2022 SPECIAL EDITION

JASON

Institute for Peace and Security Studies

35 *under* 35

This Generation's Voice on Peace and Security Issues











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Dear reader,

The magazine you are about to read is a very special one. It is the first ever edition of the JASON Institute's '35 under 35' list. In this magazine, we have featured 35 young professionals who work in the field of peace and security and are under the age of 35. We decided to approach the field of security broadly. So, besides geopolitical analysts and members of the Dutch Armed Forces, you will also find experts in climate security and journalists in this magazine. You will be reading about the war in Ukraine, polarisation, terrorist threats, inequality, and the dangers of climate change. Furthermore, the people on this list reflect on their own career paths, the challenges they have faced, and provide us with some valuable advice.

JASON is an organisation by and for young professionals. With this list, we aim to give this generation a platform and let different voices be heard on the most pressing issues of our time. The people on this list are the ones that we will need to get through current crises and secure a future for the generations to come. We need them now more than ever.

This magazine has been the product of several months of work. We started last spring with the creation of our expert panel. Over the course of various meetings, our experts reviewed many profiles of talented young professionals from all over the Netherlands. After extensive discussion, we ended up with the current list. There is no ranking, our selected candidates are all unique and cannot be compared. We spent the last couple months reaching out to all the candidates and sat down for full length interviews with some of them. We asked the others to answer some set questions, giving us a mix of longer and shorter interviews to present in the final magazine. We finalised the project in October with the help of our final editors and editorial committee and on the 1st of December 2022, we will celebrate the launch of this magazine with those on the list, the expert panel and the JASON board and committees.

This project would not have been possible without the help of our expert panel, consisting of Willemijn Aerdts, Annemijn van den Broek, Thierry van der Horst, Danny Pronk, Eric Schouten and Onno van Boven. We would like to extend our sincere gratitude to the time and effort our expert panel dedicated to select the final '35 under 35'. Lastly, we would like to thank all the members of the new editorial committee for their hard work and dedication these last months, as well as our final editors. We could not have done it without you.

We hope you enjoy this special edition of the JASON magazine and are inspired by brilliant young professionals on our '35 under 35' list!

Kind regards,
Anne and Naledi
Editors-in-Chief

Colophon

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Lin Brandwacht

Photo credits: Private picture

Thomas Kloosterman

Photo credits: Mediacentrum Defensie

Vincent Heuts

Photo credits: PZC (Provinciale Zeeuwse Courant)

We are prepared

Lin Brandwacht *is the commander of the nursing centre within a military rehabilitation centre.* ***Thomas Kloosterman*** *is a finance and control manager of a new F-35 unit and chairman at Jong Defensie.* ***Vincent Heuts*** *is a platoon commander in the explosives disposal unit. We sat down with Lin, Thomas and Vincent as a group to discuss their career journeys since attending the military academy together, the similarities and differences in their respective defence careers, and their perspectives on domestic and global issues.*

Interview with Lin Brandwacht, Thomas Kloosterman and Vincent Heuts

by Anne Preesman and Naledi Tilmann

Could you introduce yourselves, your career, and your role within the Armed Forces?

Vincent: I studied law in Maastricht and planned to become a judge, but soon after I started working as a lawyer, I realised that this was not the job for me. So a few years ago I joined the Royal Dutch Air Force and went to the Royal Military Academy together with Lin and Thomas. I initially worked at the airbase in Volkel as a platoon commander in the security forces, but later got a chance to apply for a job at the Explosieven Opruimingsdienst (EOD, Bomb Squad). That was my dream job when I was a child.

That was my dream job when I was a child

I am a platoon commander which means that I have one platoon under my guidance and we respond to around 3000 reports of explosives per year in the Netherlands. We dismantle bombs from the Second World War, but also those used by organised crime. It is a very nice job, but it is challenging as well. Being simultaneously an explosive expert and leading the platoon is difficult at times.

Lin: Before I began working for the army, I studied nursing and I became a team leader in civil nursing. After that, I went to the Royal Military Academy to become an officer. I could have chosen to become a nursing specialist as well, but I opted to become an officer because leadership is my passion. There, I became the platoon commander of a nursing facility in Ermelo. In that position, I had the chance to work during the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic and transformed a hotel into a nursing facility. I did that with a small part of my team and we worked together with many civil partners.

However, I recently became a mother, so I decided to do something that would give me more stability. Therefore, I am now a commander of two nursing wards at a military rehabilitation centre. There are 27 civil nurses under my guidance, a few of them are former soldiers, but I do not have any active members of the Armed Forces in my team at the moment.

Thomas: In contrast to Lin and Vincent, I joined the military directly after secondary school. I did my bachelor's degree in Military Management Sciences at the Royal Military Academy in Breda. I have not pursued a master's degree yet because it is quite difficult to start one once you are an officer. Right now, I am working as a finance and control manager at the Volkel Airbase in the brand new *F-35 Logistic Operations Center* unit.

Last year, I became the chairman of Jong Defensie (Young Defence), an organisation for young professionals within the Dutch Armed Forces. We organise activities facilitating discussion on high-level leadership for example, as well as drinks and parties.

You have all followed different paths, but found your way to the Dutch Armed Forces in the end. What motivates you to work for the Ministry of Defence?

Lin: When I was younger, I always had the ambition to join the police or the military. After gaining some experience in civil work in the healthcare sector, I thought to myself at age 26: "If I want to do it, I have to do it now." What I find attractive about working for the Armed Forces is the mentality, the combination of physical tasks and mental ones, the everpresent 'action' and the fact that you can help others by pursuing a common goal.

If I want to do it, I have to do it now

Thomas: I think a lot of people joining the Armed Forces have acquaintances or relatives working there. In my case, my uncle and my grandfathers were part of the military. So that is how I came to think of it. I first wanted to be a pilot, but that did not work out, so I started looking at other job offers within the Armed Forces. The reason why I chose to study at the Military Academy and not at a research university was because the goal of the Armed Forces is to be active in society and help people. I find the orientation towards business and financial gain off-putting. Also, if you become an officer in the Armed Forces, you receive many professional responsibilities already at the beginning of your career, whereas in other jobs, starting as a junior means that you have to work a long time before you can be in leadership positions.

This feels almost like a family

Vincent: For me, it is a combination of the ethos of the Armed Forces and the possibility to go on adventures. I agree with Thomas about the fact that most recruits join because they know people who are in some way connected to the military. And I also found myself in the same position as Lin: "If I want to join the Armed Forces, I have to do it now. It is now or never." The environment of the Armed Forces also allows for the creation of close relationships between colleagues. Compared to a nine-to-five job, this feels almost like a family, which is natural when working so closely together, but also essential for the good execution of our work. And the best conversations are always those in the early morning, when you have to stand guard with your buddy in the freezing cold.

Do you feel like there is a particular event, like Covid-19 or the war in Ukraine, that has shaped you, personally or professionally?

Vincent: The war in Ukraine shows the importance of being prepared. Within hours after the invasion, we were able to send fighter aircraft in that direction. This is a very complicated operation, and the fact that we were able to send them off so rapidly shows that we were well prepared. My unit is also closely involved. When needed, we are ready to intervene, and we are prepared. When we get the signal, we only need to pack our bags, prepare our guys, and go.

We only need to pack our bags, prepare our guys, and go

Lin: At the military rehabilitation centre we also have to be prepared, and we have to ensure the quality of the care we can give. After all, preparation is crucial for the Armed Forces: we train to be prepared for anything that might happen, to make sure that when it happens, we are ready. The challenge is then to keep people motivated when training for an event that might never happen.

Vincent: I find the preparation part especially challenging for those who do not have 'daily' operational tasks within the Ministry of Defence. For instance, people who are part of an infantry platoon are predominantly trained for conflict. If there is no conflict, they might decide to leave the Armed Forces.

Thomas: I think preparation is indeed the key word, because the Armed Forces have to always be prepared for any type of conflict, and nowadays pandemics as well. I was trained to vaccinate people over the Christmas holidays last year, which is something I never expected to do when I joined the Armed Forces. I also think that the war in Ukraine has changed many things. It made the Armed Forces more visible to the public and politicians because people realised that our job is not just to fight in distant wars, but also to protect our country. This is reflected in the military budget spending, as we finally managed to reach the minimum NATO contribution threshold, which is two per cent of the national GDP. At the same time, if the war were to end today, I think there is a risk that the topic of defence would again be considered less of a priority on the political agenda.

Vincent: The defence budget is always cut when conflicts end and we enter more peaceful times. We clearly saw this at the end of the Cold War in the 1990s. However, the fact that we were very active during the Covid-19 pandemic has made us more visible, and demonstrated that the Dutch Armed Forces are crucial in times of crisis. However, it should not distract us from our main goal, which is to protect our domestic boundaries, protecting our country and its inhabitants.

Lin: I think we should make society more aware that as the Armed Forces, we do more than just fighting wars. During the Covid-19 pandemic, it became clear that we can also make a significant contribution to the Dutch healthcare system.

At the moment people are feeling an increased sense of insecurity. Do you think that in the future this might result in a greater involvement of the Armed Forces within society?

Thomas: That is actually one of the goals within our new defence memorandum for 2022, to get the military more visible within society. Our leadership seems to realise more and more that we need to be visible, and I agree with that.

Vincent: I think that being visible matters mostly to the people living in the Netherlands. This means that when we go out with military vehicles and our combat uniforms on, people can see our presence and our daily contributions to society.

The Ministry of Defence is often stereotyped as being very hierarchical. Do you agree with this view? Is there space for young people to leave their mark?

Thomas: The hierarchy depends on the unit you work in, as the internal culture depends on the different units. However, hierarchy is important, since it facilitates the effective exchange of information in times of conflict. At the same time, it also makes it difficult for young people to get in touch with the leadership, but that is not impossible. At Jong Defensie, we are trying to get young people more involved. When coming up with new ideas or policies, young people are definitely needed. For instance, General Eichelsheim, the Commander of the Armed Forces, is now doing a project with various youth organisations within the Armed Forces to get young people involved in a more official manner. When drafting innovative policies, people from all ranks are needed, not just the highest ones.

Vincent: In times of war or crisis, hierarchy matters because it gives leaders both the responsibility and authority to make decisions. In those cases, immediate decision-making is needed, and you can later evaluate or criticise those decisions. However, when I have to dismantle an explosive with a colleague, we do not have time for official names and ranks. I need to be able to trust them 100% and have open and honest communication. This is because in our field, the smallest error can be fatal.

Lin: Nobody stands above the team. Even when you are a leader you are also part of the team. Of course, if a decision must be made, your team will turn

We are trying to build a stronger European partnership

to you as a leader. In other situations, you need to make use of the individual qualities of your team members. In those cases, ranks do not matter anymore. I am also in favour of placing young people in a close work environment with generals, so that they can get fresh new perspectives.

Recently there has been a strong emphasis on increased European cooperation in the defence sector. How do you experience this in your work?

Thomas: I work in the F-35 programme, which is of a very international character. Not all countries are partners, but the Netherlands is and that means that we have the right to take decisions on programmes, such as ones that work on building new engines. The United States is the biggest partner in this, but we also try to work very closely together with our European F-35 partners. We are trying to build a stronger European partnership. I think that is a good idea because we are geographically close to each other, we share a lot of similarities within our organisations and by working together we can be more effective and efficient.

