



World Chronicle

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GUEST: Hans Blix
Former Chief UN Arms Inspector in Iraq

JOURNALISTS: Warren Hoge
The New York Times

Ian Williams
The Nation

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“Disarming Iraq”

When Hans Blix, the Swedish arms expert who headed the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) for 16 years, came out of retirement in 2000 to head the UN’s search for weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, a former US diplomat said: “From the Iraqi perspective, he will be too demanding. From the perspective of the Bush administration, he will be too judicious. From the perspective of people who want peace at all costs, he will be too uncompromising.” Was Hans Blix tasked with an impossible mission? Did he believe that Saddam Hussein’s regime had weapons of mass destruction? How reliable was intelligence on this question? What does the Iraq experience teach us about the future of international weapons inspection efforts? These are some of the questions discussed in this edition of **World Chronicle** by the former chief UN weapons inspector in Iraq, Hans Blix.

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ANNOUNCER: From the United Nations in New York, an unedited interview programme on global issues. This is **World Chronicle**. And here is the host of today's **World Chronicle**.

M.A. WILLIAMS: Hello, I'm Mary Alice Williams and this is **World Chronicle**.

Weapons of mass destruction – did Saddam Hussein's regime have them? If so, where were they hidden and how could Iraq be disarmed? These were the central questions in the run-up to the invasion of Iraq, and they're at the heart of this new book: "*Disarming Iraq*", a chronicle of the search for weapons of mass destruction in that country. Its author is the former Chief UN Weapons Inspector in Iraq, Hans Blix, who is our guest in the studio today.

Mr. Blix welcome to **World Chronicle**.

M.A. WILLIAMS: The *New Yorker* magazine calls your book a judicious account of the prelude to the Iraq war and said it was punctuated by anger. Are you angry Mr. Blix?

BLIX: No, I'm very rarely angry I would say. Little bit one thing or another occasionally but it doesn't usually last very long.

M.A. WILLIAMS: Are you angry at the Bush administration, Mr. Blix?

BLIX: No, I'm not angry at any administration, but I'm disappointed. I'm sad more because I think that the war could have been avoided. The negative consequences of that would have likely been that Saddam Hussein would have remained but the war itself I do not see justified. They advanced the justification that there were weapons of mass destruction, said they existed as a fact, and Colin Powell said these are real weapons, they are real anthrax and real VX but that was not the case. And I think that they were not sufficiently critical examining the evidence. They were so convinced that there were weapons of mass destruction that they didn't examine the evidence.

M.A. WILLIAMS: Joining us in the studio today are Warren Hoge of *The New York Times*, and Ian Williams of *The Nation*. Ian...

WILLIAMS: Well, I know that you're completely laid back and would not get angry on your own behalf but would you like to do some gloating on behalf of the United Nations? A year ago your failure to find the weapons and the failure of the Security Council to authorize the invasion led to headlines saying, "The UN is dead, thank God", I think it was that Richard Perle wrote in the *Guardian* in Britain [Guardian Unlimited, a British newspaper]. A year later, of course, the United States is begging the United Nations to come back in and there are no weapons to be found as far as we can tell. So would you like to do some gloating in an institutional manner?

BLIX: Well, I think I used the epithet "exotic" for Mr. Perle in the book, and I think he is and I think that some of these people are exotic. They have such – so filled with a sense of

power, or military power, that they sort of forget that even the United States is not big enough to stand alone, that they need not only coalitions of the willing but also of the United Nations. There's no way that you can be unilateral in today's world and, whether HIV or SARS or you have terrorism or anything, we need the multilaterals. But I am not extending that the UN is the only multilateral church in the world, no. And I think that those who praise the UN endlessly may do us much damage, but it is a place which can give legitimacy and can bring people together as Bush, the father, did in 1990 against the Iraqi aggression. And I think that Mr. Perle, and a number of others who feel that the UN is just nonsense and we can do it ourselves, that they are very badly mistaken. I think the lesson from Iraq is that, yes, you lose on legitimacy and that costs something. The Security Council was not irrelevant, it was relevant. When they refused to give an authorization it was still relevant.

HOGGE: Another lesson from Iraq that's being talked about a good deal now a year later is how the intelligence, how the information was used. In the book I believe the verb you use is "exaggerate" when you talk about what the Tony Blair government in Britain and what President Bush did with the information. Is that the word you would choose? Not "distort", not "manipulate", but simply "exaggerate"?

BLIX: Well, I have never said anywhere that either Bush or Blair was in bad faith. I think they were in good faith, maybe that's even worse in a way (laughter). But, no, bad faith I don't think there was but I think they were again so fixed at the idea that the weapons were there that they would not ask themselves very much about the quality of the evidence and they should have.

