



The War in Ukraine

On 24 February, Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Even though the war in Ukraine had been going on since 2014, the invasion created massive shockwaves throughout society, including the VU. It stoked fears of further escalation and even nuclear warfare, it led to tensions between Ukrainians and Russians in the Netherlands, it sparked a big wave of solidarity with those fleeing from Ukraine – and it raised a lot of questions, not the least for the peace and conflict studies community at the VU and elsewhere. These questions concern many disciplines, including international law (can war crimes in Ukraine be prosecuted in The Hague?), psychology (is Putin more likely to use nuclear weapons if he feels cornered?), political science (why do some states refrain from condemning the war of aggression?) to theology and ethics (is it legitimate to export weapons?).

The Peace and Conflict studies community at the VU has been in high demand to address these questions. On 26 April, for example, PACS organized an expert roundtable on “Resisting Mr. Putin’s War”. Speakers were Maartje Weerdesteijn and Willemijn Born, both from the department of Criminal Law and Criminology of the VU’s law faculty. Maartje has worked on the decision-making calculus of authoritarian leaders and regimes and talked about likely responses of the Kremlin to international actions and likely scenarios. Willemijn works on non-violent resistance and pointed to various ways in which Russian society has resisted the war in Ukraine.



“Resisting Mr. Putin’s War” with Wolfgang Wagner (left), Willemijn Born (center) and Maartje Weerdesteijn (right)

From the PACS community

Moreover, the PACS community has given interviews, written op-eds and advised decision-makers. A selection of these activities include:

Bastiaan van Apeldoorn

Bastiaan van Apeldoorn wrote an opinion piece for *Trouw* at the end of March on the (renewed) nuclear threat of Russia. In his piece he warns that although the chances of a nuclear strike remain small, the chances are no longer negligible. Russia’s relatively weak military increases that risk. As conventional military operations versus NATO would prove to be unsuccessful, Russia must rely on its nuclear capacity — and not only as a deterrence. In his piece, he reminds us that political and diplomatic solutions are the only options to resolve this conflict. Van Apeldoorn was also a guest at *Boekestijn en de Wijk* (BNR) to discuss the war, also focussing on how to avoid the use of atomic bombs.

For the full pieces:

- Trouw: <https://www.trouw.nl/ opinie/ ja-rusland-is-militair-vrij-zwak-maar-juist-dat-brengt-een-kernoorlog-dichterbij~b77b5972/> (Dutch)
- BNR’s Boekestijn en de Wijk: <https://www.bnr.nl/podcast/boekestijn-en-de-wijk/10473398/oekraïne-en-de-nucleaire-dreiging> (Dutch)

Yarin Eski

In an opinion piece in *Het Parool*, Yarin Eski highlights that the them-versus-us rhetoric is not exclusive to conspiracy theorists, we all seem to crave it. The need to 'other' is perhaps more complicated now in a time of hybrid wars, to which Eski asks: "Are we the monster or are we Frankenstein?" Perhaps Putin is not the ultimate 'other', but the embodiment of our worst fears: that we ourselves can become like him. Whether Frankenstein or his monster, human suffering does not seem to stop... and thus history seems to repeat itself.

You can find this opinion piece here: <https://www.parool.nl/columns-opinie/opinie-zijn-we-in-het-wij-zij-denken-dokter-frankenstein-of-juist-zijn-monster~b484e293/> (in Dutch)

Fernando Enns

Both in the newsletter and on the website of the Amsterdam Centre for Religion and Peace & Justice Studies (ACRPJ) Fernando Enns published a statement on the war in Ukraine. He calls for a 'Just Peace', to break the spiral of violence, and recognized that any creative measure to orient oneself towards a "Just Peace" require the rigidity of fear to dissipate first. Regardless of faith or culture, political actions ought to contribute to peace for all — not the security of one.

The statement can be found on the website of the ACRPJ:

<https://www.religionpeacejustice.com/#comp-ktxtwwx3> (in English)

Marit Sijbrandij

PACS fellow Marit Sijbrandij has been working with our new Ukrainian colleague Iryna Frankova to help displaced people deal with the impact of their displacement. In a radio item for Nieuws & Co, they talked about their chatbot which they developed to offer immediate practical advice for traumatized individuals. They are also working on forming a network for displaced Ukrainians with other displaced Ukrainians from the psychology field.

Marit was also a presenter at two mental health response webinars: a benefit-webinar that raised €60.000 for Giro555, and one organized by the International Society of Traumatic Stress Studies. She also joined fellow PACS member Pim Cuijpers and many other scholars in an editorial statement in *Sleep and Vigilance*, Scientists against war!

To read more (or listen) about her efforts:

- NPO Radio 1's Nieuws en Co (starting at 49 minutes):
<https://www.nporadio1.nl/uitzendingen/nieuws-en-co/ebf70a5b-e12b-4be2-8cb6-3ef25cec10c9/2022-04-08-nieuws-en-co> (in Dutch)
- The benefit-webinar for Giro555: <https://www.vgct.nl/nieuws/benefietwebinar-voor-oekraïne-was-een-succes/> (in Dutch)
- The resources offered by the International Society of Traumatic Stress Studies:
<https://istss.org/public-resources/war-and-disaster-resources> (in English)
- The editorial piece in *Sleep and Vigilance*: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41782-022-00198-0> (in English)

Paul van Lange

PACS board member Paul van Lange worked on pieces for both *Het Parool* and *NRC*. In *Het Parool*, van Lange urges to find a durable solution to helping refugees because “empathy is a fleeting emotion”. Biases are most visible in these kinds of situations, compassion is stronger for those who we believe to be similar to us. By connecting concrete actions to our words of empathy, we could overcome its fleeting nature.

