

November 4, 2020

Interview with Jill Sinclair

Citation:

"Interview with Jill Sinclair", November 4, 2020, Wilson Center Digital Archive, Interview conducted by Miles Pomper with editorial assistance from and prepared for publication by Tricia White. <https://digitalarchive.umd.edu/document/300082>

Summary:

Jill Sinclair is a former Canadian diplomat. She served as a member of the Canadian delegation to ACRS.

Credits:

This document was made possible with support from Carnegie Corporation of New York (CCNY)

Original Language:

English

Contents:

Transcript - English

Jill Sinclair, Canada**Oral history interview conducted by Miles Pomper on Zoom on November 4, 2020****Miles Pomper**

Great. So we start with some preliminaries, if you could, give your name, full name and what your role was in the ACRS process.

Jill Sinclair

Okay, Jill Sinclair. I was the director of the arms control division at the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs during my time on the ACRS process. Which I would say was probably from about late probably 1993-1994 through to when things sort of suspended and around '95 or so.

Miles Pomper

So you kind of joined mid-process?

Jill Sinclair

Exactly. After the initial big meetings, I came in much more when we were moving into the operational stuff.

Miles Pomper

So when you got started, what was your impression about the team that you were working with in terms of both the kind of people and the issues you were going to address?

Jill Sinclair

So in terms of the sort of the international teams, both within the delegation, we were a pretty tight team. And because I came in once the process had been launched, I was inheriting a team that had been through a number of these meetings, it was a combined effort from our foreign ministry, Department of Foreign Affairs, and our defense department, along with the Coast Guard, because we were doing a number of operational things. So we were approaching it both from the conceptual level, they had the two baskets. So we were doing work at the conceptual level, and then at the more operational level. So it was a very cohesive team. This is the sort of thing, this is a sort of diplomacy that Canadians like to think we excel at. The informal, brokering, bringing people together, providing venues and opportunities for people to have conversations that they can't have across tables when they have their nameplate in front of them. And lots of, really, really deep commitment, enthusiasm, passion about this, within the within the Canadian team. Just because the stakes were so high. And it was such an exciting, I would say exhilarating process, because of course, there were lots of challenges, and we can get to those. But the mere fact that we were getting, parties to the table who had not had previously contact or substantive discussions about these issues, was something meaningful, and we had tremendous support from our minister too. So this was a sort of a priority politically for Canadian foreign policy to support this. This means we were able to tap in to the resources and things that we needed, which is not always the case in a foreign ministry that you can marry up resources and ambition. But, a diplomatic initiative with resources, not that they were massive, but we had the support we needed.

Miles Pomper

Now, was there any way besides resources that the minister demonstrated support for your effort?

Jill Sinclair

I mean, just in terms of, wanting to be briefed up wanting to be kept in the picture, obviously, it was an issue whenever he was speaking with U.S. or other counterparts internationally, it was one of those talking points. Because I think we were committed to the role that we were playing. And as you know, Canada was dual-hatted in this, in the sense that we had taken the refugee working group from the broader multilateral process, which was a very big priority. And then we also had this arms control and regional security line of effort.

Miles Pomper

And you're sort of, I guess, more of a functional specialist by training in terms of the arms control, diplomacy work. Were you used to negotiating in this region? Or did you negotiate with people in the Middle East before? And were there sort of new people that you met that you really got strong impressions of at the beginning?

Jill Sinclair

I hadn't worked specifically on the Middle East previously, but I'd done a lot of work multilaterally, so in the United Nations and on arms control stuff, which inevitably has a Middle East dimension to it. I had done a lot of work in the OSCE indeed with the CSCE and I can come back to that because part of the stuff we brought to the table was shaped by CSCE/OSCE work. Like the regional security centers. They were directly inspired by Canada's work, because we actually had written the concept for the conflict prevention centers. So, working in regional security settings, I'd also done work in Latin America. Yes, the Middle East was a bit of a new place. In terms of the players. You know there was a pretty amazing array of folks, when I think of, some of the people like Abdulla Toukan, and Ariel Levite and folks like that, and the Palestinians too. It was an interesting group of people who were not necessarily steeped in arms control and CSBMSs. But were obviously delegated, designated by their governments, because they were smart, astute and kind of knew the politics as well the practical stuff.

Miles Pomper

You mentioned these conflict resolution centers or regional centers, maybe you could elaborate a little bit more on that. And what Canada's role was in that effort?

