

October 9, 2020

Interview with Michael Yaffe

Citation:

"Interview with Michael Yaffe", October 9, 2020, Wilson Center Digital Archive, Interview conducted by Miles Pomper with editorial assistance from and prepared for publication by Tricia White. <https://wilson-center.drivingcreative.com/document/300076>

Summary:

Michael Yaffe is a former US diplomat. He served as a member of the US delegation to ACRS.

Credits:

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

Original Language:

English

Contents:

Transcript - English

Michael Yaffe, United States

Oral history interview conducted by Miles Pomper on Zoom on October 9, 2020

Miles Pomper

Great, well, we're recording now. So, we need to start with a few of the sort of basic preliminaries, if you could give your full name?

Michael Yaffe

Sure, my name is Michael Yaffe.

Miles Pomper

And could you give us a sense of the kind of dates that you were involved in the process?

Michael Yaffe

Sure.

Miles Pomper

From/to dates, basically.

Michael Yaffe

Yep. So, as you know, the process began in January 1992. I actually joined the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency in August of 1993. And my assignment included the ACRS process. My overall assignment was to focus, principally, on the issue of Middle East regional security, and basically nonproliferation. And so that intersection led me to become the representative from ACDA to the US delegation. And then, I stayed with it through the end of the formal process. And then began a Track 2 program to support ACRS, and what was hoped to be an abeyance of ACRS, that it would resume sometime, if you will, and so I stayed with it. Even though it didn't resume, it was still on the books all the way through to 2000 with the last steering group meeting of the overall multilateral track. And so, about a year after that, I left the State Department. At some point, I crossed over to the State Department when ACDA was folded into the State Department.

Miles Pomper

Yeah, like, in the late '90s.

Michael Yaffe

In '97, I think.

Miles Pomper

So, you said, so you weren't involved in any of the initial stages, Madrid Conference, original plenaries, or any of those?

Michael Yaffe

Correct. And then, you know, there were a set, I went through several leaders for the US side, the last one being Bob Einhorn, as the deputy assistant secretary for political military affairs. Fred Axelgard was the main coordinator for the overall working group for the US delegation. And then a bunch of us who were with it became, kind of like, just other coordinators, if you will. And so, I think I was the last one in, actually, I think everyone else had left, such that I think the last two people in the department who worked on ACRS were Bob Einhorn and myself.

Miles Pomper

You closed the door behind you as you left?

Michael Yaffe

Something like that.

Miles Pomper

Can you talk a little bit about, how did you feel that various members of the US delegation worked kind of the interpersonal and institutional dynamics on different agencies and sort of civilian and military people on the team?

Michael Yaffe

I thought it was a great example of a good interagency working group process. It was

very clear who the leader was for the working group, in the sense of, again, it was originally the assistant secretary for political military affairs, and then it went down to the deputy assistant secretary from the Near Eastern affairs bureau, you had Fred Axelgard, who served as a coordinator, who was matched by coordinators from each of the other four working groups that made up the multilaterals. And overall, you had the deputy assistant secretary at NEA, who basically became the principal person looking at overall the multilaterals themselves, who helped bring all these various elements together. And then we'd be, kind of, conjoin to the office of the Special Middle East Coordinator's office.

Miles Pomper

Dan Kurtzer?

Michael Yaffe

Dan, yeah, Dan was the first DAS under which this began. But as I was saying, they would then coordinate with the Special Middle East Coordinator, Dennis Ross, who was in charge of the bilateral negotiations and so on. And on the ACRS team itself, we had representatives from all the different agencies involved. And I thought that went really well. And some of us, you know, would serve as the go-between for some of the agencies. For example, I worked very closely with Department of Energy, and the National Laboratories. I also worked quite closely with the Department of Defense, but also others did as well. And, you know, we worked a lot of it diplomatically, but as we got deeper into the security issues, having the support from the other national security agencies was really important.

Miles Pomper

And what about the people you were going to negotiate with? I don't know what your background was before you came to ACDA, but did you know any of the people on the other delegations beforehand?

Michael Yaffe

For the most part, no. For the most part, before I joined ACDA, I was an academic. And so, I would see some of these people in academic conferences. You know, there would be times when we actually had people who were part of the negotiations on ACRS come to some of these conferences. Bob Gallucci, for example, who was the second person to be in charge of the delegation for ACRS, came to some of the conferences. So, the first person was Dick Clark, who was the Assistant Secretary again for PM. Then it went to Bob Gallucci. And when I joined the team, Bob was still the head of it. And it was then handed to Bob Einhorn. Bob was involved with ACRS from the very beginning when he was on the policy planning staff, which is where much of the thinking for some of the multilaterals began as well under Secretary Baker.

Miles Pomper

And when you came to work for the team, what was your sense of the issues you were going to address in the process and how it was going? And you know, where did you, where did you think this was headed?

Michael Yaffe

So I guess there's multiple parts to this. I mean, first, we knew we were driving towards trying to get agreements as best we can on various issues, and particularly amongst a set of confidence building measures. And each one of us was assigned to be the US liaison to particular CBM negotiations. So remember the structure of ACRS was such that the two co-chairs were Russia and the United States. And then you had the 16 parties. And then you had extra-regionals, as we called them. And the extra-regionals were there to support the overall process. A number of them would volunteer to take charge of negotiations on particular confidence building measures. Often, they proposed the confidence building measure. And if the overall parties agreed to that, they would take charge.

So, for example, the Dutch were in charge of confidence building measures related to communications. And part of what they did was setting up a communication network. And so, I was the liaison, particularly, to that negotiation. And part of that was leading towards setting up a network within each country where they'd be able to communicate with each other, with maybe some long-term thoughts actually to end

up being a hotline- type of structure. And what it did was, because the Dutch were so engaged with the OSCE, I'm sorry, the European Union's communication network, hosting the hub of that network in The Hague. They became the natural party to lead this. And so, the goal was to basically establish this network and to establish a hub somewhere in the region. What we wanted to do was to build institutions in the region. So, the parties in the region had ownership of this, of the overall talks. The idea was to have various elements posted all over the Middle East. And I can talk to you more about how we were doing that. And as things moved along, you know, I would become the principal go-between on starting a regional security center, which started in many different permutations. It started as a crisis management center, moved eventually to become a regional security center, with the idea that it would become eventually a foundation for the equivalent of an OSCE, to be, you know, an organization for security and cooperation in the Middle East. And again, I can talk more about that, as well.

Miles Pomper

We'll get back to those. Those are both very interesting and we will get more detail.

Michael Yaffe

So, you're asking about the overall question, various contexts, and so the other thing I think that was on our minds was to, of course, get certain agreements, to try to see where there was like-mindedness on security threats, on long term vision for security, and overall conceptions. And, of course, one of them included the idea of starting a weapons of mass destruction free zone for the region itself. So part of it was a socialization process, having the parties just be in the same room with each other, talking directly to each other, and maybe even hosting meetings in the region that included Israel as part of the invitation. So those were all things that, you know, we saw this as a process that was slowly built on particular negotiations on confidence building measures, and then eventually start to build up the overall relationship. And that was also with regard to the overall multilaterals. That it was to give a sense of a couple things. One was that it was to bring the other Arab parties, particularly, into the peace process itself. Whereas, as you know, the core of it were the negotiations that Israel was conducting with the Palestinians, with the Syrians, with the Jordanians. But this, the multilaterals, were, again, an opportunity to bring the others into it. And more, so to say, what happens after there are the bilateral agreements, you need to then have more comprehensive agreements. And so this was to jumpstart that process down the road. But built into that, from the very start, was the idea that the multilaterals were subordinate to making progress on the bilaterals, which meant that we can only go so far in what we could achieve before they get paced with regard to the bilateral tracks. So that when the bilateral track started to slow down, the overall multilaterals started to slow down as well.