Lin: In the military rehabilitation centre we have military personnel from various NATO member states. I think that is great, because we specialise in amputations, and the Netherlands is at the forefront of healthcare developments in this area. Hence, it is great for our partners to see how we work.

Vincent: Our training and education are also very international: we do it all across Europe, but also in the US and Canada. In the case of the Explosieven Opruimingsdienst, cooperation is especially strong with Belgium, the United Kingdom, and Denmark, as these were the four most bombed countries during the Second World War. If, for instance, you ask Americans, they do not have to engage in grenade clearing at a domestic level, because historically their involvement during the Second World War was different.

What do you think is the biggest challenge the Armed Forces will face in the coming decades?

Lin: If I look at the healthcare department, it is the quality of care we want to provide to our soldiers. Military healthcare specialists need to work in hospitals or similar structures in order to gain relevant work experience. There is a standard of quality which we want to give our soldiers. In addition to the medical standard that these people have to maintain, these people are also soldiers. To be a good soldier you must also be able to train as a soldier. The fact that they have to be good in both areas and be able to maintain this sufficiently to deliver the right quality is the biggest challenge.

Thomas: There are three big challenges. The first one is to have consistent and stable policies. Policies change all the time in response to what is happening in the world. Nowadays, for instance, we are moving from policies centred around terrorist threats to those oriented on domestic and international conflicts. There is also the military spending challenge when trying to build a stronger defence – it would be better if we have a stable situation in this regard and do not have to face any more budget cuts. The third challenge is something we already talked about, namely getting society more involved, and making sure that the public gets to know us better.

Vincent: I only have one thing to add, and that is keeping up with technology. We are making important advancements with cybernetics, artificial intelligence and robotics. However, staying up-to-date with technology is difficult because of legal and bureaucratic procedures within our organisation.

Before ending this interview, what advice would you give to young people who aspire to have a career in the Armed Forces?

Lin: Go for it! You can do so much within the Ministry of Defence. During my year at the Academy I learned so much about myself, both as a professional and as a person and every day I still learn new things. The possibilities are endless as long as you want it and look for it yourself. My motto: Everything you give attention to, grows.

Vincent: Always aim higher. Other people will not be able to reach your standards if they are so high that you have not reached them yet either. I always tell my colleagues: it is only good when it is better.

Thomas: The opportunities are endless within the Armed Forces. I very much like that you are able to change jobs or even your main field. It is a great opportunity to learn a lot about yourself and improve your leadership skills. Just go for it! ■

Thomas and Dutch Minister of Defence Kajsa Ollongren
Photo credits: Private picture

Photo credits: Private picture

Jessica den Outer

Jessica den Outer is recognised as an earth-centred law expert with the United Nations Harmony with nature programme. As an advocate for the Rights of Nature, she uses her expertise to host campaigns and projects to inform and inspire others on environmental issues.

What opportunities can you identify for positive change within your field?

There is a lot that needs to be improved in environmental laws. More technical regulations will not help bring about the change that is needed. Besides increased precautionary approaches, we need a paradigm shift in the way we see ourselves. We need to understand humans are part of nature, not rulers over the earth. We need to take the interests of the rest of nature with us in all our decisions and practices. We can do so through the Rights of Nature, which appoints human guardians to stand up for nature. Through fighting biodiversity and habitat loss, we are building a secure future for our own species, as our well-being depends on a sustainable and healthy planet.

What career advice can you offer to those looking to join your field?

People will say you are crazy if you decide to follow a career path that no one has taken before. But I believe that if you follow your passions, you will always find a way to make it work. We need more people to think outside the box. These scary times of ecological crises ask for creative solutions. If you wish to join the Rights of Nature field, I highly encourage you to start by researching and learning more about the Rights of Nature and volunteer with organisations like the Global Alliance for the Rights of Nature or Earth Law Center.

Marlin van Hal

Marlin van Hal is general director of Triangular Group Academy (TGA), a training and knowledge institute in the field of security and resilience. TGA employs more than two hundred instructors every day for the Dutch government (half of which for the army). She is a former professional athlete and has won several national championship titles.

What opportunities can you identify for positive change within your field?

In the Netherlands, the government should guarantee the safety and resilience of our society. Both the armed forces and the police have serious staff shortages, particularly in instructional positions. This hinders capacity building and thus increases existing deficits, setting a negative spiral into motion. Public-private partnerships can be a solution to this problem.

Internationally, there are countless examples of strategic partnerships between private military contractors and governments that have an enormous impact on the employability of units and teams within the security and resilience sector. In my opinion, these potential strategic partnerships represent the greatest opportunity for a more resilient society.

What are your ambitions for the future?

With my team, we are striving to make the TGA Europe's largest training and knowledge institution in the field of safety and resilience by 2026. A formal strategic partnership with the Dutch Armed Forces is one of the first steps associated with these growth plans. Additionally, we aspire to expand to an international level.

My ambition is to continue to grow as a professional in parallel to the growth of the organisation so that I can continue to contribute and invest in TGA and remain a valuable member of this fantastic community.

Photo credits: SiemsMedia

Xiaoxue Martin

Xiaoxue Martin is a research fellow at the Clingendael China Centre and the Strategic Initiatives & Outreach Unit. Her research focuses on the contemporary politics and international relations of China.

Why did you decide to join your field and have you faced any obstacles or challenges in your career path?

Although I have always loved learning about the country where I was born, I did not set out to become a China researcher right away. Luckily, I had the freedom to explore my interests during my bachelor's at University College Maastricht. Looking back, even my very first paper covered China. An incredible semester abroad in Taiwan confirmed this was the right fit for me.

China is an important global player, yet our knowledge of it is often lacking, which leads to dangerous misperceptions. Therefore, I realised my passion is to increase my understanding of China and use my knowledge to inform the public debate as well as policymakers.

What do you consider the biggest security threat faced by China, currently or in the (near) future?

Beijing is facing daunting challenges in both its internal and external environment. Domestically, climate change and environmental degradation pose immense environmental security risks, as China grapples with increasingly extreme natural disasters, suffocating pollution, desertification, and water scarcity.

Both internally and externally, Beijing deals with many threats to its claims of national sovereignty, from the South and East China Sea to Hong Kong, Tibet, and Taiwan. Beijing has territorial disputes with several of its neighbours, creating a constant headache for the Communist Party.

Photo credits: Clingendael Institute

Karel de Zoete

Karel de Zoete currently serves as chief of staff to a senior partner at Deloitte Risk Advisory, assisting in advising the boards and executive teams of global companies on cybersecurity, geopolitical risk, and financial crime.

What opportunities can you identify for positive change within your field?

While significant challenges remain, I have witnessed several positive changes, both in the wider field through an increase of public-private information sharing partnerships and intelligence sharing but also personally, in my own organisation. I believe that the inclusion of diverse and multidisciplinary talent in teams can help solve today's complex problems. My own team reflects this argument – we have various interesting backgrounds (political scientists, military cyber reservists, and even a computational linguist) and numerous nationalities. All offer a unique and creative perspective.

What career advice can you offer to those looking to join your field?

My personal advice for those just starting out is to not confine yourself too much to specific fields of work. Try to explore various ventures and seize opportunities that initially might feel outside of your comfort zone. Continuously seeking new ways to challenge yourself will aid you in your own professional development. Find like-minded people, they will be of great help – like a sword needs a whetstone.

For those who already have a wealth of experience under their belt: stay curious, and maintain a helpful, knowledgeable, sensible, and flexible posture. Engage with more junior-level people, who often possess a wealth of valuable expertise that more seniors may not be well-versed in.

Photo credits: Tessa van Voorthuizen

Waiting for checkmate

Interview with Isa Yusibov

by Jacco van der Veen and Anne Preesman

Isa Yusibov came to the Netherlands from Azerbaijan as a refugee. His father, one of the prominent opposition figures in Azerbaijan, inspired him to study politics. Isa has had a career as a geopolitical analyst, started his own consultancy firm on Eurasian risk intelligence, and is now working as a senior financial crime analyst at Delta Capita.

Photo credits: Private picture

Isa, you have had quite some changes in your career already, Can you tell us a bit about your career path?

Geopolitics has always been the red thread in my life. After all, it was the reason why we had to leave Azerbaijan. After my studies, I worked as a geopolitical analyst in the United Kingdom. Here, I used to write analyses for international clients on a large variety of topics. I primarily focused on Europe, Central Asia, the Caucasus, and Turkey because of the languages.

At some point I wanted to experience London, the heart of geopolitical analysis, so I moved to London to continue my career. When Covid-19 hit, I moved back to the Netherlands for personal reasons. It was difficult to find a fitting job here, so I established my own consultancy firm and started to work closely with relevant Dutch institutions. For instance, I was involved in a project with the Ministry of the Interior ahead of the elections in March 2021.

Aside from this, I have also frequently appeared in the media to give my view on the situation in Russia, Turkey, and the wider Eurasian region. In the meantime, I have worked on other things as a contributor, for instance for the Dutch television programme ZEMBLA. For more than a year I have been working as a senior financial crime analyst at Delta Capita, a leading global financial services provider.

You remain very active on Twitter, where you mainly share your views on geopolitics, including on the Russia-Ukraine war. Your Twitter account gained quite a following. How did this happen, and did you expect beforehand that this could happen?

Actually, not at all. I started with Twitter in 2013. I decided to study how Twitter could be optimised during my tenure in the UK to help the online visibility of my employers as a business model. This helped us to attract renowned clients.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, I shared lots of non-political stuff such as pictures of cats, chess, and Caucasian dances. And then of course the war in Ukraine started, which saw my amount of followers increase rapidly. People started sharing my tweets and analyses, which has some advantages in that I am being approached a lot by media and organisations such as foreign embassies in the Netherlands, to share my thoughts on geopolitical developments.

Because I am quite outspoken, partly because of my own family background and my experiences, I also get my fair share of negative responses. The increase in attention has also made me realise my responsibility more. Before I post news about the war, I make sure to fact-check it thoroughly and wait with sharing information until it is officially confirmed. So far, I have only once fallen for a photoshop five months ago, which I am still quite frustrated about. I consider it my responsibility to share correct information about the war, and follow the news from hundreds of sources in the Eurasian region very closely.

This Twitter thing is not something I make money with, although many followers have suggested sending me money for my reports on Twitter. I have always kindly refused the idea, simply because I have the desire to inform the public. Being fast with translated live updates also makes it easier for Dutch media outlets to take a dive into those subjects. For example, journalists regularly approach me for further elaboration of news from my sources, and I always try to get back to them quickly.

Chess is actually just like politics and war

You post frequently about the war in Ukraine. What is your view on the access to information concerning the war that we get in the West, especially in the Netherlands, and how would you compare that to your own sources?

First of all, I read from many different angles, including pro-Kremlin media, which I have for more than a decade. It is important to know why they do what they do, and what – even if historically wrong – the Russian actions are based on. In general, however, I think the debate on Ukraine has so far been dominated by realists, also in the Dutch public discourse, without taking into consideration many other factors, such as the society in Ukraine or the level of corruption in Russia which has contributed to military failures on the ground.

The perspective, coming from conventional warfare, was that "Ukraine can never win this war, they need to negotiate, even give up some territory for the sake of peace, and sanctions will not work". Of course, the second most powerful army in the world cannot be stopped with sanctions in six months. However, the sanctions have gotten Russia in deep trouble in different ways, including financial and military capabilities. For instance, they cannot produce new weapons due to the sanctions.

