

It is crucial not only to respect the ones you like but to respect everybody. Respect is the basis for all private or professional relationships

Open Collar №63 with Bruno Russi

EDITORIAL: PIR Center is publishing a new issue of the *Open Collar* series and continues to acquaint readers with our colleagues, friends, and experts who have made a significant contribution to the process of the establishment and development of the organization at its various stages.

This time, we have talked to Colonel (ret.) **Bruno Russi**, Former Swiss Defence Attaché, independent analyst, member of PIR Center Advisory Board. In the interview, **Bruno Russi** told us about his childhood and professional development, shared his impressions of working in the Swiss Ministry of Defense, his most vivid life memories, personal values and beliefs, as well as told us the story of his acquaintance with PIR Center.



Read more on the pages of this issue.

Roasting sausages on an open campfire with family and friends and the smell of freshly mown hay are my childhood's brightest memories

I had a very happy childhood, quite far away from the busy world in a small village called Andermatt, high up in the Alps. I was one of five children. My father was the village carpenter, and my mother was a dressmaker. So, I'm not from a wealthy background, but I had a very happy and easy-going childhood. I had to go to a boarding school because we didn't have a college in Andermatt village, as it was simply too small. But that was a different and exciting experience being at boarding school.

There were maybe 3 or 4 people who influenced me most. First of all, of course, were my parents, because my parents always taught me to think and decide for myself, not regarding other people and what others are doing. My father always said to believe and do what you feel is right. And then, of course, a significant influence was my grandfather. He aroused my historical interest. The Suvorov Memorial is close to Andermatt, and he took me there and explained the history of Suvorov crossing the Alps. And then there was the director of my boarding school, who opened a large new arena of knowledge, of learning. He also encouraged me to read a lot.

The brightest memories from my childhood go back to roasting sausages on an open campfire with family and friends, being on a family outing, and swimming in the ice-cold water of a lake where some pieces of snow still floated. So, these are the childhood memories that come to my mind. Or the smell of freshly mown hay. Generally, I liked this feeling of living in the countryside.

I learned how to ski from my cousins and friends



My hobbies have been changing throughout my life. Of course, one of my first hobbies was skiing because in Andermatt, we had very long winters, and at the age of three, my mother used to put us on our feet and out for skiing. And then you learn from cousins, from friends. I mean, you learn how to ski. I never had a formal ski lesson but have always enjoyed skiing. And in the summer, it was essentially hiking. But now, my wife and I have started taking a sailing course, which is an excellent experience and great fun.

I hadn't thought about working for the military, yet we always had soldiers in the village

When I was a child, I hadn't thought of being a military officer someday. In fact, my parents had a friend who worked at Zurich airport, and we all admired him because he was in contact with the big world outside. It was some

kind of a dream, but with my bad eyesight, I was not seriously thinking about becoming a pilot. At the same time, as children, we got into contact with the military because Andermatt was a military base for the mountain infantry. Thus, we always had soldiers in the village. I remember they had particular biscuits that we liked as children. And so, you know, we also sometimes played soldiers. Yet, I didn't think I would tie my professional life with the military at the Ministry of Defense.

The brightest memory was the academic freedom we enjoyed during university time

My major at the University was English Language and Literature. The first minor was history, and the second minor was political science. I enjoyed my studies very much. And in those days, I never thought of becoming a diplomat, let alone a military diplomat. I was planning to become an English teacher. And, of course, history would be a good second because that was also in demand then.

The brightest memory was the academic freedom we enjoyed during university time. That was before the Bologna system that organized the universities into just another school. Of course, studies in those days tended to be a bit longer, but I remember I followed courses in psychology, archeology, and economy, and I even followed one course in electromechanics, which didn't have anything to do with my core subjects. In those days, it was possible, and I found this very enriching. It was an incredible experience.

My pedagogical abilities would probably not last long enough for a lifetime of teaching

During my studies, I had a friend at university who was a bit older and had already started teaching English at a commercial college, and he had to do his military service. He asked me if I wanted to step in for him. And I agreed. I met with a headmaster who was very supportive. And that was my first professional experience. After that, the headmaster proposed that I continue teaching English after graduation. Of course, I was in favor. I knew the people. People knew me. We were

comfortable with each other. So, it was a kind of a smooth transition from being a student to teaching English professionally.

