

## **A conversation with Robert Einhorn, November 10, 2014**

### **Participants**

- Robert Einhorn — Senior Fellow, Arms Control and Non-Proliferation Initiative, Center for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Security and Intelligence, the Brookings Institution
- Nick Beckstead — Research Analyst, Open Philanthropy Project

**Note:** These notes were compiled by the Open Philanthropy Project and give an overview of the major points made by Mr. Einhorn.

### **Summary**

The Open Philanthropy Project spoke with Mr. Einhorn of the Brookings Institution as part of its investigation into nuclear weapons policy. Conversation topics included the challenges of nuclear policy advocacy and the possible ways philanthropy can rebuild capacity for engagement in the area and influence the debate around nuclear weapons.

### **Nuclear weapons policy advocacy**

#### **Current opinion on nuclear weapons policy**

Nuclear weapons policy is a challenging space for philanthropy. The relevant policies of any national government are highly sensitive, driven by compelling national interests, and usually pursued in secrecy.

Advocacy work on this issue is difficult because most Americans have not viewed nuclear weapons as a serious threat since the Cold War. Prospects for effective advocacy are related to perceptions of threat and public opinion data has consistently shown that nuclear weapons fall well below other areas of concern such as economic insecurity and the environment.

It is hard to imagine public interest changing without there being a significant nuclear incident, such as a nuclear exchange between India or Pakistan, a nuclear test that leaked radiation, or a group like the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria gaining control of radiological material and detonating a dirty bomb. The Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster led to a reconsideration of nuclear reactor safety globally. Mr. Einhorn is doubtful that the current tension between the U.S. and Russia will increase interest in nuclear policy. Americans are no longer very concerned with Russia's nuclear weapons. Fewer young people are choosing to pursue careers in the field of nuclear weapons policy.

#### **Grassroots advocacy**

Mr. Einhorn does not believe grassroots advocacy on nuclear weapons issues has often been very effective. At best, its record has been mixed. For example, despite significant public support for the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, the Senate voted it down during the Clinton presidency. On the other hand, popular

nuclear disarmament movements in the early 1980s may have had some impact in getting the Reagan administration to begin disarmament negotiations.

Nuclear terrorism is a serious concern but it is hard to see how grassroots advocacy could help the issue. Even without public advocacy, preventing such an attack is already a high national priority.

### **Political advocacy**

Political advocacy which aims to influence technocrats and lawmakers directly may be more effective. For example, in 2007, former secretaries of state Henry Kissinger and George Shultz, former Defense Secretary William Perry and former Senator Sam Nunn published an op-ed in the Wall Street Journal calling for complete nuclear disarmament. The op-ed argued that nuclear weapons had a useful purpose but are becoming increasingly counter-productive and that the U.S. should significantly reduce and eventually eliminate its nuclear arsenal. Given their experience and expertise in nuclear matters, this statement was very influential.

A private foundation could help to support a similar action by assembling the former “nuclear priesthood” (i.e. members of the nuclear establishment). Many nuclear leaders, such as former commanders of U.S. Strategic Command, become more skeptical about nuclear weapons after retiring. A public statement by these leaders advocating for stronger nuclear arms control or disarmament could be very influential.

### **Other possibilities for philanthropic engagement**

#### **Rebuilding capacity for engagement**

Because nuclear weapons issues are no longer a top concern for most Americans, there are fewer nuclear policy experts in politics or academia.

#### *Supporting a new generation of nuclear weapons policy analysts*

The Center for Strategic and International Studies runs the Project on Nuclear Issues. This program aims to build a network of young nuclear experts and to provide the next generation of leaders with the necessary knowledge to design sound nuclear policy. A private foundation could support further efforts like this to ensure that there is a next generation of nuclear weapons policy analysts.

A private foundation could also help to ensure that academic institutions continue to teach the relevant nuclear policy issues. Mr. Einhorn taught a policy workshop on the practical issues of nuclear nonproliferation at the Woodrow Wilson School of Public & International Affairs at Princeton from 2004-2006. This program included funded field trips for students to such locations as Moscow, Vienna, Beijing, Tokyo, and Seoul. A private foundation could support other academic institutions that want to provide similar practical experiences in nuclear policy for their students.

#### *Creating expertise in Congress*

During the START I (Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty) talks, many members of the US Congress, both Democrats and Republicans, were focused on nuclear issues and had a considerable level of expertise in the field. There was a Senate Arms Control Observers Group that visited the Geneva talks periodically. Currently, it is difficult to get politicians interested in the issue. Supporting a program that regularly briefed members of the House and the Senate and their staffs on nuclear issues could raise interest.

With enough funding, a private foundation could host a retreat for policymakers focused on nuclear issues; a retreat could rebuild interest and expertise in nuclear weapons policy. While there is no guarantee that rebuilding nuclear expertise on the Hill would lead to more nuclear arms agreements, it would raise the level of national debate. Because many current politicians lack expertise in nuclear policy, current debates, such as the Iran deal, are more ideological and less sophisticated than they could be.

### **Conducting a budgetary analysis of nuclear policy**

A private foundation could also steer the direction of the debate by focusing on the budgetary perspective. The U.S. currently has a large number of aging delivery platforms – including strategic bombers, submarine-based missiles, and land-based missiles. The extent to which the U.S. should reinvest or upgrade this technology remains an open question. It is possible the U.S. could limit itself to two of the three legs of the nuclear triad. It may be easier to shift views on nuclear policy by presenting a budgetary analysis of nuclear arms practices and presenting alternative uses for the money than by making an intellectual case for arms reduction.

### **Rethinking deterrence**

Private philanthropy could also support the development of a new theory of deterrence. The previous framework was focused on deterring the USSR and its allies from using nuclear weapons or attacking Western Europe. It is not clear how relevant Cold War principles are to present-day policy. Coming up with clear answers to those questions could help guide future policy. It is possible that nuclear weapons now play a significantly reduced role in deterrence. This area needs further investigation.

### **People to Talk to**

- **Matthew Bunn** – Professor of Practice, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University
- **Jon Wolfsthal** – Senior Director for Arms Control and Nonproliferation at the National Security Council (NSC)

*All Open Philanthropy Project conversations are available at  
<http://www.givewell.org/conversations>*