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Oral History Interview with Robert Einhorn

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Member of the US Delegation to the 1995 NPT RevCon

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Robert Einhorn

Member of the US delegation to the 1995 NPT RevCon

Oral history interview conducted by Michal Onderco in person, in Washington, DC on 24 March 2017

Michal Onderco:

I'm very thankful for the fact that you found the time to talk to me. I want to talk in three main areas. The one is before the conference, and the activities that happened before the conference. Then what happened: actually the negotiation at the conference, and I want to briefly touch upon the follow-up afterwards. I want to start with a very general question on how did you become involved with the dossier on the Middle East and nuclear proliferation?

Robert Einhorn:

And let me just say that caveat is we're talking about events 22 years ago.

Michal Onderco:

Okay.

Robert Einhorn:

One's aging memory, you know, often finds it difficult to go back that far, but this is an easy question. I was co-chairman of the Arms Control and Regional Security working group of the Middle East peace process. Do you know what ACRS is?

Michal Onderco:

Yes.

Robert Einhorn:

Okay, so I don't have to go through that. I was co-chairman, with a Russian, of the conference and I was head of the American delegation. So I was very much acquainted from '92 to late '94 with the Middle East nuclear question. My counterpart in ACRS on the Egyptian side was Nabil Fahmy, who was a key assistant to Foreign Minister Amr Moussa and, you know, a leading foreign ministry person on the nuclear questions.

ACRS had been fairly successful in making progress on confidence-building measures that involved Israel and a very large number of Arab countries. The problem came in trying to figure out how to integrate nuclear issues in the ACRS agenda. Ultimately, we weren't able to satisfy all sides. The Egyptians wanted to deal frontally with the nuclear question. The Israelis wanted to talk about confidence building measures, and not deal with the nuclear issue. We couldn't find a meeting of the minds and so, as a result, ACRS went belly up.

So, that's a prelude to the 1995 conference, and an explanation why I was asked to take the lead on the Middle East issue, which was recognized as being an important issue for that Review Conference. So, do you want me to continue a monologue or --

Michal Onderco:

I can ask, because my next question was, was the issue of Middle East at that time considered something that can make or break the conference?

Robert Einhorn:

No.

Michal Onderco:

Okay.

Robert Einhorn:

Different people have different perceptions of this. If you ask an Egyptian, they will say, "yes." Before the conference, the United States, at the very highest levels, made indefinite extension a top national priority. The U.S. Secretary of State sent out instructions to all of the U.S. ambassadors that said, "You're instructed to seek [my] counterpart," you know, the Foreign Minister of the country. "You're instructed to seek a commitment to support indefinite extension." The rule under the treaty is that all you needed was a majority of the parties present to make, to get a decision on the future of the treaty. Before the delegations showed up in New York, we already had sufficient support to ensure that there would be indefinite extension. That was in the bag, so to speak. Nonetheless, the Middle East issue was important because we wanted to bring the Arab governments on board the consensus. So, the solution -- the adoption of the Middle East resolution was essential. Not to indefinite extension of the NPT. It was essential to adoption of indefinite extension of the NPT by consensus, without a vote. This nuance is often blurred. Especially by Egyptian and other Arab audiences who like to say that without the Middle East resolution there would have been no indefinite extension. That is demonstrably untrue.

Michal Onderco:

Yeah. When did you start to think that the way to bring the Egyptians and other Arabs on board was through a resolution? When did you start to think the resolution was the means to use?

Robert Einhorn:

I don't remember.

Michal Onderco:

Okay.

Robert Einhorn:

I -- if you ask me to guess I would say that this was an Egyptian idea that we went along with. But I -- don't pin me down on the truth.

Michal Onderco:

Okay, so, the Egyptians probably came involved with the idea. Why did you care so much about consensus? Why did you play along, if it was such a divisive issue?

Robert Einhorn:

Because, actually, the United States has long supported the goal of a Middle East free of all nuclear weapons, of a Middle East free of all weapons of mass destruction.

