

## **November 2, 2020**

### **Interview with Shimon Stein**

#### **Citation:**

"Interview with Shimon Stein", November 2, 2020, Wilson Center Digital Archive, Interview conducted by Hanna Notte with editorial assistance from and prepared for publication by Tricia White. <https://wilson-center.drivingcreative.com/document/300075>

#### **Summary:**

Shimon Stein is a former Israeli diplomat. He served as a member of the Israeli delegation to ACRS.&nbsp;

#### **Credits:**

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

#### **Original Language:**

English

#### **Contents:**

Transcript - English

**Shimon Stein, Israel**

**Oral history interview conducted by Hanna Notte on Zoom on November 2, 2020**

**Hanna Notte**

This is the second of November and my interview with Ambassador Shimon Stein for the ACRS oral history. Thank you so much for being with us today. And I want to start with a broad question. Maybe you can just explain to us in what capacity you were involved in the ACRS negotiations and what your role was in the process.

**Shimon Stein**

Well, the starting point for my engagement with the ACRS process was, in a way, as the whole concept of the multilateral was conceived in the context of the so-called Madrid process, with the two tracks — the bilateral and the multilateral — and at that time, in '91, I was serving at the Israeli Embassy in Washington. And I was a kind of coordinator for the multilateral process that took shape during that time, culminating in October of '91, when the whole multilateral was launched in Moscow. So it is from the very beginning that I accompanied the multilateral track, with the ACRS being one of the five working groups, and I spent in Washington two additional years before I returned to Jerusalem in '93, September. And I then was appointed as head of the department, it was at this time division, but with the department authority to cover the whole issue of regional security, disarmament, non-proliferation, and ACRS was part of my portfolio. So I was in the Foreign Ministry, part of the inter-ministerial, I was the representative to the inter-ministerial Steering Group, which was then in charge of the whole preparation, thinking and ideas that has guided us then through the process, which — we will talk about it — came then to an end a few years later, in '95. So that was my participation at this process.

**Hanna Notte**

Great. And in that capacity, did you participate in all the plenaries and also all the intersessionals, so called, and the operational basket? And were you in all the meetings of ACRS?

**Shimon Stein**

I was in, I cannot remember if I was in all the meetings, but I was in 98% of the meetings. And when it became a bit more operational, for example, as part of the operational dimension when they were meetings between, or relating to marine questions where officers had their own meetings — sea rescue or whatever, when it got technical — and it was at the level of the experts, I did not participate there. But in all plenaries and all the main meetings, wherever they were, I was present, yes.

**Hanna Notte**

Great. And you already mentioned the steering group on the Israeli side. Can you talk a little bit about the domestic process of putting together the Israeli delegation for the ACRS?

**Shimon Stein**

Well, as I said, that will be a long story, I think that Eli Levite may have told you, so there's no need for me to repeat it. But I think that the multilateral was kind of, and the need to engage, was a sea change in Israel thinking about arms control disarmament, what have you, because earlier, in the decades preceding, we were, in most cases behaving like the three monkeys. We never heard, we never talked, we never saw. In other words, we tried to disengage to the extent possible from interacting with the international community on issues which we felt are impinging on matter of national security. And pretty much the whole notion of the concept of the slippery slope guided us — don't engage because you start the process where you never know where you can find yourself. And as isolated as we were, and singled out as we were, and as a country that is perceived as, that has a deterrence component over which we don't like to talk, and rightfully so. And as a result, we were kind of doing the housekeeping, more or less fighting battles, where we were singled out, criticized for our policies. But we were not in, other than that, in an engaging mode. And the beginning of the multilateral on the ACRS had compelled us, because the decision was then taken to engage. Hadn't it been for the U.S. Secretary James Baker

and Bush, and another guy at the (which I'm sure you will have also to talk to), who did it from the State Department, Daniel Kurtzer, a key person for the whole multilateral, so hadn't it been for the U.S. pushing us and pushing the neighboring states to participate in a very intense diplomacy from December of 1991 until October, to the... I guess we would not have had that process at all. So it takes an intervention from outside in order to compel the parties, who by themselves are not showing great interest for different reasons. So, because the U.S. has pushed us to come to Madrid, our Prime Minister Shamir at the time was a very stubborn guy. So we went there, and therefore we had also to engage on the outstanding issues which we were consulted, about the forming of the different working group. So we understood that you have to start in a very methodical way to prepare yourself for that launching of a new process for us — engaging and having to articulate the positions that we were not so happily, we were reluctant to do. So that led to a unique moment where the Israeli ministerial community was formed.

