

THE INSPECTOR

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Steve Kroft reports:

Tomorrow morning, for the first time in four years, UN weapons inspectors will be back in Iraq to scour a country the size of California for evidence of weapons of mass destruction. What they find, or don't find, may well determine if the United States goes to war against Iraq. Leading the team is Hans Blix, an unflappable Swedish diplomat regarded as brilliant but cautious. The Bush administration and the rest of the world will be watching his every move as Blix confronts an Iraqi regime notorious for delaying, deceiving and lying to weapons inspectors.

KROFT: You are very much the man on the hot seat.

Dr. HANS BLIX : So I understand.

KROFT: Are you going to be tough?

Dr. BLIX: We're going to be correct and effective.

KROFT: Correct and effective?

Dr. BLIX: Mm-hmm.

KROFT: There are people that say what this job needs is somebody tough and aggressive.

Dr. BLIX: Aggressive is an American quality. You're aggressive in business, that's fine. Aggression is prohibited under the UN Charter. And as a European, I would rather use the word dynamic and effective, if you don't mind.

(Footage of Blix; UN Security Council meeting)

KROFT: (Voiceover) Semantics aside, Hans Blix wasn't anyone's first choice for the job of chief inspector. According to some reports, he was the 24th choice, after permanent members of the UN Security Council vetoed each candidate one by one until compromising on Blix, who had been the head of the International Atomic Energy Agency for 16 years.

There are people who believe that you are the wrong man for the job. The complaint has been you are too much of a diplomat.

Dr. BLIX: Well, I prefer peaceful solutions to warlike solutions if I can have them, but I'm not a pacifist.

(Footage of UN vehicles; helicopter; computer; man in helicopter)

KROFT: (Voiceover) His team will be made up of 280 weapons inspectors from around the world, supported by helicopters, surveillance planes and state-of-the-art detection devices, some of which were specifically designed for this mission.

This could all come down to--to one locked gate or one locked door, or one building that you're denied access to; that could touch off a war.

Dr. BLIX: That's true.

KROFT: If I read the resolutions correctly, any refusal by the Iraqis to give you access to a facility, or any foot-dragging, can be interpreted as a violation of the--of the resolution.

Dr. BLIX: We will report honestly and objectively from the field. But it's clear that we, too, have to exercise some common sense. If we have one flat tire among our escorts on the road and are delayed a quarter an hour, that's one matter. But if you have four flat tires on the road to the same place, that's a different matter.

KROFT: What is your tolerance for Iraqi recalcitrance?

Dr. BLIX: Well, somewhere between one and four flat tires.

KROFT: The UN Security Council has given the inspectors extraordinary powers, at least on paper. The resolution even gives them the authority to take Iraqi scientists and their families out of the country to be interviewed. The inspectors have unimpeded, unconditional and unrestricted access to any site in Iraq. They can seal off wide areas around those sites and suspend all movement in the air and on the ground.

Is there any place you can't go? Is there any building you can't enter? Is there any filing cabinet you can't demand be opened?

Dr. BLIX: No, under the resolutions enforced by the Security Council, there are no sanctuaries and there are no places closed to us. Even the pre--so-called presidential sites--and there are quite a few; eight of them which were defined on the maps--we will now have immediate access.

KROFT: Do you think the Iraqis know where you're going to go?

Dr. BLIX: Some of the places, yes, but I don't think they will know all the places we'll go to.

KROFT: Really?

Dr. BLIX: No.

KROFT: You think you may be able to surprise them this time?

Dr. BLIX: Well, we will go to many places which they are not anticipating us.

(Footage of UN vehicles; people obscuring camera view; UN official talking to men)

pastime. Previous UN teams were penetrated by intelligence agents who may have compromised the inspections. Blix's group of international scientists and military experts were personally interviewed by his staff and chosen from thousands of applicants.

Do you have confidence in the people that you've hired?

Dr. BLIX: Yes, but I can never have 100 percent guarantees that no one will not be someone who worked for a state. All I've said is that if I discover that ever, then I'll fire the person.