Yet, during my teaching, I realized that my pedagogical abilities would probably not last long enough for a lifetime of teaching. I was frank with the headmaster about it. He asked, if I wanted to look into a different job. Then, very unspectacularly, I saw an advertisement in a newspaper saying that the Ministry of Defense was looking for a security policy analyst. I only had history in my first and political science in my second minor, but wanted to throw my hat into the ring. I was invited for an early form of what is now called an assessment. There were 30 other people from different walks of life majoring in political science. After completing the assessment, there was a long time with no updates, and I thought the chance had gone. So I talked to the headmaster again, and I asked for another assignment as an English teacher. Yet, as soon as I had signed the contract, the Ministry of Defense phoned me and asked if I could start on the 1st of January 1985.



And I must say that my colleagues at the language school were very supportive, which helped me overcome this difficult choice. But teaching was an excellent experience. And I think the rewarding thing in the end was the experience that openness was supported by superiors and colleagues.

I felt comfortable in the MoD environment

Having already done my compulsory military service, I was very comfortable working with the MoD. Officers even from different military branches share a common military background. In addition, we also had superiors who were very demanding but, at the same time, very supportive in return for good work. So, I enjoyed that. My expectations at the beginning were very unspecified. Of course, I knew it was going to be an analysis job. Yes, but analysis of what? Who for? Why? Based on what? All these sorts of questions. But it soon became apparent that it was an analysis of current events and world politics. And that, of course, was fascinating.

Colleagues, over time, became friends, but it is also essential to distinguish between personal and professional life



If we talk about a positive working environment, one important thing is that colleagues became friends over time. Since we had a good atmosphere at the office, we often went out for lunch together or organized grill evenings jointly. And as such, throughout time, professional relationships became friendships. Being stationed abroad later allowed me to invite my colleagues for a memorable holiday, let's say, a holiday in India or Moscow. And that even reinforced these friendships, which we still maintain regardless of whether the people are still active or retired.

I think the important thing here is to maintain trust and hospitality between people. One of the worst sins is to abuse trust. If a friend trusts you and you abuse his trust, that's pretty bad. Transparency and trustworthiness are indispensable to establishing and maintaining a positive work environment or person-to-person relationships.

And when I was in a leading position, I had to distinguish between the personal and the professional sphere. While I was the superior, I had to qualify my colleagues. I had to tell them unpleasant things when work was not according to standards. Then it helps to have a special kind of professional distance. But on the other hand, once this professional subordination ends, when you call it a day, you can be on a first-name basis and an equal footing. Another thing, of course, is always knowing what you can tell. Being in a position of trust is one thing, but not betraying that trust is another thing. So, there are certain things you can talk about, but you have to know where the limit is.

I had the possibility to build up an entirely new post in Kyiv

An exciting moment was the trip from Berne to Kyiv because that was in winter. It was the beginning of January, and our roads had a lot of snow. I drove through Germany, Poland, Lviv, and then to Kyiv. But one of the most exciting experiences happened shortly afterward because the then Ministry of Emergency Situations in Ukraine invited us to visit Chernobyl. And there we saw the tragedy that happened to people, and to the environment. I mean, that was a profoundly moving visit. And, of course, Kyiv was an exciting post because there was no Defense Attaché post then. So, together with my then-boss, I had the possibility to build up an entirely new post.

The Swiss Embassy was already there, so there were diplomatic contacts. And, of course, the question we had from the military point of view, was to look at the development of the Ukrainian armed forces and potential for cooperation. Many of the structures and training, came from the Soviet Union. What is Ukraine doing with this? How are the Ukrainian armed forces developing? Another important question in those days was the denuclearization of Ukraine. So that was an important question. How is this going? What are the obstacles? What are the open questions? Then, the negotiation on the Black Sea fleet's division was also salient. How are the talks going? Is it

going towards an easy separation? These were the sort of questions that were of interest to us in the 1990s.

The most memorable things were always linked to people

Throughout my career as a Defense Attaché I have worked in different regions of the world. Yet, the most memorable things were always linked to people in unique surroundings. For instance, in Ukraine, I wanted to buy an icon at the Kyiv Pechersk Lavra. One of the monks there said they could paint one for me because it was not allowed to export cultural goods. Moreover, it was possible to watch the monk paint the icon. I watched this monk paint with utter concentration and, simultaneously, with an incredible serenity surrounding him, which was a fantastic experience.

