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Interview with Piet de Klerk

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Summary:

Piet de Klerk is a former Dutch diplomat. He served as a member of the Netherlands delegation to ACRS.

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Piet de Klerk, Netherlands

Oral history interview conducted by Miles Pomper on Zoom on August 25, 2021

Miles Pomper

First let me do the introductions for the sake of having this on the tape. So, can you give your full name and kind of talk about what your role was in ACRS?

Piet de Klerk

Are you serious?

Miles Pomper

Yeah, just so they have it on the recording?

Piet de Klerk

If there is a recording, okay. Piet de Klerk, I was at the time, the head of the arms control bureau of the Netherlands foreign ministry, or the arms control section, whatever the better translation is, which has to do with all sorts of arms control matters primarily in Europe, in the context of the CSCE and all that. But at some point, we also got involved in this ACRS business, and then for one or two years, that also became an important part of my portfolio.

Miles Pomper

And how did the Netherlands get involved in the ACRS process given it's not in the region.

Piet de Klerk

The fact that I was not involved in the first two plenaries had nothing to do with the Netherlands as such, but we had a slightly different setup in that first year of the Madrid conference, and a colleague of mine went to the first two. So, we were involved from the beginning. And I'm not sure, I've never researched that, and it was before my time, so to speak, why the Netherlands was involved from the beginning. There are two factors that come to mind. One is the fact that Hans van den Broek, our foreign minister at the time, was in Madrid. I just looked at the pictures of the Madrid conference earlier today and he's prominently there at the table with Presidents Bush and Gorbachev and with Shamir, with Amr Moussa and whoever else was there. Because the Netherlands in that year was chairman of the European political cooperation. So, he might have said, you know, if he can be of any help, let me know. The other factor that might have been of interest is that the Netherlands at the time had a rather prominent role in CSCE arms control, we were the depositary of the Treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe, and we ran the CSCE communications network. And so, if from early on, the Americans were thinking, I don't know whether at the time of the Madrid conference the thinking was that far advanced, but if they already had a view of the operational basket and operational activities and if communication was one of them, then it's logical that they ended up with the Netherlands, but that's something that I don't know for sure.

Miles Pomper

But the Netherlands was what - I guess you called it originally, there was three shepherds that were outside the participants?

Piet de Klerk

You would have to ask Michael Yaffe or Fred Axelgard. But anyway, they would know, or else Bob Einhorn would know. I think he would be the best to ask about the very beginning. I think by the time of the Madrid conference, the Americans were really running the show, because you remember, this was a month before the Soviet Union collapsed. And James Baker had shuttled for at least half a year to get this Madrid conference off the ground. And I'm sure that they had some ideas about follow up and follow up in a bilateral channel and in a multilateral channel, and some sort of interaction between the two. But how far their thinking had already evolved by the time of the Madrid conference, and whether they had already this split in three, that I don't know.

Miles Pomper

And you said, you know, you weren't there at the beginning. I guess you started in, you got involved in '93. Can you talk about your first meetings and how you got involved and what your impressions were at that time?

Piet de Klerk

Right. So, you know, this of course was a time of great optimism. More optimism than, you know, from today's vantage point seems warranted. But it was a time of tectonic shifts, and Madrid, in itself, was one of these tectonic shifts. And I think Madrid, in itself, is one of the great diplomatic achievements of the Bush Sr. Administration, next to getting START off the ground and a few other things. But it was certainly one of these great achievements, because remember, it was not only the Jordan-Palestinian delegation and the Egyptian delegation, that in itself was maybe not too difficult, but they also got the Syrians and the Lebanese at the table. That was unheard of as a diplomatic achievement to get them all together. So that in itself was a source for optimism. And when I joined, then of course they had gone through the first round, and these three areas had come out of the wash. We had not yet formal - I think the only thing formal was that there would be an operational basket, but certainly these three shepherds had not been formally appointed. But we knew we were in line for doing that. So I went there with the very pleasant task, or maybe not task, the pleasant expectation, based on what American colleagues had told us, that we would have an operational role in this. You know, I think most of the conferences that I've attended before, you go there, you listen, and you try to make a sensible remark from time to time, but this was one where we had an operational task ahead of us. Of course, that's a source of great inspiration. And especially, in a forum that they would not have seen possible before the first war with, the Saddam Hussein war.

