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Interview with Robert Einhorn

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Summary:

Robert Einhorn is a former US diplomat. He served as the head of the US delegation to ACRS.

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Robert Einhorn, United States

Oral history interview conducted by Miles Pomper on Zoom on November 16, 2020

Miles Pomper

So just in terms of getting started, if you could just give your full name.

Bob Einhorn

Yeah, Robert Einhorn, Bob Einhorn.

Miles Pomper

What your role was in the process and how you got involved in it? And what years and so on?

Bob Einhorn

Well, at the time of the First Gulf War, I was on the State Department Policy Planning staff. Dennis Ross was the director of the staff, Bill Burns was the deputy director, and Dennis was a close advisor to Secretary James Baker. And even before the First Gulf War concluded, and it was a rather short war, but before it was concluded, Dennis called a number of us together, Aaron Miller, Dan Kurtzer, a number of people who were involved in the Middle East or arms control issues, and said "now, we're going to need to plan the period after the war." And we began thinking about what became the Madrid Peace Process, which was convened, I think, the first meeting to establish the Madrid Peace Process was, I think, in 1991. Anyway, you can look that up.

The idea was to plan out a series of bilateral meetings between Israel and several of its neighbors, as well as a multilateral process. There were five multilateral working groups set up, one was the working group on arms control and regional security, it became known as ACRS. And I was involved with Dennis and the others in kind of conceptualizing what that multilateral group would do. And it began - I forget, you'll have the dates, there was the Madrid meeting, and this process was established. I think the first plenary meeting of the arms control group was in 1992. Dennis Ross actually chaired the first meeting of the first plenary of ACRS. Richard Clarke, Dick Clarke chaired the second one. Bob Gallucci, I think, the third, so we had a succession of chairs. I took over, I forget when, I think it may have been late 1993. I was a participant in all of these meetings, as someone who had helped conceptualize what the group would do.

But I think it wasn't until late 1993 when I became both the head of the U.S. delegation, as well as co-chair of the working group. It was agreed back in Madrid, first it was the United States and Soviet Union that would be the co-chairs, and then with the demise of the Soviet Union, and with Russia succeeding the Soviet Union, the United States and Russia became overall chairs of this Madrid process. And there were U.S. and Russian co-chairs of ACRS. It was a time - remember, just after the breakup of the Soviet Union, Russia had succeeded the Soviet Union, it was rather weak at the time. It was kind of organizing the new Russian Foreign Ministry, things were in flux, they had a lot on their plate. Making Russia a co-chair was a kind of effort to, I wouldn't call it a consolation prize, but the sense was that we had to give Russia its due. It had suffered a blow with the dissolution of the Soviet Union, we wanted to build up Russia as a separate actor, and so gave it this role as co-chair. But it was kind of recognized throughout the process that even though there was a nominal Russian co-chair, that the real leader of this multilateral group was the United States.

I think it was late 1993 when I became head of the U.S. delegation, and the co-chair of the working group. And I continued in that capacity until the demise of the group, which was in 1995-1996. And my role in the group - I should say, at the time, I moved from the Policy Planning staff, at the end of 1992, to be a Deputy Assistant Secretary of the political military bureau of the State Department. And I was the deputy in charge of non-proliferation, and at that time, there was not yet a separate bureau of the State Department on non-proliferation. I later became the Assistant Secretary. But at that time, a Deputy Assistant Secretary had responsibility for all of non-proliferation. And so, I had to cover a broad waterfront, and ACRS was only a

small portion of my responsibilities. I was responsible for the multilateral export regimes, I was responsible for a lot of North Korea stuff across the board, so I couldn't devote full time to ACRS. But I oversaw U.S. engagement in the ACRS process, I participated in all the plenary meetings. And there was a conceptual working group, I participated in that, but others on the U.S. team were engaged on more of a day-to-day basis. There were lots of intersessional meetings, our specialized technical groups on maritime affairs and military information exchanges and communications measures. I didn't participate in any of those technical working group activities.

And especially in the period beginning around 1994, but into 1995, and 1996 - when ACRS began to flounder for a number of reasons we could discuss - I was playing an active role and kind of at the political level, to try to ensure that ACRS had a future. And so, in the 1995-1996 period, I engaged in a lot of shuttle diplomacy between Israel and Egypt to try to find a basis for going forward. It eventually proved futile and ACRS went belly up.

