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Oral History Interview with Nabil Fahmy

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Summary:

Nabil Fahmy is an Egyptian diplomat and politician who has served in various official posts in the Egyptian cabinet and Ministry of Foreign Affairs, including serving as a member of the Egyptian mission to the United Nations Office at Geneva and New York and political advisor from August 1993 to September 1997.

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Nabil Fahmy ☐☐

☐☐☐Egypt ☐☐

☐☐☐Oral history interview conducted by Hassan Elbahtimy in person in Cairo on 12 April 2017 ☐☐

Nabil Fahmy:

Let's sort of just try to answer as many of these issues as we can and if you raise a question as I'm talking and I don't want to focus on it, I'll tell you.

Hassan Elbahtimy:

Sure, that sounds great. Okay.

Nabil Fahmy:

It's important first of all to take into account our context. Different context where we have a treaty that we ratified in '81. We had signed in '69 if I'm not mistaken -- or '68, with the same conditionality and when you signed it we said we would ratify if Israel joined not because it's an anti-Israeli or pro-Israeli thing, but because it's the other country that had the potential to have a bomb. And when we ratified in '81 the understanding was the Americans would get the Israelis on board. So, we're coming to this issue of extension treaty having been going for 25 years, and the issues are how long do we extend it. Even though the inequality that exists, still exists. Secondly, and equally important the last five years from '92 to '95, the last four years, were ACRS years.

Hassan Elbahtimy:

Yes.

Nabil Fahmy:

Where the nuclear issue was being debated very vehemently by ACRS.

Hassan Elbahtimy:

So, ACRS, is the Arms Control and Regional Security Working Group as part of the peace process, at the time?

Nabil Fahmy:

Right. And where it became obvious that Egypt and Israel were having great differences in whether to deal with the nuclear issue now or later. So, that's in the run up to the NPT meeting. Our position on disarmament generally, is very progressive in region. Our basic context, basic point of departure, is the more the merrier. Provided it's symmetrical and reciprocal. We signed the NPT from the beginning. We signed the BW agreement in the beginning. We refused to sign the chemical weapon agreement or ratify it because the asymmetry kept increasing over time. And we also proposed a zone concepts which were not really our preferred option. But because they were options that frankly accommodated others in the region, be that Israel or Iran, we went along with that. So, our basic position is quite positive on disarmament. Secondly, we believe in general and complete disarmament. In other words, global disarmament. We don't really believe in the sustained effectiveness of deterrence. So, this is a posture where for us it's a trend that is passed, if we want to succeed, not the conflict. The problem is if it's succeeding only by our taking measures, and not other areas of concern taking measures, it makes us more insecure, rather than more secure.

As much as we would like to have seen the nuclear powers do much more on nuclear disarmament, that wasn't our concern. That was part of our concern for the NPT as a whole. But it wasn't part of our concern in terms of the immediate issues that were on the table. For us they were regional. We would nevertheless argue for a balance

between nuclear disarmament and nuclear energy, verification, and all that sort of thing. So, going into the NPT we see the potential for extended asymmetries, because of the failures of ACRS. And we were negotiating, we were trying to negotiate in ACRS with the Israelis, it was not succeeding. We were negotiating directly with the Israelis on the nuclear issue as we got closer to the NPT. And there was progress there with some Israelis. It was specifically with Shimon Peres and his team. They actually agreed to a suggestion that they would have reflected a commitment to the NPT in the reasonably near future once peace was achieved.

But I knew from day one this was not something they could sell domestically. And it was proven within a week that they didn't sell it, seriously. So, we went into the NPT with a failed attempt at getting progress at ACRS. A failed attempt at getting things done bilaterally with the Israelis. No serious American intention to move forward. In fact, I remember and I'm not sure if this was immediately before the NPT or immediately after, we met Richard Perle in New York. And we talked to him about Israel joining the NPT and he said, "why in the world should they join NPT. You already did. What's the intent that they have to join?" And we tried to explain that it should apply to everybody. He said, "that doesn't make any sense security wise". Anyway, so we're going into the NPT process concerned about permanent asymmetries. Our delegation was therefore composed of people who could argue the NPT balance: disarmament, nonproliferation, peaceful use. And others who would focus on the regional issues, per se.

Hassan Elbahtimy:

I think at this stage it might be helpful to describe what was your position at the time?

Nabil Fahmy:

I was Political Advisor to the Foreign Minister. And I also had done a considerable amount of work on disarmament so I was also heading the delegation to the ACRS process. In other words, if you wanted to push a disarmament policy or position, this was the Foreign Ministry it had to pass through me. It would of course then go to the Foreign Minister. But these were issues that I reviewed directly.

Hassan Elbahtimy:

And the Foreign Minister at the time was?

Nabil Fahmy:

Amr Moussa.

Hassan Elbahtimy:

Amr Moussa.

Nabil Fahmy:

And Amr Moussa was the one who met Richard Pearl.

Hassan Elbahtimy:

And that position, your position was Cairo based?

Nabil Fahmy:

It was Cairo based. I was Political Advisor from 1991 to 1997. So, it was throughout the whole NPT process and a number of years after that. And it wasn't focused only on disarmament. But it was among the issues --

Hassan Elbahtimy:
Sure.

Nabil Fahmy:

-- was about disarmament. And of course, Amr Moussa also has a U.N. background so he's done international security and he's done disarmament. So, we're going into the conference wanting to achieve better balance between disarmament, non-proliferation, and peaceful use of nuclear energy, and very cautious about not wanting to have an indefinite asymmetry. And we'd been told by those who promised us that they'd get the Israelis on board, that it was silly to ratify the NPT there is no incentive for them to join. It was not a very useful argument but at least they were honest about it. Again, to be fair by some of those, because others were less blatant about it.

Hassan Elbahtimy:
Was --

Nabil Fahmy:
Go ahead.

Hassan Elbahtimy:

So, that means that you were part of the preparations in Cairo before the conference but also my understanding is that you were in New York during the conference as well?

Nabil Fahmy:
Sure.

Hassan Elbahtimy:

And then after the conference was over you went back to your position in being Cairo based?

Nabil Fahmy:

Exactly. And again, it's important to put into context disarmament was a very high priority issue in that period, '91 to '95 because you had two issues and then the third immediately coming with it. The ACRS process, the NPT extension, and then the build up to the CW. So, disarmament then was topical. Now, it may not be topical.

Hassan Elbahtimy:
Right.

Nabil Fahmy:

But it was very topical then: politically, internationally, regionally, and domestically. And you might even remember that President Mubarak at one point issued a statement that he would not sign an extension to the NPT.

Hassan Elbahtimy:

Do you remember roughly, when was that?

Nabil Fahmy:

About three months before the --

Hassan Elbahtimy:
The conference.

