was in Moscow, like that was where they, they sort of came up with the concept. And then there was the early meeting in Washington. And I think that goes back to the experience that, well, the fact that the prestige of the United States in the wake of the Gulf War in the region was, I think, quite high. And people were willing to give the United States the role of trying to be the catalyst for making this happen. I think there were a lot of people who believed this wasn't going to happen if they were left to their own devices. So the United States, I think, the Bush administration appreciated that. It couldn't do it on its own either, and having a partner like Russia, with whom we could jointly share experience, our experiences with them, who had less experience in doing this kind of negotiation of this kind of work.

And the fact that we were working reasonably well with the Russians, in other areas at this point, because of the European security talks, the nature of the way we worked with the Russians, during the Chemical Weapons Convention negotiations. It seemed like a good idea to bring them in as a way to co-host or be the co-catalysts for it. And they had some significant relationships with some of the key participants as well, and some influence with some of the key participants so I think it made a lot of sense to get the Russians involved in a way that together, we could move this forward. I think a lot of it had to do with where the United States stood after the Gulf War in terms of the willingness of the others who may have seen it as an opportunity as well, to say, 'okay, oh, let's, let the United States try to bring this together. And let's see what happens.'

Miles Pomper

You mentioned sort of the US preeminence after the Gulf War, and we reached out to Russia as a co-host. But was this, would you say this was an equal partnership when we went through the conference? Or what was the relative roles of the two countries?

Michael Moodie

I imagine that in this effort you're doing, you're asking the Russians too. I think you might get, well, maybe you'd get the same answer. No, I don't think that it was, in reality an equal measure. I think the United States was the driving force behind it, the Russians contributed I'm sure in terms of, of specifics, and maybe ideas in terms how to move things forward. But I think the driving force behind it was the United States.

Miles Pomper

And you sort of mentioned earlier that you wanted to start early on, a lot of delegations needed to be kind of brought up to speed and educated on confidence building measures and so on. Do you think that was a helpful approach? And if we were to say, have another process today, would that be another way, way to go about it?

Michael Moodie

I'm not sure. Because, normally, I would say yes, I think doing things incrementally, taking those smaller steps, creating a positive, dynamic, personal relationships among the participants. And all of that would be the way to go forward. The problem with that was that in many ways, the Egyptian position stood in very strong contrast to that. It existed already. And it was fundamentally different from that sort of incremental approach doing those smaller things from the outset. The Egyptians made it clear they expected the Israeli nuclear issue to be addressed early on. And it was their top priority, and they wanted it to be prominent in the discussions from the outset, and that had been made clear early on in the process.

We went to the Middle East to talk to countries about signing and ratifying the

Chemical Weapons Convention, which was almost finished at that point. And one of the stops we made was in Cairo and met with a foreign minister, who made it very clear that they were not, they had no interest in signing the Chemical Weapons Convention or moving forward on it if Israel didn't sign the NPT. That was the message we got. And it was a very tough meeting. So we knew where the Egyptians were on this, and they made it clear in the ACRS context as well, fairly early on that their expectation was that the Israeli nuclear issue had to be resolved before some of these other things could be done. And that was just 180 degrees from the other approach, which was let's do the things we can do, get some early wins that will create a positive environment moving forward. And had it not been for the Egyptian position, the incremental approach might be the best way to go. In that situation, the reality undermined that a little bit that maybe we should have been smarter about finding a way to address at least some of the Egyptian concern in a way that made it less resistant to doing much of anything. And, and I think ultimately, it was the Egyptian insistence on their approach that ultimately led to the view that we can't do anything more at this point; we're not making progress anymore. This is just getting us nowhere. So let's put things in abeyance for a while.

Miles Pomper

You were, you were involved, I guess, through the end of the Bush administration, a little bit into Clinton administration?

Michael Moodie

Right. Yeah, a little bit. I, like others, sort of ended my formal service on January 20. But I stayed on as a consultant to ACDA for three or four months after that, and the project they had me work on, which showed an interest in what was going on in the ACRS, was to use a CFE approach to come up with a conventional arms control agreement for the Middle East, on the lines of CFE, which, which was a fascinating exercise. I loved doing it. But I think it got to the point where it never saw the light of day because nobody was going to talk about it.

Miles Pomper

I guess that's sort of one of the questions. It seems like before, at least, during the Bush administration, part of it was mainly just kind of giving lessons about what's happened in the past, sharing experiences, there were not a lot of direct contact, or between the delegations or any kind of, you know, direct movement on, on the substance. Is that, is that fair to say?

