

**Impact Philanthropy:  
How Strategic Grants Can  
Help Change Strategic Policy**

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Philanthropists want to do good. Whether it is paying forward or giving back, they want to use their money to make a demonstrable improvement in the lives of others. There are two basic approaches that philanthropists may take: direct contributions to aid a relatively small group of people, or investments intended to change social policy on a large scale.

The first approach usually funds specific, local, or national projects that directly help a community or social group. This might be constructing an art museum or hospital wing, supplying foot pumps so Burmese farmers can irrigate a hectare of land, or funding an early education program that gives inner-city children the skills they need to succeed in school.

There are hundreds of foundations, public and family run, that pursue these types of programs. One of the largest, the Ford Foundation, gives over \$420 million in grants each year to implement its mission to provide all people “the opportunity to reach their full potential, contribute to society, and have voice in the decisions that affect them.” The grants usually track with the foundation’s mission statement:

We believe the best way to achieve these goals is to encourage initiatives by those living and working closest to where problems are located; to promote collaboration among the nonprofit, government and business sectors; and to ensure participation by men and women from diverse communities and all levels of society. In our experience, such activities help build common understanding, enhance excellence, enable people to improve their lives and reinforce their commitment to society.<sup>1</sup>

In the second approach, individuals and foundations will often try to change public policy by funding research to provide objective, analytical support for policy change, promoting public education efforts



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2 to build support for change, or funding organizations that advocate for change.  
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The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, as every listener of National Public Radio knows, “supports creative people and effective institutions committed to building a more just, verdant, and peaceful world.” MacArthur gives about \$240 million in grants each year on a broad range of issues. It is one of the few foundations to provide substantial grants for international security issues. Under the leadership of its new president, Robert Gallucci, it focuses these latter grants on preventing nuclear terrorism and strengthening stability in the Asia-Pacific region, a key area of nuclear risk and competition.

In 2012, for example, the MacArthur Foundation announced the award of \$13.4 million in grants to sixteen organizations to strengthen nuclear security around the globe. Much of the funding was directed to train and support “an elite group of nuclear experts to make policy recommendations for preventing nuclear terrorism and enhancing nuclear non-proliferation.”<sup>2</sup>

Gallucci explains the foundation’s approach:

The obligation of someone who runs a foundation is to figure out what is the proper place for us. Where should we stand? On which issues? Try to accomplish what and how? How do we use those resources to get the change, the impact on the human condition?

What most foundations, including MacArthur, try to do is to use the money we have . . . and try to have an impact in some areas, but an impact that is outsized, where we have leveraged in some way the amount of money that we have.

Wherever we decide we are going to work, we are looking for a strategic approach . . . looking for leverage, looking for substantial change so at the end of the day my colleagues and I can go home and say we did right by the confidence that was placed in us by the American people.<sup>3</sup>

The Ploughshares Fund takes this leveraging strategy a step further. It is an operating foundation that coordinates grants around a specific strategic objective, then applies the talents of its staff to network the grantees together for a near-term policy impact. This model, dubbed “impact philanthropy,” provides both a case study in effective grant-making and a model for one way that modest grants can achieve an outsized impact and promote significant policy change.

## THE BIG CUBE

“The results of work in the big cube are often measureable only by small statistical changes,” say Paul Brest and Hal Harvey in their seminal guide to philanthropy, *Money Well Spent*, “and even small changes may take many decades to emerge.”<sup>4</sup>

Brest, the former president of the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, and Harvey, chief executive officer and president of ClimateWorks, developed a three-axes chart of social issues ranging from the “small cube” to the “big cube.”

Work in the small cube focuses on “local, quality-of-life, reversible problems.” Work in the big cube deals with “global, life-threatening, irreversible problems.” The latter “tend to require ambitious grantmaking, and require funders with a tolerance for ambiguity and complexity.”<sup>5</sup>

But the advantages of working at the edges of the big cube are profound. When you are successful, your efforts will affect millions of people and can prevent irreversible damage. The patience, the risk, the indirectness of such work can be compensated for by astounding leverage. If you do this right, your money will reach its fullest potential.<sup>6</sup>

Since 1981, the Ploughshares Fund has tackled a classic big cube problem, the global threat of nuclear weapons. This has required the fund’s leaders to understand the need to keep their sights set on the horizon while pursuing strategies that make steady progress toward the ultimate goal. Foundations involved in other “big cube” problems do the same in their efforts to ameliorate climate change or eradicate a devastating disease. Each victory may seem small, but the key is to identify—and win—those steps that can unlock the more ambitious strategic agenda.

