December 8, 2022
Interview with Harald Mu

¨

ller

Citation:

Summary:

Harald Müller recounts his lifelong interest in nuclear issues, stemming from the Cuban Missile Crisis, and his extensive career at the Peace Research Institute Frankfurt (PRIF). He emphasizes the dual role of nuclear weapons as both a deterrent, especially against threats like Russia's current aggression, and a danger due to the possibility of catastrophic misuse. Müller suggests a multi-faceted approach to nuclear disarmament, advocating for academic input, practical policy steps, and international cooperation, while recognizing that genuine disarmament requires alignment among global powers, including autocratic states. Despite recent geopolitical setbacks, he remains cautiously hopeful for future nuclear arms control, though he stresses the importance of conventional deterrents in a potential nuclear-free world.This document summary was generated by an artificial intelligence language model and was reviewed by a Wilson Center staff member.

Credits:

This document was made possible with support from Carnegie Corporation of New York (CCNY)

Original Language:

English

Contents:

Transcript - English

Michal Onderco: Good morning, Harald and thank you very much for being here with me. I normally start this interview with a very general question, how did you become interested in nuclear weapons?

Harald Müller: I think as a seven years old boy during the Cuban Missile Crisis, which I lived through very, very lively and intensely. Because in my environment most adults thought it was the end of the world. And I witnessed unforgettably the end of the crisis in the football stadium of Frankfurt, when a top match was going to start, and the whole crowd, holding the little transistor radios, to get the latest news from the crisis, all of a sudden burst out shouting like five goals being shot at the same time. Because the message came through that there was an agreement, and the crisis was over. So it was an extremely impressive experience for a youthful boy. And it never left my memory. So when the chance rose, that I could dive into the subject… and that was during my studies in political science and international relations, I started studying the literature. And I was hired as a student assistant only shortly after, on the subject of the American military-industrial complex, with all the nuclear connotations that go… and never left the field.

Michal Onderco: After you finished your PhD, did you ever have the desire to maybe refocus your career and do something else than nuclear weapons? Because there are many people who think: well, nuclear weapons are interesting, but there is little opportunity to maybe have an impact, change things. And they decided to go and do something completely different.

Harald Müller: Well, I did my PhD on energy policy in general, where nuclear was only a tiny part. But I did my first few publications on issues connected to nuclear proliferation. Already during that time, on the side, and got the chance shortly after I finished my PhD, some 15 months later, to go to Brussels as the scientific director of a large project on European non-Proliferation policy, where I was serving a group of European luminaries in the nuclear field, most of them by the way from the civilian nuclear field. But with people like Sir Ronald Mason from the UK, who was the Chief Scientific Adviser to the Prime Minister, and Bertrand Goldschmit, the father of the French bomb, as you can say, a couple of others, under the chairmanship of [unclear], who by that time was an eminent person, basically walking the line between academia and politics… became later Norwegian Defence Minister and then Norwegian foreign minister. And from that time on, I was basically defined as an expert, and I was an expert. After three years with those folks I knew a lot, a lot of which most people don't know, because it was inside information, streaming over me, and David Fisher was also a member of the group, who was just freshly retired from his IAEA job. So I never, never had a big temptation to leave the subject.

Michal Onderco: And then you came to work at the Peace Research Institute in Frankfurt.

Harald Müller: I was there from the beginning. I mean, I did my PhD basically, yes.

Michal Onderco: But then you worked in Brussels

Harald Müller: Several years, yes

Michal Onderco: And then you returned and PRIF or HSFK had has this very specific position within the German civil society because it was one of the well, there were three peace research institutes and two of them survived, right? So the one in Berlin didn't really get off. Why did you choose an institution like brave over a university department? So..

Harald Müller: Well I did not choose, I was chosen. The founder of Ernst-Otto Cziempel, came to Frankfurt university. When I came back from, from the factory, where I've worked for a while. And

basically, we fell in love the first moment, because in that seminar, my friend and me, we were the two, who really tried very hard to work somehow scientifically. And he liked that. The rest were just duds. And the next seminar was already on the subject American military industrial complex. And he called us to became his tutors, student assistants. And after that, he invited me to do a PhD at PRIF period. So it was fate. Yeah, coming along.

Michal Onderco: What made what made PRIF for you, the place to be, because many interviewees when I talk to them, they basically say, "Well, the idea of peace research comes with a certain, for lack of better term baggage", certain idea that you, for example, carry, certain normative persuasions. And some people very clearly, for example, say, "Well, I went to peace research because I didn't want to do security policy, because I didn't want to be you know, a hawk". But when I look at your work , I don't see this very stark distinction between sort of doing security policy and doing peace research. So why did you choose proof, the essence? Or what do you choose to return to proof as an institution that carried this very obvious baggage?