Jill Sinclair

We were pretty central to this, as I say, the idea of regional security centers came out of the work that had been done when we were making the transition from the CSCE to the OSCE, and setting up conflict prevention centers, which are designed to be places for dialogue, places where you could elaborate further, CSBMS type arrangements. But also to build on this was new and specific to the Middle East process, to build a cadre of folks who understood some of these concepts, because the Middle East was not steeped in CSBMS, and all of that stuff to the same extent that obviously, Europe had become over the years of the Cold War. And so we were actually quite central and helping the drafting, but there were key regional people like Abdullah Toukan, Eli (Levite) who were real intellectuals. Jordan played a very constructive role there. And the idea was for the center to be in Jordan. And we did quite a lot of work directly with the Jordanians to stand up that center. And Canada invested a bit of money in it. And, and as you say, we helped pen the concept of this of this idea very much inspired by our work in the OSCE, obviously modified to the Middle East.

Miles Pomper

And were you lead? Was there a particular group that was on that, and you guys were leading that?

Jill Sinclair

Miles, this is one of the problems I wish I could remember, all the details. It's just, it's shocking how much I forgotten. But I do remember being part of this, because as I say, I had actually helped pen the concept in the OSCE setting. But we were a fairly small Canadian team, and they were made mostly comprised, our delegations were pretty, pretty tight, and mostly comprised of a couple of folks from my arms control division who would help, write stuff and draft things and go back and forth. But actually, the Jordanians took quite a role on this, they took a real interest in it, I think, some sort of pride of authorship, and host-ship, because they were going to be the main focus. The idea was to have a couple of ancillary centers too, one in Qatar, and one in Tunis.

Miles Pomper

What kind of information were people sharing?

Jill Sinclair

In the context of the center?

Miles Pomper

Yeah.

Jill Sinclair

The centers really, they never really got stood up effectively. I mean, a lot of work was done. It was going to be a place to actually build some understanding and expertise, familiarity is a better word, around arms control concepts. And to make an institutional focal point for it in the region. Because this is not, this isn't, wasn't the bread and butter of this region of the Middle Eastern region. This is, when in the Euro Atlantic space, you have generations of people who understood the evolution and the CFE treaty and all the things that we went through like CCSBMDE and, the Helsinki Final Act. So it was to try to build a little community around this. There was some expertise and understanding, but obviously, in building that center you were also building a community. You're getting people to have discussions on slightly abstract topics, which would just bring some of this dialogue, make some of this dialogue happen.

Miles Pomper

And you mentioned the Jordanian role, was this before or after the Israel-Jordan peace treaty, and how did that kind of play into it?

Jill Sinclair

This was after the peace treaty - '94, yes. It's so interesting in these processes, because so much is personality. And I think we had in the personalities on the Israeli and the Jordanian side, and also pretty special leadership on the U.S. side. Some really extraordinary personalities who wanted to make things work. Like Fred Axelgard. And of course, the atmosphere, it's so hard to convey that atmosphere: the excitement, the hope, the openness. There were the obdurate players, I can remember, one of the meetings where the Saudis just turned their back on the head of the Israeli delegation when he tried to extend a hand. So there was all of that, but there was at its core a genuine excitement about the chance for cooperation, progress, whatever you want to call it. I think it was Jordan, Israel, and to a certain extent, to the Palestinians. And the US. Plus the partners like Canada. There was there was a real desire to try to make this work. And so I think that force of personality, and you had in some of these folks. They were smart operators, but they were also intellectuals with a vision. And so it gave it a different feel, it wasn't just the visceral politics that you usually could expect to get. And again, we were in an odd way, we were a beneficiary, because the because the plenary had stalled out. There were big issues and conflict at the macro level. But we had the chance to try to do constructive stuff at the other levels. I recall this as particularly important because, for example, Israel and Egypt had reached an impasse on some of the bigger issues.

Miles Pomper

You mean, even the plenaries stalling out in terms of this conceptual basket that kind of got separated from the operational?

Jill Sinclair

Yes, exactly. And in the absence of plenaries, those plenaries, we were, I was very busy with ACRS for a couple of years, and meeting all of these folks. And I kept in touch with everybody in between, I mean, I can remember, and these were the old days. There's no internet connections or anything. I can remember having long conversations with the Algerian head of delegation, this Algerian General, who I used to have a dialogue with, to try to keep Algeria in - and engaged in between the sessions. So we did a lot of work. Interpersonally and intersessionally.