Miles Pomper

And your first meeting was the plenary session?

Piet de Klerk

The plenary session in Washington that I described, where that funny scene took place. I think everybody and his brother coming from the Middle East wanted to smoke cigarettes in the first break, and there were no ash trays. And then there was panic among the Americans. What do we do? Then the decision was made, you know, what the hell 'this is non-smoking room', the Middle East peace process is more important than our rules. Where they got these ash trays from, I don't know. But within two minutes, there are 10 ashtrays around the room.

Miles Pomper

I guess you don't want the peace process to go up in smoke, right?

Piet de Klerk

Right. Yeah, you can make all sorts of nice metaphors. But later it went up in smoke. But at that very moment, it was saved for the next half year. Anyway, so yeah, it was very interesting. This mixed Jordanian-Palestinian delegation and the Egyptians and I think everyone, I don't remember the meeting in detail. But that was a very positive atmosphere. And it went all right between the Americans and the Russians, and I had a separate talk with the Israelis who wanted to, you know. In Dutch, we have an expression 'feeling my kidneys'; it doesn't make sense in English, but they wanted to get to know me in advance. So, we had a drink. I think the whole - how James Baker got the Israelis on board - because, of course, there were all sort of separate assurances to all the regional parties of what they would get out of this, and I think Shamir wanted no multilateral process in the first place. He wanted bilateral talks with everybody so that they could now make a separate peace with each one, and that's a very legitimate Israeli goal. An emphasis on the multilateral track was not their first priority. But anyway, then they were in this process, and fortunately for them, not fortunately for the Americans, the Syrians and Lebanese said, you know, we want to make more progress in the bilateral tracks before we join the multilateral process, so that made it much easier for the Israelis to take an active role. But anyway, no doubt there were intensive talks between the US and the Israelis before the meetings. My pre-meeting before the plenary started was very pleasant. And they were very - especially Hannan Bar-On, who did most of the talking, and who had a good sense of the Netherlands because he had been an ambassador there. Yeah, he

was a very good colleague. He died, I think, a decade ago or so, but yeah, it was very pleasant.

Miles Pomper

And the first I guess, you said, the first meeting, that in The Hague, I mean, the Netherlands hosted an intersessional at The Hague on the communications workshop later that year, I guess, which was probably kind of a big substantive event for you.

Piet de Klerk

Yeah. I don't see this in my notes, but I think these shepherd roles were fixed in the course of that meeting in Washington. In any case, we had that role that was formalized at the meeting, I think, or after, but I think at the meeting. So we could go ahead with a workshop on communication. And yeah, I mean, from time to time, the Netherlands, in the run up to Oslo, here and there we tried to carve out a role for ourselves in this Middle East peace process other than in the context of ACRS, but we didn't have that much experience. And we were nervous because there were all these diplomatic subtleties about you know, whether there were separate Jordan and Palestinian delegations, or was it a joint one, and what do you do with the flags, and it was all a bit - you had to be very precise in your setup.

But everything went all right. You had two things, or three things that were important, one was that we did have a thorough discussion about communication systems. And we were very proud that we got already quite far. In sort of the architecture of that. Of course, I should add that within a few years, this was all outmoded, because this was just in the year before email and closed email groups, that sort of communication became common. I think, in the same year or the year after I got my first modem for hooking up to the internet, but that was just on the cusp of that, and that all didn't exist. So you had to have more special measures to make that sort of rapid communication possible. But, whatever came of all of that, but we were proud that we could sketch out an architecture that everyone had at least some sympathy for.

