

November 4, 2020

Interview with Nabil Fahmy

Citation:

"Interview with Nabil Fahmy", November 4, 2020, Wilson Center Digital Archive, Interview conducted by Hanna Notte with editorial assistance from and prepared for publication by Mackenzie Knight.

<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/300080>

Summary:

Nabil Fahmy is a former Egyptian Foreign Minister and diplomat. He served as the head of the Egyptian delegation to ACRS as well as the head of Egypt's delegation to most of the Steering committee meetings

Original Language:

English

Contents:

Transcript - English

Nabil Fahmy, Egypt**Oral history interview conducted by Hanna Notte on Zoom on November 4, 2020****Hanna Notte**

Well, thank you so much for taking the time to do this. We're trying to do a really comprehensive oral history of the ACRS process. I want to tell you that I've interviewed now quite extensively from within the Israeli delegation, in particular, some of your colleagues who were on the Egyptian delegation, Jordan, Turkey, and a colleague of mine has, of course, interviewed quite extensively the American delegation, Canadians and some of the other externals. So we're really thrilled to have you speak to us as well, for obvious reasons. Well, maybe we'll start with a broad question. Explain to us what your role was during the ACRS process and in what capacity you were involved.

Nabil Fahmy

At the time, I was the political advisor to the foreign minister of Egypt. What that basically meant was that, if there's a problem, it comes to me first, before it annoys him. Or if there's something new, it would pass by me before it goes to the minister. Or, if it's something new, the Minister wants to try, he would pass it by [me] before it went public, not because I'm the expert in everything. That's not what I mean at all. It's simply because I had the luxury of not being encumbered with any bureaucratic tasks. Therefore, it was always just a matter of: get the judgment on this, proof check this, fact-check this, and so on. The other relevant part of it was, when I started my career in the foreign ministry, about 18 years earlier than that, I started working on disarmament. So, I've had an incremental expertise of almost 20 years on disarmament before the ACRS process even started. Therefore, besides being the policy advisor to the minister and being the head of the Egyptian delegation to the steering committee of the Madrid peace process, I also headed the Egyptian delegation to the ACRS committee itself. So these really were the different hats I had. And I was dealing with arms control, if you want, as a specialized portfolio, although my portfolio included other things. But if it had to do with arms control, it had to pass by my desk, if it was a change in policy. If it was consistent policy, then of course, the institutions were more than capable in dealing with it.

Hanna Notte

Great. And can you talk a little bit about how, more broadly, the Egyptian delegation to ACRS was put together?

Nabil Fahmy

The delegation was composed of diplomats, military, intelligence as well as some individual experts.

Most important is to take into account the way we thought at the time. Egypt is a medium-sized state that is geographically is part Asian, part African and culturally Arab - although people forget that - and it lives on two seas. We import three-fourths of our national needs. Our water comes from other countries. Energy up until five years ago came from abroad. Capital came from abroad, and foodstuffs came from abroad. When you have those kinds of basic needs, you cannot be an isolationist. You have to be an internationalist, and you have to be internationalist in your outlook. You have to have an active foreign policy. Because we were medium size, in spite of a very long history, part of our value added was an ingrained - if you want - embedded genes, for lack of a better term, that our foreign policy was proactive. We were all over the place, all the time. We had opinions on anything. That being said, we also defined our national security capacity both in hard assets and in political assets. So, our activism was part of how we secured our national security. It wasn't all about buying planes or hardware or being ready to fight left and right. Yes, we went to war several times, but we were also the initiators of the peace process.

With that mindset, even though we came from a very volatile region, we had a history of being very progressive on arms control. Even the NPT, by the way. The head of the first committee when the NPT was adopted was an Egyptian diplomat; he was my father, as a matter of fact. And he was a major force in helping conclude the

compromise that allowed the NPT to be concluded. Nevertheless, even though that was the position then, the Egyptian decision upon his recommendation was: We will sign the NPT, but we will not ratify it, unless the regional parties also ratify it. Because on the one hand, we are progressive on arms control, we believe you bring the threshold of danger down. But on the other hand, we weren't born yesterday. And in issues of arms control and national security, you have to preserve a certain amount of balance in your region. If you take a number of arms control areas, including, for example, areas where we had absolutely no expertise, no hardware: outer space. Egypt was the original sponsor of an outer space resolution to keep outer space for peaceful uses.

So our mentality on arms control was very forthcoming, very progressive. We felt that these were important norms. But we were equally adamant about: The region had to have equal obligations among all our parties. So even while Egypt joined the NPT, against my advice, by the way, before the Israelis did, we didn't drop the topic. We kept raising it all the time, everywhere. And when Secretary Baker and the American delegation came to us in Madrid, and told us, there's going to be three committees, multilateral committees - environment, economic cooperation and water - we told them, "the Palestinians want refugees as well, and the Egyptians want arms control." Not because we were trying to be difficult, but if we're trying to develop the new Middle East, what is the future of the Middle East? The Middle East at peace? We strongly felt that arms control, bringing down the threshold of terror, the threshold of losses and damage, was important. So, we were always very progressive on arms control. It wasn't something we made up; it was not anti-Israeli by any account. We simply butt heads with the Israelis all the time, specifically because of the nuclear issue. That's really the context of how we operated.

Arms Control, while in many countries was felt to be a mundane topic, for young Egyptian diplomats, it was actually something people wanted to engage in, because they knew how important it was for us. It is from that perspective that we were always active in the First Committee at the UN. And it was from that perspective that we were vocal at the NPT. Yes, people heard very frequently what we said on the Middle East, but we were also vocal on the importance of the five permanent members having concrete disarmament steps, and the 13 steps that were suggested by the non-aligned movement at certain points in time. Bizarrely, arms control, and especially the ACRS process, and the Middle East zone issues, were topical, public issues in Egypt. And they were public issues that the public followed carefully, and that the public put pressure on politicians in that respect as well. In other words, when they felt, when they heard of a possible test, here or there, we were held accountable to explain: who was that testing? Why were the South Africans testing? Or why were the Israelis testing? Or what's the truth of this? And what's the truth of that? I don't know of many other countries where arms control is a public issue on a day-to-day basis, but it was.

Hanna Notte

Great, that's very useful. And actually, I wanted to ask you the question about how the five working groups of the multilateral track came about, and you suggested that the Americans, James Baker came with three and then the Palestinians wanted refugees and you tabled arms control. And so, how did we get to an arms control and regional security working group? Was it quite consensual? Or was it controversial to proceed that way?

Nabil Fahmy

It was both. When it was raised - this was all at Madrid when it was raised - some of the members of the American delegation objected. But Baker was a big man. And he frankly turned around and said: if you're talking about the future, and the Israelis want to talk about water, environment, and economic cooperation, well, they have to also engage on the other issues raised by us. So, he agreed to these proposals in his conference room, in our meeting with him, and he overruled his own delegation. And at that point, frankly, Baker and Bush were so big, in comparison to others, globally and regionally, nobody in the meeting was going to go head-to-head with them and object. They may not have been, I mean, the regional parties may not have attempted to cooperate in these working groups, but they were not going to block their establishment. So that's how they were established.

