



February 19, 2023 Interview with Geoffrey Wiseman

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Summary:

The interview with Geoffrey Wiseman highlights his career, including his time at the Ford Foundation, where he managed the Peace and Security program during a transformative post-Cold War period. He outlines three main priorities: promoting alternative security concepts, advancing arms control and disarmament, and strengthening international organizations, particularly in UN peacekeeping. Wiseman reflects on the optimism of the 1990s regarding nuclear disarmament but acknowledges missed opportunities and emerging challenges, such as non-proliferation issues involving India, Pakistan, and North Korea. He emphasizes the importance of proactive philanthropy, fostering new voices in civil society, and leveraging resources to maximize impact while critiquing the complexities of achieving lasting global nuclear disarmament. This transcript was lightly edited to ease understanding. Some names were withdrawn. This document summary was generated by an artificial intelligence language model and was reviewed by a Wilson Center staff member.

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Michal Onderco: So, Geoff, thank you very much for joining this interview. I always start this interview with a very general question. If you could tell us a little bit about your professional career, up until the moment when you started working for the Ford Foundation, but also after your departure from Ford.

Geoffrey Wiseman: I'm glad to Michal. So basically, I finished a Master's degree at the Australian National University in Canberra. And from there joined our Foreign Ministry, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade as it's now called. And I was posted after that to Stockholm, Sweden. That was my first posting as a Third Secretary. And I mention that, in terms of your project, because this posting introduced me to the Nordic approach to disarmament in general, and nuclear issues in particular. So I had very close contact there with SIPRI colleagues during my three year posting, this was in the mid to late 70s. And also with PRIO, the Peace Research Institute of Oslo, and other institutions in that Nordic peace research circuit, if you like. And Sweden itself has always had a very interesting approach to disarmament and nuclear issues. And so that was my first posting.

And after that, I went back to Canberra, to the Department of Foreign Affairs, and worked on the Indochina desk. After that, I was posted to Vietnam, sensibly enough. And I had a two-year posting there after doing some Vietnamese language training. And then I was cross-posted after Hanoi to Brussels. And so I had a three-year posting there, and the mission of the Australian Embassy was accredited to the European Communities, to Belgium, Luxembourg, and of course, to NATO. So we were triple-headed there. That introduced me to issues of, I'd say, strategic concern to NATO at the time, including obviously, nuclear. After my time in Brussels, I went to Oxford to do a Master's in International Relations. It was a coursework Master's. And the Master's thesis that I did was on non-provocative defense. And that, of course, involved questions of nuclear weapons. I was caught up in the debate, roughly at the time, about common security. After the Master's I went back to Australia. I was still in the Department of Foreign Affairs as a Foreign Service Officer, and worked for two years in the private office of the Foreign Minister, Gareth Evans. I worked on arms control [and] disarmament issues for Gareth Evans. And he has been, as you know, a full-throated international actor, on nuclear Non-Proliferation, disarmament issues for 30, maybe 40 years. And so that experience reinforced my interest, if you like. After my time in the minister's office, I returned to Oxford to do the PhD. I wrote on concepts of non-provocative defense, which combined both conventional and nuclear. And so, as I was working on my PhD, I was recruited by the Ford Foundation in 1992 to go and work in New York, and to run the Peace and Security program.

Michal Onderco: And how did the Ford Foundation appeal to you? As someone who was before in diplomacy, and then did a PhD, what was appealing about the Ford Foundation?

Geoffrey Wiseman: I was initially perplexed that the Ford Foundation was interested in someone with my background. I didn't know very much about the foundation. But after a while, I did some research and realized that this, at that time, it was the biggest US foundation; it had the biggest endowment. This was pre-Gates, of course. And the endowment at that time was around the six-plus billion-dollar mark. And so the Ford Foundation was really the gorilla in the room, in terms of US philanthropy. But I can remember when I went for my interview with the foundation, I still really didn't have a feel for it. And this I think plays into your project in a sense, in that I went to the wrong building in Midtown New York. I went to a small, two-story brownstone building, assuming that that's where the Ford Foundation was housed. And then I was told that the Ford Foundation was two doors down, a magnificent building. I don't know if you've ever been to the Ford Foundation building, but it is an

architectural marvel. And so I walked down to the foundation building and realized that this was a *very serious* institution. And the interviews were extremely rewarding in the sense of an organization that was very open-minded, especially about all sorts of international, post-Cold War issues. And I realized that the Ford Foundation was giving me very much of a wide berth, in terms of the things that I could do in the Peace and Security program.