Miles Pomper

So this was all by phone?

Jill Sinclair

Yes. It was phone, don't forget, we weren't writing emails back and forth in those days.

Miles Pomper

Yeah. Not even a cable or anything like that.

Jill Sinclair

No, I mean, in those days, particularly when I think of the Algerian, it was quite

extraordinary. He would call me regularly, I would call him regularly. I kept in constant touch with the Israelis, the Jordanians. All of this was by phone to just keep things going in between the meetings and have a sense of what the issues were.

Miles Pomper

And how did - I mean, people tend to talk about Jordan and Egypt and Israel, which are, obviously kind of the core countries in the process - how do you feel those other countries, the Algerians, the countries in the Gulf, and others, I mean, more on the periphery, were they engaged enough in the process? Was it effective enough? Should anything have been done differently in terms of those countries?

Jill Sinclair

Well, so here, I'm switching between levels of engagement. And so I should probably be more precise. Canada was the shepherd for one specific set of work in addition to the wider ACRS discussions. We would stay close to folks like Mike Yaffe, and the fabulous folks on the on the U.S. delegation, and other heads of delegation. Canada had custodianship for maritime security building measures. We offered to do that because we thought that it was a line of effort that could offer some prospect for progress and constructive dialogue. Because when you get mariners together, they all talk about the sea, like to sing songs and I mean it literally it sounds camp but this is literally what we did. I can still recall, one of our naval officers leading them all in sea shanties. In those settings, some of this work wasn't dominated so much by the key players. Also, this was practical stuff. Everybody had an interest in things like prevention of incidents at sea and search and rescue. And again, quite deliberately, we chose two humanitarian areas, which could be devoid of politics, because they were about saving lives. And again, the naval camaraderie we thought would be a good place to kind of start. So this is where you had room for the others to play. Now, as I recall, the Gulf states were more reluctant to be there. As I say they, they didn't want to look the Israelis in the face. And they weren't too interested. But, but it was interesting to see the Tunisians and the Algerians, the Palestinians and others who genuinely saw some practical utility here, and were not averse to having the conversations.

Miles Pomper

And you mentioned in terms of the regional centers - I've talked to some people, you mentioned the sailors and the shanties, and there were demonstrations, Coast Guard demonstrations, Navy demonstrations that Canada put on - were there similar tours or demonstrations you did in terms of the centers?

Jill Sinclair

We did do something with the Vienna one. And we did some little workshops. We took folks out from Halifax naval base on our ships and gave them tours at sea and a chance to talk to our sailors. I can remember going to Jordan frequently, and I can even see kind of the place that they had given us, for the regional security center and working with the folks that were going to be standing it up. But yeah, I mean, we did a lot of information sharing about what this sort of look like in the Euro Atlantic kind of context. Always conscious that, there was no template for the Middle East. But we did have a pretty strong reference point back to the Vienna center, then other partners wanted to show their skills and experience, with meeting in Tunisia and elsewhere.

Miles Pomper

And I guess some people have said every, there was a hard sell in terms of, particularly arms control, rather than through the CBM aspect of, or the of the title in terms of every time that as you said, the Russian, the U.S.-Soviet, NATO-Soviet context was used as a teaching tool. But that the response from a lot of people in the region was like, 'Well, that doesn't work in the Middle East.'

Jill Sinclair

Exactly. Yes. Absolutely. There was an attitude that nothing, nothing works in the Middle East. Nothing that's been tried anywhere else could work in the Middle East. They probably weren't entirely wrong about that. And I think we all we all had to be kind of conscious of that. And I think it helped because we had the Euro Atlantic experience. But we also had the experience of Canada and kind of working in other

regions too, like with the Americas, so we had a slightly broader reference base. But yes, there was this dismissiveness that everything was different.

Miles Pomper

Was there anything that kind of was able to penetrate that?

Jill Sinclair

Maybe it's not a template, and you can't transfer this stuff. But there are some kinds of principles, and this is about conflict prevention. So just trying to get them engaged in a dialogue as to what it meant for them and their region. But there was a lot of reticence. There's no question. And you never know, one never knew, of course, how much of that is because people didn't understand what the concepts were. So there's a defensiveness there. Part of it is because they didn't want to understand what concepts were because they weren't interested in being there. But the United States bludgeoned them to the table, so they showed up and had to listen, people would say, 'great, it was super for you guys. But that's not our reality'. And for sure, we do suffer from a little ethnocentrism sometimes: 'Well, this was great and worked here. So we'll just project it there.'