Harald Müller: I didn't see the baggage. You know, I mean, I had certainly a very normative vocation to work for peace. I was never in a war. But my childhood and youth were filled with war tales of my parents, my grandparents, and my other relatives, and I had an understanding what a cruel thing a war was and to work for, in some way, preventing it to recur, including, God forbid, nuclear war was an almost self-explanatory motivation, to go into a place whose basically, task given by a society that financed. It was, to work for peace, and to research to do research in a way that maybe recipes could become visible, how to come closer to peace, in an era when the tensions between the great powers and between East and West in Europe, were high and went in ways, some of which were rather frightening. So I found that simply a good thing to do. And this ideological baggage, you know, the leftist anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist drive, which was in some future peace researchers including the great John Galtung, when you read his work. I was a bit immune towards that because I had, my radical left period behind me, and I knew it at the time when I went to PRIF. While I was not any more, the radical leftist, maybe a left of center person, but certainly not a radical leftist.

Michal Onderco: How do you view the role of nuclear weapons in the world today? Do you see them as fundamentally stabilizing or destabilizing force?

Harald Müller: I think they are completely ambivalent and ambiguous. Because nuclear weapons by themselves are nothing. They acquire their meaning, or they are given their meaning and their role in in politics and policies by people, usually by governing people. And today, I can give you that formula, "nuclear weapons are absolutely horrible". They use the certainly against anything which is written in humanitarian law. And in the end, they have to be abolished, because one day they will be used.

But today, the nuclear weapons which are held by the Western Allies are the only thing that prevents Mr Putin from marching westwards. And the guy has shown no scruples whatsoever to fight an almost genocidal war, and to address civilians whose deaths on a daily basis… to win a few square meters on land. And I think it's really self-understanding that if he had a chance to march forward into Estonia, or Lithuania or Poland, and maybe further than that, he will do it. But he's facing the annihilation threat of American nuclear weapons. And for the time being, that means we don't disarm US nuclear weapons as long as Putin still has them. That's it.

Michal Onderco: There is a large civil society that works on different issues of nuclear weapons. And if you look at, at the activities, where do you think the focus of the civil society should be, in an ideal world? Should it be about a push for elimination? Should it be on focus on the practical steps? Should it be on the normative pressure? Where do you think civil society should focus on?

Harald Müller: That's a difficult one.

Michal Onderco: I didn't promise easy questions.

Harald Müller: No, you didn't. And knowing you, I didn't expect them. I think I would think about three different tasks for civil society. And, in a way, one could imagine something that has always existed, divisions of labor, unconscious, non-intentional division of labors, lots of different types of civil society, they do different things with different directions. But in the end, by the cunning of reason, come together. The first thing is, yes, working for an abolition, in order to get the easiest slogans that get the people in the streets, and that exert pressure in a direction. The second is to, and that is more for the academic part, to use all one's scientific academic skills, to invent ideas that could be turned into practice. It's a quite different thing from abolition. To think about sensible steps that stabilize the situation at the moment, while opening possibilities for future progress toward abolition, that is what arms control specialists have done all the time. Not always with abolition in insight or in consciousness, but objectively paving a path, and the third most difficult and completely unsolved one is to gain some traction in the non-democratic states, towards that goal. I have basically no idea how to do that.

One can study the time when Pugwash was founded. And what Pugwash did at the time when Soviet and Western specialists really sat together and saw together something that had an influence on Gorbachev and this enormous turn after 85. But that's maybe too little really to move things. So far forward, that we can dream about. Dream in a realistic way about abolition. But on the other hand, it's quite obvious when China and Russia don't move, there won't be an abolition. And the worst thing that could happen would be an autocratic oligopoly of nuclear weapons, vis-a-vis disarmed democracies, that, for me is the ultimate nightmare. And the situation in which nuclear use is most likely so when one should avoid that, but those three prongs of civil society activities I have in mind.

Michal Onderco: What do you see in the nuclear field, broadly seen, as the biggest failure since the end of the Cold War?

Harald Müller: Say it again,

Michal Onderco: In the in the broad field of, of governing, addressing nuclear weapons? What do you see as the biggest failure since the end of the Cold War?

Harald Müller: Well, the biggest failure, the biggest failures, certainly that the whole arms control and disarmament process came to a halt in the late 90s. And we had a roll back ever since.

Michal Onderco: And why do you think it happened?