Michal Onderco: So when you started working at Ford, what were the things that you were thinking about as the most pressing topics at the time? What were your priorities?

Geoffrey Wiseman: Well, it took a while to figure that out, because I had a budget of about, I suppose, a few million dollars a year, on average; it varied from year to year because of funding arrangements.

But the big priorities that I outlined for myself were basically three. And the very first one was that I wanted to work on alternative security concepts. Now, this in part reflected my own interest in non-provocative, non-offensive, defensive defense, but also ideas like common security, as described in the Palme Commission report. So that was the very first priority, now that the Cold War had ended. The second area was really looking at promoting new approaches to arms control and disarmament. And here, what I was trying to focus on, was a combination of nuclear and conventional. And, if anything, I would say that the trend tended towards the conventional. Because there was a general impression that many of the nuclear issues had been resolved. Remember, the Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty was a blockbuster of a treaty in 1987. The first time that a sector of nuclear arms was disarmed under an international agreement. And so, there was great deal of optimism, at that time, and then you throw in the idea of the success of the Gulf War, removing Saddam's forces from Kuwait, and then the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Which many people in the West, perhaps too soon, celebrated the collapse of the Soviet Union and the rise of an independent, "democratic" quote-unquote, Russia. And so there was a general feeling that many, but not all, of the nuclear wishes had been, to some extent, if not resolved, were heading in the right direction.

And the third area that I focused on was strengthening international organizations and UN peacekeeping. Again, bear in mind that the Ford Foundation is literally 200 meters from the UN, so it made very good sense to work with the UN, especially on peacekeeping. The background here is Boutros-Ghali's Agenda for Peace, which set a new agenda. And now that I think about it, possibly moved things, a little bit more in the non-nuclear direction. Peacekeeping moved to peacemaking, to peacebuilding and so on. And so in the conceptual debate at that time, people were discussing new things that tended, on the whole, to be non-nuclear. There are exceptions to that, on the non-proliferation front, and I would even throw in the idea of counter-proliferation, which we can come back to.

Michal Onderco: I want to come back to all of these questions in a little while, but before we go there, you said that in those periods of time there was this feeling that things on the nuclear end were going in the right direction. We're having this discussion in 2023, when do you think things stopped going in a good direction?

Geoffrey Wiseman: I hesitate Michal, because I haven't really thought about strategic nuclear issues in a systematic way, for quite a long time. And so, if we were to think about it, I would say that even if you go back to the NPT Review and Extension Conference of 1995, after very difficult negotiations that I'm sure you know all about, that things again seem to point in the positive direction in terms of non-

proliferation. There was the Israel exception, of course, and there was the North Korean problem that was bubbling over. But maybe if you wanted to force me, in a good way, to think about this I suspect, it was the 1998 nuclear explosions by India and Pakistan, that on the non-proliferation side really alerted people to the problem, because here you had a very combustible situation with two countries side by side. And so this was quite unusual, right? It was different in a way from, arguably the North Korean situation. But again, that's tricky, too. But North Korea was starting to look more ominous as well, I would say at the end of the 1990s. Again, I hesitate to even mention the strategic nuclear equation at the moment but... yeah, so I would pause at that point, and just stick to the non-proliferation side of it. India, Pakistan, and North Korea, heading in a different and worrying direction.

Michal Onderco: And do you think that there is something that, for example, civil society could have done differently to prevent that from going in the wrong direction?

Geoffrey Wiseman: Here, I think my basic position is that civil society... I'm giving away my philosophical position here, civil society can in fact have a certain amount of agency, certainly, in the early years of the post-Cold War period. Was civil society focusing enough on the negative trend lines? I can't answer that question as an empirical matter. But what I can say as an optimistic, philosophical matter, that if civil society had been galvanized enough, early enough, I would say that, yes, it could influence the debate. It could influence the agenda, it could remind people of things heading in the wrong direction. And the sad fact is that we generally realize how things are going when it's a little bit too late. But again, I wouldn't want to pinpoint a turning point at all. I'm speaking a little bit out of my comfort zone on that one.

