# December 14, 2016
# Oral History Interview with Hans Blix

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## Summary:

The interview with Hans Blix, conducted by Michal Onderco, delves into Blix's experiences as Director-General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and his pivotal role in strengthening the agency's safeguards and mandate in the wake of nuclear proliferation challenges. Blix reflects on the lessons learned from Iraq, South Africa, and North Korea, emphasizing the need for comprehensive and intrusive inspection mechanisms to ensure compliance with nuclear treaties. He discusses the balance between diplomacy and enforcement, contrasting the IAEA's professional inspection style with the more confrontational approach of other agencies like UNSCOM. The conversation also explores Blix's advocacy for consolidating nuclear verification efforts within the IAEA, despite opposition favoring the creation of new organizations. Throughout, Blix underscores the importance of maintaining the IAEA's impartiality and technical credibility in the politically charged landscape of global nuclear governance.

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English

## Contents:

**Hans Blix**

**IAEA**

*Oral history interview conducted by Michal Onderco in person, in Stockholm on 14 December 2016*

**Michal Onderco:**

**T**he preparation at the Agency for the 1995 conference started already in 1993 with the 93 + 2 programme that was authorized by the Board. Why did the Agency come up with the programme at that moment?

**Hans Blix:**

In 1993?

**Michal Onderco:**

Yeah.

**Hans Blix:**

Well, it was evidently because of the experience of Iraq. In 1991, in the spring we had been there for the first inspections, in the spring of ’91, and we were then going to what turned out to be the calutrons that had been damaged by US bombing, and the pictures showed unusual commotion there, so it was suggested by the Americans that this would be one of the places that we should inspect, and after some bewilderment and analysis the conclusion was that these were calutrons. So that… then more was discovered during that summer and we concluded that, fairly immediately after these discoveries, that the safeguard system that we had, the so: called full-scope safeguards under the NPT, were inadequate. They had not discovered it, we were not aware of these things being there and we had not been told by any intelligence Agency and I do not think that anyone ever really had any concrete knowledge about this. They too were taken by surprise. So we realised that we needed sharper means of looking, to make conclusions about comprehensiveness and completeness of our safeguards declarations. We also realised that you can never be 100% sure, you cannot examine every nook and corner of big countries, but nevertheless you can cover much more than we did, because we had restrictions in the safeguards agreement to afford inspectors to go to strategic points, for instance. So we went only to declared destinations, and to strategic points in these evaluations, and that was very limited. It was good in order to sufficient, in order to trace any diversions of fissionable material from an existing plant and they had cameras that did this, and measurements etc. But it was not good for discovering anything outside of that and we were aware, of course, that there were other methods. Like the satellite pictures could give you some information on suspicious buildings. We did not yet have the environmental sampling, that came during the Iraq war, but the inspections in the spring was a wake-up call and I went to the Board and said that we want a right to more access for the inspectors and that we intended to start a programme to deliver an expansion of the system. At earlier NPT review conferences I had made a point of this, that we wanted to have more powerful inspectors but it had not been accepted. And this goes back to the simple story that member states do not like to have intrusive inspectors milling around in what they regarded as sensitive installations. The attitude was traditionally somewhat negative, for having international inspection, and that has since been overcome. And my line has always been that safeguards inspection is a service, because it performs something for states that they cannot do themselves. They want to have a reputation for living in conformity to the NPT but self-declarations will not be sufficient for that, or it will not be as good as inspection by a professional outside party. So that was the starting point I had, but that was not the starting point that states had. They often felt that this was a nuisance, it cost them money, and moreover they had to receive these inspectors, and they had to have equipment sitting there and so on so forth. So this was the background. And after the debacle in Iraq governments realised that ‘yes, we have to move on’ so we had a mandate to go ahead and that was what we started in 93+2, but still thought that it would take two years, well it did take longer than.

**Michal Onderco:**

Many observers marvel at your ability to turn an obvious weakness of the Agency to a

strengthening of the mandate. Basically you significantly strengthened the Agency as an institution. How did you do that?

**Hans Blix:**

Well I think it's the same as with nuclear accidents, take the Chernobyl accident in 1986. We immediately went to the Board and said that now we must learn something from this and we did. We, in the summer of 1986 we succeeded in drafting two conventions, one on the duty to disseminate information, and the other about help to the states that have been affected by an accident. And we had two conventions signed in September 1986, accepted by the General Conference and signed by a number of them. I don't think any other international organization can match the record of getting two major conventions produced in such a short time. Of course we had various regulations that helped us to do it, but anyway that was one thing: acting immediately. The disaster was there, so we had to do something about it, governments recognised this. We also had set up a huge conference in which Russians came and briefed the world about what had happened and again, well this is what they wanted. So I think we performed what governments recognised was their need and in this situation to safeguard after Iraq in 1991, they recognised that 'what is the meaning of having safeguards unless we have something more substantial?'. And as I said in a speech at the conference that poor safeguards is worse than none. I sometimes say that that's cosmetic.

**Michal Onderco:**

But were there any countries that contested that claim?

**Hans Blix:**

Not that I remember. There were those who traditionally were rather sceptical of safeguards. The Belgians for instance, they were always very reluctant and felt it was an unnecessary expense. They felt that they were living perfectly honestly ok, but they were always reluctant. Germany was also not always belonging to those who were very enthusiastic. So you might say, perhaps, a tendency by non-nuclear weapons states with a lot of nuclear activities, to them it would mean more work, for others not. But by and large it was accepted.

**Michal Onderco:**

But many observers say that while you asked for an expansion of the mandate of the Agency you were opposed to turning an Agency into something that someone called "a confrontational inspectorate".

