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Oral History Interview with Jaap Ramaker

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Summary:

Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva.

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Jaap Ramaker
The Netherlands

Oral history interview conducted by Michal Onderco in person in The Hague on 14 October 2016

Michal Onderco:

Let me start by asking first about a few things that happened before the conference and before you went to New York. What was the discussion which was going on within the Dutch government about the Dutch position for the conference? What were the main considerations that were going on within the Dutch government?

Jaap Ramaker:

Well, they were not very different from the running up to previous NPT review conferences in the sense that we would like to see a consensus outcome and a final document that would be agreed and would have the minimum requirements that would fit our policy, as a Western country. Also as a NATO partner - of course, we do not have to forget that. That is the kind of general picture we had not only for this conference but also for the previous Review Conferences. This particular conference was different because the treaty was, in 1995, 25 years after it entered into force, expiring. So for us, for the Dutch government, but for other western governments as well, it became an extremely important factor, in fact an overriding factor in this conference, to make sure that this treaty could be extended - not only for one brief period of time, or for brief periods of time, for another 10 or 20 years - but indefinitely. Of course the question why so is, at least in my opinion, very clear: we felt, in the West, that by having an indefinite duration of the NPT we could create a sort of stable environment for other arms controls and non-proliferation measures. If a doubt would be hanging over the future of this treaty, and one wouldn't know what the conditions would be five years later, or 10 years later, because these were all periods of time for the extension under discussion, we would add an element of unpredictability to the entire security environment in which we were trying to push for further reductions and the eventual elimination of nuclear weapons. Which is something I think that we always had in mind, the Dutch, for the near future. So it was obtaining a stable security environment for further measures that was the main concern. And in this particular conference the central issue therefore became how we could ensure that this treaty indeed would be, after 25 years, become a permanent feature of this entire fabric of arms control and non-proliferation instruments that we know now, or that we knew at the time.

Michal Onderco:

You already alluded to the ongoing disarmament steps that were going on at the time. How did the disarmament measures between the United States and the Soviet Union affect the calculation of the Dutch government?

Jaap Ramaker:

I think only indirectly. We were of course, and still are, linked to the United States in many ways, and in this context mainly as a NATO ally. I think we are one of the more faithful and more reliable allies of the United States, and always have been, right from the beginning. Also in the nuclear field - as you know we are one of the five countries having tactical nuclear weapons on our soil, as it is rumoured. It is probably true, I suppose. Of course, we applauded, at the time, that the relations first between the Soviet Union, in its last years, but then thereafter with the Russian Federation as its successor state, and the United States had considerably improved. And actually, this whole period of the 90's was unique in that sense. It made it possible to take steps like, for instance in the Conference on the Disarmament, the conclusion of the Chemical Weapons Convention in 1993 and the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban in 1996. These agreements would have been unthinkable a decade before, or five years before. There was, of course, the Russian-United States element in these negotiations. But the 90's were unique in that the improvement in relations between these two powers created a window of opportunity for the conclusion of these treaties. The decade thereafter was, unfortunately, from an arms point of view: a lost decade: the first decade of this century that is. For us, not as a major nuclear power, all of this was very positive.

Michal Onderco:

Was there a lot of hope that was also placed in the ongoing negotiations at this time on the CTBT and the FMCT.

Jaap Ramaker:

Yes, the climate was different from now. If you talk about the Dutch...?

Michal Onderco:

Yes.

Jaap Ramaker:

If you talk about the Dutch then it was also public opinion...

Michal Onderco:

I was thinking about the government and what the government thought.

Jaap Ramaker:

The government was simply in favour of all of these measures. Strongly in favour. And we had a long long tradition in multilateral arms control actually, probably more than is usual for a country like the Netherlands. We had in our foreign ministry people, especially one who unfortunately died earlier this year, Mr. Meerburg, who had not been a career diplomat but had spent almost his entire career in our Foreign Ministry working on arms control and disarmament. He had a major influence on creating a tradition of an active Dutch policy in this area. We were, for instance, the first country to introduce a working document in the CD on radiological weapons, an idea that was then, in 1969, immediately dismissed as such weapons were thought impossible to manufacture. But, anyway, it had all been thought through in The Hague. In any case, most of these things came from Mr Meerburg. Of course I am a typical civil servant, a career diplomat. But the continuity of the whole thing did come from the Foreign Ministry, mostly, and not so much from the defence Ministry. The vision then - and now - was really focused on reducing the dangers inherent in weapons of mass destruction: chemical weapons, biological weapons, but of course nuclear weapons as well. Public opinion became very much concerned when we had this medium range missile crisis in the latter days of the Soviet Union, with their SS-20's, the counter measures as the Soviets called them, and all that, all of which ended when the INF treaty could be concluded. That was the time that Dutch public opinion was mobilised against nuclear weapons. But in a rather curious sense, in that it was mainly, how shall I say this - it became initially an anti-nuclear movement benefiting, in my opinion, the other side. There was a famous figure involved in the Netherlands and I think that was prior to the INF treaty...

Michal Onderco:

Mient-Jan Faber?

Jaap Ramaker:

Mient-Jan Faber! We had a demonstration in Amsterdam during which a million people took to the streets. A million people is a lot in a country the size of the Netherlands. As soon as the INF question was over, in the sense that, as soon as it became clear that the dangers posed by these intermediate range missiles for the Dutch or for Western Europe had disappeared, public opinion lost its interest. Never mind that you could retarget long range missile on Europe as they are at the moment. So when the Test Ban negotiations, the first one in the nuclear field after that crisis, started, there was some interest in the Netherlands, but not a great deal, quite honestly. There were a couple of people and organisations interested, as you mentioned, Mient-Jan Faber's IKV, for instance. I received letters from them, but they were not very substantial as far as I can recall. The power behind the movement had gone. It had deflated after the INF Treaty. So, I got letters as the Chairman of the Test Ban negotiations from NGO's, but mostly originating from other countries: from the United States, from the UK, and to a lesser extent from France. I must still have some of these somewhere.