Harald Müller: I think the key change was the radicalization of the Republican Party in the United States. There has always been a pocket in that party that resisted any arms control. Early on. You can find quotes from the Eisenhower administration, that negotiation about arms for complete nuclear arms are completely out of the question. And you had people during the Nixon administration, well, close to [unclear]. And, of course, the Committee on the Present Danger, which was really the signal that things were changing quite profoundly in the Republicans was, was also there. And that's one over

after the great victories of the late 80s and early 90s. That wound over after the middle of the 90s, with a Republican takeover in Congress, the rise of the Tea Party, the reign of Senator Helms at the head of the Foreign Relations Committee, and the killing of the CTBT. And it went on from there. And I would think that if we ever get again, at archives in Moscow, we will see how the changes in the United States had an influence on the rise of the hardliners, and ultimately, the fascists in Moscow, who are now at the top.

Michal Onderco: Do you think there is something that civil society at that time could have done differently to prevent this outcome?

Harald Müller: [pause] Well, what is clear is that we had a seminal decline in the disarmament movement in the West and in the United States. After the victory in the Cold War, it was not the first decline. We had three or four waves like that, in this movement. But after 1990 the decline was maybe the largest, a with a short flare up around the time when the French and the Chinese tested their last their last tests and until the CTBT was negotiated, and signed. And then as it went really completely done, maybe if we were the foresight, watching what was going on in the Republican Party, one could have could have had a different constellation in the Senate in the House of Representatives, in the second half of the 90s. A man could have prevented George W. Bush from becoming president, thereby maybe getting enough Republicans to offer the moderate, rather than the radical policy inside the party, maybe that could have been possible. But judging from hindsight is always a tricky thing.

Michal Onderco: If you look at the period since the end of the Cold War, in your view, what are the main important most important milestones when things could have really gone differently? And they didn't. And you talked about the election of George W. Bush, and then the sort of the change in the Republican Party. Do you see also other milestones that are similarly important where things could have actually gone differently?

Harald Müller: Well, I mean, we could have had a Nuclear Posture Review in the first Clinton administration, there were good chances to get a different one. And the chances were boosted by very, very sophisticated strategic behavior of some people in the Department of Defense, with Frank Miller at the top. And Senate Republicans. Could have been a different Nuclear Posture Review, maybe was different repercussions in Moscow. And that could have been something different. Election of George Bush, certainly, it was closing as several times since was slight majority for the Democratic contender because of the US system of election. Nevertheless, the Republican President…

NATO could have handled it differently in Kosovo. Maybe there could have been… Yeltsin could have had a doctor who saved him from alcohol. I mean, it's extremely trivial things where I believe that you know, the forks in the road, were choosing the wrong way. Over this time. No uprising in Chechnya. In the end, then no Putin at the top, probably.

That's counterfactual history, and we do it now over the table here, I think it's one of the most tricky methodologies we actually have in our in our field. And it takes much more than then lose talks, to really do it right. You know, but I mean, it's many that you get somebody in the White House, who says no to Cheney, I don't believe in the nuclear weapons and biological weapons in Iraq, and I don't invade it. And the whole thing gave goes different. And a whole hell of different impressions in Moscow about Washington. No big rise of Iran, in the way that we have it now, no Russian-Iranian alliance in the way we have it now. What shall I say? I mean, it's so many things which you could construct here.

Michal Onderco: I want to move on to a different segment. So imagine this interview is read by a graduate student in the United States in 15 to 20 years. What should they know about PRIF? What kind of organization is PRIF?

Harald Müller: It's typically German.

Michal Onderco: Okay, so explain. Well, it's because it's not a university…

Harald Müller: It's state-installed, you know, it's a state, in a democracy, that says, "Okay I need some stinging insects in my side to be alert when I should be alert. So I afford to have a few peace research institutes, who are basically tasked with the task to look critically at security policy of the government, and to bark when they believe that what we do is dangerous and dead wrong. And to come up with ideas that we don't come up with ourselves to give us alternatives."

And the German democracy faults this and pays for it. And gives the researchers who do the job some sort of stability and security and a good salary. And that is outside of the university. Why? Because to free those people from the university bureaucracy, to help them to focus more with their resources on research, to give them the freedom to do practical things, to work with the media, to work with politicians, to work with bureaucrats. All things that you can't do from university with this enormous amount of work in administration and teaching, which university people have, it's very tough to do these things in addition, you have. So outside of the you know, the university you can't do that. Still, PRIFhas developed and has always had connections to the universities, many have PRIF people have always taught and the construction which we have today, and which was installed during my directorship, namely that our research leaders of all professorships at the university, but a reduced teaching duty, not eight hours a week, but only two hours a week, helps with that and to helps to focus on that sort of work. So PRIF is a place where serious academic work is done. And at the same time research on practical policy with a view to develop options what one can do.