**Hans Blix:**

Yes

**Michal Onderco:**

How did you strike the balance?

**Hans Blix:**

Well I think that, these were comments and views that were expressed later than 1991.

**Michal Onderco:**

Well that was around 1995.

**Hans Blix:**

'95 yes? Alright, then we may have some experiences you see. Because in 1991 when the Security Council gave us the mandate, there was a big fight in Washington. And in Washington, I don't know who they were, who were very negative to the Agency, and felt that "these chaps failed to see what was going on, they are useless, and now we shall set up an inspection organization for Iraq, and we'll put it somewhere else, we won't put in on the Agency."

**Michal Onderco:**

You mentioned, I think, that it was supposed to be under the Security Council.

**Hans Blix:**

Yes, well the Security Council adopted Resolution 687 of course, but before they got there, before they had decided on this system with UNSCOM, four or three others, and IAEA for nuclear, there was a big fight in Washington when they were drafting

this. And this was Bob Galucci, who later became the vice-chairman of UNSCOM, he was in the State Department at the time, and he and a number of people on his side felt that “let’s forget about the Agency, they failed this one, and let’s create something totally new, UNSCOM”. But they were opposed by Ambassador Kennedy who was the US governor on the Board of the IAEA, who felt that if you did not give this job, the nuclear inspections, to the Agency, it means that you are undermining the confidence in the Agency generally, and I think that argument won. But the construction of the mandate was nevertheless one in which “the Washingtonians” - and the CIA etcetera - won a number of things, namely that the budget for the whole organization would be placed under UNSCOM in New York, and that also designation of sites to be inspected could come through New York, they would have intelligence and they would designate the sites. So, if you read a book 'Dismantling the Iraqi Nuclear Programme' by Gudrun Harrar a bout the Agency inspections in the ‘90’s, you’ll find very vivid descriptions of how UNSCOM in New York was trying to steer us. In the early stages, in one case, which made me furious, the UNSCOM, and behind UNSCOM I’m sure CIA, designated a whole team for an IAEA inspection. Well, the leader was to be an IAEA man, but the whole team was in fact named by them, and there were lots of CIA picks. There were locksmiths, and there were translators, and there were people with copy machines etc. So in reality UNSCOM took over, and behind UNSCOM was CIA. Later, you found that on a number of cases there were confrontations between UNSCOM inspectors and the Iraqis. They wouldn’t let them in. In 2002, the suspicious question was “why did the Iraqis keep the inspectors out, unless they had also concealed something?” So this fact, of keeping the inspectors out, became an important element later. Now I, and the IAEA, we had a different style of inspections. We were professionals, we had a long tradition of how you behave as inspectors correctly, we are not there as international policemen, we are there as inspectors. We are not an occupying force, and we seek their cooperation. It’s a difficult but correct relationship. Whereas UNSCOM had, from time to time, a very aggressive style. If you read Scott Ritter, quotations from what he said, it is vulgar. I can’t even repeat them, expressions of how the inspectors should behave, like “aggressive dogs”, “pissing on the Iraqis” and so on so forth. We would not have any of that, and I have sometimes suspected that a reason for Iraqis stopping UNSCOM inspectors, was that they were simply indignant. There might have been other reasons too. I just read an article in which an American author asserts that the main reason was that Saddam was obsessed about his own security and, I think rightly, suspected that through the inspectors they were trying to figure out ‘where is he’ . US attitude and US policy at the time was for regime change. And that probably, possibly, including assassination. They certainly had people in Iraq they cooperated with. Well, the statement from me that you are quoting is one that marks the difference of attitudes, We went much more by conversation, by seminar types of meetings in which we treated a type like Jafar Dhia Jafar, who was the head of the nuclear programme, very courteously, as a scientist.Later the method was emulated by UNSCOM, with very good results.

**Michal Onderco:**

Was there any internal opposition to that, within the IAEA, to for example treating Iraq.

**Hans Blix:**

No, not within the IAEA, no. The UNSCOM people called us, “bunny huggers” and we had also a nickname for them -- "rambos". This was the style, a certain animosity. There was also cooperation, this was not a public fight, because we had a mission given by the Security Council so there had to be cooperation, but it was unpleasant, and I tried to avoid all that mistake when I later came to head in New York, and Mohamed ElBaradei was in Vienna, I think we were very keen to see to it that there would be good cooperation, and there was.

**Michal Onderco:**

Prior to the 1995 RevCom there were three big non-proliferation stories, which you also mentioned in your speech [to the conference], there was Iraq, there was South Africa, and there was DPRK. Can you briefly comment on how these three stories affected the IAEA’s standing in the run-up to the conference?

**Hans Blix:**

I can't really read conference reactions to it, but I think that in the general public and among governments, the South Africa inspection improved IAEA standing. If you take the South Africa, it was a very, very thorough investigation that we made. Tt was lead by Dimitri Perricos, who was later UNMOVIC's head of operations. He died two weeks ago. He was, I think the world's most experienced inspector, and one of the most professional and skilful. He was the head of the investigation in South Africa. You can't say it was real disarmament, because the bombs were already gone. So the inspector didn't learn any secrets about them. There's always been a problem about inspecting enrichment facilities. If you can enrich 1kg of uranium to 4% you can do it to 10%, and 30% and 90% - and use it for a wepon. Therefore the means of inspecting enrichment plants had always been special. There's something called the hexapartite agreement: you did not use a North Korean inspector, for instance, to go to an enrichment plant in the Netherlands or the UK…

**Michal Onderco:**

Because they could learn something?

**Hans Blix:**

Yes. It is somewhat of a problem, because it clashes with the principle that you must treat your staff equally, and you don't discriminate between your staff. But here it is inevitable to avoid them learning something, unless it's shrouded in some other way, you may have to make a distinction between inspectors.