Miles Pomper

So I guess you said you started in '93. So that would have been the Doha meeting?

Jill Sinclair

I was not at Doha, but I picked up later, I was in Tunis. We did stuff in Turkey, lots of trips to Jordan, thanks to Abdullah Toukan. It was quite extraordinary as he arranged for us all, and took the first delegation of Israelis to Petra, and it was quite amazing. I can remember it just was quite historic. No Israelis had been to Petra and this little delegation of folks - and in fact, there was this extraordinary hotel, that the Jordanians used for us, and they put us all up there.

Miles Pomper

Well, I mean, I guess that was one part of it.

Jill Sinclair

Right.

Miles Pomper

The general point is, the Israelis, you're kind of going to places in the region where they'd never been accepted before.

Jill Sinclair

Exactly. A lot of it was a classic, successful low-key diplomacy. Because people didn't know this was going on. So you could have Israelis in Doha. And you could have Israelis in Petra, and you could have Saudis and Israelis at the same table. And they had plausible deniability in a way because it wasn't a big, high-profile meeting. But it was successful, because it was low-key, and it was focused on practical cooperation, anytime we got into the politics and I have to say, even in the maritime security building stuff, we would deliberately schedule, time to get through the political declarations. say we had three days of talks or whatever. The first, at least half day was always scheduled for throat clearing. Everybody had to get out there and pound their chests. So we had to go through the whole history of everything from the Palestinians, a whole history of everything from the Egyptians, and the Israelis would need to kind of put their thing, but we would actually schedule that in exercise, so everybody can get it off their chest. And then we say, 'Okay, fine. We've done that. Great. Okay, now, we'll get down to business.' And literally, we scheduled it in.

Miles Pomper

Hilarious. Usually they just, what do they call it, ministerial meetings, as ministerial statements, but yeah.

Jill Sinclair

Exactly. But they all felt - and again, you never know how much of this was just for theater, or just because they felt they had to restate the grievances and the historical perspective and the narrative, but that was okay. We understood. There was a lot of history and grievance. That was the price of kind of admission, and getting on with the business afterward. And then there it was literally like, you switch the channel. So

maybe they all came in with their instructions, I have to read this seven-page thing that you could recite to me, and then we'll be able to get on with something. You had to be able to say to Cairo or wherever, I told them, they had to get rid of their nuclear weapons. I told them we need our security, you know? That's okay.

Miles Pomper

Well, I mean, speaking of that, it was obviously one of the key challenges in the talks. Egypt certainly brought that up a lot. And a lot of people sort of attribute the, the failure of the talks to Egypt kind of insisting on that at the cost of everything else. Do you agree with that take? Or what's your sense?

Jill Sinclair

Yes, to a certain extent, I'm sure that they were genuinely concerned about Israel's capability, whether it exists or not. But there was more to this. I think this was a higher level of political decision making and, approach and that they had shaped that was based on the fact they weren't going to legitimize anything around this table, because they weren't ready to kind of go the next step of the at the broader diplomatic level, to warm up the relationship with Israel. So I must say, I always felt and I don't think it's just in retrospect, but that this was an excuse, a very convenient excuse. But every effort was made to try to talk through it and work around it. And we all know, that odd circular kind of discussion. Well, we have to talk about nuclear weapons first and our saying let's talk regional security first. It felt like it was designed to just keep you on a hamster wheel. But I do think I do suspect that was part of a broader Egyptian reticence to let anything get out in front of the Egyptian-Israeli relationship the privileged relationship between Egypt and the United States, because they were the first peace partners, and to let anybody else into that space and to further normalize relations or warm up relations with Israel. I mean, that's just my own take.

Miles Pomper

No, I've heard some of my colleagues, I think, talked to some folks in the Israeli delegation who said, their take was that part of it was that the defense ministry or the military in Egypt that basically said, you can't negotiate anything but pressing this, we'll let you talk about the nuclear issue, because the foreign ministry can go talk about that. But we're not going to get into these confidence building measures, because it would actually affect us to some degree.

Jill Sinclair

I think that that's a very accurate description too. I think when you dig down into the, into who was kind of running the show here, there's no question that the Egyptian military would have had a massive say, and in any approach to discussing anything around security, however benign, it was. And they were reluctant players. I mean, we drag them along in the maritime security building measures thing, but they were always the most difficult player.