Michal Onderco:

Oh, you still have them?

Jaap Ramaker:

Yes, but that's on the Test Ban, not the NPT. Yes, there were remarkable things that happened but there was not a great deal of comment. I should also say, that when it

came to the Test Ban negotiations; my government, of course, was entirely behind me and in favour. But I did not work on the basis of instructions of the Dutch government. Such instructions would have been irrelevant anyhow. I was sort of the possession of the international community, of the negotiators. The only thing I did was keeping, of course, the Foreign Ministry informed because once in a while, this-or-that country that did not agree with what I was doing would try to influence me through the Dutch Foreign Ministry, but that did not work.

Michal Onderco:

In the run up to the PrepCom. You mentioned that civil society wasn't too active. Was parliament maybe a little more active?

Jaap Ramaker:

Yes, there was some interest from the Dutch parliament. We had members of parliament in our delegation. For many of them it was also an educational experience, in my impression, both in as far as the substance was concerned and in the manner in which we, as diplomats, operated in such an environment, in this case, the United Nations in New York.

Anyway, the run up to the Conference was important in a different way which had not so much to do with the Netherlands. As I said, the idea of the West was to extend this treaty indefinitely. And the objective was, at the time, prior to the conference, at least of the United States - and of the other Western nuclear weapons states as well - to get consensus on a final document for the review conference and for an indefinite extension decision as well. Full stop. And it became clear to many of us, myself included, that you couldn't simply have a review conference as usual and then consensus on an indefinite extension decision too. Somehow you had to give in to a number of wishes that the non-aligned countries had in this respect. The non-aligned countries in general were very vociferous when it came to Nuclear Disarmament and much less so when it came to conventional disarmament. Because conventional armament was what they were involved in, and the nuclear stuff was for the others it seems. But it was clear that you needed at least a substantial part of the non-aligned parties to the treaty on board and for that to come true you had to give something in return. But if you were going to say that too early in the game, I remember, if you say that, let's say a year before, then you were considered to be a defeatist in the west, in particular by the US. You were not tough enough so to speak.

Michal Onderco:

The Americans would consider you a defeatist.

Jaap Ramaker:

But it was clear that something had to be given to obtain an indefinite extension. I remember at one stage, more towards the end - I've forgotten exactly when it was - that nevertheless the Americans started to move and we had during a PrepCom meeting in Geneva, I think, a discussion on this thing. It was my humble person that said to the Americans that 'you shouldn't move yet'. I had a lot of experience in multilateral affairs. The man I talked to, by the way, is someone I think you should talk too as well, if you haven't already, Tom Graham, a very nice fellow. At a particular moment during that PrepCom I remember I said "hey stop" in the Western group meeting, "this is not the day that we should be taken to the cleaners." My deputy afterward always said "maybe this isn't the day ...". Anyway, I said that because I felt, and it was accepted by the others by the way, that from a negotiating point of view that, though it had become clear to all that you couldn't have simple extension decision without giving something in return, the timing was very important. This was well before the actual review conference itself had started. I thought that if you start there and then to make concessions you'd have to go much further in the conference itself. Too far probably for the nuclear weapon powers, and you'd probably end up with no indefinite extension at all. So the timing of your moves was essential. I remember that when it came to the negotiation of the text of "Objectives and Principles", which became actually part of the package on the extension decision the time of moving had come. That document was thoroughly negotiated in a small room down in the basement of the UN, towards the end of the conference, later on in May, 1995. And that's exactly how it worked, that's where it happened the moment of give and take and all that. In all of these negotiating processes it is the same. It's at

the end game where all the hard nuts are being cracked. And that was the case that time as well.

Michal Onderco:

You already alluded, of course, to the position of the United States; and the United States, also in the run up to the conference, was engaged in very heavy lobbying on behalf of indefinitely extending the NPT.

Jaap Ramaker:

Yes, but many participated. I think we, the Dutch, have, most actively if I may so, participated but of course many other Western countries as well. We had an extensive, and nowadays even more extensive, network of embassies all over the world. I remember that all of my Dutch colleagues across the world were instructed to actively lobby worldwide, together with others and of course mainly with the United States, in the direction of an indefinite extension. We were very, very strongly behind such a decision for the reasons I just explained. And I think it was good reasoning. I have other things to tell about this package deal of course, but maybe we'll come to that later.

Michal Onderco:

Yes, We'll come to that, of course, at a later point. One of the things that some people also mentioned that was also important in the way they were thinking about the NPT in 1995 was of course the fact that Iraq's nuclear programme came to light shortly before. Did that, in any way, weaken the trust in the NPT or in the IAEA?