**Michal Onderco:**

I'll come to that point afterwards.

**Hans Blix:**

Ah. In South Africa there were of course enrichment facilities and they must have looked into them. But it was a very thorough affair, and I'm sure we did not say in the end that there is nothing left, I think we did as was my attitude that we describe everything we have done and then we say that we have not found anything. And I think I said that also in the speech, that this is as far as you can come. You cannot prove the negative, you cannot prove that it is complete. In the last resort, the governments have to be the judge and it's a political judgement.

**Michal Onderco:**

But did you ever have, for example, did you ever come to question the judgement?

**Hans Blix:**

About South Africa?

**Michal Onderco:**

About South Africa.

**Hans Blix:**

No. No one has ever questioned it since, but that is as I said a political judgement. You say "OK, these guys have gone through everything here and there and found nothing. So now we, as the government, have to act. Do we act as if they have nothing, or do we act as though we still suspect?" and then they conclude "yeah, no this is so thorough that we will assume that there is nothing." But if you take the inspections in Iraq in 1997 and 1998, and that time we had a report, it was me in 1997, and in 1998 it was Mohamed ElBaradei reported to the Security Council, that we fully understand the programme, and although we cannot guarantee there's not some little thing that remains, computer programmes that remain somewhere, we do not see anything left. But we did not say there IS nothing left, because the US would have jumped at us, they wanted the question to remain a question mark. I mean the distinction with South Africa they wanted to write it off, but here they wanted to keep it because they didn't want to declare that the nuclear dossier is closed. And they were helped by the fact that we cannot logically say there is nothing.

**Michal Onderco:**

At the time of the conference North Korea was in the process of withdrawing from the treaty and one of the arguments that you have made during the speech was also that North Korea needs to comply with all its obligations until the withdrawal is complete. How did you come to that conclusion, and was there any internal opposition to it?

**Hans Blix:**

No, I don't think so. I looked through the text but I don't remember, I probably said they were still, in my view, a party to the treaty. Well if they were party to the treaty then they were obliged also to go by the safeguards agreement, so formally that was correct. But they did not and I think I said somewhere that the sooner they come into conformity with obligations the better. But I do not think there was any opposition to that, everyone was after North Korea, there was no one defending them.

**Michal Onderco:**

Did IAEA have a position on the extension of the treaty?

**Hans Blix:**

No, I don't think I ever pronounced ourselves on that. Do you mean the withdrawal, they withdrew?

**Michal Onderco:**

No no, I mean the extension…

**Hans Blix:**

Oh the extension of the treaty, I see, the NPT. I don't think that we pronounced our thoughts on that. No.

**Michal Onderco:**

Was there any informal…

**Hans Blix:**

Well of course we were in favour of it.

**Michal Onderco:**

But were you in favour of indefinite extension or of long…

**Hans Blix:**

I don't think the question was put to us at the time, no. No. That was a political decision eminently. If the Agency were to have any view on it, I think it should be the Board of Governors, not the Secretariat.

**Michal Onderco:**

In the run up to the conference, you asked the Board for renewal of non-proliferation powers, and especially in strengthening of the safeguards, and there were many countries that opposed that at the conference very publicly and very openly. How did that opposition play out at the Agency and within the Board?

**Hans Blix:**

You mean in light of the programme that we were…?

**Michal Onderco:**

Yes.

**Hans Blix:**

Well I never felt, we can go through the records of the Board discussions from the period, and I never felt a very strong resistance to it. I mean the way we went about it was to draft main lines and then dressing them into articles and so forth. There were two - Laura Rockwood was one of them and Bob Hooper, two Americans actually, who drafted most of it with me and some others. And that was discussed in the Board, I'm sure there were many comments, and probably those who were more sceptical registered, like the Germans. But the German governor was an old, very senior member of the Board of the IAEA and basically was positive to the mission. If you read Mohamed ElBaradei's memoirs you probably find that he felt that we were going too far. Together with the Chairman who was a Canadian at the time, he set up a small group, to go over the draft. They changed a number of things, and I think that Mohamed was of the view that I had been too rigid in demanding extensive powers. They conceded on some points in order to get it through. Well I don't completely agree with his description of the story, and I think that some concessions were unnecessary to give.

**Michal Onderco:**

Such as?

**Hans Blix:**

Visa? I think I compared it to CWC that I mentioned in my speech.

**Michal Onderco:**

Yes.

**Hans Blix:**

The CWC inspectors do not need a visa to go there, and there was a very explicit paragraph about how quickly they are to be entitled to come to the places they want to visit and we did not get that. I think in the draft we had, at least, I believe we had proposed that there should be no visa, and they have that, I think.

**Michal Onderco:**

And who was the strongest opponent to that?

**Hans Blix:**

I can't remember anyone in the Board, but this was in 1995 so I might have forgotten it, but I can't remember anyone who took it up there. But somehow it did not get through the process in which ElBaradei and the Canadian Chairman, what was his name? Walker, I think, Peter Walker and their laundry, and perhaps they judged that the draft, the last one that I'd had my hands on, would raise resistance, it's possible. Anyway, I would have pressed it. I sort of looked on it as a negotiation after all. Yes, there were differences. As I've said Germany was generally more restrictive, whereas the US was the one that wanted to strengthen the powers of the inspectorate.

**Michal Onderco:**

Why do you think the Americans were so interested in expanding the powers of the IAEA?

**Hans Blix:**

Well, they do not have to submit to safeguards themselves, so this is an instance by which the nuclear weapons states can haunt the non-nuclear weapons states and they, I think, they see it as a principle goal that there should not be a spread of nuclear weapons and the more inspections, the more control you have of that, the better. So they will support.

