

November 30, 2016

Oral History Interview with Sha Zukang

Citation:

"Oral History Interview with Sha Zukang", November 30, 2016, Wilson Center Digital Archive, Contributed to NPIHP by Michal Onderco.
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Summary:

Ambassador for Disarmament Affairs and Deputy Permanent Representative of the People's Republic of China to the United Nations Office at Geneva.

Credits:

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

Original Language:

English

Contents:

Transcript - English

Sha Zukang

China

Oral history interview conducted by Katrin M Heilmann in person in Beijing on 30 November 2016

Katrin M. Heilmann:

There are three areas I would like to ask you about today. The first is the process in the run up to the conference, in particular, the plans you went to the conference with, then what happened at the conference and finally I want to briefly talk about CTBT and the future of NPT. I would like to start with a rather general question: What plans did you come to the conference with?

Ambassador Sha Zukang:

The 1990s were the Golden Age for arms control and disarmament. After Gorbachev came to power, there was a renewed détente in the tensions between East and West. The external environment was very positive, which is one of the main reasons why many international agreements like the Chemical Weapons Conventions, the CTBT, the Biological Weapons Treaty, the Missile Technology Control Regime, etc. were signed. Bilaterally the United States and Russia came to an agreement over INF, START I and START II. This was really a fantastic period in which we also came to an agreement over the Landmines Protocol. In arms control, progress or the lack thereof are always related to the external security environment and, in particular, the relations between the 'big guys'. Because of this constructive external environment, all the national committees, in particular the member states of the NPT had very high expectations for the review conference because that is where the future life or death of the NPT would be decided. All people had high expectations - NPT signatories, Non-state parties and the three 'threshold countries' - India, Pakistan and Israel. At that time, North Korea was not there yet. We all put a lot of effort and energy into the preparations. That is: the 'leadership' of the United States and other NWS and others, including Jayantha Dhanapala, the leaders of the Non-aligned movement. We all worked very hard. The activities in the run up to the conference were almost hectic, a little mad, the whole world was mobilised. I remember Ambassador Thomas Graham visited more than 100 countries in preparation for the conference. He went to about 100 capitals if I am not wrong.

Some bigger countries used this opportunity to exercise pressure to convince smaller countries to push for disarmament. Non-nuclear weapon countries regarded it as a golden opportunity. The Non-aligned movement held a series of meetings at foreign minister level, etc. They utilised each and every opportunity to make sure that this coming conference would achieve something. To sum up, I would say, everyone was interested, everyone was ambitious, everyone worked very hard and everyone was hopeful.

Katrin M. Heilmann:

Coming back to China, when China went to the conference, was there a specific agenda it went to the conference with?

Ambassador Sha Zukang:

China acceded to the NPT in 1993. Even on the occasion of China's accession, we issued a statement of reservations. That means both as a state party and a non-party we did have some different views. Many people believed that the NPT was discriminatory and did not live up to the ideal of general and complete disarmament - after all who knows what general and complete disarmament is? There was no mention of Non-First Use in the NPT. We saw that there was a small imbalance in responsibilities of nuclear-weapon states and non-nuclear-weapon states, which was

more in favour of nuclear-weapon states, you know that is the feeling, rightly or wrongly. So, we did have some strong views. However, we changed our position because the trend was very clear. We noticed that there had been a series of agreements that had been negotiated and agreed upon between the two superpowers in the conventional field as well as between the two military blocks, so we sensed that there were some keen for progress in disarmament. China is a big country. We should at least show our willingness and at the same time China should reserve some of our points. On the one hand, we were party to the NPT but on the other hand, we had some strong views – that was our mindset when we went to the conference.

Katrin M. Heilmann:

What was China's position on the NPT review conference?

Ambassador Sha Zukang:

China is a party to the NPT. We have strong views about disarmament and non-proliferation. That explains our approach towards the review conference and what position China took. First, we had serious debate among ourselves. There was unanimous consensus that the NPT should be extended. None of the state parties had expressed the wish to withdraw from it and NPT had proven to be effective – it worked. No new nuclear states emerged. Therefore, this indicated that NPT was useful, it worked. As a result, there was an unanimity for extension.

