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Interview with Shlomo Brom

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Summary:

Shlomo Brom is a former Israeli military official. He represented the Israeli Defense Forces in the Israel delegation to ACRS.

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Shlomo Brom, Israel**Oral history interview conducted by Hanna Notte on Zoom on October 16, 2020****Hanna Notte**

Let's start with a broad question: What was your role in ACRS? How were you involved in the talks at the time? In what capacity?

Shlomo Brom

Well, at that time I was serving at the Israeli Defense Forces. I was a colonel. And when Israel has built its delegation for the ACRS talks, it was a combination of Foreign Ministry persons, the Ministry of Defense, and the IDF. And I was there representing the IDF.

Hanna Notte

And you participated in the process from the beginning to the end on the various plenaries and the meetings on the confidence building measure or?

Shlomo Brom

Not from the beginning. Only from '92. Because the ACRS process started right after the Geneva Convention, Madrid convention [meant: Madrid Conference], sorry. And at that time, I was not serving in the IDF in this capacity. I joined the organization that is responsible for political-military affairs in the IDF only in '92.

Hanna Notte

Okay. And what objectives did Israel pursue joining the ACRS process, going into the negotiations? What were the goals?

Shlomo Brom

Well, I would say there was a change, it was changing through process. When Israel just started the process, one has to understand that the Israeli government was pulled to this process unwillingly. It was actually, if you remember the time that was after the first Gulf War, and it was clear that now the United States is the only real superpower in the world. And, you know, Israel was dependent on the United States, I would say for 20 years, since '67. But at that stage, its dependence on the USA reached a peak. And Israel could not say no to the United States, when the United States really wished to do something. So when the Bush administration, well actually Secretary Baker, came with this idea of convening the meeting in Madrid and then deciding on the Madrid process, Israel had no choice but to jump in, but unwillingly. Namely, the main goal of Israel in the beginning of the process, is to prevent the process from damaging what was then perceived by the Government of Israel as the interests of Israel. And what Israel was mostly - and, you know, there were different parts of the process, there were the bilateral talks and the multilateral groups, and ACRS was only one of the multilateral groups - so within the multilateral groups, from the point of Israel, ACRS was the most threatening one. Because then the conception in the Israeli government was that, once we are starting to discuss this subject, we are getting on a slippery slope. And it will be very difficult to stop it. And, of course, the main concern was that the whole purpose of ACRS is to disarm Israel of its perceived nuclear capabilities.

Hanna Notte

Okay, thank you for that.

Shlomo Brom

And then, it changed. But we will discuss it.

Hanna Notte

Sure. That's great. You've mentioned the First Gulf War. Can you talk a little bit more broadly about what kind of global or regional events and developments fed into this process at the time?

Shlomo Brom

Mostly two of them. One of them was the First Gulf War. That was very meaningful from the point of view of Israel. Because it fragmented further the Arab world. And you know, the scenario that was always worrying Israel was a scenario in which the

important Arab states are cooperating against Israel. So fragmentation in the Arab world was very good for Israel. And it removed a very significant military force among the perceived enemies of Israel. And you know that Iraq under Saddam Hussein was perceived an enemy, and he [Saddam Hussein] actually, during the Gulf War, attacked Israel although Israel didn't participate in this war. And the military might of Iraq was very significant from the point of view of Israel because once Egypt was taken out of from the circle of hostility against Israel after the conclusion of a peace agreement with Egypt in 1980, then what was left as significant military Arab powers were Syria and Iraq. Once Iraq was taken out as a significant military power, it was very meaningful from the point of view of Israel. Its military edge in the Middle East only increased.

Hanna Notte

Yes.

