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Oral History Interview with Harald Müller

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Expert member of the German delegation to the NPT review conference.

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Harald Müller

Germany

Oral history interview conducted by Michal Onderco in person in Frankfurt on 15 November 2016

Michal Onderco:

Thank you very much for agreeing to talk to me about your participation in the conference. Let's start by placing you within the delegation: how did you become involved in German non-proliferation policy and how did you become a member of the delegation to the conference?

Harald Müller:

Well, I'll try to make a long story as short as possible. I wrote my first piece on non-proliferation in 1977 when I was a PhD student. I had my first encounter with German officials in the run-up to the 1980 conference. I was hired by a Belgian institute 1983-1986. I spent two years there and the first year I just commuted, as the academic secretary of a prominent group of Europeans who worked with a prominent group of Americans. In the American group there were people like Gerald Smith, George Bunn, Lewis Dunn - names of the time. And the idea was to find a new transatlantic consensus on non-proliferation after the very harsh Carter years when Europe and the US clashed all the time. And in this job, I learned, first of all, to move myself in the diplomatic circles and I became more important to my government because I was German, I was in this group, this group had an impact and an output and all that. So my contact to then Bonn intensified - as a very young expert who would talk to the people and, during these talks show that he knew something and I would take always a lot of information with me. Then I became a member of PPNN, I don't know whether you have crossed PPNN anywhere?

Michal Onderco:

Yes.

Harald Müller:

Which was indeed a group that was very important for the NPT Extension Conference because of its composition: members in the delegations, the conference president was one of our members, the conference president of 1985 one of our members. So our discussions and also our briefings had an impact. And the German government was very aware of this group and my role in it. So I became, basically, in the early '90s such a thing like a chief external expert advisor to our non-proliferation office. And when the run up to '95 came they just asked me whether I would like to participate as an expert member. And of course I said yes. I had already seen two conferences as an observer but being on the delegation is quite a different thing. And also I felt quite honoured.

Michal Onderco:

Was it normal at the time to have experts on delegations?

Harald Müller:

Not for Germany. It was by-and-large still very rare. In the US case, they always have experts but because of the rotational system. They took Lewis Dunn, who was not in the diplomatic service anymore, to the 1995 conference as an expert, because he was tremendously good. I think Bill Potter was participating for the first time in the Kyrgyz delegation but otherwise there weren't many.

Michal Onderco:

You mentioned that your insertion in different networks was, of course, of value to the German government. Was it bi-directional flow? So was it also the German government trying to spread its ideas through you, or did they ever ask you to spread their ideas?

Harald Müller:

No, no. I mean it was a two-way flow in that of course I could gather information through my contact with the government, including confidential documents which I would not see, without the governmental contacts. But in terms of ideas, I would argue that if there was any flow it went from me to them. I have always argued that the value of expertise to government concerns two different forms of knowledge. One: we have much greater background knowledge. We are on a subject - I mean I've been on that subject for a long time. In '95 I was already 18 years into non-proliferation matters. So in terms of the legalities, the history, the position of various countries, the intricacies of some of the issues - I was superior to anybody on this occasion. Even so it was a brilliant delegation, but in terms of background knowledge I was far ahead. And the second type of knowledge which we have and value, but that depends on the openness of the government, is the invention of crazy ideas. That means ideas out-of-the-box about which they hadn't thought before; because they are in the box of course, but that are reasonable, and with an air of realism to them, and I was a rather productive producer of those sorts of suggestions.

Michal Onderco:

Let's move to Germany at the conference. What were the main thoughts that Germany went to the conference with? What were the main policy positions that Germany went to the conference with?

Harald Müller:

Well, before the conference there was a deep discussion in the government, and also in the parliament, about whether we should support the indefinite extension. We were not the only European or NATO country where that happened. I mean Germany, when the treaty was negotiated of course was one of the main targets and, was not all too amused about it. The NPT was highly controversial, when it was opened for signature there was part of the Conservative party strongly opposed, including luminaries like Adenauer and Strauss. And it was not possible for the Social Democratic-Conservative coalition to sign before it broke down and was replaced by new elections, because of the Conservative position. Now, of course, part of that wandered in the bureaucracy into '95, the Germans had a very strong impact on the 25 years initial period, and when this period came to an end there were quite a few people on the left and on the right who said 'wouldn't it be better to have it again limited?' and this debate extended into the Foreign ministry. There was controversy between the then leading office which was not in the Disarmament department but was in the Economics department, which shows the auspices under which Germany was at this time looking at the NPT. And they had decided for indefinite extension, because they believed the diplomatic damage to Germany after reunification and the economic dimension, maybe in relations to the United States, would not be justifiable. But while the head of the Disarmament office at that time, a dedicated Social Democrat, was sceptical about indefinite extension because he said 'we will never see disarmament then.'

Michal Onderco:

And what was the position of the Minister, Klaus Kinkel?

Harald Müller:

Indefinite extension.

