

A conversation with Philip Yun on October 16, 2014

Participants

- Philip Yun — Executive Director and Chief Operating Officer of Ploughshares Fund
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Note: This set of notes was compiled by the Open Philanthropy Project and gives an overview of the major points made by Philip Yun.

Summary

The Open Philanthropy Project spoke with Philip Yun as part of its investigation of nuclear policy. Conversation topics included: sources of potential nuclear threats, changing attitudes towards nuclear weapons, and areas for research.

Addressing potential nuclear weapons threats

Potential threats could be reduced by:

- Taking concrete steps to reduce the US nuclear arsenal. Key focus – specific policy changes and efforts to shape the views of the national security community generally. Grassroots campaigns and campaigns to change public opinion, such as the below cultural strategy, could also be helpful to promote cuts to the nuclear weapons budget.
- Taking steps, including promoting negotiations with other nations, to prevent the establishment of nuclear weapons programs or to rollback developing ones. This approach is especially relevant in Iran and North Korea.
- Removing states' motivation for having nuclear arsenals. This is especially relevant in South Asia, where tensions between India and Pakistan influence the countries' nuclear policies.
- Technical work to improve safety protocols

To support these activities, organizations develop and analyze policy, advocate for policy change, promote grassroots engagement, and produce communications to educate the public, policymakers, and academics. Ploughshares Fund has found that most resources in the past have been devoted to policy analysis and that more could be used for communications and advocacy.

Cultural Strategy

Widespread, but inaccurate, beliefs about nuclear weapons are:

- Nuclear weapons are no longer a problem or a threat to humanity;
- They are the “last best hope” for national security.
- The only problem with nuclear weapons is that “bad guys” have them.

- Nuclear deterrence in today's world is as strong as it ever was and continues to work

If there is any hope of reaching the long-term goal of eliminating nuclear weapons, these opinions need to change. Ploughshares Fund commissioned a study exploring how a "cultural strategy" might be helpful in this regard. Mr. Yun does not know of other groups working on a cultural strategy to reduce potential threats from nuclear weapons.

A cultural strategy could take a range of forms. Some of these possibilities are outlined in the report, which is posted on Ploughshares Fund's website.

Other areas of interest

- The Nuclear Innovation Collaborative (NIC), now named N Square, is envisioned as a research and development space for the nuclear nonproliferation community because the community is so strapped for time and resources. N Square aims to use funds to encourage the development of new tools, including communications strategies, and identify potential new policy goals.
- Millennials are not engaged in nuclear security issues. The nuclear policy community needs to reach millennials to increase the relevance of nonproliferation issues and to increase funding for the field. Millennials respond to mass communication differently from previous generations.
- The US is currently engaging in the development of ballistic missile defense (BMD), a platform to intercept intercontinental ballistic missiles mid-flight. This may be an obstacle to reduced nuclear arsenals and is a source of concerns for Russia and China. Though BMD theoretically could provide countries with protection against nuclear weapons, it is arguably destabilizing, motivating countries to increase their nuclear weapons arsenal in order to bolster their ability to overcome others' defenses.
- Some have voiced concerns about the possible susceptibility of a country's nuclear weapons platform to cyberattacks. If cybersecurity were insufficient, there is a fear that outside groups might be able to remotely gain control of some portion of the nuclear weapons infrastructure.

South Asia

Ploughshares Fund would like more funds to devote to South Asia work. The threat of a nuclear exchange appears to be greatest in South Asia. Given the amount of fissile material Pakistan is producing and concerns about the country's internal politics, some say Pakistan is the most dangerous place in the world from a nonproliferation perspective. In terms of a philanthropic investment strategy, the region could benefit from more venture investments geared toward new solutions to lessen India-Pakistan tensions. Ploughshares Fund has made small seed investments in groups seeking to do "proof of concept" work. It has invested in water-related work in Kashmir, since water is a major cause of tension in the region. Also, it has invested in establishing business connections between Pakistan and

India to develop informal relationships that bypass traditional barriers to international cooperation.

Many universities and think tanks have well-known programs related to South Asia. These programs in part aim to promote dialogue between groups and elites within both countries. The popularity of South Asia policy studies may be related to how potentially dangerous the region is from a nuclear perspective. Ploughshares Fund sees its value-added – with its relatively modest amount of funds – as trying to promote innovative thinking about India-Pakistan relations.

The US cannot force conversations between the countries. Before any arms reduction agreement can be reached, both parties must be open to initial confidence building measures. The US can help create an environment conducive to dialogue by fostering informal relationships and by having resources already prepared for the parties when they want to formally engage. These resources could include providing technical help.

Timing is very important in these matters; it is necessary to be ready to act on short notice and to delay action until the right time. Currently, India-Pakistan relations seem to be improving, but could change quickly.

It is expensive to fund policy and advocacy work in South Asia, in part due to India's size. However, to properly monitor and evaluate effectiveness of grants, it is best to have a local presence.

There is value in improving nuclear protocols and doctrine. This work would be mostly technical.

Korea

Because of the presence of U.S. troops in South Korea and the history of US-ROK relations, the U.S has traditionally been very focused on events on the Korean Peninsula. Trying to figure out a way to rollback North Korea's nuclear weapons program is a challenge that needs to be dealt with and made a priority from a nonproliferation perspective. Ploughshares Fund for this reason continues to invest in this part of the world.

The size of the field

Mr. Yun is unsure of the total funding for the field of nuclear policy. Published reports estimate the amount of funding exceeds \$30 million annually, but this amount is shrinking and some funders have left the field. Stemming this contraction, and hopefully reversing it, is a major challenge for the field.

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