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Abstract

Following the Middle East Peace Conference in Madrid in 1991, the Arms Control and Regional Security (ACRS) working group was launched as the first and so far only official regional arms control negotiations. While there have been multiple attempts to distill the lessons of the ACRS process, the aspect of events most conducive to forging trust between the negotiators and their inter-personal dynamics has never been explored. This paper takes an inter-disciplinary approach to studying negotiations: it zooms in on the ACRS process, integrating Middle East studies, decision making processes and nonproliferation literature with negotiations theory and oral history techniques, in the first attempt at a more comprehensive methodology to one of the highlights in the modern Middle Eastern diplomacy. To convey the multiple vantage points of participants, a three-stage methodological process is discussed: individual interviews with negotiating team members and facilitators, followed by group interviews of national delegations, and finally, a group session with representatives from each delegation. Ultimately, this model helps preserve a more accurate historical account, and significantly complements the technical insights on the negotiation dynamics with unexpected inter-personal relations angles, assisting in the design of more promising future frameworks.

Keywords: *Arms Control and Regional Security (ACRS) working group, conflict studies, cultural differences, diplomatic negotiations, inter-disciplinary approach, inter-personal dynamics, Middle East, negotiation behavior studies, oral history*

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Following the Middle East Peace Conference in Madrid in 1991, the Arms Control and Regional Security (ACRS) working group was launched as the first and so far only official regional arms control negotiations. While there have been multiple attempts to distil the lessons of the ACRS process, the aspect of events most conducive to forging trust between the negotiators and their inter-personal dynamics has never been explored. This paper takes an inter-disciplinary approach to studying negotiations: it zooms in on the ACRS process, integrating Middle East studies, decision making processes and nonproliferation literature with negotiations theory and oral history techniques, in the first attempt at a more comprehensive methodology to one of the highlights in the modern Middle Eastern diplomacy. To convey the multiple vantage points of participants, a three-stage methodological process is discussed: individual interviews with negotiating team members and facilitators, followed by group interviews of national delegations, and finally, a group session with representatives from each delegation. Ultimately, this model helps preserve a more accurate historical account, and significantly complements the technical insights on the negotiation dynamics with unexpected inter-personal relations angles, assisting in the design of more promising future frameworks.

Introduction

This paper presents a new methodological approach developed for a two-year oral history study of the Arms Control Regional Security Working Group (ACRS), a multilateral official negotiations track launched at the Middle East Peace Conference in Madrid in 1991. Much of the literature on conflict studies and negotiations in general, and the long years of the Middle East Peace Process in particular, has tended to readily accept negotiators as sterile representatives of national interests, with scarce attention to their personal traits or institutional background. Subsequently, this study focuses on personal perspectives of the ACRS participants, and the impact of inter-personal and inter-institutional dynamics on the

process. It draws on a diverse spectrum of practices of oral history, integrated with insights from studies of negotiation behavior, offering a new methodological contribution to help bridge the divide between different disciplines, and between theory and practice. The study complements the prevailing approach to exploring negotiation dynamics on the state level (which, in case of ACRS, is now relatively well understood) with additional levels of analysis on institutional decision-making and relevant personal aspects, painting a more comprehensive picture of these historic events. With no official record of the ACRS negotiations, and a new generation of arms control experts yet to emerge in the Middle East, the project, for which the methodology discussed in this paper was developed, will be able to offer guidance for setting up more successful future frameworks for negotiating Middle East security.

The paper starts with a brief background on the ACRS process, introducing the methodological approach designed for this study. The second section reviews the practices in oral history that have laid the groundwork for this methodology. The third and fourth sections proceed to discuss the relevant theoretical frameworks in negotiation behavior and institutional decision making processes, which are subsequently tested for explanatory power for the ACRS case during the interviews with former negotiators. The fifth section follows with a brief discussion of the inherent limitations of the chosen research methods, and some of the remedies available to address them. The final section discusses preliminary findings from the interviews conducted to date.