Nabil Fahmy:
-- the conference. Now, there's no signature. But what he basically meant --

Hassan Elbahtimy:
Sure.

Nabil Fahmy:
-- is that he was very disappointed with how this process was going.

Hassan Elbahtimy:
Was that under -- you know building on advice coming from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, do you think? Or was it?

Nabil Fahmy:
Well, we didn't ask them to say that directly. But to be very clear, we literally sent a memo to the President, covering the next few years, all the way right through the chemical weapons thing. with an overview with what's coming on the disarmament issue. These are the issues, these are the proponents of these issues, these will be the sponsors of these issues, this is the cost-benefit of taking option one, option two, option three, and so on and so forth. We packaged the whole thing together. And he had a clear landscape not only what were the issues, the timing of the issues, and also frankly who would pressure him and who would support him, if we did this or we did that.

Hassan Elbahtimy:
So, you're saying he was well informed about what was going to help?

Nabil Fahmy:
Oh, very well informed. And on that memo, if I'm not mistaken, about 15 pages.

Hassan Elbahtimy:
Oh, okay.

Nabil Fahmy:
If I'm right. And again, I may be a little -- maybe a couple of pages off. But he literally signed off on every action item we had put on that memo. Every single one. So, you had an institution that was focused on the issue, you had the Foreign Minister who knew the issue, and you had a President who had read the issue very clearly.

Hassan Elbahtimy:
Sure.

Nabil Fahmy:
And again, this Mubarak in the early '90's.

Hassan Elbahtimy:
Right.

Nabil Fahmy:

He was much younger and much more robust then in 2010.

Hassan Elbahtimy:
Sure.

Nabil Fahmy:
Which was 20 years later.

Hassan Elbahtimy:
Much more involved as well.

Nabil Fahmy:
Oh, yes. And he -- at that time he dealt very rigorously with the institutional establishments. In other words, disarmament, he'd ask us, he'd ask defense. And if it's more political, disarmament it's us, but yeah.

Hassan Elbahtimy:
Sure. So, there are two things that I think were significant in the run up to the conference, at least internationally. So, there was the end of the Cold War and a kind of like the feeling that we are to start a new area of multilateralism. And you mentioned that there was a lot of promise a lot of hope about disarmament at least some significant progress when it comes to disarmament. And on the other side, you see also the big implications of discovering Iraq's WMD programs. How do you think these two issues, the end of the Cold War, and the discovery of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction, were perceived in Cairo in the run up to the conference? You mentioned, of course, the situation in the region and the symmetry with Israel where obviously the --

Nabil Fahmy:
Asymmetry.

Hassan Elbahtimy:
-- the asymmetry with Israel was obviously a key component of Egypt's looking into this process as it was about to start. How did these two things impact on Egyptian thinking at the time?

Nabil Fahmy:
They both impacted positively. In other words -- let me phrase this correctly. They both impacted to solidify our arguments. If the Cold War is ending and the Soviets and the Americans are talking to each other more seriously than the whole environment towards disarmament should be more conducive. Trying to find security through collective security rather than through -- what was the term? I forget the term at the time -mutually assured destruction --

Hassan Elbahtimy:
Sure.

Nabil Fahmy:
-- is more sensible. So, then if these guys can talk about these issues, than the Middle East should be able to. And frankly, you add to it, also -- another dimension that people tend to forget: without Egypt - in other words, with an Egyptian Israeli peace - there's no Arab-Israeli war. So, the threat perceptions in the Middle East have changed. There are not any longer existential threats of Arabs supposedly invading Israel and getting rid of Israel. If that was ever the case. So, for us we signed a

peace agreement, there's no real existential threat on Israel. We had ratified the NPT. Still no progress, with NPT and then the peace agreement. We raise this issue with the Israelis and they said well, after peace, after peace we can discuss it. You have the Cold War coming to an end, these are all positive negotiations. Then you have the Iraqi situation. Well, it just shows you that if you want to cheat you can cheat. And it also shows that the system actually works. Because you can cheat but ultimately, you'll get caught.

Our whole logic was you need to create symmetry. So, either you downsize, or there's going to be an arms race. And the Iraqi example is an example for this. So, if these two events actually strengthened our own arguments. At least in our minds that yes, our argument is valid, it's time now for the Israelis to start reacting, and it's time for the Americans and the Soviets to get serious about this. And if these guys can talk about this, why can't we. And don't forget see at ACRS, the Israelis wouldn't even talk about the nuclear issue. They talked about it as bilateral but they wouldn't even talk about it. It isn't that we definitely achieved then we had disagreements, they wouldn't even talk about it.

Hassan Elbahtimy:

Sure. I think at this point it might be beneficial to talk about ACRS a little bit given how important it was in the run up to the conference itself. So, what do you think was the main takeaway from the Egyptian side from the ACRS process? So, this is a process that started from the early '90's and started to taper down towards the mid 90's as the Review and Extension Conference was gearing up to a big diplomatic show in New York. I mean obviously, there was a lot of frustration from Egypt, it was one of the key countries involved, had strong positions like leading positions within that context. But I can't help feel also that there was a lot of disappointment about how this happened. So, given how important this is on the lead up to the conference, what do you think were the main takeaways from Egypt?

Nabil Fahmy:

Sure. Excellent point and that's why I mentioned ACRS previously. When the Middle East Conference ended, you know we had -- and we agreed on the five multilateral groups. There were originally three, economic cooperation, environment, and water. The Arab side insisted on two more. The Palestinians wanted refugees, and the Egyptians wanted arms control and regional security. The whole logic was: if you want to talk about a new Middle East before you solve the problem, then the new Middle East also includes solving the refugee problem and dealing with security issues. You're not going to end up talking about the water, the environment, economic cooperation, and at the same time have the same mindset that security is only weapons, and battlefields, and what not. So, that was what we brought to the table. This was an Egyptian request to start to have ACRS as part of the five working groups, therefore it was an important issue for us. At ACRS, and we submitted a paper from the first or second meeting, laying out the answers. Look these are the issues you can discuss, we do this in phases, we do this blah, blah, blah.

Hassan Elbahtimy:

Papers to be shared with other members of the ACRS?

Nabil Fahmy:

The public, the public. Including -- and it was a very well-studied serious paper. It wasn't let's all disarm and walk around naked tomorrow. It was basically what can be done by way of unilateral steps, what can be done by way of CBMs. What can then be done by way of -- so, unilateral steps, CBMs, what can be done by way of unilateral adherence to different treaties, what can be done regionally, and what is the ultimate objective? And the reaction to that paper from precisely [inaudible] he came to me and he said, you're going to scare people. And I said why? I've never written anything more reasonable. Because this is not platitude, this is actually serious

disarmament. Step by step. And he said, they haven't thought that thing through that far. And therefore they're going to worry about the slippery slope process. And I said, I was very clear. This is exactly the way we see it. So, it's not that we're trying to lead them on in an undefined role, this is the landscape.