Michal Onderco: So in the period when you had held this portfolio and the Ford Foundation... I mean, you mentioned that new approaches to arms control, were at that time, one of your priorities, and that included nuclear, but also conventional, and maybe primarily conventional. The nuclear part... some of the respondents that I talked to, would say: well, in the early 90s, we may be may have had an opportunity to finish off nuclear weapons, to ban them, to push for the complete disarmament. Did you notice this as something that was sort of an idea floating around civil society at that time?

Geoffrey Wiseman: I think the answer to that is yes, but it would have to be qualified. As I mentioned earlier, I think there was a general feeling that, community-wide, let's say in the philanthropic world, or the people that the group of American foundations that I dealt with, and we were a fairly close-knit community, I would say there was a community of practice, to use contemporary language. We really did share views, we shared ideas, we would sometimes consult each other on applications for funding. So I'd say that, now that I'm thinking about it, there was a community of philanthropic practice at the time that I really enjoyed, it was really a wonderful part of working in depth in a philanthropic organization. Because remember, all these people were highly trained. PhDs, very, very specialized in many fields. And they knew the field, from a generalist perspective.

But one way I could answer that, would be to look at my grant lists for that time. And I would say, looking at them now, that there was a clear... and I've got them for 93,94, 95, and basically what I see here is a reflection of my three priorities. So, in other words, I was really in a sense, putting the world into my program categories, rather than answering the question that you're putting to me now. But I would say a part of this, if I'm thinking about alternative security concepts, most of these were typically conventional. The Cold War had been won, right? And so as a result, the nuclear issue would basically

be resolved. You had the Comprehensive Test Ban, you had the Chemical Weapons Convention, the 90s looked pretty good in that respect.

Michal Onderco: I mean, one of the groups that you funded at that time was the Project for Promoting Nuclear Non-Proliferation, right? The PPNN.

Geoffrey Wiseman: At Southampton. Yes.

Michal Onderco: Go ahead, you wanted to say something.

Geoffrey Wiseman: You wanted to know, was there something that struck you about that in particular?

Michal Onderco: No, I wanted to ask you...so the PPNN, started in 80s, as this sort of unusual club, where he directly focused at the NPT Extension. But they overtime became, I would say, more controversially seen in the broader field. I mean, I know PPNN because I worked on the extension, and I wrote a paper on the PPNN. But my question to you is: was the PPNN a sort of a traditional recipient for you, or were you working more with other types of recipients?

Geoffrey Wiseman: Now, again, I'm going on memory, I believe John Simpson was the head of PPNN at the time, and he had an excellent reputation as a highly credible researcher, and academic, and activist academic, if I can use that term, on non-proliferation. So, it never occurred to me, I mean, at least my retrospective memory, is that John was a controversial figure and that the program was controversial. But can you tell me a little bit about the controversy or the controversial nature of it that you saw, and maybe I can speak more directly to that.

Michal Onderco: Especially, well probably not in the early days, but over time, they... I once interviewed someone who said: "well, they would go to these countries and pontificate and talk..." In this sense, that that was seen as a more controversial approach. Can you tell me more about what kinds of funders you worked with and what kinds of differences you saw with them?

Geoffrey Wiseman: Well, on that particular question, I have, no sense of how PPNN conducted itself in the field if you like, so I really, I really am not in a position to address that. But all I can say, is to repeat that, it was regarded as a very credible, very committed, well-researched grantee. Absolutely no controversy about that, from my point of view. And again, I won't speak for the Foundation, but I'll just say from my point of view, this was a non-controversial grantee. And a very good and active one that was sort of pushing the envelope. And I would have thought, in the right direction.

Michal Onderco: It's fine, go ahead.

