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Interview with Peter Buijs

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Summary:

In this interview, Peter Buijs recounts his journey into nuclear disarmament activism, influenced by his father's views and his own medical background. He explains that his work with NVMP and IPPNW centers on raising awareness of nuclear weapons' catastrophic risks, emphasizing prevention as the only viable option. Buijs highlights that civil society, particularly medical professionals, can exert considerable influence on policy by presenting the humanitarian and health risks of nuclear warfare. He shares successes within Dutch civil society, where NVMP's activism has led to increased political discourse on disarmament and even influenced government policy positions. This document summary was generated by an artificial intelligence language model and was reviewed by a Wilson Center staff member.

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Michal Onderco: So thank you very much for talking to me and for participating in this interview. I want to start with a very general question. How did you become interested in nuclear weapons? As a person?

Peter Buijs: Well, that goes quite long, long time ago. As a teenager, in the early 60s, my father, a medical doctor and a kind of right-wing Christian Democrats, he had something very peculiar. He taught me when I was 14-15 years old that nuclear weapons are godless weapons. So from the devil, so to say. And he was very convinced about the completely lethal consequences when this goes wrong, read a lot of books about the bombing of Hiroshima and the American bomber crew. And he made it perfectly clear, this is absolutely something we have to ban. Well, that I have taken to my consciousness, as a high schooler, I didn't do much with it, but it still was there.

So in the late 70s, when the new neutron bomb was promoted, that was a moment that struck me as a medical student. Completely insane idea that all the buildings are still there, but unfortunately, all the people are gone because of the working of this neutron bomb. And then I started in, in the medical society, actions, petitions against this from a medical perspective.

And then, in the early 80s, of course, we had the enormous demonstrations here in Holland: in '81 400.000 in Amsterdam. I was there with my, with my eldest son, five months old, - and now I take care of his children! -, with a small sign "I also want to be grandfather"; 3 years later in the Hague at the Malieveld, we had 550,000 people; my parents, the Christian Democrats, never went to any demonstration, but this is one they did. So our whole family was there. And it's still the biggest demonstration ever in Holland, like in the United States at the time. And I was a member of the NVMP, but a sleeping member, so to say, and later on, I was too busy with my work as a social medicine [professional]. And then, let's say some 15 years ago, I was approached by the chair of the NVMP Herman Spanjaard, to be member of the Board of NVMP. And he hoped that I could succeed him as the chair of the NVMP. So I went into the board and then 10 years ago, I started to be a co-chair together with him, to *ingewerkt worden*.

Michal Onderco: To learn the ropes.

Peter Buijs: And then, after I retired, I had a lot more time. So I started reading about this topic much more than I was able to before. and I was flabbergasted that we as global civilization, tolerate to be defended by weapons that any moment, even tonight, could destroy us - hopefully not by purpose, but probably by accident, and we have had a lot of accidents. As medical persons, we are educated to signal small risks, with very big consequences. We have to be very, very aware of preventing that kind of accidents, that can cause a medical disaster of mind-boggling size. So it went perfectly clear for me that this was a cause arising above the party political nitty gritty, as a precondition [for mankind's surviving]. But unfortunately, few people are aware of this precondition that has to be taken care of. You know, the expression in medical care is: prevention is better than cure. But cure is no option here at all. The only option is prevention, because [if it goes] wrong then it... That was already a lesson in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, that substantial medical help us out of the question; the destruction was too big, while that was only such a small bomb compared with what we have now of course.

So as a human being, but especially as a medical educated person, as a medical doctor, I thought this is a very important cause that people come up for to bring this on the table, to confront the policy

makers and to raise awareness among politicians, the general public and also in the medical society as a whole. To warn about this risk and to try to eliminate it. Is that a sufficient answer?

Michal Onderco: That's a very good answer. So before we go further and talk about NVMP, and I want to ask, from your point of view, what is the role of the nuclear weapons in the world today?

Peter Buijs: When we go to the origin, we know that during the war, the Germans tried to get an atomic weapon, the Americans and people from other countries also were involved. And as the war was proceeding, the United States wanted to be the first to use it, and tried to get the knowledge and expertise. So famous atomic scientists from abroad were brought in, like Fermi. Oppenheimer, of course, was the leader, . And the war in Japan was still raging, and the US wanted to have a weapon more powerful than any other weapon, to be sure to be the strongest.

So three weeks after the first try out of the bomb - and we know that scientists were afraid that it would have catastrophic consequences already - then it was used in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, being argued that they will to bring down Japan on his knees to prevent a bloody [war]. But later on the archives of the Japanese royal family [were opened] and of the Japanese army. And that showed that after the bomb was dropped, there was no meeting of the General Staff, and no meeting of the staff of the Emperor. But at the moment, a few days later, when the Soviets invaded Manchuria, then there was a meeting of the General and the royal Staff, and then they decided to surrender.,. That it is absolutely not clear that [the surrender] was because of the nuclear bomb. And more probably, and I'm convinced of that, that it was because of the Russians...

Michal Onderco: If you look at the year 2022, today, what is the role of the weapons in the world today? Yeah...