Anyway, their approach there was, nuclear is existential so we need that. We talked about other kinds of security, mostly conventional and even some non-military aspects. Basically, cooperation and the sorts, and search and rescue operations, and things like that. So, a number of -- reading through it and this as we lead up the NPT Conference it is obvious that the Israelis were not becoming serious on having a discussion on nuclear. Their position was we won't have it. We had one session on verification. We had it in Cairo, and it was a very academic session, and that was it. And the whole discussion was simply do we use IEA or do we use regional members or is this a package, it was very academic. Nothing really played and that was it. And so, we're going to this NPT Conference, we have concerns about the treaty but these are related to the concerns of the Soviets and the Americans not doing enough. We have concerns on peaceful use of nuclear energy but that's another point. And then we have our regional concerns and there's no promise at all. And we're really asked now not to extend the treaty but to make it indefinite. In other words, make that asymmetry permanent.

Hassan Elbahtimy:

Was there a decision about -- that in Cairo taken before the conference, was there a concrete do you think negotiating position that was formed in Cairo before the conference started?

Nabil Fahmy:

To do what?

Hassan Elbahtimy:

So, well, it was known that this conference will not only refuse the treaty, but have the big task of considering whether it would be extended, or not.

Nabil Fahmy:

Sure.

Hassan Elbahtimy:

And you just discussed the main challenges that faced the Egyptian policy makers at the time when they were looking into the extension of the treaty. Was there a well-formed position, a concrete position -- a negotiating position that was taken from Cairo before the conference started, that was passed onto the delegation? Or was it more done in an illustrative manner where the delegation on the ground will pass on their assessments and call?

Nabil Fahmy:

There was a decision but that also included the delegation on the ground passing -- I'll tell you why. In going toward the conference you had the prep committees. At the prep committees and also at the non-aligned meeting, if I'm not mistaken in Indonesia --

Hassan Elbahtimy:

Yes.

Nabil Fahmy:

The primary point of contention was the length of the extension, in the beginning.

And with the two main options being, I'm not belittling the Mexican position, but the options being 25 years revolving or indefinite. And let me argue also, my sense is that almost about six to eight months before the conference, the [First?] Committee was still leaning towards 25 years revolving including a number of Western or Western-leaning countries in the world.

Hassan Elbahtimy:

So, going again to the conference that was the impression that this going to be the likely outcome?

Nabil Fahmy:

My sense was, again, after looking at the calendar, at least eight months before, it was still the option that 25-years revolved. And even that was not agreeable to many developing countries. And I can tell you that we had delegations, among them Americans coming to Cairo.

Hassan Elbahtimy:

Yes, I was going to ask you about that.

Nabil Fahmy:

They came and Thomas Graham was among them. At least once if not more than once. I forget the exact date but we were very clear that the issue was whether we would support the 25-years revolving, nothing else. That was really the issue. But we couldn't do that with the same kind of symmetry continuing. Now, as things got closer to the non-aligned meeting in Indonesia before the conference, the Western pressure on South Africa and the desire of South Africa to sort of seize the moment, the Mandela moment, and sort of come out into the world was so strong that they broke ranks with the Non-Aligned Movement. They broke ranks at the Indonesian Conference, or just before, from do we support or not support 25-years revolving to their support for the indefinite extension. Our assessment, going in to that conference, was we could even object, and I use that word because I didn't share that opinion frankly, that we could even object to a 25-year revolving solution. Some members of our delegation felt that wasn't even fair.

Hassan Elbahtimy:

Right.

Nabil Fahmy:

I thought it wasn't fair, I didn't think we could stop it.

Hassan Elbahtimy:

Right. Sure. Were you part of that conference?

Nabil Fahmy:

No.

Hassan Elbahtimy:

You didn't go?

Nabil Fahmy:

I was at that point very busy

Hassan Elbahtimy:

In Cairo?

Nabil Fahmy:

-- working with Moussa. The Head of Delegation if I'm not mistaken was Mounir Zahran

Hassan Elbahtimy:

Who was at the time perhaps the Ambassador in Geneva?

Nabil Fahmy:

In Geneva, yeah. So, it was clear in Indonesia, that there was a problem there.

Hassan Elbahtimy:

Within the non-aligned?

Nabil Fahmy:

Within the non-aligned. Because they had broken ranks or immediately- again, you need to check the dates, it was clear for us there that there was a problem. Now, whether the South Africans announced there or immediately after that, that they would go along with the extension, you need to check.

Hassan Elbahtimy:

Sure.

Nabil Fahmy:

Because I'm not exactly sure, but I know that in Indonesia I could sense there was a problem. Because we had -- some of our colleagues felt that they could even stop a 25-year extension. Which I did not share.

Hassan Elbahtimy:

Revolving?

Nabil Fahmy:

Revolving extension. But after that we knew we had a problem. So, anyway, suddenly I think, with the timing the Americans, in particular, had shifted from 25-years revolving to indefinite. Then they made a further shift during the conference to without a vote. And I make that point now it is going to lead into the other issues trying to adopt the extension decision.

Hassan Elbahtimy:

Sure.

Nabil Fahmy:

And you asked me whether we had direct instructions before going to the conference. Yes, we did. Our guided instructions on all of the disarmament treaty issues were typical. Push as hard as you can for more disarmament, push as hard as you can for more peaceful use of nuclear technology, make sure the safeguard system is applied equally. But they never included on these issues that you make or break the conference. Because the point I made earlier, we are progressive on arms control but realistic that these things take time. And just to keep pushing as hard as you can. So, we were not going to stop the conference on how much progress there was on disarmament or not, on the word here. On the other hand, we clearly had instructions that we would not vote in favor of indefinite extension. So, going into the

conference it was already our sense that the mood had shifted very strongly.

Hassan Elbahtimy:
In the preceding month?

Nabil Fahmy:
Yes. Towards an indefinite extension.

Hassan Elbahtimy:
So, most of the preparations were in the context of, is this going to be a 25-revolving extension, and the transformative moment was South Africa, at least within the NAM, South Africa shifting slightly its weight into support of an indefinite extension that has?

Nabil Fahmy:
The transformative moment for us were two moments. One, the clear failure of our bilateral efforts with the Israelis -- let me rephrase that. They succeeded but they didn't respect their game. And I personally was very clear eyed in that they had just agreed to something that they would not respect. And within the week they had not respected it again. So, that was the first real negative thing. And then you go to okay, now we started off with a negative, you end up with one to have an indefinite negative. Had the Israelis implemented their agreement with us we would have gone into the conference with a less negative mood.

Hassan Elbahtimy:
Sure.