Each and every ministry had then to simply prepare itself. And we then, Ministry of Defense, Minister of Foreign, the Israeli Atomic Energy Agency, the military needs different components. So it was quite an inter-ministerial comprehensive undertaking which I found extremely helpful, useful, and that has opened the new chapter in the way Israel has been approaching. In other words, in reaching out and engaging following the motto, it's better to engage and then avoid things happening, which are not in your interest, then simply let things go. But that speaks only for some of the issues and not for all the issues. And that process, aside from the ACRS has also led to - and that's something that you will have to get, or perhaps you already - to a major speech, where we outlined our attitude, where our director general of the foreign ministry, Eitan Bensusan, came to Geneva and presented the Israeli approach to arms control regional security, I guess it was in '96 or so. We were at that time also trying to get into the Conference on Disarmament, which is a composition of the different regions.

And since Israel has an eternal problem, that though we belong to Asia, Asia doesn't want us, so on a so-called temporary decision — and you know, sometimes in life temporary becomes permanent — so, at that time, we decided to become members of the Western group and a member the CD and I spent quite some time discussing it to with the Western group in Geneva. Because what was at that time happening, that's a *Klammer auf* (German for 'open bracket'), as you say — was that the international community was negotiating the CTBT. And they needed us badly. So I guess I established at that time a rule, whenever there is a need, there is a way, because for many years, the Western community, the Western group, didn't want us for whatever reasons. And when the moment came, and we were crucial, and still are, for the entry into force of the CTBT, we all of a sudden were accepted as members, only to come back to my point of Israel engaging on subjects that before '91 were unheard of.

### **Hanna Notte**

Great, thank you, and directly following up on this decision by Israel to engage, as you put it, and the importance of the Americans giving a push in that direction at the time, is well understood. Were there other global or regional events or developments at the time that makes Israel more willing to engage in this process?

### **Shimon Stein**

No, I mean, bear in mind against what backdrop the whole idea came into being. Here we are the end of the Cold War, the disintegration of the Soviet bloc (a unilateral moment in the history of the globe, the U.S. is the one and only), the Iraq War in '91, or the Gulf War, whatever you want to name it, and then a clear dominance by the U.S. And then the idea, as is always the case in those big events, and that is not only with respect to that — I mean, a kind of what I call, a moment where a *Paradigmenwechsel* (German for 'paradigm change') is possible is only in such events of a military with a clear cut end, like the Second World War for Germany and Europe, and mutatis mutandis for the Middle East with the Iraqi War, where it presented an opportunity for restructuring, a kind of a transformation of the region which brought President George Bush at the time to speak about a new security structure for the Middle East. And something which, *im Nachhinein* (German for 'with hindsight'), it looks also kind of nostalgic and a bit naive, in light of what is happening, has

happened ever since was the democratization of the Middle East.

And, well, the Saudis couldn't start with the notion of democratization, they told the Bush administration that it would not be a good idea, so the Bush administration forgot the notion of democratization in '91, perhaps a pity, or not. But, they didn't go the way the U.S. did go later with Bush Jr. with regime change, and whatever. And the whole notion of to what extent can one impose democracy, or other way of governing, from outside is a question in and of itself. But creating a new regional security structure came into being. So that was against the notion that the leading superpower had in mind, and the ACRS, and I would say also the other four working groups, was in the same vein. Saying that if we want to transform the region, we also have to look at transnational problems that are a source of instability. And therefore we have to simply grapple with them on a region wide basis, and not only bilateral, state to state. So, that was kind of the *Hintergrund* (German for 'background') for that idea.

So there the event was the Iraqi War, and what conclusions the U.S. derived from that, to what extent as far as Israel — I think that the post-Iraqi War had created a much more - well we know now that it was a terrible mistake, but it's a different story, because then comes the whole issue, whether not only the '91 but the even two or three war in Iraq was the right thing to do, whether there were other threats that one should have focused on, and not on the Iraqi one. So, it was only, at the end of the day, the U.S. And I think that that remains until this very day, and I can't see for the life of me any ACRS revival, or any revival of multilaterals without an extra regional power that will come together. And if you go to the website of the INSS and read what some of the papers that I wrote, mostly together with my late friend and colleague, Emily Landau, where it says that it will still have to be an extra regional power that will have to push the parties to come together - other than that, I cannot see any such gathering any time soon.