Peter Buijs: Yeah, sorry. It was a long startup of the answer. So as soon as the Americans got it, the Russians, of course want to get it and others want to get it, in order to have a weapon that made them maybe not exactly invincible, but that means a high threshold to be attacked. Up till North Korea, with the same intention, it demonstrates that as soon as you have such a weapon, that you'll be treated different than other countries. So they consider it to be a weapon to defend yourself.

But at the same time, the five principal nuclear weapon states signed the NPT, the Non Proliferation Treaty, including Article Six about total nuclear disarmament. And the first resolution of the UN in 1946, signed by the Soviet Union and America and all the other countries unanimously, was about getting rid of this awful weapon that only the United States then possessed. So you see an ambiguity in wanting to have such a weapon. In the NPT, the *great bargain* was that the five nuclear powers want to get to hold their own to their weapons for the moment. But as long as the others didn't require and proliferate, the deal was that they would fulfill Article Six to get rid of their weapons. But, up till the moment now, they refuse to do so. The reasoning was the Mutual Assured Destruction first, and later on under another name, credible deterrence, promising the non-nuclear states not to attack them, or non-nuclear weapon free zones.

But when it goes wrong, you're absolutely not immune, despite your nuclear weapons, because the radioactive cloud could be everywhere and the consequences of the nuclear famine and nuclear winter will be globally. So you're never safe, nowhere, from the consequences. And especially now with the Ukraine war. In that specific situation the deterrence of those weapons is not argued like "this is a guarantee to be not to be attacked, to preserve peace". No, deterrence is used by Putin to go on with

his war. Instead of promoting peace, he now is being 'allowed' to fight against Ukraine, threatening with nuclear weapons, if somebody would be interfering too much.

Michal Onderco: So do I understand correctly, that you see nuclear weapons as a destabilizing factor in international politics?

Peter Buijs: Yeah, and a very dangerous factor. And not not so much because of purposely use, we hope that the leaders would be sane enough not to do that. But we also known as Kubrick's Dr. Strangelove, in the early 60s, a movie still very worthwhile to see because you see how it can go completely out of hand. And so the risk of an accident, of an unintended chain of events, with severe consequences is always there. And as a medical doctor, so we said, "Okay, we are trained for [events with] little probability, but very huge consequences. So It's our task, our medical duty to warn for this.

Michal Onderco: Okay. So, in this world, what do you think the focus of civil society should be? Should it be on the elimination? Should it be on the practical steps? Should it be on normative pressure? Where do you think the role of civil society is when it comes to nuclear weapons?

Peter Buijs: I'll come back to the medical perspective, but in general, I think civil society in the first place has to raise awareness, every part of active civil society, because most people are not aware about the huge unacceptable of these weapons.

And as a medical contribution to the solution we say "Okay, when we as medical doctors, see a big health risk, then first we have to stabilize the patient, to prevent death at the spot; that means, we need acute measurements like the dealerting, detargeting, no first use, decoupling, that kind of short time ... risk reduction measures" to bring down the risk that it goes wrong. Then we have the time we need for the fundamental but longer time-consuming fundamental therapy: to eliminate those weapons as circumscribed in Article Six of the NPT.

Michal Onderco: When you look at the nuclear field for the last 30 years, yeah, what do you see as the biggest failure in the field in the last 30 years, since the end of the Cold War?

Peter Buijs: Yeah. I think that then as long as there was the Cold War, the awareness of this kind of risks were, was there. Especially in the 50s, with all those rehearsals from the *BBB*

Michal Onderco: the civil protection

Peter Buijs: Yeah. [gestures]

Michal Onderco: Duck and cover.

Peter Buijs: Duck and cover, yes. You can laugh about that, but at least it was considered as a governmental task to warn the civil society [about] the risks of nuclear war. That has gone completely after the Wall came down, and replaced by a feeling of "Well, there is peace, all those nuclear risks are eliminated." And indeed, We have seen already since the Reagan and Gorbachev-agreements - with a special medical treat¹ - , the arsenals were brought down from 70 till now about 13 thousands nuclear warheads. So that's okay, and it still never went really wrong. So unfortunately, awareness is going down a lot. And in the meantime, and all those NPT five year--

Michal Onderco: Conferences.

¹ [Both leaders have stated that the medical arguments, esp. from IPPNW, were decisive for them to start negotiations.]

Peter Buijs: Conferences, a lot of talks has been done about Article Six. And even at the beginning of this year, the 3 January, we had a promising P5-statement about their commitment to Article Six, to risk reduction, and other positive things, but to bring this into practice has failed. And it's, I think a big task for civil society, with a lot of work ahead, that they maybe are not the only force, but when they raise their voice, from the churches and all the other religions, from Red Cross, from Mayors for Peace, or whatever you can mobilize in civil society, that makes it more complicated, difficult for the nuclear weapons states to say "Okay, we want to disarm", but refuse to do it in practice.

On the contrary, as we know, of course, we have the whole modernization process, by all the nine nuclear weapon states. So civil society, I am convinced, have a very important role to play to raise awareness among the people, and to develop pressure on the decision makers, also in countries like Holland: we are not a nuclear weapons state, but we host 20 US nuclear weapons on our soil. And we are part of NATO. So there, we have to raise our voice. That perspective will come to a little later. Maybe we have made some progress here in Holland.