ACRS as a Case Study

The Arms Control Regional Security Working Group (ACRS) has so far been the only official multilateral security dialogue and framework in the Middle East concerning WMD control and nonproliferation. ACRS was established as part of the Arab-Israeli multilateral peace process initiated at the Madrid Peace Conference in October 1991. The ACRS group held six plenary sessions and many other conceptual and thematic meetings between 1992 and 1995. By 1995, complications in the Peace Process, the 1995 Review and Extension Conference on the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation on Nuclear Weapons (NPT), and the ongoing disagreement between Israel and Egypt over when, where, and how to discuss the nuclear issue, all contributed to the ACRS talks being put on hold indefinitely (Landau, 2008).

Nevertheless, ACRS achieved important understandings, including draft Declaration of Principles and Statements of Intent on Arms Control and Regional Security, draft charter

for regional security centers, as well as procedures for pre-notification of certain military activities and exchange of military information. At the same time the failure of ACRS also revealed the deep disagreements between Egypt (which took upon itself to represent the Arab position) and Israel on priorities, the sequencing of the Peace Process versus WMDFZ negotiations, threat perceptions, and the nuclear issue. The process also deepened mistrust and rivalries among various Arab states (Kane & Murauskaite, 2014).

While much has been written about the ACRS process, its achievements, and reasons for its failure, not a single study has been written by those who negotiated the process. In fact, no account has ever been written of the decision making processes in the lead up to and during the negotiations, or the events most conducive to the negotiations, and most helpful in forging personal relationships and trust between the negotiators. Nevertheless, with consistent emphasis on confidence building measures in the literature analyzing ACRS content, the role of inter-personal dynamics, trust and good faith – or lack of thereof – held great potential significance. Yet, with no official record of these negotiations, memories of the participants, many of whom are already in their late seventies, are the last remaining trace of this significant chapter in the Middle East Peace Process.

ACRS lends itself well to case study methodology, being a unique and significant component of the Middle East Peace Process, with a less abstract content focus, a clear start and finish date, and a relatively small and consistent group of people involved. These specifics make it knowable in a more comprehensive manner than other aspects of the process, or the Peace Process as a whole. Yet, many of the insights associated with personality impact and dynamics, are still externally generalizable and have value for similar future efforts in the region.

This is the first attempt to gather the ACRS Working Group participants' memories, commentaries, recollections, perspectives, interpretations, and accounts of events and experiences during the negotiations. The broad objectives behind this approach are to better understand what happened; offer rare insights into individuals and states' decision-making processes; identify differences based on cultural values and perspectives; verify or explain contested events or decisions from multiple perspectives; transmit experiences to the future generation of negotiators and regional policy makers; and identify areas that require special care or consideration in future negotiations.

In this study of regional conflict negotiations, an inter-disciplinary approach was adopted, integrating Middle East studies, decision making processes, and nonproliferation

literature with negotiations theory and oral history techniques, in the first attempt at a more comprehensive methodology to one of the most significant but least studied events in the modern Middle Eastern diplomatic history.

The project was divided into three stages of interviews, complemented with personal notes of the participants, as well as archival materials of the period in question for canvassing a more accurate and comprehensive backdrop. In the first stage, members of the region's negotiating teams and facilitators were interviewed individually about their personal experiences and roles during the negotiations, and the events that, often unwittingly, became the pivotal points. In preparation for this stage, each interviewee was asked to write a brief, mainly to be used to refresh the memories, as almost 20 years have passed since the discussed events. The second stage brought together small groups of individuals, who had served together on their state delegations, clarifying common and diverging interpretations as they become apparent, reflective of national inter-institution dynamics. The third stage unfolds as a joint session with one or two representatives from each delegation, where participants collectively revisit some of the key experiences identified in the previous stages, and get to compare notes across the national lines. This multi-layered methodological approach allows telling the story of a particular negotiating process from multiple vantage points – the individuals, their organizations, national delegations, and the process as a whole. The following sections detail the body of scholarship that this methodology was built around, explaining the aspects the model draws on, with the limitations of the chosen approach addressed in section five.