Michal Onderco:

Yeah.

Robert Einhorn:

So, you know, it would have been odd for us to say we're not interested in this at all. This was part of the U.S. position. So, if we could get a good, constructive resolution in support of that U.S. goal, why not? And if it, on top of that, would bring the Arabs

on board support for indefinite extension, all the better.

Michal Onderco:

Prior to the conference there were track two negotiations between Israelis and Arabs and including Egyptians, and they were taking place in the United States. Did these in any way influence the negotiation or did these influence what was the outcome?

Robert Einhorn:

Are these Steve Spiegel's meetings?

Michal Onderco:

Yes.

Robert Einhorn:

I mean, I was -- I forget whether I was included in those meetings, whether I attended them, whether I didn't have time to attend them. I don't know. I don't think they had a major impact on the substance of the resolution.

Michal Onderco:

So, how was the -- was the substance of the resolution already negotiated, prior to the conference?

Robert Einhorn:

No.

Michal Onderco:

You negotiated right at the conference? What did you, as the U.S. Representative, go into these negotiations with? What was the ultimate goal for the resolution?

Robert Einhorn:

You know, certain principles. I haven't read the resolution in years, so I forget exactly all of its contents but principles such as, you know, the zone should be arrived at through direct negotiations of regional participants. It couldn't be imposed from the outside. So, Israel would need to participate along with key Middle East countries. Perhaps a principle -- I'd have to consult whether it was incorporated was: you know, all relevant countries of the region had to be included.

Michal Onderco:

Yeah.

Robert Einhorn:

You know, you couldn't have -- you know, if Iraq, which was, you know, believed to have a nuclear weapons program at the time, Iran suspected of having a nuclear program -- if they were not included in the zone, what relevance would it have? So, participation of all, you know, states of the region, you know, worked out through direct negotiation.

These are the kinds of principles that were important to us. You know, politically, you know, it was important that, you know, friends of the United States not participating in the Review Conference have a chance to comment to us. Israel, not being a party to the NPT, didn't attend the conference. Would not have a say, would not have a vote, and so we thought, especially because Israel was a key country in the Middle East zone, if not the key country in the Middle East zone, we had to have their

reactions, their input, and so forth.

Michal Onderco:

What was the reaction from your Egyptian partners when you sort of outlined these propositions: that it should include everyone, and that it should involve direct negotiations? Were they in agreement with that?

Robert Einhorn:

I believe they were. Again, 22 years ago, but I think the Egyptians recognized that this could only be achieved through direct negotiations. I think they also agreed that all countries of the region would have to be included in it. Another principle -- I forget whether it was incorporated or not was, they would have to work out their own verification arrangements.

The Israelis in particular wanted to know that questions of compliance weren't going to be decided by, you know, organizations, you know, in Vienna, The Hague, but they would be participating. They would be engaged in discussions of compliance, in inspections and so on. I don't know to what extent that concept was reflected, but that was one the Israelis cared about, and which, to us made a lot of sense.

Michal Onderco:

Yeah, and what did the Egyptians think about that?

Robert Einhorn:

I think they were probably less enthusiastic about it, but I think the idea was acceptable.

Michal Onderco:

So, what were the most important sticking points that you spent the most time on in the negotiation?

Robert Einhorn:

If I recall, one of our concerns was not in singling out any particular country, namely Israel. There were some illogical things that, in my view, the Arab side wanted.

Michal Onderco:

Such as?

Robert Einhorn:

Such as: "as a first step toward the zone all countries of the region must join the Nonproliferation Treaty". That's not the first step toward the zone. That's when the zone is done. The zone has already obliged countries of the region to abide by all of the necessary prohibitions, and then it would be easy for anyone to join the NPT afterward.

Michal Onderco:

Yeah.

Robert Einhorn:

That was kind of the final step, not the first step.

Michal Onderco:

Yeah.

