

## **A conversation with George Perkovich on June 6, 2013**

### **Participants**

- George Perkovich – Director, Nuclear Policy Program, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace
- Alexander Berger, Senior Research Analyst, GiveWell
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**Note:** This set of notes was compiled by GiveWell and gives an overview of the major points made by George Perkovich.

### **Summary**

George Perkovich is the Director of the Nuclear Policy Program at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. This was GiveWell's first conversation to learn about the area of nuclear policy.

Dr. Perkovich highlighted the main areas of philanthropic work within the broad area of nuclear policy. He pointed to interventions to improve relations among states with nuclear weapons, particularly India and Pakistan, as an area in which philanthropists could make a difference.

Other objectives in this field that were discussed include better safety regulation of nuclear power plants, prevention of accidental discharge of weapons, reduction of nuclear arsenals, and prevention of nuclear weapon proliferation, including to terrorists.

### **Areas of nuclear policy work**

The field of nuclear policy includes:

- Safety of nuclear power plants
- Prevention of nuclear war
- Prevention of accidental discharge of weapons
- Reduction of nuclear arsenals
- Prevention of nuclear weapon proliferation, including to terrorists

### **Safety of nuclear power plants**

Philanthropists have limited opportunities in the area of safety of power plants. It is a worthwhile goal to increase the independence and power of regulatory authorities, but achieving this would be difficult.

The Indian government has reacted to grassroots protests against the construction of two nuclear power plants in the country by increasing restrictions on NGOs, especially those who receive foreign funding.

There is limited scope for this work in the US because new plants are not being considered, largely for economic reasons.

### **Prevention of nuclear war**

This area is likely where there is the largest scope for philanthropy.

Reducing the risk of war is a very different type of philanthropy than what most West Coast philanthropists work on. It is international politics, which means that the results are highly uncertain and the time frame for meaningful progress is long.

Dr. Perkovich believes that the highest risk of nuclear war stems from conflict in South Asia. If there were another terrorist attack on a major Indian city that could plausibly be linked to Pakistan, there is a significant chance that India would respond with a conventional military attack on Pakistan. Following the 2001 attack on the Indian Parliament, India marched troops to the border with Pakistan but didn't attack. After that, Indian military leaders drew up plans to be able to launch an attack on Pakistan within three days, called "Cold Start," to make their threats more credible. Following the 2008 attack on Mumbai, Indian leaders showed restraint and didn't retaliate against Pakistan, leading some to believe that another attack would force India to retaliate. In response to the Cold Start plan, Pakistan, because it would not be able to match India's conventional military strength, has pledged that it would respond to any Indian attack on its territory with a nuclear bomb. This makes the Indian-Pakistani situation the lowest threshold for use of nuclear weapons in the world.

The chance of a terrorist attack on India that could be linked to Pakistan is reasonably likely. The effects could be mitigated if the governments of India and Pakistan were deeply engaged in a peace process, but the Pakistani Army and intelligence services have been resistant, in part because their predominance and funding within Pakistan depend on the projection of an existential threat from India.

Examples of efforts to reduce the risk of a nuclear detonation in South Asia include:

- Meetings between leaders and former leaders of both sides, diplomats, and experts in the field of nuclear conflict resolution to come up with ideas for how to build trust between the two countries and between both of them and the US. The US, with enough trust from India and Pakistan, could play the role of the mediator in a conflict situation. A recent meeting in Vienna brought together important Pakistani military leaders with US military leaders, diplomats, and nuclear conflict experts. Similar meetings have been held with Indian leaders. It is a delicate process because any progress gives war hawks

and terrorists an incentive counteract this progress with a military action or a terrorist attack.

- Brokering agreements that reduce the possibility of misunderstandings. India and Pakistan currently have an agreement to notify each other 24 hours prior to testing a missile. The current agreement does not cover cruise missiles, so Dr. Perkovich and others are working to get them to extend the agreement to cruise missiles.
- Creating a center of excellence on nuclear safety in Pakistan to highlight Pakistan's strong record on nuclear safety, as a way to boost Pakistan's confidence and buy-in to the international system. The idea is that such buy-in would increase Pakistan's willingness to comply with international nuclear law and norms.
- In the 1990s, Dr. Perkovich worked on a program to bring together young scholars and policymakers from Pakistan and India to increase goodwill and communication among the next generation of leaders. The program ended because the governments weren't in favor of the project and made it difficult to obtain the necessary visas. Restarting a program like this could be a good use of philanthropic funding.