Hanna Notte

Very interesting. Thank you. And just -

Nabil Fahmy

Sorry, let me just add one point here: The whole idea of normal relations, what peace really meant, was - you'll be amused by this because it's not really known quite well - it was the first time raised by the Egyptian Foreign Minister in 1977 at the General Assembly. We raised it, not the Israelis, but we raised it post conflict resolution. The Israelis, later, picked up the same topic, but wanted to do the normalization part first, as a preliminary step towards conflict resolution. The Americans, frankly, under the Bush father administration, and with Baker, understood that if you want to have a deal, you have to accommodate both sides, not only one, and they brought the two packages together. When the Israelis came to Madrid, and Prime Minister Shamir's - in the late Prime Minister Shamir's autobiography, he actually says that he came only under tremendous pressure from the Americans, but how they had no intention to actually reach a deal quickly. So, he couldn't say no to the Americans then, they were too prominent, so he wasn't going to cooperate. The same, frankly, applied to arms control. The Israelis were not in the mood to engage on arms control. But they couldn't say no, because Baker had said yes. And I will add a point here that at the first or the second meeting of ACRS in Washington we already had proposals.

Hanna Notte

We had a January 1992 meeting in Moscow, and then the first plenary in Washington, DC, I believe.

Nabil Fahmy

Exactly. So, at the meeting in Washington, DC, we were very well prepared. We had thought about arms control in the Middle East at peace for some time. And don't forget, we were at peace with the Israelis already. So, we were not fixated on a conflict resolution case. And Aly may also have mentioned this to you, we actually prepared an extensive, comprehensive action plan that included unilateral measures, voluntary measures, confidence building measures, some legally binding measures, some multilateral measures, and so on and so forth. Some of which were symmetrical, others which were not. And I remember Dennis Ross coming across the room to me and saying, "Nabil, they can't swallow this. You'll scare them."

Hanna Notte

I think you mentioned this in your book as well.

Nabil Fahmy

Exactly. And I said, well, this is our position. I'm not saying we'll do it all at the same time. But we're serious about arms control, this is not a game for us. And it's not anti-anybody.

Hanna Notte

Very good. I wanted - you've already mentioned the importance of the Americans at the time - I want to take a step back and ask you a broader question about context: What global and regional developments did you see as making this kind of process possible at the time? And also, I want to ask you: the US and Soviet Union, and then Russia, were the co-chairs of the ACRS group. What role did you see Russia playing in the process as it went on?

Nabil Fahmy

Great Question. First of all, this was a changing world. The Berlin Wall had been brought down, Kuwait had been liberated, George Bush was talking about a new world order, and so on. The Americans - this was the world community as seen from American eyes. The Russians came to Madrid, frankly, as a junior partner in the process, and they came to Madrid only because the Americans wanted to bring them to Madrid, not because anybody really felt that they had influence at the time. They were going through their own problems, per se. But also, the American liberation of Kuwait, before the Madrid peace process - which included, by the way, Egyptian forces and Syrian forces - was seen as an opportunity by the Americans to, "okay, let's start doing something different here." And they initially started to think of a ballistic missile ban. One of the proposals they had in mind at the time was to create a ballistic missile ban for Middle Eastern states. And we wanted to go further than

that. This was a changing period. And the Americans were leading the change. And frankly, they were doing it, I must say, quite constructively. I support in many respects how the Bush father administration wanted to move the world forward. And had this been played properly, had it extended, had Bush been reelected, you would have been able to get much more out of this for the Middle East.

Hanna Notte

Okay. I want to come back to Madrid and ask you: What was Egypt's position as to the relationship between the bilateral tracks which came out of Madrid and the multilateral track? What should be the nature of that relationship, according to Egypt?

Nabil Fahmy

I'm going to give you a very candid answer: Egypt was the pioneer in the region. We're the ones who went to war, and we're the ones who started the peace process. And we frankly appreciated being complimented and commended for that. And we were strong believers in the peace process, and still are for a comprehensive peace. Therefore, having the Madrid peace process was a natural next step in how we saw the world develop, or our world develop, at least. That being said, as we prepared to go to Madrid - and I'm telling you this very openly - we had to actually think about, okay, what's our role? All of these guys are in conflict with each other. We're not. So, wait, what exactly is our role in this process? Are we simply going to be the barrier between the Israelis and the Arabs who are at war with them? So, they place us in between them, so not to offend people? Are we simply going to be the go-between? Is that going to be our role? We went through our own evaluation. How do we continue to show Egypt's role in this process? That's one thing. The other thing is we had experience negotiating with the Israelis, while most of the other Arabs, except for maybe Jordan, had not. And thirdly, because we were at peace, we had actually thought of the process of what comes after peace. And we had even thought, in terms of our foreign policy, well if you solve the Middle East peace process, where should we be active? And our focus here was on the Mediterranean in particular.

I give you all these points, because we went there enthusiastically, but also a bit hesitant. Because the spotlight was then not on Egypt, the spotlight was on the Syrians, because they were angry with the Israelis, and vice versa; the Palestinians, because [of] how much recognition they would get or not get in being there, as an independent entity; and Jordan, and so on. All that being said, we were the least sensitive to the multilaterals. Different Arab countries participated in the multilaterals, including ACRS, but very casually. They would participate when they wanted to do something in particular, but they wouldn't really engage. And we were engaged in all five committees, because we felt that Egypt had to play a prominent role in moving forward.

We did not share the Israeli opinion that the multilaterals were a first step towards the bilaterals. For us, it was the other way around. But we were happy to do them in parallel. Because if there's a conflict between two countries, they had to sit down at the table and negotiate, we will help them. But we can't define the borders between Jordan and Israel, or between the Palestinians and Israel, or Syria, for that matter. It's not our prerogative. But if we're talking about water sharing in the Middle East, we will definitely play a role. So, the Syrians were very sensitive about the multilaterals, and they didn't come to them. Other Arabs came to them but were quiet, and in ACRS for example, the majority would be quiet and simply follow Egypt's lead. The only other active player was Jordan. But nobody else was really quite active. Some Arabs would - Oman, for example, was active on water. And Jordan, and maybe one other country was active in economic cooperation, while the Palestinians were the one prominent on refugees. So, we were quite comfortable with the bilaterals, multilaterals, but we didn't see them as sequential.

Hanna Notte

Great. That's very clear and very useful. And I want to ask you about the definition of the region in the context of this process. The Turks ended up being involved as an extra-regional player in ACRS. Certain countries were not involved because they didn't want to - Syria, Lebanon - or because they just weren't at the table. The whole definition of the region: was that non-controversial among all participating, or what

was Egypt's position on that?