**Michal Onderco:**

Because you talk about the United States, but of course there are five of the nuclear weapons countries. Did they tend to ally together, or was it really the United States that was at the forefront?

**Hans Blix:**

The US was at the forefront, but I cannot remember if there was any real difference between the nuclear weapons states, no. I think it's always been their attitude that the more they can get by way of inspection of the non-nuclear weapons states, the better. And you see it even now: I saw an article the other day by Lord Hannay and by Pickering. And they are saying that Trump should not throw out the Iran Agreement, he should build on it and he should try to get it as a pattern for non-nuclear weapons states. Now, I don't think that's going to fly, because it's suggesting really that the great danger in the world are lambs, not wolves, and now we have to sort of pull out a few more teeth from the lambs, getting them all to agree that they should not have so-and-so many centrifuges.

**Michal Onderco:**

Well I'll come to that point a little later but in your speech you were quite positive about the steps that were taken in the area of disarmament in that time.

**Hans Blix:**

Yes, this was in 1995. It turned worse afterwards, but the first half of the 1990s was a big détente and disarmament time: the CWC came into force at that time and what else did you have? Well the Comprehensive Test Ban came in '96.

**Michal Onderco:**

But there were of course the bilateral negotiations between the Russians and the US.

**Hans Blix:**

The ABM.

**Michal Onderco:**

Of course, the member states of the IAEA were divided over the idea of how the treaty should be extended; whether it should be extended indefinitely or shorter. Did that division in any way affect the work of the Agency, or of the Board?

**Hans Blix:**

No. It would have been the same if they had extended it for ten years or for twenty years.

**Michal Onderco:**

For the Agency it would have been the same?

**Hans Blix:**

Yeah, I think so.

**Michal Onderco:**

And the animosity between the two camps didn't really affect the work of the Board?

**Hans Blix:**

No. No we were to serve. It could go on for another ten years or it could go on forever, it made no difference in our thought.

**Michal Onderco:**

At the conference, you said that you provided certain memos in the preparation process. Tell me how that happened and what consequences it had.

**Hans Blix:**

Well I don't know what they contained, I don't have any copies of them. But this was our traditional role, to do before all the review conferences. Under the treaty the Agency has specific functions, one is to contribute to the dissemination of nuclear science and technology for peaceful purposes, and the whole technical cooperation programme of the Agency was in that basket, so there was a memorandum provided on that activity. Then there was this memorandum about the safeguards, and I think there was a third memorandum, I forget which right now. But anyway, these were prepared in advance and submitted. We also provided the conference with some personnel who were knowledgeable in these particular areas, but they were not there to play a political role, no.

**Michal Onderco:**

So they were there only for technical issues?

**Hans Blix:**

They were there to explain the role of the Agency, what they could do and what they couldn't do. But this is an intergovernmental conference, they would play their role and we would play the secretariat role.

**Michal Onderco:**

But the issue of safeguards for example was a clear issue were the Agency had a stake.

**Hans Blix:**

An interest, a stake, yes.

**Michal Onderco:**

How did you play that stake?

**Hans Blix:**

Well I don't know whether Bob Hooper, which of us was there, but [people like him] are the ones who can and need to explain for the government delegates how things are actually done. And the conference didn't do anything about the safeguards programme.

**Michal Onderco:**

But they discussed it.

**Hans Blix:**

They discussed it yes.

**Michal Onderco:**

They had a whole committee on that.

**Hans Blix:**

But I don't think they pronounced themselves on, say, whether we should use satellite images or not, because we had not done that before the Iraqi affair. But with the affair, the Iraqi affair opened up some new perspectives of course, and then we were granted far more extensive powers than the 93+2 ever gave. And we came to use the satellite images, which were available commercially already at that time. Even more important, perhaps, was the use of environmental sampling. That was the great thing at the time. So all that I'm sure was explained by our people, and maybe it was explained already in a memorandum, that's possible. But it was not that the conference, I think, said something about it, other than in general terms that the safeguards should be strengthened.

**Michal Onderco:**

Would the Agency, for example, lobby the member states to express themselves favourably about certain things?

**Hans Blix:**

No, I'm not aware of our doing that. No I think, generally we were somewhat restrained in that because lobbying particular states, our secretariat serves all the member states. So it's much safer then, if you have a view to express it publicly, rather than privately, but what individual secretariat members have done I do not know. But my attitude would be that if you want to push something, do it publicly.

**Michal Onderco:**

Of course the early '90s are also the period when bodies such as the nuclear suppliers group emerged, after a long dormant period. How did the Agency see these other bodies such as the NSG?

**Hans Blix:**

I can't remember that I ever had any direct contact with the NSG.

**Michal Onderco:**

Well they were meeting in Vienna so?

**Hans Blix:**

Yes, well that's another matter but that doesn't mean that you have to… I was invited once in New York when they were meeting there to give a speech, but I think that was after I had left the IAEA actually. Because NSG is an important group, to be sure, and the NSG after all was the one that gave the pressure to non-nuclear states to accept their safeguards agreement because they took the decision that they would not export except to states which had full-scope safeguards, so we were sort of customers.

**Michal Onderco:**

So you were a customer but you were never actually involved with them?

**Hans Blix:**

No, no. NSG was somewhat controversial among the membership. Many developing countries were skeptical to the NSG.

**Michal Onderco:**

Of course. I'm trying to find where I have a copy of our speech because I made notes onto it. One of the things which you also mentioned in your speech, was that you were pushing for not having a new international organization for CTBT…

**Hans Blix:**

Yes

**Michal Onderco:**

… but you wanted IAEA to fill that position…

**Hans Blix:**

Yes.