Miles Pomper

One question on the regional centers, I guess there was this kind of communications network that was tied into that....

Jill Sinclair

That is right.

Miles Pomper

...started operating. But did you see that really as a big step forward, or?

Jill Sinclair

Yeah, the concept of it. And again, yeah, here we are looking at, hot lines, and all that sort of stuff. So, inspired by other experience. I don't recall how much it was used, except between Israel and Jordan, who needed it least because they had pretty sophisticated means of communication already. So I don't know. But yes, I mean, I do remember that was one of the things that we stood up in an initial way.

Miles Pomper

I have some sort of general questions, and some retrospectives and so on. You mentioned the centers for the OSCE. Did you know of any other sort of actual kind of proposals or paper that Canada came in with?

Jill Sinclair

That is a great question. We wrote lots of stuff. Because again, one of the things that we tend to do in these processes is to write non-papers and throw them out there and get people thinking about things. So I mean, certainly on the maritime confidence building measures, we put together all sorts of pieces of paper that would help people understand them, in addition to the workshops, and all of that. So some of the conceptual stuff, and the drafting of the prevention of incidents at sea. And we did have these two arrangements which were more voluntary. But these two arrangements for INCSEA. And for search and rescue, which we penned. And we drew on US -Soviet documents too.

Miles Pomper

And you talked about some of the people in Israel and Jordan who were very competent folks. What was your sense, beyond those groups in terms of the capabilities and competence of the other delegations?

Jill Sinclair

As I say, I mean, I think that the Palestinians, certainly on the maritime confidence building stuff, they had people from the Palestinian Coast Guard and such who were there. So these were technical folks who actually kind of knew their business. And the Palestinians were quite committed to this because there was a capability that was on offer, and in fact, we, Canada funded this too. I mean, we bought them some zodiacs. They put up a little coast guard unit shed in Gaza, to keep their zodiacs, but i don't think it survived others intrusions. And I remember, we had detailed conversations with the Israelis about putting governors on the throttle, so they couldn't go more than whatever, 11 knots or something. I recall them and recall the Algerians, the Turks were really good, the Tunisians too. There were some there some players who made an impression on me. I mean, that the Gulf folks don't stand out that much in my mind, except that I recall How reluctant they were to engage.

Miles Pomper

In terms of personalities. You mentioned the Algerians, and Turkey was there. What were they doing, was this something interesting?

Jill Sinclair

Yes, I'm talking more about the work that we were doing on the maritime confidence building measures. We got them away from their countries and all the constraints. We took them to some interesting spots including to Canada, I mean, kind of some obscure places on the east coast. And we brought them to a place just outside Ottawa. And we taught them how to curl, curl, okay, as an icebreaker. But I mean, literally, this is what we did, and I think that, they were able to relax and be normal, outside of their region. And when you're in Canada, it's like, outside of everything. And even in Europe, they probably would feel more constrained. But, we took them to this place in the woods, near Montreal and say, Okay, we're going to curl tonight, and then tomorrow, we're going to sit down and talk about the prevention of incidents at sea. It creates an entirely different dynamic.

Miles Pomper

Was that an actual game curling?

Jill Sinclair

Yes. it was there was at a curling rink in a place called Montebello. And, yes, and then and the sing songs and just relax. I think because we're a small player, I think we're good at trying to make people feel at ease with one another and people know, we don't have we didn't have an agenda. And here again, the sponsors of that process, the US, Fred Axelgard, Fred and Mike, these are extraordinary folks, who I think were confident, they trusted what we were doing, so they didn't micromanage any of this. And we could bring our own *je ne sais quoi* (French for "I don't know what") to the effort. And those settings, were basically collegial. The players, they were collegial, some were more ready to a sign up to stuff than others. And then when you started talking about things like, well, then you're going to exchange phone numbers. So when you started to get down to things like search and rescue in case of ships going down and stuff, and you had to exchange actual phone numbers and locations of hospitals and stuff like that, then you start to get back into people's capitals and

other ministries, and there was reticence and it was difficult. But we did manage to get those two arrangements landed. And, we exercised them. So there was some degree of goodwill around that process, I would say, amongst all the players.

Miles Pomper

And, so you mean, when you said 'getting them landed', you basically had these things that were kind of teed up to go with everything else worked out?