Nabil Fahmy

Okay, let me also take you back to a question I forgot to answer. When ACRS was established, our opinion was, as traditionalists from the developing world and the non-aligned world: let's talk about disarmament. And that's what we're talking about. We're not talking about regional security. We're not talking about arms control. Arms control was a Western, or if you want, a big power concept. It was the concept that we accepted as medium sized states. But frankly, when we put on the table that we wanted a committee on disarmament, when the Americans came back and said: we'll call it arms control and regional security, to accommodate Western concepts and Israeli concerns about this being a regional issue, my minister at the time pulled me back and said: "Nabil, you've got what you wanted. Give in on the name, don't make an issue of the name." And frankly, he was right. I mean, I could have argued on the name for a while. But in all essence, in all honesty, whatever they called it, we discussed what we wanted to discuss at the meetings, and we succeeded and failed because of substantial issues, not because of what the committee was called. What was the other question you had? I'm sorry.

Hanna Notte

The definition of the region.

Nabil Fahmy

Sure, traditionally, the Middle East, was considered to be Arab, Israel, Iran. If you look at the UN concepts, it was always Arab, Israel and Iran. So, it was from the Atlantic, right through North Africa, to the Levant, and down to the Gulf, and including Iran. The first Middle East nuclear weapons free zone proposal was an Iranian-Egyptian proposal. And of course, the Israelis were part of the region, because the Arab-Israeli conflict was a Middle Eastern conflict. Turkey was not part of the region. Turkey was not only not part of the region, they didn't want to be. The Turks at the time wanted to be the bridge between Arabs and Israelis, not to be part of the region. And then they wanted to be the bridge between - later on, when terrorism came up - between the West and moderate Islam, so to speak. At the ACRS group, the Turks participated voluntarily when they decided to, but not on a regular basis. And there was also, frankly, a number of active players because of their expertise. For example, the Canadians would come up with a lot of proposals because they had a lot of expertise in that respect. But the real Middle Eastern discussions were Israel, Jordan and Egypt. That's really where the metal hit the road, so to speak, and the agreements and disagreements emerged. Everybody else was trying to pitch in, and it was amusing because they would occasionally pitch in completely out of context. And I'll give you a quick story - I know I'm keeping you here a little bit, but...

Hanna Notte

Anecdotes are very welcome, actually. The more anecdotes, the better.

Nabil Fahmy

Sure, at one point we were in Tunis. And Tunis is right beside Libya. And Gaddafi was in his full force at the time. So, we're sitting there in the ACRS committee, and the Canadians, if I'm not mistaken, suggested that we hold search and rescue exercises, maritime exercises on the Mediterranean, including Arabs and Israelis in the practice. I was sitting here, and I knew that Gaddafi was not going to let anything, any semblance of that, happen nearby, and that the Tunisians would immediately back off once he starts to shout about this issue. But I had - as we were having the meeting - I had a personal family crisis. So, I had to leave, and I leaned over to my Israeli colleague, who was sitting beside me, David Ivry. And I said, "David, I have to leave. A member of my family has had an accident, so I'm going to leave. I'm not withdrawing from this. But this is a stupid proposal. And this is going to go through, it's going to be adopted. And then, 10 minutes after it's leaked, Gaddafi is going to start shouting. And the Tunisians will not fulfill this agreement. And then you're going to get angry about this. So this is, it's nice to have good intention. But let's be realistic where we are and what the context is here. Because that way, you're trying to do something good, you end up creating a worse problem rather than a good one."

And David, who is a very serious, direct person, he's not a small talk kind of guy, but

he was - him and I got along quite well - he said, "Is there anything serious back home?" I said, "Well, it's serious enough for me to go back, but no, it's not life-threatening. But I do have to go back." And then he said, "Okay, why do you think this isn't going to work?" I said, "Look, you're going to leak it, David. You Israelis leak everything. You're going to leak it. And the minute Gaddafi hears about this, he's going to start putting pressure on the Tunisians, and then you're going to say, 'the Arabs don't keep their word.' So why don't we just do something which we can do - it's not about bringing an idea from a think tank in Waterloo and deciding it's going to work." But anyway, this is a side story just to keep you amused.

Hanna Notte

No, that's great. That's great. Thank you. Minister Fahmy, I want to ask you about the steering committee that was put together for the multilateral track. Now, I assume you were part of that steering committee? Can you talk a little bit about how it worked, what its mandate was, how relevant, quite frankly, it was for the workings of the ACRS group?

Nabil Fahmy

It started, initially, with the first structure of the multilaterals. In other words, there are five committees, somebody has to coordinate this, to make sure that they're all working, and it's all - hopefully you have synergies between the different committees. So, it was not a technical committee, it was a political committee. And it was - our delegation was first led by a senior diplomat from the Egyptian side, he then left the process. And I took on the head of that delegation. It was mostly political, it did not meet frequently, because what happened was, the working groups tended to work in parallel. And I don't think that the co-sponsors really wanted to have the steering committee meet too frequently, because then it would politicize and possibly make one committee conditional on progress in the other. And I'm pretty sure that one of the parties, what they were worried about most was Egypt, because that was our position. We had said openly, "we are happy to have all five working groups move forward. But if the Israelis or the sponsors don't take arms control seriously, or don't take refugees seriously, they should not expect water, economic cooperation and environment to move on, as if this is not a conflict zone." So it was less and less used, and less and less effective. But symbolically, it was the umbrella for the five working groups.

Hanna Notte

Great. That's very clear. Thank you. So, if I look at the historical records, I see that a decision was taken at the first plenary of ACRS - which, again, was in May 1992, in Washington, DC - to focus on lessons from how you did confidence building measures in the US-Soviet theater during the Cold War, the Helsinki process in Europe. So I guess, we could say, to take an educational approach. How was that received by the regional delegations? Did you personally find that an instructive and useful approach?

Nabil Fahmy

Yes and no. But let me first tell, the regional parties except for Egypt and Jordan, the Egyptian party, the Arab parties, were very cautious and careful on arms control. The only two parties that were really active and, if you want, creative in their proposals, good and bad, were Jordan and Egypt. Everybody else was careful. They didn't have peace agreements yet with Israel, weren't comfortable. And the whole idea of arms control and confidence building measures and verification was not something that they could politically accommodate. So, they were happy to do arms control under the UN, but not on a regional basis. We were happy to do it on both tracks, as, ultimately, were the Jordanians, because they had had contacts with the Israelis for years, even before the peace agreement with them.

The other point, because I said yes and no, is: when we prepared the paper that I mentioned earlier, and that I mentioned in the book, we actually went through the practices of others. And we looked at some measures that had been done by the two superpowers, or through the OECD - OSCE, excuse me - and so on. And we therefore drew up a plan, which included some unilateral, voluntary measures that are not mandatory, and others that actually were reciprocal in some sense. And we used a lot of these things. But what bothered us by this is, the two superpowers and the

NATO-Warsaw [Pact] were in a Cold War. We were in a real war. So, the idea that you could do visits - but how can you do visits with each other, if you don't recognize each other? So, what really annoyed us was, we kept getting these suggestions that don't understand the context of the Middle East. If - again, it was not a problem for Egypt because we were at peace - but there were other Arab countries who did not recognize Israel, who would not talk to an Israeli. How could you have an exchange of visits? This was not going to be possible. So, it's really, we learned the lessons from the experience. And then we took those lessons that we felt could be applied in the Middle East, and suggested them as Middle Eastern things, but a bit more gradually.