Michal Onderco:

And was it because he was persuaded or was he a true believer in the NPT?

Harald Müller:

Kinkel took the NPT very seriously, he was well aware about the German history and the NPT, was well aware about the importance the NPT had to our allies, to the United States in particular, and, you know, he had become interested in the whole issue of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, he had himself proposed a nuclear arms register in 1994, which he got beaten up for. And I would say yes, he was dedicated to the treaty. It was one of the occasions when the German foreign minister also attended the review and gave the German presentation in the general debate. To the best of my recollection that had happened only three times. Genscher in 1990, Kinkel in '95, and Fischer I believe in 2005, and that was it.

Michal Onderco:

So were there, for example, other ministries involved? For example, was Defence involved?

Harald Müller:

Yes, yes. The German position was the result of inter-ministerial discussion in which the Foreign office was leading, the Defence ministry was also on the delegation, that's important. There were two officers: one from Bonn and one from Geneva. The Economy ministry, there was one person from that ministry in the delegation. And the Research ministry. The Research Ministry for the old federal republic was always the leading department, not the Foreign office.

Michal Onderco:

Why?

Harald Müller:

Because, first of all this ministry had started in the '50s as the Atomic ministry. So that was their turf. And because after it was clearly decided that we would not have nuclear weapons, the civilian side became blown up in importance beyond all dimensions, and that ministry was basically presiding over the whole peaceful nuclear energy issue. So they, I would say, until 1990 they were the lead, in the lead. But they lost through the export scandals of the late 1980's, which was largely put in their basket. So they lost in importance, and '95 you can say, was a transitional time when they slid into the background and when within the Foreign Ministry disarmament became more important and the economic side became less important. And that process was completed in 2000, but not yet in 1995.

Michal Onderco:

What was the role of parliament in shaping that position?

Harald Müller:

Parliament for the first time had an all-party resolution in '95, in support of indefinite extension. And that was quite significant, but it was quite significant and came after a long debate, in which, as I said before, on the left and on the right there were misgivings. But all that was overcome, and we got this very strong resolution, which also included an appeal to the government to work for disarmament at the conference.

Michal Onderco:

And was civil society active at that time?

Harald Müller:

Well, of course they were there, and, I mean....

Michal Onderco:

Did they matter?

Harald Müller:

No. Not at all, not at all. I would say that the first time that civil society, strongly mattered was 2015. With the humanitarian campaign that changed their role immensely, but not before.

Michal Onderco:

How did the fact that the conference basically took part after the end of the Cold War, there was the end of superpower competition, there were these bilateral disarmament talks between the US and Soviet Union, how did it matter for Germany's thinking about the NPT extension?

Harald Müller:

Well I mean the German philosophy, and that was to a large degree the merits of Mr. Genscher, was very, very firmly entrenched: that the future was one of a law-based international order, where arms control and disarmament was one of the layers of that order which was growing and growing and growing, and one can be excused after these ten years, '85-'95, to believe in that. The NPT was seen as a pillar of that. It was seen, as I said, now by the majority as being in German interest, and the end of the Cold War was seen as a golden opportunity to push this law-based order including disarmament as a pillar, forward. And of course that meant that the NPT had to stay. It's one of the mainstays of that.

Michal Onderco:

But it of course didn't mean that it had to stay as indefinitely. It could stay for another 15 years, or 20.

Harald Müller:

Well the idea was that the stability of the treaty was not well served by periodic doubts about its further existence. And don't forget that in this period, the impression that nuclear disarmament was a true possibility by treaty after treaty leading to reductions, and the close collaboration between the Americans and the Russians under Nunn-Lugar, that was not naïve. But that was in many ways realistic. And in that environment, making the treaty indefinite might contribute to the further progress and not detract from it.

Michal Onderco:

You mentioned the Nunn-Lugar and the United States, in the run-up to the conference approached a number of countries where it tried to push its ideas further. Was Germany ever on the receiving end of those demarches from the US?

Harald Müller:

We have of course been at the receiving end of US demarches between 1975 and 1990 quite often, but not this time. Because, don't forget that we had a joint-action of the EU, one of the first joint actions under the Maastricht Treaty, where we did exactly the same. Our folks travelled around and, we had, I think, the EU presidency in the second half of 1994, so we were the leader of these demarches. And the EU campaign for indefinite extension was extremely powerful and...

Michal Onderco:

Was it an EU campaign, or was it the French and British campaign?

Harald Müller:
No, it was EU.

Michal Onderco:
And was there a separate French and British campaign, or campaigns?

Harald Müller:
Well the joint action was conducted in a way that you had first Troika demarches, which were of course an EU instrument, but at the same time you had also demarches of all EU ambassadors in certain countries, plus, and that was also in the wording of the campaign, plus what the individual members could contribute by their special relationships. And indeed the French were extremely active in francophone Africa, and I think they persuaded quite a couple of African countries to go along. And the Brits did it in the Commonwealth countries.