**Hanna Notte**

Very clear and very interesting. Thank you. And your emphasis on the importance of the United States is well understood.

**Shimon Stein**

I want to tell you, because you asked, it's the United States. But that was, as I said, the '90s were characterized globally by the unipolar moment, which is no longer the case. And I remember, I mean that, the U.S. was not a very forthcoming victor, they were in a way, *im Nachhinein* (German for 'after the fact') humiliating the Russians.

**Hanna Notte**

I was going to ask you about...

**Shimon Stein**

Letting them understand who is the victor and who's the vanquished.

**Hanna Notte**

Okay.

**Shimon Stein**

So, it was quite clear that the one, those who called the shots, are the U.S. and I think that historically, *im Nachhinein*, ex post facto, they could have shown, they could have been as the victor a bit more gracious with the Russians, and not humiliating them. Because, even so many - well, not relatively speaking, a footnote: but in those decades left, the Russians have not yet overcome the post-imperial time, which is deep in their bones and influenced, to a large degree, their behavior in our day. Generally speaking, imperial powers need some time to recover from their loss, you could have seen that also with the United Kingdom. But Russia belongs also to that category. So, the U.S. could have shown a bit more grace, but... and therefore they have, in a way, informed them, symbolically giving them here and there, but those were bits and pieces. So, they drove the agenda. It was Secretary of State James Baker, who had taken the lead in moving the process launched by the administration.

**Hanna Notte**

Great, great, thank you. I want to ask you a few questions on the structure of the

process. I guess you were in Washington when ACRS started: this decision to have these particular five working groups, and for arms control and regional security to be one of them, was this an American suggestion? Was it consensual from the beginning received this way? Can you talk a little bit about that?

**Shimon Stein**

Well, I think that the whole, you know, you have to win all participants even if it was quite clear that there is a price to pay overall for not attending. But the lead-up to the whole structure and the conception of the multilateral was kind of preceded a period of intense back and forth. I cannot tell you, how many times did I go to see Dan Kurtzer at the State Department and otherwise. I guess, also the level of my ambassador at the time. So, at the end of the day, there was a consensus about the need to tackle those outstanding issues of environment, of economic cooperation, of refugees, of arms control, and water. Those were the five outstanding issues. And it was, as a process, first of all, the U.S. have come up with an idea. And generally, like in diplomacy, the start in a process of trying to see to what extent does each and every of those question address your national interests. So, what emerged as the structure of the multilateral process was an outcome of inter-state negotiation.

I guess most of the Arab states didn't have much of an interest, on the arms control - the Egyptians who were at that time, dominating the Arab scene, you could see that in the course of the negotiation, even if sometimes some have resisted it, and found a way — I remember especially a meeting with the Jordanians with Abdullah Toukan. Anyway, so yes, it was an outcome of a joint process where we could go along and feel comfortable with the way the process was structured. And the terms of reference, of course, which was quite crucial, the whole notion of consensus, which is key to any process, of course, for us, was understood. Nothing is agreed until everything is agreed. I think today, I will see it personally different, where you have to depart from it. And doing whatever is agreed can then be implemented. But doesn't have always to wait — that's a way to procrastinate. But, since I have the privilege of being outside of the government, I am free to articulate whatever I like.

**Hanna Notte**

I want to pick up on what you said about the terms of reference, which were agreed at the beginning. At the first meeting in Moscow in January 1992, when the whole process was kicked off, a steering committee was also put together which was co-chaired, of course, by the U.S. and Russia, and then it had other members. What was the mandate and the role of the steering committee that was overseeing the multilateral track?

**Shimon Stein**

Well, I mean, what is the role of a steering committee? A steering committee is a role where each and every country — in fact, it was a bit smaller, the one, our representative at that time was, if I'm not mistaken, at that time, the Air Force general who was the head of our delegation, David Ivry, whose name you have heard, I guess. He is the one who could tell you more about that. But the steering committee overall does what steering committees are — they simply are guiding the process as we go along. And I was involved in the preparation for steering group meetings, but I was not the representative. So I can't tell you about the inner dynamic, but I guess they got, the whole process got its guidelines from those meetings that took place. In more details, I can't tell you, I will have to go back and read the minutes, which I won't do anyway. So I guess you got from others a bit more about the inner dynamic. And as I said, David Ivry was most qualified. But it was a venue where there were not too many meetings by the way. And the issues that were brought up were, the parties chose to, and the U.S. chose to bring up some issues that had to be clarified and held out in that, in that *Gremium* (German for 'group').