Jaap Ramaker:

I think these are two different issues: I think by and large the parties to the treaty - and these were almost every country in the world - were convinced of the value of the NPT. So, in terms of trust, all parties were committed to Article 1 and 2: not to require, manufacture, transfer etc. etc. nuclear weapons. So it wasn't a matter of trust, but of being convinced of the value of the treaty. I think that is by in large still the case. The trust had to do, with the, reality with the inspection capabilities of the IAEA in Vienna. And the lesson of Iraq was that it IAEA inspections had not been intrusive enough. And that, in particular non-declared activities, as you know, were not covered by the safeguards system of the IAEA at the time. Since then they have been working on that and sort of repaired that loophole. Therefore, because of that, which is parallel to this exercise, the IAEA has gained a lot of trust in the meantime. But in the years thereafter. It started, I think, with the 93 + 2 discussions, but now we have this idea of the Comprehensive Safeguards and the Additional Protocols which are gradually being signed and ratified and agreed by member countries. And the more countries agree, of course, the greater, the trust, the confidence in the IAEA, will be. I think this process is on the right path now. But the Iraq affair did, of course play some role in the conference. If I remember well, this whole safeguard thing, of course, mainly played out in Main Committee 2 of the review Conference but there were overlaps in Main Committee 3 I presided over. Which was, by the way, of the three, in a way, the easiest one. Main committee 1 was the great problem. There, let's say, the non-aligned ideology played out when it came to nuclear weapons. Safeguards, Main Committee 2, was very professionally run even though there were differences. And I actually, at the end of my exercise in Main Committee 3, had no bracketed text left. That's also a matter of how you run a meeting, but of course that has to do at the same time with the issues at hand which in my Committee were the easiest ones, let's be honest. But then, of course, in my Committee the Iranians came with 'instructions from the capital' really on the very last morning... and some brackets came back in my end product.

Michal Onderco:

Sort of moving to New York and the conference itself. When you arrived at New York, there were three basic positions. There was the one advocating the indefinite extension, tabled by Canada. There was the position tabled by Mexico which advocated a temporary extension with the condition of the measure of compliance with the Treaty. And then there was the proposal for rolling extensions of the treaty. Could you start by saying, very briefly, how did you perceive each of the proposals and the motivations behind them?

Jaap Ramaker:

To the extent that there were other ideas circulating I must say that I can't recall taking much notice. This was probably important at the time, but we western delegations were focused on obtaining the indefinite extension of the NPT. We were focused on the efforts to adopt that decision and not on other formulas. But if you say so, I believe you. But the Mexican thoughts of conditional extension, I must admit, I had forgotten about those. The Mexicans were a very peculiar case; they had a radical position for a number of years, but by that time had softened up.

Michal Onderco:

So we discussed already that you were focusing on the instructions you went to New York with and the interests that the Netherlands had....

Jaap Ramaker:

We did have formal instructions on paper from my government.

Michal Onderco:

That's what I wanted to ask...

Jaap Ramaker:

We did, but I do not have them anymore. The people here in The Hague in the Ministry, as I said, including the one who had spent all his life there on these issues, were very knowledgeable. The instructions given, therefore, wisely were very broad so you had your room to manoeuvre. One of the main instructions was never to have an isolated position, always important in a multilateral negotiating environment. To never be the only one. You see? So our instructions were very flexible, but very honourable. I had no difficulty whatsoever with the formal instructions. They were sent to parliament beforehand, they were formal in nature but they didn't bother us.

Michal Onderco:

During the negotiations, during the conference, did you see a big difference in the public positions they took and the private positions they took in the closed meetings?

Jaap Ramaker:

No, not that I can remember. But I must say, the public opinion on this issue to the extent existing was mainly public opinion in the West, whether we like it or not... I do have some press clippings here, but that was because they are Dutch press clippings.

Michal Onderco:

I'm looking forward to seeing them.

Jaap Ramaker:

You can get them, and maybe I can get them back later. They are mainly of one journalist because this journalist, Robert van de Roer at the time of the leading Dutch newspaper, the NRC, who nowadays does other things, was one of the few interested in the subject. I had a good relationship with him, so he interviewed me, and he asked me to check his articles for errors and mistakes and so on. But there was not a great deal of coverage in the Dutch press. As still is the case nowadays, for example. If you take, for example the last NPT review conference in 2015, not a word in the press. Well, that Conference failed due to a lack of agreement on the Middle East. But not a word. My successor's- successor's- successor, the present disarmament ambassador in Geneva, gave me a little bit of a personal report of how it went in the end game which was interesting for me, but nothing appeared in the press. That you should realise, no interest whatsoever. Therefore, when you ask me the question: 'were positions in the room different than outside' then I quite honestly cannot say so. I don't think so quite honestly because nothing much was said outside the conference room by lack of an interested audience, but perhaps I am too strict here

Michal Onderco:

For example, some of the contemporary writing said that in private some of the non-aligned countries were more amenable to compromise than they appeared in public.

Jaap Ramaker:

That's a different phenomenon. I don't know if the non-aligned countries had a public opinion on these issues at all, but I don't think so, quite honestly. But on the issue of

the non-aligned taking their clues from the radical members of their group, there was a difference. They tended to follow radical positions of their fellow group members in formal sessions. In that sense, public. But if you talked to them in private they were much more flexible and reasonable and realistic and, for instance, when I just mentioned this disarmament lobbying campaign that we organised, you could see this: they didn't dare to speak up against the radicals of this world in public. There was Mexico, Iran, Sri Lanka, not Dhanapala - he had left his country's diplomatic service, but a couple of curious countries who were the radicals and the others didn't dare to speak up there. On the other hand in private, they were reasonable and constructive. And so you had to talk to them in private. It was useless to go to a non-aligned group meeting and try to convince those present, because the radicals would take over and the rest would be silent or agree. Hence the intense lobbying campaign in individual capitals and with individual delegates.

Michal Onderco:

So who would be in the radical group? You mentioned already Mexico, Iran, and Sri Lanka.

Jaap Ramaker:

In this conference? As I said, Mexico unlike before was moderate.

Michal Onderco:

Oh OK. Sorry.