Miles Pomper

Yes, I talked to Dennis Ross and that was sort of what he was saying, that they were very contingent on each other.

Michael Yaffe

They were, and you know, and I think if we were to do that, again, I would've made it a little less contingent, if you will. Because what was happening, another part to this was, people were developing friendships, amongst the teams. And the teams, the delegations were usually comprised of people from very senior people to much younger people. And so you can imagine, as people were developing their careers, that over time, these people would be rising into more prominent positions. And to do that all together as a generation, I think, was beginning to set up a generational change in the region with regard to how they viewed themselves as a region. And I'll just finish with this point, which is to say that, one of the hardest parts about dealing in the Middle East is that it is, as one academic said, it's a region without regionalism. It's a region that doesn't have a good sense of what it means to be in the region, which countries are part of that region. It's been a region that has often been defined by outsiders rather than the insiders. Whereas you could say to a European, you know, "where are you from?", then you'd say, "Europe", you had a good sense of what that meant. So to build a peace process, to build a set of regimes based on confidence building measures, around the concept of a region where people didn't

think of themselves as part of that, was another confounding element of doing the negotiations.

Miles Pomper

You were talking about some senior people and some junior people. In terms of, particularly in these kinds of talks and negotiations, how would you generally rate the level of experience of your counterparts? Sort of at different stages of the process.

Michael Yaffe

So here, you know, there were all sorts of asymmetries throughout, which, again, made the whole negotiations more complicated. So here you have a set, basically, we have a good number of countries whose multilateral negotiating experience is the UN. And now they're being pulled into a regional negotiation where they never really had that. Even the Arab League, which is about the only pan-regional organization, had such a narrow mandate that it really wasn't an organization that was fostering cooperation amongst the Arab states. It was principally focused on decolonization originally and to ensure the sovereignty of the individual states. Cooperation was really not a strong part of its mandate, nor necessarily with the other organizations that were set up in the region, the Gulf Cooperation Council and the Maghreb Union. So the idea of thinking of themselves in a cooperative venue was new. And of course, many of the states didn't have normal relations with Israel. And so there was a fear that every time you took a step towards a confidence building measure, even recognizing Israel, it was considered to be a step towards normalization by some, and that was a step too far.

So you had to figure out how to work with those kinds of parameters. And then you have asymmetries between the Arab states in terms of their expertise. So Egypt had the most experienced diplomats when it came to arms control. And clearly, I think, they thought of themselves as the leader on those issues, and expected others would defer to them on those issues. And for the most part, that was true for a part of the negotiations, but then some of the states developed, started to develop their own experts on issues. And they started to think about their own kind of leadership in ACRS, which I think set up a bit of tension, particularly within the Arab delegations. And then another consequence of that was that for a large part of ACRS, it turned into sort of like an academic seminar, teaching about various subjects: "what is arms control? What is a confidence building measure? Why do you need verification?" You know, everything.

A lot of what you saw in a lot of the meetings that were conducted over the course were actually more like education seminars, early on, very early on. And often, it was to look at what was done in other regions, particularly Europe, to say, "okay, is that confidence building measure which they negotiated in Europe, or between the West and the East, are any of those applicable to the parties? Which ones are you most interested? And maybe we should focus on those." So, you have that kind of element that was constantly there.

And then the other part you had is - I don't know if you will call it tension - but certainly an asymmetry between the diplomats and the military people. In many cases, there were security elements that really required the military to be there to negotiate. They would defer, of course, to the diplomatic side of things. And there was sort of an asymmetry as well between the Arabs and the Israelis. The Israeli military were more comfortable in negotiating and dealing with these issues. And they were given a certain amount of prominence in their delegation. Whereas on the Arab side, it was mainly the diplomatic elements that had the lead. So we could be negotiating, for example, we were doing a pre notification of certain military activities negotiation, which is basically - what kind of things trigger sending a notice to others to just inform, in whatever format, that something's happening, that movement of troops is happening, and so on, so that people have more clarity on that. So you have diplomats negotiating that, some of them bringing it back to their capitals for the military to look over. It'd be the first time they bring the military into it, whereas some delegation had the military there. And then you have other things where you had the military being volunteered to take a lead on, but the military were not quite prepared for engaging in a multilateral format, a diplomatic format. So they would not be able to speak very forthrightly about what their country's position is. Everything that was talked about or was up for negotiations and decisions had to go back to

capital, to go back to their diplomats who were in charge of the program. So consequently, that makes a very stilted type of environment. Both for negotiations and also then on building relationships.

Miles Pomper

So a lot of potential obstacles there.

Michael Yaffe

There were, yes.

Miles Pomper

Do you remember your first impression of any particular people you met?

Michael Yaffe

I can talk about individuals quite freely. So, I remember my first meeting that I attended, in my official capacity, was a meeting in The Hague, which was for the negotiations on the communication network. And there were a number of Israelis, you know, who, when they first met me, they wanted to go out and have drinks. They wanted to befriend me, as they became very accustomed to really being very tight with the US delegation. And so, there were a number of key people there, who would go out for coffee or whatever. And I'm still friends with those people to this day. The Dutch were great. And I'm still friends with a number of the heads of the Dutch delegation with whom I worked really closely. And then with the Arabs, particularly the Egyptians. We became very close, and some of them are still very dear friends. And one of them I actually even hired when I was a Dean at the National Defense University. So we maintained those kinds of relationships. And then I see a lot of these people now on Track 2 venues and so on. We became very close with the ambassador from Qatar, who was very active amongst the Gulf states, and very close with the Tunisian ambassador.

I'll tell you a story here as well, which is, I hope others might remember it as well. I was not there. I was told the story. And I was told the story very vividly when I first came on board, when I asked some of the same questions that you are asking now, as I was trying to become better acclimated. And the story is about the very first meeting of the working of the ACRS process, which occurred in Washington. Dick Clark was the head of the US delegation. And it was described that members from each delegation between the Arabs-Israelis were eyeing each other quite a bit but without engaging personally. So it would be such that when coffee breaks happen, let's say the Israeli delegation goes up for the coffee, all the Arab delegations were against the wall, on the back wall waiting for the Israelis to get their coffee. And then, once the Israelis left, the Arabs would go and get their coffees. At the end of the meeting, Dick Clark asked the parties: "So, tell me what you think? Tell me what you think were the results of this meeting? What do you feel were the outcomes of this meeting?" And I assume a number of people spoke up, but then the Israeli spoke up. David Ivry, who was the head of the Israeli delegation, said: "You know, I would have considered this meeting a success if one Arab leader had come and shaken my hand." And it was at that moment that the head of the Tunisian delegation went over and shook his hand. It was a very, very big moment.