The second thing was that we had involved our Clingendael Institute for International Relations, which had, in particular, one or maybe a few people who had experience in simulations of a political situation and then, nowadays you would call it an exercise or a scenario-based whatever, and we had worked something out, a rather simple scenario where, at some point, there's a crisis and all hell breaks loose and, you know, A needs to call B and it's in the middle of night, and how you do that? And I think we had a fictitious country name, and I think one of the things that we proposed at the time, it was agreed that we should not break up in delegations, feel free to distribute yourself among the parties. The question was, and I think we discussed that also at the meeting, what do you use - communication is just a means for communication, so what do you use such a network for? Now we had experience in Europe with military exercises, and certain movements and notifications of inspections or visits to airbase or whatever was in the Vienna document at the time. So that's one way to communicate certain information you have to provide or certain activities you're about to undertake, where you invite others. Now, of course, none of that existed in the Middle East, so the communication would only be useful if that sort of stuff would come off the ground. And the other way of using this network would be if it could be a rapid communication tool in times of crisis.

Miles Pomper

So, a hotline, kind of?

Piet de Klerk

A hotline type thing. Yes. And this would be a closed network for crisis communication, and that's what this simulation or this exercise at Clingendael meant to make clear: how that could work. So that was the second thing I remember of the meeting and the third thing is more anecdotal. We had planned lunch at the restaurant, Indonesian restaurant in The Hague, and only a week before, we realised that was around the time of the traditional opening of the Dutch parliamentary year, opened by the king or then the queen, who drives from her palace to Parliament in her gilded carriage. And the route that she takes passed by that restaurant, so we had some trouble getting to that restaurant and had to go through police cordons and had special passes and what have you. But then once inside, we could look down on that whole scene, had a little interruption of our lunch and discussions over lunch, to

look at this gilded carriage. I might have been more excited about it than your average Palestinian or Israeli participant, but anyway, it also sticks out in my mind.

Miles Pomper

How did those scenarios and exercises go?

Piet de Klerk

Yeah, we avoided World War III, that's all. I think, it was rather primitive, and it's more - you know I've played many of these exercises later and it's more that, you know, you have to think ahead, what you would do and who to involve at the higher level and whether to do something with the military or whom to inform or whatever, I don't remember the details, but I thought it was - the thing that it worked as it was supposed to work - that was the main thing for us as the hosts; that we demonstrated how this network could function in principle.

Miles Pomper

And then it sounds like, you know, you got fairly down in the weeds on a sort of second meeting, I guess, in early '94 and you're asking about, you know, Unix based or dos based, which again, I guess all this stuff does sound pretty pre-internet, but, this is not the usual kind of thing diplomats talk about.

Piet de Klerk

No, and I was very happy to have the chief of our electronic communication, of our technical communication department with me all the time. It was him, the head of that department, and one of these tech savvy guys of his department, and me, we were the threesome that ventured out to many of these meetings. We were already a team in the setup of the CSCE communication network because we travelled together to all the CIS capitals who became independent in 1992, or '91/'92, and we had to hook them up to the CSCE communication network also. So we were - all I remember, and I was not the man to do the technical side of things, although I'm, as you know, trained as a physicist, but everywhere, we had to find an X 25 node, and if you could find an x 25 node then you were in business, because then if that was in front of the Foreign Ministry, then you had to connect to that node, and then you could communicate to Vienna or wherever it was. What is now just internet communication. But indeed, there was always a political angle to it because it was always connected to content, but we had a rather technical task in a very charged political environment.

Miles Pomper

And you were personally, I mean, because you were kind of going between this very technical task, and then you're also doing the high-level conceptual work in these plenaries and so on, it must be, a lot - the US delegation was so big that they kind of split those responsibilities.

Piet de Klerk

I mean, yeah, in the plenaries, I think I was at a delegation always, because I was section head and this was not ministerial level, this was chaired by Bob Einhorn, so your principal deputy assistant secretary or whatever. Yeah, so I did that. And then I also chaired these workshops, but whenever it became too technical, I referred to André, my trusted head of the communications department, but I also I wrote all the papers together with him. I mean, it was not, for some of the technical aspects he had to provide the answers, but I knew I had a good grip on what we were trying to do.

Miles Pomper

And in terms of the kind of conceptual plenary ones, it sounds like the meeting in Cairo in '94 was particularly kind of contentious, or is that right?

Piet de Klerk

As I said, the most contentious one in a number of ways was the one in Doha. The one in Egypt? I don't know, when was that?

Miles Pomper

It was early '94, like, January, February. Yeah, late January, early February.