Shlomo Brom

That was the first one, the Gulf War. And the second one was, of course, the collapse of the Eastern bloc of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact, etc., which were the main supporters of Israel's rivals in the Middle East. What happened in the Middle East, our perception was that every time a group of Arab states are posing threats to Israel, then there is a war, then we are defeating the Arabs, but then the Soviet Union with its allies is coming. And once again, they're building the military power of this states. It became at that time quite clear that the enemies of Israel lost their main supporters in the Eastern Block. The successor of the Soviet Union, namely the Russian Federation - is not capable of doing what the Soviet Union was doing, even if it will sustain its hostility to Israel - which actually it didn't, it became a friendly power from the point of view of Israel. So that was very significant.

Hanna Notte

Great.

Shlomo Brom

And of course, these two things, the global change in the balance between the superpowers and so on, and the Gulf War regional change, were fortifying each other from the point of view of Israel.

Hanna Notte

Great and just building on that: Can you talk a little bit about the role of the United States versus Russia in the ACRS process? Did Russia play a meaningful role as the co-gavel holder?

Shlomo Brom

Not at all. Not at all. It, I will use a very strong term - it played a pitiful role. Because nobody counted it. And what was very typical - from my point of view it was quite revolting - was that the traditional clients of the Soviet Union were the worst when it concerned the attitude towards the Russians.

Hanna Notte

Right.

Shlomo Brom

So, you know, on the face of it, the whole Madrid process was supposed to be managed together. By the United States and the Russian Federation at that time. So in each group, they were two co-chairs - one American and the other one Russian. But nobody paid any attention to the Russian one. They were simply transparent.

Hanna Notte

Right. Right. And, and from what I understand, at the beginning of the multilateral track, the Steering Committee was set up, which did not just include the US and Russia, but also some others. Can you talk a little bit about the role and the mandate of that Steering Committee?

Shlomo Brom

Well, my impression was that when it concerned ACRS - and that's the subject that I'm more familiar with - it was not really significant, or usually they were getting reports concerning what has happened in ACRS. And then they were including it in

the report of the steering committee. But I don't remember even one case during the time that I was part of ACRS, that - we got information (because I didn't participate in the meetings of the Steering Committee), I was not senior enough at this stage - that the Steering Committee decided so and so, and we have to do something different.

Hanna Notte

Okay, great. And this choice to construct these five multilateral working groups on the five issues that we know of - Do you recall how that came about? And was there consensus?

Shlomo Brom

That happened before my time.

Hanna Notte

Okay.

Shlomo Brom

So I can tell you what I was told.

Hanna Notte

Yes.

Shlomo Brom

And at the time, I was told that that was already decided in the Madrid Conference. During the talks in Madrid, that was part of the proceedings of the meetings in Madrid and the decisions that were taken there.

Hanna Notte

Okay. Can you talk a little bit about how Israel saw the relationship between the bilateral track and the multilateral track proceeding after the Madrid Conference?

Shlomo Brom

Well, actually, Israel tried to disconnect the two. And that is the change that happened. I said that the Israeli approach changed. So in the beginning, there was mostly concern. But very quickly, we learned that we can have some benefits from the multilateral tracks, because the attention was aimed mostly at the bilateral talks. You should remember that when it started, we had a right-wing government, the Shamir government. And he was the one that was pulled unwillingly to the process. And he was a person that didn't believe in peace with Arab states and didn't think that it is important. You should remember that even in the right wing, there are of course different categories. There are some that are more moderate and some that are more radical - he was one of the radicals. He was one of the Likud party members that voted in the Knesset against peace with Egypt in 1980. So he had a history, he was not interested in these talks.

But where it concerns the multilateral talks, we thought that they have advantage, which actually reminds me a little bit of what is now happening with these agreements with the United Emirates and Bahrain. That was perceived as a way to jump over the Palestinians, to the Arab world, and form relationships and cooperation on different issues with the Arab world. And they actually jumped over the Palestinians and also over the Syrians who were not participating. They were still formally at war with Israel, right? So that was the advantage that we thought we could derive from these talks. And there was another thing that we learned through the talks. When you enter this kind of talks, and you're an Israeli, with the history of hostile relations with the Arab world, your first perception is that once you start the talks in one of these groups, you will face a situation of one against all. Namely, Israel will be alone against all the Arab participants. But once we started the talks, we learned that the reality is different. That there are different interests in the Arab world, that actually different coalitions can be formed, that we can form a coalition with some Arab states, for example, against the Egyptians.