I believe that many of the misconceptions about the war, including the belief that Russia would inevitably win, stem from a lack of understanding about the sentiment in many post-Soviet countries. Many people in Ukraine, including my friends, say that they are not going to give one inch to the Russians and feel a strong urge to defend their country. Western analysts tend to view these conflicts from a conventional realist perspective. But the war has demonstrated its limitations.

With this in mind, what do you think is the future for the Russian regime and its opposition?

In the first place, there is no real opposition in Russia, which is the nature of all authoritarian countries. I come from Azerbaijan, which ranks even lower on the democracy index than Russia. The real opposition in such a country is sadly either imprisoned, exiled, or assassinated already. However, you do have many oligarchs and elite interests, which form the main threat to Putin. He has to balance these powers. I believe that at some point, there will be a regime change in Russia, but it will not be bottom-up. It rather will be from within the Kremlin itself, and orchestrated by possibly some of the oligarchs with the support of the intelligence services. That is because this requires both money and support from the *Siloviki*, those who hold power in the intelligence circles.

As long as the war continues, the oligarchs are deprived of their financial assets abroad, so they might be willing to negotiate with the West, and overthrow Putin in order to make a deal. For the West, this would be more appealing than the prospect of a nuclear war. Putin is in a difficult position right now. Russia cannot win this war, and it will become increasingly difficult for him to stay in power.

Putin is paranoid and this way he can check what is going on around him. In short, I do believe that the demise of Putin's regime is inevitable, but I do not have high hopes for the current opposition. Democratisation in Russia will be a long-term process.

I believe that the demise of Putin's regime is inevitable

Aside from the war in Ukraine, there have been many other developments on the Eurasian continent, including the recent flare-up of the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh. How do you view this conflict?

I believe that both the Armenian and the Azeri governments should realise that what happened is in the past, and they should start cooperating and look forward. This is the only way to achieve stability and peace. I believe that the younger generation is more keen on becoming friends, and trying to understand each other and strike peace between communities.

In the end, much depends on the Russian presence. The hand of Russia can be seen in the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh as Putin wants to exert Russian influence in the region. I predicted that Armenia and Turkey would seek a resolution together when Russia would see its influence diminishing, which is happening nowadays.

As long as Russia still has influence, it will do everything to sabotage peace deals. This is something the West should take into account. Going forward, I remain optimistic about peace in the region.

We know that you are also an avid chess player. Do you see parallels between the game and geopolitics?

When people try to analyse geopolitics, they tend to use chess metaphors. I certainly do this as well. In my opinion, chess is actually just like politics and war, and vice versa, given all those pieces, different strategies, (mis)calculated outcomes, etc. However, Russia is attempting to play poker using nuclear cards. But Putin has overplayed his hand, and now we are waiting for checkmate, which has been long overdue.■

Adája Stoetman

Adája Stoetman is a research fellow at the Security Unit of the Clingendael Institute. Her research focuses on European defence cooperation and national and international security trends.

What do you consider the biggest security threat faced by Europe, currently or in the (near) future?

Writing this at a time when war is waging on the European continent for the first time in almost thirty years, it is easy to say that Russian aggression is the biggest security threat to Europe. And I believe this is partially true. But we should not forget about a whole range of other threats. Rising geopolitical tensions in new theatres (e.g. the Arctic region), instability surrounding the European continent, but also in the region's neighbouring overseas territories, and climate change and the wide-ranging implications it brings about, are just a few examples of threats Europe still needs to be wary about.

What are your ambitions for the future?

When talking about my dream job when I was younger, Clingendael always ranked top on the list. Now that this has already become a reality, I will have to look for other dreams. At present, I am very happy with my job at Clingendael as it provides me with a lot of interesting opportunities. But a more political environment also draws my curiosity. Therefore, I would be curious to experience what it is like to work at the Ministry of Defence, preferably as a policy advisor and contributing to the strategy of the ministry.

Photo credits: Clingendael Institute

Fleur de Braaf

Fleur de Braaf works as a policy officer in the Security Department at the Municipality of The Hague, where she focuses on radicalisation. She is also a board member at Women in International Security in the Netherlands (WIIS-NL) and an associate at the political risk consultancy, Libya Desk.

What opportunities can you identify for positive change within your field?

There has been much attention on broader radicalisation prevention projects aiming to increase the resilience of young people by organising lessons at locations such as schools. These projects aim to engage with children at different ages to give them tools that can help debunk disinformation and add a nuanced view to black-or-white thinking. The focus on broader prevention not only contributes to the field of terrorism and radicalisation but can play a role in making children less susceptible to other groups who engage in violence, such as gangs.

What are your ambitions for the future?

As a policy officer on radicalisation, I want to move from the local to the international playing field; taking what I have learnt on the local and practical level and applying it to the national and international stage. Additionally, as events director at WIIS-NL, I want to help grow WIIS-NL's network and contribute to the Women, Peace, and Security agenda in the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

Photo credits: Lotte Senior

Amy Blessing

Amy Blessing is an initiative coordinator at the Global Counterterrorism Forum Administrative Unit and Treasurer at Women in International Security in the Netherlands. She is co-author of The Global, Regional and Local Politics of Institutional Responses to Covid-19: Implications for Women and Children *(October 2022, Palgrave MacMillan).*

What do you consider the biggest global security threat, currently or in the (near) future?

Climate change is the most worrying global security threat for me, particularly because of its impact on every corner of the globe, and the fact that it is a threat multiplier. Water and food insecurity, displacement, and the threat to progress on women's rights are already a reality.

What career advice can you offer to those looking to join your field?

Keep your options open and when searching for a job, identify the issues you are not interested in working on, and keep an open mind about the rest. Building up skills is important, so the more proactive you are in gaining these skills (through internships, jobs, volunteering), the faster you can progress. Your first job is often not your dream job, but one that gives you enough skills to learn and advance further.

Photo credits: Private picture

I am not the classical ivory tower academic

Interview with Jeanine de Roy van Zuijdewijn

by David Mendelsohn and Naledi Tilmann

Jeanine de Roy van Zuijdewijn is a knowledge coordinator on international security topics at the Dutch House of Representatives. She is also an assistant professor at the Institute of Security and Global Affairs (ISGA) at Leiden University, which she joined nine years ago.

Photo credits: Arash Nikkhah (Sep 2021)

Thank you for sitting down with us today. Can you talk about your career path so far, and your recent switch in jobs?

I studied at Utrecht University, completing a bachelor's degree in Liberal Arts and Sciences, majoring in political history and international relations, and then my master's degree in International Relations in Historical Perspective. I interned at the Centre for Terrorism and Counterterrorism, where I helped with a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) on terrorism led by Edwin Bakker. This led me to Leiden University, where for the past years I have been completing different research projects, my PhD, and teaching.

I am not the classical ivory tower academic. My aim is to make knowledge relevant for society, and perhaps to give a more nuanced view on topics within the policy arena or the media. In August, I started a new position as a knowledge coordinator on international security-related topics at the Dutch parliament. Part of my job is to see how we can make academic literature and reports relevant for politicians in the committee on defence and foreign affairs, using skills that I learnt at ISGA as a researcher.

What would you say are some major challenges or obstacles in creating the bridge between academia and policy?

They are very different cultures and worlds, with different ways of doing things. In academia, you generally have time to really dive deep into a topic. Whereas, if you work for the ministry or parliament, you are working on the 'debates of tomorrow', and therefore you have a very limited time frame.

I know that sometimes there is a lack of trust between academics and, for example, people within law enforcement or the intelligence services because of the difficulties in sharing data. I have been part of the European Expert Network on terrorism issues, which is made up of academics, intelligence service officers, law enforcement, and the police. This kind of interdisciplinary committee allows for a bridge between theory and practice. Fortunately, I think the Netherlands is a good example of this bridge between academia and practitioners as we often have open discussions and the ministries invite us to contribute to their strategies.

What are your thoughts on the current policy framework surrounding terrorism, and how does this parallel or diverge from the public sentiment?

In the post-9/11 climate, we can see that societies and politicians can make the threat bigger by way of their response, which feeds into the terrorist desire to polarise societies. Sometimes governments or politicians might be worried that citizens will overreact, although my research has shown me that sometimes governments and politicians tend to overreact more than citizens do.

Since 9/11, the Islamist extremism threat has been very dominant in the field of terrorism and for a lot of Western governments. But now, there is an emerging threat from far-right extremism and partially terrorism as well. How do you view this emerging threat, and how governments are reacting to it?

We can still see the side effects of responses to 9/11 and the War on Terror. For a long time, that was the dominant paradigm. I do think we are fortunately past that phase where people only equated terrorism with jihadism and Muslims because this had lots of effects on the stigmatisation of communities, securitisation, and discrimination. However, we need to be careful not to overcompensate by saying jihadism is no longer a threat, and that right-wing extremism is now the major threat or the new wave of terrorism on a global scale. Paradoxically, I think that this new focus is also part of a Western bias. If you look at the number of people killed by terrorist attacks worldwide, still 90 or 95 per cent are Muslims being killed by jihadists in Muslim majority countries. So it might also be a very westernised view to speak of a dominant wave of right-wing extremism. If you look beyond the US, Professor Tore Bjørgo and his colleagues in Norway, among the leading experts on right-wing extremism worldwide, recently published a new dataset that also shows that generally speaking, right-wing terrorism is not as much 'on the rise' as many people think. We need that kind of dispassionate, objective academic analysis in a debate that is very politicised now.

You wrote your PhD about meaning-making in the aftermath of terrorist attacks. What did your research show?

I looked at four cases. One in Brussels, at the airport and the metro. The second in Nice, at the boulevard on Bastille Day. The third in Berlin, at the Christmas market. The fourth in Manchester, the attack at the Ariana Grande concert. I looked at a one-year time period after the individual event occurred, zooming in on the response of both the authorities and the citizens. My initial idea was that there would be some kind of Europeanisation of responses to terrorism because of the unfortunate volume of attacks in the past few years.

However, it was actually very different. In the case of Manchester, in the aftermath of the attack, the authorities and the citizens co-organised events and really emphasised the identity of the city. Manchester is a former industrial city that has seen a lot of hardships, such as the IRA attack in the 1990s.

We can still see the side effects of responses to 9/11 and the War on Terror

Photo credits: TV show OP1

The response was to emphasise the spirit of coping with hardships and demonstrating the resilience to move forward. In France, the anniversary was a huge event, however, it was completely dominated by the state. Macron, who had just become president, drove through the city and was shaking people's hands. French fighter jets were flying over, and the French flag was everywhere. In Berlin, I witnessed multiple demonstrations, both from the far-left and the far-right, using commemoration services as platforms to draw attention to their own political points of view. In Brussels, the week after the attack, people organised marches against fear to show that they were not afraid. However, ironically, the authorities who had authorised the march had to cancel at the last minute because of new information on potential security threats, leaving many people unhappy and angry. This is another way of channelling responses to terrorist attacks: anger, as a valid response.

So, in one case they really worked together to emphasise positive values. In others, we saw demonstrations or a lack of cooperation between authorities and the citizens. Therefore, they were very different responses.