Piet de Klerk

A couple of weeks after, right. Yeah. I knew some of that, but certainly not all of that. This was very contentious between the Americans and the Egyptians. Like it's our house, so we call the shots. No, the Americans said we are the co-sponsors of this whole process, we call the shots. So some of that was between Egypt and the US. Of course, this was the time also that you know it was not make or break then, but the tension started to build up. What is this process about anyway? You call yourself arms control, and then you're fiddling with, you know, communication systems and confidence building measures, and this is not what I call arms control. And so this...

Miles Pomper

This is Nabil [Fahmy]?

Piet de Klerk

Nabil yeah, primarily the Egyptians, but of course, supported by all the other Arabs, but primarily the Egyptians. And of course, a lot of arms control would have been possible if the Egyptians hadn't insisted on the N word. And I said previously that I thought the Egyptians were very good in shooting themselves in the foot, and still, looking back at it, I still think that that's the case. Because 30 years of their insistence on Israel getting into the NPT has not brought them anything. So you could have imagined totally different scenarios for dealing with the question of Israel and the NPT. But, basically, the Egyptians, slowly - and that process was going on from the beginning - they saw the whole process as a way to put pressure on Israel to become party to the NPT. And well, the Americans, certainly under James Baker, were willing to put some sort of pressure on the Israelis. There was this question of huge loans that were postponed in the run up to the Madrid meeting, because, you know, in some ways, the Israelis, their arms had to be twisted to agree to that formula in Madrid. The success of that whole ACRS process, or you can say the whole Madrid process, was that the US diplomacy, so James Baker and later others, found the right equilibrium to put pressure on Israel and put pressure on the others. And that worked for a couple of years. And then, yeah, the tension became too much, but there might have been alternatives for this Egyptian insistence on talking about the N word.

Miles Pomper

Well, what could have been some of the alternatives? I mean...

Piet de Klerk

That would be speculative. And, you know, I certainly don't want to say what the Egyptians should have done at that point in time, but from the beginning their policy - I've had so many demarches in The Hague, or when I was at the IAEA or in New York: "you Europeans" or "you the Netherlands, you should help us get Israel to the NPT." Yeah, okay, but I said: "What we can do is fairly limited." So, for example, and this is just one course: if Egypt had a totally different communication, totally different sort of conversation with the Israelis, in which the Israelis for example promised never to attack them with nuclear weapons, as long as Egypt would not attack Israel. I don't know whether that ever was in the cards, but that would have been a totally different sort of conversation.

Miles Pomper

Well, how much do you think they, you know, saw it as a real problem, or it was rhetorical, you know, had served other purposes and didn't really have to do with the substance of the issue?

Piet de Klerk

One of the good developments coming out of this first year in this ACRS business was Israeli long-term perspective, saying that we want to take part in a nuclear weapon free zone in the region, provided we have diplomatic relations with all parties of this region. I think it's a fair point: that you can't have such a zone, which includes quite a commitment from your side if you are a nuclear weapon state or a nuclear weapon possessor state. At least you want to get better relations with all these guys in that zone. So that's absolutely reasonable. You can't do that through a UN resolution, which has always been the Egyptian position. That's ridiculous. If you're really serious about such a zone, of course you should be, then the problem will be okay, everyone in the region, concludes a bilateral cessation of hostilities or peace agreement, or whatever you call it, diplomatic relations with Israel. And then what? Then Israel will

continue to procrastinate and we'll never get that zone. That's, of course, the risk of such an approach. But the question then, the task for diplomacy is to get certain concessions or certain commitments in return, once you go this road to diplomatic recognition and some sort of peaceful relations between the state, anyway, that process has been blocked primarily by Egypt, even though Egypt had since the Sadat time peaceful relations with Israel, so they could have been a bridge to the Arab world, I mean that the Saudis didn't want to participate, that's all in the cards and Syria and what have you. But I think a more courageous and creative Egyptian diplomacy would have been possible to my mind. But anyway, again, this is all in parenthesis, because I don't want to be the wise guy.

Miles Pomper

Well, do you think, I mean, there's kind of a couple of schools of thoughts on, you know, why ACRS didn't succeed, and one of them is, they never could have succeeded because of this Egyptian position, and the other is, well, the peace process got - especially after Rabin was assassinated, that kind of brought the multilateral process to a halt?