Hanna Notte

Can I ask you on this: did this impression come up quite early for you in the process, or rather towards the end? This impression that you just described?

Shlomo Brom

Quite early there were some things that became very clear. One of them was that

actually, many of the Arab actors hold a grudge against Egypt. And why do they hold a grudge against Egypt? Because you should remember that at that time, Egypt was perceiving itself still as the leader of the Arab world. So it was perceiving itself as the one that is taking the decisions. And the other Arab states must follow it. And they didn't like it. Because they have their own interests. So it was quite clear from the beginning that we can exploit it. We can form this coalition with the Jordanians, some Gulfis, some North African states. And by the way, that was one of the paradoxes of the ACRS that, with Egypt, we had the formal peace agreement. But Egypt was our main adversary in this group. So that was the name of the game: How do you outmaneuver Egypt?

Hanna Notte

And returning to the others, you just mentioned Jordan, the Gulfis, the North Africans. Were there some countries with which you felt that Israel had a particular convergence of interest over time?

Shlomo Brom

When I said the Gulfis I didn't mean, at that time, Saudi Arabia.

Hanna Notte

Sure. Okay.

Shlomo Brom

Saudi Arabia was very hostile. Even during the talks, I referred to the smaller Gulf states.

Hanna Notte

Okay.

Shlomo Brom

To the Emirates, to Oman, to Qatar, and with the delegations of these states, we could form understanding easily, easily. Because a second thing that we started to understand, quite at an early stage, was that each one of these states is looking for prestige. It's looking for a role. If you can find a role for them, then you secure their cooperation with you. And one of the things that we have done within ACRS was that we started to form different roles. And we talked about the regional security system and we took the example of the OSCE, before the it was the CSCE. We saw that there are different functions within this organization. Different centers, for example, the center in Vienna etc, and if you are building the same thing and you tell the Omanis, for example, we'll support you, we'll support you if you wish to have a center in Oman.

Hanna Notte

Sure, yes.

Shlomo Brom

And the Jordanians and others. That was one of the ways of building coalitions.

Hanna Notte

Great, I actually have a set of questions building on what you just said. So, it was really during the first plenaries, when I look at the record, that it seems that this educational approach was taken, that outside experts were brought in to talk about the experience of confidence building measures during the Cold War and in Europe. Can you talk a little bit about that? Was that useful? Was it meaningful?

Shlomo Brom

Actually, that was one of the Israeli ways for gaining time. You know, we wanted - in ACRS, I'm not talking about the other groups - Israel wanted to push to a later stage as much as possible, the real discussions mostly on the nuclear issue. And one of the ways was by building this educational process. So actually, you know, that you have in this type of negotiations, you use sorts of different tricks and so on. You are not completely open. One of our tricks was pretending that we are ignorant. That we don't know anything about arms control and regional security. What are you talking about? So we have to learn first. In our case, we were only pretending. With most of the Arab delegations, that was real. So it worked.

Hanna Notte

Yes. And even though you had this educational approach at the beginning, which meant outside experts coming in talking, was there still significant interaction between the original delegations themselves? Or did that, you know, start at a later point?

Shlomo Brom

You are sitting together at some remote place. And you are eating together. And you are having discussions. So you form human relationships, you know. Unless there is a case in which one of the sides, because of its principles, behaves differently. And the only one that I can remember were the Saudis. All the others were quite open and friendly, you could have discussions, form personal relationships.

Hanna Notte

The Saudis kept to themselves a little more?