Michal Onderco: Yes. We'll talk about that in a little while. But you said at the beginning that one of the big failures that you see is that after the fall of the wall and when the Cold War's over, that people stopped worrying about nuclear weapons.

Peter Buijs: Yeah. Average. Yes.

Michal Onderco: Why do you think that happened?

Peter Buijs: Because the Entente. The tension between the two big ones, US and the Soviet Union was over. Especially in the 90s, we've seen the pictures of the decapitation of nuclear missiles. And there was one disarmament treaty after another, so it was an optimistic feeling, the idea of "Fortunately, this too big problem, fortunately is gone". And people like to get rid of very, very big problems, because there are problems enough. And so I think it's partly psychological. But there was also a real base in the relation between Russia and America.

Michal Onderco: And do you think that there is someone who should be blamed for this?

Peter Buijs: Yeah, I think the leadership of especially the P5 should have done, and could have done much more, for real progress, based on the NPT. When you read the 64 points on the 2010 consensus document, at the end of the NPT, that is a kind of a roadmap for what should be done. It's not complete, but there was consensus about it. And so the nuclear weapons states in the first place, but also their allies, are to blame that they didn't do what they said they would do.

Michal Onderco: And what do you think? Do you think there is any specific role for, for example, academia, or civil society? Or for the governments? Well, I mean, you mentioned the governments of the allied countries, but especially for academia and civil society. Is there something that they should have done differently than they have done?

Peter Buijs: You know, that's a very general question, of course, you mean, globally? Or do you mean in Holland?

Michal Onderco: You can adjust it in any way you want.

Peter Buijs: Okay, please repeat the question.

Michal Onderco: So do you think that there is something that the civil society or academia should have done differently to, for example, prevent this failure that you just described from happening?

Peter Buijs: Yeah. From civil society, there could have been a much more pressure on, for example, political parties to get into programs, like we did here in Holland, a paragraph on nuclear [disarmament], because that completely was not there at all, for years. And then, when it comes to forming a government that, it would be at least in the declaration of the government at the start of the term. Which we managed to do in Holland, and could be done elsewhere also. And from academia, they have a much more free role, but they could have put nuclear weapons on their agenda, their congresses and their research. What is a bigger potential problem than this? I would say: put attention to this, but instead you see dissertations about minor issues, in my view...so, this global, life-threatening issue could have had a lot more attention.

Michal Onderco: Now I want to move really to the NVMP and the Dutch context. Imagine this interview is being read by an American student who has never heard about NVMP. What should they, what do they need to know about NVMP? What is NVMP?

Peter Buijs: Well, NVMP [Physicians for Peace²] is already a more than 50 years existing organization that was established at the end of the roaring 60s in Holland, and as in those days there was an awareness of global problems all over. And so, there were hundreds and hundreds of medical doctors, who were a member of this NVMP that wanted to prevent nuclear war and get rid of nuclear weapons. This organization had flourished in those years, but had problems after the Wall came down. And then also in our organization, the idea was "Well, our mission has been fulfilled, should we continue to exist"? Well, we did, but tried to pay attention to a lot of other peace-related issues. But the nuclear weapon issue continue to get attention, on a lower level than in the 80s. And for some special reasons, the last 10 years, so to say, there are also external factors that brought it more and more [to the front].

Michal Onderco: So what are the special reasons that make nuclear issue more important for?

Peter Buijs: First, I have to mention that in the early 80s, IPPNW, International Physicians for Prevention of Nuclear War, was established by an American and Russian cardiologist. Both died last year, unfortunately. They founded this organization with the emphasis on nuclear weapons, and NVMP represented the Dutch affiliate of this IPPNW. So that gave focus on the nuclear weapons. And IPPNW was, as you know, in 2007, one of the initiators of ICAN, the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons. And that broad bottom-up organization worked very hard for years, starting on grassroot level among civil society in many, many countries, 164 is the latest figure, I believe. And that gave new impetus to the anti-nuclear weapon movement. For example, I've visited the first and third ICAN-conference, starting in Oslo and later on in Vienna, where the ideas of a ban treaty were 'born'...

Michal Onderco: The humanitarian initiative conference.

Peter Buijs: Yes, in Vienna the Vienna pledge was presented about the legal gap between the NPT and real abolition of nuclear weapons.... And that was very inspiring also for our board. I was there with Herman Spanjaard, my co-chair in those days, a lot of others were there from all over the world, and that gave new inspiration for bringing up this in each country. Also, personally, for me, it was an eye

² [NVMP stands for Nederlandse Vereniging voor Medische Polemologie: Dutch Society for Medical Polemology (studies of war etc). Since 5 years we add: Physicians for Peace]

opener, really. And to bring there people together, for example, there was a British navy officer high up in the ranks during the Falkland war. He told a story about Margaret Thatcher wanting to nuke Buenos Aires. He was in a meeting where he couldn't believe his ears, what he heard there, and start thinking, left the the army, joined the peace movement and wrote his story. There were a lot more of them, and that resonated also with what I told you at the very beginning of this, with my father's words about nuclear weapons as godless weapons. So for me personally, it was also very stimulating, and I proposed to my board to get our vision much more into public debate. Until then, it was mostly limited to believers e.g. during our yearly 'ritual' meeting. I estimated that our message and our arguments, were strong enough to go beyond this safe area of being among the believers, into public debate, in De Balie [in Amsterdam], for example, [our national debate centre].