For most of its thirty-one years, the Ploughshares Fund has specialized in finding what it has called “the smartest people with the best ideas” for how to reduce the dangers from nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons. There is a remarkable pool of talented individuals that the Ploughshares Fund and other foundations have been pleased to support over the years. From grassroots organizers to Stanford professors, some of the most talented people in the country have dedicated their lives to these issues. Their success has been the foundation’s success.

Brest and Harvey highlighted the fund as a prime example of dedicated work “at the edges of the big cube.” The Ploughshares Fund, they noted in 2008, has a mission of preventing the use of weapons of mass destruction:

The fund, using its budget with strategic brilliance, made a principal contribution to the International Campaign to Ban Land Mines. Ploughshares grantees were instrumental in the renegotiations of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. The fund supported high-level, off-the-record negotiations between senior U.S. analysts and North Korean officials that may have averted a war during the Clinton administration.

Ploughshares took on a hugely important realm of work that was not heavily supported by philanthropy. It built an expert board of directors,

learned its field well, and has had an impact disproportionately large for its size. Given their ambitious choice of goals, it is evident that Ploughshares donors have a tolerance for substantial abstraction and significant risk of failure.<sup>7</sup>

By mid-2009, the fund had more than doubled in size from the \$4 million-a-year operation based in San Francisco that Brest and Harvey had critiqued. The visionary founding president, Sally Lillienthal, had died, and the fund had hired me as president to carry on her work, open an additional office in Washington, DC, and take the organization in a new direction. Key to the transition was a skilled and involved board of directors composed of philanthropists, scholars, former senior officials and military leaders, and successful business executives. They provided not only much of the funding but also the push for a more active, involved approach.

The fund adapted Brest and Harvey's ideas to create a new model of philanthropy to secure a true "victory in the big cube." Largely under the direction of then-Executive Director Naila Bolus, the organization designed and implemented an ambitious campaign to help win U.S. Senate approval of the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) in 2010. The agreement between the United States and Russia was not, by itself, a fulfillment of President Barack Obama's pledge "to seek the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons," but it was a major and essential step in the process—one whose outcome was initially by no means certain.

Just one year before the treaty's passage, journalist Josh Rogin wrote in *Foreign Policy* that President Obama's nuclear agenda was "faltering out of the starting gate."<sup>8</sup> Negotiations with the Russians over the expired START treaty were dragging on, battle lines were being drawn in Congress, and opponents were successfully framing President Obama as weak, naïve, or worse. But the Ploughshares Fund and many of its grantees believed the nation was at a unique historical moment. As Bolus wrote in the *Chronicle of Philanthropy*:

We and many of our grantees knew that if the Senate defeated New START, progress on the rest of the nuclear security agenda would stop cold. If we played it right, we could help shape a series of victories that together could fundamentally reorient U.S.—and global—nuclear policy. The window, however, would not remain open for long.<sup>9</sup>

The campaign for New START developed an impact philanthropy model that can be replicated by other foundations. It consists of three essential steps: (1) craft a strategy with clear goals; (2) select grantees

and knit them together into a collaborative network; and (3) commit the foundation's assets to provide leadership and amplify the grantees' work. Or, more succinctly: strategy, network, and leadership.

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## THE NEW START CAMPAIGN

The Ploughshares Fund has always been a “hands-on” operation, working closely with its grantees and encouraging various forms of cooperation and integration. Indeed, my first exposure to the fund was in late 1993, when I ended almost ten years of work as a professional staff member of the House Armed Services Committee and the House Government Operations Committee to become executive director of a coalition effort initially funded by the Ploughshares Fund and the W. Alton Jones Foundation. Headquartered at the Stimson Center in Washington, DC, the Coalition for the Non-Proliferation Treaty united twenty arms control and disarmament organizations in a successful campaign to help win the indefinite extension of the treaty and strengthen the global non-proliferation regime.<sup>10</sup>

The New START campaign took this early model and similar efforts to a new level. The campaign started with the basic understanding that the heavy lifting for the treaty would be done by the administration and the Senate leadership. But in policy debates that are often decided on the margin, the margin matters. Public groups could tip the balance. The key was to focus the efforts of many groups on core, achievable goals.