Turning now to the situation in the Sahel. The French withdrew from Mali. Terrorism and coups plague Burkina Faso. Do you believe the Netherlands and the EU (member states) are doing enough to combat these challenges?

I think that you can say that the region has been quite overlooked over the past few years, however, not for all countries. For example, France has had strong links to the region in terms of history, and recently Mali has been on the radar and many European countries, including the Netherlands, have contributed to counterterrorism efforts. But I think we have always been more focused on what happened in Syria, Iraq, or Afghanistan.

We must be very careful with how we label terrorism

One final question. In 2019, President Trump designated Iran as a state sponsor of terrorism, and the Revolutionary Guard as a terrorist group. There are now calls, from people such as the President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelensky, for the US to designate Russia as a state sponsor of terrorism. How do you look at this, and how do you look at the designation of radicalisation?

As an academic, I think we must be very careful with how we label terrorism because it is already so difficult to define. More than two hundred definitions exist and neither academics nor states can seem to agree on what it really is. Usually, it is applied to non-state actors, however, this does not mean that states cannot use terror as a tool against their own citizens or citizens of other countries. That is usually the distinction that academics make: you have terrorism, which is perpetrated by non-state actors; and you have terror, that can be used by states. There are many legal frameworks that already outlaw the use of such acts of terror by states, also in situations of armed conflict. Besides this form of "state terror", there is the question of to what extent we know that some states are indeed involved in supporting terrorist organisations, or state-sponsored terrorism. That is another category. We have to be careful in how we apply the terrorism label to states. On a personal level, however, I can clearly understand why you want to use a strong label for completely abhorrent acts.

What would your advice be to young people entering the security field?

There are a lot of different places for you to go and work so just get out there and find internships or become a member of an organisation like the JASON Institute! Go to events and lectures, approach people and make sure that people get to know you a little bit. Do not be afraid to ask people for help, and grasp opportunities. Also, do not underestimate your skills.

Do not be afraid to ask people for help

I think I was lucky, but I also worked hard. The key is to start small, work together with inspiring people, whether they are experienced or also new to the field, make yourself seen and step out of your comfort zone. ■

Bas Knapp

Bas Knapp is hoogheemraad & lo-co-dijkgraaf bij Hoogheemraadschap van Rijnland (vice chairman of the Water Board in Rijnland). Furthermore, he is the chair of the University Council of Leiden University.

What do you consider the biggest security threat faced by the Netherlands, currently or in the (near) future?

In my field of work, the biggest challenge is absolutely dealing with the consequences of climate change. The Netherlands is the lowest-lying country in Europe and many rivers flow through our river delta into the North Sea. The issue of sinking land paired with rising sea and river water levels make the challenge of protecting the Netherlands against water bigger and more complex.

What career advice can you offer to those looking to join your field?

I have a political-administrative job, which requires me to be a member of a political party. Many people find it odd when young people have a political position with so much responsibility. Nevertheless, my advice is that you should always go for it, as decisions are taken in many of these positions that will eventually impact our future. Therefore, I believe our generation should take on leading roles in work dealing with issues like climate change, environment, and water. You should just go for it with that message in the back of your mind.

Photo credits: Hoogheemraadschap van Rijnland

Erin Bijl

Erin Bijl is a Conflict Studies and Human Rights graduate, currently working at PAX as a senior project officer in the Protection of Civilians team. Her work focuses on civilian harm mitigation and response.

Why did you decide to join your field, and have you faced any obstacles or challenges in your career path?

One of the first experiences that made me consider a career in this field was my visit to Syria, shortly before the country was swept up in the Arab Spring and the subsequent armed conflict. It was surreal to see the news of the regime's violent crackdown on peaceful protests and the descent into conflict just months after my return. I thought of all the people I had met there. Since then, I have sometimes struggled with the question of whether I am making enough of a positive impact with my work, but every bit helps.

What opportunities can you identify for positive change within your field?

I see two opportunities. Firstly, my field is still quite dominated by well-educated Western people. There is a strong tendency to talk *about* people in conflict as opposed to talking *with* them. Balancing these two aspects a little more might positively contribute to resolving conflict or addressing its root causes. I also find it hopeful to see that, these days, the younger generations seem more protest-inclined when faced with global challenges, such as climate change or the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Photo credits: Lize Kraan/PAX, 2022

Louise van Gend

Louise van Gend is a policy maker in the Counterterrorism and National Security division at the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. She has extensive professional experience in the field of diplomacy and security.

What opportunities can you identify for positive change within your field?

I believe the Netherlands has evolved as one of the key players in international cooperation in counterterrorism (CT) and prevention of violent extremism (PVE). Other countries are interested in our approach to prevent radicalisation. At the same time, we learn from others as well. I believe that is the key for positive change in CT and PVE (or in any policy field): keeping an open and critical mind and learning from other countries, civil society organisations and academia. That is the only way to form innovative policies and practices.

What are your ambitions for the future?

In the future, I want to apply my expertise in other policy areas within or outside security policy. The benefit of working for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) is that there are many interesting themes and countries to work on. So, after seven years working on counterterrorism, I would also love to expand my horizons within the MFA and the field of international relations. I believe, with the current geopolitical challenges, diplomacy is more needed than ever.

Photo credits: Private picture

Photo credits: Private picture

Joris Teer is a strategic/China analyst at the Hague Centre for Strategic Studies (HCSS). His work focuses on geo-economic issues such as semiconductors, critical raw materials, and supply chains as well as maritime security in the Indo-Pacific.

Great power rivalry is heating up

Interview with Joris Teer

by David Mendelsohn

Welcome Joris. How did you get into this line of work and where did your interest in strategic analysis and China come from?

From a young age, I have been interested in how domestic Dutch politics affected Dutch society. That is what led me to pursue a degree in political science and international relations at Amsterdam University College (AUC). Since my first year at AUC, I have been doing research on the effects of hard clashes between states on the economic security of the Netherlands, and more broadly the European Union. While attending the Netherlands-Asia Honours Summer School, I realised that the rise of China was an extremely important international development and I wanted to focus on it.

My shifting area of focus from the domestic to the international is logical if you take the events of the last ten years into account. These events are elements of a fractured post-Cold War order and the relative certainty that it provided. As a great power rivalry is heating up, the effects of Russia's energy politics, China's zero-covid policy, uncertainty around the future of Taiwan, the US tech offensive against Beijing and OPEC+'s unwillingness to pump up more oil, increasingly defines the lives of Dutch and European people. This is especially true for those who are less well-off. There are fewer and fewer certainties in the world. In this new era, Dutch and European politicians and policy-makers are tasked with making our societies and economies more resilient to the shock effects of geopolitical earthquakes. A strategic analyst like myself helps politicians to anticipate what these shocks may be, when they are likely to occur and how to prepare for them. For instance, my colleague Mattia Bertolini and I recently published a report on the Critical Raw Materials for the Semiconductor Industry.

On evidence-based policy-making, George Perkovic of the Carnegie Endowment recently said that "the problem is not lack of knowledge amongst political leaders but rather the political incentives that drive them to ignore knowledge". How do you reflect on his assessment and do you recognise this in your own line of work?

That probably has some truth to it. Take the visit of Nancy Pelosi to Taiwan. It was popular in the United States, but did it contribute to the goal of deterring aggression by China against Taiwan, and maintaining peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait? I am not sure. In his new book *Avoidable War*, Kevin Rudd, the former Prime Minister of Australia, makes a case against taking provocative actions which do not contribute specifically to a strategic goal. The jury is still out on whether the Pelosi visit did this.

When we examine the conflict in Ukraine, newer forms of conflict such as cyberwarfare have certainly been a characteristic, yet the war is playing out quite 'conventionally' means. Have we perhaps overstated the role of this technology in war?

In the interdependent and globalised world we live in, great powers can badly hurt each other with mostly economic means. Think of the weaponisation of energy by Russia against Europe and the use of US technology against China and Russia. US National Security adviser Jake Sullivan was explicit about the ambitious goal of economic weapons: "If implemented in a way that is robust, durable, and comprehensive, export controls can be a new strategic asset in the US and allied toolkit to impose costs on adversaries, and even over time degrade their battlefield capabilities."

There are many security threats in the foreseeable future. Which one do you think has the highest likelihood of impacting society?

At HCSS we try to assess likelihood and impact separately. In terms of high likelihood, we are looking at hard economic competition. This will also affect rich countries like the Netherlands. Beijing will respond to the US attempts to choke-off the development of China's chip sector at some point, perhaps through weaponising the critical raw material value chains they control. These materials are necessary to manufacture anything, from wind turbines, to solar panels and computer chips.

(left to right) Hugo Reitsma, Joris Teer, Rob de Wijk, and Arend Jan Boekestijn

Photo credits: Private picture

Any clash between the US and China over Taiwan, the South-China Sea or the East-China Sea concerns me

In terms of high impact but lower probability events, any clash between the US and China over Taiwan, the South-China Sea or the East-China Sea concerns me. Contrary to Ukraine, the US has given security guarantees to Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan. This means that two superpowers are looking each other directly in the eye.

Do you have any tips for young professionals and the next generation of international security experts?

Since jobs are scarce in the field, find some way to distinguish yourself. My focus on China and my experience with living in Beijing and Shanghai helped me stand out. In these very challenging times, it is important to develop skills to help policy-makers grapple with tough decisions. We are living through an incredible geopolitical transition that will affect the lives of many. There is an opportunity to make a small contribution to ensuring the Netherlands and the European Union are more resilient to these geopolitical shocks. ■

Find some way to distinguish yourself

Jennifer Dowling

Jennifer Dowling is a PhD candidate in the Terrorism and Political Violence research group at the Institute of Security and Global Affairs at Leiden University. Her current PhD research is focused on better understanding why individuals do not cross the threshold to become involved in various forms of political violence. Before pursuing her PhD, she worked as a tutor in the BSc Security Studies at Leiden University and taught a range of courses related to security and global affairs. Prior to that, she worked as the associate IT editor for the journal, Perspectives on Terrorism, and as a researcher at the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism.

What do you consider the biggest global security threat, currently or in the (near) future?

I think we should approach this question with caution. Often the media can play a role in amplifying certain threats, and it is important to approach each threat with caution, be it from conflict, terrorism, or otherwise. Thinking globally, I think the biggest security threat we are facing is undeniably climate change. The impacts of climate change are already disproportionately impacting communities around the world. The consequences have secondary side-effects such as intensifying pressure on natural resources, socio-economic issues, as well as creating conditions of insecurity within different contexts globally.

What opportunities can you identify for positive change within your field?

One area for positive change within my field is the increasing interdisciplinarity within (counter-)terrorism research. Tackling such a complex topic requires multiple perspectives and analytical lenses to make sense of the phenomenon. The Terrorism and Political Violence research group I am part of at the Institute of Security and Global Affairs consists of researchers with a variety of disciplinary backgrounds, ranging from history, political science, sociology, psychology, and geography to name a few. Having these interdisciplinary perspectives allows us to move (counter-) terrorism research in a positive direction.

Photo credits: Arash Nikkhah Photographer

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Irina Tziamali

Irina Tziamali is a PhD candidate at Radboud University, focusing on inclusion in work experiences and processes within the Dutch government. Before that, she worked as a Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DE&I) officer at the Dutch Air Force.

Why did you decide to join your field and have you faced any obstacles or challenges in your career path?