**Hanna Notte**

Great. And then when the ACRS process sort of started, get put to work, it seems that the decision was taken at the beginning to take a somewhat educational approach, to have outside expertise being brought in on how, for instance, confidence building was done between the Americans and the Soviets during the Cold War, or in in the European theatre with the Helsinki process. Can you talk a little bit about how you

found that? Did you find that approach to be the right one, with hindsight? Was it well received by the regional delegations?

### **Shimon Stein**

Well, I start with your last comment whether it was well received. By some, probably, yes. By others, mostly Egypt, not — received reluctantly, because that goes to the fundamentals, if you want, of the different approaches that had guided us and Egypt as a protagonist, let's say. And with the Egyptians interested, first and foremost, about starting with the icing of the cake. And you know what I mean by icing of the cake.

### **Hanna Notte**

I believe I do, yes, but if you can elaborate, it will still be to the benefit of our audience.

### **Shimon Stein**

I think that has guided the thing and even beyond that. The Egyptians are first and foremost interested in Israel's deterrence. Everything else is kind of secondary. And those who are mostly interested in the icing of the cake is the Foreign Ministry of Egypt, because one could see that clearly, and even that accompanies us still this very day. What one could see in the ACRS deliberations, that whenever issues came up that pertain to the Egyptian force structure, the foreign ministry was, I guess, got a quite a clear order and more than that, from the Egyptian military, "don't touch our issues." And since the military doesn't take a diplomatic view, because I always used to say 'hadn't it been for the nuclear issue Egypt would not have, and that goes till this very day, would not have a subject internationally with which *sie werden sich profilieren können* (German for 'they can make a name for themselves'). So that serves as a permanent issue for Egypt on its international agenda diplomacy, and the Egyptian military doesn't care much about it. They care about the Egyptian force structure.

So therefore, the diplomats were not allowed to deal with matters that really got to the national interest of Egypt, in the military sense. Because I guess the military knows that the deterrence issue of Israel is beyond them. And what they have to be concerned is about the Egyptian force structure. So for the Egyptian diplomacy, that's the essence of life. The Israeli nuclear agenda. And taking us there throughout the years. I mean, also the end of the ACRS came because of the nuclear issue in '95. So, when that is the ultimate, and when that is guiding Egyptian national interest, you will understand that every other approach, that procrastinates, postpones, will not be received with great enthusiasm. And here comes the U.S. and tells the region, rightfully so, 'you have zero experience in arms control as a region, let alone in disarmament. And therefore, before we embark on that process, you have to get lessons learned from other areas as to the overall approach to arms control'. But that takes time, that is a gradual and incremental process.

Well, as you said, they go from the introduction of, first of all, a bit of education, and then if you start practicing it, putting it in operational terms, you have to start with, in an environment and - mind you - an environment with zero engagement, with 100% hostility, with 100% lack of trust. Those are the elements which are almost a precondition for any engagement to have a minimum of engagement. Not to agree but at least an engagement, willingness to hear, willingness to establish a bit of trust. And that is what the arms control process in Europe was all about. I mean, at the end of the day, the '75 that you pointed out, is an outcome of '73, of the conventional arms forces were in a give and take. The Russians wanted the conventional and the others, the Western and the U.S. wanted the Helsinki with the three baskets involved, human rights, economic and also the... So that is a process that Israel has adopted. When we have all said, learn from the European. If you go on to go directly from A to Z, not with us. I mean, and go back and see what the Europeans and Americans, the Russians, have to tell you about creating a process. So you go from CBM to CSBM to the conventional, and you build a house. You don't start from the roof. First of all, you need the basics, the fabrics.

So here we are, by the way, as I call them, those ideological differences, that seem till this very day almost insurmountable. Perhaps there are some cracks now, because there is no longer an Arab world, the nature of the threat in the region has changed.

Egypt is no longer a leading and dominant factor. There are some other countries who aspire also to have a word. So that may, that has changed, but the Egyptian diplomacy is still stuck in time. So that is the reason for, I mean, whatever you see about difficulties, lack of progress, everything derived from those two opposing attitudes and approaches to arms control. That's it. Nothing else has to be said. So we can conclude by now because that is the essence. I'm serious about it. That's the essence.