Nabil Fahmy:
Even though we still wouldn't have been enough for us to enthusiastically support an indefinite extension. So, our position going in, we will do the best to make this treaty work. But we're not going to vote for indefinite extension. Whether it's only our vote or with anybody else, we're not going to do it. With the assumption being that there would be a vote. Now, if I'm not mistaken, and you can check this also, this was not only our position I remember for example the head of the Venezuelan Delegation, I can't remember his name, but he actually resigned during the conference.

Hassan Elbahtimy:
During the conference?

Nabil Fahmy:
During the conference. Because his assumption was -- his instructions were a 25-year revolving extension. When he got instructions to support the indefinite extension he resigned.

Hassan Elbahtimy:
Very interesting. Okay, so, before we go straight into conference itself, we just want to get your recollections on the U.S. position before the conference. And specifically, if they have made any effort to reach out to Egypt before the conference on the outcome of the conference, in preparation for the negotiations in the conference?

Nabil Fahmy:
Sure, I mean Thomas Graham was the first point man on this. He came to Cairo at least once if not more. And you could see, and I forgot how many times because we were always in touch. You could see the progression in his argument from extending

the NPT and trying to make it a -- I mean in the past two NPT's there was a problem with if they actually adopted that statement or not. So, they were even worried initially as it were that they would adopt a statement. And if they didn't adopt a statement, what would you do with the extension issue. And the other ones were "just a review this was a review and an extension".

Hassan Elbahtimy:

Sure, yeah, a final document and the extension decision.

Nabil Fahmy:

Right--, so, that's how it started and then it turned into "okay, the issue of extension". With the issue of extension, they inquired a peace agreement. "Okay, any progress with the Israelis and what are you doing? And calm down, and the traditional stuff. And well, we promised to make the best effort, we didn't promise success," and the same stuff that you hear endlessly. Although, I'll say it again, Tom is a professional to the highest degree. And he was very correct and proper at least, he didn't exaggerate in any way. At the same time, he wasn't presumptuous either. But it was clear that we were going to have a problem. The last time we consulted with each other, moving into the conference it was clear. And they didn't convey to us that they could really influence the Israelis. And since they promised before and hadn't done it anyway it wasn't going to help very much. What would have helped was had the Israelis accepted out of respect the agreement. So, anyway we're going to the conference with a clear problem regarding the extension issue.

Hassan Elbahtimy:

Sure.

Nabil Fahmy:

And they're not sure consequently if they're going to play this in all the committees. In other words, try to create havoc through all the different committees, or simply on the extension. Now, whether it's the correct negotiating posture or not, we didn't try to create havoc in all the negotiating committees. Because frankly we're supporting the NPT in spite of its weaknesses, so, it's not our position to break it. As we went into the conference, do you want to go into that or do you have another question?

Hassan Elbahtimy:

Yeah. One small question before we go into the conference. I'm sure there is a lot to discuss in the conference and I would like to capture as much as possible on that. When you're talked about Mubarak trying to build institutions at that time, we're talking about his --

Nabil Fahmy:

Respect institutions.

Hassan Elbahtimy:

-- yeah, respect institutions. This was his second decade in power at the time. What was the internal discussion within the different government on this? I mean obviously the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has traditionally played a big role on these issues. Where there other actors that were invested in this decision or in creating or establishing the negotiating position? Did the parliament for example play any role, did public debate play any role?

Nabil Fahmy:

Generally speaking, multilateralism is the Foreign Minister's job. Nevertheless, if we were to compromise on our arms capacity, we'd have to consult frequently with

military and intelligence and so on and so forth. To make sure that they were clear. As long as we decided not to compromise on our potential capacity, they are close followers of the discussion but not necessarily its leaders.

Hassan Elbahtimy:
Politically important?

Nabil Fahmy:
Well, they received the memo. But they don't really engage as long as they're comfortable that we're not offering any compromise. Just on the side issue, a side example, on us joining the mines convention.

Hassan Elbahtimy:
Yeah.

Nabil Fahmy:
Because this is something that we have to go back to the military on. And we weren't able to do get it through because of our topography and all.

Hassan Elbahtimy:
Sure.

Nabil Fahmy:
But anyway, so, since we weren't compromising, the military was not in any way worried about where the Foreign Ministry was going. And our position was that we had given them the landscape of the next couple years from ACRS to the NPT to the CWC, and this is the kinds of pressure. So, they had the whole readout of this. Osama el-Baz, he wasn't a technical player, but because he was close to Mubarak, he was sort of there. He wasn't a player on a day to day basis. Although he sort of followed how far the President extended himself or did extend himself. He only got involved really in the last days of the conference.

Hassan Elbahtimy:
Did you see any specific reason Osama el-Baz would maintain or develop an interest in this topic?

Nabil Fahmy:
More so because he was -- if you want - the President's consigliere. I mean he's the one sort of who would advise him, okay, go even further on this or don't go too far. These guys are going to have to back off so there's no reason being out there. That's one thing. The other thing is because he was so close to the President, foreign governments would tend to phone him and complain about what we were doing and here it is. But he had no interest in the talk --

Hassan Elbahtimy:
Sure.

Nabil Fahmy:
-- itself. No more than anybody on the topic.

Hassan Elbahtimy:
Sure, right. Okay, so, moving on to the proceedings of the conference itself. During the conference, you mentioned previously that there was a shift on the terms of

discussion from an extension that is time-limited but revolving -- 25 revolving, to a growing inclination towards an indefinite extension. During the conference, itself there were also some other proposals coming up including -- well the Mexican Proposal, which is on the conditional extension, we have the Canadian that strongly pushed for an indefinite extension, and the proposal for the 11 likeminded countries for a 25-year extension. Where did Egypt during the conference position itself when it comes to these different proposals?

Nabil Fahmy:

Well, I'll tell you. We did not like the indefinite extension and were going to oppose if it came down to that. We were not happy with the 25-year revolving decision, but could have lived with that, depending on what else happens. We did not seriously engage on the Mexican proposal. Because going into the conference we had already drawn the conclusion that the major powers are going to push for an indefinite extension, and that they had the votes to do it. And as I said, I didn't think, and I preferred that in Indonesia that we would be supportive of the 25-year involvement, but some in our delegation felt that they could even stop that which was farfetched. But anyway, that's -- be careful [inaudible]. That was a major mistake. If the non-aligned movement had come out in the 25 years it would have been a huge force at the conference itself. Because it didn't even come up with an agreement on that. We went in divided to the conference. At that point, the Mexicans, and I say this with all due respect, the Mexicans have always had a very intellectually fertile engagement in disarmament they've committed to that, to the discipline many, many, years. The proposal was interesting. But it wasn't possible. Who was going to support it? If the Non-Aligned Movement was already broken. Neither the Warsaw Pact or the NATO Pact wanted to have that sort of conditional process. So, our position -- we were betting on this was going to go to indefinite extension. And we weren't going to support that. And frankly our reading was correct. Because that's where it went, very, very quickly.