I'll tell you a second part of the story, which is that over time, as the delegations met, they met, you know, in various permutations. I counted, there were about 42 meetings that made up the ACRS process, anywhere from plenary meetings to expert meetings to negotiating meetings on particular confidence building measures, to basket meetings, conceptual basket, and operational basket meetings. And people got to know each other fairly well. And they got to talking over dinners. They got to hear about each other's families and so on. And as we were doing the negotiations, it went from a process in which countries that were very, very hesitant about doing anything that would represent normalization, that it became a delicate issue with how to address the Israeli delegation. Arab parties, who were very hesitant when they had a question for the Israeli delegation, they would ask the co-chairs, the Americans and the Russians, who would then have to relay the questions to the Israelis and then relay the Israeli answer back. And that went on for a number of meetings.

By the time we got to the final plenary in Tunis, in December of '94, you had this process where, at the end of the meetings, each delegation would summarize what they thought about the meeting. And so, it would go around the room. And I must

say, a lot of the speeches were kind of perfunctory. And so, people would start to meet and talk with their friends on these various delegations. They may show photos or whatever. And it went around the room. And then it came to the head of delegation of Saudi Arabia, Prince Turki. And Prince Turki, for the first time in this - sorry, I should have said that all the delegations by this point were addressing the Israelis directly, so the last holdout was Saudi Arabia - and Prince Turki asked the head of the Israeli delegation a question directly. Everybody in the room stopped. For those of us old enough to remember the commercial by EF Hutton "when EF Hutton speaks people listen." It was one of those kind of moments. You could have heard a pin drop. In this case, everyone was like, "Oh, my gosh, did that really just happen?" And the head of the Israeli delegation responded directly to Prince Turki in Arabic, which was the first time he had ever used Arabic. And so, you sit there, and you say, from January 1992 to December 1994, it took that long just to have that kind of recognition. I think this is kind of emblematic of about how long it takes to do these things.

Also, you know, over time, with enough continuity, and repetition of these kind of meetings, that you can maybe achieve those kinds of key elements. I was always taught as a diplomat that personal relations make all the difference in international diplomacy. And so, I really believe that.

Miles Pomper

So I'm going to go through, in a little while, I'll go through some of the chronology and some other things. But I wanted to get back to what you were saying about these two confidence building measures and kind of look at those a little bit more in depth first. So maybe you could talk about, you know, you started talking about the communications CBM, and how that was working, and kind of how that process unspooled would be sort of interesting.

Michael Yaffe

Yeah, it's actually interesting to talk about, because it is also a reflection about how far we have come in terms of technology. So, the idea here was, as I said, to model itself after the OSCE - it was, sorry, it was the OSCE communication network, not the European Union conference network. So again, the Dutch hosted the OSCE communication network. And so, in this case, the idea was to have a computer, a PC, in every capital, and then connected to each other. And the idea was to be connected through the hub at The Hague. But the idea was eventually to set up a hub in the region. And by the end, Egypt had volunteered to be that place where that would be hosted. And so, this required both an education about the hub, and we would even educate them about how, in the case of the US and Russia or the Soviet Union - I'm sorry, it was Russia at that point - how we had set up a hotline network. And so when parties were in Washington, we would take them to the State Department room and show them what that looked like.

But in this case, it was such a big deal to just get a computer, a normal - I think it was a 286 PC. And then, it became the issue of who pays for this, computers back then were very expensive. The maintenance contract was very expensive in part because many of these countries didn't have the firms in country to handle that. Then you had to, you know, these things would have to be manned 24 hours a day in case a message came across, right? So you had to set up an infrastructure for that kind of thing. You had to make sure that people are trained. So that technological element, married with the cost element, took a lot of negotiation. The Dutch were quite willing to help, and that was quite useful. But with others contributing heavily to it. And, you know, the contracts and all, to negotiate this were very extensive, and I still have a lot of those contracts.

The other part to this was then, "Okay, what are your guidelines and the parameters for use?" And so, a lot of our time was spent negotiating those guidelines, again, looking at the OSCE user model. And eventually, it came out to about that thick as the document, again, complicated by who would be involved in this, and how to use this. And in this case, like for the Egyptians, the military were the main point of contact for establishing the network, and that would be manned by the military. And so, you had a colonel that came from Cairo, who was again not very comfortable with international multilateral diplomacy, coming to these meetings, and having to get constant guidance back from Cairo. And so, what I just described to you, you know,

became multiple meetings, to just do the negotiation and then finally to train operators. And then, our start-up was in March of 1994. I have to check that.

Miles Pomper

So you actually started this?

Michael Yaffe

Yeah, we started - actually, I'm sorry, March 1995, I think, is when we started it, we actually sent messages, or...

Miles Pomper

Just emergency, hotline kind of stuff, or was it routine kind of exchanges of information?

Michael Yaffe

It was beginning small. That's a great question. Because the vision was more evolutionary about how this could develop and for what use. So, I mentioned that the Dutch were in charge of the communications compensability measures. The Turks were in charge of the military-related communication network, sorry, confidence building measures. And that included the sharing of certain information, certain military data. And that included, as I mentioned, the pre notification of certain military activities. And, anyway, so you can imagine this, saying, "what kind of data will you share?" Right? So, they started to develop this kind of thing. And they were trying, initially, focusing on data that was readily available publicly, but maybe not all in one place. So, who's the head of your military? That kind of stuff. But the idea would be that you would have this idea of a notification of certain military activities, then becoming part of the exchange of the information that would go over this network over time. And then the Russians volunteered to head a database for the overall negotiations. And Egypt volunteered to host that as well. So again, you could see these things were building over time, where you could see how this network might help, if you will. And then, overall, the political idea of just saying, "imagine all these countries are now connected to one another vis-a-vis Israel". Or even though it's sort of like a hub and spoke system, the way it goes to the Hague and then to the country. It doesn't go directly between the two countries, at least initially. So anyway, that's how that worked out.

Miles Pomper

These were, you know, fairly technical talks. I mean, were they treated as such and were you able to do this in very kind of working level professional things, or was it politicized?

Michael Yaffe

Yeah, it was pretty much working level. The Dutch, for example, who led this, were headed by Piet de Klerk, a really seasoned diplomat. However, the person really leading the negotiation on the technical stuff - Andre, his last name escapes me for the moment - but, you know, he was also the technical person involved with the OSCE network. And so he then would lead those kind of elements as we walked these things through. And then, we had somebody else who was dealing with just the issue of buying the computers and all the contracting stuff, if you will. So, so there was about a four-man Dutch team that really was the core of their initiative, for example.

Miles Pomper

And you also mentioned the other, I guess you later got involved in these security centers. Who was the government that was leading that effort?

Michael Yaffe

So, what happened was that the Jordanians were the ones who led this idea. And they proposed it at the Paris meeting of the conceptual basket in '94. And indeed, you will see later on that their vision was - this was the beginning of the Organization of Security and Cooperation in the Middle East that was incorporated into the peace treaty between Israel and Jordan. But it was interesting how that developed, you see, because parties started to really give some serious thought about what institutions they would host as well. And of course, we were always pushing for them to do this. And so, we moved from Paris, then to the next plenary meeting, which was in Doha. And the Qataris, of course, wanted not just to host a meeting, but to also show

something that comes out of the meeting that they could call their own. So, to the surprise of everyone, including the Jordanians, they volunteered to host a regional center. And then the next meeting plenary meeting was in Tunis, and Tunisians volunteered to host a security center. So this created all sorts of interesting dynamics particularly between those three countries. And eventually, we worked it out that basically there will be a main center in Amman with what we called associate centers in Doha and Tunis.