Drawing on Oral History Practices in Conflict Studies

Oral history as a methodology can bring to light hidden aspects of a past event, facilitating a sense of closure on issues not adequately remembered or dealt with. Methodologically, oral history practices have been successfully applied to studying arms control negotiations in cases of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, USA-UK 1958 Mutual Defense Agreement, the negotiations between the USA, Canada, and Romania in the 1960s on nuclear energy cooperation, and the Cuban Missile Crisis (Blight, 2003; Daalder & Destler, 2000; Gheorghe, 2013; Haley, 2002). With efforts to revive the Middle East Peace Process in general, and regional arms control negotiations in particular, revisiting the ACRS story from this innovative angle can also assist in developing recommendations and offer insights to future negotiators. Indeed, identifying and clarifying common and diverging interpretations of events, and helping explain the thoughts and reasons behind

actions, is significant in moving forward, as many of these underlying realities remain painfully acute, and individuals in question still play a central role. In preparation for this project, the researchers consulted with three institutions that use oral history as part of their methodology.

The USA Marine Corps (USMC) routinely uses oral history interviews to capture the personal narratives of active duty and reserve marines recently returned from overseas deployments, alongside the broader historical record of events that the Corps maintains. The Marine Corps History Division has an Oral History Program dedicated for this task in Quantico, VA, where officers are trained in this technique, and subsequently dispatched to conduct individual interviews with their fellow marines, using a standard manual. Each interview session is usually conducted on one-on-one basis and lasts from 45 minutes to an hour. Shared institutional background and relatable experiences between the interviewer and interviewee are conducive to quick development of rapport, and the interviewees tend to be forthcoming with information, assured it would not be shared with their superiors or used in a way that could adversely impact their stance (J. L. Rossiter, personal communication, May 1, 2013). The interviewees consent for the recorded information to be used for the Marine Corps internally and it is rarely if ever released to the wider public verbatim, but the History division regularly uses these insights, anonymized and pooled, in its publications. These brief frank interactions in familiar surroundings, usually shortly after the events in question have occurred, represent one end of the spectrum – a routine emphasizing personal experiences in events, the significance of which is usually yet to transpire. Further down this spectrum are oral history practices employed to study events of historic importance that have occurred in the distant past, with the explicit purpose of preserving this record for the general public. Parts of taped interviews from several participants are usually combined to shed light on less known aspects of generally widely studied events. The Marine Corps Oral History Program, for instance, used this methodology to interview the veterans of Korean and Vietnam wars.

Another step further down this spectrum of oral history practices are extended multi-day interview sessions with one individual and a team of interviewers, used by historians to finesse details of somewhat controversial or less well-understood events that had occurred in the distant past. In preparation for the interview, a file is assembled based on publicly available documents, detailing the sequence of events in question (such as newspaper articles or relevant leadership statements) to provide somewhat objective and contextualized anchors

to the interview, and prompt the subject's memory. For instance, scholars with the USA Institute for Defense Analysis have used this technique to individually interview Iraqi generals, who had served under Saddam Hussein during the Iran-Iraq War, seeking their personal insights and the Iraqi military perspectives on the events of that period (Woods, Murray, Holaday, & Elkhamri, 2009; Woods, Murray, Nathan, Sabara, & Venegas, 2011). The team travelled to the Middle East to meet these veterans, usually spending around three days with each interviewee: the first day was used to build some personal rapport, moving through a series of increasingly detailed questions over the next day or day and a half, and using the remainder of the third day to rehash or clarify issues raised during these conversations. Kevin Woods (author interview, April 18, 2013, Washington, D.C.) described these intensive sessions as physically taxing to both, the interviewers and interviewees, requiring regular breaks to rekindle attention, and noted the challenges of communicating through an interpreter, as well as talking across cultural boundaries (USA-Iraq; civilian-military; English-Arabic). The scholars have also noted that interviewees who were physically in different places at the time of the event in question (e.g. an air force pilot and a ground forces commander during the same battle), and thus had different but not directly conflicting narratives, were much more forthcoming with the information, compared to those who had lived through the experiences under scrutiny "shoulder to shoulder."