Michal Onderco: And this might sound very obvious to you, but how does the topic of nuclear weapons fit in PRIF's mission?

Harald Müller: Okay, when PRIF started work on nuclear weapons that was in the early 70s, early mid-70s, when it was founded, and it has had this tradition all throughout until today. And the reasons of course, that's the nuclear Damocles sword, hung over Germany all the time, in good times, and in bad times, and was very obvious and hardly felt anymore during periods, but it was always there. And it was always one of the obvious tasks of peace research, to work on that issue and to find ways to escape nuclear war.

Michal Onderco: So in the early 2000s, there was this feeling in Europe that nuclear weapons don't really matter anymore, that they are sort of this relic of the past, but that they are not actually as important. How did you manage to keep nuclear weapons in the portfolio of PRIF at that time? They didn't sort of fall wayside?

Harald Müller: I can answer that very easily. I was the boss.

Michal Onderco: But to keep things on agenda, you also need funding for example, you need commitment from partners, you need interest in the amount of the policy world. Was there still in place?

Harald Müller: I mean, we had stable funding. And you know PRIF raises, traditionally, between 25 and 35, maybe at the moment 40% of its overall budget from third sources. And the rest, two thirds is by stable governmental sources. The stability has even risen when we enter the Leibnitz association of extra universities, institutes of excellence, joint funding by the federal government and the state government of Hesse.

And that's it. PRIF would have to do very, very bad things to fall out of that, as long as we keep our quality we will always pass the evaluations, which happen every seven years, and with the quality we get through. And then we have this funding forever.

So when this declining interest in nuclear weapons was apparently there, the problem was always at least in the form of proliferation. And I wrote as early as 98, that we were entering a new nuclear arms race with all its dangers, after the Senate had refused to ratify the CTBT. And it was clear that the United States would build a national missile defense. I thought, "Okay, boys, we are back in the old game." And we should keep our attention on that. And we did. But it was no problem. I mean, we were free enough because of our budgetary situation, to choose subjects. What we did not manage was to get the media's interest back to the issue. The political interest in the Foreign Office, and in the parliament, was still there. And we could talk to people and give ideas and give all warnings, which we draw from our research. The problem was really, the media and the public.

Michal Onderco: Did the fact that the funding for the institute come from the government create any constraints on what for example, PRIF would advocate for? Or would it create a constraint on what type of research was done?

Harald Müller: Well, I think if we had if we had spent our money in propaganda, for the [unclear] at the ballot, we would have faced problems. But otherwise, this is a country where academia is free.

And I can say that, apart from the very early days of PRIF, when peace research had a bad name with the conservatives. And that created difficulties from time to time, for a decade also, but no more. After 1990. And notably, during my own directorship, we had never problems with our political masters.

Michal Onderco: But I can imagine a critic who would say, "Well, that might be also because for example, PRIF did not advocate for radical solutions, like let's say withdrawing nuclear weapons from Germany or withdrawing from NATO nuclear umbrella" or something that sort of stayed within the political mainstream, so to say.

Harald Müller: Well, I think I did some work on trying to withdraw technical nuclear weapons from Germany given certain conditions. And I did so even in more recent times because I believe that the military job could be done by means that are less vulnerable than aircraft, which are for the delivery of the bombs, which gives potentially the attacker a lot of time to take out what is left on German soil. And I'm absolutely of the opinion that airborne or seaborne non-strategic nuclear weapons could do the job better than aircraft flying from Germany, Belgium, and Netherlands. And I think it's pure tradition and ideology, that the situation is still as it is. But I'm also completely clear that in the present political situation, it is absolutely impossible to touch upon that issue, because of the immediate panic that would emerge in Europe over the issue. But no, I mean, we were not shy. And I mean, during the dual-track decision we were quite critical of several moves, including the basic idea that Pershing with their low-fly time and high precision would be dislocated, deployed far forward, shortening the waiting time, and so on and so on. It's not that we were basically writing the government manuscript, or the

government was writing our manuscript. Now, we were critical. And they were always some people, notably in the Conservative parties, who were critical of our criticism. But that became just tolerated as a natural thing, from the 90s on and made us and the conversation partner, even for conservative defense specialists, and not because we were absolutely tame, but because I think we were just good.

Michal Onderco: Okay. How would you position PRIF within the broad nuclear landscape in Germany. You mentioned already that you had opened the door to policymakers. How would you, for example, position yourself, vis-a-vis other civil society organizations? So the universities or, you know, the activists, the actual sort of hardcore NGOs? Do you collaborate with them? Did you work with them in any way? Did they ever reach out to you, for example, to get expertise? Could you tell me something about the position and or could you position PRIF in the sort of the landscape in Germany?