Miles Pomper

And similarly, was that sort of a working level process or was it more politicized?

Michael Yaffe

I guess you could say it was working level but these were led by the head of their delegations to the ACRS process. So, Abdullah Toukan for Jordan. Ambassador Saad Al-Thani for Qatar and Ambassador Ahmed Ounales from Tunisia. So they're the ones who really led it, you know, and I have to say that, I'm not sure they all understood what this would mean. Certainly, Dr. Toukan really understood it very, very well. And this was something that the King talked about, the Crown Prince talked about. It was in frequent talking points that they had at that time, that they would host the center. You know, I think that my own point of view - and this is going a bit, maybe a little bit off track here- but I think Jordan saw that the more they can host these kinds of institutions, that it would help with their security, that they would be kind of a central player in the Middle East, that they would become this island of calm in the region as well. And so, again, hosting these kinds of institutions was important. And that created a dynamic, I would argue, with regard to Egypt and how Egypt saw its leadership on these issues as well. So I think there was another element where you started seeing this diffusion of centralization on this issue away from Egypt to the other parties. And that became part of the dynamics of the negotiation too.

Miles Pomper

I mean, it is my understanding that that was not welcomed by the Egyptians, and there was a lot of tensions and challenges because of that?

Michael Yaffe

There were. You know, I viewed it historically in this way, that after Egypt signed the peace agreement with Israel in 79, they were ostracized. They were the pariahs in the Middle East. So much so that when we were doing negotiations - and as I mentioned, we would be hosted by various countries - for many of the Egyptian diplomats it was the first time they had been to those countries. They were that ostracized for over 10 years. But where they were able to gain leadership back within the Arab grouping was on the issue of WMD non-proliferation. And so, all their diplomats were well schooled in nonproliferation as a result of this. And others in the Arab world then looked to them as leaders on this issue. And that became even more embedded after Foreign Minister Moussa made the announcement that Egypt's goal was to establish a WMD free, not just a nuclear weapon free zone. And that became not only a banner by which others would gravitate to them, but it became a main thrust of the Egyptian diplomatic objectives for ACRS as well. And so that became part of the dynamics, which I can talk more about, because that was very important, particularly to how ACRS ended. But let's continue with other questions.

Miles Pomper

So, I guess you joined, just around the time that you mentioned, Jordan, the peace treaty was soon after that. And you mentioned kind of how the bilaterals fed into the multilaterals. But how do you think, you know, that development with Jordan kind of affected more broadly, the bilateral agreements affected the multilaterals?

Michael Yaffe

So, I think it was one of the first things you saw that was quite tangible. I remember I joined right before the Oslo Accords were signed, which were signed on September 13, 1993. Up to that point, and for shortly afterwards, the Palestinian delegation was not a delegation unto itself. It was teamed with the Jordanian delegation. And so, you saw immediately after, or not long afterwards, the Palestinians became their own independent delegation. You already saw that happening. But it happened within a matter of probably a month or two after, I think, the Oslo was signed. Actually, the

more I think about it, it took about maybe six months. So, you had a whole dynamic there about that relationship between the Palestinians and the Jordanians. And the Palestinians were, you know, much more focused on their own situation and their own bilateral negotiation than they were on, let's say, the overall regionals - except to make sure that the regional process was not getting ahead of the bilateral process. And that, as I mentioned before, there was that dynamic again of gauging how far are we going on the regional elements, how far ahead of the bilateral? And when there were slowdowns, as there were, in the bilateral talks, it had an impact on our elements.

You also had, of course, the regional dynamics that were occurring at the time, too. It was not uncommon that there would be some type of terrorist action that would occur, particularly where Israelis are killed or Palestinians are killed, and so on. And it was not uncommon for these things to happen in the middle of the meeting. So, you'd come down in the morning, and one delegation said, "we're not going to negotiate, we're going home." And so, we would stop what we were doing, negotiate with them to stay, which usually involved having some type of statement negotiated, that will be read at the meeting. And then once it was, the meeting would continue as people felt like their grievance had been addressed. And it usually ended with the notion of saying, "all this gives us all the more reason why we need to keep continuing, so that we can eventually stamp this out." But what it did in that regard, though, it reminded us that this is a core issue of regional security, and how we get our arms around that issue became problematic. You know, here we are negotiating communication networks, or search and rescue coordination, and so on, but how does that connect back to stopping terrorism became a big issue.

Miles Pomper

And how was that dealt with, in the process?

Michael Yaffe

So, this is where, you know, you raised before about how the agenda gets set for these things. In some ways, these were issues in which the working group was not really equipped for addressing, terrorism issues. That it was part of the broader scheme of negotiations, and if you could possibly, of course, get a bilateral negotiation between Israel and its neighbors, that would be the best way for addressing the causes, or at least the elements that give rise to the terrorist actions. And again, you intellectually say that, if you can improve overall relations in general, and then have cooperation with each other, that that could actually lead to sharing information that may be relevant. One thing, which you never quite knew is: as a result of these relationships that were being built in the circle of negotiations, if you will, how much information was there, or how many relations were being built, apart from the formal negotiations, but allow for informal sharing of information. So those are things you'd hope would happen.

Miles Pomper

So getting back to the chronology of the talks a little bit, you mentioned earlier about the kind of origin of the conceptual basket and so on, why were the working group split into those two baskets of conceptual and operational? And you know, who was behind that?

Michael Yaffe

Yeah, so that was a negotiation that happened out of a plenary, which I think was in November of '93. And in that, there was a feeling that there was like, I think, a lot of questions about where are we going with these kinds of issues? Is it possible to make more advances on the so-called operational issues, apart from the conceptual ones? It was seeming that the conceptual issues were taking a lot longer to deal with.

Miles Pomper

What do you mean by the conceptual issues?

Michael Yaffe

So the conceptual issues were basically, at this point, coming up with a statement on arms control and regional security. It was - which is interesting - it started with all sorts of names, it started as the principles of arms control and regional security, and then eventually, it was very watered down to become just a statement on. But in it,

where it became integral, was on this issue: how is the region going to deal with the issue of weapons of mass destruction? And that was a very tangled issue, particularly with the Arabs and led by Egypt, which were saying that this needs to be a more prominent element on the agenda, versus the Israelis who are saying, that, you know, to go in that realm is one of the most complex of all issues and isn't it better to start with smaller measures, build trust, and then, eventually, we will get to the issue of WMD? And for the Egyptians, it became, "those are nice words, but when? You know, when is this going to be addressed? And how are we guaranteed that we're going to eventually get there?" And so, this became the conundrum about how to negotiate that and where to negotiate that. And so at least with regard to the statement, it was, again, a question of how to give prominence to having a weapons of mass destruction free zone.

I'm just going to march a little bit ahead in the sense of saying that, at the first conceptual basket, that became - the statement became a critical theme of that meeting. And out of which, they were able to eventually come up with an overall document, with the final paragraph undecided. The final paragraph had three different texts. An Egyptian text, an Israeli text and an American text. And that has been published, and that's available. And so, you can see where they came out on that. But again, it was left undecided.

Another element that was talked about was every country was supposed to produce a long-term security objectives paper. What are the long-term security ambitions, or, you know, what is the vision that each country has? A number of countries did it, some of those were published. They were not published under their name; you would not know they were from ACRS unless you were part of it. People, diplomats, and so on, had published some of them individually. And I remember in the Paris meeting, my job was to take all those papers, analyze them, and produce a paper that defined the commonalities between all the papers, and the differences between all the papers. And then from that, that would set an agenda for talking more about where those differences are, and how we could bridge those differences. So again, another conceptual type of idea.