In *NRC*, he wrote an article with three other crisis scholars of the Adapt Academy in which they share eight recommendations for how and when to negotiate with Putin. Among other things, they stress the importance of a timely and assertive dialogue, a negotiator’s ability the frame of mind of the other, with an eye for the Ukrainians who are in need of evacuation as to avoid worsening their situation further. Already in January, Paul wrote a piece on how to counter short-term thinking.

For full articles:

- Het Parool: <https://www.parool.nl/columns-opinie/opinie-empathie-is-vluchtig-wat-doen-we-op-de-lange-termijn-voor-oekraine~b0fa561a/> (in Dutch)
- NRC: <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2022/03/11/acht-wetenschappelijke-lessen-voor-oorlogsonderhandelaars-a4100518> (in Dutch)
- Knowable Magazine: <https://knowablemagazine.org/article/society/2022/short-circuit-short-term-thinking> (in English)

Wolfgang Wagner

Together with Michal Onderco (EUR), Wolfgang Wagner has already advised the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Tweede Kamer in January 2022 on sanctions. A main argument was turned into an Op-Ed for *NRC* in March: sanctions are necessary to establish and maintain international norms. Critiques of their efficacy are valid, Wagner and Onderco believe the value of sanctions goes beyond the economic penalties: it is a demarcation of what is - and what is not- allowed in the eyes of the international community.

You can find the pieces here:

- The factsheet on sanctions, written for the Dutch parliament: https://www.tweedekamer.nl/debat_en_vergadering/commissievergaderingen/details?id=2021A08436 (in Dutch)
- The Op-ed for *NRC*: <https://wolfgang-wagner.org/outreach-and-policy-consultancy/> (in Dutch)

Nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize

Throughout the fall of 2021, Wolfgang Wagner convened a group of students of the minor peace and conflict studies and the Master Law and Politics of International Security for an extracurricular activity: making a nomination for the 2022 Nobel Peace Prize, because nominations can be made by former laureates, parliamentarians and ministers, as well as university professors in the social sciences. The group extensively discussed criteria, previous nominations and a shortlist of candidates, suggested by the students, before deciding to nominate the **International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA)**.

Since 1968, the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA) has supported indigenous peoples worldwide in their efforts to promote, protect and defend their rights. In their nomination, submitted in January, the group of students wrote that IWGIA has documented atrocities against indigenous peoples and thereby raised awareness of their vulnerability vis-à-vis governments, security services and private, often multinational companies. It has supported efforts of indigenous peoples to hold duty bearers accountable for violations of their rights. It has leveraged indigenous peoples' efforts to claim and exercise their rights to land and natural resources. It has empowered indigenous peoples by working directly with local indigenous communities and organizations. Finally, IWGIA has supported indigenous peoples in their efforts to get access to international organizations in order to have their voices heard and their rights respected. In all their work, IWGIA has been very aware that they cannot and should not represent or speak on behalf of indigenous peoples, but instead can provide important resources to them and support their efforts of being heard and seeing their rights protected. Their work is a model and a source of inspiration for NGOs based in Global North that want to support vulnerable groups in a respectful and effective way and contribute to sustaining peace.

See also the report in *Ad Valvas* [on their website](#).

Upcoming Events, Conferences, and Reminders

On 9 May, 2022, PACS organizes a debate on “The War in Ukraine and European Security” with **Jolle Demmers** (Professor in Conflict Studies and Head of Section History of International Relations, Utrecht University) and **Isabelle Duyvesteijn** (Professor of International Studies and Global History Institute of History, Leiden University). This event will be live-streamed on zoom: <https://vu-live.zoom.us/j/97080294090?pwd=eGhldjlrMGpwY1BaSDREZS8xdFFVdz09> (Meeting ID: 970 8029 4090; Passcode: PACS2022).

On 19 May, Prof. **Shahrbanou Tadjbakhsh** (Sciences Po Paris) will talk about “After Afghanistan. Implications for Human Security and Liberal Interventionism”. This event has been organized by the students of the Master Law and Politics of International Security.

On Monday, 10 October, Prof. **Steven Pinker** (Harvard University) will speak about “Human Nature and the Future of War”. This talk was initially scheduled for September 2020 and then postponed due to covid is now scheduled for 10 October 2022.

Who are we?

PACS, the Peace and Conflict Studies Centre at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, is an inter-faculty scholarly network for research on the causes of political violence, on strategies to build peace and on the governance of conflict. These issues require an interdisciplinary approach. Researchers from five faculties – law, social sciences, behavioral and movement sciences, religion and theology as well as humanities - collaborate in PACS.

Marijn Hoijtink and Ronald Kroeze who served on the management team of PACS from the very beginning both leave the VU. We would like to thank them for the work done and wish them all the best for their new positions in Antwerp and Nijmegen.

A further change in the composition of the management team concerns the representative from the law faculty: Tanja Aalberts has been succeeded by **Maartje Weerdesteijn**. Maartje is Assistant Professor at the Department of Criminal Law and Criminology and researcher at the Center for International Criminal Justice. Maartje obtained her PhD from Tilburg University after a Master in International Crimes and Criminology from VU Amsterdam. She is an interdisciplinary scholar, combining a historical and criminological outlook. She focuses on the role of dictators in the perpetration of mass atrocities and the manner in which the international community can potentially mitigate these crimes.

The new PACS management team thus includes: [Wolfgang Wagner](#) (chair), [Arno Akkermans](#), [Paul van Lange](#), [Maartje Weerdesteijn](#), and [Srdjan Sremac](#).

More information on PACS can be found [on our website](#).