Shlomo Brom

They kept at a distance, when it concerned the Israelis. And the way the Saudis are - similar to the way I talked about the Egyptians - it was quite easy also to turn the other Arab delegations against the Saudis. Because the Saudis were - I forgot the English name for this - they were thinking themselves better than the others, also when it concerned the other Arabs. Because, you know, they control the sacred site for the Muslim world. I mean, so they are the leaders of the Muslim world and the Arab world, in the religious sense, and they have a lot of money, etc. They are better than everyone else. It's funny because, you know, I as a military man, I didn't have real experience in negotiations. So it was all on-the-job training. And then, we learned it through the process, you are learning how to form relationships and to build coalitions and to maneuver the other or manipulate the other. Those are all tools of the game. And so we learned how important it is to learn the relationships within the other camp, from the point of view of all the Arabs.

Hanna Notte

Interesting, can I just ask for my own understanding: So, as a military man being on the Israeli delegation, were you mostly interacting with your military counterparts in the other delegations?

Shlomo Brom

With the military counterparts, but not only with the military.

Hanna Notte

Not only. Yes.

Shlomo Brom

Because, you know, it depends once again on the nature of the system on the other side. So in Israel, there is a lot of trust between, you know, the military leadership and the professional leadership in the Foreign Ministry and the Ministry of Defense. So because there is a lot of trust, then they give you also a lot of autonomy. So when we reached the different subjects that were discussed, then we divided it into two baskets. And one basket was the more military one. And actually, I was given this basket. They told me: deal with it, with your counterparts. And in other states, it was different. And the classical case is Egypt. Egypt, that is a paradox, basically, Egypt is a military dictatorship. That is now, and that was then, at the time of Sadat, and at the ACRS time that was already the time of Mubarak. But what happens in this kind of military dictatorships, once the general becomes the leader, he knows that his main threat is the military. So he keeps them on a very short leash. And that was the case. The Egyptian generals, the Colonels that were there, were very strictly controlled by the civilian element of the delegation. They didn't have the liberty to do anything.

Hanna Notte

Interesting. Okay. Nonetheless, you got to an agreement on confidence building measures in the military or the operational basket at some point. Now, I imagine that you were intimately involved in that. Can you describe how that agreement came about? Was it difficult?

Shlomo Brom

Once we decided that we are going to have these two baskets - one of them included the military-security elements, and the other one was the

Conceptual. The nuclear. To be more accurate, the weapons of mass destruction element. And I was given, in our delegation, this operational basket. And then there were decisions that there will be separate meetings, in each basket. And they are doing their walk. And then, once a period of time, there is also a plenary meeting, that is getting reports from the two groups - the conceptual one, I think the WMD one was called conceptual - and in the operational basket, that's what we discussed, we discussed the regional security framework, very similar actually to the OSCE, because that was our model. So we took the protocols of the CSCE, you know, the Helsinki and what was the other one? There was another version, Stockholm, I don't remember now. And we went through the different elements and checked whether they can fit our region and what should be the modifications that we should put in. And this way, we actually succeeded in concluding a very nice series of confidence building measures.

Hanna Notte

And if I look at my notes on the record, the split between the two baskets, the operational and the conceptual, didn't happen until the fourth plenary, which was in Moscow in November 1993. Do you recall who suggested that split and why at the time?

Shlomo Brom

I mean, it wasn't, I wasn't part of ACRS from the beginning. It was decided later on. I don't remember. Most probably it was an Israeli initiative, but I don't remember.

Hanna Notte

Okay, I'll ask some of your diplomat colleagues who were on the delegation.

Shlomo Brom

I don't know, are you going also to interview Eli Levite?

Hanna Notte

Yes. I've been exchanging emails with him this morning.

Shlomo Brom

He was in the process from the beginning. Probably he knows.

Hanna Notte

Okay, I will ask him. Thank you. We've talked a little bit about the Gulf states already. I want to ask you about the significance of moving the plenary to Doha later on in the process. And I understand it was also one of the first times that an Israeli official delegation went to the Gulf. Were you in Doha? How did you perceive the event and the significance of being in Doha?