Miles Pomper

You did that?

Michael Yaffe

Yes. I did that. That was a way the delegation worked - where I think I mentioned about I would focus on some confidence building measures. But we were really focusing on everything overall together. Or some, you know, we were just more concentrated in some ways.

Miles Pomper

Was the US behind this split into the two baskets? Or who was - who kinda conceived that?

Michael Yaffe

Yeah, that was conceived by the US. It was a suggestion, you know, when things get suggested in talks, if you will, particularly talks between, at that point, Israel, Egypt and the US. And part of it was also that there were a lot of extra regionals who were coming to these meetings. There were at least 20 regional parties who were coming in, they were countries, organizations like OSCE were there. And many of them were proposing conceptual ideas - I'm sorry - operational ideas. So, this was a nice way to kind of say, we could have basket meetings in which we bring those experts - all those experts - together, and they can do their stuff. And that's different from the diplomats who would probably come to the conceptual basket. A bit of a division of labor, if you will. So, for the operational basket, there was the communications, there was the naval aspects of thing which the Canadians were in charge of, which included negotiating an INCSEA [incidents at sea] agreement and - sorry, avoiding an incident at sea agreement - or search and rescue coordination was a very big one for them as well. And they did produce documents. The INCSEA agreement was modeled after the Canadian-Russian or Soviet agreement, and it was about this thick, actually. So then the Finns started to come in with regard to seismic activity. And that was one that I started - I actually got quite engaged in that one as well. Because - I'll explain how it was - we were actually at the last operation meeting, and I gave this presentation

about a way that we could begin to talk about WMD issues via seismic monitoring.

Miles Pomper

So seismic was presumably for nuclear testing?

Michael Yaffe

Yeah, I'll explain what that was, but that's not how I built it initially. It was for earthquake hazard mitigation.

Miles Pomper

And so, did you think a split into conceptual and operational achieved what you wanted to achieve, you all wanted to achieve?

Michael Yaffe

I think so, because it was again allowing us, it was allowing the operational parts of it to go forward and not get stymied by the conceptual issues. That was the biggest thing we didn't want to, you know, tie up in the conceptual to stop everything else. So, it was a way of keeping everything moving as best we could.

Miles Pomper

So, looking a little bit, I guess, as you mentioned, one of the plenaries earlier on in Doha. That was, I guess that was the first plenary in the region. Is that right?

Michael Yaffe

That's right.

Miles Pomper

And this was only the second time that the Israelis, I guess, had visited a GCC country? Was there, how did that affect kind of the mood and the perception of goodwill?

Michael Yaffe

It was incredible. It really was. It was incredible for the Qataris. It was incredible for the Israelis. It was quite, it was quite celebratory, if you will, with regard to that. And quite fascinating, if you will, as well. We were at - we stayed at the Sheraton, which was about the only hotel, believe it or not. There were two hotels, really, in Doha at the time. The Sheraton was where the Qataris would host their GCC meetings as they rotate amongst capitals. And so, the security was incredibly tight going there, you know, we would arrive at the airport, and we would drive in caravans to the hotel, and all traffic was stopped. Security around the hotel was incredible, to say the least.

In part, just the nature of the meeting, but also having an Israeli delegation there was a big thing. The dynamics, you know, were - frankly, I don't think the Saudis were happy that the Qataris were hosting this meeting. It looked at that point like the Qataris were becoming more independent of the Saudis. And that tension had already been there before we got there. And it has, of course, become even worse today. But you saw it back then. And so, for Qatar it was a big deal. It was a truly big deal to be on the international stage in that regard. And then for the Israelis, again, for them to be invited really felt as a symbolic breakthrough. For them to be able to go to a GCC capital and then become kind of a mission to say, "how far can we push this," so to speak? "How many more countries will be willing to host a meeting with the Israelis included?" So, the meetings themselves became quite important. It wasn't the only meeting in an Arab country, of course; we had some meetings that were in Cairo. And then we eventually had meetings also in Jordan, as well. But for the plenary meetings, that was, as you say, it was the first plenary meeting in the region itself.

Miles Pomper

And you're - speaking of Jordan, I mean when, after the peace treaty was signed in, I guess, October '94, how did that affect the process?

Michael Yaffe

I think it really buoyed the process. It really showed progress. You have just a year before you have the Oslo Accords. Signed a year later, you have the Jordanian treaty. And so again, it looks like there was a lot of momentum in that for really advancing. There were intense negotiations going on with the Syrians at the time, who were not part of ACRS. They chose not to be. Syria and Lebanon, though invited, declined to attend because they wanted to make advancement on a bilateral track first. But it

looked like you had a lot of this momentum going into this. Rabin was president [prime minister] in Israel at the time and was very keen to support it. You know, so again, and as I mentioned before, that part of the Israel-Jordanian treaty includes this idea of an OSCE in the Middle East. And the Jordanians were really quite keen to keep that going. So, having that codified in a treaty was useful, if you will, for building that momentum. And we and ACRS used that as a springboard for eventually beginning to negotiate a charter for such an organization. And that truly, I think, was the last meeting of ACRS, to be honest, it was an experts meeting, which I can talk about that too, later on.

Miles Pomper

And also, you know - one of the last sort of bellwether events in this period was the '95 NPT Review and Extension Conference. How did that impact the negotiations?

Michael Yaffe

It impacted a lot, in part because it was a building up of that momentum of saying, how are we all going to focus on the issue of WMD? The Israeli preference was that if it was to be negotiated in any forum, it was to be in a regional forum of which they are a key part to it. And they can make - they can decide its future as opposed to the global forum related to the NPT. So, eyes were watching both, if you will. Even with negotiation in the NPT, there was, you know, an element by which Egypt particularly wanted to have something in the NPT, making it a condition for their support for making it permanent. And renewing it was becoming more and more consolidated around that. They needed to have something that showed that this issue was not going to go away. And I think, as it looked to the Egyptians, as ACRS was moving along, but there was resistance to really making strong progress on the WMD issue within ACRS, that they pushed harder on the NPT issue at the global level.

Which caused us to, you know, wanting to find if there's a way we could address the issue within ACRS itself. And eventually, it gets played out that the NPT is renewed, based on a consensus that had actually been conceived by my boss, actually, the formula, which basically said that there is consensus agreement that there was a majority that supported making the NPT permanent. That was actually the vote, if you will. It wasn't direct. It wasn't saying everybody agrees to make it permanent. It was - there was a consensus around that there is a broad majority supporting this. And of course, the Egyptians and the Arabs, were insistent that there needed to be a resolution on the Middle East included in the NPT that would be addressed at every review conference, ongoing thereafter; that there would be some permanent place where talks on the issue of the WMD free zone would take place.

So, coming out of the conference in May '95, the NPT review conference, I think, caused the Egyptians, even more so, determined to become more stalwart in the ACRS process on the WMD issue. They had hoped, I think, that the pressure that could be brought on to the ACRS process from the NPT review process with, particularly with regard to the US as a leader in both, but not getting exactly what they wanted out of the review conference. But getting something, allowed them to say that they could de-emphasize ACRS in general, if you will. And by that time, the bilateral track was already slowing. And Israel was - this is the whole period leading up to the Rabin assassination in November 1995 and then Netanyahu coming in - then it became very unclear what would happen with the bilateral tracks after the assassination.

