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Interview with Noël Stott

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Summary:

Noël Stott, based in South Africa, is a seasoned expert in nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament. At VERTIC, he works on fostering African perspectives in global nuclear discourse, emphasizing the lack of organizations in Africa actively addressing WMD issues. Stott critiques the stagnation in disarmament since the Cold War and the failure to leverage moments of global cooperation. He calls for African states to pressurize nuclear powers to honor their NPT commitments, advocating for clear strategies to advance Article Six's disarmament provisions. This document summary was generated by an artificial intelligence language model and was reviewed by a Wilson Center staff member.

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Robin Möser: Okay, Noël, this is Robin, I'm working in a project called "Civil Society and Nuclear Risk" jointly run by the Wilson Center in Washington and Erasmus University in Rotterdam. And, yeah, I'm grateful that you agreed to have this interview today. And to start off, I quickly introduce you: Noël Stott, you are an experienced actor in the field of nuclear Non-Proliferation, and currently working for VERTIC, the Verification, Research, Training and Information Center situated in London, but you are based in Hermanus, in the Western Cape, in beautiful South Africa. So, I would start off this interview, to find out more about your background and how you personally got to the position you're currently in. And this could also involve some of the work you did formerly at ISS, the Institute for Security Studies in Pretoria. What's your background, and why you ended up in these organizations that would interest me as a starting point.

Noël Stott: No, no, these all very good questions. And I always tell people, I mean, you really don't study and you don't think you're going to get involved in these big issues, big political and technical issues, you kind of fall into them. So, basically, my kind of history, I suppose, of getting involved was a long time ago, in the early 1990s, I used to work for an organization called "Theology Exchange Program". So, and what we used to do is, you know, it was all about building the global south or cooperation between the global south and obviously in the 80s, during the days of apartheid, it was about learning lessons, and getting other people and other countries experiences of, of how to overcome oppression and repression. So, for example, you know, we would send people to Nicaragua, to look at how they do land reform, etc. etc. Anyway, so, during that time, I came across the landmines campaign, and the anti-personnel landmines campaign. And to cut a long story short, I got involved in that campaign. And worked on that campaign for a number of years as a volunteer, while working as a researcher in other areas, social issues, etc. etc. Anyway, and then I applied for a job at the Institute for Security Studies in Pretoria to work on small arms. And that was in about 2002, if I remember correctly, so I worked on small arms. We used to have what was called an arms management program. So we worked on small arms issues, I mean, in those days, obviously, small arms was the big sexy issue with the UN Program of Action. And obviously, South Africa was in transition as well. So, there was a lot happening. Of course, in Africa, they talk about small arms being the real weapons of mass destruction. So, we didn't think to be honest with you, we didn't even think about nuclear issues, or nuclear weapon issues. I think it was, and in some respects it still is, seen as a kind of a northern issue. It's a problem between Russia and the US, etc. etc. But then, so I started ISIS in about 2002, and we got funding, we were funded by Norway. And then in about 2007, Norway approached me and said, you know, listen, why don't you guys do something on the nuclear issue, from an African perspective. And I think their main goal was that were they were hoping to bring the Treaty of Pelindaba into force, because in a sense, it was a forgotten treaty. So, I put in quite a big proposal to them that not only covered the Treaty of Pelindaba, and nuclear issues, but covered bio and chem as well. And so I ran that program from 2007 to about 2017/18. Somewhere around there, I can check the dates when I left ISS. And then there was a bit of restructuring within ISS. And in Norway in terms of the funding. So it was decided that we would or ISIS would no longer do WMD work. So, I worked on that for full time with a staff, couple of staff members dedicated to this issue. But as I say, the funding kind of declined, or ISS priorities had changed. And then I applied for a job at VERTIC, I'd known VERTIC, I had partnered with them as a kind of African partner for a while on other projects, and I applied for a job and for some odd reason, got the job. Spent a year in London, the following year spent a couple of months in

London, a couple of months in South Africa. So, I had no intention to leave South Africa. So, and then COVID hit and then I haven't been back to London, which I'm quite happy about.