Michal Onderco:
How were these demarches received in these countries? Was it seen as a sort of persuasion, or was it seen as a 'former colonial power trying to force us to do something we don't want to do'?

Harald Müller:
Well I cannot speak for the French and the British, but I think I can speak for the period when Germany was president of the EU, and during that time I know that some of the countries visited spoke favourably about the style of the EU as compared to the style of the US. In that the EU was much more argumentative, and did not apply pressures, while the US always was carrying a stick. I cannot judge whether the French in their own bilaterals with Francophone Africa was also 'sticky' but the EU as such was not. And of course our own colonial time was long past [laughter]

Michal Onderco:
Shortly before the conference, or course, details of Iraq's clandestine nuclear programme emerged. Did that in any way decrease the trust that Germany had in the NPT?

Harald Müller:
Not at all. I mean, to the contrary, what mattered to us was the strong effort after the revelations to improve the safeguard systems. And basically the 93+2, which became the Additional Protocol, was, in the end a negotiation affair between the US, us, and the IAEA. The Germans, I said before that this was the final period, when the nuclear energy industry played a role, had a strong impact on German policy. And I think that the negotiations about the new safeguard system was the main site where this showed.

Michal Onderco:
Because in the '80's Germany was known to be a country that didn't quite believe in export controls. And then in the 1995 conference Iran came up with an idea that I can imagine Germany in the 1980's coming up with, basically doing away completely with the export controls and claiming that they're illegal. Germany didn't support this anymore, so there was internal conversion?

Harald Müller:
Yes, well if you wish you could look up the piece that we wrote here: 'From Black Sheep to White Angel; German Export Control'. I mean what happened was we had a

couple of export scandals which popped up after '87. And it went well into the early '90's, 1991, when it became also clear what the Iraq connection of Germany was. And that changed German policy by 180 degrees. We turned to a full-scope safeguards policy, and we took over from the United States all the advanced feature of export controls such as intangible technology control, such as transit control, and such as the dual-use, which then resulted in a catch-all clause in our export controls system. And while you can say it was a good right, that German nuclear export controls had almost not existed in '87, by '92 we had, I would say, the most advanced export control system after the United States and Canada, much more advanced than Britain for example. And it was us who were pushing the EU to adopt a dual-use export control system which was WAY above the average of the members. Because once we had changed our own system we discovered all of a sudden that the much sharper controls were amounting to competitive disadvantage, so we wanted all our partners to go that way too, and we succeeded. I would say this was, between 1990 and '92, probably one of the main goals of German diplomacy; to get the EU to adopt such a thing. But by '95 we were really clean and white angels. Beautiful people.

Michal Onderco:

We discussed earlier your participation in PPNN, there were all these different groupings like PPNN, there was the Mason group, there were the PrepComs, the diplomats met. Can you talk a little more about how these were important for development of the German position, for German behaviour at the conference?

Harald Müller:

Say it again, I'm not sure I got it

Michal Onderco:

So can you discuss a little bit about the relevance of these informal groupings for Germany at the conference? How did PPNN matter for German behaviour at the conference?

Harald Müller:

Well I would rather turn it around. I think PPNN mattered a lot for conference management, because it was, if you wish, a kind of intelligence gathering device for Dhanapala. We met, he would be there, we would talk freely from our delegations. I remember that Benjamin Sanders was in the Dutch delegation, he was another important person. We had I think three informal meetings during conference and that helpful was for the agenda. The input into the German delegation was minimal. I learnt something from other delegation which I informed our delegation leader of, but that was rather at the tactical level than the strategic one.

Michal Onderco:

PPNN organised some of the meetings before the conference, also inviting the foreign diplomats. And one thing, when I was studying the PPNN archives, one thing that struck me was that West German diplomats before 1991, and German diplomats afterwards, very rarely attended these events.

Harald Müller:

That's true.

Michal Onderco:

Why was that?

Harald Müller:

Sometimes they were there but maybe each second or each third briefing. I thought

that they believed, at the time, that this was more educational training for younger diplomats, as it was indeed initially conceived, these gatherings. And not a track advancing where one could indeed do diplomacy. And they believed that their own young attachés, the third secretaries, were well enough briefed by their own internal training and didn't need that, that was for developing countries. That has changed. I mean if you see the German attendance at the Annecy meetings which Bill Potter is now, I mean that's the heir of PPNN. And the Germans are always there, sometimes three, four of them. Equally at the Wilton Park conferences, but you are quite right that... I think it was German arrogance: "our diplomatic training was superior".

Michal Onderco:

In the run-up to the conference did the negotiations that were ongoing on the CTBT and FMCT at that time, did they matter for how Germany was considering its options at the conference?

Harald Müller:

Well I mean of course we were involved, we were in the end quite strongly involved within the CTBT, and it mattered for us. In the sense which I alluded to earlier that this idea of a law based order, including disarmament, was emerging. The CTBT and the cut off, at the time one believed that this was just around the corner, would be important parts of it, insofar I think the positive German attitude was influenced by that.