**Michal Onderco:**

…and that was a battle you lost.

**Hans Blix:**

Yes.

**Michal Onderco:**

Tell me more about it. First of all, why did you think IAEA was suitable, who were your main enemies.

**Hans Blix:**

I wouldn't say there were enemies really, there were different views, and I thought it would be practical to have it at the IAEA. Because, not testing a weapon was really comprised in the NPT duties, and we were verifying in respect to the NPT duties. We were going into the labs to see where the nuclear material is, we were then cut off if they go so far as to breach the treaty, and set off, then that would go a lot further. And we had lots of nuclear expertise and I thought it would be saving resources, if the governments placed it with the IAEA. Now there was opposition to this, but there was also support from a number of members, a number of ambassadors for this. So we came forward with these arguments, but the other side prevailed, and I'm not going into analysis of who were the ones who prevailed. I can see in retrospect that there were some things that spoke in favour of the solution that they got, that was that the methods of verification were different: they have the seismic methods, or they have the underwater, they have the taking of air samples. Air samples is something that we could have done also I think, but the seismic and all of these things that was worked out by scientists for preparation, including a number of eminent Swedish scientists. Now this spoke, perhaps, for a separate organization. And we didn't weep over it when it when it was done. It was a proposal, a view, and it failed, so what?

**Michal Onderco:**

So who were the countries that were opposed to that idea?

**Hans Blix:**

I don't know. But I remember talking to the ambassadors about this, and I had very good support from some of them.

**Michal Onderco:**

So who were the ones who were supporting you, if you remember?

**Hans Blix:**

No, I don't.

**Michal Onderco:**

Ok. After the conference also the IAEA mandate, at some later point, strengthened, with the reinforcement of the Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement, later the foundation of Model Additional Protocol. How did the Agency see those new tasks? Because you can see both as a strengthening of the Agency, but you can also see them as a new burden on the Agency.

**Hans Blix:**

Well the Model Additional Protocol, I think came probably after my time.

**Michal Onderco:**

That was 1998.

**Hans Blix:**

'98. Well then I'd left, you see I left at the end of '97. So I did not have a hand in that, but I cannot believe that the Agency would have regretted the burden. I mean this was a means of strengthening their ability, and they must have welcomed it and worked out the protocols in that way. I thought of this as more technical, of translating the 93+2 agreement into practical work.

**Michal Onderco:**

When the conference decided that there should be a strengthened review process, and there was of course a lot of disagreement about what that is supposed to mean in the later process, did you for see new obligations for the Agency in respect to the strengthened review mechanism of the treaty?

**Hans Blix:**

Of the NPT Review Mechanism? No. We didn't even touch, as I said a while ago we

didn’t even touch the review mechanism then. They decided in a dramatic way that it would be forever, but we had no part in that decision, [that was a] very clear political decision which we should not have, and I’m sure did not have a hand.

**Michal Onderco:**

But one of the things that the conference decided was that in the future there will be more powers, there would be a strengthened mechanism for reviewing the performance of the countries, and that of course also one of the discussions was that this might mean that the preparatory conferences would turn into mini- review conferences. Is that something that IAEA was thinking about?

**Hans Blix:**

No I don’t think, at last I was not. No.

**Michal Onderco:**

So for you as Director-General of the Agency, what was the biggest challenge for the 1995 Review Conference?

**Hans Blix:**

Well I think they are the ones I talked about in the speech. And I don’t think I mentioned even the idea of the question of prolongation of the treaty.

**Michal Onderco:**

No, you didn’t.

**Hans Blix:**

No, no. I mean that’s not my desk, it was for the governments to decide on that. Strengthening and safeguards yes, that was evidently something we wanted to have. But we had done it ourselves. We had done the blueprint and I’m sure we didn’t want anything to disturb that. It had been accepted by governments after all, the ‘93+2, the additional protocols was accepted by unanimity and the general conference.

**Michal Onderco:**

So the conference, the IAEA played a highly technical role at the conference?

**Hans Blix:**

Yes. It always had played a technical role there, but in the technicalities there are also political implications. Of course.

**Michal Onderco:**

Of course. Well that’s what I’m hinting at, because you can say that the IAEA has only a technical role but there’s a deep political implication to what it does...

**Hans Blix:**

Yes.

**Michal Onderco:**

Were there any attempts to maybe draw in the IAEA to the political discussions at the conference?

**Hans Blix:**

Not that I’m aware of.  Of course I came there to give one glorious speech (*laughs)*

**Michal Onderco:**

So you were there literally for two days?

**Hans Blix:**

Yeah, yes, yes. Or one day, I forget which, but not more. No, the main thing was the contribution of the memoranda to the various groups and the people we leave there who are experts in their particular field.

**Michal Onderco:**

Is there something I should have asked about the conference and I didn’t?

**Hans Blix:**

Should you have asked something more about the conference?

**Michal Onderco:**

Yes, and about the IAEA’s role in it.

**Hans Blix:**

No, I'm sure that… We went through the speech…. (*looks through the speech)* no I think you rightly spotted that, on the CTBT is one that I lost, and also on the additional protocol, on the visa yes I lost, also. But did I speak about the manner of inspections, maybe? I said something about that. Because you refer here to the 'bunny huggers'

**Michal Onderco:**

Yes.

**Hans Blix:**

Then I'm not sure that I say anything about it in the speech, I forget.

**Michal Onderco:**

Well one thing that I find very surprising in the speech, is that you're very obvious about the fact that you wanted to have effective safeguards and you wanted to have as much powers as possible, as much oversight as possible. And it's obvious that there are some countries, including some countries on the board, who are very strongly opposed to that.