Miles Pomper

So just to pick up on that point for a second, and I'll step back a little bit, I mean, are you of the belief that what basically led to the demise of ACRS was this, you know, Israel-Egypt standoff, and particularly the Egyptian position on the Israeli nuclear weapons, or was there more to it than that?

Bob Einhorn

No. There were many factors involved. The basic idea behind ACRS was that this working group complemented the bilateral peacemaking process. So, it was kind of understood, not just understood, but explicitly stated that ACRS would have to support, all the multilateral groups would have to support, the bilateral process and not get in front of it. In other words, peacemaking on a bilateral basis - Israel and Jordan, Israel and Syria, Israel and the Palestinians - that was kind of the center of it. And progress in the multilaterals could reinforce and complement bilateral work. But the multilateral groups couldn't get ahead of the bilateral.

When there was progress in the bilateral, especially with the 1994 Israel-Jordan agreement, that gave a kind of boost to the multilateral. But, and then especially later on when the peace process began to flounder, it became hard to sustain progress in the multilaterals.

Also, there was a number of Arab delegations that [thought] there could be preparations for some of these multilateral confidence building arrangements - whether maritime information exchange, communications measures - that there could be a lot of progress there, but implementation would really have to depend on further progress in the bilateral track. There were actually, there were texts agreed in the maritime area on search and rescue, on incidents at sea, there was a provisional communications arrangement worked out with a hub at The Hague, and agreement to transfer to a permanent communications network based in Cairo. There were texts of information exchange pre-notification measures. But while there could be agreement on these texts, implementing them, that was a hurdle. That was difficult to get over. The Saudis in particular were concerned that these confidence building steps could be seen as normalizing relations with Israel before the Saudis and other Arab governments were prepared to do so. And they wanted to see more progress on the bilateral track before they were prepared to go forward with normalization. And the non-participation of Syria - for example, the Syrians did not want the multilaterals to get far ahead and probably lobbied the Saudis and others not to go too far down the track before acceptable peace agreements could be pursued bilaterally.

Another constraint, another reason I think the ACRS finally blew up was intra-Arab dynamics. In the early years, there was incredible progress in kind of socializing Arab-Israeli discussions. At first, it was a bit awkward, but once the ice was broken, these delegates were able to get along well together and began to establish serious personal working relations with one another. Arabs and Israelis and so forth. And at a certain point, the Egyptians, in particular, began to feel that, "hey, wait a minute, what, what's going on here?" The North African Arabs, some of the Gulf Arabs, they were having these cordial discussions with Israelis, they were making progress, they were kind of no longer taking orders from Cairo. And Egypt may still see itself as the leader of the Arab world and I think felt that the ACRS process was resulting in a loss

of control. And I think there was a kind of effort by Egypt to rein in the others. And one way to rein in the others was to place the Israel nuclear issue at their forefront because Egypt knew that it could rally other Arab governments behind its lead, if it focused on this concern about Israel's nuclear program.

Another factor was the domestic transitions in Israel, which played a big role. There weren't any transitions in the Arab world, which are mostly, you know, autocratic systems. But in Israel, when Rabin became Prime Minister, you had a significant movement. Before Rabin became Prime Minister, the Palestinian delegation had to be part of a joint delegation with Jordan. Under Rabin, there was agreement that the Palestinians could have their own delegation. But we didn't call them a state. And we didn't consider them a state. We talked about the PA, the Palestinian Authority was an entity. And we would tell you about "X number of Arab governments and the Palestinian authority", which was kind of separate. But that was a significant step, but then later on, after the assassination of Rabin, and then of course, Peres became Prime Minister, but that was fairly short lived, and Netanyahu became Prime Minister, and the peace process began to decline. And as a result, the multilaterals declined as well.