Michal Onderco:

So let's move to the conference itself. The conference started with three basic proposals: There was a proposal by Canada for indefinite extension; there was a proposal by 11 like-minded countries for 25-year extension; there was a proposal by Mexico on the conditional extension. Can you briefly comment on how these three proposals looked from the German point of view?

Harald Müller:

Well we were firmly committed to the Canadian one.

Michal Onderco:

What did you think about the other two?

Harald Müller:

There were heavy legal doubts about the validity on the non-aligned proposal. We were unclear on whether one could really do that without amending the NPT, since this treaty is of course almost unamendable. We were opposed to that from the beginning. And we were equally afraid of conditionality, because first of all it was clear that the nuclear weapons states would not buy that, and secondly you know when you really start negotiating conditionality you get endless lists which make the thing unviable. So it was, I mean, there was not even a big discussion about that in the delegation or back with Headquarters.

Michal Onderco:

Did you coordinate with the Canadians before they tabled their resolution for indefinite extension?

Harald Müller:

Well our delegation was aware that this would come and we had indicated to the Canadians that we supported it.

Michal Onderco:

And do you know how Canadians came up with this idea? Because it's quite surprising for me that Canada would come up with this idea.

Harald Müller:
Why?

Michal Onderco:
Because, why Canada?

Harald Müller:
Canada had a tradition of hyperactivity in the NPT context. They had at the time a brilliant delegation with a wonderful leader, Chris Westdal and a very very skilled person which I think was the deputy Sven Jurchewsky.

Michal Onderco:
So we talked about Canada and how Canada came up with this proposal, but of course there were other countries who mattered in the conference. There was the US and the Soviet Union as the two countries that basically struck up the....

Harald Müller:
Russia.

Michal Onderco:
Russia sorry, that struck up the NPT originally. How did these two countries behave in the conference?

Harald Müller:
My recollection is that the Americans were extremely active, present all over the place but they obviously had also some division of labour with the Canadians. This collection of signatures was a Canadian business, strongly supported by the US, but ostensibly Canadian. I know that the US, outside of the conference room, did some decisive things. Maybe the most decisive was to silence Miguel Marin Bosch by this famous telephone call which Clinton gave to President Fox. I mean that made its way through the conference corridors.

Michal Onderco:
So what was the call? I've never heard about this.

Harald Müller:
It was, I think, two weeks into the conference, because Marin Bosch, who had been the nemesis of the US in 1990, wanted to be the nemesis once more. And he started well, but then at one point he fell silent and was just not visible anymore.

Michal Onderco:
And that came after orders from home.

Harald Müller:
Yeah

Michal Onderco:
Ok

Harald Müller:

And something similar happened to Venezuela. The Venezuelan ambassador...

Michal Onderco:

Taylhardat

Harald Müller:

Pardon?

Michal Onderco:

Taylhardat

Harald Müller:

Yeah, Taylhardat. He was a PPNN member, and the one deviant member on indefinite extension. He was the original promoter of the periodic review idea and he, I think, was, it before or during the conference, removed.

Michal Onderco:

I don't know.

Harald Müller:

Maybe you can look that up, as I think it might have been during. I think I have seen him in the first week and then he was disappearing. Marin Bosch was still there but his attempts to take the floor petered out.

Michal Onderco:

Was Russia present, in the room? I mean, physically yes, but was its influence clear and visible?

Harald Müller:

Russia was, to my recollection, atypically silent. You know this was Yeltsin years, because Kozyrev was no doubt a highly interesting foreign minister, but I think the whole apparatus did not know where to go. I think they were not so influential.

Michal Onderco:

And how did you see the other nuclear weapons states? The UK, and France, and China?

Harald Müller:

France was quite active. It was their first NPT Conference, they wanted to show that they were important. They had Errera who was an impressive ambassador, they had Therese Delpech who was impressive behind the scenes.

Michal Onderco:

In what way?

Harald Müller:

Well she was talking to people, and Therese was a very convincing talker. And she was going around all the time. But Errera also was important. The Chinese by the way, the Chinese played no role at all. They were silent, very silent.

Michal Onderco:

From the countries outside of the P5, South Africa played an important role in the conference. How did you see the South African participation in the conference?

Harald Müller:

Well, the South Africans I think were extraordinarily important for practical and for symbolic reasons. I mean this was the one country that had renounced nuclear weapons which they had built by themselves and which they could have used if they wanted. It was a country that had turned from Apartheid to democracy, that had this charismatic angel-like figure at the top. The country that made Africa whole again after all these years of division. So they commanded an enormous morale. They had probably the best diplomatic service in the developing world, I mean the Egyptians are not bad, the Iranians are not bad, but the South Africans, I mean they had all this special quality of the British Foreign Service to them. And they had a defined role for themselves, they absolutely knew what they wanted. They had a strategy, and they worked that strategy, and notably, within the African group, but also beyond that. And I think that they were basically, for those non-aligned that decided early to go with indefinite extension, they were the beacon which they followed. Drawing, what was it, 60-80 countries behind them.