Michal Onderco: Yes, I read about those in the article you sent.

Peter Buijs: As a start I proposed to write an appeal, a medical appeal and to look if it is possible to get some VIPs from the medical world to support this quite strong political statement, knowing that medical professionals don't like to sign political statements. They like to be neutral and impartial.

And, to my surprise and that of, so to say, my 'partners in crime', in no time, up to 100 medical 'top dogs' were signing on, saying, "very good that you are doing this". Marcel Levi, for example, [former chair of the Amsterdam Medical Centre, who] in London chaired 20 hospitals, a heavyweight, he emaild me - I didn't know him very well -. "It's high time to go to the Malieveld again to demonstrate, and of course, I join you. It is very good , keep on knocking". And so very soon we gathered 100 very high quality names under a strong statement asking for total nuclear disarmament, the only fundamental therapy, while sketching the intolerable consequences when this goes wrong, for the global population. We presented it in De Balie, 26-9-2015, with public debate, handing it over to Jan Hoekema, then mayor of Wassenaar and the chair of the Mayors for Peace, presenting one of our three target groups: the general public; the medical world was represented by the head of the KNMG (Royal Dutch medical organization), Rutger-Jan van der Gaag. And the third target was the politicians. They were unfortunately not there, but later on, we presented it to them in The Hague, to the Commission.

Michal Onderco: The Foreign Affairs Committee?

Peter Buijs: Indeed the foreign affairs committee, and they were all there from the main parties. We had a delegation with 'high-ups' like the former Health Care Inspector General and the KNMG-director. Our expectations were quite low, but we saw that they [were] very interested in listening. I had speech, of course, and after the handing over of our Medical Appeal they all stayed for discussion and I immediately approached Han ten Broeke, from [our biggest party, the right wing] VVD. I didn't know him before, but I thought, "Well, let's start with the hardest opponent..". To my surprise, he said that our arguments were much stronger than those of the proponents of [nuclear weapons]. And now I have a problem, because he privately told me things that I'm not allowed to repeat. But it was clear that our message that nuclear weapons had to be banned, had even in the VVD *weeklank*.

Michal Onderco: Resonance.

Peter Buijs: Resonance, yes. And that strongly convinced me that we were on the right track. The week after, there was the first general parliamentary debate since years on nuclear weapons. And there the main resolution was defended by somebody from the PvdA, mr Servaes. He said, among other

arguments that “last week, we had a delegation of the NVMP here, and they promoted their appeal, and they absolutely convinced us that we have to do something.” And that really was our target, of course. “So we propose, Mr. Chair - it's in the transcript - so we propose to, to do everything we can to promote nuclear disarmament, including a nuclear ban treaty.” That was the reason that VVD and PvdA, forming the government - right wing and also left wing, so to say - agreed with Koenders, than the Foreign Minister, that the Netherlands should go to the negotiations on the nuclear ban treaty in New York, as the only NATO country, which is quite unusual, and also that they abstained in the voting. And as you know, the nuclear weapon states, especially US, France and the UK were very opposed. In a letter that went out into the open, they strongly said, “Never go to New York, and you have to vote against”. So this was quite a naughty position of the Netherlands. And there's a direct relation with our Appeal - of course, not the oinly explanation for this - but we really had a contribution to this. You can track it down in the transcripts. And there is more to tell about this.

Michal Onderco: Because you mentioned, of course, the fact that Netherlands went to New York, to the negotiations of TPNW. And very often, in the stories about how Netherlands got to New York, often the Burgerinitiatief, the Citizens' initiative, *Teken tegen kernwapens* is mentioned. And that initiative is very often associated with PAX.

Peter Buijs: Yeah.

Michal Onderco: And so my question is, basically, what was NVMP contribution to that, to that initiative? Or what was your role in sort of advancing those goals?

Peter Buijs: Well, we fully supported the initiative, not only of PAX, but also of the Red Cross, and also the ASN bank - Yeah, quite peculiar and a very good thing to collect the 48,000 signatures, that forced parliament to debate on NWs.talk.

We arranged medical key figures for public support, we collected signatures, so we were fully engaged , and as you could read in that “Russian article”, we gave them all the credits, that without that action there would not have been parliamentary debate, probably not. They made the soil fertile to build on, and the specific contribution of NVMP was the offering of our medical appeal and what I just cited, what was said in the Parliamentary Debate, yes. So it was the kind of reinforcing activities.

[recording goes off record here]

Michal Onderco: So we are now back. And I actually, I want to talk about something else. Before we start. I have a question of clarification. When the NVMP started so 50 something years ago, was it explicitly focused on nuclear weapons? Or was it more focused on the questions of medical science and peace?