In India, my wife and I went on a holiday to Dharamsala, north of New Delhi. It was a hot summer day, and we had a small cabin in the forest when our landlord came and said they had invited the Dalai Lama's private secretary over for lunch and invited us to join them. Talking with that man about the Dalai Lama and his philosophy and his view of the world was terrific.

In Russia, it was a visit to Kamchatka. I could experience people's great hospitality, particularly at the Rotary Club. Rotary is also about caring for others. And I was impressed by Rotary Kamchatka's care for orphans, etc. And, of course, I recall the incredible landscape in Kamchatka. I still vividly remember the evening when we arrived. Our tour guide had recommended that we pack our bathing trunks on top, and we thought we would go swimming at night. Nonetheless, we visited hot springs, perfect after a long flight from Moscow.



Special courses on security policy brought me invaluable knowledge, a unique opportunity to witness negotiation processes, and memorable friendships

One of the benefits of our work was taking courses in security policy. The first international course was at the University of Kiel, Germany. It was a summer course in security policy for junior-level military but also for junior-level diplomats. The idea was to get an introduction to global questions on the agenda in those days and bring young people together and talk. We had extensive lectures and discussion sessions, which were very helpful. And it introduced me to fundamental security policy questions and gave me one memorable friendship with a participant from Germany which lasts to this day.

Probably the course I liked best, and the most memorable, was the one-year International Training Course in Geneva at the Geneva Centre for Security Policy (GCSP). The idea was to bring mid-level diplomats and mid-level military together at one table to exchange experience. It was very memorable because we had excellent guest speakers. I remember one in particular, academic Dr.

Georgy **Arbatov** (*Soviet and Russian political scientist, Founding Director and later Emeritus Director of the Institute of USA and Canada of the Soviet/Russian Academy of Sciences (ISKRAN) — editor`s note*) from the Institute of US and Canadian Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences. I mean, that was amazing. And there were many other experts like Dr. Francois **Heisbourg** (*currently Senior Adviser for Europe for the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), as well as Special Adviser for the Paris-based «Fondation pour la Recherche Stratégique» (FRS) — editor`s note*), who was then the director of the International Institute for Strategic Studies. Usually, there were two-hour discussion sessions with a brief presentation by the guest speaker. One of the most memorable was Dr. Georgy Arbatov.



Then, of course, another part of the learning process was that the head of the analysis department whenever a foreign delegation was here, allowed us to sit in and listen. Of course, we were not allowed to talk, but we could listen and learn. We could listen to the arguments. We could also understand how our analysis was used in practice. So, it was always awe-inspiring. I remember once I could sit in with a Chinese delegation, and it was exciting to see what questions the Chinese delegation and the Swiss delegation brought up. So that kind of exchange, I thought, was highly instructive because then you also learned the practical aspects of diplomacy.

In Switzerland, practical experience is always a benefit, in academic or professional training. For instance, one of my brothers is a car mechanic, and during his apprenticeship, he always had periods of school where they were trained theoretically in material science and, separately, in practical work. And I think that's probably a typical Swiss way of doing things.

Singapore is similar to Switzerland in a way, but it is Asia

While working as a Defense Attaché in New Delhi, I was cross-accredited, among others, to Singapore, and it is interesting to recall Singapore as it has many similarities with Switzerland. On the one hand, there is the size of the country. On the other hand, it's the multiculturalism and the different languages spoken. Even politically, I think the similarity is that, as a small country, we depend on good relations with our neighbors. Militarily, there is also a certain similarity. Singapore also has a general conscript system, but they include virtually every male at age 20, irrespective of his physical abilities. I saw, for instance, a disabled person working in a military office rather than in the field. I thought that was a really a good way of integrating young people at a very early age.

Also, general staff training is very similar. The repetition course system is also comparable. In my days, I was even lucky to accompany a visit by the Singaporean Minister of Defense to Switzerland, and that was a very fruitful exchange that led to quite a succession of other exchanges in different fields. The relationship between the countries is excellent. One particular aspect is our

good economic relationship. Swiss National Bank has a branch office in Singapore, which tells you how close the economic and monetary relationship is.