But it was already clear that even before that, ACRS was in serious trouble. And that became emblematic particularly during the last meeting, as I described it to you, of the group that met to negotiate a charter for the regional security center. We had all come together in Amman to do so in September. And we had made, I thought, reasonable progress, and then the Egyptians started putting in poison pills into the text that made it unacceptable. And in every element they could, they talked about including something related to WMD. So in the end, we couldn't get agreement on that text. And that became kind of emblematic of them saying that unless we get more, we're not going to continue with this process. A plenary had been planned for September, and that had to be postponed. And then you have the assassination. And then afterwards, you have this kind of period before the Israeli elections, in which Peres was Prime Minister. And he actually went to Cairo to negotiate issues, including this issue of how to handle the WMD issue in ACRS in order to let ACRS continue. That

didn't pan out. And then shortly after that, Netanyahu was elected, and that sent the bilaterals in a very different direction.

Miles Pomper

So what caused the talks to collapse? Ultimately, was this Egyptian insistence? Or what was, how would you characterize it?

Michael Yaffe

Yeah, you know, it's a great question. And I've often thought, you know, I don't want to put it all on Egyptian insistence. I do think that there were ways that I think the Israelis could have been accommodative in this. And plus, with the slowdown in the bilateral track, there was less interest on the US side in particular on spending the political capital that might have been necessary to resume ACRS. And so that capital was being conserved for making progress in the bilateral track with the belief that if you can move that track further, that the other multilateral tracks then could resume. So, I think it was a combination of that kind of element, if you will.

Miles Pomper

There's a sort of a perfect storm of things coming.

Michael Yaffe

It really was, it really was. And to me, it was, you know, I think what happened afterwards was kind of instrumental to how a number of us thought about it. For me, at first, after it came to a halt, much of the US team had at that point kind of dissipated, if you will, and I was one of the few left. And I was asked by both Martin Indyk and Dennis Ross to keep this going as best as I could, by way of Track 2, so that it would be such that we would host of activities, and making sure that none of them had a binding nature to them, that they weren't looked at as binding negotiations as sort of a substitute for ACRS. But it would be a place where we can keep the parties meeting together, having discussions with each other, again, with the hope that this would just be a short period of abeyance, and then we could resume later. So, I was given the negotiation budget that was devoted for ACRS from NEA to support a whole Track 2 program. And I wrote about that in, actually, in a UNIDIR article that was published in 2001.

Miles Pomper

You were doing a Track 2, but you were still in the government at this point?

Michael Yaffe

Yes, I've actually never left the government. I mean, actually, it's kind of interesting how this kind of all ties together. You'll see there is kind of a flow to the story. So, we did these Track 2, I did about 10 programs of Track 2 ranging from just blabber talk and people coming together, to actual activities, including seismic cooperation in the eastern Med. Part of what I was doing was also maintaining a kind of seminar, places where people were being taught about the arms control element. One thing that happened was that the Israeli delegation came to me and said, there will be two things that they miss from the ACRS process. One was that they would miss the opportunity to continue to hone their skills in multilateral diplomacy. They still felt themselves quite behind in that area, that they're much better at bilateral, and they asked if I could put together training courses for them. And I did that, actually. And I did it for the Egyptians. And I did it for the Qataris, and I did it for the Omanis, and for the Tunisians, and so on.

The second thing that happened was - the second thing they said was that the other thing they would miss is the institutional arrangement in which they would regularly meet with their Arab counterparts. But also counterparts like the Americans and other regional countries, extra-regional countries, particularly at a more junior level, if you will, below the most senior people. So they really were quite rueful about that. And for me, that began a conception in my mind, and with others, that we needed some type of institution in the US government that could, basically, bring together Arabs and Israelis. And that led to the establishment of the Near East South Asia Center at the National Defense University. By that time, I was part of State, and so I was the State representative to the establishment of the center. It was led by Department of Defense, under Alina Romanowski, who then became the first director of the NISA center. It was established in October of 2000. And a year later, she'd asked if I would

come over and join the faculty. So, I ended up going from State to National Defense University for what I thought would be about three years and stayed until I returned, in 2012, to State to work on the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, which I did for five years after that.

Miles Pomper

Certainly very interesting. So in terms of the talks, certain countries weren't invited, as you mentioned, Syria and Lebanon chose not to participate in it. How do you think that affected the process?

Michael Yaffe

It affected it greatly. The other three countries that were not invited were Libya, Iran and Iraq. And so, it had various elements and questions like 'can you negotiate a regional agreement that did not include these countries? And would it be such that if you did negotiate something, and those countries arrived to join negotiations later, would they be accepting of it? And would they be - would they have to - would joining the group mean that it would be contingent on them accepting those agreements? Or would we have to reopen the text, particularly for them?' So that's one part to that.

The other part is what does it mean to have an agreement that doesn't include some major power like, like Iran and Iraq, in particular? So here you are, maybe putting limitations on missiles, and yet a major owner of missiles is not in the room, and in this case, particularly considered to be a threat to Israel. So that has a very big bearing, and it has a big bearing with regard to the nuclear weapon free zone idea. You know, what does it mean to have - negotiate something like this and not have some key player in the room, countries considered to be a big threat? That also led to this issue that I mentioned earlier about regionalism. There were a lot of discussions to say, well, what does it mean to be part of the Middle East? You're saying this is the Middle East region? Well, so who's in it? We're not quite sure.

So, we were, I think, we were looking towards the idea that - and we spent a lot of time in the conceptual basket discussing these kinds of issues. And it was leading us to say, 'well, tell us what the agreement is, and I will tell you who should be a part of it.' And then, can we imagine beginning to negotiate something that maybe we say will not be implemented until these parties are also part of it? So, the text becomes a model, at least, and so can we at least explore - go down that road rather than just keep pushing these things off forever, that is until these parties become ready, and which we never know when they will become ready. And so, again, that was part of the suspense, if you will. And that led to the issue of saying, well, isn't it easier, in the WMD cases, isn't it easier to negotiate something on conventional first, before you do the tough nut of negotiating nuclear in particular? And, and even then, there was the other part - sorry, there's another part of the tensions which were, if you remember, at this time, the Chemical Weapons Convention had been signed in November of '93. So you have the NPT, the Chemical Weapon Convention and the Biological Weapon Convention. And that became a question, saying, well shouldn't all parties have to sign up to those organizations first, before you join a regional one? Wouldn't that help the regional element? And of course, the Israelis were hesitant about what it meant to sign on to a global machine. However, the Israelis did sign the Chemical Weapon Convention; they didn't ratify it, but they did sign it. And then that left questions like, you know, how then, if you had a regional regime, how would that interact with the global regime?

Miles Pomper

A lot of questions.

Michael Yaffe

These were hard questions. And I remember one of the things we started doing, again, as I mentioned, an educational seminar. I remember this very clearly when we were in Paris negotiating the conceptual basket meeting. That meeting ended. And for some of us - not all the - I mean, all the delegations participated. We shrunk down in size, then went over to the French military base, and boarded a C-, I think it was a C-12. And they flew us to Germany. We went to Phillipsburg Nuclear Power Plant, which is now closed. And at Phillipsburg, we toured the facility and we had presentations by the IAEA and the Euratom on the interaction between the global regime and the regional organization. They talked about how they do inspections and

verification together, and so on. We spent the day there, and then immediately afterwards got on a train and went to Bern, Switzerland, where we went to a chemical weapons verification laboratory in Spiez. And again, same kind of issues were addressed as well, as well as seeing what's involved with the laboratory for verification purposes. These were the kind of learning things we were doing along the way as well.