**The Strategy.** The members of the campaign realized that they had to build political support if the treaty was to pass. They would need respected military and national security leaders making the case for nuclear reductions, editorial boards endorsing the agreement, and passionate constituents in states with swing Senate votes. The Ploughshares Fund focused its grants and staff work on mobilizing these critical groups.

**The Network.** The campaign built on respected expert groups long funded by Ploughshares, including the Arms Control Association and the Council for a Livable World, which were already making the treaty's approval a central part of their work. It then brought in new faces, new communicators, and new energy by adding faith groups, such as the evangelical American Values Network, military leaders in the American Security Project, and communication wizards in the National Security Project and ReThink Media. In all, fifty organizations joined in this national, nonpartisan campaign.

**The Leadership.** A common problem in coalition efforts is the organizational rivalries that can create resentments, jealousies, and grandstanding that can rip a coalition apart. As a foundation funding all the groups involved, the Ploughshares Fund could stand above and

somewhat apart from this dynamic. It was, as one fellow funder called it, “The Switzerland of the arms control movement.” It used that position to convene strategy sessions, organize the weekly strategy calls, and—when the treaty hit the Senate floor—daily “war room” messaging calls. Because the foundation was intimately involved, its staff was able quickly to deploy additional resources as needed. This was not just funding, but having its registered lobbyist work closely with Hill offices; its research staff create a twice-weekly “START News” e-mail sent to hundreds of congressional offices, journalists, and experts; its executive director keep the groups working together; and its grants staff help establish grassroots call centers and place full-page ads in newspapers.

Rogin reported on a January 12, 2010, meeting of some fifty think tank and advocacy organizations convened in “the K Street conference room of the Ploughshares Fund” aimed at “marshaling those organizations’ combined resources and preparing a full-on campaign to press their shared goals.”<sup>11</sup>

Naila Bolus summarized the effort:

By the end of the campaign our grantees had recruited a battalion of retired military officers, actively engaged both behind-the-scenes and in public forums; and placed pro-treaty op-eds and editorials that far outnumbered opposing pieces and were consistently on message (a dramatic reversal from the outset of the campaign). New allies, particularly from the faith community, drastically boosted the impact of organizations and organizers working at the grassroots.<sup>12</sup>

This was made possible, she notes, because:

We flipped our foundation’s usual practice. Rather than focusing primarily on proposals submitted to us, our grant making evolved into a process of proactively identifying organizations that could meet particular needs and providing resources aimed at encouraging our grantees to focus on tasks at which they already excelled.

By urging the organizations involved to concentrate on their comparative advantages, by eliminating redundancies, and by promoting cohesion and efficiency, the campaign maximized the potential of these disparate but now united groups. One of the campaign members, ReThink Media, said afterwards that the effort was “among the best-organized and most effective coalitions. In terms of objectives, targets, strategy, tactics and message, advocates were almost uniformly on the same page.”

On the last day of the Senate’s session on December 22, 2010, the treaty just squeaked past the two-thirds vote needed for approval, with seventy-one senators voting in favor. Undoubtedly, they made their



decision based on the facts provided by the administration and the trust they had in the leadership of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Senators John Kerry (D-MA) and Richard Lugar (R-IN), who strongly backed the treaty.

But there was an intense, political, and heavily funded campaign against the treaty in the Senate, in Washington think tanks, and in key states. The Heritage Foundation, senior leadership in the Senate organized by Senator Jon Kyl (R-AZ), and major political opponents including Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney denounced the treaty in the harshest terms. These kinds of campaigns had defeated many other initiatives in 2010 that had also been backed by the administration, Senate leaders, and noted experts. In the case of New START, the nongovernmental effort—buoyed by the Ploughshares Fund’s impact philanthropy—made a difference.

It is always difficult to measure impact, particularly in big policy issues, but ReThink Media’s survey of media coverage provides some interesting, tangible evidence of success. A big focus of the campaign was on the media, particularly on getting objective analysis of the treaty to editorial boards and columnists in key states. This was a job neither an administration nor a Senate committee can do. Before the campaign began, editorials and op-eds opposing the treaty heavily outweighed protreaty articles. ReThink’s postvote analysis demonstrated the impact of the targeted, strategic effort:

- The analysis found that print outreach—placement of letters to the editor, op-eds, and editorials—far outpaced that of the opposition and was more precise in targeting high-circulation publications in strategically significant key states.
- Data indicate that in key states where print pieces in favor of ratification most outpaced negative pieces, swing senators were much more likely to support the treaty.
- In states where positive pieces outpaced negative ones by more than 15 pieces, six out of six senators voted for ratification.
- In the key period from September to December 2010, pro-ratification op-eds outpaced the opposition more than two to one (a dramatic reversal from a year earlier, before the campaign began). Nationwide, 219 op-eds appeared for ratification, while only eight-nine appeared against (twenty-seven of those, or nearly one-third, were in the ultraconservative *Washington Times*.)
- Editorials were a powerful force behind support for the treaty. Around the country, ninety-one appeared in favor of ratification with only twenty against.