So, the next question was how long. There were several options: 25 years, several 25 years or indefinitely. State parties were divided into two groups: nuclear-weapon states and non-nuclear weapon states. Among the NWS there are nuclear superpowers and the other three nuclear-weapon states. Among the non-nuclear weapon states there are those who are non-nuclear but enjoy nuclear protection, the 'nuclear umbrella' yet, there are others, in particular developing countries, who did not. Those enjoying the nuclear umbrella like Australia and Japan for example, practically took the same line as advocated by countries like the United States, UK or France because they were military allies. While for the others, I would call them 'radical'. Whereas countries like Japan were pushing for one extreme - unlimited extension, 'radicals' like Egypt or Mexico in particular with the NAM behind them, perhaps also Cuba, pushed for another extreme – 25-years maximum. So, I would say at that time on these three options, the nuclear-weapon states, the P5, and the other non-nuclear weapon state parties, were divided – for political, diplomatic and security reasons. This division made the preparation very interesting and at times 'positively chaotic' because no one knew how long it would be extended. That said, among the P5, the US, obviously and I think Russia they strongly stood for indefinite extension, strongly supported by UK and France. China as I explained before held some different views. China was the newest member among the P5 as a state party, so internally we had some serious discussions.

Katrin M. Heilmann:

About what particular aspect?

Ambassador Sha Zukang:

25 years, several 25 years or indefinitely. For that reason, the other P5 worked very hard in pushing China to agree with them, so the P5 could work together as a group. China eventually – it is a long internal process – agreed to go with the other P5 and support the idea of indefinite extension. I personally worked very hard, shoulder by shoulder, hand in hand with the American Ambassador Thomas Graham, a true gentleman, for indefinite extension. You may ask why China, after prolonged internal debate, chose to support the US view. There are a couple of reasons. Our decision to support indefinite extension was almost at the last minute after the Chinese delegation had already arrived in New York. I never told anyone before – you are the first one in the world to hear about this. Due to the heated debate, some people who were working in the field like me took it for granted China would support indefinite extension, however, towards the end of the preparation period the other view

prevailed, that is China would strongly support 25 years. No one knew – even my government, the young people – no one.

Katrin M. Heilmann:

Did you play a personal role in the determination of China's negotiation position?

Ambassador Sha Zukang:

The leader of the delegation was the Vice Premier and Foreign Minister Qian Qichen, he was the de facto Chinese foreign policymaker, however, he was only there for one day of the debate. The decision shocked me and I owe it to those who have been working so hard for indefinite extension. First of all, I had to find out why there was this change in thinking, as there are some issues with NPT. NPT justifies the possession of nuclear weapons by the P5 – indefinite extension would allow them to keep them indefinitely- that would be bad. This is the position of the non-aligned movement. 25 years is not enough to eliminate nuclear weapons and move towards a nuclear weapon free world. The developed countries did not honour their commitment to help non-nuclear weapon states in the development of peaceful uses of nuclear energy with all kinds of regulations and costs. This view gives them a number of reasons to justify their position – only 25 years at the most. That shocked me as de facto leader of the Chinese delegation, a huge delegation with members from all departments. As diplomat and chief negotiator, I had no choice but I wanted to see if we could make a last-minute shift on the policy and change the position already agreed on by the government on the eve of my arrival. So, I tried and I succeeded.

Katrin M. Heilmann:

Wow...