Robin Möser: Let me just clarify one point. Ever since you left in 2017/18, the work on WMD, within ISS stopped. So, there's no one working on these issues anymore.

Noël Stott: Well, that is, in my view, one of the tragedies. There's nobody, there's no organization in South Africa, who is doing that work on a day to day basis. And what makes it worse is that even the arms management program that all the staff that used to do small arms, that also was kind of closed down. They do a little bit of small arms work, but in the context of organized crime in southern Africa, Africa, wherever, I don't really follow it, but it's more in the context of organized crime. Whereas what we did in the arms management program, when I was working on small arms, was obviously we worked closely with the African Union and also in the South African context in terms of updating South Africa's legislation. And we tried starting projects on monitoring illicit flows of small arms within Africa. We ran workshops with customs officials from African countries, in terms of them better being able to detect cross border trafficking. In those days, also, there was a big cooperation agreement between South Africa and Mozambique, called Operation Rochelle, or Rachel, to try and stem the flow of arms from Mozambique into South Africa.

Robin Möser: Post-civil war Mozambique.

Noël Stott: Yeah, yeah, it was kind of remnants of the Civil War, which, as you know, South Africa, was involved in clandestinely. But there were, I mean, at one point, you know, in the early 2000s, you could buy AK47s in Soweto for 1000 Rand or whatever. They were coming in from Mozambique. So yeah, to answer your question, the whole program has unfortunately, been terminated.

Robin Möser: Okay, coming back to your current position at VERTIC and the work you do connected to nuclear weapons, how do you view the role of nuclear weapons in the present world? What impact do they have and how you assess them from your from your daily work perspective?

Noël Stott: Look, I think we are living in difficult times, I mean, with Putin and possibly Trump again, and we know that all nuclear armed states, both those that belong to them NPT, and those that are outside of the NPT are modernizing their weapons. So, you know, and some of the systems that are being built up now will have a lifespan of 40 to 50 to 60 years. So, the hope for disarmament has lessened greatly. And I think we all need to understand that even though, you know, there are new treaties such as the TPNW that give some hope, for the future. But I think we are living, in difficult times, and I think I want to be optimistic and say that the US or Russia will not use nuclear weapons despite the rhetoric coming from Putin and from others. And we just got to hope that it doesn't happen. So, I think that the risk has increased. I mean, from all the literature from all the news reports, the risk of use, is increasing.

Robin Möser: So, would you attribute any kind of stabilizing value to the nuclear weapons we have in the present world, not unlike like a stabilizing factor in international politics? Or rather not since the invasion of Ukraine?

Noël Stott: No, I mean I take the view that that, you know, that most African states or South Africa, for example, uses the argument that nuclear weapons make everybody unsafe. I think, to be honest with you, I think we haven't been really schooled in the way people in Europe was schooled in strategic

stability and all that kind of stuff. And in my reading of it, I just don't understand it and I don't agree with it. So, obviously, I mean, even when you talk about Non-Proliferation, I would want to rather use the word disarmament. You know, it's quite interesting. I was reading, trying to edit somebody's article. And I know you've written on South Africa. So, you could also tell me your view, but they talk about South Africa as being a proliferator back then. And I don't understand that concept, because South Africa did not proliferate in the English meaning of the word. South Africa built nuclear weapons and had a nuclear weapons program, but it didn't proliferate to anybody else.

Robin Möser: And it disarmed.

Noël Stott: Well, eventually it disarmed, but nevertheless, South Africa was not a proliferator. I suppose it's to do with language and the kind of terms you use.

Robin Möser: And the theoretical concepts you use to maybe fit in certain categories of these things. People then label certain states as proliferators. Maybe that is also an aspect one should keep in mind.

Noël Stott: Precisely, and I think we've had this conversation before about South Africa's program always been labeled as clandestine and secret, and all that kind of stuff. But all programs at some time were secret and clandestine. So, South Africa is not unique in that sense, at all, in my view, but anyway, I'm off the topic.