Michael Moodie

No, I think it was laying the foundations. And you saw some of that come to fruition with, when the government changed, and some of the things, the ideas, especially with respect to confidence and security building measures that had been discussed, and the value of things are the sorts of maritime CBMs that they put out there, the information exchanges, the kinds of things that you could do. Those further developed as time went on when the Clinton administration was then running it. I think we laid the foundation and we probably would have gotten there as well. But they eventually did put some meat on the bones that we helped to put together for them.

Miles Pomper

Great. I'll go through the chronology again. I guess one of the, one of the big events that happened once you were out of the government, I guess, at this point, you were I think you were sort of observing this from the outside...

Michael Moodie

I was trying. Yeah, I got, I did get involved in some Track 2 stuff during that time during those three or four years after.

Miles Pomper

...I mean, one of the big events during that period was the Israel-Jordan Peace Treaty. What's your sense of how that kind of affected the dynamics in the ACRS, talks?

Michael Moodie

From a lot of points of view, it was a very positive thing. And I think that in some ways, it gave Jordan a greater standing. I don't know how thrilled the Egyptians were

about it, though, because I think that Egypt was already having some trouble asserting its leadership among the Arab members. I don't know the reasons for that, but I don't think that necessarily all of the Arab participants were as solidly in line with Egypt as Egypt hoped they would be. And I think maybe the Israel-Jordan treaty exacerbated that a little bit in terms of their frustration with not getting the kind of support that they wanted. And then I think you saw that in some other areas, too, going back to the CWC where the Egyptians had the same position about the Israelis and the NPT. And a lot of the Arab countries did end up signing, maybe not right out of the box. But eventually they did. To this day, Egypt has never signed the CWC, despite the fact that it was a very active participant during its negotiations, but because Israel won't sign NPT, they're not going to do it.

Miles Pomper

You mentioned the NPT. And obviously, the other big events during this time period of ACRS was the 1995 Review and Extension Conference. Any sense of how that kind of played into the dynamics of this.

Michael Moodie

Again, I think people felt that it was a potentially positive development, because the extension, the permanent extension, also included an agreement about getting things moving in the Middle East, again. I think there was great hope for that. And since for the last 25 years, that problem has bedeviled the NPT along with the Article 6 issues about nuclear powers, doing what they should in the disarmament area. That in the Middle East have been the two things that have bedeviled the NPT in terms of moving it forward in a really positive way. So that those, those hopes with respect to maybe getting some leverage out of this, the ACRS experience and combined with the NPT sort of emphasis to say, let's get something done in the Middle East created expectations that subsequently haven't been that.

Miles Pomper

So it just kind of almost backfired, in a certain sense, in terms of the NPT process?

Michael Moodie

The NPT agenda doesn't seem to have changed much in the last 20 years or so. And the Middle East is always one of the big things they seem to want to talk about. Who's going to take the next initiative for a nuclear WMD free zone and or whatever it is they're going to do? It goes back a long way.

Miles Pomper

You mentioned I guess, you know, Egypt, and obviously they were one of the driving forces during the meetings. Who else do you think steered the talks?

Michael Moodie

Well, from their side, the Israelis were obviously very active and, and shaped the dynamics. Jordan. I can't identify anyone else that really jumped out at me at some time during the process as woah, here's somebody taking the lead on something. I'm sure they did. I know. Some of them hosted discussion groups or plenaries or whatever offering to host, but that didn't necessarily translate into leadership within the dynamic that I, that I could see.

Miles Pomper

You mentioned earlier some certain countries in the region weren't in the talks, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Libya. How do you think that affected the process?

Michael Moodie

I think that it created a sense that we can't do everything we should be doing in order to achieve what it is we want to achieve, which is a region way more stable, secure environment. Some people were having problems with, well, clearly Iran was, was a problem at the time. Syria, as well. I'm not quite sure why Lebanon did not accept the invitation to come. Libya was not invited. I think I mentioned before, first, maybe for some of the North Africans participants, that was a gap that they would have preferred to have included in the overall mix. So I think what it did was create a sense that we don't have everybody here that we need, in a way, whatever we are able to accomplish, it's going to be incomplete. If we don't have their involvement, and their participation in whatever measures we are able to agree and implement and, and use

as the basis for going forward without them, things are lacking. And it may be lacking in a serious way that you just can't ignore their absence.