Ambassador Sha Zukang:

I used a couple of arguments. I argued and told my leaders and colleagues we should support indefinite extension because I knew, the NAM had just concluded their Foreign Minister's Meeting in Jakarta. Ali Alatas served as the President. He of course argued with me. I will tell you the story later. Of course, the Non-aligned movement came up with a very strong statement asking for the early conclusion of CTBT, FMCT and also most importantly progress with nuclear disarmament, as if extension was not that important – it is a political move. When I read deep between the lines of the statement, I noticed that even though it had been communicated as if NAM would support extension only for 25-years maximum, there was actually no specific language indicating that this was the only option. I investigated a little bit and noticed that the signatories of the draft resolution for the unlimited extension motion were overwhelmingly non-nuclear weapon states with the exception of the P5. Among the sponsors, many of them were small developing, poor countries with almost all of whom China enjoyed excellent bilateral relations. China took itself as a member of the developing countries. Since they were sponsoring indefinite extension, it has been China's consistent policy up to now- good or bad – not to work against their wishes. This does not mean we always agree with them. Among the sponsors were many developing countries. So, I argued that if we go against the wish of the majority of developing countries, it would be politically wrong. That is a very powerful argument.

Secondly, 25 years is not very long in political terms. It is a very short time in the larger historical context. We don't know what might happen in 25 years, but in case we could not eliminate nuclear weapons or would not be that successful, it might send the wrong message to the world. That is the argument I used to convince my colleagues. 25-years means what? 25-years means that from today you can start preparing for nuclear weapons, you don't need to hurry – you have 25 years. By 1 January 2020, you can legally possess nuclear weapons. This has a dangerous implication. This might encourage other states to step by step develop nuclear weapons within 25 years. This is my second very powerful argument. Nuclear proliferation is not in anyone's interest – certainly not a nuclear-weapon state's.

Proliferation would not translate into disarmament progress – why should the P5 agree to disarm when other countries proliferate?

Thirdly, I remember, by that time, we had 178 state parties. So, I said, look we already have over 90 – almost 100 sponsors. Well, article 10, paragraph 2 of the treaty only required a simple majority of states party to the treaty to vote for it with the total number of the sponsors already exceeding the legally required majority. This was a very effective argument with my colleagues. That means it has already been extended indefinitely. So, what is the point – in the moment in which I was talking to my colleagues, the NPT had already been extended. And then we needed a quick decision – you can imagine how busy my delegation was when we finally reversed back to our original position for indefinite extension.

I am using this opportunity for the first time to reveal these most confidential deliberations among ourselves. The internal process was heartburning for a guy like me, the de facto leader of the delegation, a huge delegation. Because personally speaking, I owe all those guys an explanation. For almost three years I worked with John Holum and others for indefinite extension as ambassador abroad. Because I was abroad as ambassador, I had no clue that in the debate in China, the other view prevailed. I am very happy we succeeded with indefinite extension.

Once we had resolved the issue among the Chinese, there was the question of how to convince the NAM. As a small nuclear-weapon state, China is in a way sandwiched between the nuclear-weapon states and the developing countries (radicals). Developing countries tend to view all nuclear-weapon states as a group, they were all ‘bad guys’ including China. The only difference is between bad or worse. We tried to prove that we are better and we want to build up a mutual understanding with developing countries, our friends. We don’t have allies, only ‘friends’ but for convenience I will say allies. In those days Ali Alatas, the Indonesian Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the UN Nugroho Wisnumurti arrived in New York, they asked for a meeting with me and I requested a meeting with them, so, we talked:

‘Excellency, I know what decisions you have taken in the name of the NAM – You know, I am Sha, Ambassador for China. I have my own distinctive style. I am straightforward, truthful and honest. I have a real reputation for that. There are three ways we can conduct these negotiations: Number 1 very diplomatic and polite; Number 2 call spade a spade, Number 3 mix. I can do it in whatever way but I am afraid we don’t have time. We must confront the stark reality.’

You can imagine the response... Of course, we ended up spading.

So I said: ‘Upon your request I adopt this approach: The NPT has already been extended indefinitely. Look at your guys – most of them are NAM members. It is your people who have asked for indefinite extension – no pretence. This is the reality’

Alatas responded: ‘Noooo, but I am not happy with that.’

To that I said, ‘Maybe you can ask for something else in exchange but you know, you can’t change the final outcome. This is an excellent opportunity for developing countries to ask for something – that is the only option left for NAM as a group.’