Hassan Elbahtimy:

Sure. So, how much of the conference had you attended?

Nabil Fahmy:

The whole conference.

Hassan Elbahtimy:

The whole conference. So, you were in New York the whole time? And when during the conference did you feel that a growing consensus on an indefinite extension was starting to take shape?

Nabil Fahmy:

I felt going in.

Hassan Elbahtimy:

Oh, okay.

Nabil Fahmy:

Khalas - that for us was going to happen. Careful with the word consensus because this is an important word to be careful of.

Hassan Elbahtimy:

Sure. I mean I said growing consensus.

Nabil Fahmy:

My reading was that they had the votes. If they wanted to push a vote, they can get it through. We never thought they'd try to get a consensus. But they could easily get the votes. And we were going to vote no.

Hassan Elbahtimy:

Sure.

Nabil Fahmy:

We weren't going to withdraw completely, but we would vote no. The minute they decided to try to get consensus they gave us leverage.

Hassan Elbahtimy:

And when did that happen?

Nabil Fahmy:

Well. I'll tell you. It's when you become greedy. I mean we initially tabled a Middle Eastern resolution, very early in the conference. And even if it was an indefinite extension, well, okay, we're between a rock and a hard place here an indefinite extension or 25-years revolving. In either case it's not something we're happy with, so, we wanted some focus on the Middle East. And we're going to vote no. He has the majority. He can vote no on our resolution. That's fine with us, we have a majority also. So, they're both going to go through. Irrespective of how many votes each would get, they would both pass. And to confirm what I'm telling you is if we didn't have the votes we wouldn't have seen the very tough negotiations that occurred with trying to get us to back off.

Hassan Elbahtimy:

If you didn't have the votes for the Middle Eastern resolution --

Nabil Fahmy:

Yeah.

Hassan Elbahtimy:

-- that was sponsored or proposed by Egypt --

Nabil Fahmy:

Yes.

Hassan Elbahtimy:

-- at the time? Okay. Do you remember who was on the Egyptian Delegation at the time?

Nabil Fahmy:

You know I was the Head of the Delegation at ACRS. Moussa then Nabil Al Araby was head of delegation at NPT.

Hassan Elbahtimy:

I know. Who was the permeant representative who presented it in New York at the time?

Nabil Fahmy:

No, I do not.

Hassan Elbahtimy:

Yes. And you were also there, do you remember who else was there?

Nabil Fahmy:

Sure. Mounir Zahran and Mohammad Shaker was there. I think Mohammad Karim was there. As I said the delegation was set up so that a number of people dealt with the --

Hassan Elbahtimy:

Committees.

Nabil Fahmy:

-- committees. And basically, two people dealt with the political issue, the extension, and the Middle East issue, I don't remember the rest.

Hassan Elbahtimy:

Right, right. So, how did the idea of that resolution come up? You mentioned like if the conference was moving towards some kind of a decision on the extension, whether that is rolling or an indefinite, you early on had the idea that this would be something that can be tabled. Was that your idea or was?

Nabil Fahmy:

I forget whose idea it was, I don't want to make a mistake here. That was an idea we had going in. It was my assessment that we had lost the battle about indefinite or 25-years.

Hassan Elbahtimy:

It was damage limitation?

Nabil Fahmy:

It was -- well not damage limitation since I picked my battles. Since these are battles that we can't win, okay what do we get out of it. And we were very, very, relaxed in that, we were going to vote no. Finally, politically we were going to vote no. While we won't withdraw from the treaty, we will vote no. But nevertheless, since we are members and this treaty will continue to be binding on us, we're going to pursue our security concerns in the nuclear area, part of the treaty as well. So, we went into the conference with the intentions of making a resolution. It wasn't something that came up the last version is when it shifted.

Hassan Elbahtimy:

Sure.

Nabil Fahmy:

And the first version by the way didn't have [weapons of] mass destruction.

Hassan Elbahtimy:

Right. The very first one, the one that Egypt went into the conference with?

Nabil Fahmy:

Yeah.

Hassan Elbahtimy:

Was only nuclear.

Nabil Fahmy:

And it mentioned Israel specifically. And you mentioned the point, previously, it actually talked about Israel being the only country in the region that was not a member of the NPT. And that was true. The only difference was there was one and possibly two Arab countries that didn't have safeguard agreements, but they were members of NPT. But with the safeguard agreement they were moving forward.

Hassan Elbahtimy:

Sure.

Nabil Fahmy:

As I said we had an agreement.

Hassan Elbahtimy:

Yeah.

Nabil Fahmy:

You don't do it on the refrigerator or something. So, anyway when the Americans, and I don't know who else, started to push for indefinite, and then also to push forward without a vote, they gave us two what do call them? Two reasons...

Hassan Elbahtimy:

Opportunities.

Nabil Fahmy:

-- opportunities. One we want indefinite, okay we're going to milk this as much as we can. And we were quite comfortable tabling the resolution. And believe me a lot of the even Western countries would have supported the resolution. They tried to accommodate us because we were not insulting the Israelis even though we criticized them. We were stating a simple fact that Israel was the only country that was not a member of the NPT and we want everybody to join in. The minute they decided to move towards the consensus they gave us a huge negotiating calling card.

Hassan Elbahtimy:

Sure. Because Egypt's votes would matter much more because it wouldn't be a consensus otherwise.

Nabil Fahmy:

Exactly. And at that point we said very frankly, we will vote no. You wanted without a vote, then our resolution wasn't going to vote as well. And I thought we were great. How in the world they were going to support the resolution without the vote for them? And it shows you the complicity here because five years later they did it at the NPT Conference.

Hassan Elbahtimy:

The 2000 Review Conference.

Nabil Fahmy:

Yes.

Hassan Elbahtimy:

Yes. So, it was the first conference where Israel's name was explicitly mentioned in the outcome.

Nabil Fahmy:

And I can tell you why that happened. But anyway, at the --

Hassan Elbahtimy:

The conference itself?

Nabil Fahmy:

-- at the conference itself, towards the last week, we meet with Albright, to give you a perfect example. And I remember we were meeting in, if I'm not mistaken, room Four, the bottom of the U.N. And she came to Nabil Elaraby and I was sitting with him and she said, I won't go into the details, but anyway she basically said, okay we want to do this without a vote. And so, we will do the extension without a vote and yours is the vote. And I said, no. You want the extension without a vote then ours is also without a vote. And we will issue a statement after the extension saying we're not part -- we don't support this issue. But we won't ask for a vote. But if you want a vote you have to you also have to let us have one. And she just hit the ceiling.

Hassan Elbahtimy:

Yeah. She didn't like that idea.