An additional factor was participation. Syria and Lebanon were invited to participate, they declined. Iraq, Iran, and Libya were never invited. And that created, I mean, it was an artificiality. You're talking about arms control and regional security in the region. Iraq, at that time, well, by that time, its WMD programs were moribund because of the Gulf War and so forth. But they had had an active nuclear weapons development effort. Iran was in the process of acquiring technology that could be used for the production of nuclear weapons. Libya had this embryonic program supported by the A.Q. Khan network. So yeah, here were three aspiring nuclear weapon states that were not even invited, not participating. Syria, we know, subsequently, began to pursue a covert plutonium production reactor with North Korea. So, it was kind of artificial. And the appearance, perception was that the Israel nuclear program, that was the reason ACRS failed. Much of this discussion became an Israeli-Arab, especially an Israeli-Egyptian, dispute about how to deal with the nuclear issue. Now, that was a significant issue, but it didn't really convey the obstacles to arms control and regional security, when you didn't have all of these players.

And sure, in '94/'95/'96 Egypt decided it was not going to agree (and consensus was the rule), it was not going to give its consent to further plenary meetings and even other intersessional meetings if an agenda was not agreed to address the Israeli nuclear program. And we tried all kinds of ways to work out an agenda acceptable to both Egypt and Israel, to address weapons of mass destruction and the nuclear problem, but we couldn't, we didn't succeed in doing that. So, on its face, the Israeli nuclear program and the Israeli-Egyptian disagreement on how to deal with it was the reason ACRS failed. But I think these other factors that I mentioned, I think, were at least as important.

Miles Pomper

That's really interesting. I want to get back to one of the points you made in terms of the countries that weren't invited, and that was a deliberate choice. Do you think that was the right choice? I mean, it sounds like you may not think it was, in retrospect?

Robert Einhorn

Well, look, first of all, I don't know that they would have done - maybe Iraq would have participated. I think Iran would have been reluctant to attend a meeting with Israel. Libya, did you want this erratic country participating? I think, probably it made sense at the time not to include them. I think some of them, at least, would have been troublemakers, and would have gotten in the way of the progress that had been achieved in those years. But, if I had to do all over again, and if serious thought were given to resurrecting some kind of regional discussions on arms control and regional security, now I would clearly invite the others.

Miles Pomper

I'll get back to the situation now a little bit later. But when you mentioned that Egypt kind of using the nuclear issue as part of its campaign, to ensure its leadership in the Arab world. And I guess part of it, did you think, was also kind of, particularly before the Jordan agreement, that they were the conduit to Israel, that they were the ones

that should kind of dominate that relationship since they were the only ones with a peace treaty at that point?

Robert Einhorn

Well, look, our bilateral relations were good with Egypt during that period. Mubarak was a kind of strategic partner, we counted on Egypt as a conduit to the rest of the Arab world, to the Palestinians and so forth. And throughout, our relations with Egypt were much better than they are, of course, today. But, Egypt, there's a long history to this. Sadat made peace with Israel, and he made some basic strategic decisions. He was prepared to make peace with Israel and join the NPT. Initially, Egypt had pressed Israel to give up nuclear weapons and join the NPT as a condition for peace. But Sadat eventually came to the conclusion that peace with Israel, a good relationship with the United States, was worth it. And he was prepared to conclude peace with Israel without Israel agreeing to join the NPT. Now, Nabil Fahmy's father, Ismael Fahmy, was Foreign Minister at the time, he actually resigned in protest over (Egypt) making peace with Israel.

Many Egyptians, including Nabil probably, believe that it was a mistake for Egypt to join the NPT without Israel. And the Foreign Ministry has made it a kind of crusade ever since, to focus on the Middle East zone, to be the champions of a Middle East nuclear weapon and Middle East WMD free zone. So, this was a carryover into ACRS. And so, even though the United States and Egypt were, in a certain sense, strategic partners, we had this difference on the nuclear issue. And it became kind of the hobbyhorse of the Egyptian Foreign Ministry under Amr Moussa to make this a key element of Egyptian foreign policy. So even though we wanted Egypt to play a major role in moving this multilateral process forward, we had to come to grips with Egypt's preoccupation with the Israel nuclear program.

Miles Pomper

We've heard from some Israelis that have been interviewed for this that part of that was also that the Egyptian military which, of course, was running the government, basically at that point wouldn't let the Foreign Ministry or others talk about anything other than the nuclear issue, that the kind of things that might affect them, operationally, and so on, the various confidence building measures, they didn't want seriously discussed. Is that your sense as well?