**Hanna Notte**

And I do have a follow up, if I may, on that essence, and that those discrepant views and approaches to arms control. Did you find that to be completely static throughout the process? Or did you ever find inflection points where you thought maybe the Egyptian?

**Shimon Stein**

No, no, no, that a tenant. And as I said, without that, would you hear about Egypt? There's nothing that they can... I mean, that's quite fundamental for their international *raison d'etre*, that international issue. I mean, that was what led to the blackmail of '95 to the indefinite extension, and the willingness of Egypt to go away in return for the WMD free zone resolution.

**Hanna Notte**

I was going to ask you about that as well. How did the anticipation of the 1995 Review Conference, the NPT Review Conference, spill over or play into ACRS? I mean, did it affect what you were trying to do in ACRS?

**Shimon Stein**

When you have that in mind, broadly speaking, whether that is the hovering *im Raum* (German for 'in the room'), where you know that that is the issue, the icing of the cake, and everything else seems to be kind of time dragging - so that they cannot come forward, and they were frustrated. I think '95 served them as a kind of scapegoat or pretext in order to simply cut the bullshit and then go the other way in trying to achieve setting that subject on the international agenda, which has been bedeviling us till today. There is no way that anytime soon any meaningful WMD zone — with all due respect to Chen and her company at UNIDIR, which is nice for the European Union to spend 3 million of its budget for the project of WMD free zone model - but models are not the problem. I mean, we have enough material if the countries are interested to start establishing the structure of a WMD free zone tomorrow. So yes, I mean, that was and that kind of served them as a way to simply call it a day and then move to the next attempt to put the issue on the agenda, which I may say they were successful.

**Hanna Notte**

Great, great. This is very clear. And you made very clear what the discrepancy or the issue was in the conceptual baskets. Nonetheless, progress was achieved in the operational basket on some of these confidence building measures and some of this technical work. Can you describe a little bit the work with your counterparts from the other regional delegations on these more operational things, how you found that?

**Shimon Stein**

As I said, on the operational things, I followed them but luckily enough, I didn't have to engage in all of them. I had also, first of all, in the ministry people who were also following it closely on the operational way, and beyond that, on some of the operational, those were the experts that dealt with it. I kind of, from the Ministry point of view oversaw process, and engaged only on those issues that were politically relevant leaving the technical, so to speak, issues within the arms control for others. So I well, now with so many years around passed, I also took place, but not in a meaningful way that left its impact on my fading memory nowadays.

**Hanna Notte**

Okay. Great. I want to ask you a little bit, if I may, about the atmospherics of working in ACRS and how you found it on a personal level, engaging with some of these regional delegations, and whether you recall going to Tunis or Doha for the later plenaries in the region - whether you can talk a little bit about that, the relationships between the delegations?

**Shimon Stein**

The relationship, for an Israeli like myself, I had zero engagement with Arabs. Broadly speaking, not even with Israeli Arabs or Palestinians. I think that the ACRS opportunity - and on the sidelines briefly, on the Palestinian, because at that time, beginning of the Madrid process, the bilateral with the Jordanian-Palestinian delegation took place in Washington, so I had also followed that on the margins - so I had a slight engagement with the Palestinians, but never a serious one with Arabs. Though, I had matriculated in Arabic as a language, which I hate till this very day, because the day I had my matriculation, my *Abitur* (German term for 'graduation') in Arabic, I simply deleted that language from my disk. And ironically enough, my sister later became an Arabic teacher. So anyway, so the multilateral have confronted me with Arabs, as well as Palestinians, of course. And that... did I become friends with? No, did I... They were also, you know... They keep their distance. It's not as if they engage with us even till this very day. Some are very reticent to do it.