Nabil Fahmy:

She was surprised. And I could actually it see in the eyes, and I don't want to be pompous but all of the conference was watching us. They were all sort of sitting around the tables and they were sort of watching what these guys are doing. And some of even the western guys were laughing at how these negotiations were going. Some of them later told me we've never seen anything like this. You're getting a tremendous amount of aid and you're driving them crazy. And I said "Look it's nothing against the NPT or against America but this is Egypt's security." It's as simple as that.

Hassan Elbahtimy:

This was the last week of the conference?

Nabil Fahmy:

Yeah, it was the last week of the conference. Sorry, you had a question?

Hassan Elbahtimy:

Yeah, so, I'm trying to put this in the bigger context. So, at that time the U.S. -- so Egypt would have been the only -- was the only sort of -- the only thing between getting it, wasn't?

Nabil Fahmy:

No. We didn't do that other than with Israel. The minute we would ask for a vote a number of the contingency could not vote yes, including our country.

Hassan Elbahtimy:

Right. Okay, sure.

Nabil Fahmy:

A number of them would not vote yes, if we didn't.

Hassan Elbahtimy:

Sure. But none of them were at least having --

Nabil Fahmy:

None of them would take the lead.

Hassan Elbahtimy:

Would take the lead, sure. So, it was a high priority for the U.S. in order to get this through, to get that extension without a vote through is to satisfy some of Egypt's demands in the conference?

Nabil Fahmy:

Yes, two things here. We first negotiated the language of the extension because again from our NPT perspective we were not going to say yes. So, if you read the resolution, it says a widespread majority or something like that, it does not say a consensus.

Hassan Elbahtimy:

Yeah, the majority of states, I think it refers to that, yes.

Nabil Fahmy:

That specifically because when Dhanapala came to see me -

Hassan Elbahtimy:

He was President of the conference at time.

Nabil Fahmy:

-- and said can we find a compromise. And I said, if we say the truth we can. If we exaggerate the truth, we can't. And Jayantha is very smart. And he said, well, what do you mean? I said exactly what I'm saying. If you draft a resolution that conveys the truth, we'll vote. If you draft one that exaggerates the truth, we will not. He went and later came back, with a draft saying widespread majority or whatever the language was, which was fine with us and our decision was therefore going to be we were going to ask for a vote. And say that we're going to part it -- sorry that we would vote no again. When the Americans said but we want them both without a vote -- let me correct that. The original draft didn't have widespread majority. When the Americans said we want it without a vote, at that point, Dhanapala came to me, and said can you find a way to do this? And I said yes, if you're truthful rather than exaggerate the truth. So, the language therefore became "widespread majority." Now, I could let that pass without a vote. And then issue a statement saying, "oh, I'm not part of the widespread majority."

Hassan Elbahtimy:

Sure.

Nabil Fahmy:

So, I didn't take the political majority to stop the vote.

Hassan Elbahtimy:

Sure.

Nabil Fahmy:

Sorry, to start the vote. But Egypt did make a public statement.

Hassan Elbahtimy:
Clarifying your position.

Nabil Fahmy:
Acknowledging that we were not part of the "wide spread majority" we did read the statement.

Hassan Elbahtimy:
Yeah.

Nabil Fahmy:
Now, that being said, before we even got to that voting stage, under -- in room Four if I'm not mistaken it maybe another room but probably room four, when Albright got into this with "ours is without a vote and yours is with a vote", and said "I'm sorry it doesn't work that way. It's either both or nothing. The same thing." She was extremely angry. And I won't get into the details, I'll deal with that somewhere else, but ultimately, she said well, how can I possibly support a resolution that's says 'Israel'? Can we find a way to deal with that? And I said if it's a resolution by Egypt it's going to have Israel in it. Because it's the plain truth, there's no -- you have no criticism or any rhetorical language in there, it's just factual. If you don't want to use that language, you submit the resolution. She said, what? You want me to submit the resolution on the Middle East? I said, yeah, you and the depositaries. You can submit it officially, and then I can go along with it if I like the language. But I'm not going to submit a solution. Interestingly, what you saw in 2000 that there was reference to Israel. And the Americans accepted it in 2000 because they wanted us to pressure the Iraqis in 2000. So, they swallowed their pride. Anyway in '95, this is how the negotiations went and ultimately when they asked for a consensus on extension we said there has to be a consensus in the Middle East. They didn't imagine that they could get the two depositaries. Two other depositaries, to --

Hassan Elbahtimy:
To sponsor?

Nabil Fahmy:
-- to sponsor the direction the conference may take. They agreed to do it. And then they recrafted the resolution, putting in the zone of mass destruction --

Hassan Elbahtimy:
The WMD rather than the nuclear?

Nabil Fahmy:
-- rather than the nuclear and also leaving Israel's name out. And then it talked about practical steps towards blah, blah, blah. When they were both adopted it, was the clear understanding that this package was the three elements. It wasn't that they were treated unequally, these were the three elements. We could not have gotten the result without these three decisions on the extension, the declaration itself, and the resolution on the Middle East. Now we didn't get any legal promises but if the three depositors had their names on the resolution. Now we didn't get any legal promises but if the three depositors have their name on the resolution calling for practical steps --

Hassan Elbahtimy:
Towards the WMD.

Nabil Fahmy:

-- there should be some integrity behind that. And therefore, needless to say, we were very angry between '95 and 2000 when nothing really happened. And we didn't have the pressure, frankly of "well, there's no extension here, so you can't just sort of use that against us". And that's why we said, well, we block the conference. And I frankly told Abdallah, who was the Algerian here.

Hassan Elbahtimy:
Yes.

Nabil Fahmy:
I told him with all due respect in our friendship, I will block the conference.

Hassan Elbahtimy:
So, in 2000 what was your position at the time?

Nabil Fahmy:
I was Ambassador in Washington.

Hassan Elbahtimy:
In Washington.

Nabil Fahmy:
I was brought from Washington to New York.

Hassan Elbahtimy:
To New York, oh, okay. Yeah.

Nabil Fahmy:
And this agreement, by the way, was reached with the Americans before the conference started.

Hassan Elbahtimy:
The 2000 conference?

Nabil Fahmy:
The very beginning of the conference. So, anyway --

Hassan Elbahtimy:
What was --

Nabil Fahmy:
I'm sorry. So, the resolution announcing extension happened, both by without a vote. And Nabil Al Araby read a statement after the vote on the extension saying are not part of the overwhelming majority.

Hassan Elbahtimy:
What was coordination within the conference, within the NAM like?

Nabil Fahmy:
Very weak. It basically broke down in [inaudible].

Hassan Elbahtimy:

So, and in current Review Conferences and NPT meetings, there is a very strong like NAM presence in the sense that there are frequent meetings, a lot of working papers out of submissions, but that intensity was missing in the?