Robert Einhorn

No, I didn't have that impression. I mean, they did go along with a number of - I mean, look, I don't want to overstate the importance of the military information exchanges agreed to. I mean, they agreed to exchange unclassified information that was already publicly available, and they agreed to exchange bio-data on senior military officers that was also publicly available. That was the extent of it. And I don't know which delegations were the most reluctant to share information, but they did agree, and for sure, ministries of defense would have to be involved in agreeing to the text of these pre-notification measures. I think they agreed on pre-notification of troop movements, over 4,000 personnel, movement over like 110 tanks, and so forth. And so, the Egyptians participated in that. But I think a number of the militaries in the region were anxious about doing too much in that area. But the Egyptian military – which, it is true, the Egyptian military essentially controls the Egyptian government and did then - had certain red lines, and I'm sure that was a constraint, but they did permit the process to go forward in a number of areas that affect military operations.

Miles Pomper

Getting back to the chronology a little bit, you kind of took over the leadership of the U.S. delegation. And it's kind of an interesting point, it sounds like it was kind of the point where the process went from what seemed like a lot of kind of almost tutorials on what is arms control, and what is confidence building, to actually trying to negotiate some of these confidence building measures. And also, I guess, it was probably around the point where the bilateral started picking up steam with the Palestinian agreement. Is that right in terms of the timing?

Robert Einhorn

Yeah, that's right, I mean, the early stage was kind of "show and tell", educational, sharing experience in Europe, U.S.-Soviet arms control, seminars on verification, that

kind of thing. And later on, it became much more region-focused. The early meetings were outside the region, in Moscow, Washington, but gradually, we started having meetings in Cairo, and Doha, and Tunis, and Amman, and so forth. And I was involved throughout the process but, you know, I became a head of the process at a much more promising period. But just one caveat, Miles. As I said at the beginning, I kind of oversaw the process and I'm sure if you haven't spoken yet to Michael Yaffe, you know, you ought to be.

Miles Pomper

Yes, yes we have.

Bob Einhorn

Okay. So any discrepancies between what I say and Mike says should be resolved in favor of Mike's recall of what happened. And anything I tell you where I was the only American participating in an event, you should seek corroboration if you possibly can. We are talking about events that took place between 25 and 29 years ago. As I said, I was working on a full range of issues, and this was only part of my portfolio. Whereas Mike, this was 75 to 80% of his portfolio, or 90% or something like that, and the others. So especially when you look at chronology, and so forth, you should rely on the documentation and on their memories more than mine.

Miles Pomper

I mean, you talked about how you were basically, you went to the plenary meetings and you were involved at the political level and weren't so involved in the operational baskets, going to those particular meetings and so on. There was a split, I guess, soon after you came in, between the kind of conceptual and the operational baskets. Could you talk about sort of how that happened, and why that happened? And what that affected?

Bob Einhorn

Yeah, I mean, they involved different kinds of people. When you're talking about maritime measures, or communications, or military information exchange, these are real specialists, experts in those areas. And the conceptual basket involved a number of things, including: we sought statements of national long-term policy, where countries would provide their views on their security environment, the threats they face, and their strategic goals. These were important national statements, I mean, we only, I think, ended up with six of them. But Egypt, Jordan, a number of the others, Israel of course, but the governments seriously considered these things, these were important statements of national security policy. So that was worthwhile, and that was clear. And they were submitted, they were discussed. The co-sponsors, I think, did a paper at one point trying to find areas of commonality among these statements. So, that was a useful exercise. But the kind of people you would want engaged in that discussion are not the same kind of people you would want talking about search and rescue and so on.

Another element of the conceptual basket, probably the most important element, was an effort to reach an agreement on a declaration of principles and guidelines. And this was carried on, and we got pretty far and tried to work out such a declaration, but we couldn't reach a consensus and at the end, issues like NPT adherence, and so forth, and dealing with WMD, got in the way of consensus. But we got pretty far. And again, the people who would engage in these broad declarations of principles and guidelines and so forth, these were not the same people who would deal with the operational issues, the CBMs. And so we just, we thought it made more sense to make this divide between conceptual and operational.