- It is no coincidence that states that had a strong group presence on the ground—such as in Maine, Utah, Tennessee, Georgia, and Massachusetts—were able to publish a greater number of positive pieces.<sup>13</sup>

“It’s worth noting that these outcomes are neither assured nor common,” concluded the ReThink Media analysts. “Of particular note was the leadership shown by Ploughshares in bringing people together and providing a common framework for action including a regular process for updating work, identifying areas that needed attention and creating informal working groups.”<sup>14</sup>

### ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE AND STRATEGY

The New START campaign was just one part of the Ploughshares Fund’s overall program of grants. It is unlikely that a foundation could succeed using only this campaign approach. Part of the success of the effort was that it was rooted in and part of a deeper, broader, philanthropic endeavor.

The Ploughshares Fund is the largest grant-making foundation in the United States dedicated exclusively to security and peace funding. It raises all the money it grants. In 2010, the year of the New START campaign, the Ploughshares Fund had an operating budget of \$10 million and gave \$6.2 million in grants.

Over the past five years, the fund has transitioned from just providing grants to other organizations to adding value to the projects with its own expert analysis, media outreach, liaison with Congress and the White House, and convening of grantees. All its work is focused on three main areas related to nuclear security: continued reductions in global nuclear arsenals; preventing the spread of nuclear weapons; and reducing conflicts in regions where threats of nuclear weapons, terrorism, and conflict converge.

Efforts to limit and reduce current arsenals are in large part focused on concrete steps to reduce stockpiles in the United States and Russia, which hold 95 percent of all nuclear weapons, but also include efforts to influence U.S. and global nuclear policy. Work to prevent the emergence of new nuclear states and the spread of nuclear arms focuses on two of the most significant threats to the global nonproliferation regime: Iran and North Korea. Finally, to help reduce tensions and resolve regional conflicts in South Asia that could escalate into nuclear crises, the fund supports projects to increase civil society participation in negotiations, address water conflicts, and increase knowledge and understanding of the conflicts among decisionmakers in Washington, DC.



The Ploughshares Fund employs three interlocking, grantmaking strategies to achieve these goals—capacity-building, venture capital, and the impact campaigns. The capacity-building investments allow groups and experts to maintain and expand their intellectual and operational reserves and provide for sustained progress on longer-term issues. The venture capital funding gives seed money to bring innovative ideas into this relatively small community of experts and activists. The idea is to incubate and nurture pilot initiatives, making bets on what may become projects that can continue to develop and win the support of other foundations. Finally, the impact philanthropy model discussed in this paper tackles near-term opportunities through focused policy campaigns.

These three investment vehicles leverage and reinforce each other, and few grants are purely of one type. A cutting-edge venture capital investment may feed directly into a campaign or alternatively, align with traditional, capacity-building grants aimed at issues with a five- to ten-year horizon. At the same time, capacity grants can quickly transition into short-term impact campaigns if a specific policy window opens.

The Ploughshares Fund coordinates this work with a staff of fourteen split between the fund's headquarters in San Francisco and the Washington, DC office. It maintains a vibrant website and blog highlighting grantee accomplishments and provides all its annual reports online at [www.ploughshares.org](http://www.ploughshares.org). It also engages heavily in social media, principally Facebook and Twitter, both for the organization and for the president and other senior staff.

## REPLICATING THE MODEL

But can this impact philanthropy model be replicated? Or were the strategy and tactics unique to a campaign to achieve a specific, time-limited goal such as treaty ratification? Since its New START success, the Ploughshares Fund has adapted the model to two efforts, one focused on cutting the budget for nuclear weapons programs and the other on dealing with the challenges of a nuclearizing Iran.