**Hans Blix:**

Reluctant, I would say.

**Michal Onderco:**

And this must have been obvious at the conference.

**Hans Blix:**

Possibly, unless they felt that that fight has already been fought, and in the acceptance of the Additional Protocol.

**Michal Onderco:**

But there are still countries up until today who don't accept it.

**Hans Blix:**

Yes, and not all, but more and more have. More than a hundred I think now have accepted it.

**Michal Onderco:**

Yes.

**Hans Blix:**

…So it has come a long way.

**Michal Onderco:**

But there are a lot of countries that haven't accepted.

**Hans Blix:**

Yes, well at the time of the conference there were a hell of a lot of states that hadn't taken any safeguards agreement at all, and I said that was unacceptable.

**Michal Onderco:**

How did you then negotiate with these countries to sort of persuade them to sign up?

**Hans Blix:**

Well pressure cannot be used, you can remind them, say things that are very courteous. They come with ambassadors, and you remind them that "you haven't done this yet and this is your duty", but you don't have any policemen or dogs that you can send after them no. Those who can have some leverage, and I'm sure the Americans would do that. I can remember on some occasion I sent the officer from the external relations division to the Caribbean, because we had a number of states in the Caribbean that didn't have one. They didn't have much nuclear stuff but why shouldn't they have the safeguards agreement in order? It was a very nice assignment to fly between the various islands and say that "Look, if you have difficulty and need technical help in drafting a ratification, we will provide the help to you", so we did something there.

**Michal Onderco:**

And was that welcome?

**Hans Blix:**

Yeah I think we got one or two that came along. But it's not that you can exert pressure, no. That you cannot do. (*looking through papers) (cites from paper)* Even where the Agency has been shown the most extensive cooperation… It cannot… affirm that the declaration is correct and complete, it can only report that after very thorough verification nothing has been found suggesting the country …

**Michal Onderco:**

In your discussion about the lessons from South Africa I found one line particularly interesting, because you say "it is important for the Agency to have inspectors who have some knowledge and understanding of nuclear weapon design and production."

**Hans Blix:**

Yes this is a chapter that has come to the fore. I got from the James Martin Center in Washington, they recently issued the volume about 'what can we learn from safeguards and other inspections experience, with a view to verifying disarmament in the future?" And I think I touched upon it here also. Now you have on the one hand the importance that you shall not be proliferating and it will spread knowledge about this. And that you have to observe and I think we have in the Additional Protocol, certainly the chemical weapons, we have the idea of shrouding things. They should be able to see a lot of things but at the same time to hide things that are not directly relevant. If there are military secrets for instance, it is legitimate. But if you do deal with disarmament these are different things. If you want to dismantle bombs, or you want to dismantle or do something with enrichment plants, then it's a more sensitive matter than if you simply build your nuclear power plant and you see to it that nothing has been diverted. Now here, there has been I think, and probably remains, reservations about having the IAEA dealing with this, and some are saying that there should be a separate group that should do this, we shouldn't mix them into it. However, in the case of Iraq, after all, we were dealing with materials that the Iraqis had intended to use for weapons purposes and we had then people hired from nuclear-weapons states to do that. And Jacques [Baute], he was the head of the team for the IAEA during the Iraqi inspections in 2002-2003, he had a background in the weapons. Now we ran into this problem in connection to, and I think I mentioned it there, in connection to the thaw between America and the USSR when they dismantled and did away with a lot of plutonium, and the USSR then voluntarily submitted, accepted a ratification of how they handled the plutonium. And recently of course you saw the Putin had withdrawn from an agreement about this. However there was another conflict that I did not mention there and that was the so-called Trilateral agreement. And this went back to an initiative that I took after having been to Moscow and seeing Mr. Mikhailov, who was the minister of energy at the time, and we talked about the nuclear disarmament they were about to do, and all the bombs that would be dismantled etcetera. And I said "well, this is of interest not only to the US bilaterally with Russia, it's also of interest to the rest of the world. You have an obligation to do this under the NPT, and it's after the interests of the world. And could one not have also an IAEA verification of this process?" My view was that here it shouldn't be so difficult to do, but it was also, I think, I think it would be healthy that you would have more inspection in nuclear-weapons states, because this was always a source of resentment among the non-nuclear weapons states, that "we accepted all of these things and they said 'well that's between us, it's just bilateral'." And I felt it would be healthy. And Mikhailov was positive to that and then I went to the American Secretary of Energy, it was Hazel O'Leary at the time, and she was also favourable. So we set up some meeting at the IAEA General Conference between the two and we had a sort of declaration that we would work on this, and it never worked out. I think verification was one of the problems in it.

**Michal Onderco:**

If they were ok with the bilateral verification what was then the problem?

**Hans Blix:**

Well if they're bilateral they are handled by people who -- as it were -- are already 'living in sin.' They are living with nuclear weapons. They have learnt the secrets. But here you involve inspectors, outsiders who should not learn. How one could actually prevent that they learn the specific secrets that they should not become familiar with, I don't know. We have not entered into that. We only had various schemes. There's

still one person in Vienna, Tom Shaea, who was involved in this programme, very innovative.

He had various schemes about how one could involve IAEA inspectors. Now that was after all an inspection verification of nuclear disarmament. The idea was not rejected at the time by the two sides, but it proved difficult to work it out.

**Michal Onderco:**

Were other nuclear weapons states also opposed to having IAEA inspectors in their facilities?

**Hans Blix:**

No, I mean they had voluntary offers, so they were not opposed to it in principle.