Geoffrey Wiseman: So I probably funded about 70 new grantees in a three-year period. And I would say that... and probably that same amount of funding for ongoing grantees. So, I mentioned that because what the foundation and my colleagues were encouraging us to do... because the Ford Foundation was a different kind of organization; its Board of Trustees is a hands-off one, it does allocate a lot of autonomy and independence, in a collective way to its program officers and staff. And so that's an important point to remember about the Ford Foundation, and certainly in my experience, it was very good organization, a very flat hierarchy. But I was... maybe I can give another example.

Michal Onderco: Sure, go ahead.

Geoffrey Wiseman: A concern in the non-proliferation field at the time, for me a more controversial one, was the idea of counter-proliferation. The growing idea during the Clinton Administration was that if the non-proliferation problem couldn't be resolved, by persuasion, by NPT extension negotiations, then maybe the United States could handle it by military force, or the threat of it.

Now, again, if I'm misremembering things here, please correct me Michal, because you've been following this closely. So, one of the people in Washington who was promoting counterproliferation was Ash Carter. And I can recall the debate at that time shifting, the non-proliferation debate was being eased away from Non-Proliferation based on the NPT regime towards counter-proliferation based on the use of force to solve this problem. And so the question here was: "okay, what can I do about that", right? Ash Carter was a very influential figure at that time.

I thought that the nonproliferation argument was not getting much of a hearing. And so I negotiated with [a think-tank in Washington DC] to run a grant that would really be an exploration of the choice between non-proliferation and counter-proliferation. But my normative agenda was to allow doubts about the counter-proliferation approach to be aired, in a highly respected Washington think-tank. [off record] But nonetheless, my idea was not to make an assertion that counter-proliferation is absolutely wrong and misguided, although I myself thought it was wrong. But for the foundation to fund a project where non-proliferation and counter-proliferation could be compared, and the argument in a sort of, I suppose, a Thomas Risse-way, or maybe a Habermassian way, that basically the best argument would win. And that would be non-proliferation.

Michal Onderco: Would that be a common thing to do? In terms of, if you have an idea, or if you think that there is a voice that is missing in the debate, you would go out and look for someone and say: "hey, this sounds like a good idea, would you like to do some work on this?"

Geoffrey Wiseman: Yes, that's the simple and straight answer. It's important to understand that foundation staff are not check writers. They are basically running a program that is intellectually defended, and justified with their colleagues, and with their board, whatever that board may be. And so, the idea of filling in the gaps, allowing the voices of people whose arguments might have been marginalized, to find a platform, to find a voice. And I would say that there was a general pro-active impulse in the foundation world, as I knew it, – and we were talking then about some of the big ones such as Carnegie, Rockefeller, MacArthur, Ford – that there was that was a general proactive instinct, even if we didn't necessarily articulate it to each other. But that was certainly a strong feeling at the time.

Another one was a grant to Columbia University that was interesting. A senior professor of International Relations was very interested in the idea that there was too much attention being paid to assertive humanitarian intervention at the time, and that there needed to be a little bit of caution introduced into the debate. This was a debate about humanitarian intervention that evolved into the Responsibility to Protect debate. But there were still voices that were skeptical. And so there seemed to be momentum, especially after the 1990-91 Gulf War, and how the Kurdish refugee problem was resolved in the North, that military intervention could resolve many humanitarian crises. And so I looked for ways to provide an alternative view, without being expressly prescriptive, but to just make sure that the other side of the debate was given some kind of platform.

Michal Onderco: So in your portfolio, and we don't have to run the exact numbers, but what was the balance between those that sort of approached you first with an idea, and those that you approached with a sort of invitation?

Geoffrey Wiseman: The ongoing grantees were the ones that had received funding in the past would come back and say: "our two or three-year grant is running out, we would like to submit an extension or another three-year term." And so there was, I'm going to say 70 such grants. However, in my three-year period, I developed 70 new grantees. Many of them I went out and sort of recruited, for want of a better term, to try and say: "look, we want an alternative voice here." And so I would say, ballpark, 50 per cent were 'solicited'. I was quite proud of that. And this diversity was something that was encouraged by the Foundation, because the older grantees tended to be more traditional institutions, especially universities.

Michal Onderco: And who were the new grantees?

Geoffrey Wiseman: The new grantees were people in civil society groups.

Michal Onderco: More like the activists, for a lack of a better words.

Geoffrey Wiseman: Yeah, the activist research think-tanks.