Nabil Fahmy:

It wasn't missing. It existed on the other issues in the committees. But on the Middle East issue, frankly we knew we were out doing all. And we also knew that we had the support on that. Nobody in NAM was going to challenge us on the Middle East since we weren't -- again the language was extremely professional. It had nothing to do with -- there was no preconceptions, no bad language from anybody. And it didn't actually ask if this was applied anywhere else in the world. So, it was --

Hassan Elbahtimy:

It would not step on anybody's toes?

Nabil Fahmy:

No, way. Absolutely no way. And they all appreciated that we had gone the long way. So, believe me we had the votes on that resolution very, very, easily. Even our own resolution, very, very, easily.

Hassan Elbahtimy:

Yeah. What was the coordination within the Arab group like?

Nabil Fahmy:

It was strong up until the resolution. There were three phases then, okay. The first was the draft to the solution, of the Arab resolution. And the coordination was complete, we had Nabil Elaraby chair our delegation, we had the Arab meetings and all that. When the Americans insisted that no you can't keep referring to Israel as the only non-NPT member but you also have to refer to the others who didn't have safeguard agreements. That infuriated some of the Arab countries. And we never got into a serious argument on that because again as the Americans became too greedy in trying to get an indefinite extension without the vote, we shifted to its either without a vote on both and if you can't do it on a resolution on Israel then you going to have to co-sponsor it. So, there was needless to say no reference to any Arab countries as well. But it was typically close up until the last negotiation, the last three, four days, it was just Egypt.

Hassan Elbahtimy:

Towards the very end of the conference the role that Egypt played looks from outside as paramount as very fundamental to the outcome. You said like, the meeting was suspended or adjourned till negotiations take place on the side. Was there anything of a similar nature happening on any other issue related to the NPT review?

Nabil Fahmy:

That's difficult for me to say for two reasons. First of all, as I said we were divided ourselves because of our commitment to disarmament we had serious people working on the different committees. I was focused on the extension issue and on the Middle East issue per say. All the different committees seemed to finish their work. So, and this is ironic, they actually never do, but in this conference, they all finished their work early on. So, the general sentiment was okay, things are moving forward. And the point you mentioned there had been some progress as part of the start progress. So, maybe you could find language to be used. Nobody was going to stand up and defend Iraq. But that time, again wasn't a big issue. I don't remember, the only two issues in my mind were indefinite or not indefinite, and in the Middle East issue.

Hassan Elbahtimy:

What was the relationship between the delegation and the presidency of the conference Ambassador Dhanapala?

Nabil Fahmy:

Excellent. Excellent, I mean I knew Dhanapala since Geneva 20 years ago. And we had developed -- we hadn't developed at the conference, before that. He knew that we negotiated in very small slices. That I wasn't going to go in there and make an issue out of something and give it up completely. And frankly he also knew that we never go into a conference with the objective of making it fail. So, literally most of the discussions initially were with the Americans, and the Russians, and the Brits. When we got closer to the issue of extension, he came and said "Nabil, how can we?", and I did not give him the language. He understood what was required and he drafted it. So, I think the sense of credibility that he had with us and vice versa I mean if it was somebody we didn't trust I would have thought [inaudible]. We didn't do that. And if he didn't trust us he wouldn't have sort of come and said "Well, how much do you need?" And then he walked away and did it. So, the consultations with him were close on the conference extension, not on the Middle East issue. Okay, so let's be careful here. The Middle East issue dealt directly with the Americans, and the Russians, and the Brits, and of course the Arab countries. But on the extension, it was with Dhanapala.

Hassan Elbahtimy:

What was Cairo's decision or position at the time when all this was taking place in New York?

Nabil Fahmy:

A lot of stories. First of all, as I said, we went there knowing exactly what was going to happen, in terms of if this is going to be extended whether with a vote or not. Whether that was indefinite or 25-years, we were going to vote no. Therefore, the issue was how much can we get out of this and how to make it worth my while not to vote. But we were voting no in either case. So, Cairo was following me day by day. Those who felt that -- who still felt that 25-years could have been an option or even could have been stopped, stopped feeling that. And needless to say, therefore became more frustrated with the tenacity of the conference. But it didn't make me more frustrated because I thought we had lost that earlier. But, Cairo was interesting as well. First of all, we were getting phone calls, I was either following Moussa or he was following Nabil Elaraby and myself every day. So, this was going on day after day. Furthermore, at different points in time Oussama tried to phone.

Hassan Elbahtimy:

Also, from the President's office.

Nabil Fahmy:

Yeah, to find out what was going on. And without getting into details, the Americans tried to pressure us by complaining to the President. Literally.

Hassan Elbahtimy:

That the delegation was being difficult?

Nabil Fahmy:

And it created the exact opposite effect. The exact opposite effect. And again, it shows you how little understanding they had of first of all how we worked, and also of the mentality of the work. We were not going to go out and make a fuss without getting clearance. Because at the end of the day the Foreign Ministry is a professional institution that up until that period especially, we knew our limits and our

capacity. And as I mentioned to you earlier, we had the President sign off on a 15-page memo on all the disarmament issues. So, he knew the track record and he knew when suddenly somebody complains, and remember he told me to complain. So, he wasn't surprised by any of this. So, in that sense, they underestimated our professionalism by thinking they could go around to the President and complaining. And secondly, they very much misunderstood Mubarak. If he's been briefed, the worst thing you can possibly do is go complain about somebody he's given instructions to. So, it had the exact opposite effect. And I told my American colleagues, that they came and told us of course that they had complained. And I said, "Thank you, you just made my day". And Mubarak never sent any instructions since. He actually told Moussa "Tell them to implement their instructions". And here the two people I was talking to, was Tom and Bob Einhorn and I remember saying, "Bob, you made my day". And Bob again is a consummate professional. He understood what I was saying because he had been with me at the ACRS Conference. So, he knew that again we're not what's the best word for this? I mean it's not like --

Hassan Elbahtimy:
Freelancing?

Nabil Fahmy:
-- we're not freelancing on the one hand, nor is the Egyptian negotiating style that where you sort of start at 2,000 and end up with 20. We don't do that. I mean that's like a good story on the side. Anyway, to cut a long story short, General Weizman the former the President of Israel, at one point, at one of the meetings, but mostly afterwards when I was with him, was anecdotally telling us the story of how difficult it was to negotiate with the Egyptians. Because they start from 100 and they end up with 100. They don't start with 200 and end up with 100. But then if you start with 200 the way the Israelis do, and then you end up with 100, 120, and you feel you've succeeded. Why do you guys keep saying the same thing over and over again? Not that we're smart negotiators, actually he said ask for more and then you can back off and then you can get what you want. And he was correct in this. He also said the problem is you have no sense of insecurity. You've been around as a country for so long so, that's the way you guys keep negotiating. And it's true. We had instructions and this was well prepared for and no matter how much pressure was put on Cairo or on us, it had absolutely no effect.

Hassan Elbahtimy:
And trying to reach out to Cairo and Mubarak, this happened during the last week of the conference I think?