Piet de Klerk

Sure, killing Rabin was the nail in the coffin. Because up to that point, a lot of things would have been possible. And yeah, of course, the US diplomacy did it a lot to convince the Egyptians to tone down their rhetoric. But they thought they had this huge leverage there, which I think was a mistake. They didn't have that leverage, and to this day, they don't have that leverage. You know, Nasser in the sixties said, "Oh, if the Israelis had a nuclear weapon, then ah you'll see what we can do." And then for a decade, Egypt had a nuclear weapons program, and nothing came of it. And so the rest is frustration. They should have had a different thought process of how to make the best of this situation. And the choice they made was not the best one, I think. So to my mind, these tensions, that the process would come to an end after some years anyway, that was the most likely outcome, but if Rabin had still been alive and the Israelis had had more flexibility, then this whole process of more peaceful relations with Arab neighbors in exchange for something, a nuclear weapons free zone, right? Of course, a diplomatic process is not to insist on peaceful relations and diplomatic recognition, and then we think again. No, the process is, you know, what is it worth if we would get a process of diplomatic recognition underway? What do we, the other side, get out of that? That whole process could have spun out further if that road had not been blocked by the Egyptians, to my mind. How far we would have gotten, I don't know.

Miles Pomper

And I mean, tied to that, you mentioned Doha was a particularly contentious plenary, what sort of happened there?

Piet de Klerk

Yeah, it was contentious because everybody was so nervous. This was the first time that ACRS went to the region. I think one of the other groups had been in Tunis, maybe, but in any case, for ACRS, this was a great step that an Arab country that had no diplomatic relations with Israel was willing to receive an Israeli delegation. And in the notes that I gave you, I described this pandemonium that as soon as the Israelis, at every floor of the Sheraton Hotel was a guard in front of the elevators with an automatic rifle checking who was coming in and you know that you had to show your pass, it was extremely tight. And as soon as the Israelis left - this was a three-day meeting, and at 12 o'clock on the third day the Israelis had to leave because they had to - you couldn't fly, of course, from Doha to Tel Aviv, and they had only one route available, and that plane left at four o'clock in the afternoon. So they left a few hours early and immediately all security collapsed, because all these guards ran to this small table where they got their money, and the rest, including the Americans and the Russians and the rest of us, we were of no importance when it came to security at that meeting, it was all about Israel and understandably so, because nothing could go wrong. Otherwise, it would have been a major crisis. And so that put quite some tension on the whole proceedings.

Proceedings themselves were about, you know, how far do we get with this declaration of, what was it called, declaration of principles? Right. And, yeah, to my

mind, I don't have that document anywhere, but with a few square brackets, that was, of course, the meat of the thing. 90% of this text was agreed and if we could have somehow circumvented these points, then we could have said something like, you know, the zone to be decided, that we start a process, how we get this process underway, and along the following lines, or whatever. But yeah, I was not in the driving seat, and as I recall, the text was not discussed in plenary, but there were small meetings at the sides to see whether we could go any further. I had really no role, and moreover, I would not have been in a position to know all the subtleties, but that was the real diplomatic task of the meeting: to get ahead with that declaration.

Miles Pomper

What about the personal, I mean, you said this is the first time the Israelis had come to this country with which they didn't have relations? What did you observe in terms of the delegations and how, you know, individuals interacted and that sort of thing while they were there?

Piet de Klerk

Yeah, I don't remember much about it. They say the Israeli delegation was rather on its own. I don't remember whether I saw talks between Israelis and Arab delegations. I mean, one of the advantages of the ACRS process was that by that time, there had been enough small-scale meetings where they knew each other quite well. You know, the Bar-Ons and the Eli Levites and Shimon Steins, they know all these guys, both the Palestinians and certainly the Egyptians, maybe not all the Arabs, but how much of that was visible in the plenary I don't remember. And I also don't remember that I was in sort of the inner cabinet, we probably by that time had our own small errands to run with regard to lining up all these guys, because after Doha we had five or six of these customers who said, yes, we want to take part in your communication network. So for us, it was quite a step forward that we got the green light for this communication network. And then there was lukewarm support for a CPC in the region which led to a decision in principle to establish it in Amman. But in terms of a physical building, I think it never got off the ground. But it was combined, you know, Amman is rich in regional hubs. So maybe at some point, it formally lived in a particular building, but it never was operational.