(Footage of Blix talking to two men)

KROFT: (Voiceover) With that in mind, Blix says most of his team will be kept in the dark on operational details until the last possible moment.

Dr. BLIX: So what site we go to will be kept to a very close little circle of people-- myself, the head of operations and the chief inspector. And the other members of the team will learn about it only very shortly before we go.

KROFT: And will you notify the Iraqis immediately?

Dr. BLIX: No. Most inspections are no-notice inspections. As you say, the inspectors tell you, 'We go in this direction on this road,' and when they reach the target they tell them, 'This is the--this is the target we're going to visit.'

Mr. TIM McCARTHY: No matter what you do, the Iraqis are going to have some general idea where you're going.

(Photo of McCarthy; footage of McCarthy)

KROFT: (Voiceover) Tim McCarthy is a former UN weapons inspector who conducted nearly 100 inspections inside Iraq in the 1990s. He says no-notice inspections hardly ever surprise the Iraqis because of their highly sophisticated intelligence network.

Mr. McCARTHY: They know who's defected from their country and where those people worked, and those are the sites that--that inspectors want to go see because they say, 'Hey something was going on here.' They have the capability to listen to our conversations. You know, it's--it's a high likelihood they will know where inspectors are going.

KROFT: You can't send off decoy teams and have somebody else move in with helicopters to a site that they're not expecting.

Mr. McCARTHY: There--there are techniques, but frankly it's still their country and the advantages really go to them. And--and it's--it's a very significant advantage. They have a lot...

(Footage of exterior of United Nations headquarters; Security Council documents; graphic: "...accurate, full, and complete declaration.."; graphic: "...false statements or omissions...")

KROFT: (Voiceover) In McCarthy's view, the real strength of this UN resolution is a provision forcing Iraq to provide an accurate, full and complete declaration of all of its past and present weapons programs by December 8th. Any false statements or omissions could be grounds for war.

Mr. McCARTHY: It's very unlikely that the team will find a weapon. They won't come back with the bomb in the basement. This will not happen. What they will come back with is a

kind of body of evidence saying Iraq is lying.

KROFT: And what happens then?

Mr. McCARTHY: And then perhaps we have--we have the second or third Persian Gulf War.

KROFT: So this is a bit like a poker game. It begins with them declaring.

Dr. BLIX: Sure do. I don't play poker, but I'll be in this game, yes.

KROFT: This is what we've got, right? And this is where it is.

Dr. BLIX: Yes, that's what they should do, absolutely.

KROFT: But isn't their position, 'We don't have any weapons of mass destruction'?

Dr. BLIX: That has been their position for a long time. But they have not been under quite the same stress and pressure as they are now.

(Footage of rally; photo of Blix meeting with President Bush, Colin Powell and other officials)

KROFT: (Voiceover) But it's not just Iraq that's under pressure. In recent weeks, Blix has been told repeatedly by top US officials, including President Bush and Secretary of State Colin Powell, that they expect him to take a tough stand with Baghdad.

Dr. BLIX: Well, they are impressing upon us the importance of going in and to carry out energetic inspections, giving us some advice.

KROFT: They have been giving you information about where they suspect weapons of mass destruction to be?

Dr. BLIX: I won't go into that.

KROFT: Have you gotten any evidence?

Dr. BLIX: I said if I have solid evidence of any weapons of mass destruction, I would go to the Security Council and place it before them. I do not have that.

KROFT: Have they told you where to look?

Dr. BLIX: Yeah, they will tell us some sites, where to go. And I would hope that they would give us more sites to look, because that's the best thing that we can have from the intelligence, and we can test whether the Iraqis actually have hidden something.

(Footage of Blix and Kroft; Blix at conference; Blix exiting helicopter; UN inspections)

KROFT: (Voiceover) While Blix may be sounding the right notes, his record in Iraq doesn't inspire a great deal of confidence in Washington. As head of the International Atomic Energy Agency from 1981 to 1997, his job was to monitor and prevent the spread of nuclear weapons around the world. But during his tenure, Iraq built a massive nuclear weapons program right under his nose.