Miles Pomper

What about this, the structure of the talks? I mean, there was this kind of working group seminar-style approach that was kind of taken. Was it conducive?

Michael Moodie

I don't know what the alternative would be, I guess, maybe in the electronic world of today, they might be able to do some other kinds of things. But part of it was the disparities between the participants and this need to create at least some degree of a shared foundation in terms of understanding what was going on. You needed some of those kinds of things, breaking it down into smaller bits. So even kind of distinguishing between the two categories of confidence building measures. You've got to, you've got to do the work in ways that you can get things accomplished. And I don't know how many ultimately, participants there were 17, 18 Arab countries, the Palestinians, the Israelis, the US, the Russians, the EU, the Germans, others, you had a big group of people, and I don't know how you can make progress on specifics without breaking it up into some adjustable ways of doing business. So it may not have been the ideal structure, but I'm not sure what would have been better.

Miles Pomper

Okay, I guess one option would be like, I guess, more formal groups. I don't know is that the working group? And a seminar style was, I guess, one of the questions. Well, informality, I guess.

Michael Moodie

But that, that kind of, well, maybe doing it, maybe having formal groups and the participants? What are the parameters for that? Is everybody in every group? Or can they pick the groups, but once you pick them, you've got to be there, you've got to formally participate in them. Managing that, I think would be a challenge also, because I think that when you look at the range of participants, the intensity of their motives, and what drove them there varied quite a bit from delegation to delegation. Some probably were there because they felt they should be there but really didn't necessarily care about the details or what happened and they were willing to go along with what those who care about it more we're willing to agree to; others felt very strongly about certain kinds of issues. And we're in there from day one kind of pushing their agenda. So I think given that range of diversity, it's hard to come up with an implementation or operational structure that isn't going to have its problems. And, again, I'm not quite sure what the ideal structure for that would be.

Miles Pomper

How about the linkage between the multilateral process that ACRS was and the bilateral meetings, the peace process? How, how well, how closely were they linked?

Michael Moodie

That's a good question. Because, I think, the bilaterals were really shaped by the bilateral participants and there wasn't always it seemed to me a tight link between what was seemed to be going on in the bilaterals and what was going on in the multilateral context. This is speaking for the arms control part of it, rather than the other the other four groups that were participating. Maybe their work was more closely tied to what the agendas for the bilateral meetings were. But I don't know that the, the agendas for the multilateral meetings always coincided with what the bilateral groups were talking about. The whole emphasis on confidence and security building measures and sort of doing those incremental things and understanding and let's, let's talk about during a very science or incident management and communication centers and things like that, how much that really did tie into where the bilateral talks were, it wasn't always clear to me.

Miles Pomper

It was a bit of a disjuncture.

Michael Moodie

Yeah. And again, there was a very complicated arrangement, turned out the bilaterals, and what was doable may have been quite different across those that, that

bridge, and that may have set up some of the tension also that ultimately led to the disappointment of the sense that well, there's nothing really that we can do here.

Miles Pomper

We've talked about the Egyptians a little bit. Let's talk a little bit about the Israelis. Egyptians believed basically that Israel was unwilling to take any steps towards them on nuclear disarmament or other WMD or conventional arms and just wanted normalization. Do you agree with that? Do you think their position evolved a little bit over time? Concessions on their part?

Michael Moodie

Not on the nuclear side. I don't think they moved an inch from that. I think they would have had the Egyptians been willing. I think they would have been amenable to talking about confidence building measures, and information exchanges and joint activities or maybe crisis communication centers, some of the, some of the less demanding things that would not fundamentally change their security perceptions of their own situation in terms of however they thought about nuclear weapons on the one hand, but also the conventional balance and maintaining the qualitative edge and all of that sort of thing. If they had, I think they would have been open to some things if the Egyptians had taken a little bit of a change, but I don't think there was ever a chance that the Israelis were going to open up, show any leg on the nuclear stuff at all. And that's, that was fundamentally what the Egyptians wanted.

Miles Pomper

And, you mentioned a bunch of the challenges with the Egyptians. Were there, was there any movement do you think on their views over time?