Shlomo Brom

I was in Doha, yes. Well from our point of view - for me personally, but also the other Israelis, that was my feeling - it was very exciting. The idea that we are flying to Egypt - because, of course, you cannot fly directly to Doha - we are flying to Egypt and then we are boarding an airliner (I'm trying to remember what airline it was, whether it was Qatari airlines or one of the other Gulfi airlines, I don't think it was Qatar airlines, it was another Gulfi airline) and flying to Doha, flying above Saudi Arabia, which we have never done, and eventually landing in Qatar, and having the talks and the meetings there in Doha. So it was a one-of-its-kind event from our point of view. Pioneering event.

Hanna Notte

Did you feel that was also reflected in the attitude of some of the Arab delegations towards you?

Shlomo Brom

Well, I would say, you know, the attitudes that I described earlier, when I said that most of the delegations were friendly. It was from the beginning of my participation. As I said, I didn't participate in the first meeting because I joined only in '92. Now, I don't remember exactly when in '92, when I moved to this position. They were friendly from the beginning, the only ones that we had problems with them were the Saudis and the Egyptians. But in the case of the Egyptians, it was not a problem of personal friendliness. You could talk with everyone, you could form relationships. It

was a matter of policy of Egypt. We didn't like their policy, they didn't like our policy and we perceived each other as adversaries in this group. But they were also friendly, personally. Only the Saudis were not. So that was the case also in Doha.

Hanna Notte

Interesting. And coming back to Egypt, towards the end of ACRS you also had, if you recall, the anticipation of the 1995 NPT Review Conference, and lot of tension. Can you talk a little bit about how that played into the multilaterals? And the ACRS talk?

Shlomo Brom

I don't think that I can because, as I said, most of my work was dedicated to the operational basket. And there, it didn't have real influence. So that's one of the specific subjects you should talk with Eli.

Hanna Notte

Okay, I will do that.

Shlomo Brom

You know that formally our delegation was headed by two persons because, also in our system, there's always rivalry between the Foreign Ministry and the Defense Ministry. So we had a person from the Defense Ministry, which was David Ivry - at that time, at the beginning, he was the Director General of the Ministry of Defense and then moved to the position of senior advisor of the minister of defence. And we had the foreign minister head, I forgot his name now. But you know, we saw the guy from the Foreign Ministry only in the steering committee meetings in Israel. The senior person that actually participated in the talks was a retired diplomat.

Hanna Notte

Oh, interesting. Okay.

Shlomo Brom

We also had Israeli steering committee meetings. We never saw him in the talks. Actually the guy that managed the talks in ACRS was David Ivry. The Ministry of Defense guy. And his right hand, namely the guy that did much of the work, was Eli Levite. So, he is a very rich source of information for all these kind of questions.

Hanna Notte

Great. Okay - just a follow up on what you just said: So you had a steering committee, even internally in Israel? And after each plenary, and each meeting in ACRS, you would go back home and discuss the progress and next steps?

Shlomo Brom

Of course. And also, everything was brought to our political masters. Eventually, the Minister of Defense, the Foreign Minister, the Prime Minister, they gave us instructions how to proceed.

Hanna Notte

And in the operational meetings in which you participated, which were the most active delegations and participants, was it mostly the Egyptians and you? Or were some of the others also fairly active?

Shlomo Brom

Oh no, the Egyptians and us were the most active, almost the only active, in the conceptual basket. Because the nuclear issue was the main from the point of view of the Egyptians. In the operational basket case, it was different. I think those that were the most active were the more educated ones on issues of arms control. And there were three of them: The Egyptians, the Israelis and the Jordanians. For the others, it was a completely new subject. So they were more involved only when it concerned their own interests, their own particular interests. As I told you, when the Omanis wanted a center, an organization that was supposed to be built in the framework of regional security of that regime, to be based in - what is the name of the capital of Oman?

Hanna Notte

Muscat.

Shlomo Brom

Muscat, yes. Then they were very involved.

Hanna Notte

Okay.