At the other end of the spectrum is critical oral history methodology. Namely, in mixed group interview sessions an inter-disciplinary group of scholars engages in a moderated discussion with a group of interviewees with diverse backgrounds, who had participated in an historical event, bringing different vantage points. The reference document package that the interviewers prepare includes declassified documents and more personalized records, such as letters, memos or transcripts from conversations, and the two groups interact over several days in a series of roundtables or seminars aimed at clarifying various aspects of the event. A representative example of employing critical oral history technique is a project exploring the roots of USA-Iranian enmity, where a group of international relations scholars and lead figures from the National Security Archive engaged with CIA veterans and former USA diplomats on the subject (Blight, Lang, Banai, Byrne, & Tirman, 2012). Another example is critical oral history series held at the Woodrow Wilson Center, such as an oral history of the Cuban Missiles Crisis and US-South Korea relations. In the latter, fifteen international relations scholars from the USA and the Republic of Korea (ROK), together

with former ROK and USA officials, explore the interactions with and within the Korean Peninsula during the Cold War (Ostermann & Person, 2011).

Building on these practices, oral history methodology was optimized for interviewing international diplomats about their experiences during a past negotiation. Most interviewees were Western-educated and all of them spoke English (the ACRS negotiations were conducted in English). At the same time, whilst less constrained by language and cultural barriers, temporal constraints was a very real issue. Given the high positions of the interviewees (e.g. former prime minister or current foreign minister), they were able to spare no more than a few hours at a time, after rigorous planning. Scheduling individual sessions for 1.5-3 hours in length, and proceeding with group sessions of approximately half-day long, offered a balanced approach in this respect. The third stage of the project, a two-day conference based on the critical oral history model, was also designed to be shorter: with the first two stages of interviews laying substantive groundwork, it was intended as a narrative comparison session, instead of being the primary venue for raising the critical points.

Another challenge in arranging the interviews proved to be logistics. Namely, best practices in oral history suggest meeting the interviewees in their familiar environment, as a gesture promoting openness and putting them at ease. However, with most Middle East delegates still based in the region, the tumultuous environment limited the number of locations conducive to interview meetings for security reasons. Similarly, factors pertaining to current regional dynamics also presented challenges in locating some of the former ACRS participants: with 48 delegates identified through literature review and personal consultations, it was possible to contact 20 individuals and schedule interviews with 15 of them, with more interviews expected to follow over the next 4 months.

Prior to meeting for the initial individual sessions, the interviewees were briefed about the project, and asked to review any personal notes or documents they may have kept from the negotiations to rekindle the memory. Many interviewees have subsequently agreed to share this material, and that became a significant compliment to the background compendium, consisting of a detailed timetable of the process, source documents from the negotiations, available media reports from the period, and scholarly literature analyzing the process of negotiations retrospectively from the external observer point of view. For the study of the ACRS process, this proved particularly insightful, as these negotiations, from the very start, were conducted under the agreement that no official record would be kept. Furthermore, the author has filed requests under the USA Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) with The

George Bush Presidential Library, William J. Clinton Presidential Library, and the USA Department of State, to make publicly available previously unreleased records of reports on consultations prior and following the meetings, phone conversations, as well as relevant notes, internal memos, reports and correspondence. Whilst the nature of these records is somewhat USA-centric, it offers important insights into the overall dynamics of a process that the USA was trying to facilitate, with particularly informative records of phone conversations between USA and Middle East leaders and diplomats.

The proposed focus of the interviews on inter-personal experiences and inter-organizational dynamics had initially surprised many of the ACRS delegates contacted for the project. As discussed above, the traditional approach to studying various aspects of the Middle East Peace Process had been primarily state-centric content-focused, with few personal anecdotes, occasionally found in the literature, recalled when emphasizing a point (Baker, 1995, pp. 454-455). Nonetheless, the former ACRS participants proved surprisingly frank in the interviews, eagerly sharing their personal perspectives on the interplays among the fellow negotiators on their team, as well as with their regional counterparts. The aspect of inter-personal dynamics proved particularly significant, since the composition of national teams has changed little during more than four years of the negotiating process, and the small community of international arms control experts meant they have been interacting repeatedly in this, as well as other forums.

