

We cannot stop the endless sourcing of new spies by state actors. Yet, we can better protect our research, employee, and citizen data.

Speaker

**Eric
Schouten**

Expert on aviation security
and espionage awareness



European
Peace
Conference

What if spies are the victims of bad guys?

Eric Schouten on espionage and animosity in hybrid warfare

*We are excited to announce **Eric Schouten** as a speaker on conflict escalation through espionage at the European Peace Conference on Perpetrator-Victim Dynamics in Amsterdam, 2025.*

Eric Schouten

Eric Schouten is an expert in security, specialised in travel risk, resilience, espionage awareness, and aviation security. He is a former liaison officer – AIVD (Dutch Intelligence & Security Service; 2006-2019). Oscar, the founder of the Peace Conference, came across Eric when diving into Europe's current geopolitical situation.

How can spies be victims?

“When it comes to espionage, we always look at the spies. They are the ‘bad guys’ like in the movies, right? Yet, by focusing on the spies themselves, we forget to look at the ‘real bad guys’ – whom they steal knowledge, personal data, and company secrets for. After all, spies are often forced and blackmailed. For example, China has a law that says that every Chinese citizen has the obligation to gain intelligence for the good of the whole society (read: for their government). Imagine that you study here or you do a PhD in the Netherlands. One day, out of the blue, you get an invitation for a cup of tea at the Chinese embassy. There, they are not asked, but told, to obtain certain information. Otherwise your grandmother will not get enough credit points to do her groceries. Or: we know about your mistress or about this loan you have. Even though you may not want to betray your colleagues, this way, you can unintentionally become an insider threat to the organisation you have always dreamt working for.”

What other escalating strategies (besides blackmailing), can state actors use?



“There can be many strategies. Russia may for example do anonymous donations to activists or parties on both sides of the political spectrum. Also through misinformation and disinformation campaigns, they seek to destabilise our society. What if we hate each other? In short: they stir up animosity. States like Russia, China, and Iran have an interest in confusion in our democracies. Let me give some more examples in how states may seek escalation. Let’s stick to Russia: they already send their best tanks to the eastern borders of Europe. They run a war economy. Through misinformation and disinformation campaigns, they seek to weaken their enemy, Europe and NATO, from within. Did you know that the ‘no nukes in my backyard’ campaign in the 80s, was funded by Russia? In fact, if you look at our geopolitical situation right now, from a hybrid warfare perspective, Europe is already at war with Russia. In fact, the Dutch intelligence agencies expect an armed conflict on the eastern border with Russia – within only 12 months! We, the Dutch, kind of ignore it. We have lived in peace for so long, we cannot fathom even being at war. It will be a hybrid war for sure. How do you communicate with family and friends when WhatsApp is not working? How do you get food when payment systems are down? Do you have water to drink? Do you know your neighbours for when you need their help?”

What can we do to prevent people being used as spies by state actors?

“For governments, there is a constant need for intelligence. I would even say: being a spy is the oldest job in the world, next to being a prostitute. Sometimes, these are even combined! Governments may for example send a really beautiful person who seduces the person as a spy. In terms of action, first, I think that we need to protect our information at all costs. For example, data from our ministry of social welfare, state actors can use to identify, repress and punish their own citizens abroad. Or contact details from airport security employees, criminals can use to smuggle drugs. Let me not even talk about the top secret ASML chip machine designs that we have in the Netherlands! In terms of advice for governments and businesses: Create both awareness and support for those who fall pray to the blackmailing of evil state actors. Do not just fire the person, but help them resist governmental interference.”

We need to look for the bad guys and the dynamics behind acts of spying.

Want to learn more? Join us in person or online.

European Peace Conference on Perpetrator-Victim Dynamics

"We are not at war, but not at peace either," said the new NATO Chief, Mark Rutte. "If you want peace, prepare for war." Is Europe at a crossroad towards more polarisation, identity politics, and war? Reflections on our human nature may help us find a sensible way forward.

At this year's peace conference, the first of its kind, an international group of scholars, experts and practitioners, will seek ways to explore how perpetrator-victim dynamics run through our lives, families, business and politics.

With guest lectures, workshops, personal and group reflections, we seek to embody the latest expertise from the research on war and peace.

JOIN THIS UNIQUE EXPERIENCE