The fund's leaders paid heed to the advice of Brest and Harvey:

You can't know in advance whether your philanthropy will have world-changing consequences or turn out in retrospect to be money down the drain. But you do know in advance that because social change is complex, and causal chains are often murky, strategic philanthropy requires real clarity of goals, sound analysis, follow-through, and continuous feedback. And this means that you can change the odds in your favor through strategies that are based on evidence (rather than hope) and through careful planning and execution.<sup>15</sup>

Sound, tested strategy is all the more important because of the scale of the problems this philanthropy is trying to address. Grant dollars are meager compared to the amounts governments and corporations spend on any of the big cube issues. For example, the federal government spends about \$56 billion each year on nuclear weapons and weapons-related programs. Foundations provide about \$33 million in grants in this area in any given year, or 0.06 percent of the private and government money invested in contracts, profits, jobs, and very large, established institutions. How can foundations hope to make a dent in this issue? By being smart, strategic, and thorough.

The Ploughshares Fund's staff at the beginning of each fiscal year engages in a three- to five-year forecast of the policy and political landscape to help inform its grantmaking priorities. This process identifies specific near-term and long-term policy opportunities, which are evaluated against the following criteria:

1. What forward progress is needed to create movement on nuclear policy?
2. How significant could this progress be?
3. Is there a match with the fund's comparative advantages and those of the grantees?
4. Can our resources be appropriately leveraged?
5. Is it possible to make an impact at this time?

Before planning and implementing a dedicated campaign effort, the following additional questions are asked and evaluated:

1. Is there a policy opportunity and are there concrete criteria for success?
2. Is there a match between the fund's organizational strengths and the opportunity?
3. Is there consistency between the campaign goal and the fund's core mission and priorities?

A key part of each campaign is continuous feedback. This is most critical in the beginning of the process, when the fund's staff seek advice from its grantees and partners.

For example, before launching the current nuclear weapons budget campaign, the Ploughshares Fund commissioned three focused analyses from leading budget experts to determine what policy goals might be reasonable for a campaign to address. The recommendations of that process were discussed at a meeting of some twenty groups. Collective campaign goals were agreed upon, and collaborative work plans produced.

With the campaign underway, the groups have frequent teleconferences and regular in-person meetings with campaign partners intended to assess how the campaigns are going, whether goals are being met, and if the relative burden-sharing of tasks and expertise is appropriate. This flexible approach allowed the campaign to respond to outside developments.

One example of the campaign's success came in the fall of 2012 when the Congress, in the continuing resolution for fiscal year 2013, zeroed out a multibillion dollar plutonium bomb plant. The plant, known as the Chemical and Metallurgical Research Replacement facility was to be built at the Los Alamos National Laboratory in New Mexico. Originally expected to cost under \$400 million, its budget had exploded to almost \$6 billion. The Congress agreed with the administration's plan to delay the project for five years—effectively killing it. The design team has since been disbanded. Funds from the project are being reprogrammed. And work is beginning on a smaller, cheaper alternative that can provide the necessary plutonium cores at close to the original budget.<sup>16</sup>

But this outcome was by no means assured. In two letters that year, nineteen senators wrote the administration demanding that funding for the bomb plant be restored. When that many senators demand something, they usually get it. But not this time. Many of the organizations that are part of the budget campaign—including Nuke Watch New Mexico, the Project on Government Oversight, the Alliance for Nuclear Accountability, the Union of Concerned Scientists, and the Friends Committee on National Legislation—wrote, lobbied, and argued that the plant was unnecessary and urged Congress to cancel it, shining a spotlight on the process. Editorial boards and constituents weighed in and, to the delight of the organizations, the appropriators held firm; the funding was denied. The campaign notched an important initial victory.<sup>17</sup>

Similarly, the Iran campaign networks the talents of over thirty-five organizations to prevent another war in the Middle East and stop Iran from developing a nuclear weapon. The campaign holds regular meetings and conference calls and maintains a vibrant e-mail listserv that hums with daily debate. It is the only effort of its kind in the country. For almost two years, beginning in early 2011, the campaign has developed and amplified a reasoned analysis detailing the consequences of military strikes on Iran and promoting the advantages of a negotiated settlement of the crisis.