Incorporating Aspects of Negotiation Behavior Studies

A common method for social scientists to test theories and models of interpersonal conflict negotiations is through behavioral laboratory experiments with volunteers, usually simulating situations relevant to business relations. To the best of the author's knowledge, none of the previous studies using oral history interviews have attempted to integrate such insights into their methodology through question design or interview analysis. Druckman's (1973, 1983) research offers a rare example of sociology and behavioral research models applied to analyze international post-conflict negotiations. Subsequently, this study looks to bridge the gap between disciplinary methodological practices, using quantitatively tested lab models as prompts in a qualitative study with first-hand participants of historical events. Studies of trust in negotiations are particularly relevant: introducing regional parties to each other through various semi-formal (Track 1.5) and informal (Track 2) initiatives, and bringing the discourse from abstract concepts to inter-personal interactions among counterparts, have long formed the facilitation backdrop for the Middle East Peace Process,

with success depending in no small part on the compatibility of personalities at the table. On inter-state level of analysis, confidence building measures have become an integral part of the process – but ultimately, these measures also start with a network of persons, who have confidence in their professional counterparts, and only gradually can that trust be embedded in the states they represent.

Firstly, relevant frameworks for understand the atmosphere at the outset of the negotiations are reviewed by Lewicki, Tomlinson and Gillespie (2006), suggesting that parties start with surprisingly high levels of trust, absent prior information that would encourage them to act otherwise, and gradually move towards higher levels of trust and/or distrust, depending on their experience in repeated interactions. Meanwhile, in conflict studies, the implicit assumption is that parties arrive at a negotiating table with mutual feelings of animosity, i.e. that the violent conflict, ongoing or suspended for the duration of these negotiations, would act as such prior information, negatively predisposing the parties towards each other personally. In light of the violent conflicts in the Middle East preceding the ACRS negotiations, and the sensitivity of the subject of weapons of mass destruction, the interviewees were prompted to recall any prior interactions they had with their counterparts, the first impressions, and the initial atmosphere at the working group, looking for cues about whether and how those aspects shifted during the nearly five years of repeated encounters. Irmer and Druckman (2009) have put Lewicki's model of trust development to a test, using quantitative methods to code textual inferences drawn from literature describing negotiations processes. The qualitative approach to integrating conflict studies and sociology literature in

this study complements the abovementioned research with first-hand accounts of participants collected through semi-structured interviews.

Secondly, for understanding drivers of progress in negotiations, sociological studies of conflict transformation are helpful in thinking about the points of inflection, moving the process forward or stalling it instead. Based on Linda L. Putnam's research review (2004, pp. 277-278, 283), the process of negotiation can be transformed along two dimensions: first, the level of abstraction may shift, in terms of the content of the talks, and second, the depth and quality of the personal bond between the negotiators may change (see Figure 2).

However, it is important to appreciate that the impact of these inflection points, signifying change in the inter-personal relations or content focus of a negotiation, can often only be understood as productive or counterproductive in retrospect. Frank J. Barrett (2004, p. 214) and Irving Seidman (2013, pp. 17-19) have also acknowledged the skepticism of many in the field with regards to the ability of negotiators to recognize a critical moment as it occurs – rather than retrospectively. These insights have prompted the search in this study for the multitude of critical events throughout the ACRS process that could suggest attempts at such process transformations, and also to prompt the interviewees directly as to whether certain insights had occurred to them in real time or transpired in retrospect, consulting the participants' own notes from the period in question when available.