Robin Möser: No, it's totally fine. But in terms of the world we see today, what practical steps do you think could the civil society, including think tanks and NGOs, take: more normative pressure or other practical steps towards elimination? You mentioned the TPNW, for instance.

Noël Stott: Yeah. Well, can I just say, I mean, in fact I forgot to ask in the beginning of the interview: I was going to ask you how you define civil, because I would think that is quite a broad term that covers a range of organizations, non-state organizations, academics, policy institutes, applied policy institute's, for example, I will class VERTIC and ISS as applied policy institutes, and then you have campaigning organizations. So, I think, you know, your this project needs to be clear on what they actually mean by civil society,

Robin Möser: We defined a wide rather broad, you mentioned policy institutes, Think Tanks, academics, like ICAN, doctors against nuclear weapons. I think these kinds of the institutions. Also, for example, retired politicians and government staff in a way, when they do no longer represent, like our mutual friend Johann Kellerman, for example.

Noël Stott: Precisely, but what I'm trying to say is that they all have slightly different roles. You know, I mean, in order to create, and again it goes back to this: are we talking about Non-Proliferation or are we talking about disarmament and going to Global Zero to use that phrase? And I think academics, for example, have obviously a role in creating the norm around that. They also have a role in stigmatizing the mere possession of nuclear weapons to their particular audience. Which is slightly different to what an organization like ISS does. I mean ISS does research, number one, it's geared towards capacitating states, in ISS's case African states, to understand the international obligations and commitments, and how to translate those at a national level.

Robin Möser: And eventually facilitate an informed decisions-making process.

Noël Stott: Precisely. So, ISS is not a campaigning organization, but obviously, we want to influence government's policy and practical implementation of, let's say, export controls or whatever. And then

you get the real campaigners, like, ICAN, etc., but I think, the ICANs of the world, obviously have a very important role, again, in raising awareness in putting pressure on states. But I think we need to ask the question, how can I put it?, I mean, ICAN is certainly, I would say, quite different to CND, for example, I think, you know, there's very little mass protests against nuclear weapons anymore, rightly or wrongly, because I think the way civil society works nowadays, mostly, is to work with governments or like-minded governments. And so they often don't want to rock the boat. So, you won't find it. maybe I'm wrong, but you can't find ICAN having a mass demonstration in Washington. And I think part of the problem with civil society we get trapped, especially campaigning organizations, if I can say, because we become much more close to governments, we've lost the ability to pressurize our own government. So, it's often easier for civil society, whether that's think tanks in Washington to try and put pressure on Iran, North Korea, Pakistan and India and now obviously Israel, without actually putting a focus on their own governments, the US, France, the UK. Do you know what I mean? It's become we've almost got into a trap where we believe, or we accept the US narrative. And we fall into that and therefore, there's so much written about, oh god if Iran gets a nuclear weapon and Korea definitely want a nuclear weapon Korea. You know, what I'm trying to say?

Robin Möser: Maybe I can put it this way: the normative pressure that once focused on your own government or the people in charge who ran certain policies has not dissolved, but yeah, diminished and now goes through other channels. Maybe because a lot of things went online and now something goes viral, be it a debate on Twitter or X and not so much at the doorsteps of your government.

Noël Stott: Yeah, I think that's part of the problem. And I think that started in a way with the international campaign to ban landmines. I mean, that was part of, I was very involved in that, I was on the coordinating committee etc. But the kind of and I'm sorry to attack the Americans again, but I will use the American example all the time. But for example, they would never accept the need to have a demonstration outside the White House, in terms of US policy on landmines. But it was fine to have a demonstration you know, in front of the Russian Embassy.

Robin Möser: Or against apartheid in front of the South African Embassy...

Noël Stott: Back then, yeah. But I mean ICAN is amazing. I think in terms of its creativity, and the fact that it's keeping the new generation involved, and the link between climate change and disarmament and all that kind of stuff. I think they're great at that. And they're all growing kind of a new generation of activists, in that these activists will grow up to be much more militant, if I can use that word. At some point, yeah.