But I had, well, also surprisingly or not, some more personal contact with a few Egyptian diplomats, with which I kept contact. Also, later on, and I must say, even till this day, and when we had one meeting in Cairo, that was the only time that I was in Cairo. So, I had, in the context of ACRS, one meeting in Cairo, which I attended and I, at that time, was invited to the home of one of the Egyptians delegates and had also visited the pyramids in Giza. So yes, and later also, within the engagement of another Track II activity, I kept contact with some of the Egyptians but that was, and yes of course, Abdullah Toukan. And not only him, some other very nice and engaging Jordanians. But we had no contact with, I had no contact with the Saudis. And I am a kind of person who, if somebody is not that interested, I'm not so keen simply to reach out. So, there was a kind of engagement but not full-blown, get together or whatever. We had opportunities as groups to engage in cocktails or whatever. But there's nothing special, as I said, aside from Egyptians and Jordanians. And also the extra-regionals, the Turks that I became very close to till this very day. The Indians that I became close — Rakesh Sood, I don't know if Eli (Levite) has mentioned his name. And Canadians were very close friends of mine, still 'til this very day (even a marriage came out of that ACRS engagement in Canada). So, yes, I guess the human relationship could have been a bit more had we had more time, but the Track II activities over the years have brought us and myself also close to also Palestinians, also a Palestinian or two that I met in the course of the ACRS - I then also met them on other occasion. But it is not as if we are in a *reger Austausch* (German for 'animated exchange') per email otherwise.

**Hanna Notte**

Okay. Great. Thank you for that. You mentioned the bilateral track and that you were following it on the margins. The Israeli - Jordanian / Palestinian...

**Shimon Stein**

During my time in Washington, yeah.

**Hanna Notte**

Yes. Generally, I want to ask you how Israel saw the relationship, after Madrid, between the bilateral track proceeding, or the various bilaterals, and the multilateral track.

**Shimon Stein**

Well, the overriding assumption of the whole concept of Madrid with the two tracks was that the ACRS are not a substitute but complementing the bilateral. So, the relationship was such, I mean, there are two tracks: the Israeli-Jordanian, or the Jordanian-Palestinian and the Israeli. But that has then also in those two years changed, after it became clear that there is an Oslo process which started secretly, so much so that even those attending Washington on the Israeli side didn't know about Yossi Beilin, Shimon Peres and company doing their shticks in Oslo with the PLO, and were surprised when Secretary of State Warren Christopher and Shimon Peres - in fact, Shimon Peres on his way to Los Angeles to inform Christopher about the Oslo track.

So I guess at that time it became clear that the bilateral will take a different course. And therefore, the multilateral track continued, but as I said, I mean, there were two processes, but there was the prime one, and the other one that was meant to



complement and give it the regional dimension. Which, at the end of the day, gave the Israelis — also as we speak now about the new circumstances with the Emirates, Bahrain and the changing of the kind of also recognizing the need for a regional process with Arab countries because some Arabs still till this very day feel, at least as far as Netanyahu is concerned, they are right that he was always trying to over-circumvent the Palestinians by going directly with the Arab world. And now at least we see that there is a paradigm change, or about to be, where the Palestinian issue is no longer a prerequisite for us to engage with the Arab world, as a price for coming forward on a Palestinian issue.

But I guess, at that time, even if people didn't spell it in so many words, I guess the regional dimension, all of a sudden, became also a dimension of importance for the region, understanding what the Americans felt, and I also and many others that, even if - and don't forget, that is also a change that took place in recent years, recognizing that the Israeli Palestinian problem is not the only source of instability in the region. That there are many other sources of instability, especially after the beginning of the so called Arab Spring. So that, in a way, I guess, we got to understand that even if the main thing is to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict, i.e. the Israeli-Palestinian, there is also the regional dimension out there. And even if it is secondary to the primary, it is still important and I think there has been... We speak about ACRS, because that's what you are now asking me for, but on water, there has been also progress, even creating some centers which we were not able to succeed (within the ACRS), and a center for conflict prevention that we wanted, and we agreed that it will be in Amman, but got always the resistance of the Egyptians who were quite stubborn and not allowing the Jordanians - which Abdullah Toukan, that famous meeting in Taba'a, it came to a clash between Abdullah and Nabil Fahmy, which were quite clear, because they got sick and tired of being asked, being compelled to do things and, I guess, I was not privy to the inner Arab dynamic, but it was quite clear that the Egyptians felt that they are the dominant and everybody else has to *gehorchen* (German for 'obey') So, yes, so that's to your question, bilateral, multilateral.

**Hanna Notte**

And directly building on that, what you just said is very interesting. I mean, did Israel find, were there Arab states in the ACRS process with which you felt you had particular commonalities of interests, more than with others?

**Shimon Stein**

Well, I guess with the Jordanian, the Syrian didn't, were not relevant and to a certain degree, but also individually, with the Maghreb, but not with all of them. Moroccans a bit, Algerians...

**Hanna Notte**

Any particular issues?