Shlomo Brom

And when it concerned the other issues, they were following these three actors.

Hanna Notte

Great. I want to ask you a slightly different question: Now, if we look at, you know, regional security from today's point of view, it seems that some problematic countries were of course missing in the process at the time, for understandable reasons. Syria and Lebanon did not want to join the multilaterals. And then, of course, Iraq, Iran was also missing. Now, the absence of these players, how did that affect the process from your point of view?

Shlomo Brom

Paradoxically, it made it easier, because I assume that if these kinds of players had been there, reaching a consensus on the subject of this CSBMs we reached a consensus on would have been much more difficult. But you know, the fact that none, almost none of our agreements in the operational group was eventually realized was not because these parties were not participants. There were other two reasons: One of them is of course the connection between the operational basket and the conceptual basket. Once the talks during the conceptual basket collapsed, because there was no ability to reach a final agreed draft - you know, there was the basic paper...

Hanna Notte

Yes.

Shlomo Brom

Then it was not possible also to implement the understanding and agreements in the operational basket, because especially the Egyptians were not willing to do it. Although we started implementing some steps. Everything collapsed, that was one reason, the connection between the two baskets. And the other reason, in my opinion, although I know that there is some debate about it, is the connection between what is happening in the bilateral tracks and the multilateral tracks. Once it's not going well in the bilateral tracks, then of course it's affecting also the multilateral tracks.

Hanna Notte

So which of these two versions do you think represent reality more accurately? Why did ACRS collapse? Was it more because...

Shlomo Brom

Because of the two things and if you ask me, what is the strongest reason? Then I agree, the stronger reason is that we couldn't reach an agreement on the establishment of a WMD free zone in the Middle East. The principles in these papers. And that caused the Egyptians to stop the process and at that stage as I said, they were still perceived the leaders of the Arab world. So the others followed suit.

Hanna Notte

Okay. I wanted to ask you on this, this dispute with the Egyptians about the inclusion of the nuclear issue or the sequencing in that regard - was that problematic throughout? Or did it change over time? I mean, were there times in ACRS when you recall, you thought that maybe an agreement or coming to terms is possible?

Shlomo Brom

The time that I was operating in this group, my feeling was that in this group, we are making continuous progress. I don't remember ups and downs in this group. In this basket [refers to the operational basket]. Because we are doing a very methodical work, taking each item. If it's, you know, sharing of information, if it is preventing incidents at sea, etc., all these items. And we were taking each one of them, working on it, until we reached an agreement. There was progress all the time.

Hanna Notte

In the conceptual basket not so much?

Shlomo Brom

No way. If you ask me my personal feeling, most of the problem that I had and you can say that there were ups and downs, was with my people. That's one of the things that I learned during these years of negotiations, and I participated also in the bilateral negotiations, at the same time - I learned that when you are part of a delegation in the negotiation, you are actually managing two negotiations parallelly. One of them is with the other side, the other is with your own people, with your bosses, your superiors, because when you are in the negotiations, then you know very well the subject, better than the other people on your side, and you have a better feeling, what is practical, what can be achieved, what cannot be achieved, so you want to make progress accordingly. Of course, if your assumption is that it serves your purposes, the purposes of your state, the interests of your state. So, you want to make proper progress accordingly, according to your understanding of the situation, to your understanding of the other parties. Then you go back to Tel Aviv - in the case of ACRS it's always Tel Aviv not Jerusalem. Because the Ministry of Defense is based in the Tel Aviv, not in Jerusalem. The only, I think, government ministry. And you go back to Tel Aviv. And you meet your own people and they of course have, naturally, different thinking. So you have to negotiate with them. So, there I had the problems.

I had less problems with the other side in these talks, in most of the cases. And I can give you another example, which is a daily problem with my people, because I come from the IDF, from the Israeli Defense Force. You know that in the military force, there is always a perception that you have to keep everything secret. So coming back to the IDF and say: I want to have an agreement on CSBM, which means that we share military information with the other side, it is extremely difficult for the people in the military, that are not part of the negotiation, to accept it. Why should we do it? Because everything in the military is secret. And then you use manipulation, exactly as with the other party. You know, that in a military force, in every military service, there is a part of the organization that is responsible for keeping the secrets of the organization, internal security people.