Peter Buijs: It was a mixture. Nuclear weapons were a permanent topic, a big topic. But NVPM is *Nederlandse Vereniging* [Dutch society] for medical polemology Polemology is, of course, much more than only nuclear weapons, and how to promote peace. And later on, a few years ago, we extended our name. NVMP just says nothing for the general public. So we added *Artsen voor vrede*, physicians for peace. A lot of discussion, because *vrede* [peace] has so many aspects and we couldn't cover it all, as a small organization. Yes, our main focus stayed on the biggest threat from a medical perspective. And that keeps on being the nuclear weapons.

Michal Onderco: Okay. So I want to ask you, if you could, sort of the NVMP-position within the world of the Dutch civil society. So if you look at the relative position of NVMP in comparison to for example, the Red Cross, the Mayors for Peace, PAX, other organizations. How would you position NVMP in this?

Peter Buijs: Well as a special one, as our approach [is] from the medical perspective. There's only one organization that can do that. It's the NVMP. But the general target, bringing down the amount of nuclear weapons to zero is of course not an exclusive medical, humanistic point of view.

The Red Cross for example, is a big advocate, being a very influential global organization, that should be impartial, squarely. Very, very impartial. But on nuclear weapons, they take a stand, and that's extraordinary. So they are an important ally from the beginning.

PAX is another important organization, of course, but Nuclear weapons are only one topic, they work on a range of topics. And a fundamental difference with them: we are volunteers, not state supported ; PAX has a lot of money put into from the ministries, public money.

And Mayors for Peace, that you can compare more, because they're from their position as mayors, above the parties, like the medical doctors, are supposed to be impartial and neutral. But confronted with the idea that when the bomb falls, what are the consequences for my municipality? Well, devastating. No help would be available. The only reasonable solution is prevention. Abolition of nuclear weapons. So as a kind of comparable organization, and we work with them very closely already for years.

And there are other organizations, for example, the churches and the humanists, *Humanistisch Verbond*, both very strong against NWs in the early 80s. But afterwards they were absent for years, decades on this stage, because of the big conflicts in their own organizations, because the more right-wing oriented members in their organizations, they had big problems with the position of the churches and *Humanistisch Verbond*, being clearly opposite to nuclear weapons. For example, Frits Bolkenstein, a VVD-prominent, started an alternative humanistic organization as a reaction on this. So when we thought from the NVMP, how can we form a civil society coalition, here in Holland, for a nuclear weapon free world, all those organizations passed by in our view. We decided to have our second *Baliebijeenkomst* in the year 2016, inviting potential allies, to speak there, with the intention of, later on when they have said compatible things, we could maybe form, based on that, a anti-[nuclear weapon]- movement. *Balieberaad* is what it's called later on. The Red Cross and Mayors for Peace, and also the medical organizations were already there, in the first Balie meeting. For the second we invited them too, but also new ones, especially to churches and humanistic organizations. So before I looked for contact with their leading people. And I got there and then they told me that they were absolutely interested in this, but they had big problems in their own organization to even mention the word nuclear weapons because all the resonance from the past, and division. So for example, the director of the *Humanistisch Verbond* said "Give me arguments why should I be there?" So I said to her, Well, I just got a member of your 'verbond' and think that you can from a humanistic standpoint, quite easily defend a view that nuclear weapons are *godloze* weapons, so to say.

[the discussion is interrupted here]

The specific Dutch position. So we are one of the range of more or less anti-nuclear weapons oriented organizations. But our specific contribution is in what I was telling about the *Balieberaad*, how to form

from these organizations a more coherent ad hoc coalition with the same purpose and how could that work out to increase pressure, especially on the politicians?

Michal Onderco: So you mentioned already different partners and organizations? Among the Dutch civil society or, within the Netherlands, do you see also organizations that you would say, stand on the other side of the barricade? Or would you say someone whom you can't imagine cooperating with

Peter Buijs: Well, actually we didn't meet them. The reaction on our message is mostly positive, even at the AIV [Dutch government's Advisory Council on International Affairs], when we were invited there to give our [nuclear weapon vision to all those generals and other military experts sitting there]. And we indeed contributed to their advice. [recording not clear] So, I'm curious if you met some of them?

Michal Onderco: Well, not yet. I'm going to ask you about how you view the role of some other actors in the field and maybe how you view them within the Dutch setting.

Peter Buijs: I want to ask, I'm interviewed now as a person?

Michal Onderco: Yes, as a person, as Peter Buijs. No, no, I'm talking to you as an individual.

Peter Buijs: Yes, I talked as a scientist when I worked at the scientific organization TNO.

Michal Onderco: So if you look at for example, different think tanks in the Netherlands, so whether it's Clingendael when Sico [van der Meer] was still there, or whether it's Hague Center for Strategic Studies or others, how do you see them as an actor in the Dutch civil society?

Peter Buijs: Well, I think they are important, like also the academia,, to provide facts and expertise, to program and organize [research and studies on nuclear weapons nuclear disarmament], and to bring this into the public debate. We've build good relations with them, for example to deliver speakers for our NVMP-symposia. Clingendael also invited me to, from my viewpoint, be part of think tank project on safety and security. And also with HCSS the relations are good, especially with Rob de Wijk and Han ten Broeke, partly because of the solidness of our medical humanitarian arguments. [the discussion goes off record here]

Just because we continue to say that as long as there is the risk of nuclear war is not zero, this can go wrong anytime, that we have a dark horse that suddenly can ruin even mankind, and then it's too late even to say, "Oh, why didn't we prevent this", because we are not there anymore. So we are obliged to our children and grandchildren to act!.