Michael Moodie

Not much, not much. No. They've, they've held pretty strongly to that position. And I think part of it was also the, the difference in perceptions in terms of for many of the Arab states, it was state to state. When for the Egyptians, it was Egypt-Israel, or maybe for the Kuwaitis, or others like that. For the Israelis, there was always the potential for Israel against the coalition. And that just gives them a different security calculus than if you're just worried about your security relationship with a single state. And, and so the challenge and this was, one of the things that came out in that exercise I did on conventional forces, was the, the challenge is achieving a degree of equity among a multiplicity of players. And the sense that everyone's security is going to be enhanced by this. And I think the problem that is very difficult is that the Israelis have this view that well, if it were one to one, maybe we could find a way to do this, but it isn't one to one and what we can never be sure that it's not going to be something other than one to one. So we have a different way to think about our security than other countries in this region do and that I think, was part of the, is part of the conceptual problem, challenge that people looking for security is there because it's, it's an asymmetrical perception in the sense.

Miles Pomper

Very interesting. I mean, one question I had is, you mentioned this kind of equivalent to conventional forces treaty in the Middle East. Is there something that you have related to that and other kind of documents that you'd be able to share?

Michael Moodie

I would have to look to see if I still have a copy of it, go down to the boxes in the basement, and check for that. I mean, this was before computers got all that hot, and you could save all that kind of stuff. But I might have some stored away, I will go look. And if I did, I'd be happy to share it

Miles Pomper

That and any other documents because that's, that's part of this project as well.

Michael Moodie

Essentially what I did was, was take many of the approaches that were identified in the CFE talks in terms of counting rules, geographic distribution and verification measures and things like that and tried to put them into a Middle East context, which was harder because it was not, I mean, in the CFE context, it was one on one that just happened to be NATO and the Warsaw Pact. That wasn't the case in the Middle East.

So some of the issues related to geography and where deployments could be made and the numbers and things. It comes back to that how do you make; how do you conceive of an agreement that everyone can conclude is in their interest, that therefore they would be willing to sign up to it? It was a great project. It was really fun to do, but it wasn't easy.

Miles Pomper

And then you, after you did that, you were on, you did Track 2 for a while. Did you think those meetings were useful and would be useful in the future? That kind of talk?

Michael Moodie

Yeah, I do. I think keeping the process going is important, building personal relationships among people is important in those kinds of situations, establishing personal relationships. So I do think Track 2 serves a purpose. If you get the right people around the table, I think a couple of the Track 2 things that I participated in, it wasn't necessarily the right people around the table. So you've got to be careful about how you do it. But I'm a big fan of the kind of Track 2 exercises and in terms of, especially the, it's not so much the outcome as the process, and what that process can ultimately lead to. I found my own experience was that personal relationships were enormously important in those kinds of environments. In terms of willing to try to establish a relationship where people were willing to listen, genuinely listen to you, and hear what it was you had to say. But that was true in both directions. There were some people in some of the multilateral situations I was involved in where you just kind of turned them off when they start talking. But there were others where I learned over time, this person has something useful to say, and maybe his country's position or his perspective, and I may not entirely agree with it, but it's worth listening. And I think a lot of that comes through the social dynamics of participating, whether it's a formal agreement or Track 2 informal.

Miles Pomper

It just developed as a way of maintaining and developing relationships.

Michael Moodie

Right, and keeping the issue forward sometimes too is keeping, making people stay aware that this is still going on, there is still that, there are still things happening here. Maybe a point will come where it can grow into something more.

Miles Pomper

With that, I'm going to kind of look at the few kind of retrospective questions and kind of wrap up here. So you know, overall, what do you, where would you list the successes and the shortcomings of ACRS?

Michael Moodie

Well, the shortcomings were that it didn't last as long as one would have liked or result in many concrete, lasting institutions or mechanisms of various kinds, even at the CBMs level, let alone make any kind of big breakthrough. But I, I go back to thinking about how the attitude and the mood at that first session changed after they had a chance to meet each other a little bit more informally. To watch that change was, to me, an example of there's reason to hope. This can happen, didn't, wasn't sustained or maintained in this case. But it might have led to something. So I think that to me there were some things that happened. The Israeli-Jordan agreement may not have been a direct result, but ACRS certainly wasn't a problem in that. I think the fact that, I think I recall that it was the first time that an Egyptian and Israeli delegation had a meeting between one another. I think Nabil went to Israel at one point to meet with the head of the Israeli delegation, that was something that had never happened before. So I think that, that there are reasons, I think there are reasons to believe that it was not a complete and total failure. And the issue, just kind of looking at, at the literature, the issue hasn't gone away. So maybe there will be an opportunity for the next generation to do something different and better.