Jaap Ramaker:

But the non-aligned group, as such, that was then under the chair of Indonesia I believe -Mr Alatas was then Indonesian foreign minister - was very much aiming at this conditional extension, or an extension for a fixed period of time. There again, I can't really remember who were the proponents of that, but those were the formal positions. So all of them had to be convinced in private consultations, in lobbying within the individual countries, in capitals, and in the conference, and before that in the run-up to the conference to drop this position. In the end the indefinite extension of the NPT was secured with this curious formula conference President Dhanapala used when he declared 'as there is a majority, not a consensus, but a majority, to extend it indefinitely, it will be extended indefinitely". Whereafter he hammered that decision through.

Michal Onderco:

But, for example, South Africa was in favour of an indefinite extension, but it was a NAM member. So was it a result of persuasion?

Jaap Ramaker:

That I don't know, but the South African position was very often remarkable.

Michal Onderco:

In what way?

Jaap Ramaker:

In the sense that, on these issues, they did not always espouse the non-aligned position in those days. The head of the delegation was Peter Goosen, until not too long ago Ambassador here in the Hague, until last year, I believe, and Peter Goosen has been very helpful. I remember still seeing him coming down the escalator, as it is called in America, at the UN, with some papers under his arm. These contained the first proposals to make an indefinite extension decision possible accompanied by a number of issues that would have to be part of a package deal. And that actually was the beginning of the exercise, the extension part of the NPT conference. It eventually led to the start of negotiations, in a small room, that secured the indefinite extension of the NPT.

It was a very clever piece of work, very balanced, and the South Africans played a very constructive role. Peter Goosen was one of these players. He was very well versed in these matters as he had been in charge of the nuclear programme, or actually rather, in charge of the dismantling of the nuclear programme of South Africa a couple years before. Very knowledgeable. Very much an expert on all of these issues, and very constructive. South Africa played a key role in my opinion as a catalyst to this entire process, to get people convinced of the need of more than just

an conditional extension decision.

Michal Onderco:

I will get to the small room in a second. But before we go there, I want to ask about the Canadian proposal because Canada was the one that formally came with the proposal for an indefinite extension. Was there some sort of consultation or negotiation with Canada before, or was there some sort of coordination that was ongoing before the conference, maybe between Western countries and Canada?

Jaap Ramaker:

There certainly was, or has been, because many Western countries took part in the run up - the lobby for the indefinite extension - to the conference. Of course, Canada was one of them. I really do not have the full picture of how we all were in touch with each others capitals prior to the conference. Certainly we had our Western group meetings well before the NPT review conference. I mentioned this this conversation I had with Tom Graham, I've forgotten if it was '94 or '95. We were already working on these issues. It must have been '95. Anyway, there has been close coordination in order to have the terms all right. I cannot recall whether the wording was the proposal of Canada, but if you say so most likely then it was Canada that first introduced the idea of an indefinite extension in the Western group of state parties.

Michal Onderco:

So let's get to the small room. Dhanapala established the group of Friends to the President.

Jaap Ramaker:

Yes...

Michal Onderco:

Did that create dissatisfaction for the countries that were left out?

Jaap Ramaker:

Well, most likely but there comes a moment, and as I said this was at the end of this conference like in any international conference, there comes a moment that countries that don't play a key role in the substance of it, become realistic and say 'OK, we accept such a thing because if the big boys can agree then who are we then to disagree and prevent for instance a consensus decision or a majority decision'. But I do think that it is always the case that countries which are left out, feel uneasy about it. But there's also very often in these kind of exercises a dawning realism that that's the only way key issues can be resolved. That is the way it is.

So we were in this small room, I was participating in it because I was the chairman of Main Committee 3. But my main role was to keep my mouth shut. I suppose the same goes for the other two Main Committee Chairs. Let's be realistic, it was the main nuclear weapon powers' stuff. I suppose there must be reports in the files in the Foreign Ministries of how the meetings in that group went. As I said, we, the Committee Chairmen, were not key players there anymore. Other than, perhaps, if the key delegates would ask ""how was this or that issue being dealt with in your Committee, Mr. Ramaker" for instance. And then we, Committee Chairmen, would clarify this or that question.

Michal Onderco:

So who were the main players?

Jaap Ramaker:

The main players were the five nuclear weapons states, plus... I can't even remember the others. There are always a few difficult ones whom you want to have on board as well.

Michal Onderco:

Countries, like? Countries like Egypt were of course there, right? Because...

Jaap Ramaker:

... perhaps yes because they were in a key position. I cannot recall the composition of that group. Maybe it's in this NGO report here because it's a sort of factual representation of what happened. But I can imagine that Dhanapala had a sort of formalistic approach because inviting for example the three working groups'

chairmen was in a way not decisive, but formally correct. Maybe he had this sort of idea and decided to have the coordinators of the regional groups of the NPT in there and maybe a few others.

Michal Onderco:

Because you were talking about the consensus that was sort of created. So there must have been some sort of consensus between someone.

Jaap Ramaker:

Well, consensus was the important thing from my perspective. Because basically there were three decisions on which consensus was essential: there was the decision of a strengthened review process that is still being used until this very day; then there was the document called the Objectives and Principles which I think was and is playing a much wider part beyond the immediate objective of the conference; and then of course there was the indefinite extension decision.