Robert Einhorn:

So, you know, I believe that was an issue. First step: join the NPT. Another was yeah, maybe in the meantime, or [as] another first step, accept IAEA safeguards on all nuclear facilities. Again, this is not the first step. You know, if you've accepted safeguards in all your nuclear facilities, you've already given up your nuclear weapons and so forth. So, this did not make logical sense, but these elements, if I recall, were issues that the Egyptians and the Arabs wanted. Again, I don't have the resolution in front of me. I would be very surprised [laughs] if a resolution we supported contained these elements.

Michal Onderco:

One of the problems that was in the negotiation of the resolution was whether there should be naming of the countries that were expected to come on board of the NPT, that should sort of be part of it. It was, of course, not only Israel, but there were other Arab countries. What did you see as being the goals toward other countries in the region, other than Israel, being there really? What was supposed to be their role in the zone? Was it supposed to be sort of creation of a homogenous mass?

Robert Einhorn:

The -- I'm trying to think. In '95 which countries were not part of the NPT?

Michal Onderco:

Oman, UAE, Djibouti.

Robert Einhorn:

Okay, I forget exactly how we handled that but I wouldn't be surprised if we said no naming of countries because Oman, UAE, Djibouti, you know, didn't quite have the weight of an Iran, a Syria, an Egypt, an Israel, and so forth. So, again, I would be interested if I had the resolution in front of me, but I would have thought we would resist that. I'm not sure.

Michal Onderco:

And prior to the final approval of the resolution, the final vote was held up for two hours because Iranians came up with some objection to the final language of the resolution. Were Iranians involved in the process of negotiation?

Robert Einhorn:

No.

Michal Onderco:

So, it was basically only Egypt and the United States negotiating there?

Robert Einhorn:

I don't know, I don't know when the Egyptians had any consultations with the Iranians. I did not. So, you know, so I don't know what role, if any, Iran had played.

Michal Onderco:

So, when the Middle East weapons of mass destruction, for example, was negotiated it was basically Egyptians and you?

Robert Einhorn:

Yes. I sometimes met with the Arab group. I would just call on them and give them my position. In part, because I believe the Egyptians didn't want to always carry my water there. They wanted, you know, they wanted me to make my own case.

And they wanted their Arab colleagues to understand that I, you know, it wasn't a lack of poor Egyptian negotiating tactics. It was that the Americans felt strongly about it, and the Egyptians wanted to show their colleagues that the U.S. did feel strongly about it, and that's why I was, from time to time, given an audience with the Arab group.

Michal Onderco:

How did you see the position of Egypt within the Arab group?

Robert Einhorn:

It was the clear leader. It was the clear leader. You know, Egypt, at the time, occupied a much more influential position in the Arab world than it exists today.

I don't know that Egypt could credibly play that role today that it played then, but one, this was an initiative of Egypt. If you go back to '74 it was an Egyptian-Iranian proposal in UNGA, but this was really Egypt's initiative. Iran wasn't in ACRS, so Egypt carried the ball in ACRS on the nuclear issue.

Michal Onderco:

Yeah.

Robert Einhorn:

Egypt had the most knowledgeable and skillful diplomats. So, this was an Egyptian, you know, ball to carry.

Michal Onderco:

And while negotiating with the Egyptians, were you in liaison with other friends of the United States in the region?

Robert Einhorn:

Yes, you know, I met privately with others, and I would try to encourage them: "Don't take a hard line. Be practical. You want the U.S. to support the goal. You don't want the U.S. to walk away from this goal, so let's agree to something that the U.S. can be supportive of."

Michal Onderco:

What was the support for negotiating the resolution at the highest political levels in the U.S.? Was there interest in that?

Robert Einhorn:

On the Middle East resolution?

Michal Onderco:

Yes.

Robert Einhorn:

Maybe knowledge. You know, maybe someone wrote a memo, saying these are the issues for the upcoming conference. Probably they did, because the success of the conference, a decision to extend the NPT indefinitely; that was important, important to President Bill Clinton. He knew about it. So, I would be surprised if someone - and he, you know, he's a voracious reader -- if someone didn't give him a list of items that would be important for the conference. He got personally involved at one stage. I forget exactly the issue.