That is to explain why a couple of statements in the 1995 Extension refer to the Middle East NWFZ. It was a give and take. They will vote along with unlimited extension but at the same time, it should be linked to other ‘conditions’. That explains why there is one particular paragraph in the final outcome that stresses the need to realise CTBT first, FMCT second, disarmament third and then transparency measures. But don’t forget this particular paragraph is a compromise. For their agreement to indefinite extension, they agreed to five specific measures. Then there is a chapter, I think introduced by the Russian delegation they wanted something starting ‘guided by the principles of strategic balance, stability, principle of no compromise of security’ enshrined in the Report of the Special Session on

Disarmament (Article 18/9). This was advocated by Russia and strongly supported by Sha. Otherwise, I cannot tell my government to do it. So, this is a compromise. I convinced Foreign Minister Ali Alatas, Ambassador Wisnumuriti, Indonesia was the President of the Non-Aligned Movement at that time and Egypt. So, the outcome is a compromise.

Katrin M. Heilmann:

So, were all Non-aligned countries part of the compromise?

Ambassador Sha Zukang:

Well... It's a little bit complicated. Even those who supported indefinite extension, they also supported the NAM joint decision. They can go along, though they prefer indefinite. Though they know if they were left with a choice, they were not going to develop their own nuclear weapons. Then there are regional problems, regional big powers – it is very complicated. The NAM did have a joint position. Most would have been fine with 25 years. But particularly with the US and other big powers working very hard on majority of NAM, they are all realistic... Thomas Graham who travelled to more than 100 countries kept telling me 'don't come me with arguments.' That is why so many countries sponsored the draft resolution. But had the NWS not been willing to compromise, I don't think we would have managed to find a consensus.

At the conference

Katrin M. Heilmann:

Was China approached by the United States?

Ambassador Sha Zukang:

Of course, you know in those days, there were only 5 nuclear weapon countries. Countries like Israel were not party to the treaty. They must have been watching very carefully because the outcome would affect them but they were not party to the treaty and had as such no say in the outcome.

Among the P5, China could be the only potential dissident. France and the UK were militarily allied to the US. Russia was one of the two military superpowers. They logically want to keep NW as long as they can. The strongest advocates were Russia and the US. France and the UK would go along with it. The only potential dissident could be China – and it almost happened! At all times the US kept in close touch, in particular, the Clinton Administration's Special Envoy Ambassador Thomas Graham and Sha. We worked together shoulder by shoulder, hand in hand. I didn't realise the government would change its mind in the last minute. This is a typical case of US-China cooperation. Imagine China supported another radical group. Though you might have a majority – who knows. The majority can shift. Countries can withdraw from their sponsorship. China as a nuclear-weapon state could have started its own new group with other countries. This would have caused a sharp split. Presume 25 years had happened, there may have been more NWS, it would have been very risky. Non-proliferation has always been an area of cooperation. The 1995 NPT review conference was as such a historic moment since then the US and China have always worked together on non-proliferation in the case of North Korea, Iran, Syria, etc. The US and China stand together against proliferation. This change of mindset has altered China's position itself.

Katrin M. Heilmann:

How come China became a supporter of the NPT?

Ambassador Sha Zukang:

As I explained earlier, for historical reasons, China had been living under sanctions for more than three decades. Political, economic, cultural and military sanctions imposed by the US as leader of the Western countries. There were efforts made to encircle and block China. We didn't have any diplomatic relations among the developed countries for many years, only with France among the developed countries and with the UK only chargé d'affaires-level relations. China was 'isolated' for so

many years, politically, economically and militarily. We didn't have any commodity or trade exchange. Not even cultural ones. There was the Korean War and then the Vietnam War, of course, the Americans eventually left but the Vietnamese had our support. If not for China, it would have gone on for more years. Militarily there were also efforts to encircle China. It's past now. We resumed relations with the US only as late as 1979. So, China as a nation is very, I would say, 'history sensitive'.

The NPT like other international agreements was negotiated, signed and ratified before China joined the UN. Why should we join? We did not have any responsibilities nor did we have any hand in contributing to the agreements. They were all concluded by the developed countries, the United States, the Western allies, etc. And we had strong views on all this. For China, it is logical, it is a norm. At that time our perception was completely different.