Michal Onderco: So can you give me an example.

Geoffrey Wiseman: Yeah, an example would be Saferworld. Another one was, the Institute for War and Peace Reporting in London. I reached out for the first time to PRIO, or SIPRI, you can see the trend there, kind of the peace research-ey insitutes, the Frankfort Peace Research Institute was another new grantee, for example. And so I reached out to the peace research community, if you like, but also to those organizations that were new, like Saferworld.

Michal Onderco: So was for example, the Acronym Institute, one of your grantees?

Geoffrey Wiseman: Yes. Now, I am not going to say for absolute certain, but I will say it was one that was very much on my radar. So when you mention it, then it immediately springs to mind. But one that I did work with at the time was BASIC. And again, I need to look at my three years of 140 grants, or so...

Michal Onderco: No, no, no, I just wanted to sort of get the feeling of...

Geoffrey Wiseman: Yeah. And so, the basic idea was that the traditional institutions, the traditional think tanks even, were basically doing fine. And now, with the end of the Cold War, new approaches were needed. And so, I was encouraged by my senior colleagues, to basically go beyond the universities in fact, and again, you can imagine what they were. And so, they had been receiving significant grants for decades. But universities were seen, as a general, rule, to be inflexible, to have very high overhead.. On the other hand, the independent organizations, the think tanks, even university-based centers, had more independence. They were more flexible, more agile. And so, what I saw was a general trend away from big grants to older grantees toward smaller grants, to many more newer grantees in civil society.

Michal Onderco: Yeah. So I, when I was doing research on PPNN, I came across an organization that was sort of seen as a new kid on the block at that time, and that was the Center for Nonproliferation Studies in Monterey, led by Bill Potter. And one of the things that I think one of his first grants came actually from Ford. And so he was, at that time, this really sort of newcomer, this new kid. What were

your criteria for funding people who are really new to the field? Because I think there is a difference between funding someone who has been around, but not with Ford, and someone who is completely new.

Geoffrey Wiseman: Yes. Well, this is, this is one of the exciting parts about working in a philanthropic organization. And they all differ, and I'll only speak, obviously, about the Ford Foundation, but I was encouraged to basically take risks. And so yes, the Ford Foundation had not given any grants to the Monterey Institute, although it may have given some grants to it for language training way back in in the day. Bill Potter was a new kid on the block. And he came in with a great proposal on nonproliferation. I think the first grant, I'm just looking at my record here, was about \$300,000, which was a pretty substantial grant for a new grantee, on non-proliferation. So, Bill, he was a very persuasive character.

Michal Onderco: I think he's still until today.

Geoffrey Wiseman: Absolutely. He's an absolute gem. But you get the idea. When someone comes in, they're credible, they have a track record, they have a good combination of research and policy activism. And, to me, that was... I won't use the term no-brainer, but it was one that was a very easy grant to recommend, and it sailed through the foundation at the time, no qualms at all.

Michal Onderco: Were there any grantees at that time that you stopped? Because you either didn't like the way how the project was going, or the institution was going, or you felt that the topic no longer merits attention.

Geoffrey Wiseman: I think there are two parts to that question. The first one is that the general trend in philanthropy at the time was to move away from funding endowments, and that is to say funding operations. And it was because of the mood of the times, that it was very much... these are new times, things are happening, and we've got to be different, right? And so, this was, I would say, a philanthropy-wide approach. Ford had given a lot of endowed funding, perpetual funding for big institutions over the decades. And that really, sort of shifted dramatically in the early 90s. From endowed funding to project funding. And this plays into the general theme that I was talking about before, which is that program officers, and program staff at foundations, were actively involved at this time in all projects. And so, they just weren't saying: "yes, we'll fund that." And have someone write the check. It just didn't work like that at all. So that's the first thing: a shift from endowed to project funding, but you wanted to jump in Michal?

Michal Onderco: I wanted to ask, what does this active involvement mean, but maybe we want to come back to that later.