Dr. BLIX: But the criticism has been that when I was at the IAEA, the IAEA did not discover that--what Iraq was doing in the '90s. And that is true. We did not. And this was a misery

we shared with the CIA and MIS and even the Mossad. They also did not know it, although they had all the spies and the satellites.

(Footage of UN inspectors; Blix; Iraqi soldiers)

KROFT: (Voiceover) Blix did have his own inspectors on the ground, sometimes in the very same compound where the Iraqis were enriching nuclear material to build a bomb. But Blix says his team did not have unrestricted access and needed Iraqi approval to enter particular buildings.

Mr. PAUL LEVENTHAL: The one thing that we need to see happen is Hans Blix become a man of steel, become very hard-nosed, not accept any kind of obfuscation or ambiguity.

(Footage of Leventhal)

KROFT: Paul Leventhal is the founder of the Nuclear Control Institute, which tracks the spread of nuclear weapons around the world. And he's followed Blix's career for 20 years.

Mr. LEVENTHAL: The--the real question in my mind is--is whether Hans Blix, based on, I think, a rather flawed record when he was the head of the IAEA both before and after the Gulf War, whether he really has the backbone to be confrontational, which is, I think, the first requirement for effective inspections, is a willingness to be confrontational.

KROFT: Do you think he's capable of that?

Mr. LEVENTHAL: I'm skeptical. I hope he proves me wrong, but his record demonstrates that he's highly susceptible to political influence and that he does not like confrontation. I think he's just averse to it.

Dr. BLIX: I have taken my confrontations in my life and I'm ready for more of them if it's necessary. But if you can have peaceful solutions, the better.

KROFT: Do you trust the Iraqis?

Dr. BLIX: Trust is not in the job description of the inspectors.

KROFT: They've lied to be you before.

Dr. BLIX: Yes, they certainly did not give accurate answers to the questions that they should answer.

KROFT: So would you--you would expect that perhaps they might do it again.

Dr. BLIX: It could happen again, yes.

(Footage of Pollack)

KROFT: (Voiceover) According to Ken Pollack, it will happen again. A former analyst with both the CIA and the National Security Council, Pollack says Iraq is still hiding weapons, a belief shared by the Bush administration. Pollack contends that Blix and his team will have little chance of finding those weapons.

Mr. KEN POLLACK: They're trying to cover a country the size of California, and find needles in haystacks, and what's more, they've moving needles in haystacks because the Iraqis have been able to take so much of the programs mobile, where they can move them around. This

is an incredibly challenging task.

KROFT: You said they've gone mobile. What do you mean?

Mr. POLLACK: Well, we know that the Iraqis have taken very big portions of all of their weapons of mass destruction program and put them on the road. The biological warfare program is the best example, where all the evidence we have indicates that the Iraqis have taken small biological labs and put them in the back of recreational vehicles. And they are driving these things all around Iraq. And you're trying to figure out which of these Winnepegos actually has a biological warfare lab on the back of it, or even where it is.

KROFT: How much intelligence do you think the United States has given to Blix and the UN team?

Mr. POLLACK: At this point in time, I think the US has probably given them some of the information that they have, that the US government has, but not all because you don't want to start revealing the crown jewels, the really good sources, or revealing the evidence from those sources which could blow them.

KROFT: So the US may be holding back some of its best information?

Mr. POLLACK: Entirely possible.

KROFT: What is success in this mission?

Dr. BLIX: Success certainly is to disarm Iraq. I agree with those who say that inspection is not the goal, it's disarmament that is the goal.

KROFT: W--what do you think your chances are for that?

Dr. BLIX: Well, I am not really making any assessment of the chances. I know what we want to do and how we go about it. Whether we'll succeed or not, I don't know.

KROFT: That's not too encouraging.

Dr. BLIX: Well, I don't want to promise more than I can--than I can hold; to keep promise that is that we will be effective and correct.

KROFT: What makes you think you might be successful if the last time it was not successful?

Dr. BLIX: Well, there is this difference that they know that the consequences might be very serious this time. Now you have a unanimous Security Council that demands of Iraq to cooperate. I think it's a very somber moment, and I hope that this is taken to heart by the Iraqis.