There is some dispute and uncertainty around whether the India-Pakistan situation should be the primary focus of nuclear conflict prevention, though almost all scholars agree that South Asia is where the greatest risk of a detonation is. Other important areas include:

- Iran. Iran obtaining nuclear weapons is less likely than the India-Pakistan situation to lead to the detonation of a nuclear weapon, but the threat of it could lead to a conventional war involving the US and others.
- US-China relations. There is less scope for progress by outside parties in this relationship than in the India-Pakistan relationship.
- Japan-China relations. This isn't a prominent topic in the field, but Dr. Perkovich believes that it probably should get more attention. One idea would be to bring business leaders and other powerful interests together who have a strong interest in preventing conflict due to island disputes.
- South Korea-Japan relations. The tension between these countries is very unlikely to lead to war, but it is impeding other positive progress.
- North Korea. There is a project to increase cooperation by linking North and South Korea's electrical grids. North Korea is a wildcard because people outside don't understand how they think.

### **Prevention of accidental discharge of weapons**

US nuclear weapons are not as well-managed as they should be. For example, in 2007 there was an incident in which the Air Force mistakenly loaded nuclear weapons onto a plane, which then flew to another base without the crew being aware they were onboard.

There is very limited scope for philanthropy in this area. NGOs could highlight the need, but the problem is pretty well understood already.

### **Reduction of nuclear arsenals**

President Obama has come out in support of the elimination of all nuclear weapons, recognizing this would have to occur through stages of reductions lasting decades. No other major political leader has joined him in making this a top, actionable priority. Meanwhile, leaders in Russia, France, Israel, and Pakistan push in a contrary direction, and some in the U.S. defense and political establishments actively resist. Russia seems to see an American policy goal of disarmament as an attempt to dominate Russia. The French are also strong advocates of the nuclear status quo.

Global Zero is group that is focused on persuading countries to get rid of nuclear weapons. It was started in reaction to President Bush's policies.

### **Prevention of nuclear weapon proliferation, including to terrorists**

Dr. Perkovich believes that the risk of a nuclear attack by terrorists is generally exaggerated, though he remains unsure of this view because there are people he trusts who tell him he is wrong about this.

His view is based on the very high difficulty of obtaining weapons-grade nuclear fuel and of constructing a weapon, as well as his belief that detonating a nuclear weapon would not be in the interest of most terrorist groups because it would reduce their financial and political support.

Governments are very much on top of this risk and it is unlikely that there is any valuable work that outside groups could do. Similarly, it is not clear what a philanthropist could fund to prevent nuclear proliferation to other states.

### **Funding for nuclear policy**

There are relatively few funders of nuclear policy efforts. These funders include:

- The MacArthur Foundation.
- The Carnegie Corporation in New York.
- The Hewlett Foundation. They contribute about \$4 million per year and it is not clear how long the program will continue.
- Ploughshares Fund. They fund about \$3-4 million per year.
- Prospect Hill Foundation. They fund a few hundred thousand dollars per year.
- New Land Foundation. They fund a few hundred thousand dollars per year.

- Scandinavian and German governments.
- Nuclear Threat Initiative, started by Ted Turner. Warren Buffet funds its overhead.

Megan Garcia at the Hewlett Foundation has compiled data on funding for this cause.

### **Other people and institutions to talk to about nuclear policy**

- Joe Cirincione, President of the Plowshares Fund. He focuses on US nuclear policy.
- Linton Brooks, a former naval captain who negotiated the START treaty and was in charge of the US nuclear weapons complex under President Bush.
- Peter Jones, Professor at the University of Ottawa and former Canadian diplomat.
- Bill Perry, former Secretary of Defense, current Professor at Stanford University, and Co-Director of the Nuclear Risk Reduction Initiative and the Preventive Defense Project.
- Scott Sagan, Professor at Stanford University and Senior Fellow at the Center for International Security and Cooperation and the Freeman Spogli Institute.
- Heather Hurlburt, Executive Director of the National Security Network, a Washington DC non-profit.
- The Stimson Center.
- James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies at the Monterrey Institute of International Studies at Middlebury.
- Gordon Flake, expert on North Korea.
- Joel Wit, former state department official and expert on North Korea.

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