Geoffrey Wiseman: Let's come back to that. But it basically means not only reading an application for funding and signing off on it. It's interviewing, site visits, calling around, checking around, going to a conference that they might have organized, examining who was head of the project, and so on and so forth. So that's what I mean. And I was quite hyper in that regard at the time, because that was another good, interesting part of the job. And we, the Ford Foundation, was a well-off foundation. So we could travel, we could go and make these site visits. And we didn't just simply sit at the desk, processing applications.

Michal Onderco: And has there ever been an application where you felt: "oh, this looks promising." And then you went for a site visit and came back and thought: "oh, no."

Geoffrey Wiseman: Oh, yes. I'll say often, this was common. But then there were the good ones too. There was a very small [security research group] in Cambridge, Massachusetts, which sent in a general inquiry about funding. So I jumped on the train to Cambridge, Mass. to check them out. They had two very, very capable researchers, but I didn't know them. I wanted to meet them. So I spent an afternoon with them. And really liked what I saw, really loved the project, and asked them to put in an application, and basically we went from there. So that gives you a bit of a feel for the importance of site visits. So, I'm really saying that the big philanthropic shift was from endowed funding to project funding. I don't think I could mention any grantees in particular, right?

Michal Onderco: Well, I mean, you should do whatever you're comfortable.

Geoffrey Wiseman: What I'm comfortable with saying is that, in my program, we shifted away from established institutions that were mainly some of the big-name universities. And it doesn't take much imagination to know what they were. And so, again, we would also go for grantees that might have been in the American Midwest. For example, I remember a grant going to [an impressive scholar] who was doing work on colonial assumptions about the international security order. And this was a very interesting project. But here again, I was getting away from the big, obvious institutions.

Michal Onderco: I mean colonial attitudes towards international order doesn't sound to me like a grant that a big foundation would fund today.

Geoffrey Wiseman: I don't know. [That scholar] made his name in the field.

Michal Onderco: I mean, I know his famous paper on security and the third world.

Geoffrey Wiseman: Thank you for reminding me of that. This was someone who didn't come from what you would say was an established grantee, it was a new grant. And so that's the general theme that I'm sort of pushing. But I'm also making the point that by funding new grantees, we had to ratchet back on some of the traditional grantees. And that was really a diplomatic act, because, once you get on that treadmill, many grantees think that they're on it forever. And so we had to introduce... this is how the project-based funding became, more acceptable. Because we've done the project, it's finished, now we move on to something else, we just don't keep sending money to you. So, I'm assuming that that was fairly widespread amongst my colleagues in other foundations, but that was certainly the approach at Ford.

Michal Onderco: Since you mentioned colleagues and other foundations, this is actually a bridge to another question that I wanted to ask, which is: what did you... I mean, I don't want you to talk about others too much, but what did you see as the edge that Ford Foundation had over other founders? What was the thing that distinguishes you from other founders?

Geoffrey Wiseman: At the time, the thing that distinguished Ford most was that it was the biggest foundation. Now, the difference was not as great as between Gates and the rest today, but nonetheless, it was substantial. And an example that we were given by leaders in the Ford Foundation is that the IRS took particular interest in the Ford Foundation, because it was the biggest. So in other words, if you're going to just keep an eye on the philanthropic sector, then you go for the biggest foundation, and you do audits of its funding; you make sure that it is following all of the auditing

requirements of the IRS and so on. So Ford was typically the first port of call for the IRS. And, Ford did very well, in that regard. Yes, Ford was extremely careful that it was adhering to all of the laws and regulations about philanthropies. So that was the first thing. The second thing is, as I mentioned earlier, Ford has a Board of Trustees, that oversees operations at a strategic level. So in other words, grants do not go to the Board of Trustees for approval. It's very important to understand that grants at the Ford Foundation were approved by the President and staff of the foundation.

Michal Onderco: So you were the one who was approving them.

Geoffrey Wiseman: That's right. And this is why it was such a wonderful organization. And so that means a couple of things. One, you couldn't have trustees that were a little bit too hands on, right? And could put pressure on program officers to do certain things. Program staff had to convince our colleagues in the foundation about the value of a grant. And staff colleagues would also come in from time to time and say: but, you want to work on conflict resolution, and you want to support a program at a Swedish University on peace research, right? It's another new grant. And so basically we could do that, by convincing our colleagues. I was doing something on international conflict resolution and a colleague in the Ford Foundation was doing domestic conflict resolution in major cities, or in socio-economically disadvantaged groups. For example, we would try to bring these two together. So, for me, this was why Ford was distinctive. We basically collaborated with our colleagues, to get grants approved. We had to convince them. These meetings were chaired by the president of the foundation. The Board of Trustees had very arms-length oversight.