Michal Onderco:
[affirmative]

Robert Einhorn:
It was toward the end, and the Egyptians were being difficult on a particular issue.

Michal Onderco:
What was the issue?

Robert Einhorn:
I forget.

Michal Onderco:
Okay.

Robert Einhorn:
And I remember I called a senior American who worked in the Middle East Bureau, the State Department, and explained the situation. He spoke to Warren Christopher, who was then our Secretary of State. Christopher got in touch with President Clinton. President Clinton called Hosni Mubarak. Mubarak was a little puzzled at the issue. He -- it was clear that the Egyptian president really wasn't following this. He may or may not even have known that a key issue was this resolution.

Michal Onderco:
Yeah.

Robert Einhorn:
My guess is he did not even know of this.

Michal Onderco:
So, this was all the initiative of the Foreign Ministry?

Robert Einhorn:
This was a hobby horse of the Foreign Ministry, of Amr Moussa. So, Mubarak got off the phone with Clinton kind of perplexed that his government would be almost sabotaging a goal that his close friend Bill Clinton supported. We don't know how he conveyed his new instructions to the Egyptian delegation; whether it went through Amr Moussa or went directly to Elaraby, I think was the guy's name; Nabil Elaraby.

Michal Onderco:
Yeah.

Robert Einhorn:
I think was the Egyptian. But it was conveyed. And I remember almost an amusing moment. It was near an elevator, and I was working with Madeleine Albright, who was a representative in New York.

Michal Onderco:
Yeah.

Robert Einhorn:

And she, you know, she was on-call to help out, if we had any tricky issues. So I briefed Secretary Albright, and we found Nabil Elaraby near the elevator and, you know, she's not a very tall woman, you know. And he's not terribly big either. She almost pinned him against the wall and, you know, confronted him on this issue and Elaraby repeated the old Egyptian position. And she said, "Nabil, I know your instructions. I know your instructions. That's not your new instructions."

And, you know kind that confronted him on it. Anyway, that all kind of settled down and calmed down and I think Nabil Fahmy and I worked out the language and resolved the issue.

And that was the end of it except for an Egyptian appeal that the three depositary governments become the cosponsors of the resolution.

Michal Onderco:

Yes.

Robert Einhorn:

This wasn't a decision of mine. I didn't even know that this appeal had been made, and I didn't know whether the appeal had been made to -- if you spoke to Tom Graham, he probably gave you his view. I don't know whether the appeal came from the Egyptians to Tom Graham, or it came from Dhanapala to Tom Graham. You know, the Egyptians asked Dhanapala, Dhanapala asked, I don't know what the route was. But I was kind of informed. I think it was Susan Burk who informed me that Tom had agreed that the depositary governments would do that. I was a little upset --

Michal Onderco:

Why?

Robert Einhorn:

-- with that. Because I knew, having dealt with Egyptians for many years, I knew how the Egyptians would deal with that. It would be, you know, "the depositary governments have ownership of this".

Michal Onderco:

Yes.

Robert Einhorn:

It's their responsibility to ensure the effective implementation. It's on them. You know, Tom, in a moment of magnanimity, you know, casually, I think, very readily acceded to them. I was not happy with Tom for not consulting me on that because I would have given him a contrary view.

Michal Onderco:

Yeah.

Robert Einhorn:

But that was done and so, you know, the resolution -- we had to make a good decision on indefinite extension together with this forward-looking document of principles and objectives. That was, you know, glued together to constitute result of the review conference.

Michal Onderco:

So, you would be in favor that Egyptians would table the resolution themselves?

Robert Einhorn:

And, you know, I would have been happy with a U.S.-Egyptian co-sponsorship of the resolution. I mean, we were. You know, we negotiated and [could] do it. But the Egyptians wanted to take it off their shoulders [laughs] and put it on the three depositary's.