The "Objectives and Principles" was the one text on which there was consensus reached. And for me, the most important result of that was, that the five nuclear weapons states could reach agreement on a number of issues. First and foremost agreement on something that I started using the year after in test ban negotiations I chaired. The very first item of the "Objectives and Principles" said: 'a comprehensive test ban treaty shall be concluded not later than 1996'. So that meant the 31st of December 1996. That also meant that there was unity among the five nuclear weapons states on this point. Which had not been the case until then. And I think that was essential. It was followed up, by the way, if I may just continue that line, by agreement, a few months later in 1995 when the UN General Assembly met in New York, on the final date for the test ban to be concluded, which became September 1996. This gave me a deadline that everyone agreed on, by consensus, not only the parties to the NPT, but also those outside of the NPT, Israel, India and Pakistan which was enormously helpful in bringing about the test ban. But other parts of that programme to be found in the "Objectives and Principles" - in a way commitments by the nuclear weapons states in particular, did not work out so far. As you go through the text you'll find a very thoroughly, by the comma, negotiated programme of steps on the road to nuclear arms control and disarmament and non-proliferation, and all of it negotiated in a couple of day-sessions. But, of course, even to this very day there is no FMCT negotiation going on. But nowadays, it is not the five nuclear weapon states that are the difficulty but Pakistan who is one of the NPT non-members. The point is that on FMCT there is a major issue for Pakistan and that is India's nuclear program and vice versa of course.

Michal Onderco:

On the indefinite extension: how did the different positions play out in the group of Friends of the President?

Jaap Ramaker:

As I recall, at that time, the indefinite extension was not the major issue in the group. There may have been some of those present of the non-nuclear weapons states who thought one could use the western wish to have an indefinite extension as a leverage also in that forum, but I cannot exactly recall that. I should go through all the notes and reports we wrote, but then I'd have to go to the Foreign Ministry and ask whether I could see those. But I do think that the main issue in that meeting became how to make a generally acceptable package that could allow for this treaty to go on indefinitely. It was the wording of the text under discussion that was essential, and it still is to this very day. Those commitments that the possessors of those weapons then made still stand today as we speak.

Michal Onderco:

And the negotiation of that package was only between the nuclear weapon states?

Jaap Ramaker:

I think they were the main speakers in those meetings. Yes, I suppose. As far as I can recall, yes. Because people started realising that if the five would not agree, then nobody would agree. This was after all about their nuclear arsenals.

Michal Onderco:

So when did it become obvious that the indefinite extension would be possible?

Jaap Ramaker:

Well that I don't recall anymore. I don't know the precise timing there. You asked earlier the question: 'how is it possible that the President of the Conference, Ambassador Dhanapala, could come up with a text of a decision which is, to say the least, very peculiar'. Everybody agreed that there was a majority in favour of an indefinite extension, but how did he pull it through? when did it become obvious? Who can tell? I can tell you that at the time of the decision we participants who were more closely involved were not sure at all what would happen in the plenary at the moment the decision had to be taken. My deputy made some pictures at the moment Dhanapala's gavel went down. This is Dhanapala and three pictures of the moment the gavel going down. Dhanapala asked if anybody was opposed and then "bam".

Michal Onderco:

So who are the people next to Dhanapala? There's Dhanapala in the middle?

Jaap Ramaker:

This is the head of the Disarmament Department of the UN, Mr. Davinic. Davinic was from Yugoslavia. We're still talking Yugoslavia here. The other one is probably the Secretary of the Conference, whose name escapes me. But this is Dhanapala. As I said, we, as a delegation that was closely involved in the process, at least closely observing the endgame, we weren't sure until that very last moment, that moment, whether or not the indefinite extension was going to be generally accepted.

Michal Onderco:

So who were the main opponents and what were their strategies?

Jaap Ramaker:

There is always the possibility of unexpectedly breaking the consensus in a multilateral process. The negotiating process in a multilateral environment is less rational than a scientist thinks. There is always a possibility that the odd guy puts up his finger and it could be, I'm sorry to say it, it could be a country totally irrelevant in the issue under negotiation that could say "no, no I'm opposed because...". This happened often in the UN. And then the moment is gone and there's the danger of unravelling of whatever. In this case, Dhanapala in his consultation obviously thought it would be doable. What the market would bare, so to speak. And that was the uncertainty of that moment. But who were the main opponents, you asked? That had already become clear by that time. It had already become clear that the idea of an extension of the treaty for a limited period of time that could be used as a leverage to force to Nuclear Weapons States to speed up nuclear disarmament was a non-starter. That had already become clear.

Michal Onderco:

That had already become clear before the conference, or during the conference?

Jaap Ramaker:

I think both. I think that the awareness had been growing for some time already. But you ask questions which without my notes of the time are difficult to answer. I have these on the test ban negotiations, but for this conference I don't have the notes anymore. Without notes I cannot really answer that question in exact terms.

Michal Onderco:

How then were the opponents, sort of, brought on board? Countries like Iran, which were in opposition the indefinite extension, how were they brought on board so that they were not the odd person raising a finger?

Jaap Ramaker:

I do not know that in detail, of course. But there were countries in a position to do so amongst the major powers who may have intervened in Iran at the time. Iran is an interesting country: I think they're very skill full negotiators and they have an excellent diplomatic corps. In those days, they were always figuring out how far they could go too far so to speak. I think in the end they would not like to be the one country that would prevent such a conference from succeeding. Because in those days, they were probably already in the preliminary stages of their nuclear programme. They were very careful in each and every step to make sure than no one ever could have an indication that 'yes, they had a nuclear weapons programme'.

'Yes, they had a nuclear programme'. "But a nuclear weapons programme', no! And they would really go the extra mile to prevent suspicions, unnecessarily, to be raised against them. Therefore, there may have been démarches on the part of the Europeans, but by the Americans was of course not possible. But in the end I think maybe the own wisdom of the Iranians prevailed.

Michal Onderco:

One of the issues that was agreed in the conference was of course the Middle East Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone and the fact that there would be negotiations towards that end. How did the Dutch government feel about that? And you personally?

Jaap Ramaker:

I don't know exactly. We had been looking into this as a government - I remember having been involved in that question before - on the feasibility of a Nuclear Weapon Free Zone in the Middle East. We had concluded that it was politically and even technically perhaps not possible to isolate that part of the world in that sense, but mainly political. I personally felt that it was a non-starter and I have yet to be proven wrong. I mean, it would have been much more promising if it would have been a Chemical Weapons Free Zone because a prohibition of chemical weapons is widely accepted. But even there - take Syria, for instance, one can wonder.