M.A.WILLIAMS: Was it that they were fixed on that idea or their underlings knew what the guys at the top wanted to hear?

BLIX: Oh, I think they were fixed quite by themselves. It was not just that the intelligence took this view.

M.A.WILLIAMS: I'm interested to hear the relationship, from your perspective, of Bush and Cheney. It sounds to me from reading the book that they played good cop/bad cop with you, is that true?

BLIX: I don't know whether that was planned. We were invited to see the President and to my surprise we were first taken to the Vice President. I didn't even know that was to happen and we had a very short talk. Well, he did most of the talking and...

M.A.WILLIAMS: Really putting you on notice?

BLIX: Yes. Well, he did say a sentence that I noted in my diary the same evening – because we had no note taker from our side – and he said that we will not hesitate to discredit the inspectors in favour of disarmament. Now, it's an interesting sentence and you can take it

to mean that the main thing for us is disarmament. “We want to be sure about that and if the inspectors don’t succeed in giving that assurance then we will do it some other way”. Because he put us on notice that we will have an assurance from the President this afternoon but don’t have any illusions, we are not wholeheartedly behind you.

HOGUE: If I can pick up from Mary Alice’s question, one of the most entertaining parts of the book was your description of what Cheney was like, or how you found him, and then how you found Bush right afterwards. Could you just repeat that for the sake of viewers because it’s fun to listen to?

BLIX: It didn’t occur to me that was so terribly funny but Cheney gave the impression of a confident business executive, or even over-confident, because he moves like one, gave an assertion, whereas Bush was like more boyish, moving around in his chair and moving his feet up and down. Much more agile I thought.

WILLIAMS: One of the statesmen you did meet and you quote approvingly was Jacques Chirac who said the intelligence agencies intoxicate each other and didn’t even believe his own intelligence assessments. But apart from the sort of American side of self-delusion that there were weapons there the paradox that you tried to explain, and I’d like to hear you try again, is why did Saddam Hussein bluff the rest of the world effectively that he had weapons of mass destruction? I think I believed, along with you, until January that he had them. He was giving the impression that he had them. All of the signals he was sending was that he was hiding things so why with such consequences?

BLIX: Well, I too. Of course, in December 2002 I would not have answered the question. People asked me what is your gut feeling, I said I’m not here to have gut feelings I’m here to inspect and tell you about the reality.

M.A. WILLIAMS: But in fact—

BLIX: But a year later I’m a free person, I can say yes. I also, like all the rest of us, thought there were weapons of mass destruction because they had behaved in such a way and you would then ask why did they behave this way. Why did they take it upon themselves to have so many years of sanctions that broke their economic backbone? And I have some theories on it. One that has caught the attention of the public, which they say is like hanging a sign on the door “Beware of the Dog”, but you don’t have to have a dog for that. But they might have said all right we have no weapons. They say that to the U.S., lift the sanctions but at the same time another message is sent that we might have them and we are dangerous so watch out. That’s a possibility. There are other possible explanations.

M.A.WILLIAMS: The Bush administration’s view is that the Iraq war has made the world a safer place, do you concur?

BLIX: Doesn't seem to me that the world looks very safe today but you can look at it from several points of view. They had theories that it would facilitate a settlement in the Middle East. I don't think we have seen any sign of that. It was suggested that Israel would get rid of one of its worst adversaries, yeah, but we haven't seen any improvement of that. It was to send a signal to terrorism that, look we are firm about this -- and I think the world should be firm about terrorism -- but what we see is certainly that it has bred a lot of hatred. I don't think we really understand in the West how much more hatred there is of the West and, as a result of that also, suicide bombers and people who breed terrorism in Iraq -- and not only there but elsewhere as well. No, the great game is that Saddam has gone and he was a terror to his own people. He was not a danger to his neighbours, he was not a danger to the world, but he was a terror to his own people.

HOGUE: You say in the book that you believe the United States depended too much on defectors, information from defectors, and I think you go on to say -- and I'm going to ask you to explain that -- how defector information should be used and how it probably was not used correctly by the Bush administration people.