Michal Onderco:

How did the Russians and the Brits see the fact that they're suddenly co-sponsoring something they didn't touch?

Robert Einhorn:

Look, they were happy with the result of the conference. It didn't seem like a big issue to them. You know, happy to be associated with this successful conclusion of this resolution. You'd have to ask of them, but I'm just assuming that that's how they perceived it.

Michal Onderco:

While negotiating the agreement, the resolution, did you -- were you also in liaison with any of the depositaries?

Robert Einhorn:

Oh, sure. I had meetings all day and, you know, the Western Group, you know, would want to know -- I'd give progress -- day-to-day progress reports because they thought this was important to the success of the conference. How's it going? Nobody said, you know, second-guessed us. You know, "Bob, are you being too hard on them?"

You know, they let -- the United States let me just do it, but I had to give them, you know, day-to-day progress reports. I met with the Russian delegation and, you know, regularly, to say how things were going, and as long as I, you know, could say things are on the right track, you know, we haven't hit a bad impasse. They'd say, you know, "Okay, let us know."

Michal Onderco:

Some observers accuse Egypt of building their diplomatic reputation on the issue of Middle East weapons of mass destruction-free zone. Was it something that was obvious already at that point?

Robert Einhorn:

Oh, no question. I mean, you know, it appeared during ACRS. My sense is that, you know, that Egyptians became disappointed with how ACRS was evolving. It was Egypt -- I'm sorry, it was Israel having, you know, friendly interactions with the Maghrebi Arabs, with the Gulf Arabs, with the Levant Arabs. You know, they were off, you know, telling jokes, you know, having meals together, engaging in exercises. I mean, there were naval activities. There were all kinds of confidence building activities going on, and, you know, I think at some point, you know, the Egyptians said, "Wait a minute. We should be leading this process." You know, the Arabs should be coming through us here. "We're the -- you know, we're the leaders of the Arab world. What's happening here?"

Michal Onderco:

[laughs]

Robert Einhorn:

"We're losing control." I mean, you know, I'm making you know fun. I think, you know, there was a certain concern about how this is headed. And Egypt, to be sure,

believed it was important for nuclear to play a more prominent role in ACRS, but they also knew that by, you know, pressing on Israel, or stepping on Israel's sore nuclear toe, they could, once again, put Egypt in the driver's seat.

Egypt, you know, was the most knowledgeable of the Arab delegations, the most articulate, effective diplomatically, and I think one of the reasons to elevate the nuclear issue prominence was not just to try to promote Israeli acceptance of nonproliferation constraints, but also to elevate their own stature. Now, I don't mean by any means to suggest that, you know, the Egyptians didn't care about the nuclear issue. You know, I've written about this subject in a book called the Nuclear Tipping Point I wrote the chapter on Egypt. Do you know anything about that book?

Michal Onderco:

I think I have read it.

Robert Einhorn:

Oh, my research assistant has a copy. It's about the history of Egypt's nuclear program.

Michal Onderco:

Yeah.

Robert Einhorn:

The Egyptians were reluctant to conclude a peace treaty with Israel unless Israel renounced nuclear weapons. That was a formal part of their proposal.

Michal Onderco:

Yes.

Robert Einhorn:

The Israelis weren't prepared to do that. President Sadat had priorities: making peace, getting back the Sinai, having good relations with the United States. He had given up on Russia; good relations with the U.S., and peace with Israel. That's how Sadat felt Egypt's national objectives would best be served. They made a run at getting Israel to renounce -- they wanted to have joint, you know, adherence to the NPT. The Israelis refused, and Egypt went along anyway.

This made many Egyptians very unhappy. Nabil Fahmy's father, Eshmil Fahmy resigned, not just over the NPT, but over making peace with Israel. And Sadat's successor, Mubarak, said, "Okay, yes, we do want a level playing field. It's unfair that Israel have this nuclear monopoly, but the best way to get a level playing field is not for us to build up. It's to get Israel to build down," and that's why they came, I guess, in '74 with this nuclear weapon free zone proposal. And, you know, getting Israel to give up nuclear weapons has been a central part of Egyptian policy. So, I'm not saying that this was some device just to bash Israel or to regain Egypt's lost influence in the Arab world. This was a persistent objective of Egyptian foreign policy. But it also, you know, had to do with enhancing Egypt's role in the process.