Harald Müller: Well I, between PRIF and universities, and between PRIFand the other extra-university places, like the Hamburg institute or the SWP in Berlin. Hanns Seidel Foundation, which had always a small research part, or Friedrich Ebert Foundation, the party foundations, in other words, and those people who work at the universities like Carlo Masala, Stephan Bieling , I talked now about the right of center people who could be supposed to be to be the opposite. There was always and for a long time, a good professional relationship. And we would invite them to conferences and they would invite us to conferences. The DGAP in Berlin, equivalent of the Council on Foreign Relations, had for decades working through a nonproliferation in which to then two PRIF people were working regularly. So it's really a knowledge community with different accents and different foci, but with a common theme and mutual respect, and professional relationships. I mean, it's almost an ideal type of academic discourse with controversies but with a constructive intention behind that.

With the activists, it's slightly more problematic, but not really. They of course would wish us to be with them on all issues. But we keep a critical distance. We are not completely convinced that the analysis and also some of the recipes, which organizations like ICAN propagate are completely useful, completely correct. For example, the permanent repetition by Beatrice Fihn, of the fact that nuclear weapons are now illegal under international law, which by cutting out “for its parties, are the parties of the TPNW” is silent about a very important part of the message and that is a lie. And one has to be critical of that.

Michal Onderco: But if I may interject here. So for example, ICAN in Germany pushes for withdrawal of nuclear weapons from Büchel. And there has been for example, work done by people from Hamburg, that argues, they put together this website, that I use, that these nuclear weapons fulfill zero military purpose. And I don't want to say that there is a sort of a direct connection, but it's something that supports this argument that is made by ICAN. So there is more of a symbiotic relationship. I'm not saying that it's the whole team in Hamburg, but there are certainly some people who sort of create things that are very useful for ICAN. Was that a path that would appeal to PRIF or to you to sort of be helpful in sort of providing the sort of ideas for example, nuclear disarmament

Harald Müller: I have no reservation against providing ideas for the nuclear disarmament movement, I would not propagate ideas produced by the nuclear disarmament movement, with whom I disagree, that's a different thing. I worked for two or three years with IPPNW Switzerland, to help them prepare for the world IPPNW Convention. And that as a consultant, not completely buying their ideas. I did not buy the TPNW as an agenda. But I helped them anyway. Because I had knowledge which was useful for them, and notably these skills on the political side, which may be very useful to them. The former

director of ICAN Germany, he is now a PhD candidate at PRIF. That's, not my work, but I think I could have done it as well, but a very bright guy with his own ideas and that is certainly not divorced from ICAN. I mean, when we have ideas that are useful for them, to work publicly and to get discussion forward. Of course, one would support them.

Michal Onderco: If you look at the German and also European landscape, who would you consider to be the closest partners for cooperation for PRIF?

Harald Müller: Well, we of course, have been part and parcel of the European Consortium (the EU Nonproliferation and Disarmament Consortium) from the beginning, where we have the partners you know, and then I found extraordinary, useful and rewarding. Even so between the FRS in Paris and after is there are certainly philosophical differences, which is almost inevitable when you have a French institute close to the French government, which is a nuclear weapon state and a German place. But we were all professionals, respectful towards each other and that worked extraordinarily well. Beyond this would be very close to us well, our friends well in Europe. The Norwegians, PRIO and NUPI, we had good relationships to Clingendael over a long time. I think it has been sleeping for a while. We got the good, good connections (inaudible) in Spain, who is of course a university person is, of course, but that's in has been in the consortium as well. Chatham House

Michal Onderco: And were these partnerships built over personal ties that translate into professional ties? Or was it professional interest that translated into sort of these more long-term cooperation?

Harald Müller: I think it's hard for divorce… personalities always play a role. And if you look at the way the Consortium was formed, the European consortium was formed. I don't think that it would have sprung into life so easily. Without my personal connections, to Camille Grand. And Camille's personal connections to Mike Fitzpatrick. SIPRI was in, of course, by the yearbook, the big name in European peace research. And it was clear that so but it is really a combination of both.

Michal Onderco: So at the time when, when the consortium was established, was it difficult to persuade, for example, during the Commission to fund this? Because at that time, you're still on the Commission right? DG RELEX

Harald Müller: Well, it was from the beginning. An endeavor in which the European External Action Service, Annalisa Gianella, who was at the time the head of the nonproliferation desk there. She and Camille had first, the idea to do this. And Annalisa did the hard work with the Commission. But the funding comes through the External Action Service and its budget. The commission is, of course, involved in various ways, as in everything, but this was not so difficult. It was not so difficult when you have a person in the system that is really convinced and energetic, things work very well.