**Michal Onderco:**

But I mean other countries have also been involved in the disarmament steps, and…

**Hans Blix:**

No I don't think there was any opposition to it really, it stumbled on the technical aspects.

**Michal Onderco:**

Ok. I think I read through all my questions.

**Hans Blix:**

Fine, let me see. Right now of course it is not about disarmament. What's going on is rearmament, so it's not a, so much a problem, but it could be, in the case of Iran. There, after all, they go into enrichment plants. Iran still enriches uranium. It is a challenge we've had before. W've sent inspectors to enrichment plants in the UK, I don't see that just as a new problem. When it comes to dismantling of the weapons I think it could also be done through the IAEA. Still I have a similar attitude to that which I had on the CTBT: why create a new organization if you have one and plenty of people with nuclear ability? I have never quite understood the fight. Why was thre a fight in Washington in 1991 at the time of the creation of UNSCOM? Why the wish to take over also the nuclear?I don't know who championed that, because there had not been any government criticism that the Agency failed. We did fail to discover, yes, but this was due to the system. Some say it was due to a culture -- a culture of being too kind, too gentle. There might have been something in that. But I don't think there were any grave deficiencies, serious things. Serious was the weak structure of the system, that was set up by governments. And it was weak because governments didn't want to have it strong. In the beginning of the 2002, there were discussions in Washington how we were to design UNMOVIC inspections. Discussions under the auspices of the Carnegie Endowment, on how one could sort of beef up inspections -- make the inspections really strong. There were ideas,which I did not share, that inspectors in the case of Iraq should go in and there would also be military people from the P5, accompanying the inspectors. Now, this was clearly inspired by the past experience that inspectors were stopped. If inspectors were to be accompanied by P5 representatives and military people, then supposedly they would not be stopped. I don't know whether that would have worked out actually, but I just shudder at the thought of what would happen if there were a clash between some American GIs standing near the inspectors and the host country. I had an argument about that in Washington. I said you can change the system. Overhaul it completely, if you wish. Let the states carry out inspections. In the case of the Korean War the Security Council gave the whole UN job to one country. You can do the same with inspection. But I don't think you can combine or mix inspectors who are international civil servants with national troops. This has to do with the kind of relation you create between the inspectorate and the recipient country. Mohamed ElBaradei and I were very precise about the rights that we wanted to have, and in Vienna before inspections started we discussed with the Iraqis about the modalities, the rights of inspectors. I didn't think that the Iraqis were giving sufficiently and I said "No I can't accept this". So this round of talks collapsed in Vienna. Next time ElBaradei and I wrote a letter to the Iraqis, saying "this is what you should accept". Well, they accepted more, but they didn't accept everything. Eventually resolution 1441 was adopted by the Security Council -- the famous one in the autumn. There the sponsors spelled out much regarding the rights of inspectors and simply added that for the rest

Iraq was obliged to do what was laid down in the letter from ElBaradei and Blix. Which I thought was remarkable. However, this was not a prestige fight from our point of view, it was simply that we had seen the conflicts that arose between UNSCOM and Iraq and did not want to have them.

**Michal Onderco:**

That comes directly to the point that we discussed earlier, whether it is actually legal for the Security Council to give new obligations to member states. Was there any legal debate on that at the IAEA?

**Hans Blix:**

No I don't think so. I think I would have assumed that if the Security Council takes a decision under Chapter 7, and say it's binding on member states then they are simply obliged to do so. So I would have cashed it and said "this is it". Now I agree with you that Council might go too far and be unfair In the case of Iran I think they've gone very far. First they asked the Iranians to suspend enrichment as a confidence building measure, and that was clearly not obligatory, but when the Iranians didn't do that, they said it was mandatory for them to do so. I have not denied that it was binding, but I think it was unfair. As a lawyer I can have the view that there are limits as to what the Security Council can do and should do. But there is no check on Security Council, you cannot appeal, there is not an appeal court. You can go to the International Court of Justice for an advisory opinion, if the Council want to have it, but not otherwise. There are also others who object and say that the Council is going too far, that "we don't want the Council to go into legislation". Now with [UN Security Council Resolution] 1540 that is nearly going to it, because they oblige member states to introduce legislation. They don't say exactly what it should contain, but it's pretty close. There has been a debate about that and I think that's a healthy debate. One can argue in the General Assembly and say this or that goes too far, but I think the ultimate brake is probably --if they go too far-- is that member states would not abide. There's also a consciousness, an awareness in the Security Council, that maybe that there are limits which it might not wish to go beyond. The idea of combining P5 military with inspections, I hope no. I think inspectors are the trustees of the international community, even of culprit states They, too, are members of that community. Inspectors should conduct themselves like the legendary London bobby, who is fair and correct all the way through. And I think, this was vindicated in the case of Iraq. When we came there as UNMOVIC, we didn't have great problems. It's not that they loved us. No, we had fights about various things, details like the overflights by U2 planes and so forth, and there would be harassment from time to time, but we never had any of the clashes that UNSCOM had during the 1990's. I think it also helped that we had very clear lines with the Security Council decisions.

Now there's one area I've not talked about which was not so prominent at that time, and that was the provision of intelligence.