The second point we'd make is: the problem with the confidence building measures is - and again, don't forget, Egypt and Israel had a peace agreement. Therefore, we actually had military-to-military contacts, and we had early warning systems, we had a hotline, and a lot of these things. And the military-to-military, if you want, emergency committee was actually quite efficient between the two sides. But if you can't talk to each other, you can't sort of use the same thing. The other point is, if you want me to feel confident, then you need to take steps that address my concerns. Not steps that address your concerns. And that was really never the case in the Arab-Israeli context, or - we didn't have Iran, but in the back of our minds, also the Iranian context - in the Russian-American context, they took not necessarily the same steps. But on occasion, they took the same steps. And on occasion, they took asymmetrical steps to indicate, and that's really the problem. Had the Israelis accepted to take some steps, for example on the nuclear issues, we would have been much more receptive. And we would have ran with this. But they weren't...

To be fair to the Israelis, they, then and now - I challenge you, go raise these issues with the Israelis, not the issue of what happened, but the issue of what would you like to see happen, you're not going to be able to get any serious Israelis to talk to you on these issues - they don't really want to talk about arms control. So, they didn't want to talk about arms control from the very beginning. And it showed in their practices. And I'll tell you a story later on this. So how can we possibly feel comfortable when they suggested a step that we knew we had done with them on our military-to-military cooperation, but didn't deal with our concern about their weapons of mass destruction? Whenever we raised that, we were told, "Oh no, we can't talk about that." So, it simply couldn't work for us. But we tried to do it without ignoring the fact that part of our region was still at war, or did not recognize Israel, which is different from the East-West. And the East-West process was in a Cold War, not in a hot war, by the way. Sorry, go ahead.

Hanna Notte

That's great. And I want to stick with the operational basket for a second and these intersessionals. Now, notwithstanding all you just said, it seems that the work on the confidence building measures did actually go quite far over the years. And so, given the reluctance that you mentioned, or the caution, especially by some of the other Arab delegations to talk confidence building measures with the Israelis, I guess I'm wondering what made it possible for that work to nonetheless continue in not such an unconstructive spirit, it seems, when one looks at the results that were achieved?

Nabil Fahmy

Sure, again, very important for you to keep in mind the context. You had, particularly, two Arab delegations that were actively engaged, Jordan and Egypt. Everybody else was going along quietly, without making commitments. Every now and then, you might find Morocco or Tunis coming up with a suggestion, but essentially, the others were following the - they would not break a consensus, on a proposal - but all the proposals, by the way, were voluntary, and not mandatory. And while there was a lot of activity, workshops, seminars, a verification process - we actually developed a document, at one point, a declaration about the Middle East - but they were never adopted. We always got to the point of, "okay, let's take the final decision," and it will always fail. And it will always fail because of political differences. The document that - and this is a document that Aly worked on quite well - the document on Middle East security ultimately failed for two reasons: The Israelis refused to put anything nuclear into it: "Nothing nuclear, we can talk about anything you want but nuclear, which we will not accept." We were not going to accept a regional security document on the

Middle East that does not include nuclear. It was not going to come out of that room. But the other rejection was, the Israelis refused to accept a Palestinian request in the context of regional security to talk about self-determination. So yes, you can say there was a lot of documents, there were a tremendous amount of documents, but nothing ultimately adopted. So don't misunderstand the process. You have to know the distinction between the process and the results.

Hanna Notte

Understood, thank you. And I want to ask you a question that's slightly more related to atmospherics. So again, if I look at the timeline, I think it's in July 1993 - so that would be two months before the Declaration of Principles is signed - that the first intersessional, as they were called, took place in Cairo. I think that was the first kind of ACRS event in Cairo. Of course, later, we know the plenaries will move to Doha and Tunis. Can you talk a little bit about the significance of moving the process into the region? Was that important?

Nabil Fahmy

You know, I never really thought about it very deeply, to be honest with you. We were happy to do it in Cairo, especially because this one was focused on verification, and specifically verification of nuclear issues. That was a seminar in Cairo at the time. So, if you put nuclear on it, we were not going to object to hosting the meeting. And hosting the meeting in Cairo also gave an umbrella for other Arab countries to come. The fact that the next step would be in Doha, or in Tunis, was politically symbolic, but not security-substantial. Yes, having a meeting in Doha, or Tunis, meant that you were doing it in North Africa, and you were doing it in the Gulf, and that has political - if you want - meaning to it, but neither Doha nor Tunis was a main player in arms control. It did not bother us.

But I would add to what you're saying: As this expanded, and as we saw the other working groups (not ACRS, the other ones) also proliferating around the region and in large numbers, and Israeli intransigence on the nuclear issue in ACRS increasing, and as we felt the pressure, which was a result of the desire of the NPT members to extend the NPT indefinitely, which for us, was a problem - not because we objected to the NPT, we're a member of the NPT, but because if you extend it indefinitely, with Israel outside of it, then you have the indefinite asymmetry between the obligations and commitments in our region. Now, I'm not arguing what's happening between Alaska and Albania. That's not my concern. But my concern is, this puts me in a double fix, so to speak. So, we soured on the ACRS process.

And we basically told the Americans directly, and I told the Israelis personally directly, and a little bit in the steering committee, that this is not going to work, if three committees are working and two are dead. You might be able to research this, I actually issued a public statement that people should not misunderstand our good intentions here, that unless all five working groups were working seriously, they would all stop. And I remember Uri Savir contacting me after that and saying: "Nabil, are you threatening to stop them?" I said: "No, I'm just telling you, I will." And so, we were turning sour on all five of them, because we didn't feel that ACRS was being taken seriously. Had ACRS been moving at a slower pace, we would not have taken that step. But it was moving not at all in terms of our concerns. And we felt that we were being taken for a ride. And on the other side, we were under pressure being told that we have to agree to an indefinite extension of the NPT. And well: "Why don't you guys be serious and be realistic? The Israelis don't want to join the NPT." That's not a national security decision that we can accept.

Hanna Notte

That's extremely useful. And I was actually going to ask you - and maybe it's too difficult to pinpoint, but you treat also what then went down at the RevCon in quite some detail in your book - I was going to ask you whether you recall at which point the anticipation of things being difficult at the RevCon, or not going into the direction that Egypt wanted, soured your approach to ACRS? I mean, do you recall at which point that was the case?