Michal Onderco:

How was the resolution received by other stakeholders in the region, other than the U.S. and Egypt?

Robert Einhorn:

You know, I mean. I have no idea what the Iranians, the Syrians -- I have no idea what

they thought of it. You know, presumably, you know, they were happy to have this diplomatic success, happy to say that the goal of a zone free of these weapons was going to be advanced by this. I don't know. I mean, the country that was most concerned was the one outside the meeting hall, which was Israel.

And, you know, I met with the Israelis almost on a daily basis, and told them what was going on, and some of these language compromises, you know, got the Israelis to the edge of their comfort zone. But, at the end of the day, I think, their clear preference would be not to have any resolution on this subject. They were prepared, because they knew that getting a consensus decision to extend the NPT indefinitely was important to their major ally. They were prepared to live with it.

They were much less prepared to live with the 2010 outcome, which they thought was much more, and which the U.S. almost apologized for afterward. General what's-his-name, who was Obama's first national security adviser --

Michal Onderco:
Jones.

Robert Einhorn:
Jim Jones made a statement afterward that kind of was designed -- it wasn't an apology but it was, you know, designed to lay down certain U.S. conditions for a conference that conformed with Israel's preferences. So, the Israelis were a lot less disgruntled about '95 than they were about 2010.

Michal Onderco:
So, what were the expectations in 1995? What were you expecting would be the next goal, next steps on acting on this?

Robert Einhorn:
No idea. It was sufficient unto the day. We had dodged a bullet. You know, we all knew that real-world conditions would determine whether any advancement could be made, and if you recall the mid-'90s to late '90s was not a very propitious, auspicious time for movement. [Benjamin Netanyahu] was back, was prime minister. Then the second intifada began. So, this was not, you know, progress on a zone was not at the top of anyone's agenda at that point.

Michal Onderco:
Some of the interviewees who I talk to from other countries said that at that time, they expected that within a few years, maybe five, maybe 10, maybe 15, progress would be made to the point that Israel would join the NPT.

Robert Einhorn:
I always criticize the so-called nonproliferation community. You know, they live in a cocoon. You know, I've lived in both worlds. I've been involved in the multilateral diplomacy staff. I was at, you know, I represented the U.S. at the CCD, it was, before it was called the CD '72 to '76. I engaged in, you know, test ban talks. I did U.S.-Soviet START negotiation. I've lived in what I see as the real world, and the multilateral nonproliferation world. Now, if you live in that cocoon, maybe you think there's a real possibility that in the near term, or in five years, or in 10 years Israel's going to do that.

Fortunately, I think Israel's position remains that, in the context of peace between Israel and all of the countries in the Middle East, and if all uncertainties are resolved about countries like Iran and Iraq and Syria going through nuclear weapons, then

they would consider joining a zone and joining the NPT. Unlike Pakistan and India which, as a matter of principle, would not join in discriminatory NPT. Israel has never adopted that as a matter of principle. It was all security. But they had a high bar. You know, peace with everybody and the absence of concerns about WMD ambitions from some potential rivals. So, you know, it's a good thing that they have the position, but it's no indication that this is a near-term possibility.

So, look, if you asked President Al-Sisi today what he thinks about the zone, he'd first make you explain what the zone is. You know, what in the world are you talking about. All he knows is he cooperates with the Israelis every day on dealing with extremists in the Sinai. They're his ally in dealing with one of his most important threats. So this is not high on his priority. Whatever the Egyptian foreign ministry may say, this has never been a presidential or a military or an intelligence - cooperation between the intelligence services on both sides is very good.