Each campaign effort is different, with varying tempos and degrees of coordination. For the Iran campaign, it was important to provide for a wide range of views among the participating groups on sanctions,

assessments of Iran's progress toward developing a nuclear weapon, and use of force, among others. The campaigns do not direct any group's work but provide platforms for sharing information and developing an analysis. One of the groups participating, a conglomerate of former diplomats and current experts, produced a remarkable paper that was among the most influential reports on Iran published in 2012. The *New Yorker* described its findings:

A bipartisan group in New York, called the Iran Project, released a report titled 'Weighing Benefits and Costs of Military Action Against Iran.' The group, which is composed of thirty-two foreign-policy heavyweights who run the gamut from Richard Armitage to Anne-Marie Slaughter, persuasively argues that a sustained U.S.-Israeli bombing campaign, supplemented by cyber-attacks and covert operations, could delay the Iranian nuclear program by at most four years, and that it would do so at considerable cost to American and Israeli interests. If Israel were to act alone, it might delay the program by no more than two years. In the long run, bombardment would make the Islamic Republic all the more likely to go nuclear. Any more lasting objective—such as regime change—would require a wholesale invasion and occupation of Iran, which, according to the report's authors, would cost more in blood and treasure than have the past ten years of war in Iraq and Afghanistan combined.<sup>18</sup>

The report did not make recommendations; rather it provided a careful assessment of costs and benefits. Simply by objectively presenting this information, it helped counter a rush to military strikes as a viable solution to the Iran challenge. Endorsed by Brent Scowcroft, Zbigniew Brzezinski, Senator Chuck Hagel, Admiral William Fallon, General Anthony Zinni, Ambassador Thomas Pickering, and many others, it restored the common sense of the center of America's security elite to a debate all too often ruled by exaggerated threats and political pressures from the fringe. That has been the essential point of all the Ploughshares Fund's efforts on nuclear policy.

## THE NUCLEAR SECURITY FIELD

The Ploughshares Fund is just one foundation in a larger field of public and private foundations providing grants and support for nuclear security issues. The number of groups and the amount of funding available are small compared to many other issues, such as climate change, human rights, or the environment, but it is not insignificant.

From 2008 through 2011, forty-three foundations provided almost \$130 million in grants to individuals and organizations working on nuclear weapons and related issues.<sup>19</sup> The funding has been roughly

consistent each year, with almost \$33 million granted in 2011. By far the majority of the grants have been provided by three foundations—the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, and the Ploughshares Fund—that account for more than 66 percent of all funding in the nuclear security field.

Highlights of this funding include the following:

- Nearly two-thirds of all funding was given to global nonproliferation and disarmament projects (64 percent), followed by grants to U.S. nuclear policy (20 percent), regional nuclear conflicts (14 percent), nuclear energy and fuel cycle security (9 percent), and missile defense (0.5 percent).
- Projects on Iran and North Korea accounted for more than two-thirds of the funding given to regional nuclear conflicts.
- Grants for policy and technical analysis and research accounted for nearly half of all the funds provided, or \$60 million over the four years.
- Grants for advocacy accounted for 27 percent of the funding.
- Grants for media and communication accounted for 4 percent.
- Grants for lobbying were the lowest category, accounting for 1.5 percent.
- Of the foundations, the Ploughshares Fund provided the most money and the most grants for advocacy, media and communication, and mobilization and education.

## MODELING THE FUTURE

Impact philanthropy is not applicable to many of these foundations, particularly those that eschew advocacy or prefer to concentrate grants on a few large institutional or academic actors. This type of philanthropy is important and part of the overall funding needed in the security field. But for those with the patience and the organizing inclination, impact philanthropy may be the model many have searched for over the years.

John Tirman was one of those pioneers looking to improve on the return of his foundation's investments when he served as executive director of the Winston Foundation for World Peace in Washington, DC from 1986 to 1999. He was a champion of advocacy philanthropy, writing approvingly in a 2000 study of how a small group of private donors in the 1970s and 1980s had a "profound impact" on efforts to end the U.S.-Soviet nuclear arms race.<sup>20</sup> He concluded that "philanthropy is most effective when it is able and willing to support a dynamic combination of critical thinkers and social activists."<sup>21</sup>

Tirman believes that foundations willing to fund those efforts in the 1980s helped build "the burgeoning peace movement as an opportunity

to contend with the resurgent right and to bypass the inert discourse of the elite institutions of New York and Washington.”<sup>22</sup>

This was a break from traditional foundation behavior. “The notion that American foundations might support a social and political movement aimed at disrupting longstanding security policy was unorthodox,” he writes, “virtually heretical.”<sup>23</sup> But by 1984, his foundation and five or six others were funding the analysts and activists trying to stop the arms race, including the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the MacArthur Foundation, the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, and the W. Alton Jones Foundation. The Ploughshares Fund began operations in this period and in this mold.