Michal Onderco: And so you mentioned Clingendael, HCSS

Peter Buijs: Yes, that are the most important ones,

Michal Onderco: You mentioned already academia. Do you see academics in similar ways to think tanks? Or do you see them as different actors?

Peter Buijs: I never thought about this question. I think that think tanks are more direct, have a more direct connection to the policy, policymakers. Academia, still considered to be more free, with more free space. From there, they could maybe more 'thinking out of the box', contributing to this really existential debate.

Michal Onderco: I mean, you organized, for example, this event for them 50 years of NVMP...

Peter Buijs: Forgive me that I forgot. But you were there?

Michal Onderco: Yes, I was there. You were very kind enough to invite me. [both laugh] I remember that you also had participants from very different aspects. There were people from think tanks, and there were civil society representatives, and there were diplomats. How, how do you engage these different actors in your work? In NVMP?

Peter Buijs: You mean, how do we engage them?

Michal Onderco: Do you engage with them differently for different purposes? Or do you see them as sort of members of the one big family?

Peter Buijs: Well, because at the Peace Palace, we could invite up to 200 people or so, we could broaden our circle beyond the organizations we use to work with, mostly our Balieberaad partners. Because we are a small organization, our scope is limited, we cannot handle too much.

Michal Onderco: This is actually a very good point where I want to go. Which is how much of an inflow of new members do you have? And how active is NVMP that among young people? So people my age or even younger?

Peter Buijs: Yeah, even younger? [both laugh]. Well, this, as for many organizations, is a very difficult point, to reach out to the younger generation. Well, we are very happy that because of this Peace Palace event, we have three young members of our board, below 30 But I've seen that before. Medical students, then they were very active, and when they were ready with a study, they disappeared because starting a practice or having too much other business. We lost them, many, many times. And that's one thing. And then the other thing is that the nuclear weapons are not especially appealing to young people. "Nuclear weapons, what are you talking about? When there is a problem, it's climate!". And of course, we can connect, as you know, the scientific studies of the effect of even a regional nuclear war between Pakistan and India: the effect on climate is very big. So we try to link those two big life threatening issues, one for the longer term, and one for hopefully, not the short term, but when it comes, then it's a very short term.

But we have an increase of members in the last years, because of being active in politics. And we really have results that we can show, there are some more examples than when we already discussed. But it's a constant battle, because at the beginning, 50 years ago, thousands were a member of the NVMP, and that cohort slowly dies. So, each week, we get several announcements of the death of old members, we had to renew that is a very big task, so we are slowly decreasing. And that's, of course, a challenge how to handle this. The only consolation is that we are absolutely not the only organization coping with this.

A last thing is that ICAN managed to get a lot more young people involved.

Michal Onderco: So why do you think ICAN is successful? And NVMP comparatively less

Peter Buijs: It was a new kid on the block, has a new appeal, and not a specific medical appeal, but more in general. I cannot completely explain why they were so successful, but it's apparently, and I was visiting many of the congresses, there are a lot of young people. Also in countries where the medical NVMP affiliates are not that strong. So that's another focus point.

Michal Onderco: Yeah. So you already mentioned a few times the words impact and results, and that NVMP has impact and has results. So I want to ask you, what's your definition of impact?

Peter Buijs: That you can, when you're lucky, really point out in text or whatever, that there are things written down that were not there before. And if you want, then I can give you examples.

Michal Onderco: Go ahead.

Peter Buijs: I take my notes. Here, this was an oped in the [most prestigious journal, the] NRC, in 2017, with a heading, urging the Dutch government to take stand in nuclear disarmament, signed by 20 well respected Dutch persons, among them Nobel prize winner Feringa, and Ko Colijn for example, [the Dutch nuclear weapons-expert] - the first time ever he signed up for this. Well, anyway, we sent this to the NRC and they wanted to publish it immediately. When I asked them why, that was because of the weight of the persons signing up. Not as much conductor Jaap van Zweden, but more in depth, Marcel Levi, for example, I mentioned him already.

Michal Onderco: So this came out in June 2017. That was the time when, for example, the ban treaty was already being negotiated, right?

Peter Buijs: Yeah. It was being negotiated. And the result was on the seventh of July, when they agreed.

Michal Onderco: Yes.

Peter Buijs: A year later we did such a thing, but then with 111 heavy weights, and that Civil Society Appeal, urging the Dutch government as a NATO member, involved in the NPT cycle, should play an active role in confronting the nuclear weapon states with their obligations under Article Six of the NPT. We offered it, *overhandigen*...

Michal Onderco: Handed it over.