Hanna Notte

Sure.

Shlomo Brom

So after I had some of these problems, then an idea popped up in my mind, which is, the best way to ensure cooperation with him [someone in the IDF skeptical on the CSBMs] is to create interest, personal interest in the process. So I added the guy that was the director of this department to the delegation. I said, come with us, participate in the talks, then you will understand that it's not so problematic. And it worked like magic.

Hanna Notte

It worked like magic? Okay. So by the point you got an agreement on the confidence building measures, some of the concerns on the Israeli side internally, that you just described, had been mitigated over time?

Shlomo Brom

Yes.

Hanna Notte

Very interesting. Great. I have a few final broader questions.

Shlomo Brom

By the way. It worked so well, a few years after that, the same guy that I'm talking about, retired from the military. And then he joined the Ministry of Defense to deal with this subject, arms control and regional security, because he fell in love with the subject.

Hanna Notte

Are you able to say who that was, that individual?

Shlomo Brom

His name was, his first name, Rami and his family name Yungman. That means a young man in German.

Hanna Notte

Okay, great. If you think back to all this time now, what to you were the biggest successes and the biggest failures of the ACRS process?

Shlomo Brom

There are direct successes, and the direct success was of course the ability to conclude this kind of agreements, some CSBMs. And the conclusion of all that was that it is completely possible to put in place, to implement these kind of steps, once the political background, the political environment is right. At that time it was not right. So we couldn't do it. But once it is right, from the point of view of the professional men, the military men, the professional officials, that's all quite possible. I think it's a really nice achievement. The second achievement is that we all went through an educational process. So instead, on the Israeli side, we were quite familiar with the subject of arms control and so on, we read all the papers. But that is only part of the education that you need. The other part of the education is to understand the other parties. To know, what is possible, what is not possible. How to work with them. Etc. So, we succeeded. We gained this knowledge, we went through this educational process. And indirectly also, the whole system that we are part of it, went through the educational process, because as we said, each time we returned to the [Israeli] steering committee, we educated also the others so it spread a little bit in the Israeli system.

Shlomo Brom

And that, even if the talks in this conceptual basket collapsed, I think that much was achieved also there. Because practically, and you will hear about it from Eli, there were a number of papers that were concluded. You know, the threat perception paper, the definition of what is the region, that is also important when you talk about negotiation, agreements, who should be included in this agreement. It was agreed. And even the fundamental paper that I talked about, was almost agreed. As far as I remember, the problem was with one word, that the two sides couldn't agree on. So those are the direct achievements.

Hanna Notte

Okay.

Shlomo Brom

The indirect achievement was exactly what we talked earlier, the relationship we formed with the people. And one of these relationships actually benefited us in a very short term, because at some stage in the process, we started peace negotiations with Jordan. Who were our partners on the Jordanian side? The same generals that were in ACRS. So, and not only generals, also the civilians, for example the head of the Jordanian delegation was --- Mr. Toukan. I know the person so well, we are friends, and I forget his name, Abdullah Toukan. And we forged a relationship with Abdullah Toukan, we became friends with all these people, the generals, and so on. Until this day. We meet them from time to time. And when we came to the peace negotiations, we were all familiar with each other, on good terms with each other. It's, in my opinion, it shortened the negotiations substantially. And there was also mutual trust between us, which is very important, because at least I personally learned from the beginning - you know, I talked a lot about manipulations and maneuvering the other party and so on, because I wanted to be honest with you. But you have to do all these things honestly. Which means not to lie. Not to lie. Okay, you can a little bit maneuver and so on, but not lie to the other side. And if you promise him something, keep your promise. And by that, you create mutual trust. And that is very important for the next stages.