Robin Möser: Thank you. Taking up a broader perspective: What do you see as the biggest failure in the field since the end of the Cold War? I mean, you just described this transition of the approach by, let me put it broadly, civil society actors, but what do you see in terms of outcomes the biggest failure in the last thirty years?

Noël Stott: Well, I think I mean, yeah, the end of the Cold War was a massive opportunity that we didn't take in a sense.

Robin Möser: Yeah, the lack of the lack of momentum taken.

Noël Stott: I know these issues are complex. I mean, even in the South African case. I mean we didn't, I'm not talking about myself necessarily, because I probably wasn't really around in those days, but the

end of the Cold War with the so called reductions, with the SALT agreements, and things like that. We should have been, civil society should have been, much more insistent and active in this area. I mean there was a lot of hope at the end of the end of the Cold War on a range of friends. And I think we missed that opportunity in a sense for whatever reason, I mean, were it for other priorities or whatever. But if that answers your question...

Robin Möser: Maybe let me follow up on this: do now take up an African perspective? Because in my view, Africa did rather well in the mid 1990s, with the Treaty of Pelindaba, which was later ratified, and also the pressure at the NPT RevCon in 1995. Or do you refer to Africans acting on a global scale with this lack of progress?

Noël Stott: Look, I think it's also difficult to talk about Africa as one hegemonic entity. Because certainly, I mean, you know, you're in, for example, the NPT RevCon I don't think there was full agreement by all African states that it be extended. And even in terms of South Africa given its own weapons up, there was quite a lot of backlash or anger from others. African states, because we lost the kind of African bomb in a sense. And I think it's also difficult because you have national positions. And then you have the Africa groups in New York or Geneva or Vienna, that often take quite different positions, or more nuanced positions. And then you have NAM, which I think all African states, for example, are members of NAM, which has taken a much more radical position. So, it's very difficult to get consensus on issues in general, and then what actually happens is you almost get the lowest common denominator. So, if you listen to African statements at the NPT PrepCons and Review Conferences with the first committee, the words are all great. But that's often just words. I mean, I can't remember the details, but for example, when he was at the president of Ghana, a long, long time ago, you know, they were arguing for disarmament and protesting against the French tests in Algeria. I mean even didn't he even boycott some sanctions against France? I think, that would not happen today. And why not?

Robin Möser: I'm not sure but Nkrumah was ambivalent, because he at the same time congratulated Mao on the first Chinese atomic weapon. But this was not so close to his country. No, but the consensus, I think, yeah, I agree with you could be or is part of the lack of progress. When you when you spoke about this window of opportunity, following the end of the Cold War, and the decisions not taken or not implemented at a later stage. So, what would you see as the most important milestones that should be put in practice in terms of disarmament? I mean, Africa has no nukes, of course, but Africans are active in several international fora to get this on track. With, I would say varying degrees of success.

Noël Stott: Sure, you might have to rephrase your question, because I don't quite understand it.

Robin Möser: Just simply put: what do you see as the biggest milestones to get through in the nuclear field in terms of global disarmament?

Noël Stott: I'm tempted to say, obviously, that all African states, for example, should join, should become states parties to the TPNW. On the one hand I wouldn't want to say that. On the other hand, I realize that that's not going to make much progress on a global level in terms of global disarmament. And also to use Minty's phrase: it's almost like disarming the disarmed. You know, it's kind of another nail in the coffin of not being able to or committing oneself to not manufacture nuclear weapons, which they don't do anyway. So I'm tempted to say that, but on the other hand, the question is, how

can African states and others states in the global south, who are not part of the nuclear umbrella of the US, how can they pressurize the US, UK, France etc, to disarm or at least fulfill their commitment under Article Six of the NPT. However you interpret that article, I mean, we interpreted narrowly to say, well, there needs to be negotiations, then surely let's accept that and pressurize the nuclear weapons states to start negotiations. Rather than just saying you need to disarm, you need to disarm, but actually say OK, let's accept your definition or your understanding of Article Six and you need to start negotiating.