So, you know, one of the differences, while the Egyptians would say that Israel's nuclear capability is a major threat to the region. Why, if that's the case, did Israel have nuclear weapons for, you know, 50 years, and no one really felt threatened by it. You know, they didn't like Israel's policy in the Occupied Territories and, you know, but the threat was Israel's overwhelming conventional superiority, not its nuclear capability. But, all of a sudden, Iran gets onto the thing and everyone is freaking out.

Michal Onderco:
[laughs]

Robert Einhorn:

You know, you know, the fact of the matter is the Middle East could be stable with one nuclear power; not with two, not with two. Whether the second is Iraq, Iran, Syria, Libya. But with one, it can be stable because Israel's nuclear capability was seen for what it was. You know, a last, a last-ditch threat in case the very existence of the state was jeopardized. That's what it was. It's always been.

And whereas the concern -- you know, concern about Iran's nuclear program is not necessarily that Iran's going to be crazy to use nuclear weapons, is that it will provide a kind of umbrella under which it will pursue assertive regional policy. Israel: you don't have that. You know, it's not as if Israel's going to pursue assertive regional policies under the umbrella. No, the umbrella is irrelevant. It's going to pursue a sometimes brutal occupation that has nothing to do with its nuclear capability at all. So, you know, yeah, the preoccupation with the zone thing; you know, I don't understand... You know, well, I do understand, but I don't sympathize with it.

I know this is off your topic, but I say to my Egyptian friends: "Are you serious about this zone business? If you're serious, rather than using it as a club to hit Israel, then do an initial treaty on a Middle East zone, free of all nuclear weapons tests. Get everyone to sign up that they won't carry out a nuclear test, work out a regional monitoring system plugged into the international one, of the CTBTO, and an inspection system on a regional basis. That would be a very useful step. It would teach you how to deal regionally and could establish... And it would be useful and it would deal with three of the prerequisites for entering to force of the CTBT; Israel, Egypt, Iran. That would be very positive." "Oh, no."

I say, "Okay, you don't like that one? Now that Syria has adhered to the chemical weapon convention and partially complied with it, it could create a Middle East zone free of all chemical weapons, and, you know, work out the requirements specific to the needs of your region. Work out regional verification arrangements. Consult with the OPCW" "Oh, no, no, no."

So, you know, there are practical things they could do: set up a Middle East civil nuclear agency which cooperates in the peaceful uses, in the production of medical isotopes, and nuclear agriculture, which is very important to that region. This would be positive. It could create contact. "Oh, no, no."

So, that's why I take a very jaundiced, very cynical view on all of this because it's not designed to be constructive, productive. It's political theater.

Michal Onderco:

So, why did you engage in that political theater in '95?

Robert Einhorn:

Because, one, as a kind of carryover from the heady days of the Madrid peace process. You know, there was hope, then. Israel had diplomatic relations with Jordan, with Egypt. It was not ludicrous. In ACRS, we had plenary meetings with Israeli delegations in Doha, in Amman, in Tunis. You know, things were really opening up. It was -- there was something positive about it, and Israel was still saying it during ACRS: "We support the goal of NPT. We support the goal of a Middle East zone. But we have certain security requirements."

So, it was a different, you know, a lot has changed in these 22 years. The complexion of Israeli governments has changed; the complexion of Israeli society has changed. You know, you're talking about Rabin, Peres. That's a different, that's a different situation.

Michal Onderco:

Did you, at that time, think that it may become such a big sticking issue for the NPT in 20 years?

Robert Einhorn:

I was concerned about it. I was concerned that this would be something the Egyptians would continue to use, but, look, I was the senior-most State Department official responsible for nonproliferation, getting the indefinite extension was a big deal, and I was happy that it worked out that way.

Michal Onderco:

But you could have gone with the vote, right?

Robert Einhorn:

We could've gone with the vote, but we thought that wasn't a good precedent. We wanted everyone on board making this treaty permanent, and that was the right choice.

Michal Onderco:

Thank you very much for your time, and thank you very much for your insight.

[end of interview]