And I think there was a third distinctive thing about Ford. The Ford Foundation put a lot of effort into professional training at the time. We had the sense that we couldn't just go and do philanthropy. We had to learn it, we had to have training sessions on how to conduct interviews, how to do video recordings and the like. So we were trying to train ourselves about how to be good foundation officials, if you like. So those are the three things that I would mention that were quite distinctive at the time.

Michal Onderco: You talked about non-proliferation and about counter-proliferation as the areas... and you talked about arms control. Was there a perception that disarmament is something that needs to be addressed? Or would disarmament be sort of subsumed under the rest?

Geoffrey Wiseman: Disarmament was something that I personally felt quite strongly about. I was in favor of ideas and proposals for nuclear and conventional disarmament. And I did indeed build disarmament into the program that I was overseeing.. And so one of the grantees, I believe from memory was the Stimson Center in Washington D.C., that was running, one of the most aggressive campaigns, at least in the US, on disarmament. And so yes, to me, it was arms control and disarmament. That was the formula that I operated on. And under arms control, you'd have non-proliferation, but of course, then you have the problem of, horizontal and vertical proliferation. Nonetheless, we aimed to resolve these conceptual issues; but for me, it was arms control and disarmament. And so, when I used the term non-proliferation, it is usually "non-proliferation and disarmament".

Michal Onderco: So a number of your grantees had, of course, grants from different funders. So they would have maybe somebody from Ford and somebody from W Alton Jones. Maybe I know that some had money from the Rockefeller Foundation, or if Rockefellers Brothers Fund. Did this create any sort of tensions or problems? Or was this something that was encouraged from the founders?

Geoffrey Wiseman: It was encouraged very strongly at Ford. This is an aspect of the philanthropic dynamic that people on the outside tend not to appreciate, for obvious reasons. One of the first questions we would ask if we were talking about funding a grantee was: "who else is providing funding?" Ford may have been particular at the time in this, but Ford did not want to be the sole funder. And my guess, I do not know this for a fact, but my guess is that every other foundation was in the same boat. In other words, you do not want a grantee to be dependent on you as the sole source of income. That was one of the principles that we operated on; you want to diversify funding sources. And the more diverse funding sources are for any project, the more attractive it is, the more likely it was that we would fund it.

[off record]

Geoffrey Wiseman: There was a collective feeling at the time that this was a special moment in history. And so I think the colleagues at other foundations wanted to basically make this period of history work. Not in a Fukuyama triumphalist kind of way, but no, we wanted good things to happen as a result of philanthropic work at the time. And so, because of that, I think there was a terrific feeling, from my perspective, of collegiality, with the other foundations. I don't recall any competitiveness at all. In fact, quite the opposite. It was a race to bring the other foundations on side with arms control issues. And I would certainly go to other foundations and say: "I'd really like to push this through, but it would really help if you could come in with a contribution to this grant." I would say that was the dynamic and the mentality at the time.

Michal Onderco: So, you mentioned already that there was this desire to make things work and to sort of do the most of the period at the end that existed at the time. And I think this sort of brings me to this thing that we discussed before, which is the concept of impact or success. So in your work as a funding officer at Ford, how did you think about the impact, what constituted impact?

Geoffrey Wiseman: There was a general feeling, no doubt, my colleagues in the international program at Ford Foundation, that we were all having an impact. Take the Russia program, Russian and Eastern European program. The Ford foundation set up an office in Moscow, and I think, another country in Eastern Europe at the time. And there was a great feeling of optimism that Russia would become a new, responsible, civilian power, with Ford, along with many other NGOs. You only have to read the work of Stanford's Michael McFaul, and other "democratisers" that this was a really opportune moment to do something. So the Russian program was very dynamic at the time. I think that example reinforces the general point that we were seeing this as a special moment in history. But I don't know if that really gets at the question directly, Michal.