The significant difference is that Singapore is an Asian country. The difference between Asians and Europeans is often one of style. For instance, talking to people from Asia, the preliminary in the discussion can be more important than the discussion itself. Often, before you proceed with the debate, you ask about how the family is, how things are going, etc.

Another difference I would mention is the way of looking at things. We Europeans sometimes tend to think that everything new is better. Asians, conversely, tend to also look back and say that maybe not everything in the past was bad. I believe this is a fundamental difference as well.

Every relocation was a great chance of discovery, enrichment, and getting to know different cultures

Changing the job location from Switzerland, from a small village first to Berne and then to the big city of Kyiv, with its rich traditions and history, was exciting but relatively stressful. After four years in Kyiv, back to Bern. And then, in the middle of my career, I was a roaming Defense Attaché to Central Asia for two years. I was based in Berne but responsible for the military relationship with Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan. And, of course, personally, it was an enormous enrichment to see and to experience states as diverse as Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, one being based on a nomadic culture high up in the mountains with a very long cultural tradition, the other one based on cities with a 3000-year-old culture.

Of course, moving was never stress-free. The stress came because four things were happening at the same time. One of them was that you had to hand over your old job to your successor. Then, you had to take over the new position from your predecessor. Then, you had to do all the administrative business: get new passports, get your visas, get accreditations, etc. And then, of course, moving the entire household was the tip of the iceberg, but luckily, my wife is an excellent organizer. So I could leave the entire moving process to her. She organized — with the embassy's support — the pickup and managed all the administrative problems. She did a remarkable job, which helped a lot to alleviate the stress because I was standing between two positions.

When I travel to a new country, I'm always interested in its history. I'm interested in how Uzbekistan became the way it is now. Or why are there so many archeological sites in Turkmenistan or all these sorts of questions. It was always a discovery. Luckily, my wife shared this attitude. It was always essential to meet people, see the country, and visit museums because museums always have two faces. On the one hand, they show you the history of the country, but on



the other hand, they also present an image of how a country or a city would want to be seen. And that may be quite a different story.

An important aspect of work is motivation. The best motivation for me was serving my country as best I could. Another motivation, of course, was the support of my family: my immediate family, my parents, my brothers and sisters, and also my wife and my wife's family.

Never criticize people's personalities; instead, criticize their work, if necessary

I think respect for other people is one of the most essential principles for private and professional life. It is not only a thing you bring towards other people but also what I expect from others. I hope other people respect me the way I respect them and vice versa. Another essential principle is fairness. You cannot always be fair, but try to be as fair and honest as possible. For instance, when you have subordinates in the military, you need to look critically at them but never criticize their personalities; instead, critically assess their work.

Another thing is when you have employees engaged, use their strengths rather than primarily looking at their weaknesses. Everybody has weaknesses. If you look at strengths, you will suddenly get a different image of the person. As a military leader, of course, the main principle was leading by example, which is not to demand from your subordinates what you're not willing or capable of doing yourself. It means that you have done it yourself, can do it yourself, and can assess what it means to do that particular activity.

If I hadn't joined the MoD, I would have taught English maybe somewhere in Europe

If I hadn't joined the MoD, I would probably have stayed on teaching English because, when you look at it, what are my marketable skills? I was a trained officer, but I was a reserve officer. I think I would probably have stayed on as an English teacher. Maybe I would have gone abroad to, let's say, Italy, Germany, or France to teach English there. And I would have been possibly a translator. It's challenging to say, but I would not have had the chance to have such various experiences and posts. And for this I'm very grateful to our Ministry of Defense.



I enjoy writing old-fashioned letters

Now I am retired, as retired people always say they don't have time. But quite frankly, I enjoy reading, particularly books I've always wanted but never managed to read. My wife and I both enjoy camping. I also enjoy writing old-fashioned letters. So I have a couple of friends, and we still write in the old way, not necessarily by email or WhatsApp, but just old-fashioned letters. What is also essential is that much of my time is spent with friends, discussing, talking, and enjoying each other's company. We established a group of former military diplomats, and we meet maybe every three months.