Jill Sinclair

Well, they were actually separated out from the rest of the process. So we did actually agree, prevention of incidents at sea and a regional search and rescue understandings, including things like hospitals and how many beds did they have. And who do you phone if a ship goes down. And so we did have that, and what frequencies will the ships use to communicate with each other, to prevent incidents at sea, we actually had that. Now, these were totally voluntary, and I can't remember how many countries signed up to them. But Israel committed to them and tried to get them working with neighbors. Certainly we had a bunch of countries that signed up to it and actually used it and practiced it.

Miles Pomper

I guess my sense was that, but after that this didn't, they weren't practiced when the process collapsed. They didn't keep working on it.

Jill Sinclair

No, and it would be an interesting question to ask whether those navies have maintained, is there any record of that? And do they have a way of talking to each other? I mean, there's a million new things now of course, with GPS and stuff. But it would be interesting, I have no idea what happened to them. But yes, but when ACRS kind of fell apart. We didn't follow up to see what was happening. We had no mandate or ability to do that.

Miles Pomper

So, you come out of the general arms control, disarmament community, nonproliferation, what do you think the relationship was between this process and the '95 Review conference? How did it affect ACRS?

Jill Sinclair

Well, these were well rehearsed themes for nuclear weapons free zone in the Middle East and all of this stuff. So, we had heard in previous review conferences. So I also was at the NPT review conferences, because I was a director of the arms control division. But there were no surprises. I mean, the approaches, the concerns, the issues that were raised around the ACRS table, on nuclear weapons in the region, whether or not they exist. And, at the NPT, they were just variations on a theme. I think it prepared the ground. Canada played quite a central role at the NPT conference in helping to negotiate the Middle East paragraphs of this, because we had some, deeper knowledge of the players and the issues and knew them. And we were trusted to be fairer than others in managing the different views. And so that enabled us to play a role. I know, when you spoke to Don, I mean, certainly Don played quite a role there. And not only at the NPT review conference, but because of the work that we had done in ACRS, and then, in the NPT review conferences on the Middle East peace. Don was even pulled into, to helping negotiate similar language when it appeared, things like G7, declarations and stuff, so, it just this stuff has a life, it keeps on giving.

Miles Pomper

Another question was, the relationship between this and the bilateral process, which kind of set the tone, kind of drove things in your view?

Jill Sinclair

The bilateral process was always the big deal - , it's hard, I have to make sure that I'm not extrapolating current thinking to back then, but I think it's safe to say the bilateral process was always the big deal. Because that's getting up close with the United States of America, which means all sorts of things, whether it's kit, or financial support, or political, whatever it happens to be. So that's the main focus, real equities at stake. The multilaterals were, I mean, almost the price that I, (this is me, again,

thinking it through), but maybe the price that the U.S. was asking some of the really reluctant partners to pay for having a better bilateral relationship. Because the multilaterals were, in one way, all about legitimizing Israel in the regional context, that's what that was all about. And also building some relationships between and amongst, Arab and Gulf states. But, it was really about legitimizing and normalizing in the regional setting, Israel. And so that that was, I think that it was we'll give you this on the bilateral, but you're going to come and sit down, and in this wider setting too. And we want you to talk about some of these broader issues.

Miles Pomper

So the bilaterals - my understanding is the whole thing came out of the Madrid process, and that the bilaterals were basically, what Washington promised to get the coalition in the Gulf War.

Jill Sinclair

Yeah, that was the big strategic deal. I mean, that's, that was the strategic present to folks. And Israel always was deeply interested - my sense, anyway - deeply interested in the multilaterals, because it was about the wider legitimacy piece. And there were very few places where Israel could sit down with all of those countries, it didn't really happen anywhere else. So it was pretty historic and pretty groundbreaking. And I think when you look at how things developed, even back then you could see that you had some of the Gulf states were more forward leaning than others, and now they've limped forward into, actually talking about it publicly. With a little incentive from the US, as always!

Miles Pomper

Yeah, given that and other changes in the region, do you see any prospect for this kind of, these kind of talks in the future? Or does that offer hope in terms of, 'Okay, there's a few connections there', when it's obviously a very different region than it was then?