Peter Buijs: ...to the Committee on Foreign Affairs, and later the opposition parties came up with a resolution with all lines copied from our Appeal. [Our Minister of Foreign Affairs] Stef Blok refused to support it, but still, it got a majority in parliament. You've asked me to define results. So here is another one. So, the next answer from the ministry to Parliament, was "conform to the resolution from the 22nd of November, we do this and this" It's maybe not a very big event. But we were congratulated by parliamentarians that it was quite extraordinary, such a result by 'outsiders' in such a complicated matter...

Michal Onderco: And do you think that...

Peter Buijs: And one of the major results, even the most important, when Rutte III had their declaration...

Michal Onderco: Their coalition agreement?

Peter Buijs: Yeah. In October 2017. There was for the first time ever the quote that this government, within the framework...

Michal Onderco: of alliance commitments...

Peter Buijs: Yes, Alliance commitments, actively pursues a nuclear weapon free world! Well, even under Den Uyl, our most left wing government, never had such quotes in it. And when we asked the parties, especially Sjoerd Sjoerdsma [from D66] and Joel Voordewind from Christian Union, congratulating them with this [important line] and asked "[How is that possible in a centre-rightwing

government ?]” They said: “we could only bring this in because of your civil society actions. Otherwise, we would have had no chance at all, to bring this in. And we brought it in without the ‘framework of alliance obligations, because we knew that VVD, in order to agree, they would introduce that phrase. So we left that to Han ten Broeke [from VVD] and he came up indeed, with that phrase.” But for us, that was, of course, very good, also because Rutte IV copied this, in their *regeerakkoord*, their coalition agreement. That gave us a base to refer to each time we had an action, like “you said this, so then the next step should be [a further step on the road of nuclear disarmament] or whatever. Was that the kind of answer?

Michal Onderco: That was actually a very good answer, because he gave me a very nice example of what you consider to be to be a success. So this might be a little provocative question. But if you compare, for example, the impact of NVMP, for example, with the impact of PAX, yeah, the PAX is also very active in lobbying the parliament, and in the foreign ministry. Do you think that this kind of activities like this article from the NRC has more impact than the type of lobbying that PAX does? Or is it complimentary?

Peter Buijs: To the last point, it's complimentary. We are working on the same goal, with different relations. They have traditionally good relation with parliament. We had to build it up, gradually in the last years, not without success but they have this topic for years. But the last years, they are not that active anymore as they were before, what we regret actually, also in the Balieberaad, where they participated from the beginning. And their organizational power, for example, around the Volkel demonstrations, about the Hiroshima and Nagasaki remembrance, was much stronger in former days when Krista van Velzen, for example, was active, or Susi Snyder. But both has gone somewhere else. But complementary is the best word, I think.

Michal Onderco: So we talked about impact? Do you have a different definition of success? Or is this an example of success?

Peter Buijs: We consider as success in the first place, to have these names under this quite sharp article, that it is published in the high quality journal NRC and that it was building up influence. Our next appeal was funneled into a parliamentary resolution. So we made it to the soil fertile for a next step.

Michal Onderco: So I want to close off with two very broad questions, focusing on the future. My first question is, what are your expectations related to the future of nuclear disarmament? And where do you expect the field to go in the next five to 50 years?

Peter Buijs: 15 or 50?

Michal Onderco: 50.

Peter Buijs: Please repeat the question.

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

Peter Buijs: Well, regarding the first question about the perspective of disarmament: it's a very uphill battle and a very tough job where no guarantees can be given at all, because the counter powers are very, very strong, especially ... well, Eisenhower after being president already warned against the military industrial complex. The relations at the Capitol with Raytheon, Boeing, all the military, big companies are so strong, and they are thinking years ahead regarding their contracts. So to really get

rid of those weapons is a hell of a job, with absolutely no success, guaranteed. And at least it obliged civil society to do much more. And we try to, to promote our Dutch example, not to copy it exactly. But to make clear that in and NATO country, it is possible to really influence the politicians in the right direction, so to say. Then, keeping urging for their acts and deeds compared to their words, is our thing. But there we have to build up pressure.

Michal Onderco: But if I wanted to push you on the question, will there be nuclear weapons in 50 years? Is the answer yes? Or is the answer no?

Peter Buijs: Medical doctors never answer in that way; we have a differential diagnosis. We have probabilities...

Michal Onderco: So, what's the probability that nuclear weapons will be still around?

Peter Buijs: Well, that would be quite a probability, maybe even 50 years. I can of course, say I hope less, but that's not what you're asking for. We have to be as medical doctors very realistic. Idealistic, but very realistic. As I said, also, in the Peace Palace - you will maybe remember, then we met – that we may be very, very happy when within let's say, 25 years, Article Six would be fulfilled by the P-5; because we know that four of the NW-states are not even part of the NPT. And that's another tough question. So a lot has to be done for the political environment to build up a relationship of trust. And the Ukrainian war, of course, is very bad, a big backlash on this field. Although we also know that the Cuban crisis was made the world aware of the real risk of nuclear weapons, and the NPT would probably not have been there without Cuban crisis and diplomats and other people, reasonable people realizing we have to do something.