Michal Onderco: When you were founding the consortium, was there a very concrete idea what you wanted to achieve on the sort of policy? And because I understand that it's important to bring together institutions who work on a very similar topic, but was there already an idea that there was some sort of a policy goal in mind?

Harald Müller: Well, I have, as a person, and as a PRIF person, have always believed that one should push forward with European Non-Proliferation policy.

I had long before the consortium was build, I had a project that went over a dozen, a few years from 87 to about 2000, 2001, 2002, where I try to bring together academics from as many EU countries as possible and have them work together and think about what the Europeans could do in nonproliferation policy.

And when Camille came up with the idea of a consortium, well, I mean, that's now so much easier because we have a European Nonproliferation Strategy, European security strategy. And it's time that that sort of activity becomes when we really official, and it was quite clear that the task of this consortium should be: one, to advise the European External Action Service on the whole spectrum of non-proliferation issues, not only the nuclear, but also the rest, and at the same time, extend the amount of extra government expertise in the field in Europe. Because even today, the differences in the European countries, in terms of quality and quantity of expertise are just enormous. I think the consortium has done a good job in expanding and enhancing. But this job never stops. So it's an internal and an external task here, and there was complete unity and agreement from the beginning that these two things should be done by the consortium.

Michal Onderco: Do you feel that…because the consortium brings together the think tanks and academic institutions, do you think that it will work better if for example.. if it was, for example, restricted only to think tanks or was it a good idea to open it also to universities? Because often, when I do these interviews, especially from with people from civil society, they would often say, “Well, a lot of work that is done in universities is actually useless in practice. It's nice theoretical work, but it doesn't deliver actionable advice for practice.” Do you think that there is a special role for universities to play in the consortium?

Harald Müller: I don't think so. I mean, we spoke at the beginning about the meaning of an extra-university existence. And I think for the sort of tasks, which the consortium has adopted, the extra-university, the think tank, is the ideal partner. But now, of course, first of all, the countries where no such thing exists, and the only people who know anything, if at all, about the issues, are in universities, and, of course, in government, but also of course different. So, universities, so in those cases, of course, you work with university people. And then you can do can have special focus by universities on the issue by the choice of the university leadership, or by the choice of certain professors. And when they're very good, of course, they can enter the network of the consortium, and be invited to the conferences and write papers for the consortium and so on. But principally, I believe that the organization models of the extra-university has advantages that shouldn't be heeded.

Michal Onderco: And where do you think, in the whole nuclear landscape, the role of universities is? Do you think that you know, what kind of role should universities play? Is it really about of education? Or is there also some other role?

Harald Müller: Well, universities can always do great research, and notably in the United States, very, very good research on these issues happens at universities. Stanford, Harvard. Princeton, to name just three. And you had in Germany you had to Kiel, with Joachim Krause. Right of center, excellent expert, and maybe unnecessarily counterweight to me. And there is no principal reason why university cannot contribute, of course, by their own professional, they are basically called upon to contribute to theoretical development and so on. And they do. And for those who work more on the practical track, looking at what they find out, is always useful. I mean, Bill Potter is a university person. And he's at the same time theoretical, excellent, theoretically excellent. And a brilliant practitioner and also an

overwhelming educator. So you can even do all those things at the same time. But you need a genius whose day has 48 hours, like Bill, to do all this,

Michal Onderco: Apart from the, apart from the academics who are active also in the different research institutes like in PRIF, or in Hamburg, do you think that in Germany in the German landscape universities play a role in this when it comes to discussions about nuclear weapons?

Harald Müller: It's a small world. And it depends on individuals.

Michal Onderco: If you look at the people who have real impact on the policy that is done in Berlin, and if you look at these different actors being think tanks, research institutes like PRIF or Hamburg, academics, but also civil society activists. Is there any of them who have like a real sizable impact? And one of them do you think is, is the one that was most impactful from these types of organizations?

Harald Müller: Well, Hamburg and PRIF certainly had impact. Apart from that, the DGAP, I don't know whether this is still the case. But over decades the DGAP was really influential. SWP, of course, I think they have lost a bit because of a sort of...I don't know... I mean, my impression is that the way they're built, maintaining this staff was not ideal. Same applies to PRIF which has to rebuild its staff. But when there was a certain logic in that after I left as anchorman of the issue, that's your heads some sort of valley and they have now a huge grant from the Foreign Office, which I think will help them to get back on track.

Apart from the two, Joachim Krause over years, he is now also retired, but was of influence even from a small place in Kiel, him and a few assistants, but anyway. But the end of course, the foundations, the political foundations for the research branches, hav an influence. When I mean influences people voters and picking up some ideas and taking in people into delegations where they could. Then again, exert a bit of influence. It’s really more the extra university places than the university.

