

A conversation with Gary Samore on September 8th, 2014

Participants

- Gary Samore – Executive Director for Research, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School
- Nick Beckstead – Research Fellow, Future of Humanity Institute

Note: This set of notes was compiled by GiveWell and gives an overview of the major points made by Dr. Samore.

Summary

GiveWell spoke with Dr. Samore as part of its investigation into nuclear policy and security issues.

US Nuclear Policy

There are four main aspects of US nuclear policy:

- 1) **Nuclear arms control and disarmament** in countries that already have nuclear weapons. This is mainly focused on US-Russian negotiation and policy. It also includes multilateral elements, e.g., the Conference on Disarmament and the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty.

The US government's ability to reduce nuclear arsenals is constrained by military and national security concerns. It is very difficult to influence other countries to disarm if they have their own incentives to maintain their nuclear capabilities.

- 2) **Non-proliferation**, i.e., preventing additional countries from acquiring nuclear weapons. Currently, this is focused mainly on Iran and North Korea. The broader international regime of non-proliferation is based largely on the International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA) Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.

The most significant challenges in the area of non-proliferation are political and diplomatic, rather than financial (e.g., it has proven very difficult to dissuade Iran from pursuing a nuclear program, but more funding would not necessarily help).

- 3) **Nuclear security**, i.e., making sure nuclear weapons and materials are secure and accounted for and preventing their acquisition by terrorists.

Dr. Samore believes that most countries with nuclear weapons spend an adequate amount on nuclear security in this narrow sense. Matthew Bunn (Harvard Kennedy School) believes that Russia may not spend enough on nuclear security.

President Obama has increased attention toward nuclear security through three nuclear security summits (with a fourth planned for 2016).

4) Nuclear energy.

Nearly all government security agencies are involved with nuclear policy to some degree, including:

- The White House International Security Council
- The Department of Defense
- The Department of State
- The Department of Energy, involved in both nuclear energy and nuclear security (through the National Nuclear Security Administration)
- Intelligence agencies

Areas for philanthropy

The overall level of philanthropic funding for nuclear issues has decreased since the end of the Cold War. Most philanthropic funding directed toward nuclear issues is spent on policy development and research. Some funding also supports “track II” diplomatic efforts (i.e., meetings between non-state actors, such as policy experts and former government officials, to discuss nuclear issues).

The US government spends very little on nuclear policy development or education on nuclear issues, and these areas may be effective options for philanthropic funding.

Policy development and scholarship

Non-government foundations produce most of the policy work and scholarship on nuclear issues, although not very many foundations are involved in nuclear policy. Foundations doing nuclear policy work include:

- The MacArthur Foundation
- The Carnegie Corporation
- The Stanton Foundation

Many foundations that were once involved in nuclear policy no longer are, including the Hewlett Foundation and the Ford Foundation.

The multilateral aspects of nuclear policy do not receive much attention from foundations or academics.

Education and career training

Philanthropy may be particularly beneficial in support of training and education to prepare people for work related to nuclear issues in government, at think tanks, or in other careers. It could be beneficial to support bigger fellowship programs and to provide more opportunities for people outside of government to work and contribute within the government. \$10 million of additional funding a year would have a significant impact in this area.

Building an international expert base

The US has a far broader base of expertise on nuclear issues than most other countries do. It could be effective to contribute to the development of policy schools and think tanks internationally that would address nuclear issues, especially in the major countries that have nuclear weapons. The MacArthur Foundation has attempted this (e.g., the work of the Center for Policy Studies in Russia [PIR Center] in Moscow). Other American think tanks (e.g., the Brookings Institution, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, the American Enterprise Institute) have partnership programs with foreign think tanks and universities.

Past philanthropic achievements in nuclear policy

By providing financial support for scholars and experts, philanthropic funding has helped facilitate idea development, including:

- The work of Thomas Schelling and others on theories of deterrence, which created the intellectual basis for US arms control policy.
- The concept of cooperative threat reduction, developed at Harvard University and Stanford University.
- The Obama administration's recent "Prague Agenda," developed by scholars and graduate students outside of government.

It is very difficult to measure the impact of philanthropy on nuclear issues. Charting the careers of people supported by philanthropic funding (e.g. tracking how many go into government, NGOs, the private sector, academia, etc.) could provide a partial metric.

An IAEA nuclear fuel bank (such as that proposed and funded in part by the Nuclear Threat Initiative) is unlikely to have a concrete impact on, e.g., the Iranian nuclear agenda (because Iran's nuclear program is not in reality motivated by nuclear energy concerns).

Other people for GiveWell to talk to

- Joan Rohlfing (President and Chief Operating Officer, Nuclear Threat Initiative)

On nuclear arms control:

- Steven Pifer (Director, Arms Control and Non-Proliferation Initiative, Brookings Institution)
- Robert Einhorn (Senior Fellow, Arms Control and Non-Proliferation Initiative and the Center for 21st Century Security and Intelligence, Brookings Institution)

On nuclear security:

- Matthew Bunn (Professor of Practice, Harvard Kennedy School). Dr. Samore believes Professor Bunn is the best expert outside of government on nuclear security issues.

On nuclear energy:

- Daniel Kahneman (Senior Scholar, Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs, Princeton University)
- Sharon Squassoni (Director and Senior Fellow, Proliferation Prevention Program, Center for Strategic & International Studies)

On nuclear policy development:

- Emma Belcher (Director, International Peace and Security, MacArthur Foundation)
- Joe Cirincione (President, Ploughshares Fund), especially about the role of the private sector and lobbying groups.

It could be useful to talk to regional experts (beyond just nuclear experts) for information on regional approaches, e.g., to Iran.

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