Miles Pomper

I was intrigued on your outline, because I hadn't heard this before about the Netherlands - you and the Middle East director - on a technical mission to Syria about the communications network. Tell me more about that.

Piet de Klerk

The first time I ever was in Damascus, and the Syrians, you know Syria in that period was of course, on the one hand, part of the rejection front, the hardliners when it comes to Israel and it was, of course, a very dictatorial regime, Al Assad's feared mukhabarat, it was not a pleasant country, at least if you had any views that didn't align with that of the regime. But on the other hand, we had regular contact at the highest level with them, because it was also a country with you know, religious diversity and, because you know the setup of the country and, can't think of the words of what the Assad family is, what did you call that? That religious minority?

Miles Pomper

The Alawites?

Piet de Klerk

It doesn't ring a bell, anyway, it had also, for a Middle Eastern country, it had also its tolerance aspects next to the very intolerant parts. But yeah, of course, they had been involved in Madrid, and they had no doubt followed from a safe distance, how these bilateral and multilateral tracks were developing. There was not a great enthusiasm to hear in any detail what this communication working group in ACRS entails. But when our foreign minister said, "Oh, I have these interesting guys who can tell you what they are working on," then the Syrian foreign minister said, "Okay, yeah, we'll look for a date and then they are most welcome." And so we actually had, it was a Sunday that we, did I give dates? Oh yeah, October two, has must have been a Sunday. So on a Sunday morning we were in the office of the foreign minister or a deputy foreign minister, we were received quite high as I recall. They listened very

politely and they asked a few questions and they repeated what their position was in this whole Middle East peace process. And then the rest of the Sunday we went to the Grand Mosque and whatever else, to the souk, and whatever else was of our interest. So yeah, it was sort of going through the motions, but it was interesting. I went back later as human rights ambassador to Damascus, but this was the first time that I was there. It was interesting for me personally.

Miles Pomper

And meanwhile, you know, while the communications network seemed to be moving along, and you mentioned sort of a databank in there, what was what was that about that they were working on?

Piet de Klerk

They had, I think there was a Russian idea. And I don't know, the Russians have put forward ideas about databanks, databases, in several contexts. I was also confronted with it when I did counterterrorism, where the Russians wanted to have a big database of all the terrorists of the world. It was a bit too close for comfort for our taste to have a huge data base somewhere in Russia with all terrorists of the world. So we could, I mean, in abstract it was a good idea that in the same way, you have a database connected to New START where you have all notifications and, you know, you need a central repository somewhere for an archive of all your notifications and your declarations and what have you. So that's, because the communication system as we had planned it, was only about getting messages from A to B. And this is the sort of the logical supplement to that, that all these messages will be stored somewhere, and that you could order it, and all the tricks you can do, and of course, nowadays, it's all easy as pie, and so, the Russians, of course, at that point in time, went through a difficult period, and so whenever they came with a proposal, we said in principle, yes, rather yes than no. And there was something to be said for it. But with the communication system it died a quiet death, because the two were connected.

Miles Pomper

I guess the interesting part is you actually did set up the network at one point in '95? You actually stood up the network? I mean, the communications that were -

Piet de Klerk

Yes, and indeed with also the message from the Russian Foreign Minister. So they showed their commitment. I don't know it was an easy give in a sense. I think, you know, the Russians of 2021 would be more skeptical about it and cynical. At the time, they want you to play their full role, and they did. They had some very good diplomats. I mentioned a few names. Yeah, but I don't know whether they resent that. Of course, they resent that period in general, as being the junior partner of the US, but I don't know whether they resent their role in ACRS at the time, I don't know. Have you spoken to Russian participants?

Miles Pomper

A little bit. It's actually hard to get them, I mean, either they're not alive or they're not accessible. I mean, I know, Hanna has actually been the one leading that because she speaks Russian, but I know she's had a lot of challenges.

Piet de Klerk

Okay, unfortunately not. Yeah, I mean, there must be all sort of information about who was at which meeting.