Nabil Fahmy

It actually happened outside of NPT and ACRS. And I also mentioned in the book, we were extremely serious on arms control. And we were also very realistic about arms

control. People can say whatever they want about Egyptians, but we were not born yesterday, we're 7,000 years old. And we've had tremendous achievements and tremendous failures. So, we understand how to move things forward, when to take a good deal if it exists, even if it's not a perfect one. As we were working in ACRS, and the larger context, and as we were discussing NPT - and that does not include talking to Israelis - we talked to Israelis directly. And I know I mentioned this in the book. We had bilateral contacts with the Israelis, we made proposals to them: "Okay, you don't want to join the NPT now as a non-nuclear weapons state? But this is not going to work that you keep saying no, no, no, no." And we keep pushing it forward. "So, give us the commitment 'when'." And I put on the table a proposal: "give us a commitment within one year of comprehensive peace" - which was, frankly, a wishy-washy proposal, because it's very difficult to define. But I just wanted to get a political commitment. I wanted to get the Israelis to open up on a discussion about, okay, how do we do this? That, for me, was much more important than daydreaming about them signing a zone agreement in a couple of weeks or a couple of months or joining the NPT.

And the Israelis, they are extremely smart negotiators. They ignored the proposal for a while. Then, suddenly, when they really felt the pressure that we were exerting as part of ACRS - and the Americans wanted us to be more cooperative in the NPT process, so they must have been talking to Israelis - the Israelis contacted us. And as I mentioned, they invited the foreign minister and myself to lunch in New York. And Shimon Peres told Amr Moussa, "Okay, I'm ready to accept this proposal, one, two, three. And let's have a constructive proposal, constructive idea." And Amr was well briefed on these issues, and he understood arms control. So he leaned over to me and in Arabic said, "What do you think?" I said, "No." And he looked at me with a very strange smile, and then he changed the subject. And then before we finished lunch, he looked at Shimon and said, "I agree with the proposal." And then as we walked out, he said, "Nabil, why in the world are you objecting your own proposal?" I said, "Because he doesn't have the authority to accept it. And he's going to create even more problems, because we're going to have to go back to Mubarak now and tell them that they agreed, and then he's not going to fulfill the agreement. And we're going to look bad. And people will say, why don't you move more on ACRS and more on NPT?" So, again, we tried with the Israelis, and at that point, we realized they're not going to move on this at all.

Now, we soured on the NPT at a different point. In preparation for the NPT, first of all, the world community was, not torn, but was searching for, what is the length of time that we make the extension. Different proposals, one of them was a 25-year revolving extension. And the other was the indefinite extension. The 25-year revolving extension was actually the one most supported initially, and people assumed this was the one going to go through. Because nobody thought that the indefinite one would go through. And the first one also provided a review process, which was more serious. And then the non-aligned movement had a meeting in Indonesia. And at that meeting, the movement, including ourselves, did not really support the 25-year revolving proposal. That was a big mistake, we overreached. And at the beginning, at the middle of the meeting, the South Africans - this was at the beginning of the Mandela period - the South Africans, and they were larger than life with Mandela, broke with the non-aligned movement, and said they would go along with the indefinite extension.

So, this was before the NPT Review Conference started. When we went to the conference, we knew that we were between a rock and a hard place here. It's either going to be 25 years, revolving, which we didn't like, or indefinite extension, which we really disliked. But we didn't have the votes to stop either of them, because there was so much pressure to go along with this. And, frankly, we entered the NPT conference, the extension conference, I wouldn't say frustrated, but very realistic about what we could actually get out of the conference. And we knew that we were not going to fight the battle of the length of extension because this was a losing battle. So, we decided to focus more importantly on, okay, if this has to go through, how do we shed focus on the Middle East itself? And we made a proposal to issue a resolution on a decision on creating a zone free of nuclear weapons in the Middle East, and so on. It's a long story, but it would have gone through with a vote. We would have gotten a majority. And the Americans and a couple of other players would have probably voted no or

abstained. But we would have gotten it through because it goes to the General Assembly on a regular basis.

Then the Americans overreached. Meaning, they made the same mistake we did in Indonesia. They really overreached. They came to the meetings in New York and said: We want to adopt the extension conference without a vote. And frankly, we were almost about to flip over in joy, because it immediately gave us leverage to negotiate. And we didn't have a majority to support our opinion. But if you wanted to go without a vote, you had to get Arab support. So, it gave us leverage. And it gave us leverage, which was unnecessary, you could very easily have adopted the resolution anyway. So, we put forward the Middle East resolution. The Americans were furious with that resolution. And Albright, who was Ambassador in New York at the time, I remember she came to me, she said, "How can you expect us to support a resolution referring to Israel?" And I said, "Well, how can you expect Egypt to submit a proposal on the Middle East that doesn't have Israel?" It's pretty simple. And she said, "Okay, your resolution can be put to a vote, and the extension conference will go on without it," and I said, "No, they either go through this way, or they go through that way." And the ultimate conclusion was that, okay, if you want Israel's name to be withdrawn, to be removed, then the depositories submit the resolution, not Egypt. If we submit it, it's going to have its name there.

So, this was actually all a function of Americans overreaching. We didn't have anything to negotiate with, we had already lost the battle going in, because of what happened in Indonesia. But we then were able to negotiate to get this resolution and to have it adopted. And we made the point that - the head of our delegation, Nabil Elaraby - we would only allow the resolution on extension to go through without a vote, if it was factually correct. And when Dhanapala asked me, what did I mean, I said, "if you want to say there's consensus, there is no consensus. We don't support the extension. But if you describe what's happening in the conference room, well, we can't deny what's happening in the conference room." And he was very smart. He drafted language which said there was widespread support for the extension. So, there was widespread support. We weren't part of it. But there was widespread support. So, we told the Americans and the Russians, we will not block that passing without the vote. But we will make a statement after the vote, after the adoption, saying we were not part of that majority, which we did. So again, what turned us were two things. First of all, what happened with Shimon Peres. And secondly, frankly, that turned us both on the NPT process and on ACRS. And then what happened in Indonesia turned us even more on the NPT process.

Hanna Notte

Very good, very detailed and very clear. I want to take a step back from the NPT RevCon and ask you: the split that was consciously adopted - and I think it was at the fourth plenary, or it was not until the fourth plenary in November '93 in Moscow - to split the work into the operational and the conceptual basket. Who came up with that approach, with that idea? And again, was that consensual? Was that easily adopted? And I also crucially want to ask you, how did Egypt understand the mandate of the conceptual basket?

Nabil Fahmy

I need to go back to my notes. Because, while I was leading these different delegations, I also had a lot of responsibilities with Amr Moussa as his policy advisor, so I was not in every single one of the meetings. But I know that our posture was: let's be as flexible as we can on tactics, if we can get a substantial discussion on all issues of arms control. So, discussing the conceptual part of arms control, and discussing the operational part of arms control, wasn't something we would like, traditionally, but it wasn't something we would want to oppose. For us, we were ready to be more flexible on tactics. To give you a more precise answer to that, I would refer you to the position of Jordan. They tended to come up with these, if you want, creative options. Some of which we didn't really like very much. But they were all meant to provide a certain continuity to the process. So, I would not rule out that this well could have been a Jordanian proposal, and that we went along with it, because we did not have a problem with it. But I don't remember us suggesting it, I don't remember who actually suggested it.