Thirdly, it is important to consider the impact of cultural differences on inter-personal dynamics. It has been suggested that negotiators from diverse cultural backgrounds likely

come to the table attaching differing levels of significance to verbal agreements (Friedman, Yi-Hong, & Simons, 2013), and varying levels of propensity to search for win-win (as opposed to winner-take-all) solutions (Aslani, Ramirez-Marin, Brett, Tinsley, & Weingart, 2012), potentially leading to miscommunications and overall sub-optimal results of interaction. Behavioral studies of negotiation dynamics in business settings have also explored the persistence and impact of cultural stereotyping (Tinsley, Turan, Weingart, & Dillon-Merrill, 2012, pp. 272-274), and it is worth seeing how these aspects play out in diplomatic negotiations. Cofman-Wittes (2005) has studied the interplay of cultural factors in Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, but broader regional research in this domain remains scarce. In case of ACRS, whilst parties from the Middle East would have been abreast of the neighbourhood cultural and political dynamics, their limited official diplomatic interactions may have given them little indication of how these factors play out in practice at the negotiating table; for Western diplomats the reverse may have been the case – more direct bilateral interactions with the parties, but less practical comprehension of regional realities on the ground. Subsequently, the former ACRS negotiators were prompted to recall the general level of cultural awareness amongst their colleagues and counterparts, as well as previous experiences they may have had of cross-cultural negotiations.

It is also worth noting that few contemporary behavioral studies of negotiations include individuals from the Middle East in their samples, with the contrasts between Asian and North American styles of negotiation as the more common research focus. Therefore, the insights of former ACRS participants from places like Israel, Egypt, and Jordan may offer new perspectives to the ongoing studies and future negotiations in this field.

Inter-Agency Decision-Making Dynamics in Arms Control

Studies exploring state decisions to acquire or renounce weapons of mass destruction frequently turn to the bureaucratic politics framework as part of the explanation, but similar approach has so far not been applied to studying the ACRS process. The institutional factor is important to consider, first, as a formative background influencer of the negotiators, and second, as a systemic indicator of the different bureaucratic arrangements for handling these arms control negotiations in participating states. Relevant models detailing organizational behavior are drawn upon in an effort to offer a more comprehensive understanding of the ACRS negotiations.

The literature detailing decision-making and influence over nuclear weapons issues considers three institutional categories of particular relevance: the national nuclear energy

establishment, significant units in the military, and the political apparatus (Sagan, 1996-1997). For the study of ACRS negotiations, the first category is expanded to include technical experts from a broader range of relevant backgrounds (e.g. missile or other WMD programs), and the third category is further divided into country leaders, foreign affairs experts, and (lower level) civil servants. The inter-institutional dynamics came into play by socializing the relevant groups of experts and influencers in the discourse of arms control through educational seminars, dialogue, and identifying the agreed confidence building measures. In addition, inclusion of persons with military background into some of the negotiating teams created potential for civil-military institutional background clashes.

In his seminal work on institutional decision-making, Graham Allison (1971, pp. 67-96) postulates that organizations follow a fixed set of actions to perform complex tasks, with their own survival and advancement as the top priority, and are subsequently able to produce only a limited range of responses to any given problem – inbuilt biases not always immediately obvious to outsiders. James J. Walsh (2000) has found institutional factors to be the most significant in explaining nuclear nonproliferation decisions, after testing a range of alternatives pertinent to security and normative environment: modifying Allison's classical theory slightly, Walsh nevertheless underlines the importance of identifying the institution that stands to gain from such a significant national policy change. However, it is not clear whether, to set the disarmament talks (and process) in motion, the factors that have initially driven certain institutions to become proponents of pursuing WMDs would have to be reversed, e.g., as was the case in South Africa, or whether a rival institution would have to emerge with goals inconsistent with such a pursuit and challenge that incumbent, as was the case in Brazil and Argentina (for an overview of explanations of nuclear reversals, see Mueller & Schmidt, 2010; Paul, 2000). Subsequently, during the interview process, the author attempted to distinguish institutional level drivers of the ACRS talks, and identify evolving institutional approaches to ACRS, in light of their traditional operating dynamics.