Hanna Notte

Great, and the failures of the process?

Shlomo Brom

The failure was the fact that we, eventually, we didn't achieve anything substantial. One of the reasons was actually that, you know, in the operational basket, we succeeded in reaching this agreement, on CSBMs. But then we started to talk about the implementation of the agreement. There were parties very persistent on one provision, and the provision was that we will agree, that the implementation is

voluntary, is not mandatory. Namely, each party that wants to join in will do it. We agreed on the text. But the agreement was that, okay, if the parties will decide on a regional security regime, that should be the form of it. But that doesn't mean that we agree on a regional security regime, because that is a political decision. And everyone has to decide voluntarily, whether they join or not. So from the beginning, this agreement was not mandatory. And, of course, when the politics were not ripe, because of the nuclear issues, because of the problems in the bilateral tracks, everything collapsed, that's the big failure.

Hanna Notte

Could anything have been done differently to make this political climate more ripe? I realize it's a difficult question to ask. But also, if we want to think in terms of lessons learned from acres and what we can take, you know, from this process, 30 years later in a much changed region...

Shlomo Brom

My lesson from that was - and I think I wrote on it in the past in different papers in a project that I participated in - was that we should not let the parties to this kind of project escape from commitment so easily. Namely, from the beginning, we should decide that if we agree on something it's mandatory. For this group, not for others, because of course, we understood that there are quite important significant Middle Eastern parties that are not participating in the process, as we said earlier in this talk. And so, I remember that, you know, after ACRS, and also after my retirement, I started to participate in the world of Track Two. We continued discussing this subject. And then my position was always: we have to be serious. We have to understand that if we agree on something, we should commit. The parties that participated in these negotiations, if they're not willing to do it then of course the talks themselves are problematic. Not leave us with the feeling that we achieved a lot and then... as if it is nothing. So that is one conclusion.

The other conclusion is of course, that we should make the process as comprehensive as possible. I say that there were other parties that could participate in the group even in this stage. For example, I have the feeling that Libya could participate. Libya was not invited at all because Libya under Gaddafi was a pariah state. Gaddafi was crazy enough to let his people come, if he was invited, etc. So we should make it a more inclusive process. Not a process, you know, an American process. Which includes only the players that the Americans like. Other than that, I think that this group was managed very well. You know, we didn't talk about other elements of its management, for example, in the operational baskets, there were different...

Hanna Notte

Sub-groups?

Shlomo Brom

...tracks on the different sub-subjects that we had discussions on. Now, at an early stage, we agreed that at every subject sub-group there will be a third party that will be responsible for this subject. For example, the Turks, which were also considered a third party, did one subject. The Canadians and others, the Dutch, etc. That, I think, was very wise way to make the discussions effective. And reach the conclusions that they reached. So, it worked very well. This project in itself. The reasons for its failure were external ones, not the internal ones.

Hanna Notte

Yes, understood. Great. We've gone slightly over an hour, I'll ask you at the end, is there anything important regarding ACRS that I have failed to ask you about, or that you should mention, or that you would wish to talk about?

Shlomo Brom

The first one I mentioned, in the last couple of minutes, meaning the way that these talks were managed. And I think that another decision that was useful was our decision not to make the talks in the same place, but each time in another place. So that was also a tool to make parties more comfortable with these talks, because they had the chance to host it - some talks in Turkey, some talks in Tunisia. That was also a useful lesson. Because one of the important things in these talks, I mean, negotiations in general, is also that when the asymmetry between the parties to the

talks is very extreme, it makes the talks very difficult. That I learned also from my experience with the Palestinians. The asymmetry between Israel and the Palestinians is huge. And I think that in ACRS, we tried to give the other parties the feeling that they are equal. Everyone is equal. And as I said, that works very well for our purpose, forming coalitions. Because the Gulfis and the North Africans didn't think that the Egyptians and the Saudis considered them equal.

Hanna Notte

Okay. Yes. Thank you so much.

[End of transcript]