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Interview with Robert Gallucci

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Summary:

Ambassador Robert Gallucci is a former US diplomat. He served as a member of the US delegation to ACRS.

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Transcript - English

Robert Gallucci, United States**Oral history interview conducted by Miles Pomper on Zoom on October 5, 2020****Miles Pomper**

So we have some, a couple of formalities, if you could give your full name at the beginning.

Robert Gallucci

Robert L. Gallucci.

Miles Pomper

Great. Maybe you could talk about what period you were involved in the ACRS process and what got you into it and your role and so on?

Robert Gallucci

Here's how I recollect it, which may or may not be accurate. I had been in a previous assignment before coming to Washington. I was the deputy executive chairman of the UN Special commission charged with the disarmament of Iraq after the first Gulf War. And my recollection is that around February of 1992, Larry Eagleburger telephoned me and invited me back to the department, which is something I wanted to do, and to work for him as the coordinator for nuclear reactor safety assistance to the former Soviet Union is how I recollect the title. And oh, that's what I started to do. And that evolved into in a matter of hours, literally hours, Larry had me meet with Jim Baker and who was Secretary of State, and between Eagleburger and Baker, they described their concern about Russian scientists disappearing from the former Soviet Union going someplace else on earth that we would not like, typically places that have, from our perspective, far too much sand. And I was invited to create a science center.

Well, I said, hmm, what's a science center? And they both look back at me as though everybody knows what a science center is. I said, I really don't. And they said, well, Baker said I've used it the phrase in a speech I gave that we ought to have a science center. I said, well, then, Mr. Secretary, you must know what one is then, he said "no, the person who wrote the speech would know go see Dennis." So he literally sent me to see Dennis Ross, and I went to see Dennis Ross. This has nothing to do with ACRS, by the way, but I'm warming up. So Dennis described what the science center was in his mind, and there were no, none on Earth. But it would be a place that would employ former weapons scientists. Weapons as in WMD. They were thinking nuclear weapons, principally, but they were also thinking BW, CW. They were, they were, I don't know that anybody was thinking as far as whether they wanted to include ballistic missiles. But there was certainly BW, BW and nuclear weapons principally. So I was invited to go and figure out what one would look like, who would participate and how we'd make that work. And so in the midst of my tasking, and all this,

Miles Pomper

This is what became ISTC?

Robert Gallucci

Became ISTC. And also, there was another one in Ukraine, in Kiev. Or Kieve or however we're pronouncing it these days. Anyway. Larry, at some point in all this, said he was going to make me an Assistant Secretary of State and I said, well, that, that's kind of funny since when I last was in this building, I was an office director. I said, that's a good move up. I'll take that. I said, but you know, I, I had a political appointment from the Carter administration. My guess is that's not going to work so well for you. He said, 'Well, I'm glad you told me that, Gallucci, but I don't need you to tell anybody else that.' Nobody noticed. Well okay. Anyway, so I was, the relevance here. I think, if there is any to, to your concern is that I think the first plenary was in May.

Miles Pomper

So just to be clear. You're the assistant secretary for political military affairs?

Robert Gallucci

I would, that's what I was about to become. I was not when the first ACRS took place.

Miles Pomper

Okay.

Robert Gallucci

Dick Clarke was in that role. But by the time I got to, which I think was the summer of '92, by the time I was confirmed as an assistant secretary, I went into the office and tried to figure out what I needed to do. One of the things they told me I needed to do was ACRS. And I actually hadn't copied on, I mean, I was not involved in Middle East Peace or the Madrid process or anything. So ACRS was unknown to me. Even the acronym was unknown to me. But they said the next plenary was in Moscow, and a very nice man, was going to be the co-chair with me. The Russian, and whose name I'm blanking on. It begins with a B, do you know the, can you refresh me?

Miles Pomper

I'm sure, Chen and other people know it, but I'm afraid I don't.

Robert Gallucci

Anyway. So I said, 'Sure, that would be a great thing to do.' The players who would actually show up in Moscow for the plenary in terms of the regional players - I mean, there were regional, there were extra-regional players. And then of course, there were our 2, our groups. My right-hand man, the guy who, you know, I was a talking dummy pretty much, but the person who seemed to know what's going on was Bob Einhorn.

Miles Pomper

Sure.