Michal Onderco:

So did you see that the NAM was basically following what South Africa said? How did you see NAM, because NAM has, of course, enormous manpower in the room.

Harald Müller:

Well, NAM was completely divided and therefore they played much less of a role than before. And it was divided because South Africa had split them. There was this NAM meeting shortly before the conference...

MICHAL ONDERCO:

In Bandung?

Harald Müller:

Exactly. Where the South Africans and one or two other African countries were saying "we'll go for indefinite extension under the right circumstances" but they would basically prevent a NAM position for the periodic extension which, of course, the classical NAM leaders like Indonesia and Malaysia, and maybe Egypt, would have preferred.

Michal Onderco:

So Germany was also part of the group of Friends of the President that was convened by Dhanapala. Can you talk a little more about what was going on within that group and how that group worked?

Harald Müller:

Well I'm afraid that's a part where I'm least useful. Because the Germans who participated there were Hoffman, Keller, and Guellil, and I was basically condemned with the rest of the delegation to do the review. The briefings which Hoffman gave to us on what was going on in the presidential negotiations were very sporadic, and not very complete. In that regard, he was not the perfect delegation leader. In later review conferences, I had much better experiences here, so my own information and also recollections are relatively weaker. If you have specific questions rather than a general one maybe something comes back but.

Michal Onderco:

One of the things that I'm interested in is basically whether the friends of the

President was the place where the opposition to extension was broken or whether that was outside through informal negotiation and basically Friends of President was the place where this was confirmed.

Harald Müller:

It was a combination of both. One has to look at this absolutely fascinating constellation of the unclear rule, of the Canadian initiative, and of the negotiation in the presidential group. And I think it was basically the confluence of these three things that led to the quasi-consensus at the end. There was a very, very hard fight over the voting rules in preparation of the conference and even during the conference. And one part of that was never resolved...

Michal Onderco:

Which was?

Harald Müller:

Wait a second, it was ... I'll have to look that up. Because it's really important: If we had the rules of procedures completely agreed before the conference, or even during the conference, I think there would not have been a solution without a vote. I think the Americans would have pushed for a vote

Michal Onderco:

But was there ever a serious consideration that there should be a vote?

Harald Müller:

I think the Americans approached the conference determined to force a vote if they would not have clear indications early on that there was consensus. But the precondition for that would have been rules of procedures that were agreed. Because otherwise when you have a vote, but the rules of procedures are not clear, you could have parties declaring at the end that they are not bound by the vote. And the Americans wanted to avoid that by all means.

Michal Onderco:

Was there ever consideration that, for example, a vote would be divisive for the treaty?

Harald Müller:

Of course, that was maybe more of a consideration on the European side. I mean I have seen the Americans in advance of the conference very confident 'we'll get a majority, and that's what we need'. Maybe that was also a diplomatic game which they were playing, I'm not sure about that.

Michal Onderco:

And was, for example, the fact that the Canadians were trying to get as many countries as possible as co-sponsors of their resolution also part of a strategy to ensure that?

Harald Müller:

Wait a second, let me first clear this one because it bothers me. [pause as checks notes] Right! It was secret or open. It was secret or open, that was the one thing that was not clear.

Michal Onderco:

And was the fear that secret could lead to defection from the promise to support?

Harald Müller:

Yes, yes that's it. The Americans didn't want a secret vote. The Non-aligned wanted a secret vote, and there were a couple of proposals to combine it which all fell through.

Michal Onderco:

And was there ever fear among the Americans that the defections would come from the Non-aligned world, or was there a fear that the defections would come from among their own allies?

Harald Müller:

There was just a fear. I'm not sure whether they were afraid of the allies. Even so you can never know, I mean, maybe not the allies, but the European neutrals for example, or New Zealand. The usual suspects, so to speak. Or the Japanese. And this was not clear, this means that during the conference nobody knew "when there is a vote, how will the vote be decided?" And that exerted a heavy pressure on the side of the nuclear weapons states to avoid a vote, because of this trouble: we vote, but we vote in a way which is contested, and then people declare not to be bound by the outcome of the vote.

Michal Onderco:

Well one of the things that some criticised, for example, Dhanapala, for choosing the way how he did about the extension, basically asking if there was any opposition and then smashing the hammer immediately afterwards. And then there was a number of countries that spoke in opposition to that. What did you think about that, that way that he handled it?

Harald Müller:

Well, I think it was aiming at one single country, namely Nigeria. He had already done this in the presidential negotiations. I mean, it was basically in the last hour of the negotiations, everything was done and then Ayewah marched in, who was preoccupied all the time of the negotiations with Main Committee I. And he marched in and protested against the consensus and Dhanapala said "sorry, it's done, your representative was here, he has not objected, I brought down the gavel, it's done." And that was, I think, the more important, bringing the gavel down, compared to the conference. Because in the plenary all was set up, all was set up. And I think when he brought down the hammer, it was much more because of the Iranians, on the Middle East resolution. That was the remaining fear. The Iranians had objected very long against the language of the resolution.