BLIX: Well, this is a theory. I have not got privy to the relations between the U.S. and defectors but it's been written a fair amount about it and I have read the accounts of some of them. I read Mr. Hamzai, who wrote a book about "I was Saddam's bomb maker", and that was about an area which I knew something about and I can see that so much was completely nonsense, wrong. And he is now in a high position in Baghdad. There was another Iraqi nuclear scientist who was in Canada and he wrote very recently a book also and he said there was no way the Rukia [?] people could do anything, they could hardly get a hammer. They were so badly off that it was all nonsensical. And defectors of course will tell the intelligence what they think intelligence wants to hear. They go to governments because they want to have asylum, change in identities, or whatnot. They did not come to us but that was a blessing in disguise perhaps. But the CIA of course has long experience in respect of work of defectors, much more. I don't have that much experience so I think they were probably critical but there might have been other people who were not so critical. We have heard Mr. Chalabi talk about it lately and then it isn't scary, I think.

WILLIAMS: I'd like you to tell us more about the transformation you tried to achieve. UNSCOM was, by the end, sort of thoroughly tainted in everybody's eyes. It was almost acting as a sub-unit of United Nations under the direct control of the British and the Americans. I don't know, they provided the personnel. As we know, there were spies and the electronic devices smuggled in at the same time. And I know because you had two years to do it while you were

waiting to get inside Iraq. What did you have to do to transform UNMOVIC to make it a genuine, independent, multilateral agency?

BLIX: You see UNSCOM was set up in 1991 and you might say that this was war continued by inspection. I mean if Klausowitz said that war is a continuation of diplomacy by other means then this was continuation of war with other means and they used inspection. But they had no resources so they relied upon voluntary contributions of people, of equipment. So that meant – and they needed people quickly – that they turned to countries that were willing to give it to them and they made the selection of course. And in the course of time it meant that there was a strong dominance from the Western side and they also got the information, as they should, from Western intelligence and from others where would you go. So that was useful but by and by this developed into really sharing; that they were almost a sort of prolonged arm and the intelligence agencies misused them to plant electronic equipment and piggybacking and that lost them the legitimacy in the end. And it was not that I had the intention of making this a sort of more pure UN institution, it was the Security Council that said that this new body that will succeed UNSCOM will have broad geographical recruitment and the reports that underlay, there was quite a signal that we should be a UN institution. Fine, that's what I did. That's was the way it was.

WILLIAMS: Can I just ask though, UNMOVIC is finished now but I mean UNMOVIC's task in a sense is finished but it still exists, do you see a future role for it as part of a multilateral disarmament work?

BLIX: Yes, it could be. When the U.S. occupation phase is over they may well still need monitoring. That was always envisaged. So there will be no time limit to that and I think that for the Middle East, still looking for its own free of weapons of mass destruction, you should not dismantle any monitoring. You should, if possible, increase such as in Iran today.

WILLIAMS: Sort of expand the limit of UNMOVIC to other countries in the Middle East?

BLIX: Well, if possible.

M.A.WILLIAMS: When you began the recruitments for weapons inspectors only one Arab country, Jordan, was willing to nominate a candidate. Would you have liked more collaboration from Arab governments? Would it have made any difference?

BLIX: Yes. It would have given us people who could speak Arabic, and it was very useful to have that among the inspectors. And my interpretation was that Saddam did not like to have inspections and that was made known or was sensed by the other Arab governments so they wouldn't nominate people to be with us. The Jordanians did and we have some Jordanians. We had some other people who were Arab-speaking but too few. It is desirable that you understand what you do. We also gave the inspectors good training – and that was

also on the instruction of the Security Council – including a couple of hours about the history, culture, sensitivities and where all the... Well, some of the people in the newspapers said, you know, this is sensitivity training. It was like we were sissies. Well, I hear now that the US army is doing the same thing. Good for them I will say.

WILLIAMS: Belatedly, I suspect.

HOGGE: Do you think there was any linkage between the people who attacked the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon here on September 11th and the Saddam Hussein regime and do you think that was part of what was on the mind of the Bush administration? An act of retaliation against Iraq for what had happened September 11th here and in Washington?

BLIX: Well, I have no inside information but we read quite a lot about it when the overwhelming part of the story, I think, is that they have not proved that there was any such link. And it seemed unlikely because the Al Qaeda was fundamentalists and the Baath party was always much more moderate in its Arabism. So I think it was, again, a wish on the part of the administration here to build up a case for attacking Saddam. I don't doubt that they believed that the weapons of mass destruction but it was also a lot psychological, I think. After 9/11 there was – they felt...

M.A.WILLIAMS: They had to retaliate against--

BLIX: Yeah. I read somewhere that it might have been as much or if not more a punitive war as a pre-emptive war.

M.A.WILLIAMS: This is **World Chronicle** and we're talking with Hans Blix about the search for weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. Let's take a look at this short clip from the run-up to the war:

VIDEO ROLL-IN:

NARRATOR: Iraq dominated the news in 2003. As the year began UN inspectors in Iraq continued their search for weapons of mass destruction. Hans Blix, Chief of the UN's Inspectors argued for sufficient time.