Michal Onderco: So if… how would you define impact in, if you look at for example at your career, can you point situation where you would say I had impact here? And why do you think that happened at that time?

Harald Müller: Well, I mean 1989 was such a moment, maybe the most exhilarating moment when the Foreign Office asked PRIF, where we had, at the time, five people with some knowledge in the field, to come up with a think piece on the follow-on the LANCE, the short range missile deployed in Germany. And after the INF Treaty was was sealed. The British and the Americans wanted to replace LANCE by more capable and somewhat lower range missile. Missile was still in the short range, but more towards the upper end. And there was a dispute in the German government. The chancellor's office was more inclined to accept the British and American request. The Foreign Office was absolutely opposed. And they asked us to come up with a think piece to bolster their position, which was also ours. So we did it. We had a very short time. I think it was 10 days. And we came up with a substantial and really good PRIF report on the issue, which indeed was taken to the foreign minister, went into his brief when he had the decisive talk with Kohl, and Kohl became convinced that if not for strategic reasons, and for domestic political reasons, it was not a good idea to go forward with that armament plan, and it was basically scrapped. Because when the Germans didn't play, the British and the Americans had no way to get it. So we did. That a moment when, I believe, we have a little bit from the coat of history between our fingers. The inclusion of substrategic nuclear weapons and in the European common position for the 2000 review conference, I think was to certain degree, my work. The

readiness by the EU to take note of the TPNW, in the past conference 22, I think I did good work on that.

Michal Onderco: And when you say you did good work, that means that you talk to people in the Foreign Office and try to persuade them that this is a reasonable position.

Harald Müller: Well, yes. The preparation for 2000 I was I was involved in permanent discussions with the people in the place. And on the TPNW. I did a briefing with CONOP. That was some 18 months ago. And tried to convince them that in order to narrow the huge cleavage, it was wise to accept the inevitable which would, of course, be inevitable once TPNW would be in force, which I think would happen and it happened. A formula which does not give big credit, but which accepts the fact that there is this thing and which does not pretend that this was winning the NPT. Because that would then be a self-fulfilling prophecy, but that's too quickly so on and so on. So it was the French delegate was not enthused. But the others were interested. And I mean the way the EU presented it in New York, it was in New York was quite according to my ideas.

Michal Onderco: So do you think that your views were accepted because they were… Because sort of who you are this sort of elderly academic who has been around for a long time, has the standing in the field. Or is it more because they were sort of this middle ground, it doesn't enthuse the French, but it's something that the rest can live with, or is it something else?

Harald Müller: Well, I think that those two things must come together having become a sort of elder nonproliferation statesman, or person, or you call it, and having reasonable, practical and simple proposals, which they have called always can modify, but which in in principle shows a way out of the quagmire. I think the two things must come together.

And the easiest of the three examples, there more but these three are particularly striking, the easiest thing was, of course, the one in 1989. Because in its despair, the Foreign Office called upon us and then of course, you cannot fail to deliver.

I should say, at that time, was (name unclear). Splendid expert in nuclear matters. And I was one of the contributors. In the other two cases, it was, effectively me. The sub-strategic nuclear weapons was, of course, an easy time, because the red-green coalition just took over. And they're really searching for making a difference. And the thing fitted quite nicely. The New agenda coalitin agenda and was also not opposed to the NATO position, because NATO had developed the interest in getting a curb on the Russian tactical nuclear weapons, which the number of which was is quite huge compared to NATO. It was a favorable environment for this proposal. And of course, the EU at the time was quite eager to say something as EU, which was new and different and still useful. They didn't made it in the final declaration, of course. Beautiful.

Michal Onderco: Do you think that something like that would be possible today?

Harald Müller: Today, nothing's possible.

Michal Onderco: That's a very pessimistic view.

Harald Müller: Today, nothing is possible, because you know, everything, everything, which we do and think, must focus on stopping the tyrant. And that is. You have to go out of your coat as a peace researcher to say that: ''we have to stop this guy.'' And this is not a very peaceful endeavor, because you stop through supporting the war. And there's nothing else at the moment we could do. Because

how can you have arms control talks with Mr. Putin? How can you think of having an agreement with them, on which he will cheat the moment he believes it's useful to cheat?

Michal Onderco: But isn't that case the any arms control agreement

Harald Müller: For the moment? Yes.

Michal Onderco: But hasn't that been always the case?

Harald Müller: No.

Michal Onderco: Well, but hasn't that been the case that countries believed that it's in their interest not to cheat.

Harald Müller: Yes.