And again, as I mentioned a few minutes ago, the conceptual part of the process was

what ultimately led to this declaration that was put together. And we had the technical know-how to engage in these. But we were very careful with the balance, therefore, while we were not comfortable with the blah, blah, blah and the principles and the preambles and the language, because there was no concrete substantial work being provided on the operational part, we were ready to be patient a little bit on this, provided there was a proper balance. And the minute we found that, even in the conceptual part, there was going to be an exception on nuclear issues, that broke the process for us. And then, of course, the same thing happened with the Palestinians on self-determination. But I would suggest, look at the Jordanian position, and there was a book by Abdullah Toukan and Shai Feldman, it provides their version of events, but I think it also has some useful points there.

Hanna Notte

I will. Sure. Thank you. I do want to ask you about the Israeli position. And I'm grateful for the Shimon Peres lunch episode, which is already quite useful. But more broadly, this fundamental discrepancy between the Egyptian and Israeli position on when to include arms control, nuclear disarmament, in these discussions, or the sequencing in that regard - did you find that discrepancy to be static? Or were there ever inflection points, moments within ACRS, where you felt that there might be greater opportunity for rapprochement between those two approaches?

Nabil Fahmy

Initially, no. They seemed adamant about not discussing the nuclear issue, but they couldn't rule it out as a topic. So, we got it in there among the topics, initially. But the Americans, particularly Dennis Ross, would frequently come and try to sort of slow me down in the process of bringing this up, repeatedly - but not only, frankly, that, also a lot of the operational part of the arms control issues, it was not only the nuclear issue, but it was mostly the nuclear issue. That being said - I wanted to say something just slipped my mind a second ago. The other part of it, frankly, I had discussions with the Israelis themselves. And they were really interesting discussions. David Ivry, let me tell you this anecdote. Well, no, let me answer your question first, then tell you an anecdote that relates to it.

The one time I had hope that there may be a slow, incremental process, was when they agreed to the verification seminar in Cairo, which included nuclear issues, but verification of nuclear issues. We thought, well, you know what, they may want to do this slowly. We're happy to look into this. But we're not going to close the door, as long as they keep it a little bit open. But I think after they held that meeting, they decided that we were pushing them down a slippery slope. And if they continue to do this, they were going to get into trouble. And therefore, they would stop this. And I say this, because if you look at what the military establishment was saying, and you look at what Shimon Peres agreed to us later, they were clearly having their own internal discussion about how to get us to calm down a little bit.

The second point I really make to you is, I had discussions with David Ivry because the Americans came to me and they said: "The Israelis are complaining, if you don't even bother to criticize them. They say anything they want, and you say anything else. You don't even bother to comment on what they say." And I said: "Yeah, that's exactly true. I get no satisfaction in insulting anybody, or in criticizing anybody, but I'm not an idiot. And I don't negotiate with anybody who's not serious. So, if they want to raise issues that are irrelevant in my mind, I will raise my issues. I'm not going to start a discussion." And then somebody says, well, let's play it halfway. Egypt doesn't negotiate that way. Anyway, we had this discussion - I and the Americans, with, if I'm not mistaken, with Bob Gallucci

Hanna Notte

Mike Yaffe? Bob Einhorn?

Nabil Fahmy

Anyway, the Americans went and told the Israelis that Nabil is saying he's not going to bother with this. And yes, he's doing this intentionally. So, David called me and said, "Did you actually tell the Americans?" I said, "Sure, I did." So, he said, "Well can we have breakfast?" I said, "Yeah, why don't you come over and let's have breakfast tomorrow." David is a very serious man, he's not somebody that you're going to engage with in small talk. But he's professional. So, he came over for breakfast, and

he said, "You actually told them?" I said, "Sure, I did. I don't negotiate the way you guys do. I would negotiate with you when you're serious. But I'm not going to get dragged into a nonsensical discussion." And he started to smile, a very small smile and said, "What do you mean?" I said, "You're actually arguing that you need to keep the Golan in Syria because it's high? What are we talking about, mules and camels? That's really the security problem on your hand?" He started to laugh, and he said, "Okay, let's do the following: we understand each other. We won't get into big arguments with each other. And we'll just play the Americans and calm their nerves. But you and I know that this discussion is not ripe yet. When it is ripe, we'll start the discussion. But it's not now." I said, "That's fine, David, but again, so you don't misunderstand this, if it's not ripe now, there's not going to be any fruit on the other committees either. Let me just be careful here, I'm not going to argue with you. And I, again, we spent 30 years or more arguing and insulting each other, I get no pride or satisfaction in continuing the diatribe. But don't think you're going to get me to a discussion that's nonsensical on arms control." And ultimately, we managed the remaining part of the ACRS process until it died, quite professional.

But again, it's really about, they did not want arms control. They were never serious about arms control, they were dragged in here because they couldn't say no to Baker. And slowly, over time, they became more reticent. They agreed to have one discussion just to calm us down. And then they put their foot down. I think I said this in the book, but in the middle of all this process, Amr Moussa was on a visit to Israel. And he went to see Prime Minister Rabin, and I was with him. And they discussed everything. And then Rabin said, "Oh, by the way, on arms control, the only guy talking arms control on my side is David Ivry. And we would appreciate if the only guy on your side is Fahmy." He understood that I wasn't going to be taken for a ride. But I also understood that they weren't serious. And this is not going to be how we're doing. So again, they simply weren't serious, and it had to stop. Frankly, if I had allowed it to continue, it would have been a really acerbic platform for arguments. So, it was better to stop the whole thing than to go on nonsensical.

Hanna Notte

Israel, at some point during the process, signed the Chemical Weapons Convention. Did that have any bearing on your perception of Israeli intentions and objectives?

Nabil Fahmy

No, because their position from the day one was: get the others to sign, anything that's not nuclear. And we had said openly - I mean, our original proposal was a zone free of nuclear weapons - but even in '91, we made the proposal, okay, let's make it a zone free of all weapons of mass destruction. So, we were more than ready to sign the CW agreement. And to ratify both the CW agreement and the biological agreement. Sorry, we had signed one and not ratified it. But we didn't sign the other. But we were ready to do both. Our only condition was: Israel has to join the nuclear one as well. And they would not do that. So, the sort of compartmentalization of national security does not work. I mean, the American argument to us was, "why are you linking it together?" And it's very, very simple: Our national security is a package of national security, but it's not one weapon. You cannot use one weapon, you have weapon systems, and national security concepts, and threat perceptions from different regions. So, these, for us, our threat perceptions - and they're also negotiating tools, because you guys promised us things which you never fulfilled, which was the Israelis would join the NPT if we join the NPT. If they had joined the NPT, we would've been the first to join the CWC. But you did not fulfill your commitment. And then you said: Well, let's be realistic.