Miles Pomper

Do you think those were helpful and was that the right approach to kind of go through that level of education?

Michael Yaffe

I think so, because we could just sit there in a classroom and talk about it. But I think it's another thing to actually go to these facilities and see them for yourself. I think it made a big difference in that regard. For many of these diplomats who were there, they had never seen a laboratory like the one at Spiez, had actually never been to a nuclear power plant. So, it gave it a much more realistic vent. If you were to ask me, did it draw to the next step, if you will, what to do? Not necessarily, but it did - it added elements to our knowledge about what would be involved in a text, if we were to do a WMD free zone. And I spent a lot of time thinking about that issue in particular.

And it was interesting, because what I started doing was looking at a whole bunch of the nuclear weapon free zone treaties that had been negotiated, and one that was going into effect here was Pelindaba for Africa, which would involve Egypt, of course. So, you had that kind of element. And I looked at this, and I said, you know, based on this, based on these texts, I basically said there have to be about 26 articles that would make up the WMD free zone treaty. Again, no one had ever done anything like that before. And then I said, even though there have been a number of activities within ACRS that have addressed elements of a WMD free zone, it hadn't been done in a concerted way, it hadn't been done in a strategic way. And, and so I started to piece together, if you will, based on what a text will look like, what you need to know for each part of a text. And what had been done, what had been taught, what had been talked about. You know, could you put together a strategy that revolved around activities that would address all 26 portions of a text? And maybe from there, see if there are elements you might be able to negotiate. That was my thinking. It was not adopted by ACRS, but I was trying. That was where I was trying to lead the US delegation in that direction.

And so, when we got to Helsinki in May of 1995, I was asked: 'is there something we can do as a confidence building measure on WMD?' Given that the Finns were so adept at seismic monitoring related to monitoring for nuclear tests, for the Nuclear Test Ban, because the plain from Helsinki into Central Asia where the Soviets would do their testing was so flat that Finland was a good location for doing that. And Finns had specialized in that. And so, that became a central element of piecing together a proposal. A second part to this was that I had worked with the US Geological Survey, which for years had been focusing on this program called - it had a really ugly acronym - REHEMR - Reduction of Earthquake Hazards in the Eastern Mediterranean Region. A number of countries are involved in it, including Israel. And the idea was much more related to civil engineering, if you will. You know, put up a building that could withstand an earthquake and so on.

But the scientists have been meeting in this forum for years. And then I teamed with Keith Nakanishi, who was down at Livermore National Laboratory, and who was involved in the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, which again was happening at that time, if you recall. US had now come together to advance an idea. We decided that if you could take an approach where you say that you need seismic monitoring in order to protect yourself from earthquakes, knowing that it is the same technology that's used for nuclear test monitoring. So what if you open the door for earthquake monitoring, and then expand out for nuclear test monitoring as a regional confidence building measure, as opposed to just the global element.

So, the idea, then, was how do you sell this? We found what may be, at that point, the one geophysicist whose specialty was the Middle East, a professor from Cornell University named Muawia Barazangi, who is Syrian by birth. He came to Helsinki with

us. And for about an hour, he gave a presentation about the history of seismic activity in the Middle East, explaining that it is one of the most active areas of the world, and explained where all the fault lines were. And then explained how there was a horrendous earthquake, and I forgot exactly the year, like in 1847. And he focused on that earthquake, and, based on what he understood was the impact of that earthquake, he projected what would happen if that same earthquake occurred outside of Alexandria - nope, sorry, outside of Damascus - if it happened today. The same, you know, intensity, if you will, what would that mean to the Middle East? And it was incredible. Alexandria would be completely underwater, you know, all these things would have fallen down, and so on. So we did this presentation in two parts. We had Barazangi do the first part, then we took a coffee break, and then we did our proposal. At the coffee break, people are like, why are we worried about nuclear weapons? It's earthquakes we really got to be worried about. And then afterwards, we did a presentation - Keith and I - saying, look, if you could set up a seismic monitoring system, building on much of what's already being built up with regard to CTBT, maybe this is a way to begin that process of having a first WMD confidence building measure. So the next thing that would have happened after that, having been discussed at the operational basket, that it would go to the plenary for adoption. And we never had that plenary.

Miles Pomper

Oh wow. What a shame.

Michael Yaffe

Not sure that it would have got adopted. I don't know. But I'm just saying, that's where we were heading.

Miles Pomper

And this wasn't anything that was taken up later or outside of the process?

Michael Yaffe

No. Afterwards, I kept it up as a Track 2 level, working again with the US Geological Survey, which actually even included Iranians in that too. But we never took it up anywhere else.

Miles Pomper

So, one general question, what was your perception about the dynamics between kind of the core participating states and the other Gulf and Maghreb states?

Michael Yaffe

Sorry, could you repeat?

Miles Pomper

Sure. What did you - how did you see the dynamic between kind of the core participating states and the other Gulf and Maghreb states?

Michael Yaffe

I think, well, again, you had the dynamic between Egypt and any other Arab states in general. But certainly, they as well, again, as they were watching countries like Qatar step up and offering to do more, I think they thought that was a challenge, if you will. But you didn't see like, where the Gulf states were coming together to cooperate together on this. It wasn't clear. It wasn't clear if the UAE would be willing to host a meeting. Oman looked like it was much closer to being willing to host a meeting. And the Omani Ambassador was quite active in that regard, as well, as I recall. But overall, I think they were, at that point, very tempered with regard to how much progress there was being made between the Israelis and the Palestinians in particular. That was certainly the case of Kuwait. And definitely Saudi Arabia. The other interesting thing was the Yemenis. They were interesting as a delegation because they were so new to many of these concepts. And I think they were just happy to be there, to have a presence. They were always there, they couldn't offer very much in terms of hosting or whatever, but they were quite eager to be a presence. So, you could say that was also part of the dynamics that, you know. The parties were quite willing to continue to engage and to send their delegations to these things.

Miles Pomper

Overall, how would you see sort of the successes and the shortcomings of the process?

Michael Yaffe

I think, I think the mere fact that it happened was a success, honestly. Which was good and bad. For those of us who worked it, I think the bad thing is to be - well, those of us who worked it we became kind of junkies. So, I know it can work and we thought if we only did this thing or that thing, we could get it back on track, and so on. Even yesterday, I was in a conference in which people were talking again about bringing back something like a multilateral framework. So, I think in that sense, there are a bunch of people that really started to give serious thought to what it meant to have some type of regional framework. It was disheartening in the way that the multilaterals became so tied to making progress on the bilateral track. You know, the problems didn't go away, especially with regard to regional security in particular. You could argue they've gotten worse. There is no forum where all the parties in the conflict are really meeting together. And that's a real shame, I believe.