Jill Sinclair

Yeah, it's a very different region, but I actually think ACRS, and the multilaterals were prescient, and they were ahead of their time. And, I think they paved the way for some of the stuff that we've seen subsequently. And I would think that this is absolutely the time that you could return to some settings like this. I mean, the region doesn't have all the hang ups that it did with Israel back in those days. Now we have a hang up with Iran, which is a forcing function for bringing folks together. And, and I think, there's a greater understanding of what the reciprocal benefit can be in sitting down at these sorts of tables. So, I actually think that it would be a very interesting thing to try to relaunch something like this in the right context. You'd have a much better starting point with some of the Gulf countries. The poor Palestinians, however, are in a difficult position. But it's exactly the sort of thing, if you were trying to figure out how to build on-ramps for folks, face-saving on-ramps where they can maintain dignity and principle, but come back to a table quietly, and start to talk about these issues. And they need to have a dialogue as much or more with their regional Arab Brethren, as they do with the Israelis. I mean, the Palestinians and Israelis, they talk all the time. But getting those Arab countries, those Gulf countries who have leant forward now, to say, look, this is in your interest, and come to this table, it would sort of be an ironic reversal of the way it was, back in the '90s, when it was the Palestinians and the Jordanians and the Israelis. So this would be a bit of a twist, if you could get some of the Gulf countries to say. Come to this table, quietly, let's just start to talk this through. I think it's a more propitious moment for that.

Miles Pomper

And you mentioned Iran, and Iran was among several countries that weren't invited in some others chose not to come. I mean, if you were going to do this kind of process, first of all, what do you think that was a problem or a good step? And secondly, if you were going to do it today, would you include Iran in the process? Would you not include Iran?

Jill Sinclair

I recall the regret that we all had the countries like Lebanon and Syria had decided not to show up, which was too bad. Iran is kind of sui generis. I believe that if you

launch a process like this, you invite everyone and see who comes but, what you don't let happen is to have one voice at the table that there only to stop things. This is a technique I used when I ran Canada's effort to ban anti-personnel landmines, the Ottawa process. And one of the things that we used was to let people self-select into the process. So we sort of set out some very high level principles, and said, look, if you're willing to jump over this bar, then you're in. And you could look at something like that, where you put some two or three foundational principles, so that you don't get a country coming in, deliberately to skew or skewer what you're trying to do. But you leave the door quite wide open so that you can get them to the table, if they fancy. They can come and listen and invite them to come as an observer, if they don't want to actually sit at the table. But there are ways of doing it.

Miles Pomper

It's very interesting. You mentioned also before that it was good that basically people didn't know about this process that people could talk. I mean, there was no kind of public diplomacy effort during this. And I guess first of all, how did they manage to keep it quiet? Because you have all these people shuffling around the world you think people would know about it?

Jill Sinclair

Yes. Thank God, there was no social media.

Miles Pomper

Yeah. That's true.

Jill Sinclair

Yes. It's a different world. I mean, it's a really great question, because I don't know how easy it would be to do something like that now. I mean, especially something as kind of dramatic as having Israelis in certain Arab countries. In this era, it would be tweeted out-I heard Hebrew, oh my god- But it didn't exist then. So you were able to do that. I think that Track II diplomacy is a lot more challenging in a totally hyper-connected world. But there's probably there are probably ways of doing it. And you know, bringing people to obscure Canadian spots is probably a good point, because nobody ever pays attention to what's going on here anyway Unless we send you an Arctic cold front or something like that!

Miles Pomper

So I think that covered most of the questions, unless there is something that you think I didn't cover that we should have?

Jill Sinclair

No, no, those are great. It's fun to go back. And to think about this. I think it was an extraordinary piece of diplomacy. Creative and courageous. People who were involved in it were very, we were all very excited and positive about it. I think we all felt that we were engaged in something that could make a real difference.

Miles Pomper

You mentioned the Egyptian position, why do you think it was that? And what were the kind of the successes and shortcomings, when you think of it? And why didn't it work?

Jill Sinclair

It was inherently linked to the broader political issues and dynamics. And I think that it was - and that was its Achilles heel - that you could always, you had some players who could always dig in their heels and say, 'No, it's not going any farther.' So you let people have a veto over the ability of the process to move forward. And I guess if you were doing it again, the dynamics are a little bit different now. But you might want to find some firewalls. So that people can engage in the stuff that they want to, so a little bit like a Chinese menu. You can say, I don't want the fried rice, I want the egg rolls here. So a little bit more mix and match to tailor it to a country's and people's political tolerances, without letting the whole of the process get stalled.

Miles Pomper

Yes, it makes sense. I appreciate you taking the time, it has been fun.

Jill Sinclair

It's been great. And I'm so thrilled you're doing this project. It's great.
[End of transcript]