Robert Gallucci

And he also has an unnatural ability when it comes to multilateral diplomacy. I have avoided - and still, this age in my life - almost entirely avoided multilateral diplomacy. And whenever I become involved in it, it hasn't gone well. I, bilateral I've done a lot of and negotiations but multilateral, not. Einhorn does know his way around a multilateral setting and he was, from my perspective, just everywhere at all times when we actually showed up in, in Moscow. So that's how I got there. And it's not a pretty story, but it's the way we do things in the United States of America.

Miles Pomper

And how long were you? You know, what was your period of sort of being involved with this?

Robert Gallucci

Probably three days, I mean I'm trying to remember how long the conference was, two days or three days wasn't very long. And I, to the best of my recollection, was not engaged in it again, because by the time the third plenary was coming around, I was almost full time on North Korea. Not entirely, but I had been tagged to do the, engage with North Koreans in bilateral discussions. And I wasn't trying to figure it out, I knew that the North was the one on the top, but I wasn't it wasn't, I'm not an Northeast Asian expert. So I, nor am I a middle east expert. So I peeled off most of the other responsibilities of the Assistant Secretary except those that I, I couldn't peel off from, and peeling off from ACRS was an easy call for me because I saw this as an exercise, long term exercise, and absent political success, progress on the ground was going to go nowhere. And I - no offense to anybody who may be listening or eventually listening to this - but the Israeli view was, seemed to me to be almost guaranteeing that if nothing else was, I mean, that personalities we haven't gotten into it yet. But the two personalities were David Ivry. And then the Egyptian ambassador, Nabil Fahmy. Fahmy was, took on kinda the spokesperson for everybody else. And David. I don't know if you know Ivry but he's not a diplomat. It is a fair sentence, just as, just as Fahmy clearly is a diplomat, David was not. Or I don't think he would mind me saying that, in fact, he'd insist on it would be my guess.

Miles Pomper

And so what was the dynamic between the two of them?

Robert Gallucci

Well, the, what dynamic of a whole show in Moscow, was that my co-chair and I sat at the elevated (inaudible) and we looked out over the - I forgot how many Middle East delegations were there. There were, of course, those who didn't participate in Madrid who were not there. And then there are some we didn't want there. Some who didn't want to be there, but there were a lot of delegations. They were below ministers. I guess, Assistant Secretary, that's what we were, the Russian and myself level. And, the I think, I mean, there were a number of things going on. One was, could the Israelis be moved to say anything? Other than we will not be the first to introduce nuclear weapons into the Middle East. And could we get anything out of Israel? Because Fahmy and his colleagues, were very interested in having Israel, adhere to the nuclear nonproliferation treaty. And that was, didn't seem to me a realistic expectation or hope, anytime soon, but that was one bit of business, you know, what would the Israelis ultimately say about nuclear weapons?

A second bit of business was, what would the next meeting look like? And where was this ACRS roadshow going? What would happen if well, it was going to the region at some point. It was going to move its venue. But who was, who was going to do what? What kind of confidence and security building measures would be discussed in what areas, and who would take the lead? There was a very capable and active Jordanian who was like a science advisor, right my recollection, to the king. And there were some other notable personalities who seem quite talented to me. Fahmy is a, you know, is a virtual genius and multilateral diplomacy, I have great respect for him. And affection, too. I would, I would add. So going back to the first, there was, there were moments when I thought things were going quite badly in terms of engaging these realities. I mean, this was one of the first, if not the first time, this was a direct engagement in a diplomatic setting like this, between the Israelis and their Arab colleagues. And so this was historical. And some of the comments made by one or more delegate and I, and I don't know that I'm terribly comfortable in naming names, even if I could remember them.

But it was a representative from a Gulf state, I believe was a bit harsh in the statements made about Israel's posture of security in the Middle East. And it was a, it appeared as though the Israeli delegation was going to walk out. And, again, my recollection is that Bob Einhorn leapt from his chair and headed them off, and ultimately talked them back into the room. That was just one example of Bob, demonstrating his skill at diplomacy and making clear that this was, you know, this is within zone, the comments were kinds of things that are set up multilateral meetings. They're not formal. It's not, it's not a formal record, and all that so that one can still continue to operate. In any case, the high point of that meeting in substance, to me was came to my recollection on the second day. And in this second day, the Israelis came back with new language, which I would encourage you to get or if you do not already have, and it was the Israeli position on nuclear weapons. It, it didn't change the formal position of we will not be the first to etc.