Robin Möser: How do you intend to act on it etc.

Noël Stott: Yeah. I mean, you know, Article Six is always the big issue at PrepCons but nobody has really, besides for the 13 steps, but even they don't really address Article Six all that much, nobody has set out a clear plan of how to implement Article Six. And a clear plan on how to pressurize the nuclear weapon states and under the NPT to take it forward.

Robin Möser: Yeah, so indeed, this could be an important step forward.

Noël Stott: I think, because otherwise, it's just repeating myself over and over again, in every review cycle and every First Committee and General Assembly and nothing actually changes all that much.

Robin Möser: Presently, from my perspective, I'd say the timing is probably not the best with Putin and of Trump perhaps being reelected.

Noël Stott: No, no, there are contradictions and I mean, obviously, if you look at BRICS, for example. I don't think ever discusses nuclear disarmament, because it's a trade and financial body. But have we thought about how such fora can be used to promote disarmament? I would hope so, but I doubt it. I mean, there are too many other things happening, because as I said, there are trade offs. If for example Senegal starts pushing and pressurizing France to disarm, they'll say, oh, but then you're going to lose the trade that we have with you. It's quite complex.

Robin Möser: I guess the same can be said about South Africa and Russia these days. And if you look to the New Agenda Coalition, not much materialized in the end.

Noël Stott: No. And I think maybe the lesson, I mean, that's a good point, because in terms of the New Agenda Coalition, there used to be something before that, I have forgotten what it was called. Seven Nation initiative or something like that. Maybe the thing is that we need to understand that some of these initiatives, like the NAC, were appropriate at a particular point in time. And now, we need to think of a new thing. Otherwise, as you said, it kind of loses its momentum etc., etc. So, maybe NAC should close and a new initiative should be started, given the current context, I suppose.

Robin Möser: A pessimist would say the same about ICAN and the TPNW. And when you look back to 2020, or 2021 when it was ratified, I forgot the exact date, since then, I mean, with every that year goes by, in my view, it loses a bit of momentum. I'm the pessimist now, playing the devil's advocate, but that would then be timing again and again.

Noël Stott: Well, the counter argument to that is that, you know, it's a young treaty, it needs to mature and things like that. I mean, one, I suppose we'd have to look back at for example, the NPT, to see at what point did France etc. come on board and I think it was quite late.

Robin Möser: Yes, early 90s So, more than 20 years after it was ratified, same is true for Brazil, you know this.

Noël Stott: Yeah, so maybe that you need to see it in a more longer term process but also, I mean, talking about nuclear risks, I mean, part of the TPNW is also to address some of those risks and also to do victim assistance, environmental remediation, kind of in parallel to the call for disarmament. So, you know, all those things help. The NPT doesn't, I don't think it talks about victim assistance or environmental remediation. So, at least that's a bit of progress in a broader sense, you know, of how to deal with the past. And the present, I suppose. I think strategy-wise, maybe that's quite hard.

Robin Möser: Okay, I think that sort of concludes the first part, I would now turn a little bit more towards VERTIC, the organization you work for. Can you maybe tell me a bit more about the rhetoric employed and how the nuclear portfolio does fits your organization's mission? I want your personnel assessment of this, because I could read the official statement on VERTIC's homepage. How do you evaluate the nuclear aspects in your work?