But in the case of a Nuclear Weapon Free Zone there is of course the fact that one country, being Israel, in that region did not adhere to the NPT and therefore did not commit itself to not have nuclear weapons. As you know, the formal position of Israel is that they will never be the first to introduce nuclear weapons in the region. But that most likely means, I think, but I'm not very expert here, that they don't have these weapons in the strict technical sense of the word now, but that, if needed, they'd have them tomorrow. If it's a matter of putting the components together, and then you are probably there. So, that alone already prevented a Nuclear Weapon Free Zone in that part of the world from happening.

The Finnish diplomat Laajava, in recent years, has tried to convene a conference on the matter as was decided in 2010. He had a mission impossible on his shoulders and he never succeeded convening the conference and had to postpone it. The Egyptians are very adamant about this issue and there is, I believe, the narrative on the part of the Egyptians that at the time of the Review and Extension Conference, back in 1995, the United States had promised Egypt that they would make sure that they would bring Israel on board. On that basis, according to the Egyptians they agreed to this formula of an indefinite extension of the NPT. The Americans deny this version of the story and I simply do not know. This story, that the Americans should have promised the Egyptians to bring Israel on board, I heard a number of years ago from an Egyptian Ambassador, a colleague of mine in the UN, who was also previously involved in all of this. He once told me that, and I inquired, but my American friends said 'not as far as we know'. Who is telling the truth? I can't tell you. But, it remains an interesting issue. During the NPT Review Conference last year in 2015, as I understand from the present Disarmament Ambassador in Geneva who briefed me later on on the end game, the three main committees had all reached consensus but there was this Middle East Resolution as the last sticking point. This Middle East resolution comes up all the time, also in the annual General Conference of the IAEA in Vienna. And it's always the Egyptians who are leading on the agenda item. Then such a position becomes a recurrent feature of disarmament conferences, you know? It is a roll-over thing from session to session.

Michal Onderco:

When it came to the discussion of the export controls. And we already alluded to the fact that it became a contentious issue towards the end when Iran sort of rejected the idea. Can you tell me more about the discussion that was ongoing on export controls and how you brought Iran on board on that issue? How was Iran brought on board?

Jaap Ramaker:

That happened later, I think, in the drafting committee. The discussion in Main Committee 3 was, on the existing export control regimes. Iran was trying to sell the notion that the existing export control regime of the exporters of nuclear technology, equipment etcetera, was to the detriment of the developing world. Who, after all, had

the inalienable right, to the peaceful use of nuclear energy. By having an export control regime, the possessors, the 'haves' of those technologies and equipment, and materials, and so on, were violating the principle of the inalienable rights in their view. In order to remedy that, the Iranians said 'such a regime must be a multilateral regime in which both the possessors and non-possessors work together to decide on exports of these technologies and materials'.

But of course, they did not really get that. For them it was another effort to soften a regime that denied them the free acquisition of these technologies. Their objective was to undermine those regimes just like the DPRK at the moment. There are all sorts of shady deals going on in the world to acquire the know-how, the materials etcetera, necessary for nuclear installations and production, at the end, of a nuclear device.

But most countries, I think, accept export controls. Certain countries, Indonesia for example, even went on record saying 'we have no problems with export controls, we import freely for our nuclear programme, but, of course, we accept also the inspections and the safeguards system of the IAEA'. That went very smoothly in the end and for us, no problem whatsoever the Indonesians said.

In that sense, Iran did not get what it wanted. It did not get the support it wanted from other influential countries. Indonesia, of course, was an important country, a leader in the non-aligned world. The Iranians were pretty isolated on this issue. As I said, in the end, they were the only one in my main committee who, at the very end - the morning I was supposed to hand over my consensus text to Dhanapala - came with a so called instruction from their capital, and wanted an amendment that had been disposed of earlier in my meeting, and said 'put it back in'. And I think that, yes, I remember, that later on in the drafting committee chaired by the Polish Ambassador Strulak, that proposal was being dealt with. I can't really remember how it went.

The point, by the way, of the Main Committee meetings at this particular conference was, of course, to make the extension decision easier. That was in 1995 the overriding concern. It would have been marvelous of course, if we had had, like they had last year, in 2015, consensus in all three main committees. That would have implied, for instance, that you would have consensus on the most sensitive part of the exercise which is disarmament and nonproliferation in Main Committee 1. Which deals mainly with the nuclear weapon stuff. If that would have been accomplished in 1995 the extension component of the exercise, the indefinite extension decision, would have gone over much more smoothly. I was the only one by the way, who had a finished product by the deadline that Dhanapala had set. That was important because he needed time after the Main Committee work was completed, to start working on the extension decision. I still remember, that he came to me earlier on and asked 'how about you', and I said 'you'll get my report in time'. But as we said, I had the easiest of the three Main Committees. But the other ones: on safeguards in Main Committee 2 there were a number of things that were left open, and Main Committee 1 on disarmament was a disaster that year.

Michal Onderco:

Before we go to the aftermath of the conference. I want to ask about some individual countries and how you remember their performance. Of course the big differences were the big geopolitical changes in Europe. One of them is Germany and the other is the Soviet Union. Can you at least briefly talk about how you saw their performance in the conference?