Throughout my time at the Royal Military Academy, I experienced different group dynamics based on gender. For instance, there seemed to be a lot of competition amongst women and women experienced multiple forms of harassment. I wondered how these social group dynamics had evolved within the Academy. Without planning on it, my research became a catalyst for interventions in the field of diversity and inclusion. My thesis gave me possibilities to move further into the field of diversity, equity, and inclusion. However, I also had to cope with a lot of resistance to these interventions from former colleagues. This has been one of the biggest challenges within my position as DE&I officer.

What career advice can you offer to those looking to join your field?

Create a strong support system of trustworthy people around you with whom you can share your experiences and challenges. Do not be afraid to be vulnerable with close colleagues, friends and family. Their emotional support might be crucial at difficult times. While there will be challenges, try to reflect on the positive aspects of your experiences as well. Lastly, do not pay undue attention to your inner critic. As a change agent, critiquing an organisation makes it natural to be more critical of oneself. Try to focus on your achievements and use your mistakes as lessons instead of self-criticism.

Kimberley Kruijver

Kimberley Kruijver works on strategic security and defence issues, including hybrid threats, information manoeuvre and serious gaming, in her role as a research consultant at TNO (The Netherlands Organisation for Applied Scientific Research). She was previously a researcher at the Clingendael Institute and interned at the security policy department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

What opportunities can you identify for positive change within your field?

One major opportunity is to close the gender equality gap. The security sector is still dominated by a male presence. I think that it is important to achieve a more equal representation of men and women. Therefore, I always try to support female colleagues and students aspiring to join the security sector. It goes without saying that the same applies for people of colour and members of the LGBTQ+ community.

What career advice can you offer to those looking to join your field?

I have seen many intelligent people worry too much about grades (which no one will look at when you apply for jobs in our field, believe me) and finding a job as soon as possible. My advice would be to not let your student days fly by without enjoying the opportunities it offers you. My best decision was to study abroad in South Africa, which not only contributed to my personal growth and created some of my best memories, but it also always comes up during job interviews. If you can talk about something you thoroughly enjoy(ed), the ice is broken immediately.

Photo credits: Private picture

Cybersecurity is not about machines or securing systems, but about securing progress

Dave Maasland is the CEO of cybersecurity company ESET Netherlands. He is passionate about educating others on cybersecurity opportunities and threats.

Interview with Dave Maasland

by Anne Preesman

Photo credits: William Rutten

Could you tell us a bit about yourself?

I studied commercial economics and started out as an intern at a sales company. My brother, an ethical hacker, always inspired me regarding cybersecurity. So, when I saw an advertisement to work at an antivirus company, which was the working term for cybersecurity at the time, he inspired me to apply. Back in the day, technology and cybersecurity had a Robin Hood element to it, anyone from a dorm room could bring down a major corporation. That intrigued me. So I kept on working, studying, and I became the commercial director and later the CEO of ESET Netherlands, the local Dutch office of the largest cybersecurity company group in the European Union. Even after becoming CEO, I kept developing and for the last five or six years, I have also taken part in the national debates concerning cybersecurity because I think there is still a lot that needs to be done. It is a very young industry, so besides focusing on the company and its trajectory, I also try to focus on communicating with a broader audience.

What do you think are the big issues that governments, institutions, and private companies face when it comes to cybersecurity?

I think we can divide the problem into two main issues. I call it "survive and thrive". We have become highly digitised and so many processes have become smarter and more efficient. Think of the transformation of offices, the emergence of artificial intelligence, and all the possibilities for collaboration. That is one side of it. The one question we did not think through is "are we doing this in a secure manner?" We have digitised the entire planet while knowing that it is not 100% secure. Software is developed by humans, so there are mistakes in software which attackers, criminals or states can exploit. And we know what can happen in terms of attacks on critical infrastructure. I see these attacks as a real threat to national security. That is the "survive" aspect of the problem.

Cybersecurity had a Robin Hood element to it that intrigued me

The "thrive" problem is different. Even though I do not believe technology is a silver bullet or can single-handedly solve every issue, I do think technology is a part of every answer to big challenges. In the fight against climate change, poverty, or for international peace, technology is going to play a role. And if technology is inherently insecure, we are not going to achieve the progress we need. So in the end, cybersecurity is not about machines or securing systems but about securing progress.

A lot of people are hesitant to get involved with cyber because they just do not understand what it is. What do you think makes many people struggle with cybersecurity?

I think what makes people view it as, "This is about cyberspace. This is about technology." And while technology causes these problems, it is actually the same old concept. People spy on each other. Nations wage war. The concepts behind it are not changing.

When it comes to cyber, we need to keep updating, keep patching, and keep making better policies. We need to show people that cyber is just another risk. Whether a fire breaks out in your office or your computers are infected by ransomware, the result is the same. Your data are compromised. Cybersecurity is about simple risks we can all understand. It is just a new way for criminals to earn money, a new way for states to blackmail one another, a new way to do good or bad. I think if we can explain that, we can really change the narrative.

Turning back to your career path, you started working at this company and made your way to the top. Do you have any advice for people trying to get to the top?

Today, thanks to technology, self-improvement is easier than ever before. You can follow Harvard educational classes. When going for a run, you can listen to any podcast. You can hear world leaders talk to you. If you feel like reading, you have eBooks. If you are a young professional, be ruthless about self-improvement. Of course, give yourself the rest and the mental health breaks you need. But whenever you can, listen to that podcast. Listen to that audio article, subscribe to HBR. There is so much you can do. If you choose the right topics, you can learn anything about them. I am not the brightest or most talented person. But I am very disciplined about reading books, listening to podcasts, and following online classes. It is like the old saying, "hard work beats talent." Make use of all the information out there and be serious about self-improvement. I think the time is now to utilise technology to become smarter than any generation has ever been.

Be ruthless about self-improvement

If you look to the future, what is the biggest cyber threat?

I think the biggest issue is that it is very hard to fully grasp the exponentiality of cybercrime. One bad actor can now rob a million people in ten minutes. In conventional crime, you had to rob five banks in roughly five years to achieve the same outcome. This exponentiality of cybercrime, I think, is the real threat. With cybercrime, if there is a gigantic leak in software it can be abused in hours, maybe even seconds. The reac-

tion time is quick, and to counter that we need to shift to the paradigm that cybercrime is exponential. We can use machine learning and artificial intelligence to help defend ourselves against the attacker. The attackers are never exceptionally smarter than us. So I am still very positive, but the playing field has changed. Attackers are using exponential weapons, and we still mainly rely on non-exponential defences.

I can imagine it is quite attractive for people who are good with computers to get into hacking, rather than helping improve cybersecurity. How do you think society, schools, and the government can help bring these people into the system?

That is an excellent point, and yes, the solution for cybercrime is not a technological one. But if we are talking about the reasons why people commit cybercrime, it is just a new version of the old question: "Why do people commit crimes?" I do not believe the perpetrators are inherently bad people – it is because of the context and the circumstances they find themselves in. A holistic approach is needed to solve this problem. We need to start in schools, not only talking about development, but also about cybersecurity and how social media works. Companies need to invest in guiding talent. Cybercrime is threatening to everything we do because everything is digital, and therefore it needs to be tackled on the largest scale possible. We need legislators to understand it and make it a priority in policy perspectives. We need security awareness specialists. We need people in communication to educate a bigger audience outside the field. We do not solely need technical specialists – we need more people to care about this problem and to understand it and why it is so important.

Do you see a bright future for the security field, or are there some challenges we have to face soon?

I think we are going through a storm. The Covid-19 pandemic accelerated the digital transformation. People worked from home and there was no time to thoroughly think about cybersecurity. The EU however is taking very important steps in the right direction with NIS2 and adjacent legislation. This can offer a strong basis for a more secure digital future.

At the same time, we live in a geopolitical place where cyberwarfare is more prevalent than ever. Several other challenges are worsened if cybersecurity does not provide a stable foundation, like supply chain disruptions. Threats are rising really quickly, and we do not have a very secure foundation at this moment in time. I think we are going to have a rough time ahead of us. But if we take action now, I hope that in ten, fifteen, twenty years cyber will become just another security risk. The future is really bright, but we have to go through the storm first. I would also like to emphasise that technology is a means to an end. Digital security is a foundation, so if we can partly solve the issues we have there, progress in fighting other issues can be sustained. I think that is my main driver, my main passion, and why I am doing this.

That is a very nice note to end on. Thank you. ■

Tessa Rodrigues

Tessa Rodrigues is a policy officer at the Permanent Representation of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to NATO. She works as a financial advisor on issues related to international relations and security.

What do you consider the biggest security threat faced by NATO and the Netherlands currently or in the (near) future?

The most imminent security threat at the moment is Russia, but in the longer term, I see hybrid threats, such as cyberattacks, as one of the biggest challenges, as they can have a big impact on civil society. It is very important for NATO and the Netherlands to keep innovating and keep up with technological developments in order to be able to counter those threats

What opportunities can you identify for positive change within your field?

Due to the changing security environment, the political mindset on security has seen positive change. The extra investment in defence spending and compliance with NATO's two per cent rule are important steps. After years of cuts in defence spending, it is important to compensate. Money is needed in many different areas such as cyber defence, readiness, and information technology. It is important not only to support ongoing activities, but also to invest in future proof armed forces.

Photo credits: Private picture

Itay Garmy

Itay Garmy is a senior cybersecurity consultant at Deloitte. He is also a city councillor for Volt in Amsterdam and was the campaign leader for Volt during the Dutch parliamentary elections in 2021.

What do you consider the biggest security threat faced by the Netherlands, currently or in the (near) future?

Our biggest security threats are polarisation and a lack of trust in governmental institutions. In order to face the biggest challenges of today like climate change, we need to work together as a society and trust that our elected officials and our institutions will take the decisions necessary for us to prosper. Without this trust and cooperation, we will never be able to find solutions for our current security threats.

What career advice can you offer to those looking to join your field?

Let your voice be heard! Become active for a cause you believe is important and share your voice with everyone around you. If you are aiming to enter the political field, become a member of a political party. Start volunteering at the party, spend time building your network, and when you feel the time is right, you can run for elections. Do not be afraid to lose! It is admirable that you want to work hard and put yourself in a vulnerable position to serve society. Sometimes you will find yourself in difficult situations, in which you are criticised or your goals seem further away than ever. But if you believe in your cause then you need to keep going and always stay true to yourself.

Photo credits: Anne van Muilwijk

Niels Drost

Niels Drost is a junior researcher at the Clingendael Russia & Eastern Europe Centre and the EU & Global Affairs Unit. His research focuses on contemporary politics and security issues in Russia, Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia.

What do you consider the biggest security threat faced by Russia, currently or in the (near) future?

While I would rather like to stress that the Russian Federation is currently the greatest security threat to other states itself, first and foremost to Ukraine, Russia itself faces a variety of security threats as well. The consequences of its unprovoked invasion of Ukraine are clearly the most predominant. This is not only due to the impact of Western sanctions on the Russian economy, but also because of other possible future consequences of the war Russia is waging – considering that Ukraine is strongly supported by the United States and other Western states through weapon deliveries and financial support. In one of the worst scenarios, from the Russian perspective, the Russian Federation could even fall apart. However, there are also plenty of other security threats that Russia faces, such as climate change and more specifically the potential melting of permafrost, which is the foundation for many cities and other infrastructure in Siberia.