Miles Pomper

I know she's looked pretty extensively. Maybe Hanna, you want to get on the screen for a second so you can, I cannot interpret for you anymore. I know, she's tried a whole bunch of names but, go ahead Hanna.

Hanna Notte

Yeah, I mean, we've contacted those of the negotiation who are still alive, because unfortunately, a few of the negotiators passed away already and of those still alive, one is serving in the senior position on the Ukraine file in the foreign ministry, and is just not willing to speak. And then others have said that they remember insufficiently what transpired at the time in order to be of use. Some of them also just attended the

Moscow plenaries and nothing beyond, and so it's just been difficult.

Piet de Klerk

Right. Yeah, and this lady who, I remember the name or I saw the name and I will have a vague memory of her presence, Maria Popova. But she was foreign ministry but maybe, I don't know, you could try her, but she was also not that senior.

Hanna Notte

I'll definitely look into that name, because that name didn't previously come up. So I'll check it out for sure.

Miles Pomper

Thanks, Piet. So in terms of, let's sort of step back a little bit and wrap up, sort of big picture on the whole process. I mean, kind of looking back, what do you think some of the, you know, successes and failures of the process were? I mean, other than obviously, ultimately it didn't succeed but, you know, what did we learn? What worked? What didn't? And now, looking forward, is there something we can learn from this now when we've got a sort of a very different region?

Piet de Klerk

Right. I was thinking about that this morning. One short way of saying it is that I think, the Madrid plenary as the starting point of the whole Middle East peace process represented a tectonic shift in the Middle East. Only that first meeting, to get to the starting point, that was a tectonic shift only comparable maybe with the Abraham Accords of a couple of years ago, it remains to be seen to what extent that is a tectonic shift. But Madrid certainly was one, so that's a lasting legacy of Madrid. I'm afraid that ACRS doesn't have a lasting legacy other than, you know, improved personal contacts and networks that may be endured on a personal basis. But in terms of outcome, I can't think of anything. You spent a lot of time on it and I don't know whether that's worth it, there's nothing to build on really, other than sort of goodwill among participants.

I personally learned a lot about the Middle East and how these guys are, like this luncheon at Garuda that I mentioned before, how the Israelis and the small luncheon that I was hosting, the Israelis and the Jordanians and the Palestinians and the Egyptians how they interacted with each other and how they jostle and joke and throw challenges to the other side of the table. So that, and I'm sure I'm not the only one who learned from that process. But there's nothing tangible resulting from it. So that's one reason. The other reason is that, I think, as you said, we are today in a very different world. This was, with all the lack of equilibrium, this was a time for very good relations between the US and the Soviet Union/Russian Federation, with all the chaos of the period, but I think this was handled very well by the Bush Sr. Administration.

Today that relation between the US and Russia is very different. The core why the situation today is very different is that in 1990/1991, or early 90s, there still was some hope for a two-state solution, which today is much less clear when we are a quarter century down the line and with all these settlements, and it's all much murkier than it was at the time. And the third reason is that there has been so much other chaos in the Middle East, you know, Syria's in shambles, Lebanon is in shambles. You've had the whole ISIS period and so for reasons in the Middle East and reasons of the relations between US and the Russian Federation, you couldn't do the same thing now. So also, that is a reason why you have nothing to build on. It's a very different world.

Miles Pomper

What about building on the Abraham accords, is there some way to tie it to some of these confidence building measures?

Piet de Klerk

It's an intriguing question. That depends on Iran, of course. I mean, imagine you get the Emirates and the Saudis talking in some sort of format about a nuclear weapon free zone in the Middle East, or weapons of mass destruction free zone or whatever. Of course, we couldn't get very far without solving the Iran problem. But then an optimistic scenario—that we resolve the JCPOA issue, and if we solve that, then there would be some merit in building on Abraham Accords, maybe.

Miles Pomper

Great. Well, thanks for your time. Is there anything you want to add? Thanks for your time the second time, I should say.

Piet de Klerk

I think, on ACRS, I think I've said everything I wanted to say. I might have one or two remarks about other things.

Miles Pomper

Let me stop the recording now.

[End of transcript]