So the Ukraine war and the issue of nuclear weapons, and Putin's threads about that, could be another wake up call, hopefully, that behind the screens, also in Russia, a lot of people, reasonable people think, "yeah, actually, it's a too big risk, we can reduce risk, but never guarantee that it never will go wrong". And also the expenses. It's so costly that in the UK, for example, you see already 'fighting' within the Army, who will get the money, because it's a beast that absorbs all means. So I am sorry to say that there probably is also a chance that after 50 years, there will still will be nuclear weapons, not be used, then is an absolutely not zero, maybe 10-20-25%. But there are also scenarios thinkable that the proliferation goes on, e.g. by Iran, Saudi Arabia and others, and than God may help us. So it can also go a different way.

Michal Onderco: Yeah. So, my last question is imagining there is a world without nuclear weapons. How is security provided in a world without nuclear weapons?

Peter Buijs: Well, that's of course a key issue, probably to resolve the whole issue. There should be very specific scenarios before the whole process really will start. And surely, on the end of the process, there should be much more work to do in the security, how to provide real security and then you have to go into maybe in between the ears, into fears from countries and regimes or whatever. And there are, I think, think tanks, and scientific institutions, And academia, who can play a role here to build bridges between the actors. Recently I tried to do that by peer reviewed paper [about the Dutch situation, for the scientific journal of the St Petersburg University, Vestnik,] to build a bridge. That was the best article they found from last year, and we were organizing a conference on that, to bring together experts on nuclear disarmament from all countries, and that's totally ruined because of the Ukraine war. So, academia, think tanks - your cup of tea, so to say - can really play here a role behind

the screens to build up mutual trust, to start with academia, to start with think tanks, people who are, yeah, using their brains. Because I'm convinced that everybody who really thinks on this issue, that nine out of 10, the conclusion will be "Yeah, [nuclear weapons] are too dangerous".

Michal Onderco: Is the world free of nuclear weapons for example, a world where the concept of deterrence makes no sense? Or is it the world where deterrence, for example, is provided by other means?

Peter Buijs: Well, that brings us medical doctors in a difficult position, because every weapon can cause harm, and we are then the people, e.g. surgeons, trying to repair that harm. So we are actually opposed to any weapon. But having to choose between nuclear weapons which their completely devastating, or a drone attack, for example, where only that Iranian general will be killed... And actually nuclear weapons are such an awkward, such an *onhanding* how do you call it?

Michal Onderco: Useless.

Peter Buijs: Yes, useless weapons. Or maybe obsolete would be the real word, because we have much more non-nuclear deterrence means. Because security will always be an issue of any country of course, and that's very real, within certain boundaries, of course. So, we have to respect that, also seeing the mutual importance, that it would be a security that would not be threatening for another on a high level. So, I think the maybe security has to be assured before the whole process of nuclear disarmament, I'm afraid that the process only will really start and come to a good end, when we present concepts of security that goes beyond the nuclear weapons and still provide for countries the security they need. And also, to *ontmaskeren*, the people who say "Well, of course we have to get rid of nuclear weapons!", but actually, they don't want. Because security is also used as an excuse, too. So that's the reason I think we have to really, realistically go into that issue, also from academia and think tanks, and also from the peace movement. Not simply say: "Well, dismantle all the nuclear weapons". That's too easy. And I'm afraid you will never get to your goal, when you are not also interested in that security aspect. We as physicians cannot solve that issue, of course. But we have to realize and to accept that that is a big thing, too, as maybe a precondition for total nuclear disarmament.

Michal Onderco: I've gone through all my questions. I normally ask at the end of every interview, if there's something I should have asked about, and I didn't, is there something that I miss in the in the questions?

Peter Buijs: Well, maybe that last year, I was the initiator of [a IPPNW-Pugwash Appeal] to the presidents Biden and Putin, halfway last year, regarding their summit, via the speakers of the Peace Palace event, Batsanov and Countryman. I raised the idea, to quickly try to get high-level Russian and American supporters of an appeal regarding three nuclear weapon issues: on the point of starting again [nuclear] negotiations, reaffirming the famous Reagan-Gorbachev quote, and do this urgently. And [we did, together with another speaker, Ira Helfand (IPPNW). E.g. the predecessor of Lavrov and two generals signed, one the former head of the complete Russian nuclear missile fleet], to my surprise. Then, the Appeal was offered to the delegations preparing that summit. And that was of course, very helpful. And our three points were in the only agreement of that summit, in a presidential statement.

That Appeal was not specific medical humanitarian, it was more a consequence of our [former activities and network building]... Without the peace palace, this probably never would have happened. And that is one of the things I'm most satisfied about.

Thanks to a lot of others, because I came up with the idea, but was absolutely not able to collect the American and the Russian subscribers, e.g. the predecessor of Lavrov and even generals out of service already, the former head of the whole Russian nuclear fleet and of the external, the Foreign Intelligence Service. In that Appeal the urge to pave the way for a nuclear weapon free world (!), so that is an achievement I'm quite proud of. And in a way, it is related to, but not directly, a our medical activities. So that could be a piece I want to mention. Further, maybe later, but not at first sight.

Michal Onderco: Welcome. Thank you very much for finding the time and thank you very much for talking to me.

Peter Buijs: Okay, and it was a pleasure to do that, I hope my English was clear enough., because that's not native tongue of course.