

*War is the end result  
of unprocessed pain,  
both within ourselves  
and in society at large.*

Speaker

---

# Frits van den Heuvel van Varik

---

Expert on Ministry of Defence &  
Royal Netherlands Marine Corps



European  
Peace  
Conference



# How aware are you of your inner war zone?

## Frits van den Heuvel van Varik on the dynamics of war and peace

*We are excited to announce **Frits van den Heuvel van Varik** as a speaker on our inner war zone at the European Peace Conference on Perpetrator-Victim Dynamics in Amsterdam, 2025.*

### **Frits van den Heuvel van Varik**

Frits van den Heuvel van Varik has 33 years of experience at the Dutch Ministry of Defence, Amsterdam police department and with designing youth interventions. He is the founder of BaseQamp, an organisation based upon human performance optimisation: 'A true warrior is not about fighting, it is about engaging your true self'. Oscar, the founder of the Peace Conference came across Frits at the yearly two-day gathering "War and Peace" by the conference speaker Hilbrand Westra.

### **What do you mean with 'creating awareness of our inner war zone'?**

"In my view, we all have our personal war zones. You do not need to be in the military for this. For example, those who are raised in complicated families or with difficult situations at work may also be feeling as if they are in a battle. Our unprocessed struggles and painful emotions can energetically go two directions. Inwards, in our minds, we feel cramped, powerless, sad, frozen and may even reject ourselves. We feel like a victim of someone else or of life in general. We can unconsciously identify with this victim role, as if we are indeed the victim, while in actuality we lost the connection between our heart, mind and body. Outwards, we typically project our inner aggression upon others. We make others the perpetrators we are afraid to be ourselves. I would therefore wholeheartedly say: both our inner victim and outwardly projected perpetrator roles are only sides of the same coin – our unprocessed emotional pain."

### Can you give me an example of this mechanism?

“I myself have always felt like a victim of my father. I never felt acknowledged by him. Nothing was ever good enough. At the time I had only processed it in my head. I thought in binaries: my father was the perpetrator and I was the victim. My victim feelings of fear and distrust I brought into the relations with my bosses. I never felt acknowledged by them. Only when I processed my victim feelings from my early youth, my primary trauma, I could better understand my reactions towards my secondary trauma experiences, those I would incur in my military work (e.g. losing colleagues in missions or being under attack in Cambodia). In the end it's not about my father, it is all about me. Lessons in life. In my heart, where non duality resides, I am neither victim nor perpetrator. But in my mind, within the realm duality, I feel both. There, peace and war coexist, yet in my heart, only stillness remains. It's my choice whether I live through my heart or mind and be more aware. Additionally, I believe that if an experience — whether positive or negative — is not fully felt, and no emotions are connected to it, it will return in a different story, carrying the same energy, again and again, until the lessons are learned.”

### So if we would generalise your example, what does it say about war?

“I believe that war is the end result of unprocessed pain of different systems. How can you expect people to process their own personal trauma when the society they live in avoids processing its collective trauma? In fact, as unfortunate as it may sound, in the interbellum, our personal trauma's are often nudged into perpetrator and victim roles in war times. Maybe simply put, we get stuck in our head, in binaries. We rely on our fight or flight response modus. When our energy goes inwards (head or mind), we *flight* from the situation and we become the perpetrator against ourselves; when our energy goes outward, we become the perpetrator towards others by ‘making them the perpetrator’ and denying our own *fighting* side through our projection. This does not only happen at an individual scale, but also with groups. Political groups can also ascribe their unresolved pain to other groups. Their inner wound is mirrored in the outer world. I'd say: unprocessed feelings and experiences are like wounds that have never been treated, taped up nonetheless, and start to fester, eventually causing blood poisoning. Media typically digs in with their dirty hands when they report about people feeling angry, not understood, or unjustly treated.”



*War is the result of unprocessed pain. We should heal these inner wounds by feeling beyond the perpetrator-victim binary. If we don't, it is like we dig our dirty hands into festering wounds.*

## What does happen when we do not take responsibility for our projections?

“Let me give an example. Back in 1992, I was on a mission in Cambodia. All out of nothing, some United Nations colleagues were under siege. At first I felt anxious and scared. ‘F\*ck, they are shooting us, we are the victim.’ We would soon get the upper hand and three heavily wounded Cambodian KHMER soldiers were lying in front of us. Energetically I could sense all my unprocessed anger coming up. I was closed off of my feelings. I felt hate towards them. I was like ‘F\*ck you, now it’s your turn to suffer’. Instead of medically assisting them, I felt the earlier suppressed hate take my emotional inner world over. It seems that by switching to our head, out of our feelings, we switch from feeling victimised into a victimiser. Our hate takes over our fight, flight, freeze, and fear response; and you project your own hate feelings upon the attacker.”

## So what can we do to avoid getting out of the perpetrator and victim binary?

“I like to differentiate between acute and chronic trauma. With acute trauma, there is no time between stimulus and response. When under attack, you need to act. Once the acute danger is over, however, it is time to feel what has been unprocessed. Yet, with chronic trauma, from our youth, this processing muscle of us can get blocked. So I’d say: acute trauma is a wake up call to start processing our chronic trauma. This can however not happen when we are caught in the dualism of our head; it thinks in the polarities ‘war and peace’. Yet, we can be both: I know that I can be a killer and a caring father. Peace does not start ‘out there’. Binaries only give a false sense of security. Instead, real peace starts from within. We should integrate both war and peace, almost in a non-dual and spiritual fashion. ‘In the end, it’s important that your heart always stays connected to your mind, especially in stressful situations — the heart leads, the mind follows. For me, it was the other way around for about 50 years.’ So, the real question is: What is your war zone?”

## In the media

- Van Den Heuvel Varik, F. & Samen sterker Ministerie van Defensie. (2022).
- *Frits vd Heuvel Van Varik #41 BaseQamp | Empowerment | Jongeren | Emotie | Stressregulatie* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d8IR4lwWf04>



*When we are overwhelmed by sudden (acute) trauma in daily life, we should take it as a wake up call for addressing our (chronic) youthful trauma. What daily inner war do YOU fight?*

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**