China was perceived in the West as a communist power, a dictatorship, without human rights or freedom it was seen as a hell where nothing was good. I am exaggerating a little bit but that was the general impression in the West; otherwise they refused to have relations with you. And vice-versa – those are all imperialist powers who invaded, colonised, occupied, bullied and fought war with China. So, this is the historical conception of the other world, the other group of countries. Internal debate is only natural. We developed nuclear weapons not because we love it but because China is or was the only country which lived for decades under real nuclear threat. It was under the risk of being used by both superpowers. The Korean War, 1954/5, 1958. And then 1973 Brezhnev – it is all recorded and I was working in the Embassy at that time. Be honest and objective, tell me was there any other country by that time that was actually threatened with the use of nuclear weapons? China was the only country that had to confront the real danger of nuclear weapons being used against it. That forced China to have a little bit of nuclear weapons ourselves, so we had it in 1964. We had to have something ourselves to prevent other powers from using it. Of the treaties, none of them was good. When Deng Xiaoping came to power, China's approach changed. He opened China to the outside world. We had more access, we had relations with practically all the major powers in the world. That also changed China's mind in a way. That explains why, within China we were fighting amongst ourselves - old school views against new school views. We were debating among ourselves the three options and which one we should take.

Katrin M. Heilmann:

What kind of groups met during the NPT negotiations? Was China part of any coordination meetings among the P5?

Ambassador Sha Zukang:

We met practically every day at all levels. This practice dates back to CTBT negotiations. NPT indefinite extension was agreed upon before the conclusion of the CTBT, before the initiation of the FMCT negotiations. Among the five there was an agreement to finish CTBT as soon as possible and immediately start negotiating FMCT because these two were considered to be interlinked. CTBT once concluded and implemented would curtail the qualitative improvements of NW, while FMCT would seal the increase of quantitative developments of nuclear weapons. So, if we could succeed with both treaties – qualitative and quantitative restrictions plus NPT extension, the effects would be enormous. To the extent that those responsible for nuclear weapons could worry less because if the NPT had been extended indefinitely, all countries had undertaken a commitment not to develop nuclear weapons, so we could focus on nuclear disarmament. How, who, how much – that is our internal business but as a group we could have first stopped qualitative and second quantitative enhancement and then non-proliferation. Chemical and biological weapons are already banned – the only WMD left are nuclear weapons. With nuclear weapons, it is so complicated. We cannot do it the same way as with chemical weapons. So, complete disarmament and the nuclear weapon free world can only be achieved through efforts like CTBT, FMCT, – it is a step-by-step approach. As P5 we all

shared this objective – ironically. We all agreed that it was the blueprint necessary to implement and we are on it now. We are about to successfully conclude CTBT negotiations. Of course, China and the US played a very important role. At some point some people said American Ambassador Stephen Ledogar and Sha should be given a Nobel Peace Prize for their efforts because CTBT is the most important disarmament agreement in the history.

The P5 met practically every day at all levels. China eventually agreed to indefinite extension. That facilitated P5 group work because it meant the P5 could speak with one voice. However, we still had to convince the other non-P5 countries. We worked very hard from early morning to midnight for many days.

Katrin M. Heilmann:

What kind of proposals did the P5 come up with?

Ambassador Sha Zukang:

There were also differences among the P5. For example, in the chapter, one of the specific measures - the idea of strategic stability - was introduced by Russia [the future Strategic Stability Cooperation Initiative]. They were very experienced diplomats. Now when I look back they were very clever. The United States under President Bush abrogated the 1972 ABM Treaty. The Treaty served as the foundation of superpower disarmament and non-proliferation. I always counter my American colleagues 'All this time, you have been educating us. You know, the ABM Treaty is the very cornerstone of all nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation efforts, as you have been teaching us for many years. This cornerstone has been removed. That explains the chaos today: double standards, multiple standards, etc. Many rules were made by the UN Security Council but now you have been arguing for years and you argued it yourself. However, because you are a superpower, no one can impose sanctions on you as you did with Russia.' I don't know why the Russians were so intelligent at that time. Of course, there was the issue of outer space.