Noël Stott: Yeah, I think VERTIC, like most organizations in this field, is donor dependent, number one. And therefore, follow the kind of the sexy issues of the day. So, for example, VERTIC doing quite a lot of work on modeling North Korea's fuel cycle, and looking at open source intelligence in terms of trying to monitor North Korea's nuclear weapons infrastructure and preparations for tests and all that kind of stuff. And then, in terms of verification, I mean, verification was a big topic a couple of years ago. And it has, which has decreased a little bit, I mean, we hoping that donors would continue to fund verification work. Some people might criticize the work that I do, in the sense that doing verification at this point is a distraction to the real need for disarmament. And it's all very nice. Norway can say, listen, we put in a lot of money into verification, as part of our commitment to disarmament. But other people in other countries might say, well, it's just a distraction. But I think VERTIC, we do play quite an important role. Again, with a longer term vision, I mean, the project that I work on, is trying to build capacity in the global south to participate in conceptual and practical thinking of how one could do verification, when the time comes for disarmament. So, it's both at a practical level, but also at a conceptual thinking level. Because people are not aware that if you're a party to the NPT, nuclear weapons states cannot share information about the designs etc. of nuclear weapons. And as a non-nuclear weapon state, you're not allowed to accept that information. So, there are lots of legal issues around verification. So, again, I think we play a dual role of raising awareness amongst states of the complexities of these issues, but also that we need to prepare with the understanding that this is a long-term goal, but let's prepare now. Russia for example, let me just say this thing, Russia, for example, thinks we are wasting our time, that we should only be discussing the methodologies and the practicalities of verification when you have a Treaty. And we don't have a treaty, they would say. To put it crudely, they say, well, all these initiatives that the German NGOs and academics and VERTIC and at Princeton, we're just wasting time, good money. But we don't believe that.

Robin Möser: You earlier told me about the current project that you are involved in with the regional hubs and building capacity on disarmament. Could you maybe briefly, for a couple of minutes, elaborate on that?

Noël Stott: Precisely, that's what I'm talking about, in a sense, because what we try to do, and I mean, we, you know, we started small, in order to build capacity for thinking about these issues. We've created, or we're in the process of creating, three regional hubs, what we call research and innovation hubs. So, basically they are networks of interested people, this includes retirees, academics, and young people who are interested in this in this topic, to think about these issues. So, the African hub, for

example, is at the moment, it's been driven by one of VERTIC's partners in South Africa, University of Witwatersrand. In Kazakhstan, Central Asia, it's ISTC in Kazakhstan and in Latin America, it's an organization, an NGO, called NPS global in Argentina, and they are driving this process. And what we do kind of has a dual function, because what we've realized is that, let's use Africa as an example. There are very few universities, if any, that actually teach disarmament and Non-Proliferation. So, students are not even aware of this as a possible area of study, or even as a career path. So, we can't just go straight in and talk about verification, in a sense, we have to prepare students and make them aware of the whole issue of nuclear disarmament and Non-Proliferation. And we in fact, in June, are going to run an African Non-Proliferation course, which obviously will have a component of verification. So yeah, what else can I say? And also we commission papers out, and we try and pair a young person with an older person or an expert or retiree, again, to build capacity, and to get some conceptual thinking going on these issues.

Robin Möser: And who are VERTIC's partners that you work with for this? Do you have regular contacts with other people in the field like Think Tanks, NGOs with whom you team up or join forces? Who would these be?

Noël Stott: Yes, as I just said, in Africa, and specifically in South Africa, we partnered with the University of Witwatersrand. In Central Asia, we partner with an organization that is based in Kazakhstan, a very famous organization called ISTC. I have to you look up what it actually stands for. But that's a regional organization already that does quite a lot of work on a range of security issues. And then in Latin America, it's NPS Global, which is an NGO in Argentina. So, at some point we hope that these hubs will be become self-sustaining. So then VERTIC almost withdraws from the project and allows these hubs to continue. So, for example, one of the dreams that we have here in South Africa, or in Africa, is that the hub actually becomes a project or almost like a unit within AFCONE, because that's the logical place where it should be, rather than outside of, because obviously we try to mix civil society and governments working together on this issue.

Robin Möser: Do you also plan liaison offices in other African countries or at the AU?

Noël Stott: No, we haven't got that. I mean, the finances are not that great at the moment, I mean, given the global situation, I wouldn't envisage that yet. I think we just need to put verification and nuclear disarmament verification on the agenda of the African Union and in universities in Africa. More that way, then trying to set up a huge infrastructure.

Robin Möser: Okay. And in terms of VERTIC, I mean, VERTIC is part of the European Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Consortium, but do you have specific partners with whom you cooperate on in your daily work?