**Michal Onderco:**

That's where I wanted to go. Because you were talking about the positions of the agencies being independent of the member states, but of course the question of where the Agency gets its information from and the provision of intelligence from member states has become over time an incredibly touchy issue. And some scholars say that you were, compared to for example Mr. ElBaradei, you were more willing to take into account the intelligence that was given by the member states…

**Hans Blix:**

Or rather the country, because we got so damned little intelligence when I was there! I sat through some of the sessions and there was very little. It was welcome, but very, very little. No I think it became more prominent later, especially in relation to Iran. And Mohamed ElBaradei in my position was exactly the same, when we pronounced ourselves about it. That was to say that yes, we want information, if they are sitting on something don't come afterwards with something discovered and say that "well you didn't find it", "well why didn't you tell us, if you knew?" That was our complaint to start with. But the second point was that we thought it should be a one-way traffic, we are not a cooperating group with intelligence, we are not a quid pro quo. You should tell us and then we will do something, if we find it valid we will do something, we will put on the track and then we will tell the Board, including you, what we have

done. So that was consistently our view. Now we didn't, as long as I was there, we didn't get that much intelligence, but Mohamed of course and Amano, the present Director-General, they have received massive amounts. And there is a danger in this, you have to be very critical in it. And there is a lot written about this, you have the whole book by Gareth Porter about this which I read with great interest and it's very hard to assess. They must make use of it, they must go through it, they can take leads and I'm sure they can go to places that they've been tipped about. But there's also a temptation for the governments to come with something and get the Agency to insert it and say that this is plausible, or it's by and large…

**Michal Onderco:**

Is that the famous sentence that was in the report of the Director-General about Iran that was alleged to have come directly from American intelligence, for which Mr. Amano was greatly criticised?

**Hans Blix:**

Yes, I'm not criticising. I'm simply saying you have to be very careful and I would not have any criticism or accusation without going into the concrete case. But so the intelligence, getting intelligence is a blessing but also something you have to be very, very cautious about. Because intelligence, they have no compunction about peddling, fooling you, they have their own national objectives and they may not be the same as you. You are supposed to be an impartial, international civil servant, its one concept that I feel very strongly about, international civil service. No one can be 100% objective in this role but it makes a hell of a difference if you try to be objective, than if you don't try to be objective. So intelligence remains a whole chapter. And if the governments in the UN, if they want to have something that is run by intelligence, well then set it up as a government institution, set it up separately. But don't say it's a part of the UN organization.

**Michal Onderco:**

And did you at that time, already in the 1990's, expect that the issue of intelligence would become such a prominent thing at the IAEA?

**Hans Blix:**

No, no. The problem was rather that we didn't get anything.

**Michal Onderco:**

But did you foresee that this might happen as a problem?

**Hans Blix:**

No, not really. We thought it really in terms of getting a tip of where you should go. There was one case in Iran where I had secured an agreement, it came out in a press release, that we could go any time any place. This was always the beautiful formula, we also got it with Libya. In the case of Iran, there was a newspaper article in a UK paper that they had nuclear secret installations up somewhere in the Elbruz mountains. We said "this is not on your list of declaration but can we go there? on the strength of this 'any time any place', We did. And John Jennekens , head of the Safeguards department went up there in a rather adventurous helicopter trip. He walked around there and said that no, there was not enough water. It was a recreation place for people form the nuclear sector, so it had some link to nuclear. That was a good example because it showed the Iranian side that if you are sufficiently open, if you are accused by somebody, or alleged something, then you can clear yourself by being more open. And we did it also in the case of North Korea. There too I got this pledge "anytime, anyplace", and the first time we asked to see something they said ok, but the second time I think they said no, you are not going to do that. Now, linking back to intelligence you get a tip from intelligence that here is something you should look at, and in a case in UNMOVIC, yes we have tips from the intelligence about, I don't know how many, places that they suggested we should inspect and we went to about three dozen of these places and in no case did we find any weapons of mass destruction because they were not there. And of course we reported that, both to those who had given us the tips and to the Security Council and I think this is one of the most damning parts of the UK and the US, namely that they had suspected so many sites, and we went to them, and they were empty. Should I have been impressed by that? I mean surely they had not given us the poorest sites,

they must have given us the ones they were most suspicious about, and that didn't work out. They should have, I think they should have pulled up their socks then, and be more sceptical. They didn't want to be sceptical, that was the reality of it. So that was intelligence.

**[HERE RECORDING GOES OFF RECORD]**

**Hans Blix:**

This is a difficult problem which arose with the additional protocol. Now the additional protocol gives many new rights and additional techniques to be used to find more material. But it also allows the Agency to reduce inspections in some areas, if a country fulfils its obligations and declarations very well, then you can reduce. And this was a complaint that we had had for a long time, countries would say "why the hell should we have so many inspections here, we are, you know that we are against proliferation. You should be in Libya, more inspections there." So the system was set up to enable the Agency to reduce for good safeguards behaviour, as it were, and we could also jazz it up in other places. However the departure from the more mechanical rules that "for so-and-so much material there will be so-and-so many inspections", we departed from that in giving greater flexibility, and thereby opened itself up somewhat for possible accusations of being arbitrary, and acting politically. There has been some Russian, I would say a Russian who spoke at a conference a couple years ago, and criticised the Agency, he said that he thinks that they've gone too far in this and is more favourable to some countries than others. And that is a new problem if you have a system that is more flexible.

**Michal Onderco:**

But how do you then decide about who is the good citizen and who is not the good citizen?

**Hans Blix:**

That was my argument, I argued against this, and said that you cannot do very much about it. The difference between if you have a police authority in a city like Stockholm and they go after narcotics, like heroin, well they know areas where they will put more resources because they suspect, and that's all right. But international inspections are with states which are equal, and it's more like an airport control where if you have a beard, or you have a shabby dress, or you're dressed elegantly, you go through the same damn thing. And I say state control is more like that, it has to be more like that. I mean we may have our views on who are scoundrels, whether Libya or anyone else, but it's not that you can really gear and say that "we suspect Libya more and therefore we will have twice as many inspections", you cannot do that.

**Michal Onderco:**

Thank you very much.