Miles Pomper

And you mentioned that it wasn't the only issue, obviously, the Israeli nuclear program, the Egyptians' concern about that. Were there sort of periods where you thought there might be more progress on that? Or less progress? Or was it just constantly a problem? Or was there some…

Bob Einhorn

At times there seemed to be, it seemed that we were making some progress. You'll have to go over the records with Mike. But at certain points, there was an agreement, Israelis-Egyptians, to talk about certain aspects, verification of some of the nuclear

stuff, the IAEA was involved at some point in talking about nuclear-related verification. So, there were some steps, tentative steps forward. But then there were setbacks. I mean, the basic difference was, Egypt wanted to talk about nuclear, the Israelis said, “we’re not ready to talk about nuclear in a very committal way. First, we have to begin building confidence and trust, and we have to begin with these smaller steps, and dealing in a significant way with nuclear is down the road.” And that was the major difference that prevailed. Although, from time to time, there was some little progress in dealing with some aspects of the problem.

The United States, we recognized that there were limits to how far Israel was prepared to go in the absence of peace in the region. And we understood that, but we were encouraging the Israelis to be as forthcoming as possible, even if they were not prepared to agree to take certain steps. Couldn’t we talk about, theoretically, what some of these arrangements would look like? Weren’t there things we could talk about in the nuclear realm that would provide the Arabs some sense that Israel was prepared to engage on the nuclear issue, even if it wasn’t yet prepared to accept restraints? We tried our best, but at the end of the day, we couldn’t come up with a real compromise.

Miles Pomper

You mentioned earlier that there seemed to be some real progress after, I guess, the Israel-Jordan peace agreement. Could you talk a little bit more about that? And how that--?

Bob Einhorn

Yeah, I mean, that was in 1994, I forget exactly when, early fall 1994, you can look up the date. But a lot of the progress made in the CBMs, working out the texts of agreements, some of the demonstrations, visits to facilities and so forth came after that, it was an optimistic time. Rabin was Prime Minister, Peres was his Foreign Minister. So, it was, remember, in the world of non-proliferation, there were major, positive developments in the early 90s. I mean, the Iraq program was gone, you had the US-DPRK Agreed Framework, South Africa had given up this capability. If you look, I mean, there were a lot of very positive things. And I think this contributed, I think, to some momentum in the ACRS process. And then, as time passed, and the Jordan agreement didn’t become ancient history, but it was past us, and you had the change in the Israeli government, and other factors. And as I said, Egypt’s desire to take back control of the process as much as possible, and concerns in the Arab world that we’re moving too fast to normalization without Israeli concessions in the peace process, these things began to inhibit the process.

Miles Pomper

Calling up a couple of points you mentioned a little earlier about the Saudis and others being concerned about going too far and what was kind of the relationship, there’s a couple, few core countries it seems - you know, Jordan, Egypt, Israel - that were really quite involved in all the deliberations, and a lot of other countries outside. How did they, you know, what was the interaction between those groups, particularly the Arabs?

Bob Einhorn

Well, one of the interesting aspects of the ACRS process was that diplomacy depends on individuals and their personalities. And, you get some individuals together, and it could create a kind of positive dynamic. And it was very interesting. In a number of meetings that I attended, we’d take a coffee break, and I would look over and I’d see some Saudis joking with Israelis and so on. A lot of the official barriers that exist in public began to erode when you get people in that kind of environment. And it was quite positive. And so, you would have individuals, Mike would be able to name them, on a Moroccan delegation, or a Tunisian delegation, who were clever and courageous. And they would engage, I mean, they would not necessarily reflect the hesitations of their governments. And so, when you looked at some of the players in the ACRS process, you had individuals that were punching way above the weight of their countries, in terms of the initiatives that were taken. And this was, it was a positive dynamic that was taking place. And every once in a while, reality would set back in. And even though you had some very cordial relations taking place in this process, the official positions of governments were much more standoff-ish. And so, the

individuals at certain junctures sort of had to pull back, because the governments basically said, “Hey, wait a minute, not so cordial, don’t go too far, too fast.” So, there was always a kind of dynamic in that regard. But again, speak to some of the others who were engaged on a day-to-day basis to get a better feel for the personal interactions among the delegates.