**Shimon Stein**

I talk about general, no, there was no coordination, if you mean, on certain issue, so there was no coordinating, but informally we could hear from the Jordanians their frustration with the Egyptians. The Saudis didn't engage that much with us. And the rest were not that important. The Saudis didn't also send the high caliber delegation.

**Hanna Notte**

Field, yeah, okay. You just mentioned Syria. Of course, you were talking about arms control and regional security at the time, and a number of important players were not at the table, Syria and Lebanon, because they chose not to. And, of course, Iran, Iraq and Libya were not in the process. How did the absence of those players affect the process?

**Shimon Stein**

We have not come that far to deal with those issues. And mind you, yes, Iraq, Libya, and Syria and Lebanon is, was, less of a problem because it serves as an appendix of Syria at the time. And Iraq wasn't there for obvious reasons. And the question of the definition of the region for arms control purposes and disarmament was something that the ACRS dealt with and reached a conclusion that for the purpose of arms control and disarmament, the region will be the Arab League plus Iran and Israel. So

that was one of the outcomes of the ACRS that many still stick to, though recently, I all of a sudden heard, that it would be a good idea to include Turkey, which I think is a problem in and of itself. And I don't see how that happens. And I don't think if Turkey itself is willing to do it. But that aside, and Iran at that time, '91 was *am Boden* (German for 'devastated'). Anyway.

And though I must say '91, I belong to those veterans, there are not too many nowadays, that have on the Israeli side, at least I take credit among the few who has been following the Iranian nuclear file since '89. From my time in Washington, and later as head of the division, and then later, the Deputy Director General for the GUS (German abbreviation for the Commonwealth of Independent States, or CIS), and also as Ambassador and also the INSS. So I look back at those years since '89, where we had already started to deal with that as a problem. So '91, Iran wasn't there, and I don't think that somebody had insisted that Iran will, should be there. And we also had taken the approach that - you speak about definitions, for what purpose? Because it's a very wide region that has sub-regions. So what concerns the Maghreb doesn't necessarily concern the Gulf or the core region for arms control. So we could envisage regional arms control that could have taken place on a sub-regional, without having a direct impact on the security of the entire region.

And you also spoke about, as I said, for what purpose, a definition? Because it is one thing to speak about conventional arms control, and it is another one to speak about non-conventional plus missiles. So had we come that far to speak about the non-conventional with Iran, with Iraq *am Boden* ('devastated'), because when Israelis has done and still do its net assessment, threat assessment, then we look at the entire region from the question, "what does pose a threat to us?" And since Iraq took place in wars against Israel, conventionally, since the war of independence in '48, Iraq was part of the conventional balance of power, that should have to be taken into account, Syria, of course. But Iran wasn't part of that. For all practical purposes. As I said, it was only in later years when - still, we will have to deal for many years with the Iranian problem. But in '91, it wasn't, and Iraq wasn't there, because the Iraq was *am Boden* at the time defeated. And kind of ostracize. And Syria also decided not to go that way. So it was without them, but it is hardly easy to imagine any meaningful regional agreement without taking Syria and Iraq into account. But we didn't come... I mean those achievements, operational, the CBMs, were not such that that had impinged on national security on each and every participant. So we could go and do rescue at sea, and some other things which were nice, counting and whatever, which were nice but were not really starting to cause a problem in the way countries looked at their national security, and whether they were kind of impaired or threatened by any of the steps that were taken by ACRS or agreed upon.

### **Hanna Notte**

Great, Ambassador Stein, if you could go back 30 years to the beginning of ACRS and you would have the say for something to be done differently in this process, what would it be? And building on that, maybe, I mean, what were the greatest failures of ACRS, as well as greatest successes?

### **Shimon Stein**

I mean, I would have to think about it, I can't give you an answer off the top of my head, but I'll say spontaneously: From the Israeli point of view, the fact that it has compelled to think seriously about arms control, regional security, and disarmament, the fact that we have established a community of experts within the bureaucracy that still engages, that we have decided to change our mode of engagement when it came to those issues — all of them could not have happened without that process. Overall, as I said, with the U.S. first and foremost pushing - hadn't it been for the push of the United States and the outcome, I don't think that we would have talked about it, anyway. And generally, I think that interaction at the regional level, even if at the end of the day, was, did not come to an end. And what does an end mean? To fruition, in terms of regional agreements, has to do with what I've described as fundamental differences, that still exist and will exist with us, so we could have gone on discussing, but with reluctance of one side, the Egyptians, and with reluctance of Israel to deviate from the approach, which was based on our learning from the European, that you build on a process, and once you build on and gain confidence, you can then try to touch about more sensitive issues to national security, and that there is no other way.