What career advice can you offer to those looking to join your field?

It is great to widen your skillset as much as possible by doing interesting things besides your studies. This could be actively writing tweets or a blog about a topic of your choice, learning coding skills, working with software like Adobe Illustrator or Photoshop, volunteering as a reporter at the local radio or TV station in your city, or starting a language exchange. All the different things you learn from such experiences will be useful later in your career, and will help you to make your profile stand out.

Photo credits: Anna Loh

An opportunity for collective action

Photo credits: Clingendael Institute

Maha Yassin is a research fellow at the Clingendael Institute, and manages the outreach of the Planetary Security Initiative (PSI) of the Clingendael Institute. She also coordinates the Basra Forum for Climate, Environment and Security, dedicated to fostering dialogue between various local stakeholders from Iraq on climate security issues facing the region. In this interview, she discusses the impact of climate change in southern Iraq, the challenges of cross-sector climate security dialogues, and her experience working as a woman in non-traditional security issues in Iraq.

Interview with Maha Yassin

by Naledi Tilmann

Welcome. Could you introduce yourself and your work briefly?

My name is Maha Yassin. I am originally from Basra, Iraq and I lived there most of my life. I worked there for around three years as a communication officer for a humanitarian disarmament project. Then I found a scholarship in the Netherlands and came here to study a master's in Media, Culture and Society at Erasmus University Rotterdam.

I am currently at Clingendael as a researcher, where I also manage the outreach and the communication of the Planetary Security Initiative (PSI) project. PSI is a policy research project and a knowledge hub on the climate-security nexus, and we have been focusing on Iraq as a hotspot in the Middle East for climate and conflict. With the initiative, we hold environmental peacebuilding dialogues with different actors. The aim is to raise awareness on the topic of climate security, influence policy, and increase political participation. We bring conflicting stakeholders to the table and use climate change as an entry point for dialogue and peacebuilding among all these parties.

Have you faced challenges or obstacles in having these dialogues on climate and security?

Yes, that is definitely something that we have faced with our project in Iraq. We have had people from the intelligence services sitting in one of our closed meetings and local partners have been questioned about collaborating with a foreign institute. So, there is definitely some suspicion surrounding our work but it is fine because we do not have anything to hide. This might not create a safe environment for the civil society, who are treated with suspicion, to share their views, but we see it as the first step towards building trust between parties.

We do not have anything to hide

Also, bringing different stakeholders together can be challenging. They do not normally work together or talk with each other because of their political differences, and they are often in conflict with each other. We have to negotiate with these actors before bringing them to the dialogue sessions. Climate change affects all parties equally, so why do we not use this as an opportunity for collective action?

The first step towards building trust between parties

Another challenge is that there are only a few organisations operating in the south of Iraq who are working on the climate-security nexus, with limited resources and capacity. This makes it hard to find the balance between state actors and civil society.

Since it is your focus region, how is climate change affecting the south of Iraq specifically?

Iraq has a very fragile security situation. Climate change is like a threat multiplier in this context, and the response of the government is very slow. They prioritise addressing hard security problems such as terrorism, which also makes sense, but at the same time they neglect the fact that climate change is also another driver of instability.

We see the impact of climate change on stability clearly in the south. There is a persistent water scarcity issue, water pollution, and salt water intrusion. As a result, arable land loss occurs and livelihoods are lost. After losing their livelihoods, many farming communities emigrate to cities, which puts further pressure on the already fragile urban water infrastructure. There are also tribal and intergovernmental conflicts in some regions of Iraq, fighting over scarce water resources. Water problems have definitely also prompted violent protests across the country.

How does the Iraqi government, or governing bodies in general, respond to these issues?

There is an increased political interest in addressing climate change impacts, and recently, an interest into looking at climate change as a security risk. However, concrete and long-term solutions are still lacking. While Iraq is considered a rich country, problems with corruption, mismanagement of resources, limited capacities, and internal political conflicts hinder a proper response. These issues should be addressed as well to pave the way for meaningful climate action in Iraq.

Climate change is like a threat multiplier

There is a lot of local knowledge and academic work on mitigation and adapting to the effects of climate change, but the government does not sit down and talk with these actors. The process of identifying and implementing solutions is still in its infancy. Most Iraqi politicians do not look at climate change as a real security issue, it is more of a human security issue that is left to development organisations.

There are a few climate civil society organisations and activists trying to influence policy in this regard, but they are constantly under threat because they criticise the political actors who are failing to respond to climate change threats. Some activists have lost their lives, some have had to leave the country because of the threats. But they are still pushing and calling for nationwide climate action.

And what role does PSI play in this situation? What are you doing on the ground?

We believe that dialogue and peacebuilding among local actors are important step towards climate change action and stability. We hold dialogue sessions between different stakeholders, whether they are NGOs, activists, researchers, academics, governmental officials, decision-makers, or members from the security community from the local or central government. We also bring in people from different religious, political, and ethnic backgrounds, because this is one of the instability drivers in Iraq. We do not tell people what to do or what to say, we only provide support and facilitate the sessions. The meetings are moderated in Arabic and the topics are chosen by them, as is the outcome of the discussion in terms of actionable steps.

We simply provide the space and a platform for them to talk about the issue and bring their recommendations and knowledge to decision-makers in Baghdad. We also share their articles on our website, thereby giving local voices a platform. Hopefully as a result, action will take place on the ground when public awareness and political participation increase. We also hope to help attract funding because we are not a development organisation, we cannot fund the actors projects but can connect them to funders. This is our goal, to create a platform for these people and see how the international community can support them.

It is definitely very important work you are doing. Going back to your personal career, have you faced any specific challenges?

I think it helps if you have an academic background in conflict studies or security studies. But of course if you do not, it should not stop you. I come from a development organisation background, from when I worked in humanitarian disarmament. Working for Clingendael is different, there is more of an emphasis on policy. The benefits of policy work are that you start to understand how long it takes for an issue to be recognised, internationally, and also amongst the political circles. It takes time to push the agenda. In the development sector, you immediately tackle the issue, often with limited resources, at least from my experience in Iraq. They are two different worlds, and I find both interesting.

Definitely. Is there anything else you would like to talk about related to your work?

The gender perspective. Being a woman and working on non-traditional security issues in Iraq can be a bit challenging. Sometimes you are not taken seriously, especially by older men. There can be a lot of resistance to a younger woman pointing out that they should look at climate as a security problem – as this is considered their field of expertise. Sometimes they make me so angry, but I still want the work to be done.

I do not intend to do this work to prove myself to them, but I do it out of care for my community, which I have seen rapidly deteriorating because of climate change. You have to find the balance between fighting to be heard equally and getting the job done. But it is changing as well. There are also a lot of young activists, men and women, who are trying so hard to change these outdated narratives about gender and work. They put their lives at risk just to challenge these kinds of norms, for the sake of having a better future for themselves and their children. I have so much respect for them. Not just in climate activism, but in all sorts of social and political issues that they are fighting for. ■

Veerle van Dijk

Veerle van Dijk is a policy advisor at the Netherlands Joint Delegation to NATO working on the Women, Peace and Security Agenda and public diplomacy, among other topics.

What opportunities can you identify for positive change within your field?

In 2019, Macron called NATO brain-dead, but the way in which NATO has responded to the Russian invasion of Ukraine shows that NATO seems stronger than ever. I think the situation has shown us how important it is that NATO is united, and the same goes for the EU. If the unity that we are currently witnessing persists, it could be an opportunity to deal with other issues such as climate change, emerging and disruptive technologies and cyber threats.

What career advice can you offer to those looking to join your field?

During my studies, I joined Jonge Atlantici. There, I attended many interesting events and got to know a lot of people with similar interests. So if you are interested in international security, I can very much recommend joining an organisation like JASON Institute, Jonge Atlantici or Women in International Security (WIIS). It is great for building knowledge, a network, and just having fun with like-minded people.

Photo credits: Private picture

Cherissa Appelman

Cherissa Appelman is the director crisis management at KLM Royal Dutch Airlines. She was the chair of JASON Institute in 2017.

Why did you decide to join your field and have you faced any obstacles or challenges in your career path?

I started my career in the field of psychology, aspiring to be a forensic psychologist (specialising in the diagnosis and treatment of both the perpetrators of criminal offences and their victims). While volunteering in a forensic mental institution I learnt about the flaws in the system, which resulted in people not always receiving the help they needed and higher rates of recidivism. I became passionate about social as well as political dimensions of the governance of such issues and enrolled in the MSc Crisis and Security Management. I was excited to start something new, but it was challenging as well. I did not have much knowledge on crisis and security issues prior to starting my master's degree and I definitely had some catching up to do.

What career advice can you offer to those looking to join your field?

I have benefitted from surrounding myself with people that are successful in the security field. During my time as chair of JASON Institute, I had the opportunity to organise numerous (networking) events that offered the opportunity to meet with and speak to many inspiring people. In my work, I have always sought out mentors from whom I can learn and ask for advice. In my experience, people always enjoy talking about their work and exchanging knowledge with a young person with new perspectives. Do not hesitate to reach out to others that inspire you!

Photo credits: Private picture

Eviane Leidig

Eviane Leidig is a Marie Skłodowska-Curie postdoctoral fellow in the Department of Culture Studies at Tilburg University. Her research focuses on the far-right, gender, and online extremism. Previously, she was a research fellow in the Current and Emerging Threats programme at the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism.

Why did you decide to join your field and have you faced any obstacles or challenges in your career path?

It was partly by accident that I found myself working on issues related to far-right extremism and online radicalisation. My studies and work experience coincided with topics that have gained increasing security and policy relevance in the last few years. I enjoy working in this field and sharing my knowledge with different audiences. However, because I completed a PhD at a young age, one obstacle I always face is that people are surprised to learn about my credentials based on my appearance. This has challenged me to present myself with more confidence and authority.

What opportunities can you identify for positive change within your field?

It is promising to see the threat of far-right extremism being taken seriously on policy and security agendas. Further, that lessons are being learnt from the War on Terror paradigm on how to properly deal with far-right extremism as not just a securitised issue, but from a societal approach. We are starting to see a new generation of students and those early in their careers wanting to actively engage in conversations related to far-right extremism and recognise its broader connections to social phenomena like racism, sexism, misogyny, and homophobia.

Photo credits: Private picture

We are still figuring out what we can do with all the open data online

Foeke Postma is an investigator and trainer at Bellingcat. He uses Open Source Intelligence (OSINT) to investigate military, environmental, and human rights issues. His story on how fitness app Polar revealed the locations of military bases, soldiers, and secret agents was nominated for 'De Tegel', the most important award for journalism in the Netherlands.

Interview with Foeke Postma

by Anne Preesman and Jacco van der Veen

Photo credits: Private picture

As a start, can you introduce yourself, your career path and your motivation?

I have been working at Bellingcat for two and a half years. I have always been interested in the security domain, especially in the military and human rights component of fighting wars.

Before, I worked at Dutch peace organisation PAX. While working there, I read a story about how the running app Strava showed the locations of secret military bases. I am a runner myself and use these apps too, so this story never really left me. After going for a run, I returned to my house and stopped my running app, called Polar. Then I thought to myself, if other people do the same, you can probably see where they end their run and where they likely live.