Miles Pomper

You are obviously involved in all sorts of other nonproliferation activities, and been involved for years, and the Egyptians are always very prominent in that. But how about some of these other countries in terms of their representation? I mean, at the beginning and sort of later on, how comfortable were they with this process?

Bob Einhorn

It’s very interesting. Like Jordan. For much of the period, maybe all the period, I forget, the head of the Jordanian delegation was a guy named Abdullah Toukan. And he is MIT graduate and totally westernized, science adviser to the King. He had tremendous self-confidence and some background in a lot of these issues, so he was able to play a very prominent role.

The Egyptian delegation, there wasn’t a terrible amount of technical expertise, they were mostly diplomats, but very accomplished diplomats. First and foremost was Nabil Fahmy, he was head of the Egyptian delegation, who played a kind of outsized role. And then you had individuals, I mean, I remember the head of the Saudi delegation, Prince Turki, I forget his other names. But I visited him in Riyadh a couple of years ago and we had a fun time kind of reminiscing about that period. I mean, I think he would regard his years as part of the ACRS process as very positive.

But again, I think there were some Emiratis who were very engaged, very active. But there was not necessarily a close correlation between how active and positive an individual was, and how active and positive his country was. I say “his”, because it was always his. And I’m trying to think, I mean, only in the extra, what we call the extra-regionals, I forget what we called them, not the Middle Easterners but - you know, Canadians and Dutch - there were many women involved, but not in the Arab delegations.

Of course, see, I didn’t mention the Israeli delegation, but this was an Israeli all-star team. For Israel, remember, this is the first time in the multilaterals, in general the first time they were meeting in a multilateral setting with other Arab governments, most of whom did not have diplomatic relations with Israel. So, this was a big deal. And, you know, it’s one thing to talk about refugees and water and economic development, which were the other multilateral groups. It’s another thing to talk about security, you know, the most sensitive issue. And so, the Israelis fielded a real all-star team led by David Ivry who was the Director General of the Ministry of Defense. He organized the Osirak raid against the Iraqi reactor, I mean, an Air Force pilot, Chief of Staff of the Air Force. You know, he was one of the, one of the most prominent figures in Israeli security for many years. And you had Uzi Arad, who was deputy of the Mossad, he became a foreign policy advisor to Netanyahu. Ariel Levite, you probably know, Eli you know, Shimon Stein, who was at the embassy in Washington, Jeremy Issacharoff, who is also at the embassy. I mean, I can go on and on, I mean, Kuti Mor, who is kind of right-hand man to David Ivry, Eitan Ben Tzur who is a senior foreign ministry official. This was kind of ‘who’s who’ in the Israeli national security establishment. And, you know, they were clearly the most expert, you know, by far, of the delegations. And good to deal with, but they had their firm, you know, positions.

Interestingly, I don’t know, I haven’t followed what the current Israeli position is on the NPT. But in those years, Israel didn’t rule out eventually adhering to the NPT, but they had the condition that Israel was not going to do this until they had peace with all their neighbors, and that the security threats, the WMD threats from some of these neighbors, had been resolved. And the Israelis had an expansive view of which neighbors would have to have peace with them. But a talking point of mine - when I talked about India, Pakistan, and Israel, I’d say, “you know, India’s position is they are against the NPT, period. It’s a discriminatory treaty, they’re not going to adhere to it at all, forget it forever. Whereas Israel’s position was different. It was, we’re not opposed to this; however, the conditions have to be met.” And, you know, you can

ask yourself how realistic the conditions are for Israeli adherence, but at least in principle, they weren't ruling it out, and that was a useful talking point for us to use with the Arab delegations.

Miles Pomper

And you mentioned the progress that was taking place in that period more generally on non-proliferation. Obviously, the NPT 1995 Review conference was sort of in the middle or towards the end of this process. How do you think that affected the dynamics of ACRS?