Noël Stott: Well, VERTIC works closely with a lot of organizations: CNS in Monterrey in the US, the new center in Uppsala.

Robin Möser: The Alva Myrdal Center, I think, yeah.

Noël Stott: ISADA, some of the German organizations as well. RUSI, I mean, there's a whole range of organizations that VERTIC works with, either by submitting joint funding proposals, and a consortium approach to new projects. So, for example, the new sexy issue, I don't even know this, but the new sexy issue now is trying to get a greater understanding what irreversibility or irreversible nuclear

disarmament means. Because there are the three principles, right? Verified, irreversible, transparent. But if you look at the UN documents, nobody has actually defined what irreversibility means. So that's the new issue, there's a lot of funding that has been put into research to understand this concept. And VERTIC is involved in that with King's College London and with other organizations. And both the US and the UK, and Norway, are very interested in this topic at the moment.

Robin Möser: Are there also organizations and other groups that are actively opposed to what VERTIC does? You mentioned Russia is laughing at this time, but do you encounter any organization sitting on the other side of defense actively criticizing the work you do?

Noël Stott: No, I wouldn't go that far. In terms of VERTIC or even organizations, I mean VERTIC, as I said, it's not a campaigning organization. I mean, VERTIC also had projects that are of a technical nature, which are written for the donor. So, they would never be published or anything like that. So, that's why I say VERTIC is quite an interesting organization in that it's a neutral organization, obviously. So, I mean, to give you an example, VERTIC does not take a position on the TPNW, for example. I mean, it doesn't say anything about it. But my argument would be that part of what VERTIC's mandate is, is to assist states in implementing international treaties. So, the TPNW is an international treaty, whether you like it or not, one could still do work on that, to assist states to implement it.

Robin Möser: And we touched upon this time and again, but let me explicitly ask you: how do you engage with different actors in your work, be they academics, think tanks, civil society organizations - is this on a daily basis? Do you actively seek contact?

Noël Stott: Um, that's quite a broad question. Obviously, if we have a particular project, let's say on, I don't know, Open Skies, the treaty that is now defunct. VERTIC would identify experts who have been involved in that. And let's say we were organizing a workshop on Open Skies. We would bring those in. VERTIC has the pulling power to bring such people together. VERTIC is very well connected in the Non-Proliferation and human security or general the security field, so they would have lots of contacts. And it's kind of a snowball. So, if you talk to this academic who might say, no, no, you should really also speak to somebody else. That's how we work.

Robin Möser: Having met you at academic conferences, I know that you have a network that consisting of academics, as well as people from think tanks all over the world. So, yeah, I know how you approach them and do joint projects with them. So, very characteristic for your work, I'd say.

Noël Stott: We try and work with others, rather than seeing this as our turf. You know, the whole term. I mean, one of the problems with NGOs and civil societies that, you know, you get these tensions, well, don't trade on my area of work, you know. And I think VERTIC certainly tries to avoid that as much as possible. And I certainly do in my work, I mean, we need to network and talk to people. That's the only way we can move forward.

Robin Möser: I agree. Okay, now, coming to a "big" question again, I still have a couple of big ones. How would you define impact in your field? And could you give a concrete example of an impact VERTIC had?

Noël Stott: This is probably the most difficult issue – to define and show impact. A couple of years ago impact became a big issue especially for the donor community. Even when I was towards the end of my term at ISS, impact, and the ability to show impact, became much more important. But impact, I