Michal Onderco:

Why?

Harald Müller:

It was too soft for them on Israel. They wanted to name Israel, and they wanted a much stronger call for Israel to accede to the Treaty.

Michal Onderco:

So it's good that you brought up the resolution because it's one of the things that I wanted to ask. So how did that resolution come about? How did that idea of a resolution come about?

Harald Müller:

Well I mean it was quite clear as to half of the conference that you have to give the Arabs, and that is the Egyptians, some sweetie. Because the Egyptians never committed to any of the solutions, not even to the periodic extension. And they

played a smart game by being negative, but putting forward the request that something has to be done about the Middle East. And then I think the Arabs worked out a resolution and discussed that with the Americans: more or less the Egyptians and the Americans, and the Americans accepted that. And then the Egyptians demanded that it be brought in by the depositaries and I think there were several reasons for that. One was that the resolution called on all states in the Middle East who were not members of the NPT to accede, which was a call to the Arabs, and the Egyptians founded out that an Arab resolution, which the Arabs brought in, would do that. And the second is that they of course wanted to keep the resolution very high standing, and by the same time oblige the depositary to do something for its realization.

Michal Onderco:

But was there some sort of a bargain that they would support the extension if else?

Harald Müller:

Yes, Yes. I understand that the Egyptians had said "if you don't get the resolution we will ask for a vote."

Michal Onderco:

And then of course the vote comes with all the disadvantages which we just discussed. Because you said that there was uncertainty about the voting rules, but one of the questions I always had was: if there was enough countries that supported the Canadian proposal for the extension, why not go the easy way of working out whatever vote there is. Because basically putting the Middle East resolution provides a weakening device to the treaty, because it now becomes a contentious issue time and time again.

Harald Müller:

Well, it was contentious before.

Michal Onderco:

But was there at that time a serious, did anyone seriously consider at the time that this could come true?

Harald Müller:

That what could ever come true?

Michal Onderco:

The Middle East Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone.

Harald Müller:

I think the Egyptians believed that the Americans might pressure the Israelis. I think they at least hoped for that. The Egyptian argument was "we have made our peace in 1978, we got one promise; that the Americans would work on Israel, it was not heeded, now we need a stronger commitment by the Americans." And they believed that maybe it will work.

Michal Onderco:

And did Germany believe in that? How did Germany see that resolution? Because Germany has this special relation with Israel.

Harald Müller:

Special relation. Well I don't think that anybody in the delegation speculated about

what would happen then, how this would work out. We were all so focused on getting a decision by the conference that the only interest we had was that the resolution might have language which is palatable to our Israeli friends. And we trusted in the Americans to see to that.

Michal Onderco:

Did you coordinate with the Israelis as an observing delegation?

Harald Müller:

Well I am positively sure that there were contacts but I have no specific memory of that. It might be that the ambassador once informed us that he had talked to Israel but I'm not sure. I couldn't swear on that.

Michal Onderco:

Moving to another thing that also emerged from the conference was the strengthened review process. How did Germany imagine the strengthened review process would look like afterwards?

Harald Müller:

Again, not much thought about that. I mean the formula sounded good. We saw that it was satisfying the more dissatisfied parties. The idea that you have more time and standards which to use, so that we had almost kind of permanent organization with the exception of one year. But the main thing for us was that it obviously worked as an attractive offer for most of the non-aligned states that could bring them along, and that it was definitely a demand of the South Africans, which we had to fulfil.

Michal Onderco:

You talked about both the Middle East resolution and the strengthened review process as things that were, sort of, given in in exchange for the indefinite extension. Where was the limit where Germany would not be willing to go in exchange for indefinite extension?

Harald Müller:

What sort of demand, you mean?

Michal Onderco:

Yes

Harald Müller:

Well the change of NATO nuclear strategy, most probably.

Michal Onderco:

So if there would be a push for immediate start of discussion on nuclear disarmament, or sort of time-bound plans, or something like this?

Harald Müller:

Well, we would have leaned back and watched our nuclear-armed allies. If the Americans, the French, and the British would have gone along with it so would we. I think from our point of view there was almost nothing which was conceivable.

Michal Onderco:

So if there would be something that could be potentially touchy you would just look at the three Western countries?

Harald Müller:

In terms of nuclear disarmament there were, I think there was nothing which we could not have accepted, quite frankly. If there would have been something which would have addressed us, or only the Western nuclear weapons states, or only NATO but not Russia or China, I think our defense people would have demanded that this did not happen. And the limits for disarmament demands for clear limits which our nuclear allies were deciding for us, if they had agreed, for example, to the removal of nuclear weapons from German soil, we would not have objected.

Michal Onderco:

But was there ever a consideration that this would be something? Did Germany ever seriously consider that it could happen? That nuclear weapons would be removed from German soil?