And there's been a lot of changes, of course. Where parties, like Iraq, were not part of ACRS, they now have a change of government and a change in disposition. I think they could really benefit from this. And the region is fractured, it is very much as it was when we first started it. That's quite sad. It's an opportunity lost, if you will. On the other hand, things were not that advanced. We hadn't really advanced anywhere on the WMD issue. So, if there was a possibility of something coming out of a framework, like an ACRS, you could build on that, but that opportunity was lost as well. I think these things take time, as I mentioned, just being in the same room with each other regularly is important in developing those person relationships, and without those things, you look for other ways of doing it, like the NESAC center and other Track 2 meetings. But we lose - we lost a generation. In other words, a senior generation is usually the diplomats who negotiate these things, and then the junior ones start to see what that's like and implement it, and so on. There has not been that kind of continuity that could help build the kind of relationships you need over the long run because they, those junior people, don't have the opportunities. There are a number of projects that have been done to train people from the younger generation for arms control negotiations. But because there hasn't been any sort of negotiations - okay, I don't wanna say that it has been a wasted effort - but that certainly we didn't advance as much as we possibly could.

Miles Pomper

Kind of a, you know, exercise their chops, I guess, or something.

Michael Yaffe

Exactly. It becomes very hypothetical, illusionary at a certain point.

Miles Pomper

You mentioned that even as recent as yesterday, you were talking about a regional framework. I mean, how - if you were gonna, you know - how do you think any future arms control negotiations in this sphere, regional level, will or should be different? What kind of lessons could or should be drawn for future negotiations?

Michael Yaffe

Yeah. So there are a bunch of us who really focus a lot about how the OSCE organization came together. It came about because there was a feeling that a military stalemate developed in Europe after detente, that basically the parties said that we're not going to be able to change the relationship between the East and the West through military means. That, the conflict is not over, that competition still exists. And when that happened in 19--, well 1968 through '73, Europe basically was trying to say, well, where do we fit within detente? And what they came out with was based on an idea that the Norwegians advanced, called common security. And that was a notion of saying you accept military parity, and that you need some place where you can talk about how you're going to compete in other non-military ways, and how you can have cooperation. So this led to a particularly type of conference to focus on it. That became the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe, that eventually turned into the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

So in the Middle East, I think that there should be some place where the parties are at

least coming together on a regular basis, to have talks and begin at just that kind of low level recognition that there still is a competition that's going on. I think until you get that competition under control, you really may not be able to make a lot of advancement with regard to cooperation. I do think there are elements on which you can put into place agreements that can help manage the conflict better. So, in the Middle East, in ACRS, for example, I mentioned to you we were doing that with the pre notification agreement. And we got it. We had agreement on this, which was a - it was a two-page document in which we said if you move so many tanks, you move so many helicopters, in this period of time, you need to notify. And then we got - we actually did negotiate an INCSEA agreement under the Canadians. It was about that thick. But it wasn't implemented. And so, I could see a place like a regional conference where those things can be negotiated. This is what makes it interesting with regard to the UAE-Israel normalization agreement, the Abraham Accords. Is this an opportunity along with the Bahrainis that we should start to think about it as a springboard for something different? I would hope it would include all the parties.

Miles Pomper

So the Iranians too?

Michael Yaffe

Exactly. And what's interesting is, you hear the Iranians have called for this. The Russians have called for this. Again, it's in the Jordanian treaty. You know, there's a lot of people who have called for something along this line. But no political capital has really been spent to bring that together.

Miles Pomper

But do you think there might be an appetite within the region to at least discuss it? Or?

Michael Yaffe

I think so. I think so, I think that, to me, arms control agreements and agreements like this, if they can bring any sense of predictability into a conflict, a conflictual relationship, that's, I think, a good thing, rather than leaving people guessing what others are doing. But, people should go into it with eyes wide open, of course. It's not going to solve everything. And it would be one of many different types of platforms that could be like this, that can be supportive overall.

Miles Pomper

And I guess, you know, some people have said, particularly if Vice President Biden wins the election, that if he's going to try to restore some of the nuclear deal and some of the relationship with the Iranians, that you also want to have a regional component to kind of go along with it. Does that make sense to you?

Michael Yaffe

Yeah. In fact, when Secretary Kerry was negotiating the JCPOA agreement with Iran, he had asked some of us to give thought to this idea. So, there were a bunch of us at the State Department working on this kind of conception. We didn't know whether it would go anywhere, but we were certainly pursuing it very hotly. And I think everyone, of course, was looking at the JCPOA as being a springboard towards other negotiations that could address all the issues; those issues outside the JCPOA, in particular. But there was a conception that this would, again, be part of what would be a changing region. So, so if a Biden administration comes in and wants to set the US-Iranian relationship onto a different footing, I can see where this could come up; and maybe in a revised or a renegotiated agreement, related to the JCPOA, or something like that. I think the people around Biden are, you know, multilateralists, in general, from what I can see. So, I think that their inclination will be to build on something like this.

Miles Pomper

I mean, in terms of what Secretary Kerry talked to you about, was that - you just sort of ran out of time? Or was - how, why did that not advance?

Michael Yaffe

We ran out of time. That's exactly right.

Miles Pomper

Great, well, this has been, you know, fascinating, really helpful. Is there something that I haven't touched on that you think I should? How to start - I know, for you, it's probably, it's been your career. So, I guess probably, you could spend all day.

Michael Yaffe

I wasn't expecting that question. I'm sure you could probably dig deeper, you know, into what worked, what didn't, and other things of that sort. I think we hit upon the key highlights, if you will.

Miles Pomper

Well, we can always come back to it, but thanks so much for your time.

Michael Yaffe

Absolutely, absolutely. I appreciate it. And I'm glad to chat about it. It was an interesting period of my life, and a bunch of us devoted a lot of time to that. For me, I had just gotten married when I joined ACDA. And ACRS was one part of my portfolio, as I mentioned. The other part was related to the NPT, in particular, and its renewal and then the review conferences that happened afterwards. But the ACRS process was so consuming that literally what would happen would be that we would go out to these meetings every two weeks. We would go out, come home, write our reports about it, then write our guidance for the next meeting, and go out again after two weeks and that went on for over three years. So it was really a big part of our life, and my wife was very forgiving as a newlywed, and my bride. It was part of her life as well in that regard too.

But it was fascinating. And it was a great experience for me, in part also, because it was interagency-wide process. It really opened me up to engaging with other parts of the US government that many, many diplomats, in particular at State Department, don't do enough of. Our system really does maintain these kind of silos, if you will. So you often talk about the need for interagency cooperation, and so on, but it's really not easy. And the best way to do it, I think, is around, kind of, things like this kind of negotiations. And we are actually...

Miles Pomper

Which parts of US government in particular?

Michael Yaffe

Well, State and DOD can be in two different universes, in particular. But, you know, the thing that amazed me was that there would just be things that bring in others, as I said to you, Energy, there's parts of Justice, that comes into this. There was no Homeland Security at that time. But we bring in Border Patrol into some of these elements. There were just so many things that go into regional security - and Treasury was part of this. There was just so many parts of the government that really, if you have something where they're all focused on some program like this, that it helps. And that means that you grow a generation of bureaucrats, if you will, who will grow up with that cooperation, that helps actually provide some grease, if you will, that helps move the bureaucracy together. So, I did focus for a while after ACRS, about how do you have more national security professionals working together, not necessarily just tied to particular departments, and what's involved with their education and so on. And you may remember, there was the Goldwater Nichols Act that transformed the Department of Defense and which brought together the services much more closely under the Joint Chiefs and formed the National Defense University, as opposed to being educated at a particular University or College tied to particular service.

[End of transcript]