think, is very difficult to show in the short term. That's what I'd say. Some things take quite a long time when you can say you had an impact on this. In terms of VERTIC, one of the easiest ways to show impact is in terms of its work on legislative change. So, as I said, VERTIC assists states at their request for assistance in terms of the laws and regulations regarding whatever nuclear issues. And so obviously, VERTIC would try and get a better understanding of the context in that particular country, and then we'd hold workshops, drafting workshops with all relevant departments in that country. So, VERTIC doesn't, for example, have has never created a model legislation on a particular issue, like, for example, the ICRC would do, I think VERTIC takes a much more contextual approach to drafting legislation. So, that's one easy way of showing impact. If the results of your work in that particular country becomes law, goes through Parliament and gets promulgated. In terms of the work that I do, for example, it's obviously much harder in the short term to show impact. Obviously, you can the increase in the number of people who participate in the hubs, or the increase in the number of students who go on to do a Master or PhD in Nuclear Non-Proliferation. So, there are some little things that you can quantify. Another way, we try and show impact or derive impact, is to see if any of our research is reflected in, let's say, the general statements that that states make at the First Committee or the general assembly or during the NPT PrepCons and Review Conferences. And I mean, these are all very simple ways of showing impact. I mean, we sometimes have side events, for example, during the NPT Review Conference, and if they're 50 people in the room, it's better than having 10. So, hopefully that shows that there is interest in the topic and obviously, you get feedback from states and other sectors of civil society, who comment on your work as being important or whatever. But impact in general, I think it's in our field is quite hard. Especially nowadays, as I said earlier in the interview, with states not reducing the number of nuclear weapons they have.

Robin Möser: So as a follow up, how would you define success then in your field? And can you give me an example for success, a professional one.

Noël Stott: I mean, this is gonna sound strange, but I think sometimes we become a victims of our own success. So, sometimes, and then that that's probably at the extreme end where you can see that, in fact, you are no longer needed, because it's been taken up by states, in the policies and in the legislation etc. I think a big role for civil society is really to prepare states or to, I don't want to use the word build capacity, but to transfer knowledge or to facilitate government officials to think about issues in a particular way. And certainly at ISS, for example, we did a lot of work before on the establishment of the African commission on nuclear energy. And I would say we had some impact there in terms of the way it operates. You know, the kinds of projects that they've taken on. So, that would be a concrete example for me. But as I say, it is difficult to measure success, especially because there's so many external factors: politicians change, civil servants change. And somehow you need to sustain these initiatives over time. So, it is difficult to measure success.

Robin Möser: No, I fully agree. And it then also depends, it's similar to the impact question, the other perspective that you take up on success, I think, it's even, it's even harder to measure in quantitative terms.

Noël Stott: Yeah, as I say, especially the global environment today. Before people used to say, you know, the Soviet Union, or Russia or the US have reduced the number of nuclear warheads, we now only have 13,000 weapons as opposed to 40,000. So that you could measure as some sort of success. But the opposite is true today.

Robin Möser: Yes. I mean, let me conclude this interview with another question. And that would be what's your main expectation for the future of the field? And where do you expect to see it developing in the next five to 50 years?

Noël Stott: Look, I don't want to be too pessimistic, because of the environment that we are in at the moment. But I think, in my experience, for example, I'm on the scientific advisory group of the TPNW, and I think there's a really important role for scientists to play in terms of reducing the nuclear threat. And I think we have to... I would hope that governments and governmental officials base their policies on scientific evidence. You know, I think, often when we talk about civil society, we don't really think about scientists, for example, and the role that scientists can play. I mean, after all, scientists built the bomb, and maybe it should be scientists that dismantle or disarm, you know what I mean? So, I think, and I'm not, I mean, campaigning is very important. But I think in the future, we're going to have to be much more science-based in order to get our message across. That's the only thing I can really think of at this point.

Robin Möser: So, provocatively put: would your answer before the Russian invasion into Ukraine have been less pessimistic or about the same?

Noël Stott: No, I think less, I think you're right, I think less I mean, by the Russian invasion of Ukraine, I presume you also include the rhetoric that is coming out of Moscow in terms of a nuclear threat, but it's not only Russia, I mean, you got to admit, that the whole issue of deterrence has reared its head much bigger now again, so it's all nuclear weapons states, as I said earlier, that are increasing the capacity and sophistication of their nuclear weapons. And I would presume it's not only because of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, but that's certainly part of it. But I think it probably happened slightly before that as well.

Robin Möser: Yes, thank you Noël, I think that concludes our interview. Thank you. I appreciate it. Let me switch off the recording now.