Every year, in the first committee on the prevention of arms race in outer space, the only two no-votes were the US and Israel. Always, the only two red lights, the rest all green. The US wanted to keep all options open at all times and Russia sensed that. Hence it came up with the formula: 'This stability as long as it is maintained, as long security is not compromised, we will agree to the following measures'.

Within the P5, there are differences. On nuclear disarmament, there are sometimes differences on the order of who should start first and how much between the superpowers and the other P5. The UK, France and China are always together. The US and the Soviets already negotiated the nuclear disarmament agreement, which contains transparency measures and verifications. They intended to impose this on the other three NWS. By that time, France had conducted 200, UK and China each 45 nuclear tests. We were junior nuclear weapons countries. We were ready to join in disarmament at an appropriate time. The difference between the three and the two was evident. So, we had to discuss among ourselves first and then reach out, together or separately to the other almost 180 countries with one voice.

In addition to that there is the issue of the Middle East. It mostly concerns the US and Egypt, the Arab World, basically it is their issue, so a lot of consultations.

Katrin M. Heilmann:

Who initiated the P5 meetings?

Ambassador Sha Zukang:

It just happened automatically. I told you that this P5 meeting mechanism, it is not official or regular, it just happened automatically, naturally. When I was the chief negotiator for CTBT, we rotated Chairmanship on a weekly basis. It worked very well because CTBT – only 5 countries tested – the others never tested.

Katrin M. Heilmann:

Officially?

Ambassador Sha Zukang:

Well... in 1974 India had a peaceful nuclear explosion...

I think the P5 mechanism started from that time of the CTBT negotiations and has been used practically in all important fields: security, political issues, terrorism. Today we are seeing a wider application of the P5-mechanism because they are members of the Security Councils and all happen to be the nuclear five.

Katrin M. Heilmann:

What about the 'friends of the President'? I heard that they were divided.

Ambassador Sha Zukang:

The President was Jayantha, right? Jayantha is a lifelong friend. I worked in Sri Lanka since the end of 1973 as Translator and Ambassador's Assistant and Jayantha Dhanapala was Director or Joint Secretary in the Ministry back then, so we worked very hard together. In 1980, he went to India as Deputy High Commissioner, I was sent to India too. Another 5 years passed and by 1985, he became the Sri Lankan Ambassador to the CD. I then also joined Disarmament. Our whole career we have been working together. Jayantha is a very good friend because of this close association. I would almost argue he is a 'disarmament addict' in a positive way. He is 100% devoted to arms control and disarmament. One of the reasons for his dedication is that Sri Lanka for many years was one of the leading countries of the NAM particularly during Mrs Sirimavo Bandaranaike's time. That explains why he was 'addicted'. He became the President of the conference because of his devotion, knowledge, strong background and his personal connections. He had friends in all countries - the US, China, Russia, the UK. We all trusted him, so he has good standing with practically all groups of countries. He became the President of the conference to facilitate it. He knew his job. He worked very hard and used every chance to strike some balance. He is really a great artist in striking balance. At the same time, he is a man of strong principle. I think this mechanism 'friends of the president' worked very well. The mechanism was good and so was the President. I think the world has not been extremely fair to him in the sense that we did not give him enough recognition for his work. Once the job is done, the people are often forgotten. We are very pragmatic perhaps, but really, his name should be recorded in history. He is not here anymore. But his devotion and commitment for disarmament make him a fatherly figure of disarmament that is particularly for young people important to know about: Jayantha Dhanapala.

You know sometimes we argue with him - you can imagine all the nuclear weapon countries...

Katrin M. Heilmann:

What did you argue about?