PIR Center has always been a source of expertise and inspiration as well as friendship

PIR Center, for me, is a center of excellence in security policy, which combines analysis, education, and promotion of young talent, but also community building in a unique way. Professionally, PIR Center has always been a rich source of expertise and practical experience because in PIR Center, you have no pure academics. You have practitioners like Dr. Vladimir **Orlov** (*Founding Director of PIR Center — editor`s note*) and Lieutenant-General (retired) Evgeny **Buzhinsky** (*Chairman of PIR Center Executive Board — editor`s note*). They are, on the one hand, academics who are up to the latest developments academically, but they`re also experienced practitioners. This combination has always been a source of expertise and inspiration, and in addition, PIR Center has always been a facilitator for new and high-ranking contacts. For instance, *Triologue Club International* gave me access to guest speakers from the Russian Academy of Sciences, from other embassies, from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other institutions.

I highly value my friends from PIR Center. PIR Center has always been a rich source of friendship and inspiration. Let`s say, Dr. Vladimir Orlov, Dr. Vadim **Kozyulin** (*Head of the Center for Global Studies & International Organizations of the Institute for Contemporary International Studies of the Diplomatic Academy of the Russian Foreign Ministry, PIR Center Consultant, member of PIR Center Executive Board — editor`s note*), and Lieutenant-General Evgeny Buzhinsky are entirely different personalities but fascinating experts in their fields of expertise. Listening and talking to them has always been a great inspiration. The concept of PIR Center also plays a crucial role: solid research, solid political advice, solid educational programs, and solid networking.

I was impressed by Vladimir Orlov's hospitality when we first met in Moscow

In 2014, when I first came to Moscow, there was a reception at the Swiss Embassy, and Dr. Vladimir **Orlov** was also there. The then Deputy Ambassador, a good friend of mine, introduced me to him, and we immediately started talking about security policy, Russian policy, foreign policy, and all the different aspects. We immediately hit it off. Of course, I was impressed by Dr. Vladimir **Orlov`s** practical and academic experience, but also by the concept and vision of PIR Center, which he is heading. At that time, he told me about the international summer schools on global security and invited me to present the Swiss foreign and security policy.



That was a fantastic opportunity for me, and I agreed. That`s how my work with PIR Center started. Another format was the *Triologue Club International*. I thought that was an enriching format. We had people like academic Dr. Alexey **Arbatov** (*Head of the Center for International Security of*

the Primakov National Research Institute of World Economy and International Relations, Russian Academy of Sciences (IMEMO RAS), member of PIR Center Advisory Board since 2004 — editor`s note) as a guest speaker or Prof. Dr. Vitaly Naumkin (Academic Advisor of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, member of PIR Center Advisory Board since 2014 — editor`s note) from the Russian Academy of Sciences. These were relatively short events but treasured because you got much insight, not just into facts and figures, but also into the way Russian academics and practitioners looked at the world and global problems. And I thought that was truly valuable.

Today, PIR Center keeps its relevance and importance for several reasons. First, the concept and the vision. PIR Center can already look back at a tremendous experience in analysis and policy advice. And it is possible, among other things, because of a great network, which I think is a real asset. Furthermore, with international fragmentation and polarization becoming more intense, I think topics like nuclear arms control, nuclear disarmament, conventional arms control, and international relations get even more critical. I think the concept and the vision of PIR Center are central to discussing these problems.

In addition, I'd love to emphasize again the network that PIR Center established, which is invaluable when discussing Track 1.5 and Track 2 Diplomacy. These networks are what PIR Center also stands for. These networks will become increasingly important because many diplomatic channels are being closed now. I think that Track 1.5 and Track 2 Diplomacy will have a tremendous influence in future as a stepping stone for official diplomatic negotiations, which is where PIR Center comes in.

Sometimes, the trodden path does not work

Talking about advice for the younger generation, one of the topics that has gone through our discussion is respect for other people. And it is crucial not only to respect the ones you like but to respect everybody. Respect — for me — is the basis for all private or professional relationships.



Another advice I would give young people is to work hard without exhausting themselves. Find a healthy work-life balance, spend time with family and friends, do sports, and be interested in culture. A career is meaningful, but it is not everything in life. If you have a burnout, nobody thanks you for working too hard.

Moreover, engage professionally without being selfish and without working at the expense of others. Don't push others down to elevate yourself. But also be curious and try to get to the heart of the questions in a

healthy way, not superficial. Sometimes, the trodden path does not work. So you have to be creative and find new solutions to what you are doing.

Interview: Maksim Sorokin

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