Nabil Fahmy:
The last few days.

Hassan Elbahtimy:
Right. So, when the discussions on the --

Nabil Fahmy:
The indefinite extension and the resolution.

Hassan Elbahtimy:
-- on the extension and the resolution were in full gear?

Nabil Fahmy:
Well, at the beginning you don't call Mubarak.

Hassan Elbahtimy:
Sure.

Nabil Fahmy:
And frankly they didn't phone him -- they tried to form it but it they didn't pick up the phone. So, that was the end of that. But they were at least smart enough to understand you're not going to send this, send them a letter about the safeguard agreements, or the CTBT, or whatever.

Hassan Elbahtimy:
Sure, something that isn't --

Nabil Fahmy:
That's basically going to end it.

Hassan Elbahtimy:
Do you have any recollections of how the conference ended?

Nabil Fahmy:
What do you mean by how? I was there.

Hassan Elbahtimy:
Yeah. Like for Egypt, so, this is like a long conference, the last week specifically was a week where Egypt was so much part of the outcome. And then the conference ends with the President putting out that decision which was not opposed from the floor. And then Egypt making a statement. I mean did you by the end of that conference feel that given what you started with that this was what you wanted to achieve? Or was there a sense of achievement, accomplishment, or was there a sense of we could have done something differently?

Nabil Fahmy:
Great, great question. First of all, again at that closing session all three depositaries, there was actually as much attention, and media attention to the resolution in the Middle East as there was on the extension. This was not where the extension was done, and the Middle East was taken in different --

Hassan Elbahtimy:
Sure. It was all in the same package.

Nabil Fahmy:
It was all in the same package.

Hassan Elbahtimy:
Yes. So, there were three decisions and one resolution. So, one on the objectives and principles of the treaty regime, and another on the strengthening of the review process. And the third on the extension itself, and then the fourth on the resolution on the Middle East.

Nabil Fahmy:
So, that all happened in the same place. Therefore as much as I think a lot the developing countries were not comfortable with the indefinite extension, it was sort of a bitter pill for them to take. The western world -- not the western, the developed world were more happy about the indefinite extension. We ended up feeling we had

gotten something out of the conference. But I remember in our meetings after the conference, immediately, we had our own, as is always the case, our own delegation discussions. And there were some there who felt we had achieved a lot. My position and that of the Nabil Elaraby at the time, were no, let's be serious here. We did not achieve. We simply had a very bad hand to play and therefore we got something out of it. Because the extension was going to happen, either indefinite or 25-years, before we went to the conference. Therefore, it was how could you get something out of it. We did not have the capacity to block either of the two extensions. So, I remember both Nabil and myself were very clear in our assessment to Cairo that we got something out of a very difficult situation. And this is the first time, and this was true, that the three co-sponsors, not a regional state adopt a resolution. Furthermore, -- on the region -- furthermore, this was part of the package. And that's how it was taken. If you look at the statements made by the Arab states they all referred to this solution as well. So, it's part of what happened there.

No, we did not overplay and we did not look at this as a major success. The indefinite extension continued the asymmetry and made it open ended. That made it even much more problematic for us domestically because there was no promise on the Israeli side. And don't forget, somewhere in our Parliament's records there should be a statement by Kamal Hassan Ali when he was Foreign Minister on the ratification of --

Hassan Elbahtimy:
The NPT, yes.

Nabil Fahmy:
-- that if the Israelis got nukes, we would withdraw. And I'm not exactly sure where that statement is frankly.

Hassan Elbahtimy:
I might have it, I'm sure.

Nabil Fahmy:
Yeah. But that asymmetry was always a problem with us. So, no, we came out of the conference tired, not satisfied, but feeling that we had gone through a good battle. But we did not come out euphorically in any sense. Of course, we did counter some of the Western public statements that the NPT had been gloriously indefinitely extended, and that was a reflection on how great the treaty was, by underlying our positions as well. But you know we were tired. If we had expected more -- I mean you know it was a bizarre situation because going in we expected the extension. We never in our wildest imagination thought we could get the three depositors to adopt the position on the Middle East. That was not in our mind. What was in our mind was we were going to push an Arab resolution. But we also understood that this does not mean Israel is going to join tomorrow. Because we've had promises since the '80's and nothing has been done. So, it was a hard-fought battle. And don't forget, yet again, we're not anti-NPT. So, as bad as it is we just want to make it better.

Hassan Elbahtimy:
Right. Finally, did you have any -- did Egypt have any discussions with Israel after the conference?

Nabil Fahmy:
No.

Hassan Elbahtimy:
Or related to the outcome of the conference?

Nabil Fahmy:
Not seriously.

Hassan Elbahtimy:
Not seriously.

Nabil Fahmy:
Every now and then, yes.

Hassan Elbahtimy:
Yes.

Nabil Fahmy:
What small steps could be done but [inaudible].

Hassan Elbahtimy:
We started out talking about ACRS, how did that relate to the outcome of the NPT?

Nabil Fahmy:
It stopped before.

Hassan Elbahtimy:
It stopped before.

Nabil Fahmy:
It stopped before simply because -- look we kept ACRS going. Up to the point where it was clear for us that the Israelis were not going to do anything serious. It wasn't how much. They weren't going to do anything serious on the nuclear issue. But, at that point we told the Israelis, look I headed the ACRS delegation, I also headed our steering committee delegation. So, we told the Israelis, we will stop the other committees. You're not serious and these five committees are a package. So, the multilateral process was stopped. The minute we stop ACRS the others are going to stop as well.

Hassan Elbahtimy:
As well.

Nabil Fahmy:
All of that stopped before the NPT Conference. Or were dying down as a result of it. So, --

Hassan Elbahtimy:
I think there were a few perhaps track two meetings on the side? Yes?

Nabil Fahmy:
There are still some crazy factors going on now. And there's still I think the water thing occurring in[inaudible], but essentially the committee stopped working.

Hassan Elbahtimy:
Yeah, the official track has stopped.

Nabil Fahmy:

But look we understand disarmament is complicated. And it's mostly incremental. But, it's complicated tremendously, if you're serious. If you're not serious it's a waste of time. And that's the point where "Khalas, it becomes a waste of time". I mean speaking of ACRS by the way, we developed a conceptual paper something which would have been the foundation of a Middle Eastern OSCE.

Hassan Elbahtimy:

Yeah.

Nabil Fahmy:

And it stopped really on two points. The Israelis refused to have the word determination because they wouldn't accept that for the Palestinians. And then they refused to accept anything related to the nuclear. But in other words, we had tried all the different angles in ACRS to try to sort of soften in order to create some incentives. But once you decide that your counterpart is not serious, it's better not to negotiate.

Hassan Elbahtimy:

Right.

Nabil Fahmy:

Because then you are negotiating with yourself.

[end of transcript]