Hanna Notte

There were some developments in the bilateral tracks. We had Oslo, of course, in September '93, and then also the Israeli-Jordanian peace treaty in October '94. What impact did that have on the workings and the atmosphere within the ACRS group?

Nabil Fahmy

Nothing really. The Jordanians were a bit more constructive, a bit more active. They felt that, okay, they can now play a really leading role. And Jordan is, if I may say, they're lighter. They move much quicker than we do. And they're lighter in their tracks, they're more nimble. And they negotiate differently from the way we do. And,

frankly, because of that, they were ready to do some processes with the Israelis that were very close to the OSCE processes and wanted to have all these meetings. And we weren't comfortable with those processes. And we told the Jordanians: Slow down a bit. Because unless these processes also include nuclear issues, it's not gonna fly for us. It's not going to be a process of only having - I mean, you can't dance on something that's not of concern to you. And if I may say, at a point in time, they felt they could lead us.

Hanna Notte

That's very interesting. Thank you for that. Minister, I realize we've spoken for quite a long time already. I have two, three more questions, if that's okay with you. Now building on what you just said about Egypt and Jordan, more broadly, can you talk a little bit more about the dynamics and the relationships within the Arab delegations between the core participating states, Egypt and Jordan on the one hand, and then the Gulf and Maghreb states on the other?

Nabil Fahmy

Sure. First, in terms of style and tactics, the Jordanians had been engaged with the Israelis for years privately, not in any cooperative measures, but on security issues and problems and so on. So, they were not, if you want, nervous about engaging the Israelis. This was even before the peace agreement with Israel, but that increased also after that. The second point is, the Jordanians are very well educated. They had good experts in their delegation. And they had creative minds in the delegation. They were trained to make proposals, especially the people that they sent to this delegation. Abdullah Toukan, for example, was a really smart man. And he wanted to play a role. He was an activist and creative and all that. My third point here is, it's a small country. We're not only 7,000 years old, now we weren't 100 million then, but we were still a large number, and we have a heavy bureaucracy. So, for us to change positions, or to make proposals, there's a process - even if our foreign ministry tends to be a bit ahead of the curve, domestically, there's still a process. They are a smaller country, they're a much more nimble country. And as long as you had relations with the Diwan, the King's offices - and Abdullah's sister was married to the King, had previously been married to the King - so he had access. So, the Jordanians and us, we both respected each other, we both understood the technical capacities that each side had, we occasionally would compete with each other, who would play the role more than the other, because we, both of us, wanted to be the activist and submit proposals. They weren't necessarily always synchronized. Especially on this issue of nuclear versus non-nuclear. That's really where we had differences. But on all the other issues, it was fine. There was no real problem. The other Arab states just didn't want to be pushed to get into operational things that were regional too quickly. When pushing was necessary, we didn't do that. Nor did Jordan, the Americans did it. And that's how they got a meeting in Tunis that ended up with this hilarious discussion about having a maritime exercise. Sorry, go ahead.

Hanna Notte

No, no, that's very clear. Sorry, finish the story.

Nabil Fahmy

And the Gulf was the same, the Gulf had, in the back of their mind, Iran, but couldn't, frankly, put Iran on the table. They weren't yet ready to engage openly on arms control. And they couldn't put it on the table because Iran wasn't, it wasn't their right to come anyway. So, you couldn't actually have a discussion, if you're not going to be able to bring the Iranians in.

Hanna Notte

Very clear. Thank you. I want to ask you a little bit about the personal dynamics and relationships that were being forged during ACRS. How did you observe those - I mean, not just necessarily between Egyptians and Israelis, but also between other delegations, Israelis and those in the Gulf, for instance? I mean, was there socializing outside the plenaries in these meetings? How did you see that personal dimension, and was it significant?

Nabil Fahmy

Very smart question. Again, this is back in the early 90s. So yes, they were all in the

room. They were courteous with each other. There may have been, here and there, some social engagement, especially when there were dinner parties of the sort where everybody was in a seminar or working group. But it was reserved for Israel and the non-Arab states that were in the committees. Now, it differed from meeting to meeting. On arms control, it was very reserved. On water, for example, where the Omanis were interested, they became more engaged, and therefore, of course, they engaged the Israelis more. On economic cooperation, you had not only the Jordanians, but also some other countries, engaging more socially, as well as substantively. On arms control, this is a sensitive issue. People don't want to talk about security, except with clear-cut instructions and a mandate. And nobody in the Arab world at the time wanted to talk to the Israelis, as an issue of priority, on these issues, and the Israelis didn't want to talk to - the only two who would talk to them, or well, one of the only two who would talk to them were the Egyptians and the Jordanians. So no, it didn't really create much of a social engagement. But I want to tell you, I think it created a professional comradery between the Israelis and the Jordanians and the Israelis and the Egyptians.

If I may say, I was sort of the hard-head, the bad guy, in this process. But I had a lot of personal, extremely interesting discussions, and open candid discussions over dinner, over a drink. We learned how to agree and disagree with each other, and frankly, the idea that we could keep our discussions substantive without getting into insults was appreciated. And it's not only about me, Aly and [others] on my delegation - but I wanted to say that we were not in this for rhetorical golden stars, we were in this for serious arms control, and that was going to be difficult. So even when the Israelis didn't want to move, they respected the fact that we were professional. Therefore, when they wanted the subject to be discussed, Rabin said: We want, from your side, X or Y, because they hated my positions, but they knew that I was serious about how I will engage or not engage them. I think the ACRS process did create some comradery, I became friends - I think he passed away now, the deputy of the delegation, I forget his name now, David's deputy, he was an academic at the university, originally from the military. We became good friends. And there were the younger members of the delegation who hated my guts. But David would control them when they got too agitated about my pushing, and Aly was, if you want, the more pleasant of our delegation. So, he could play that role when he wanted to. But the long answer is: No, there wasn't much socializing in our committee. There may have been on other committees, but yes, between those who could talk, it did create an area to get to understand each other. Years later I socialized with David Ivry more when we were both Ambassadors in Washington

Hanna Notte

Great, thank you. What could have gone differently at the time? ACRS failed. With hindsight, if you now reflect on the process, could something have gone differently? If you could go back now 30 years and say one thing, give one advice to a fellow negotiator, whether it's on the Egyptian delegation, or one of your counterparts, what would that be? I guess, I realize, I packaged two questions into one. But it's sort of the reflection on ACRS.

Nabil Fahmy

Sure, let me tell you a story, which answers your question, even though it's indirect, but actually it gives you a good answer to the question. Because of the sensitivity of the issues of arms control, our delegation always included military, intelligence, foreign ministry people and the sorts. And while the foreign ministry people tend to be disorganized, undisciplined, because that's the way we were trained, the military are not. The military are very disciplined, and they're very careful in what they say - as, of course, is the case for the intelligence people. They need to have instructions from their authorities before they engage on new subjects. Now, it's very, very difficult to hold a negotiation and not be able to ask your colleagues for technical advice, because they haven't read the question before. So, I needed their expertise, but they needed authority, because they respected my authority as head of delegation. But that meant that I would be the one deciding what is told to foreigners. But what they can say to other members is determined by their authorities.