And I would stick to that, every arms control process has to start to gain trust and confidence among all parties. Outside my bureaucratic hat, what I am now since 13 years, I think that's something which I advocate also in my papers, is that for whatever regional engagement which the region serves as our precedent, because there is no other region that doesn't engage on a regional level. In Asia, notwithstanding the any number of latent conflicts, you still find Asia regional forum (means ASEAN) that is coming together that is discussing everything, you have it in Latin America and Europe. But the region stands out as a region who lacks a regional forum to discuss, and I am now for a regional forum that will be comprehensive in its agenda and inclusive in its participants. That is something which Israel is still a bit reticent, in terms of the comprehensiveness for the agenda.

**Hanna Notte**

And you did say at the very beginning of our conversation that maybe, that you personally think that this paradigm 'nothing is decided until everything is decided', that that is maybe something that needs to be rethought. So how would that apply to such a regional forum today? What would that mean?

**Shimon Stein**

Well, you have to get to the bridge before you cross it. So we have not yet even reached the bridge. And therefore I say, let's start an open discussion — a regional one, where each and every state that does what we did, as part of the learning process and educational and that presents its approach, presents its threats agenda, or an assessment and understanding better each and every position since '92, '93, '94, a lot has changed in the region, of course. So I mean, first of all, let's agree that there is a need for a regional forum. And I am back to my original opening and I've also advocated it in a few Zoom conferences and I guess it will take, nowadays, the U.S., Russia, China and the European Union for that matter, to agree on the basic idea of such a need, because everybody speaks about how unstable the region is. And in terms of the arms race and the nuclearization of the region, and the threats that it might pose beyond its region. That if those come together and make a decision, I think that it would be very difficult for the regional participants to resist the pressure, which will have to involve also carrots and stick. I mean, the region doesn't know any other language but the language sometimes of sticks. *Diese Keule* (German for 'club'/'bat'), which is important. So before asking the other I think, first of all, get the region to agree that there is a need to have a discussion. And then try and agree on an agenda, where all subjects should be on the agenda. And then we'll go from there. But we are still far because I don't see a consensus among the extra regionals emerging, let alone the parties. I mean, I don't see them coming together anytime soon. So we are kind of stuck where we are.

**Hanna Notte**

Ambassador Stein, thank you. I mean, maybe I'll ask you right at the end, is there anything else you would like to say on ACRS or anything important on the process that I failed to ask you about?

**Shimon Stein**

Whatever you failed to ask me, you will ask somebody else that you have not yet interviewed. And, they will complement, after all, it's only my vantage point, which is a bit selective as time goes by. But I guess I mean, leading is to understand the broad lines and what brought us, what led us stay for a while, what brought the process to an end, and see whether that much has changed. Things have changed, but on some, the Middle East is frozen in time in a way. And let's hope that your generation, let alone others, not mine certainly, will be... But I have my basic understanding, as I said at the outset, it is only in this case, but not only the paradigm change which make a qualitative change of approach possible. And I always come back and say, bring the paradigm change in Europe after the end of the Second World War: Germany was crushed, defeated, Europe *lag in Asche* (German for 'lay in ruins'), in ruins. And it took an historic leadership of some Europeans like Robert Schumann, and Adenauer and Jean Monet, that understood that there is no status quo ante, but going only forward. And the idea of European integration was unprecedented in European history in recent centuries. And it took this historic leadership, with the defeat, in order to move Europe to a new dawn. It took not necessarily a war, but a

historic figure, like Gorbachev, to realize that the time has gone and that you cannot now send battalions of tanks to try and make again Eastern European countries who have started to revolt, to crush it with military power. And therefore, glasnost and perestroika has led to the end of an era. It took De Klerk and Mandela to realize that against the abyss, only working together can overcome those years. We have not yet received such a defeat in the Middle East. As a region, we don't have any historic leadership. We don't have the extra regional powers who have an appetite. So we are in deep shit - that is an unhappy note to close our discussion.

**Hanna Notte**

Yeah, but also quite powerful. So, I want to thank you for your time today. Thank you so much. And we will definitely be in touch as this research progresses with the results if you're interested. Thank you.

[End of transcript]