National government profile has also been considered among the leading explanations of state propensity to pursue weapons of mass destruction or disarm (if one presumes the reversal of the original drivers would allow the space for starting a dialogue on disarmament) – with assessed characteristics being the relative depth of democratic institutional culture, and international political and economic integration (Hymans, 2012; Solingen, 2012). These factors significantly affect the audience costs, domestic and/or international, that the leadership would incur in making such decisions. Regional security negotiations concerning

the most strategic armaments arguably had the potential to start generating audience costs on institutional level (for instance, consider Saddam Hussein's misleading behavior regarding Iraq's WMD capabilities leading to the 2003 war). In addition, existing and developing contacts between corresponding agencies of negotiating states would affect the ease with which international influence could be exerted over domestic bureaucratic apparatus. Furthermore, greater national inter-agency coordination necessitated by the ACRS process around the specific set of issues at hand could potentially extend the range of such external influence of any institution by effectively transmitting it over a newly formed domestic web of relations, rather than being limited to a single nod of the corresponding agency. These factors form an illustrative background for understanding the dynamics within national ACRS delegations, explored during the second stage of interviews in this project.

Leadership susceptibility to public opinion pressure has often added complications to the Middle East Peace Process talks, but as the ACRS talks unfolded in a separate, more isolated domain, with negotiators several levels removed from the highly visible top leadership, an interesting insight to consider is whether this increased the relative significance of the institutional level traits (over personal or state level). Although country leaders still were the ones to make the final decisions in ACRS, their involvement in the negotiating process was rather limited (in contrast to the talks during the Peace Process), having instructed their national negotiators in broad terms. The technical nature of discussions would have also made it accessible to a much smaller public audience, especially given that many of the negotiators had to be themselves gradually educated on the matter, potentially creating more leeway by further reducing public pressure.

Another important factor to consider is the civil-military institutional dynamics. For instance, Israel's tradition of particularly close civil-military bureaucracies in a democratic setting would have posed a curious challenge to the Arab state representatives, where a strong military establishment did not typically coexist with an effective and powerful civilian political structure - the nature of their previous domestic experience of civil-military interaction would have been radically different. Moreover, the measures and exercises agreed through the ACRS process would have required closer domestic cooperation between the civil-military structures, as well as the technical experts, and it is interesting to analyze the potential impact of ACRS to alter power relations between these domestic institutions. For instance, Barry Posen (1984, pp. 56-75) posits that as the probability of armed conflict declines, military structures conform more closely to predictions of organizational behavior

theory, and also – that growing security concerns prompt increased civilian efforts of oversight over the military establishment. Since the ACRS process was intended to gradually improve the regional security environment, it is curious to observe whether any of these effects on inter-agency relations could be observed as it unfolded.

Methodological Limitations and Proposed Remedies

Some of the common critiques of the interview and oral history methodologies stem from the nature of verbal and textual information as a credible modicum. Questions surround individual's general ability to accurately convey their inner experiences or events they have witnessed through a verbal exchange process of an interview (Hammersley, 2008). The primary focus of the interviews was the personal narratives of interviewees, rather than the search for absolute historical truths, as is characteristic for phenomenological interviewing (Roulston, 2010, pp. 16-29). This was also helpful in addressing the challenge of accuracy when discussing the events that occurred some twenty years earlier – a detailed timeline of key factual events was maintained for reference purposes, but focused on memories of emotions and perceptions, which individuals seemed to have a better recollection of.

While it was important to avoid giving the interviewees an impression that they are being judged and ought to offer a justification for thoughts and actions they describe, the second and third layer of group interviews were added in an attempt to qualify these individual experiences through a collective history filter. In the second layer of national delegation interviews, that had to be weighed against the participants' level of comfort to speak frankly in the presence of their former (or current) superiors and colleagues, especially since they experienced these events together, so diverging recollections could suggest direct confrontation. The third layer of interviews, with representatives from each delegation brought together, presented challenges in depicting divergent perceptions within teams or delegations – inviting particular representatives risked validating their narrative in the eyes of fellow participants as the discussion moved ahead.