But what it did say is that Israel could imagine- de facto it said this, I don't remember the exact language - but Israel could imagine a situation in which the basic security relations in the region had evolved to the point where it would be possible for all the states in the region to adhere to the nonproliferation treaty or a nuclear weapons free zone. But it was a circumstance under which Israel could imagine itself becoming a non-nuclear weapon state without saying they were then a nuclear weapon state. So it was interesting. There, some quipping went on about it. The statement seemed to suggest that this all could happen in what might be called geologic timeframes rather than, than some, something more immediate. But still, it was a I took it, I took it that David Ivry was not going to say anything about nuclear weapons, even what he ultimately said, without going back to Tel Aviv, Jerusalem to get approval. And I don't know this to be true, please understand, I have no way of knowing this. But I believe that David fought for language that would be a tad bit more forthcoming, and might be appreciated, at least by some at that conference. And I know that as an American looking at the Israeli position, and with very low expectations, we're going to have any movement. I thought it was important. I haven't seen much reference to it ever again. But I thought it was important at the time.

Miles Pomper

Did it affect the dynamics there, did, you know, did it change the mood at all?

Robert Gallucci

Well, as you would expect, I hope you would expect nobody congratulated the Israelis on their forthcoming position. I believe I thanked David - or if I didn't, I should have - for making an effort and coming up with what he could, overnight. Right. That's not an easy thing to do on that topic. But I don't think it, it materially moved the ball. I think it did improve some of the atmospherics that the meeting wouldn't take much to improve the atmospherics. But I think it did that. Although I may be making it up right now. I don't really remember very crisply. I remember that conversation about the other activities, confidence security building measures, whether they be incidents at sea, or they'd be special communications or observations of exercises, crisis communications, lots of ideas were in the mix that were traditional CBMs. And the idea was that these ideas would be pursued, but in future meetings that would occur in the region rather than necessarily in Moscow or Washington.

Miles Pomper

Do you think, what was the US role, if any, in terms of sort of nudging Israel to at least make this step?

Robert Gallucci

I think we nudged as hard as we could nudge, I think. I mean, one of the problems I'm having now is I have developed a relationship with David, that I valued a great deal. And I've had a lot of conversations with him, on what I would consider very sensitive topics. You may know that the assistant secretary for political military affairs before me, Dick Clarke, and then when I was there, becomes the American lead in the JPMG the joint political military working group with Israel. So I had a lot of business with David and his colleagues. And some of it came before but I think most of it came after. And I have great respect for him as well. But I'm sure my job was to, to encourage the Israelis to be as forthcoming as they could possibly be in order to make the, the ACRS meeting a success. I don't actually remember the exchange. I remember a lot of hard discussions with Nabil. He was he was very tough at the meetings. He always is in a diplomatic session, session like that. But also always a gentleman.

Miles Pomper

So the Moscow meeting, I mean, it focused on sort of past lessons, particularly on regional security and confidence building from Europe and the US-Soviet relations. Did you think there was a useful and helpful approach?

Robert Gallucci

Yeah, I think, I think there was some learning that had to go on. I mean, in the European context, we've talked about a lot of what we could envision in the Middle East, where the experts in the Middle East hadn't talked about it. And by the way, we had in Moscow, this was, these were not local delegations, everybody sent the people who did security in arms control to the meeting. So we had experts there, but I welcome the presence at the time of delegations of people who had lived through the interminable meetings in Europe, about security relations between NATO and the Warsaw Pact between United States and the Soviet Union. And I think there was a lot of expertise in that room.

Miles Pomper

So, since that was your main involvement in the process. I'm gonna kind of skip to some of the more general questions. You sounded like you were pessimistic from the beginning about how this would work out. What's your sense of why the talks collapsed?

Robert Gallucci

I don't, I mean, I think there's probably a good answer to that there's enough, enough people have looked at this. My guess is lack of progress and the fundamental underlying tensions of the Middle East will overwhelm this process, unless there's the those tensions are being addressed, and the process follows that. I don't think arms control is going to lead a political reconciliation. I think it could follow one. And that was my view. And it still is actually.

Miles Pomper

And you mentioned, there was some countries that weren't there. Do you think that

the absence of some of those countries, leaving them out, Iran, Iraq, and so on, I guess Syria chose not to come here. Was that a good idea? Bad idea? Did that hurt the process?