Bob Einhorn

Well, it was emblematic of this basic issue of how to deal with Israel's nuclear program. At the 1995 Review and Extension Conference, a resolution on the Middle East was adopted, as you know, on creating a weapons of mass destruction free zone in the Middle East. The co-drafters of that resolution were Nabil Fahmy and me, actually. We spent a lot of time working on the text, I was in close consultations with other friendly governments. I would meet very frequently - Israel, of course, was not at the conference, it was not a party, and it was not an observer - but I would meet with members of the Israeli mission to the UN, and I think if I recall correctly, there were Israelis from Washington, and maybe from their capital, who came to New York just to consult with me on progress in drafting that resolution. And the key issue, of course, was Israel's nuclear program. And we managed to work out the terms of a resolution that Egypt and Israel could both support. It didn't name Israel, that was a kind of a red line for Israel. It dealt with weapons of mass destruction, and not just nuclear issues. So that, kind of from an Israeli perspective, that diluted it a bit, because there were others in the region. And I think it may have also dealt with missile delivery systems, which further broadened the scope and to some extent diluted the focus on Israel alone. So, it was acceptable, and that was 25 years ago. And since then, the history that 2010, 2015, the General Assembly resolution in 2018, the conference they had last November, all of that. So it remains a contentious issue.

Miles Pomper

Let me ask you some sort of retrospective and future-oriented questions. What would you say were the successes of the process and the shortcomings in a general sense?

Robert Einhorn

Well, I mean, a real shortcoming, obviously, was participation. The idea that you could have arms control and regional security without critical actors. It just, at some point, you would have to involve the others. And looking forward, I'm a supporter of not necessarily resurrecting ACRS per se, but having broader security discussions within the region. And I think, there you have to involve Iran, Iraq, Syria, and so forth. I think that would be critical. I don't know if they're prepared to do that, prepared to have discussions with Israel. But I think that was necessary. So that was a key shortcoming of the process.

But I think what it demonstrated was that there is a recognition in the region that these security issues need to be addressed on a collective basis, on a multilateral basis. And it demonstrated that even countries without diplomatic relations with one another can have serious discussions. They may not be prepared to implement these arrangements, but they're prepared to discuss them and reach agreement, at least on texts and so forth. So, I think that was one of the more positive elements.

Now, interestingly, now you have, with the Trump administration, one of its most positive achievements was this process of normalization between Israel and Bahrain, the Emirates, Sudan. And presumably, there will be interest in Washington in continuing this. Now, the question is, if Saudi Arabia back in the ACRS day was reluctant to go to the implementation stage for these measures because of a lack of real normalization, once normalization is beginning to take place between Israel and some of its neighbors, does that open the door to multilateral consideration of some of these security topics today? I hope it does open the door. But of course, and one can even imagine, the Saudis are not prepared today to normalize relations with Israel. But would they be prepared to - they're cooperating behind the scenes in security issues with Israel - are they prepared to pursue different kinds of confidence

building measures now, that they were reluctant to implement before? Perhaps they are. And I think ACRS was a good forerunner. It demonstrated, it was kind of a proof of concept, that you can bring individuals from these countries together to talk about sensitive security matters.

Miles Pomper

And if the Biden administration comes in and says, “yeah, there’s possibility here,” if you were going to give them advice, how would you say, how would that be structured? And what would we learn from the previous process about how you might organize such a negotiation?

Bob Einhorn

Yeah, I mean, I think it would be hard today to constitute a multilateral process, a formal multilateral process. I think the antagonism is so great. Maybe I would encourage Track II kinds of discussions. What would a multilateral process look like? The project that you’re somehow loosely affiliated with, the UNIDIR project, I would hope that they would talk about multilateral measures that are stepping stones to a Middle East zone. More informal measures, intermediate measures, and part of it could have to do with confidence building in the region. Taking up where ACRS left off. But I think formally constituting a working group would still be very difficult now. But maybe on a Track II basis, or even on a formal but sub-regional, whether it’s the Gulf states or something like that, would be worth pursuing.

Miles Pomper

I think those are the basic questions I wanted to ask, is there something I didn’t cover that you think I should have?

Bob Einhorn

No, but you could go over your notes and figure out where the gaps are in your interviews and so forth, and feel free to come back and we could do it another time.

Miles Pomper

Terrific. Really appreciate it.

Bob Einhorn

Okay, Miles, thank you.

Miles Pomper

Thank you. Thanks for participating.

[End of transcript]