A subsequent set of concerns relates to the use of language and terminology. Namely, the selection of language to conduct the interviews in may influence the interviewee's speech patterns and choice of vocabulary, as well as their interpretation. For this project, all interviews were conducted in English – a language all participants were fluent in, but many were not native speakers. Similarly, a cautionary note is needed for the terminology used in this interdisciplinary research project: different academic fields tended to use different terms to refer to the same issue at hand, and vice versa. In addition, the effort to make this project

accessible and useful to both, academic and policy practitioner audiences also influenced the terminology choices. Nevertheless, it must be noted that all the interviewees were from the field of nonproliferation and shared understanding of the discussed terms.

Finally, the reliability of the interview process could be challenged on the basis of that the interviewer, as the medium eliciting and capturing responses, influences responses as the information requested is channeled through him or her. While this is a general concern, following consultations about the best interview practices with other scholars, each interview was conducted in the consistent team of two, with interviewers taking turns in leading the question process, and taking notes independently, as well as tape recording the interviews. In turn, some interviewees got more reserved when the conversations were taped, choosing their words more carefully and noticeably filtering their responses, despite being promised anonymity.

Preliminary Insights from Individual Interviews

At the time of writing, stage two of collective delegation interviews was in progress, and the final joint session was yet to be held, but the first stage of individual interviews, together with newly available primary source information, have already produced significant preliminary insights, briefly discussed below.

First, the interviewees shared their insights about the personalities on their national teams, as well as regional counterparts, with surprising frankness. With the promise of non-attribution, elaborate pictures were quickly presented of the characters that played the leading roles throughout the ACRS process – whereas discussions of national inter-organizational dynamics were slightly more formalized and assessments – more ambiguous. Furthermore, the interviewees frequently pointed out the contrasting personalities of the lead Egyptian and Israeli negotiators, and, more importantly, their contrarian inter-personal dynamics, as major obstacles for building trust.

Second, testing the theoretical frameworks on trust building proved challenging: it turned out that many lead ACRS participants knew each other before the process had started from previous interactions in diplomatic forums of New York and Geneva, as well as USA-Israel Joint Political-Military Group (JPMG) and brought a certain level of trust (or rather distrust) to the table. Indeed, it transpired that previous connections to parties in the region, as well as belonging to the small national communities of arms control professionals, were key to being selected to the ACRS delegations to begin with. Since the formative stage of these inter-personal dynamics had already unfolded, the interviewees recounted few episodes

reflective of initial bonding, instead focusing on later stages of trust development. The parties recalled naturally gravitating towards the persons they already knew; gradually increasing the levels of trust in these relations, whereas previously untrusted and unfamiliar parties continued their interactions at an arms-length. Whilst such behavior of seeking comfort in familiarity would generally hardly be surprising, the fact that this dynamic unfolded amongst highly skilled diplomats, changing little over the course of five years was somewhat unexpected and disconcerting. Interestingly, the bottom-up effect of trust building amongst lower-level staff being gradually channeled up the chain of command was also hardly discernable.

Third, with regards to cultural aspects, it was not the lack of cultural awareness, but rather fundamental political disagreements that made it hard for the parties to connect and trust each other. Many recalled substantial initial reservations - to even shake hands, much less talk across the divide - which dissipated only marginally as the process unfolded. Nevertheless, the cultural and institutional factors surfaced in the different ways that the parties tended to (or not to) draw a line between national positions and actions in official capacity, and personal interactions. For instance, the negotiators recalled political frustrations exploding into personal animosities at times of heightened tension, and some felt cheated when a fellow negotiator they felt they were getting to know on a personal level would stubbornly stick to a national position counterproductive to the process. Overall, most participants expressed a preference for more directness in conduct of their counterparts, even when the content to be delivered was inevitably unpleasant.

Fourth, the interviews revealed that the USA, the leader of the process, came to it with very limited objectives, namely, promoting a dialogue between the Arab states and Israel. Arms control turned out to be simply one of the issues at hand, largely selected following the recent success of the USA-USSR arms control agreement, and shred regional concerns over WMD programs revealed in Iraq. There was a marked disconnect between the national institutions that set the process in motion during the Madrid Conference and its implementers, as well as diverging views – amongst the participants, and between the USA and the regional parties, about the objectives of the process.

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