In this way, I was able to figure out not just the locations of secret military bases as Strava did, but track the individual soldiers themselves, which was new. You could for example see exactly where a soldier was exercising in Iraq or Afghanistan, but also at which house in their home country. It is important to realise that this was at a time when soldiers were not allowed to wear their uniforms in public in the Netherlands for fear of terrorist attacks. So this data was sensitive. And it did not only concern soldiers globally, but also those working for intelligence agencies. This story made it to the news and helped change policy, as it is now forbidden for soldiers to use GPS tracking apps.

From reading a little bit about what you do, it seems that you are generally interested in solving 'puzzles' – from exposing illegal wildlife trade to finding the location of old pictures in the Rijksmuseum. How did this inspire you?

I am genuinely interested in stories where data is somehow hidden online, meaning data we can use but do not know about. Investigating illegal wildlife trade, the war in Ukraine, nuclear weapons, and historical photographs are all a bit the same to me. It is the same technique or puzzle, but with different topics. The questions do not change, only the subjects. I think that we are still figuring out what we can do with all the open data online.

So, you mentioned the 'hidden online' data. This is known to be one of the biggest challenges of open source research, as there is so much data out there. How do you find the right data?

Yes, the haystack is enormous and only getting bigger, and you want to find the needle. A couple of techniques have really worked well for me. When I give talks, people always tell me that I can use more tools or automated processes. But the most useful thing for me is empathy. This sounds odd, but I mean that you have to imagine yourself as the source of the data. You have to basically position yourself in the shoes of your subject. What kind of person are they? What interests do they have? That is how you find the needle in the haystack.

You say that you need to have empathy to find the right information. But more broadly, what is your thought process when embarking on a new topic or project?

Sometimes it is random and I just come across data which I can use. For example, one time I was drinking a beer with my dad on the terrace, discussing what beers we like. I looked up an app to review beers and figured that soldiers might do the same when they are on a base, and they did.

Other times I realise something is off and I investigate. I did a story on illegal wildlife trade when Memphis Depay was photographed with a lion cub. He said he got it from a zoo, but he never mentioned which zoo. So I looked into it and found out that he very likely got it from some illegal wildlife trade network that was selling cheetah cubs from an apartment.

One of the headlines of the articles we read said that you just 'Google'. Is that really true?

It is pretty much googling – or searches on social media anyone can do. There are many tools out there, but I rarely rely on them. It is more about the technique behind finding the needle in the haystack. Of course, tools can make it easier, but they will not carry an investigation on their own. The only thing I frequently use is reverse image search with facial recognition and Artificial Intelligence (AI), to see whether two different face pictures belong to the same person.

To go back to your career, what advice would you like to give to others that aspire to work in your field?

Well, the good thing is that it is open source. You can do it yourself and you do not have to buy anything. If you have access to Google you can get quite far. You need the interest and perseverance to investigate and write a story. Most people that I see succeeding were already volunteering and had a very niche interest in something specific. The OSINT community on Twitter is very appreciative of good work and if you find something interesting, it will get picked up quite fast, which allows you to establish yourself. So you need an interest, perseverance, and a passion for what you are doing.

You need an interest, perseverance, and a passion for what you are doing

We would now like to focus on Russia and Ukraine. There has been a lot of talk of an 'information war'. Do you think this is true? And do you have a role in it?

I do not want to say I am part of it. I want to emphasise that this is two-sided. Ukraine occasionally also spreads incorrect information, as its priority is winning the conflict. Our role at Bellingcat is not necessarily choosing a side but stepping in when something is really off, for instance when states lie about human rights violations they have committed. I do not see that as being part of an information war, but more as fighting for the truth. The priority is on the human rights front.

Our role at Bellingcat is not choosing a side but stepping in when something is off

There is a lot about Russia and the Middle East on Bellingcat, but some other regions like Latin America and China are less visible. Is there a reason for this?

We are a small team, and those who joined Bellingcat at the beginning were mostly focused on Russia. The Russian government has done many awful things and there is a lot of data going around, so there is a lot of potential for stories there. But we have also done a lot on police violence in the US, and on Yemen regarding US-supported Saudi airstrikes. We want to expand globally but there is a capacity problem. Before the war in Ukraine, we thought about having a more global reach, but now we are focused on documenting war crimes that are taking place in Ukraine. In an ideal world where we have the means, we would focus more on the rest of the world too.

Are there some other challenges that we have not touched upon?

I think in terms of ethics, some things are worth mentioning. We use a lot of new techniques which do not always neatly fit existing journalism guidelines. An example is joining a private group online. This often depends on the size. If I join a private group of ten thousand people on Telegram or Facebook and start listening to what they say, you might not consider it a violation of privacy. But what if I join a group with only three people and start listening in?

We also make fake profiles and send friend requests to people to see what they share. I cannot follow illegal wildlife traders with my own profile because they will see that I am from Bellingcat. But when you communicate with them, this changes because you are now entering this 'fake' connection with them. But where is the line? Liking a post? Viewing a story? Answering the standard questions required to join a Discord group? We have an ethics group at Bellingcat that deals with these issues.

Related to ethics, how does Bellingcat support you when it comes to dealing with very graphic images, videos, and documentation you might come across in your work?

The organisation is very receptive to our needs. We have a lot of freedom in determining our work schedule. If I feel bad, I can stop working, no questions asked. We also get help from trauma experts who specialise in vicarious trauma. So there is a lot of help, and we get a lot of tips and tricks on how to deal with graphic imagery.

What do you think will be the future of open source investigations?

To me, that future looks bright. We will have more data, more open sources and more data leaks. There might be stricter rules on privacy, but this will not prevent all data leaks in the future. ■

Photo credits: Stefan Heijendael/NOS

Iris de Graaf

Iris de Graaf is the Russia correspondent and head of Bureau Moscow for NOS News and Newshour. She has been working in Russia as a journalist for several years, recently providing extensive coverage on the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Why did you decide to join your field and have you faced any obstacles or challenges in your career path?

My fascination for Russia started as a little girl, growing up with a Russian 'babushka' (grandmother). I got my degree in Slavic Studies, and realised I wanted to share the voices of those who are not heard. I decided to do a master's degree in journalism, which led to me becoming a correspondent in Russia. The challenges were enormous; a global pandemic left me 'stuck' in Russia, not being able to leave and separated from my partner. Then the Russian invasion of Ukraine led to unprecedented repression in Russia, with military censorship and criminalisation of our work. All these obstacles make it very hard to do our job.

What are your ambitions for the future?

For now, improve myself every day and become an even better journalist while I find a way to keep reporting in an unfree country. We need to listen to people, even if we do not understand them or disagree with their worldviews and ideas. In the future, I see myself either reporting from other countries or working back in the studio to present the news to the Dutch public. And I would like to write a book someday. Not necessarily about my work and personal life, but rather a fictional dystopian novel based on my experiences in current day Russia.

Chris Vloedbeld

Chris Vloedbeld is an advisor at Andersson Elffers Felix and is also working on his PhD at Groningen University. He is particularly interested in societal responses to terrorism.

What do you consider the biggest security threat faced by the Netherlands, currently or in the (near) future?

Focusing on the Netherlands, I think a major challenge is how global ideologies affect the (sense of) security in local communities. The strict division of responsibilities and jurisdiction between municipalities and the national government in the Netherlands is not designed to deal with this.

Threats like jihadi terrorism, right-wing nationalism, conspiracy theories, or disinformation campaigns, do not seem to follow the classic divide of local, regional, national, or international concerns. To effectively counter these threats, you often need to understand global ideologies and networks, develop legislation and policy on a national level, and execute the countermeasures on a local scale.

What opportunities can you identify for positive change within the field of security/your field?

Increasingly, I see different levels of government successfully searching for ways to cooperate in a manner that these new challenges require. They also do so for challenges that do not immediately fall into the category of 'existential threats'. For instance, the municipality of Bodegraven-Reeuwijk had to deal with conspiracy theorists visiting a local graveyard and creating unrest in the local community. A small municipality is not designed to have any knowledge about such ideologies and beliefs. Currently, the national government is trying to find a way in which it can assist municipalities with these issues, without taking over their responsibilities.

Photo credits: Bert Muller

I hope the world will be a bit safer

Anne de Ruijter works for the Security Policy Department at the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs in The Hague, where she focuses on crisis management and peacekeeping operations. Anne has been a self-proclaimed political junkie since the age of fourteen, and in the years since has carved out a career at the centre of Dutch political life. With Jasper and Anne, she reflected on her journey so far, as well as the changing world we live in.

Interview with Anne de Ruijter

By Jasper Hack and Anne Preesman

Photo credits: Roos Eijmer

Why did you choose this career path?

I started with an internship at the Government Information Service, which I really loved because you work directly with the Prime Minister. If you are a political junkie, this is the place to be. At that time, I decided I wanted to stay there. So, I asked "can I please apply for a job?". And they said, "yes, but you have to finish your master's degree". I started working there part-time and did a part-time master's degree in Rotterdam at Erasmus University in Media, Culture, and Society. I specialised in political communication.

I became a political editor at the Ministry for General Affairs, which involves selecting all the news for the Prime Minister and the people around him. I did that for two and a half years. When it was time to move on to the next job, I really did not know what I wanted. So, I had coffee with everyone. As such, someone from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs offered me a job as a spokesperson. I always said that I did not want to work at Foreign Affairs because they appeared slightly corporate and old-fashioned to me. But then I thought, why not? It turned out to be amazing. The job as spokesperson was very intense. In normal jobs, you have high peaks and easier periods, but here it was always high peaks, which was super fun. You also get to know the whole ministry because you have to do the communication for all the departments.

However, it was also very hard work. So, after three and a half years, I figured I would like a job that does not involve weekend calls or getting up at two in the morning to write a tweet for the minister, for example. In the summer of 2021, I switched to the security department, a club of ambitious young people within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The external pressure of the job and the political importance is really something that drives me, something I can also find here.

What attracted you specifically to work for the government? Have you ever considered a move to the private sector?

Well, my interest is mainly in politics. So, the choice for me was easy. What also motivates me is to do something good. I do not want to work at big firms that are mainly driven by making money instead of making the world a better place.

It also had to do with my personal situation, as I am in a wheelchair. This is not the main reason, but the government makes a lot of effort to facilitate me, even when I have to make a trip to Israel and the Palestinian territories. Things are not that easy if you work in the private sector.

What was the reason you were visiting these places?

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is, together with the Ministry of Defence and Ministry of Justice, responsible for all the missions and operations the Netherlands participates in around the world. At that time, I was responsible for Israel and the Palestinian territories. Together with the Director of Operations of the Ministry of Defence, I went to Israel to do a tour of the missions. To see those who are participating in these missions, thank them for their work, but also talk to the head of the missions and force commanders to discuss the future and possible problems.

For example, if you look at the Palestinian territories, the situation is getting worse and is quite dire at the moment. With these missions, we support the Palestinian Authority in building a security sector that is working properly, so in the end it could possibly contribute to a two-state solution. But the Palestinian Authority lacks democratic support from the Palestinians at the moment. There have not been any elections in sixteen years. So, we ask those on the mission how they deal with this situation.

What other challenges do you encounter in your work?

I think a big challenge we are currently dealing with is our view on missions and how we want to continue this in the future. Afghanistan has raised some fundamental questions that we need to discuss and view in light of the other missions we have. Are we doing it the right way? Is there a right way? It is all very fundamental.