Anyway, this is a long story. But what we did to solve this was, between every session, I would hold simulation training groups. We would actually convene different

delegations, would convene an exercise, one or two of them between every meeting. And some of us would be the Israelis, some of us would be the Jordanians, and some of us would be the Americans, and some would be the Egyptians. And we would put ourselves in the shoes of others. And as we did this - we frankly trained ourselves to do this - a lot of the questions that ultimately came up in the meetings were raised in these simulation activities. And because they were raised in these activities, my colleagues from the military intelligence had the time to get authority to answer those questions. The reason I tell you the story is, this was tiresome, but extremely useful. Because it forced us to put ourselves in the shoes of the Israelis, in the shoes of the Americans, or the Russians, or whoever, to think like them. So, we could ask questions like them and be prepared with the answers that we needed. Authorized answers.

So, my point, my long answer to you is, in all honesty, and I say this to younger diplomats when they come to ask my advice: First of all, you never negotiate with anybody who doesn't have the authority to negotiate. Secondly, if he's not serious, don't bother to negotiate. Thirdly, if you think he's serious, put yourself in his shoes. And try to think: what does this guy really need? Not what he wants. What does he really need? What he needs is the bottom line. What he wants is his ambition. But first of all, what he needs. If you are able to do that, when you listen to him making his presentations, you'll be able to see how far away he is from his basic need or not. I would really openly tell anybody who starts this process again: Put yourself in the shoes, do the simulations, put yourself in the other guy's shoes - don't agree with him. Don't fall into the trap of agreeing with him - but just put yourself in his shoes, so you understand what he wants. And vice versa.

I honestly believe that had the Israelis moved with us on the declaration and allowed for references to nuclear issues and allowed for references to self-determination for the Palestinians - had we moved on some of the confidence building measures that were unilateral and initially non-mandatory - we could have started a process very early on and would have opened many, many doors. It would not have established, we would not have reached our objective in the short term of creating a zone free of nuclear weapons in the Middle East. But it would have created a much, much more equitable security discussion. And it frankly would have also enabled us, as we're taking this step by step, to engage in discussions with Israelis, who might want to think about this. See, I've talked to Israelis, academics, especially outside of Israel, and they will get into technical discussions with us on this. But the minute you talk to the officials, they cramp up. So, I'm happy to do things slowly or incrementally. But to understand my pace, my context, the other side has put themselves in my shoes, and vice versa. One should never get lost. You should never put time ahead of substance. But I would never get into an open-ended process if the substance is not serious.

Hanna Notte

That's great. You also answered my question, which would have come next about what lessons we can draw from the process for any work on regional security today. I believe you've just answered that question, actually. So maybe I'll just end with the last question, which is, well, what were the successes -

Nabil Fahmy

I thought the last question was an hour ago - go ahead.

Hanna Notte

What were the successes of ACRS? I promise, it's the last one.

Nabil Fahmy

You know, I honestly don't believe that there were any substantive successes. But I do believe, and this goes to your previous question, that the different parties understood that we're all human, that we can actually discuss these things with each other. I mean, I had discussions with Israelis whom I argued with vehemently. I had discussions in the evenings with them, about their families, about my family, about life in Israel, about life in Egypt. David Ivry and I - by mere coincidence, frankly - when I finished this position, I went to be ambassador in Japan, and then ambassador in Washington. And a year or so after I was in Washington, David became ambassador in Washington. And we were socially engaged with each other, never closed, but always open. And the Americans were surprised how we could agree and disagree

professionally without any real tension. I visited Israel several times. I had some very amusing comments about the country that provoked the Israelis quite a bit, but they were sincere comments, and I'll tell you one, just to amuse you.

And then I remember hosting David once in Cairo. I'm not a big fan of going to airports and protocol. It's not my piece of cake, I don't do this stuff. I don't care people doing it for me and I don't do it. But anyway, the two stories: when I went to Israel, first time, I arrived in the airport with Amr Moussa. We went to the King David Hotel, whatever it was, at the time. And we walk in and Amr Moussa, of course, is met by Shimon Peres. And all the Israelis I ever knew in my life at the UN were gathered on the other side of the entrance, waiting for me to show up. So, I go in there, and their first comment is, "What's your first reaction?" And the Israelis have this tremendous need to get first reactions from people. I asked, "You guys really want me to give you my first reaction? Or do you want me to tell you what you want me to say?" They laughed, and they said, "No, no, tell us your first reaction." I said, "You guys are very noisy. This country is very noisy. Everybody is shouting - and coming from an Egyptian, believe me, you must be loud, because Cairo is a very loud city." And they broke out laughing. But it was true. I was surprised - nobody was fighting in the street, but they were shouting. And I was sort of surprised by that.

The other story: When David came to Cairo, my colleagues convinced me - I don't know how - to go to the airport. I went to the airport. We picked him up, got in the car together. We're being driven back to his hotel. And I'm playing the tourist guide role. Again, trying to be nice to my colleague on the Israeli side, because we're going to work together on all these issues. So, I point to the railway station - this is the railway station. I point to the Ministry of Finance and said: Ministry of Finance. I point to this and that. And every time I point to something, he says, "Yes, we targeted that. Yes, we targeted that." He was at the Air Force. By the time we got to the hotel, I hated him. And I hated my colleagues, and particularly Aly, for convincing me to go to the airport. But when we finally got to the hotel, I was really fed up and disappointed. But when I got home to think about it, nobody in his right mind would try to embarrass his host, from the airport all the way downtown, the end of town, by telling him what was targeted in his country, all the way. And if you think of this, the Israelis were so fixated on war with their neighbors that this is their mindset. He did not find it strange to tell me, and I'm not his friend. I wasn't, then at least - that, oh yeah, I targeted this and I targeted this. And again, don't forget, David's son died over the Sinai. He was an Air Force pilot.

But anyway, so I used to know Israelis at the UN. But the ACRS process allowed me to understand them much more on a person-to-person basis. Even though I know they didn't like my negotiating tactics - I didn't like theirs - but I respected their capacity. And I think that they respected at least my integrity in putting things forward. I honestly don't think that ACRS was a success, because you have to have two to tango. And the Israelis were not ready to tango, even in small steps. They wouldn't even dance a slow dance, they did not want to deal with arms control. So, it was not a success. And had we been able to take some small steps, we could have done much more. But the collegial nature and the humanizing of the other side - I mean, we were at peace with Israelis, but I had only dealt with them at the UN, I had never really gotten into a dining room table every day with them for three weeks... I've taken more time than I'm sure you designated for this.

[End of transcript]