Ambassador Sha Zukang:

He said China should take the lead in nuclear disarmament and set examples for others. Can you imagine?! China should destroy all nuclear weapons? We are the only nuclear-weapon state that has Non-First Use and we should take the lead because the US and the Russia don't want to disarm first. I said the superpowers should go first and then China, France and the UK would follow. He said 'no, go first' - that is what I meant when I said he is addicted - he is very passionate. Even as best friends we differed on certain aspects of disarmament issues.

Katrin M. Heilmann:

What was the attitude towards non-members of the NPT?

Ambassador Sha Zukang:

We had 178 countries who were parties to the NPT at that time - almost all of the

185 United Nations member states except for the three threshold countries and that does not even include Korea because Korea acceded to the NPT and then the problems started...It is a long story. At that time, there were only the three threshold countries. I don't think there were any negotiations or consultations with the three because it is none of their business. They chose to keep a distance. I am sure that they are psychologically concerned about the outcome but they 'pretend' they couldn't care less. So, no consultations. You know, at junior level they may ask us some questions... You know as diplomats we work together, we have casual conversations, so we may talk about it but officially there are no mechanisms or arrangements.

Katrin M. Heilmann:

Were they mentioned at the conference as states that were absent?

Ambassador Sha Zukang:

Of course - very much so. Of the three Israel was mentioned the most frequently because it was a real issue. Egyptian President Mubarak as early as the 1970s, advocated a Middle East Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone, this proposal was very much designed with Israel in mind. That explains why today a country like Egypt has not even acceded to the chemical weapons convention or CTBT. Syria as well - though they acceded to the Chemical Weapons Convention because of the Syrian War, they were forced to accede to the Treaty. Israel was very much a central topic but it was not engaged outside the conference. We did not talk about India or Pakistan, or even Korea.

Katrin M. Heilmann:

Iraq's clandestine nuclear program - did that weaken your trust in the NPT as a regime?

Ambassador Sha Zukang:

No... Let me think about this... Since I don't have that memory, it means it was not that important. I am not sure which one happened first: the Israeli bombing of the Iraqi nuclear facilities or the NPT Review Conference. My impression is the bombing happened first. Each and every year the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution condemning the bombing. They called it a 'surgical operation' by Israel against Iraq. After the bombing, all nuclear facilities were eliminated. Iraq condemned the bombing promising it had never gone nuclear. It was not an issue. But every year there was an issue when we debated the motion condemning Israel's attack. They claimed their own nuclear facilities were for 'peaceful purposes'. You know I was there in New York; I was in charge of the first committee on disarmament.

Katrin M. Heilmann:

What about the IAEA?

Ambassador Sha Zukang:

We have changed our approach now. At the beginning, we were, I wouldn't say hostile, we were very suspicious of all institutions established by the developed countries. Back then, we perceived the IAEA as a 'watchdog', for the developed countries' interests, that was rather hostile to us, in contrast, today we are a very active member. Our approach has changed completely. We fully support IAEA in every possible way.

Katrin M. Heilmann:

Was that already the case in the 1990s?

Ambassador Sha Zukang:

We joined IAEA in 1980. IAEA helped China. We were about to develop our nuclear industry. They made sure that our nuclear industry lived up to the technical criteria, so by 1995 we were quite favourable towards IAEA. We appreciate their efforts. At that time, when we were negotiating the CTBT, we used information provided by IAEA

such as the list of countries in possession of nuclear capabilities (44). Based on that, we decided to use this as the number of ratifications required for the treaty to enter into force – based on science and technical data. So now these 44 countries have to ratify the treaty for it to enter into force. When we came across technical questions during negotiations, we made efforts to seek out advice from IAEA.

After the conference

Katrin M. Heilmann:

China opposed the CTBT negotiations ahead of the conference. Did you take the inclusion of the language in the final document as a failure?

Ambassador Sha Zukang:

CTBT is a historical document. It played a historical and strategic role in halting the nuclear arms race among the P5. All the P5 politically committed to the testing moratorium. I understand that each and every year, frequently, the P5 reiterate their commitment not to carry out any further nuclear explosions. It established a monitoring system, as part of which inspections were conducted in Jordan, etc. In China alone we have 12 monitoring stations that detect explosions all over the world.