Robert Gallucci

I mean, I don't, I didn't know the players at the time. So I don't know who would have come. But my guess is that as difficult as the meetings were, they would have been even more difficult had they been there. So if there was a possibility of progress, in other words, if they were, if there was something really happening on a political track simultaneously with this going on, I think it would have been terrific. But to my knowledge, there wasn't. And so like I said, I did couldn't see this, breaking the ground and leading away, and I don't think bringing in some of the hardliners would have would have made it any easier.

Miles Pomper

Let me bring this forward a little bit to today. I mean, some argue that there was a lot of promise in ACRS for real security and cooperation, I guess, in your view, after there was other progress. Do you think there'll be any appetite today for some similar initiative?

Robert Gallucci

Well, I must say the Middle East is something I used to actually eventually gave talks on because I felt that confident of my grip on the fundamental dynamics of the region. I no longer have that confidence and haven't for a while. I mean, knowing Shias, Sunni, doesn't get you very far anymore. I mean, you got, you have to do better than that. And I find the cleavages to have gotten much more complicated in the roles actually. What role the Saudis are going to play, the Syrians out of the game entirely. What, I mean, I find it now very, very complicated. So I don't I don't know how to begin to answer your question about, you know, what's possible. Now, for example, let's suppose this was an interview about recent moves in the Middle East. And you were to say, so was it significant? What just happened in terms of recognition of Israel, by Arab states. I would want to say it was not insignificant. But how deeply significant it is? I don't know. I mean, I, the, you know, as a fundamental proposition that Henry Kissinger put on the table in a wonderful op-ed back in the summer of 2000, in which he said, fundamentally, you know, until the Israelis believe that the principle Arab states will accept their existence, you don't, you shouldn't be looking for a successful peace process. I mean, and the question in 2000, of course, as you will recall, was whether they had reached that point or not. I was guessing Kissinger's view that, you know, as we started the Second Intifada, the answer was no. So I don't know now, whether this, is a, a truly substantial and fundamental shift in attitudes in the Middle East. And you know, there's something called the Arab Street, you may have heard that phrase a couple of million times. I don't know where the street is on the moves that have just been made by states in the region to acknowledge Israel's existence. So I just don't know where we are right now. There are any number of people I would go to find out, but I wouldn't be one of them for you.

Miles Pomper

Okay. Is there something you think I should ask about that I haven't or have left out?

Robert Gallucci

I think there's a ton of things you could ask me. But I find I don't have anything else to say. I mean, this is a, this was one meeting for me, it must have been, for which I was not extremely well prepared. And that is not a cut at my staff. But just because you probably know, the scope of things an assistant, secretary for political military affairs, which has no geographic bounds to it is extraordinary. And I was just trying to explore that. And I really, this was, I was not happy about going to co-chair a meeting with the Russians on the Middle East when I felt completely at sea. I mean, I just, I had just come from over a year of working, I want to say working with the Iraqis, working against the Iraqis, but kind of essentially spending all my time in the Gulf. And this was not an easy thing to kind of figure out, out of this, how to move this along and get some real progress. And I was pessimistic at the time. Though, I, I did think that useful work could be done in educating experts in these individual countries, in what would be required in order to have successful CBMs. It didn't seem

to me unreasonable, that you could get a crisis communication center up and running, a hotline. Didn't seem unreasonable that you can have an incidents at sea, agreement, the kind of stuff we had with the Soviets, that there are a bunch of technical things that could be done.

Miles Pomper

I guess eventually they seem to negotiate those.

Robert Gallucci

Right. That's worthwhile, a worthwhile thing to do. But at this meeting, my recollection of the fireworks at the meeting were the Arab states, particularly Egypt as, as then Fahmy as a personality in Egypt, in a historical way, leader of the Arab states, taking on these rallies over nuclear weapons and adherence to the NPT. That wasn't going to happen at the ACRS meeting. I mean, it was pretty clear to me. Anyway, so I don't think I have more for you Miles actually, but.

Miles Pomper

Good talking with you. Appreciate it.

Robert Gallucci

Thank you. Thank you. It was good, good to see you. And I wish you well with the project. It's got to be a good one.

Miles Pomper

Yes. Thanks. Take care, Bob.

Robert Gallucci

Take care.

[End of transcript]