Harald Müller:

Well I think rather in 2000 than in 1995. In 2000 we pushed, ourselves, the issue of tactical nuclear weapons into the European common position. And we would have welcomed if it the language of the final declaration had been even stronger than it was. In 2000 we got better language than 2015 from the disarmament point of view. And we would have also, I think, willingly accepted that also in 1995.

Michal Onderco:

Some of the interlocutors that I've met told me that Humanitarian Initiative comes from 1995 and the fact that there was not a stronger push for disarmament at the time because the nuclear weapons states refused that. What's your take on this? Was there a lot of push for disarmament in 1995, and why didn't it make its way into the documents?

Harald Müller:

But it did.

Michal Onderco:

Well it did but not as strongly as...

Harald Müller:

Well it was the strongest language in any review conference since 1975. And in so far it was clearly marking progress. I mean you had the systematic steps, you have the CTBT, and you had the cut-off. My own hunch today is that if that agenda would have been really implemented, the whole mood in the NPT community would be quite different, and probably we would not have the humanitarian campaign. I mean if we had, after 2010, another START treaty going slightly below 1000 warheads, providing for the verified dismantlement of the rest, and providing for the next round of disarmament talks where the other nuclear weapons states would be included, if we had a cut-off, if we had a CTBT I think people would be, maybe not happy, but definitely happier than now. And don't make a mistake - in 1995, the Principles and Objectives were seen by everybody as huge progress.

Michal Onderco:

How did that document come about, the Principles and Objectives?

Harald Müller:

Well the South Africans came in with a couple of proposals which were coordinated with the Canadians, and which they had apparently also already talked about to the Americans at least and to their African friends, so there was a bloc there. And that was largely on disarmament, a bit on peaceful uses. And the disarmament part was of

course polished to get out more radical proposals, and the whole Article 2, Article 3 proposals were I think negotiated on the spot. The Americans brought something on that with them, and then they were negotiated by this group. I have not seen this initial South African paper.

Michal Onderco:

So it was not circulated?

Harald Müller:

They had a working paper from which you could conclude what was in, but my recollection is that the presidential negotiations on the principles and objectives started with a room paper, or non-paper, which was definitely confined to the parties in the room.

Michal Onderco:

That was in the Friends of the President?

Harald Müller:

Yeah.

Michal Onderco:

And that is not public yet?

Harald Müller:

I mean, I don't have it in my archives.

Michal Onderco:

In 1995, there was a number of countries still that was outside of the treaty, in addition to smaller countries there were still important countries. Brazil was still out of the NPT with, of course, the big countries that are still out, like India and Israel and so on so forth.

Harald Müller:

And Cuba. United Arab Emirates.

Michal Onderco:

But Emirates didn't have a nuclear programme at the time..

Harald Müller:

No, but they did have a lot of money. And they were Arab.

Michal Onderco:

Did they have a lot of money already at the time?

Harald Müller:

And I think Saudi Arabia was not in yet, but I'm not sure. I mean there were a few Arab countries not being members, and that always created some disquiet.

Michal Onderco:

Among the Arabs?

Harald Müller:

No, among the Western Group and of course Israel.

Michal Onderco:

Was there ever a fear of potential nuclear proliferation into these countries?

Harald Müller:

Saudi Arabia had close relations with Pakistan and there were always rumours that this extended to the nuclear sharing.

Michal Onderco:

Those rumours persisted up until almost today.

Harald Müller:

Yeah.

Michal Onderco:

But was there at that time serious fear that something could happen Saudi Arabia would get nuclear weapons?

Harald Müller:

Well, the possibility was periodically discussed.

Michal Onderco:

And was it in relation towards Israel at the time or towards Iran already? Or was it for status reasons?

Harald Müller:

Well I mean, it basically started with the fact, the distrust started from the fact that they weren't in the treaty, and they had this relation with Pakistan. And then we were looking at their geostrategic situation, with the tensions Iran - the Sunni Arab world, which were there. And there were of course the rumour on the Iranian programme even in the mid 1990's, which the Germans did not take too seriously, but it was the Americans and the Israelis who brought it up every now and then. In the end of course, we discovered that they were right. So at least those two important players had concern there, that the Saudi's may play a role.

Michal Onderco:

There were two questions. One was: how were the non-members seen/approached during the conference. And the second is: was there a hope, whether within the conference or within the Germany delegation, that there would be an increase in the membership of the treaty?

Harald Müller:

There was at least definite hope for Brazil. Argentina had just acceded and we thought it was just a matter of time before the Brazilians would come in. And when the Brazilians would come in, Cuba would probably not stay long outside, in Latin America. There was a rather vague, and weak, hope that a very powerful successful conference for indefinite extension might have an impact on India and Pakistan, but there was already the contrary fear that India might feel even more isolated and that could push them over the brink. Which in the end happened, ironically not through the indefinite extension but through the CTBT that never ended.

Michal Onderco:

So at that time there was still a hope that India could join the NPT?