CTBT firstly, stopped the qualitative arms race among the NWS. This is of huge importance. Secondly, it contributed to the detecting of any possible violators including DPRK and Iran. Any country party to the CTBT, though the CTBT has not entered into force, knows that the monitoring system is there, so countries have to think twice about proliferation. In that sense, it stopped proliferation. This is the most significant disarmament agreement since the establishment of the United Nations. The negotiation at that time meant for the P5 to stop testing and they stopped. It was successful. Even if legally the US Senate and China have not ratified it, it is in reality enforced for all of them. Without the legal ratification, there is a danger of it being violated but that danger is rather small. The P5 are responsible countries – I don't think they would do anything that would violate their commitment.

There are of course always some radicals who complain and blame Article 14 for its constructionist constraints - requiring 44 countries' ratification - but this is based on IAEA data and we all agreed on this. The P5 agreed to stop testing and the others should not proliferate. This is logical, so no complaint. This agreement was signed on my birthday, September 24th. It is very special to me. We have annual meetings in Austria to discuss enforcement. Whatever arguments we have amongst ourselves, it did not diminish the importance of CTBT.

Katrin M. Heilmann:

Last question: What were your expectations about future action immediately following the conference?

Ambassador Sha Zukang:

NPT is at a crossroad – there are opportunities and challenges. Your question has taken us back to the present. With the latest statement by the President elect Donald Trump who said he might abrogate the Iran nuclear deal, Japan and the ROK should get their own nuclear weapons. With the Republicans having a majority in Senate and Congress, it appears to me at this point in time, but I don't know it may change, the ratification of CTBT could be more difficult. Of course, for the US national interests come first. That is the same for China but we live in a globalised world. Though there are backlashes to globalisation, like it or not, we are already globalised with common challenges like climate change. No matter who or how powerful the country may be, globalisation cannot be changed. We are all in the same boat. If these noises, assertions, statements made during the elections are honoured that would be the end of the NPT. And that said, after CTBT, NPT, there have been multiple standards

introduced in the field of non-proliferation like the last policies of the US through the US violation of the Security Council resolution 1172. Did you read it? I drafted that statement because I was the Chairman of the P5 then. I chaired the First P5 Foreign Minister's Meeting –Secretary of State Madeleine Albright was there. The US let the effort and mobilised the whole world in opposing nuclear explosions. That created a very good situation for the smooth adoption of Security Council Resolution 1172 (1998) condemning India and Pakistan, which called upon them to immediately stop testing and join NPT. The US broke this, violated this by having nuclear cooperation with India and then other US allies like Japan, France, UK followed the bad American example by cooperating with Indian nuclear industries. Look, what else can we do in this situation? Number one is Trump's statement will kill NPT if implemented and two are changes in US cooperation with India, which weakened the existing regime. Look I am not angry, maybe one day, China will also work with India. But if all those who were once strongly against nuclear proliferation are now helping India, if this is the case, that on the one hand we promote signing and ratifying arms control agreements and on the other hand we are ready to violate them, then what is the point in negotiating new international agreements? Non-proliferation is at a dangerous crossroad. We are now faced with a choice between chaos and order. I don't know what approach we should take. An international committee, in particular the UN should sit down and look at the situation to think about what to do. I don't think we should throw away all existing instruments, including the UN Charter but we need to look at the reality - that is the realistic approach and the legal approach - which approach should we take? Or should we take the merit approach? Should we consider making legal amendments to accommodate reality? Perhaps this is the only way. Sometimes reality cannot be changed. The world is moving ahead. India is a huge country, a developing country, a poor country. With almost 1/5th of the world population, they have a right to peaceful uses of nuclear energy. But with Security Council Resolution 1172, NPT, all those barriers, legal instruments agreed upon by all minus the three, which approach should we take? China proposes we should sit down together and have a group to exercise our wisdom.

Katrin M. Heilmann:

Thank you very much for this insightful and inspiring conversation! I knew going into this interview that you have a special reputation for being very honest and straightforward and have to say you lived up to it!