BLIX: "It would not take years, nor weeks, but months. Neither governments nor inspectors would want disarmament inspection to go on forever".

NARRATOR: The eyes of the world were on the UN Security Council as diplomats debated the case for war or peace, decision or delay. US Secretary of State, Colin Powell called for prompt action.

POWELL: "The gravity of this moment is matched by the gravity of the threat that Iraq's weapons of mass destruction pose to the world".

NARRATOR: Others counselled restraint. French Foreign Minister, Dominique de Villepin”

DE VILLEPIN: “To what extent do the nature and scope of the threat justify the recourse to force? How do we make sure that the tremendous risks of such intervention are actually kept under control?”

NARRATOR: But efforts to reach a consensus were unavailing. Without the support of the Security Council the American-led coalition forces set a deadline for military action. UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan:

ANNAN: “This is a sad day for the United Nations and the international community. I know that millions of people around the world share the sense of disappointment and are deeply alarmed by the prospect of imminent war.”

NARRATOR: The attack was launched. The result was the fall of the regime... and the occupation of the country.

VIDEO OUT

M.A.WILLIAMS: Looking back, at what point did you decide that war would be inevitable?

BLIX: Only on the Sunday when John Wolfe, the Assistant Secretary of State, phoned us and said that we better withdraw the inspectors. Until the very last moment, the President could call it off, as Clinton called off bombers in the autumn of 1998.

HOGUE: Just watching that clip a moment ago, what did you think of Colin Powell’s presentation the day you heard it?

BLIX: I felt a little like here is a prosecutor who puts the evidence before the tribunal and I was in a way also engaged in this, but I always preserved my critical thinking. I say, you know, how solid is this and I’d like to have my experts examining, case by case, how solid is it. And I did. Now, afterwards it occurred to me that in a way it was telling the world that well the inspectors are okay. He said no nasty words about the inspectors but, you know, they hadn’t seen this. We, the US, you see. And in a way it was a little paradoxical with the US position because the US said that a smoking gun is not interesting, it is the change of heart, it is a strategic decision. Well, that was not what his performance was about. The performance was about smoking guns all the time because they realized that smoking guns carried a lot more weight than otherwise. Now, I asked our experts and they were a very sceptical number, but the numbers they could not verify the intercepted telephone calls. How could we know whether they were – who had done them? The US or Chalabi’s people or who? So I came out with

some critical things and then I decided that I had a moral duty to say something in the Council itself that we are sceptical about some of the evidence, and I did in very courteous terms.

WILLIAMS: One of the sort of high points of melodrama was the delivery of the 12,000 pages full franking, very, very complete but possibly incomplete description of the Iraqi programmes. Do you think they did this was sort of sense of humour? They knew that the Americans didn't have Arabic translators so they sent thousands of pages in Arabic and they sent a how-to kit on how to make chemical and biological weapons that was going to get published across the world. Did you feel they had a sense of humour about this or was it just stupidity?

BLIX: No, I saw no sense of humour. There was no tongue-in-cheek. I don't think so. Rather spite that you asked for a declaration within one month's time of all your chemical programmes -- and here's a country with a petrochemical industry -- do that in one month's time and if you don't, well then you're at your peril. I think they were gnawing their teeth and then they worked like mad to put it together and as a result some sections were repeated five times there. They had just cribbed it from earlier periods. But the more serious aspect of it I think was that Negroponte would say afterwards that these are lies, or they're omissions. Well, what are the omissions? It's true that they didn't straighten out any question marks that we had but I think the US started from the point that there are weapons of mass destruction and these are not described, so ergo, therefore, they are omitted. But is it an omission if there is nothing to describe, nothing to declare? Of course it's not. So it all started from the premise that there were weapons.

M.A.WILLIAMS: About 9/11 you write that the terrorists used no weapons greater than box cutters to hijack the planes and control the passengers and yet you were looking for rogue states. What would happen if a rogue state got its hands on a weapon of mass destruction? Did you find that ironic at the time?

BLIX: No, it was too serious a thing. It was a peculiar operation. After all, you feel that just by talent to fly planes and box cutters they could carry through this massive operation. And I think it was natural to ask oneself if they are so callous in their calculation would they not also, if they could, get hold of weapons of mass destruction and make use of them without hesitation? I understand that fully but I don't think it is so easy, possibly with the exception of chemical weapons. Biological weapons are difficult to handle and the nuclear weapons need more infrastructure so I'm worried but not that worried.