Michal Onderco: So if it wasn't their interest, they would cheat. But that has always been the case.

Harald Müller: On the face of it? Yes. But the way they were looking at the interest was quite different. I mean, the, you had this one thing with a radar in Russia, which objectively was cheating, objectivity was also a very minor issue. And in the end, in the end, they, they gave up. So there was a possibility that they would give in after a long, intense negotiation, and a lot of American pressure. And so that will happen again in the future. And the interests, you will have Russian leaders, someday, who understand that their interest does not lie in getting all sorts of territories for their beautiful empire. But in keeping peace and developing. It will come back, I believe, if we don't have a nuclear war before that. And then, of course, you can go back to business and negotiate and, and have nice agreements.

Michal Onderco: This is a very nice segway to the last segment of the interview where I want to go, which is where do you expect the nuclear field to go in the next 15 to 50 years?

Harald Müller: 50 years? No, I don't say a word about 50 years.

Michal Onderco: Do you think there will be nuclear weapons in 50 years?

Harald Müller: Possible, not sure. Will there be human beings in 50 years? Maybe not…

Michal Onderco: You can have weapons without people....

Harald Müller: If the if there are no people there, these items are no weapons.

Michal Onderco: That's true.

Harald Müller: But they're things that rust somewhere in the desert or in at the North Pole. Well, it's that sort of question, which I, I always refuse to… I'm not a prophet. I'm not a prophet. Will we have nuclear weapons still in five years? Most probably .

Michal Onderco: 15?

Harald Müller: 15? Probably

Michal Onderco: 20?

Harald Müller: Uncertain. That's far beyond my horizon. It's likely that we will have a world without error and murder by that time.

Michal Onderco: Do you think that there will be a push to move beyond nuclear deterrence? Or will there be a will, for example, what's happening currently in Ukraine pursued more countries that nuclear weapons are a good guarantee for their security?

Harald Müller: Well, there's certainly an objective probability that the experiences of Ukraine with a Budapest protocol and its breach will have an impact on other countries that are in difficult security situations. It depends on a couple of variables. One is the development in the United States as an umbrella protector, this tendency in the last 10 years is not good. If we had a return of Mr. Trump, tendency catastrophically… well, it all depends on the stabilization of the Republican Party as a centrist rather than radical jingoist entity. And this means that if things bad comes goes to worse than you will have this discussion. Not only in neutral countries, but in allies of the United States as well.

Michal Onderco: I want to ask the final question, which is imagine there is a world free of nuclear weapons, how would a security in such a world be provided? I know you've written about this.

Harald Müller: Yes.

Michal Onderco: So maybe it's also an opportunity to pitch your own work to people who haven't been fortunate enough to read about it.

Harald Müller: Well, you can only get a world free of nuclear weapons when the great powers are on good speaking terms, and willing to cooperate, and willing to accept the status quo. And that is also the basic condition to establish a credible guardianship over the world, non-nuclear plus, with the little question mark, which is, I think, to be underlined three times, given the experiences of the last 10 to 20 years, what if one of the great power is changing, changing domestically in a fundamental way? And we lose the trust in such big power? The answer then is collective security. That is the rest gangs up against this… I think the jury about collective security is always out. It's impossible to say whether it will work. It's impossible to say if it won't work. But where did that? That's a big question mark. I have written about that, and try to devise all sorts of assurances that is worth it. But will it?

Michal Onderco: Do you think that a world free of nuclear weapons is a world where the concept of deterrence is still important? Or will it be a world that will be so fundamentally transformed, that even thinking about deterrence will be an anachronistic.

Harald Müller: Then that would be the ideal hope. But until we arrive there, we have to go through a transition period where you need an answer. What happens if? And that answer will be a military option? And the cheap answer is yes. You need some sort of deterrence, but it should be conventional. And it should be a combination of the possibility to attack somebody who breaks out, somebody who breaks a peace and to defend against the possible… you know, when you look at Ukraine, and you just imagine Ukraine was an excellent air defense and missile defense system, you will look at a different thing and different possibilities. And that's how I see the world in a non-nuclear status.

Michal Onderco: But do you think that in a world free of nuclear weapons, and that's a big assumption just an hour ago, you said you don't like counterfactuals, but in a world free of nuclear weapons are things like war and the Russian invasion of Ukraine, are things more or less likely?

Harald Müller: I think they are less likely, because of the political conditions you need to be nuclear weapons free, but I think they are not completely to be excluded.

Michal Onderco: So if I have, other counterfactuals, and I don't want you to push it with them. I always end interviews with a question. Is there anything else that you want to add to the subject of the interview.

Harald Müller: I have been completely exhausted.

Michal Onderco: Thank you very much.