Miles Pomper

What would you do, you know, if you were going to have another regional negotiation? What, what lessons would you learn, what differences, or how would you might approach it differently?

Michael Moodie

I might create a smaller group. I think negotiating in a group of the size that that was very hard. And especially if, if it's all done as often these kinds of things are on the basis of consensus. That makes it really hard because then somebody can hold everyone else hostage to a particular thing. So I may have tried, maybe worked a little bit harder to identify who are the leaders here, that the others will be able to follow? And, and concentrate on getting them and I think it would, could be more than just a handful of three or four people. But I think 20 plus or whatever involved in it makes it very difficult. But I might sort of say, okay, well, we'll have a group of 10 or so. And if we can come up with some trials, and some things that we could see, test, and get more people involved in the testing of these things. I think that may have been helped.

I think, also beginning with trying to identify a common concept of security, or cooperative security or whatever the term is that you want, I think people have to begin by if their objectives are too different, you're not going to be able to get it. So you've got to find a place where they agree that this is commonly in all of our interests. And so this is what we are going to try to achieve. Maybe, maybe that means breaking it apart into smaller pieces with a smaller group to get something going, but may then be able to be pushed out to others in a way that groups of states that are willing to give it a try might be able to do so. It's tough, I think because the Middle East has got so many dimensions to it and so many different security challenges, participant countries in the region have. Are you going to be able to address all of them in one go? I think that would be very hard.

Miles Pomper

Do you - since you know there's obviously been quite a few changes in the region recently - do you think there's any possible, you know, possibility or promise for some kind of regional framework these days in the region? And any kind of appetite for something like ACRS?

Michael Moodie

I don't know if there's an appetite, I'll have to talk to the CRS experts about that in the region. But I think it would depend on who's involved. Because if Egypt is involved, when is it going to change its position on Israeli nuclear weapons? I don't know. Would Iran be involved or not? If it's not, then you confront again, a big gap, and what people seem to think is a major security challenge to a good swath of the region. So would you agree to let the Iranians in, knowing that they have great potential to make mischief? Of course, could you do something more on a very limited basis in a more tightly defined geographic space? That's harder to know, given the political composition or the internal political challenges of some countries. Doing something in a Jordan, Lebanon, Israel sort of arena? Lebanon's a basket case at this point. So they're not going to be able to do very much of anything. Even on the other hand, the relationships between Israel and some of the Arab states are clearly better today than they were 30 years ago. And that may be the, perhaps the thin reed on which to pin one's hopes?

Miles Pomper

Well, I guess one part of that is the, you know, there's a certain way that they've been dealing with the Palestinian issue in these two bilateral negotiations that the Israelis have been doing with the UAE and Bahrain, for instance. Do you think there's some hope in that, that, you know, that's kind of been a stumbling block in the past? And including in the regional talks, do you think does that mean that perhaps that one obstacle would, you know, be less than in the future?

Michael Moodie

Well, even the UAE, or, or at least some of them who have talked about improving relations with Israel, if they haven't signed agreements with them, have said the Palestinian issue has to be a two-state solution, or at least it cannot incorporate at this time annexation of the West Bank by Israel. Maybe the Israeli position will change if the political leadership changes. Don't know, don't know Israeli politics well enough to be able to say whether the post-Netanyahu leadership will be as hard over as, as this group? Or would they be willing to make a land change swap of some kind that could lead to a two-state solution. That, I think is where the critical issue is at this

point. I don't know how far the Arabs are going to go if Israel were to unilaterally annex the territory that they've talked about.

Miles Pomper

Thanks. I think that's, that's sort of all the questions I had. I know you've already given us a lot of time. Was there something that we didn't ask that you think we should have brought up?

Michael Moodie

No, I pretty well covered everything I can contribute.

Miles Pomper

That was a lot. It was very helpful. And, yeah, we'll keep you posted as this project moves along.

Michael Moodie

I think it's a fascinating project and I don't know how long it is you're working on it, but I would be delighted to see the results. When you, the written then visual results when you when you've got it at the point where you like it.

Miles Pomper

And if you happen to come across that paper, your CFE for the Middle East.

Michael Moodie

Yeah, I'll see. I will check, but I can't make any promises. Thanks so much again. I was my pleasure, good luck on the project. And please do give my best to your colleagues.

Miles Pomper

I will, thanks.

Michael Moodie

Thank you.

[End of transcript]