HOGGE: Donald Rumsfeld said just recently, just last week, that there's still 1200 inspectors out there looking for weapons and they still may be there. Do you believe that is possible?

BLIX: I think it's highly improbable. I mean maybe that they'll find some debris from the past, as we found 12 chemical warheads. They found some nuclear equipment dug down in the garden of a professor, that's not interesting, or a vial in a refrigerator. They might even find some system of anthrax maybe somewhere but this is not a stock, this is not stockpiling for war. No. To me the decisive thing was that in April/May the US were there and they could interrogate people -- military and scientists -- and they will surely be given rewards if they were able to indicate where you would find any weapons, and none of them came up with anything. All of them said, according to the media, that there is nothing. So I think once that is done, April or May, by the end of May, it was pretty conclusive that there weren't any weapons. I wouldn't have had -- well I think it was good that Kay (David Kay, former Chief US arms hunter) was there with his people and looked around and above all they got a lot of documents, they found out about the missiles, that the programme was probably much larger than we had thought. We had suspicions about it that it was probably larger. That was the area where they really trespassed, I think. And it was good. The more they find out the better. We'd like to have the truth.

WILLIAMS: Now you're in between doing the kind of a job of turning a book round in such a short time after your retirement. You're now the head of an international commission on non-proliferation and disarmament. It seems that the United States is very keen on other people disarming but it's not always so keen on participating itself, how would you reckon the chances are for example of a non-proliferation conference coming off when the US is developing bunker-buster nukes in defiance of international treaties?

BLIX: Well, you know, the very word non-proliferation is framed by those who already have it. I mean in the first place the US would have had, should have had the nuclear weapon alone, no one else. Proliferation is where the first one gets it, the UK, and then they have the circle of the five original sinners who are permanent members of the Security Council. And then, unfortunately, it slipped also and went further to Israel, and Pakistan, and India got it as well. But I think it's rather good that they almost stopped that. Iraq tried, yes, North Korea might have it, possibly Iran might have tried -- that's possible -- but it's still not a fairly good operation. We are at a dangerous point because if Iran were to move ahead with the weapon and enrichment of uranium then I think it's risky for the Middle East. If North Korea were also to have a weapon and go ahead with it then that might be risky for the Far East. So it's a very dangerous moment and I think that we need to exercise our imagination. I think that in the Iranian case they have been really good, the Europeans have been good, and the US have been more hawkish but maybe there's a role for the bad cop and good cop there.

M.A.WILLIAMS: As we wind this up I want to ask you – a former US diplomat said of you when you were appointed to lead the weapons inspection team, "From the Iraqi perspective he will be too demanding, from the Bush administration perspective too judicious, from the perspective of people who want peace at all cost too uncompromising". Were you tasked with mission impossible?

BLIX: No, I don't think so. And I think there would have been a chance and of course I was eager to set up inspections that were genuinely international, effective but correct, just as we want our own national police to be effective with thugs or anybody but yet correct. We were not there to humiliate them and I think the psychology of this game has some importance, not everything, but it has some importance.

HOGGE: In a world where people are now talking about pre-emptive wars obviously intelligence becomes ever so much more important, what have we learned from this that we must improve in the future? How can we get better intelligence?

BLIX: Well, it's a difficult thing and I think the tracks, the traces are very worrisome. This was not the first time they failed. You remember after the bombings of the US embassies in Dar-es-Salaam and Nairobi the US shot missiles under Clinton on Afghanistan and on a chemical factory outside Khartoum. And it turned out that that was wrong, intelligence was wrong, so they lifted their hats, said sorry about that – and now that is worrisome. Intelligence is necessary and I have a high regard for it. They risk their lives but it's a different game and you have to maintain your critical thinking. See, if a prosecutor goes to a court well then you have a very good scrutiny of the evidence but intelligence comes in closed chambers to the administration, to a government, you may not have at all have that similar critical thinking and you would need to do that. So this evidence, critical thinking, I think is important. And we of course didn't serve any particular policy. That's the advantage of having international inspectors. You serve the Security Council and they didn't ask us to do anything more than objectivity.

M.A.WILLIAMS: All right, thank you very much for being with us. Thank you very much for joining us on **World Chronicle**. We've been speaking with Mr. Hans Blix, who is the former Chief UN Weapons Inspector in Iraq. He's been interviewed by Warren Hoge of *The New York Times*, and Ian Williams of *The Nation*.

I'm Mary Alice Williams, thank you for joining us. We invite you to be with us for the next edition of **World Chronicle**.

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