Clearly, the desires of Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev to move toward eliminating nuclear weapons (desires many questioned at the time but that are now established fact) were decisive in ending the arms race and making sweeping reductions in nuclear arsenal possible. But “It was the public demand for an end to the nuclear danger that spurred and strengthened these events,” argues Tirman. “And American philanthropy, particularly the decisive and risk-taking philanthropy of the early 1980’s, was a partner in this remarkable story.”<sup>24</sup>

Expanding his analysis, Tirman details five critical factors that help explain why political leaders are willing to negotiate peaceful agreements and search for solutions that may fall short of their original aims. These could well serve as guideposts for any successful advocacy campaign:

1. A critical community of intellectuals who informally work in concert to nurture social values that promote, for example, the legitimization of an insurgent group, or preference for nonviolent solutions over military solutions;
2. The rise of activist movements to adopt these values and introduce them, first within their own circles and then with increasing intensity through a variety of techniques into the national or international discussion about the conflict;
3. The growing concordance of measured attitudes in the public that support the new social values and goals. . . . ;
4. A noticeable embrace by non-governing elites—leaders of religions, business, news media, universities, etc.—of new social values or something akin to those values; and
5. New initiatives from opposition political parties or similar groups in the political culture that reflect the new social values.<sup>25</sup>

Tirman was writing about mass movements in those decades but, in



many ways, these are the elements of the more limited policy campaigns of the impact philanthropy model: analytical research, activists, public support, elite validators, and adoption by political leaders.

There continues to be considerable debate about the proper role and past successes of foundation-supported national security enterprises. Mitchel Wallerstein, the former vice president for the Program on Global Security and Sustainability of the MacArthur Foundation, writing in 2008, is less sanguine than Tirman about the impact of the philanthropic efforts “either regarding the modest arms control success achieved during the 1980s and early 1990s . . . or ultimately, in hastening the end of the Cold War.”<sup>26</sup>

Wallerstein says that foundations did provide key support for a broad range of policy studies and educational efforts during this period, many of which proved highly influential in policy formation. He also cites the value of their support for specific initiatives, such as the campaign to ban landmines.

It is not the impact of these projects that Wallerstein criticizes, but the failure of foundations to sustain these efforts, particularly when the sharp partisan politics that emerged in the second Clinton administration made major policy change exceptionally difficult. Many foundations left the field disillusioned or disinterested, short-circuiting a process of policy change that requires sustained effort.

There remained “extremely important ‘unfinished business’ related to nuclear arms reductions and the security of existing nuclear weapons,” argues Wallerstein, including “additional deep reductions in nuclear arms and improved nuclear safety measures, such as warhead de-alerting or de-mating, plutonium disposition, and re-direction of the work of the nuclear weapons designers.”<sup>27</sup> Foundations needed to stay the course rather than “abandon or reduce the scope of this work in order to divert resources to other, more contemporary threats, such as biological weapons.”<sup>28</sup>

Ten years later, Wallerstein’s critique has proved accurate. Fortunately, there remains a core group of dedicated funders, including many cited above in this paper. They are in it for the long haul, the only perspective one can realistically take when fighting in the big cube. And many would agree with Wallerstein (whose perspective of 1990s partisan politics seems almost quaint compared to how brutal these fights have become in the second decade of the century):

Funders have learned from experience that if they support only academic policy analysis, however well conceived and innovative, without attending to the far more difficult (and ‘messier’) questions of how policy is actually made—or changed—in the real world, there was likely to be little tangible

progress—especially on a subject as complicated (and potentially frightening) as weapons of mass destruction.<sup>29</sup>

New grant-making foundations, most importantly the Skoll Global Threat Fund, and new operating foundations, particularly the Nuclear Threat Initiative lead by Senator Sam Nunn and Ted Turner, have joined the field in the past ten years, bringing financial resources, organizing skills, and imaginative new approaches.

The foundations in the field today are seasoned, savvy, and as tough as the problems they seek to solve. Some favor research and publication, others public education, others public advocacy. All have a role to play in continuing this “unfinished business.”

Those who get into the contest of “how policy is actually made” may find impact philanthropy a useful model to adapt and improve.

## ENDNOTES

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