Harald Müller:

Possibly. I mean let's say, have a review and develop a more positive attitude towards the whole field of non-proliferation. I think nobody really believed that the next day after indefinite extension the Indians would sign. We knew them too well.

Michal Onderco:

Just before the conference, North Koreans announced that they would withdraw from the treaty, and nowadays it's one of the big things that are debated it are the consequences of withdrawal for old machinery etc. How was the idea that a country could withdraw from the treaty seen at the time?

Harald Müller:

I think it was already seen as a gap, at least by the Western world, and a gap that should be tended to by agreeing on additional procedures beyond the wording of the NPT. I don't recall whether we had already then Canada and us working on this thing. No - I don't think so, that happened later, from 2000 on, that we tried to address this. Of course, one had the Iraq experience which brought that on the table. What would have happened if they had prepared everything and then withdrawn? But to my recollection that did not come up either in Main Committee 2 or Main Committee 3 and the review board as a major issue, and it's also not in the Principles and Objectives. So it was an emerging debate which had not yet really matured. Am I wrong?

Michal Onderco:

No, no. Was Germany happy with the conference, how it ended up?

Harald Müller:

Absolutely. We had a celebrating dinner sponsored by Hoffman with a glass of champagne in everybody's hand. The relief was very strong across the delegation. And you must also see the psychology of these conferences: You work like a dog for 4 weeks, I mean I had on no night more than 5 hours sleep with the exception of the weekend. And even during the weekends our delegation leaders were busy all the time, because the negotiations were going on. And 16, 17, 18 hours a day long hours into the night because we did our reports to headquarters every night until 3 o'clock. And you do that, of course, with instruction: to get this treaty prolonged. And once you have accomplished that, you know, the suspense is enormous. In the end, you forget what is this all about, and does it make sense or not. You just strive for the goal and then you get it, and you are just happy.

Michal Onderco:

And you said there was a lot of negotiation, but those negotiations were, did most of them take part in one-tMichal Onderco:

one, or was it mostly group negotiations? What was the most difficult part of it?

Harald Müller:

The decisive thing were definitely groups, at least from our delegation's point of view. There were a few bilaterals, where Hoffman would talk to some of the more reluctant. I know, for example, that there were talks between the Iranians to try to make them more, or to soften them up. And our relations to Iran at the time were good.

Michal Onderco:

Were probably the best among the Europeans.

Harald Müller:

Absolutely. Not yet sanctions, which means between, I don't know, 5-6bn of trade.

Michal Onderco:

Well there were visits of German mayors to Iran and Iranian mayors to Germany.

Harald Müller:

It was a good relation, which basically goes back to the Shah. But I mean the Americans had of course beautiful relations with the Shah, but there was this new team coming down and ours continued practically unscratched. So there were talks between us and the Iranians, that is one thing I recall. I also think we had talks to the Mexicans and the Argentinians. The Argentinians were wonderful, I mean very helpful. The Mexicans were not but we tried to be good to them anyway. But the main thing were the presidential negotiations, that is Friends of the President. That was where the music played. The most important bilaterals were Egypt and the United States on the resolution. And that was, I think, bilateral throughout and there were frequent calls to Washington by the Americans, to Cairo by the Egyptians, and to Jerusalem by the Americans as well.

Michal Onderco:

Immediately after when you finished that glass of champagne that you talked about, what were your thoughts about what will the future bring. What were your expectations about the future of the NPT? Of the German delegation.

Harald Müller:

We, genuinely thought there was a high chance that nuclear disarmament would proceed incrementally, as before, but steadily; that we would have a CTBT really, within a years time, that would be ratified by the relevant parties; and that cut-off negotiations would start, but certainly also that we would have one to three other START treaties; and that at one point the rest of the nuclear weapons states would join some sort of talk. Transparency, all the good things. We also believed that we would have a chance, in exchange, to sharpen the non-proliferation instrument beyond what was in negotiation on '93 +2 we were assured that this would be completed successfully. I mean this was 50 per cent in our hands so we had some control over these conversations. No, I mean it was a very optimistic look into the future. We also believed of course that, in five years, the review conference would be a success, which it actually was. Even so the rest of the treaty dreams did not realise. No new START treaty, CTBT no ratified, cut-off treaty...

Michal Onderco:

When you probably went to New York you didn't expect such a success from the conference and from the extension. Or did you?

Harald Müller:

No I thought the chances were 50/50. Of course I was in the Billiard Room so I knew there was a plot which was promising, but of course it was completely unclear whether it would work out. And it was also quite unclear whether in the end not a few stubborn Non-aligned might just object. I mean the way it was solved: with the pressure on the nuclear weapons states concerning the voting rule. The pressure on the non-aligned by the Canadian demonstration that there was a majority; and the South African compromise that you get an indefinite extension, which was legally unconditional, but factually conditional. That was not visible at the outset, how all these pieces would fall in place. And so we were, not only me, but I think the delegation at the whole was hopeful but not at all certain.

Michal Onderco:

Thank you very much for this interview.