Jaap Ramaker:

On Germany, I can honestly not remember a very particular role that that country played in this conference. They did play an active role in other forums at the time, but not in this conference. I think that probably they have been generally supportive, but realised that whilst they were an important economic power, they were not a nuclear power, and this exercise was mainly an issue for the nuclear weapon powers, the Five, and the non-aligned. They must have been generally supportive, certainly, but although I've taken part in the attempts to lobby outside even New York for bringing about the indefinite extension, I cannot recall their particular role.. Although they may be offended, I can't remember that they played a particular role.

As to Russia at the time, in general, in the 90's the role of Russia was very

constructive, and very positive. Not only here, but also in the Test Ban negotiations. By the time I had the chair of the last part of the CTBT negotiations, the Russians were, on behalf of the Eastern Europeans, chair of one of the two main working groups, and the two working group chairmen had to step back because I had to come up with my own text and there Ambassador Berdennikov was extremely constructive. The Russians had their own positions of course, and Berdennikov was very good at making sure that those came through. But, I mean, they knew that there was going to be, there had to be, a good end result. The Russian have always been strong supporters of nuclear nonproliferation. So, they were fully behind an indefinite extension of the NPT. But here, one should add, in the case of the NPT, that all along Russia and the United States, and before that the Soviet Union, had, of course, a number of shared views and interests when it came to nuclear weapons, fortunately. And so, it wasn't a dramatic shift in my opinion, that all of a sudden, Russia became constructive. After all, in the Cold War years there had always been close contacts between these two nuclear powers, fortunately, and of course they had been able to conclude a number of arms control agreements before the end of the Cold War. And later on, of course, there was also the whole rapport, the chemistry, between Gorbachev and Reagan towards the end of the Cold War. But, anyhow, in that conference the Russians were completely on board.

Michal Onderco:

So, after the end of the conference, was there a sense of satisfaction? Both within the Netherlands, but also within the wider Western Group with the result of the conference? Were you happy with what was agreed in New York?

Jaap Ramaker:

I think so. The point was the indefinite extension, making sure that not somehow in the future, in 10 or 25 years, or whatever, this treaty would disappear, and create an unstable security environment for all the parties to the treaty. And that was where the satisfaction was. The fact that when it came to the review process that continued afterwards - and I'll come to that, because it's a peculiar thing - it did not succeed, I think didn't bother at least the West too much. But that has been the same over the years, you know. If you go through all of the NPT review conferences: 75 Consensus; 80 - no; 85 consensus but with an incredible night session, I'm told. Anyway this 1985 Conference stumbled into consensus; 1990 did not reach consensus, I believe; 1995 in a way, did not, but the indefinite extension was secured that year, the 2000 conference was a success with the 13 points agreed also by the United States on nuclear disarmament, interesting 13 points by the way. But the 2005 Conference did not reach consensus but in my view that was positive given the prevailing political climate of the moment. I remember a conversation - I was in New York, a little later I believe - with Jan Eliasson who was a former foreign minister of Sweden, and at this point still is UN Deputy Secretary General, a very knowledgeable Swede. 'How sad', he said, 'that we did not reach consensus in 2005' and I said 'I am so happy that we didn't reach consensus. Because if consensus had been reached that would have meant that the NPT parties would have given in to the positions of the Bush administration'. And that would have meant watering down a whole lot of issues, including my own baby: the Test Ban. Apparently at least one of the Western nuclear powers wanted to give in to the United States at that time. I answered that no consensus with the text of 2000 still in place was preferable to a watered down final declaration. And he said 'oh yes, you're right'. Do I make myself clear?

Michal Onderco:

Yes.

Jaap Ramaker:

You cannot have consensus when at least one important player wants to play the whole thing down because that would have undermined the results of 2000. Yes of course, it was a pity there was no consensus, but then you could also say it's a pity that the Bush administration had the position it had because that's what it was. Anyway, and now we have this thing going on in the US which is a different story.

Michal Onderco:

You already alluded to this strengthened review process, so what were your expectations for how the strengthened review process would play out in the future?

Jaap Ramaker:

Well, the strengthened review process basically had to do with the fact that from then on PrepCom meetings would also deal with substance and not only with procedural issues as till then had been the case, but...

Michal Onderco:

...was that clear to you already at that moment?

Jaap Ramaker:

That was part of the, I think, part of the understanding of the strengthened review process. I'm not sure in so many words but I think so, yes. No?

Michal Onderco:

Well, already in early 1996 there were reports that there were disagreements about what was actually agreed.

Jaap Ramaker:

That's possible, but I mean the idea was to have substance being dealt with well before the actual review conference. But quite honestly, these are all meetings of civil servants, so to speak, that will not change the course of world history. In my view the importance of the the strengthened review process should not be exaggerated. You can have discussions where people all of a sudden discover the truth again, on this, that or the other, reinvent the wheel. But you get these kinds of discussions at the civil servant level and these are basically repeats of the same movements, but you can talk beautifully of course about substance. Take the discussion in the first PrepCom in a review cycle whereas the next conference will take place four years later. What about the substance? What if the international situation has changed in the meantime? Quite honestly, I don't think these discussions among civil servants make a great deal of difference in the real world, but that's the personal view of this humble person.

Michal Onderco:

So, would you as a person prefer that the PrepComs would still focus mainly on the preparation of the agenda of the conference?

Jaap Ramaker:

Well, to the extent that the discussions on substance reflect the situation's as it is at that particular moment, you would probably see somewhat more of a gradual transition towards the main conference. So then positions in the Review Conference itself would not come totally as a surprise, so to speak, but they have of course a very relative value. It's not as if all of sudden a breakthrough will be found in those discussions. Breakthroughs very often don't happen in the meeting rooms of the UN. They originate in the real world, in capitals, so there we are.

Michal Onderco:

How is the balance between what is going on New York and what is going in the capitals?