Afghanistan has raised some fundamental questions that we need to discuss

Will the war in Ukraine impact the future of peacekeeping operations? If so, how?

Yes, definitely. In the past, we had room for peacekeeping operations because we did not have a threat on our home base or NATO turf. But now we do. We have a limited amount of people and materials, and at the same time, we have to divide these between those two objectives. Both are very important tasks because, of course, we need to defend our territory and NATO's, but the international peacekeeping operations enhance security cooperation and are important for our safety in the end as well.

Could the war in Ukraine have been prevented if the United States, Ukraine and Russia, or institutions like the European Union and NATO had taken different steps in the last years?

I think the difference in interests of Russia on one side, and Europe, NATO, and our allies on the other side is too big. I am not sure how you could have straightened that out because Russia has long claimed a part of Ukraine, but we did not expect President Putin would act on it. You could have taken

measures like military forces on the border. Would that have prevented it? I do not know.

As for what goes on in Putin's head, I wish I knew. Why did he do this? It sounds a bit weird to me to start a war and let your own citizens be killed for it, the Russians, but also the Ukrainians. I think he did not expect the West to be so supportive of Ukraine. He thought he would probably win in a very short period of time. We are nine months in now, so that is not true. Now he is stuck because he does not want to lose.

How do you see the future of security in thirty years?

I hope we learn from the past. I hope the world will be a bit safer, especially because now it does not feel safe at all. I hope that at least the war in Ukraine will have ended and that a new one will not have started. I think that power dynamics are changing rapidly. Right now, China is rising and we are facing a climate crisis. This will massively affect the power dynamics in the world.

> *We really underestimate the effects of climate change*

In particular, I think we underestimate the consequences of climate change on everything we do and see. That should be discussed more. If we want to create a durable policy, we have to take the climate into account. If you look at conflict, radicalisation, and migration, they all stem from a lack of resources. People migrate because they do not have a job and cannot afford their food, housing, etc. I think this will become worse. So, I do not see the future as very positive, to be honest. We really underestimate the effects of climate change.

What advice would you give to students who aspire to have a career like yours?

Ask for what you want, do not be afraid to ask. If people do not want you or your expertise or your opinions, they will tell you, but you will not know if you do not ask. I asked for a job that I really wanted and I got it. I think it is important to not be afraid to say what you want and go for it. ■

Photo credits: Private picture

Lotje Boswinkel

Lotje Boswinkel is a PhD researcher at the Centre for Security, Diplomacy and Strategy (CSDS) of the Brussels School of Governance. Previously, she worked as a strategic analyst at the Hague Centre for Strategic Studies (HCSS), focusing on European security and defence.

What do you consider the biggest global security threat, currently or in the (near) future?

It is hard to pick just one. As major powers are increasingly competing in the political, economic, and military domains, direct confrontation looms and proxy conflicts spike. More actors are emboldened by military clout, while rules and norms are eroding. As a result, the potential for miscalculation rises, the threshold for military use lowers, and escalation becomes harder to manage. Meanwhile, internal stability across the globe is under pressure: polarisation intensifies and freedom falters. Lastly, it is impossible not to mention climate change. The myriad of effects will be highly disruptive and likely to hit the most vulnerable disproportionately. There is a lot to worry about.

What are your ambitions for the future?

Having spent three years working at think tanks (HCSS and EUISS), I am now starting my PhD to deepen my knowledge on a particular subject and advance my research skills. CSDS is part of the university but also a think tank conducting projects with NATO, the EU, and various partners in the Indo-Pacific. As such, I will be able to continue doing more policy-oriented work alongside my PhD. Ultimately, that is my ambition for the future: to do policy-relevant research that tries to strengthen security and defence policy-making in Europe.

Annick Dingemans

Annick works as an operational manager at Dyami and has experienced several crisis management situations. During the evacuation of Kabul, she helped more than 250 Dutch passport and status holders get to Kabul airport safely.

Why did you decide to join your field and have you faced any obstacles or challenges in your career path?

I started at Dyami as a marketing and communications intern. I have a hospitality and business administration background and I never thought about working in the security industry. However, in the blink of an eye, I was hooked on the significant challenges and exciting opportunities in aviation security, espionage, and crisis management. During my first crisis management situation, I realised that my practical skill set and my eagerness to learn were just as valuable as a university degree.

What do you consider the most significant security threat faced by the Netherlands, currently or in the (near) future?

The biggest pitfall in our society is ignorance and a general lack of resilience. We live in a world full of life-threatening risks and yet we do not teach our children how to recognise unusual behaviour. A reluctant attitude is also reflected in the budget of our government. This involves cutting back on funding for security and crisis management, which has led to the fading of skills within the Dutch government. To me, this is the greatest challenge for security within the Netherlands at the moment.

Photo credits: Alessia Cappelletti

Karlijn Jans

Karlijn Jans is a senior policy advisor at NL Ministry of Defence. Furthermore, she is a reservist with the Royal Netherlands Air Force. Her areas of expertise include NATO, European security and defence policies, strategic foresight, and the impact of new technologies on defence policy and military affairs.

Why did you decide to join your field and have you faced any obstacles or challenges in your career path?

I have been interested in military history since I was a young child. My grandparents' stories about life under occupation during the Second World War left a deep impression on me. When I turned eighteen, I adopted the grave of a soldier at the American Military Cemetery in Margraten: Private First Class Orsini was killed in action in April, 1945. Being the caretaker of his grave has been a humbling experience and is a constant reminder that freedom is not for free. It led me to seek a better understanding of international politics and conflict throughout my studies and motivated me to find a career in this field.

What opportunities can you identify for positive change within the field of security/your field?

It is safe to say that defence and the military is still a rather male-dominated field. When I chose what I wanted to study or do in the future, I did not consider serving in the military as an option. As a wise lady once said: "you cannot be who you cannot see".[1] Therefore, I am thrilled to see more and more female role models rise up the ranks, such as Lieutenant-General Elanor Boekholt-O'Sullivan, Commodore Jeanette Morang, Lieutenant-General Sharon Nesmith, Lieutenant-General Laura Richardson and many more.

It is important to have these role models in order to imagine what is possible when you work hard, are good at your job, and love what you do. I believe there now is broader support to create a more diverse (work) force (that goes beyond just gender); it is a strategic imperative and will strengthen our competitive advantage. We need the best and most capable teams to address current and future security challenges.

1. Marian Wright Edelman - American civil rights activist

Phote credits: Private picture

New rules to counter emerging threats

Photo credits: Private picture

Louk Faesen is a policy advisor at the European Parliament and previously worked as a senior strategic analyst at The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies (HCSS). He focuses on tech, cyber, and counter-disinformation policy. Our Editor-in-Chief Naledi sat down with him to discuss his work.

Interview with Louk Faesen

by Naledi Tilmann

Thank you very much for sitting down with us today. Could you start by talking us through your career path so far?

In June, I started a new position at the European Parliament, where I work as a policy advisor for the Dutch VVD party which is part of the Renew Europe group. I mainly work for MEPs Bart Groothuis and Catharina Rinzema on cyber and tech policy, foreign interference and disinformation, and security and defence. This includes regulations like the Chips Act that will mobilise 43 billion euros of investments to enhance Europe's relevance in the semiconductor value chain. But it also includes trade agreements, defence funds, counter-disinformation initiatives, or new rules to counter emerging threats, like those against our subsea infrastructure.

I started working on cyber policy at the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where I did my first internship at the Task Force International Cyber Policy. I continued working as a policy officer before joining HCSS as an analyst, mostly doing research on cyber and hybrid warfare. I continued working on cyber diplomacy but from a civil society perspective through track II diplomatic dialogues and the Global Commission on the Stability of Cyberspace. The Commission developed norms to inform the traditionally state-led discussions on international security and disarmament with expertise from outside stakeholders of the technical, internet governance and rights communities.

From government to a think tank and now the European Parliament. After working on cybersecurity in so many work settings, do you see any key differences in how these various institutions approach cybersecurity?

One similarity is that you operate as part of a relatively small team for a truly global effort. You can only succeed through wide stakeholder engagement. While there has been some improvement, governments largely approach this topic within the bounds of their existing multilateral institutions and struggle to find effective ways to involve non-state stakeholders in their decision-making process. Compared to other domains, cyberspace's main distinguishing feature is that it is predominantly shaped by industry and civil society stakeholders. As a researcher, you may get frustrated with how slow governments appear to move. You may come up with new ideas, but sometimes overlook how difficult it is to implement them. The European Parliament deals with hundreds of legislative acts, requiring you to use your limited resources as effectively as possible in order to have the biggest impact.

The Russia-Ukraine conflict has been associated with hybrid and cyberwarfare. Could you reflect on that, and also talk about the implications this has for the use of cyber military capabilities in large-scale conflicts more generally?

Prior to the invasion, I think a lot of people expected more far-reaching effects from cyberattacks. But to say that it did not play a critical role would also be a dangerous misdiagnosis. Russia still made many attempts to infiltrate Ukrainian systems and sabotage critical infrastructure. Overall, I think many, including the Russians, may have underestimated the Ukrainian defence, which was partly supported by Western governments and industry actors. And we may have overestimated the Russian offence, which suffered from poor preparation and coordination, both of which are essential in cyber and electronic warfare operations. Cyber operations play a largely supportive role in large-scale conflicts, but are essential for intelligence gathering or sabotage attacks that can have sweeping psychological effects on victims. Cyber operations featured more "successfully" in previous Russian operations in Crimea, East Ukraine, and Georgia, which were much shorter and more targeted, and without the same kind of escalation from the other side as we see now.

Cyber operations play a largely supportive role in large-scale conflicts

While we are on the topic of cyberwarfare, a relatively young field, do you have any predictions of what the next five to ten years will bring with regard to this threat?

Cyber conflict does not happen in a vacuum but is anchored in geopolitics. As interstate conflict intensifies, the outlook does not look very promising. The current geopolitical situation is much more contentious than, for example, during the Cold War. The distinction between threatening with and actually wanting to harm was much clearer back then, as were the capacities and intentions, than it is now in cyberspace. The battle is fought on multiple fields, by the incident response, intelligence and military community, but also by diplomats and lawyers. We need to keep on improving our defence to limit the effects of adversarial operations. But resilience alone will not deter an advanced persistent threat from nation states. Europe needs a more proactive deterrence posture. But the battle for a free, open, and secure internet is also fought inside the doors of the UN and other fora, where authoritarian states continuously seek to advance their internet-model that seeks to replace the existing multistakeholder internet governance system with a state-led model. The effects of bad cyber policy can be even more damaging to the Internet, freedom of speech, and democracy itself.

Is there any advice you have for our readers for getting into the security field?

Policy wonks who may not have the immediate technical cybersecurity knowledge should still consider working in cyber policy. Every part of our society has some digital component, be it the military, online freedom, international peace and security, diplomacy, or economics.

Every part of our society has some digital component

You do not need to be a technical expert to be able to contribute. You learn about it along the way. The lawyers, policy workers and security analysts from the Cold War also made crucial contributions to nuclear deterrence and stability without being nuclear physicists. And finally, do not fixate too much on the prestige of large companies or institutions, but look for the people you want to work with and learn from. ■

Cyber conflict does not happen in a vacuum