Jaap Ramaker:

Well, I think that there is always a number of, when it comes to capitals, a number of developments that escape the delegates. If I take my own test ban negotiations. I know what happened in the meeting rooms. I know what happened in my consultations. But, I have a very vague picture of what happened between capitals. Between, for instance Washington and Beijing. And the same goes for an NPT conference. There is always a lot going on: you asked me before 'how was this or that country brought on board' when it comes to the indefinite extension. At the time I had a very incomplete picture. I suppose if I put myself in the shoes of Mr. Dhanapala, he did not have a full picture either. He didn't even have the time to get that. I suppose this or that country would come to him and say 'my capital had spoken to this capital and this was the result'. That may have happened. But a complete picture of what happened outside the meeting rooms of the conference is for delegates very difficult to get. Even if you are in the pilot's chair.

Michal Onderco:

If you were to assign a percentage to which one is more important: what is going on in the capital, and what is going on in New York. How would you divide that? Is it like

50/50?

Jaap Ramaker:

On nuclear weapons, which is a very serious thing, I can tell you the capitals of the nuclear weapon states in the end decide. They draw the lines.

Michal Onderco:

So it is 90% of the agreement is worked out between Paris, London, Washington, Beijing and Moscow?

Jaap Ramaker:

Or, sometimes the positions are being discussed. On nuclear weapons issues I am a little bit more familiar with the American system because of my other, my own, negotiations on the test ban. Positions, formal instructions to a conference like this are hammered out in Washington with a number of government agencies involved: the intelligence community, the Department of Defence, the Department of Energy, the Department of State, in those days ACDA, which doesn't exist any more, and God knows what. They work these things out between themselves which very often leads to a complete lack of flexibility for the poor US delegation who has to sell the result of Washington's deliberations in the meeting rooms in Geneva or New York or wherever. And so there is very often ... but I can tell you that when their positions are worked out on this or that issue in Washington, it is very difficult to have these changed when the dynamics of the negotiations so require. And it can only be changed if Washington realises that their objectives are not met if they stick to the positions that they worked out amongst themselves. Because in the dynamics of the conference room there are different rules at play partly reflecting positions of other capitals than those in Washington.

Michal Onderco:

Was that also what played out in 1995?

Jaap Ramaker:

It's always the case, I suppose.

Michal Onderco:

Was it obvious when these positions had to be amended?

Jaap Ramaker:

I can't really remember in detail, but of course, my own experience was, that there is always one issue or the other on which a lively interchange between the head of the delegation and his capital takes place. It then depends on the clout of the head of the delegation in his capital what comes out of it. I suppose the same goes for Russia, and I suppose the others. And then there are different agencies also represented within one and the same delegation. They look at each other, they watch each other. I, to my surprise, have sometimes found that they don't even trust each other. We do, of course, have a better insight in, for instance the Americans, than in the very closed system of the Russians..

Michal Onderco:

But in the Netherlands, you already said that you don't have this problem because your instruction was...

Jaap Ramaker:

Listen, on these issues, basically, basically the role of the Netherlands has always been, in the Test Ban negotiations, and in this exercise we talk about, one of facilitating. Of course, we have certain confinements, we are a NATO member, for instance. But we have always been bridge builders, facilitators. To a great deal that was also our role in Main Committee 3 and that is basically what I did in the Test Ban Negotiations. I remember people coming to me when there was this or that issue, which turned out to be a potential blockage of the process on the Test Ban, and they would say 'you have a problem ambassador'. And I'd say 'no, no, no. Not me, you all have a problem if you don't resolve this. I'm at your disposal but... solve it'.

By the way, my procedure was the same in Main Committee 3: if there was an issue and this group or that group or country opposed the other, I would ask a third one to mediate, solve it, and come back to me. That was what happened on this transport at sea issue, which was a very sensitive issue in my Committee. It was an conflict

between the small island states in the Pacific and the nuclear weapons states. New Zealand, I believe was the one who as a mediator at my request, solved it. But New Zealand was at the same time sympathetic to the small island states because it is itself an island state. Anyway, that's the procedure I had. 'Solve it. Don't come back to me until you have solved it. But by the way not later than...'. It worked out fine. Facilitator: that was the role of the Netherlands.

Michal Onderco : Before we wrap up the interview. Was there something I should have asked and I didn't. Something important that I omitted?

Jaap Ramaker:

An incident or so?

Michal Onderco:

Yes.

Jaap Ramaker:

There's one open question to me. The question is also one for you I suppose. Well there may be two things: I do not exactly know how Dhanapala secured this decision whilst the review process had not been finished. But he did. That was the moment my deputy put on a picture. You may have them, but they're not very good quality, I saw.

Michal Onderco:

I think they're perfect. I've never seen a picture of that moment.

Jaap Ramaker:

It is taken from that seat where the Dutch delegation was situated in the General Assembly Hall. So I don't know how Dhanapala did that. I was not privy to his consultations that got him there, as far as I can remember. The second question mark I still have is, I believe, why it was that subsequently Dhanapala became very disappointed,.

Jaap Ramaker:

So apparently Dhanapala was disappointed that after the main decision in the indefinite extension of the NPT was secured there wasn't more flexibility on other contentious issues. Where, for instance, nuclear weapons states would have accommodated somewhat more the positions of the non-nuclear weapons states, as the jargon says. But that was basically the non-aligned. But that is the reality. The nuclear weapon policies, the strategic doctrines of the nuclear weapon states, are very rigid. It was only in 2010 that President Obama addressed in a fundamental way the question of what is the role of nuclear weapons in US security policy. So, all of this takes time. These are not things that you start fiddling with, with all due respect, in the multilateral conference that we discussed this afternoon. That is the reality.

Michal Onderco:

Thank you very much.