Michal Onderco: I mean, very often these projects had these goals of sort of improving, for example, understanding or improving cooperation between actors. And that seems to me like something that is inherently very difficult to measure.

Geoffrey Wiseman: I apologize. I waxed a little too lyrical there about the Zeitgeist. Grant impact and evaluation was, I would say, always a question. Senior officers at meetings where grants were approved or not approved – and sometimes they were not approved – would ask about the very question of evaluation. "How do we measure what is success? How do you prove that you have been successful?" Now, we had to conduct regular evaluations; every grant that concluded had to be evaluated. That was a requirement. You would like to think that you made a good faith effort to

evaluate fairly and not just say: "oh, this was money well spent." I'm sure there was that temptation. Some grants are more successful than others. And how do you determine that? You determine that largely by output, right? And that output could take the form of workshops, conferences, documentations, published articles, magazine articles, books. Grants were evaluated by people who had PhDs. Previously, it may have been enough to come out with a book years after a grant finished. In the 1990s that was just not a possibility, because of the times. So that when applications came in, people in the meetings approving these grants would say: "okay, you're having a conference, why are you having a conference? Why don't you have two workshops instead?" And so this was another thing at the time that shift away from big conferences, to small workshops. Workshops were workaday, they were more active. They were smaller, they were more manageable, they produced results quicker. And so, we would focus very much on that. And you would go back to the grantee and say, your idea for an edited volume is not enough : "what is the range of things that you will do?" And the implication being: things that will have impact. And so it was better, for example, if a grantee came in said: "we are going to do a policy report within two months of the completion of the grant, and we are going to send copies of that policy report to every Member of Congress in the United States".

Michal Onderco: That sounds like a good impact.

Geoffrey Wiseman: Yes, but I won't say that was enough. But that would reassure us that the grantee was really interested in impact, in policy impact. And there are all sorts of ways of measuring policy impact, even if far. Going further, how do you measure the impact of foundations? And that's an ongoing issue, = in the philanthropy literature that I've sort of kept in touch with to some extent in my teaching. Thus, a presentation to a Congressional committee would imply impact. But it doesn't necessarily prove it by any means. But what I'm saying is that we were very conscious that grantees pay attention to impact. And that was a shift from the 80s, 70s, 60s, where grantees would typically produce a book. This was a very, very big shift. A footnote I'd make on this is the big concept that was important to us at the time was "leverage". In other words, the Ford Foundation couldn't solve the problem of non-proliferation in the Middle East. But it would add to what others were doing. So if I started out with a small grant of \$75,000 on peacekeeping, for example, that could encourage interest from other funders, including the UN itself. At the time, the UN didn't have a systematic register of peacekeeping casualties in the field. A colleague of mine at the time was the former Undersecretary General of the UN, Brian Urquhart. Brian was an incredible source on what was happening and what was needed at the UN Kofi Annan was head of peacekeeping in the mid early-mid 1990s? And so, we provided a small consultancy grant to set up a peacekeeping register that the UN was able to build on subsequently. To us, that was leverage.

Michal Onderco: That's something that is very difficult, difficult often to estimate, right?

Geoffrey Wiseman: You bet. We talk about it, we use the language, but again, it doesn't fully get to your impact question. But it improves the chances of impact if you're leveraging your grants. That was our thinking at the time.

Michal Onderco: I want to move on to a thing that I asked every single interviewee, which is do you... so you said that, in those mid-90s, people were thinking things are going in a good direction with nuclear weapons. And we see the situation where we are today. And you mentioned that you are not following the topic on a daily basis. But I still want to ask you, do you think that, If we look 50 years ahead, will there still be nuclear weapons in 50 years in your assessment?

Geoffrey Wiseman: A long, pregnant pause. [both laugh] There are two ways of answering almost any question, Michal. But one way is the analytical and one way is the prescriptive. And so I'll start with the obvious prescriptive one, I certainly hope that in 50 years' time we have total nuclear disarmament, and that no worse kinds of weapons are invented in the meantime. That's the prescriptive part of my answer. It is very difficult to imagine that.

I tried to square that analytical-prescriptive circle in my time at the Ford Foundation, by using the formula Barry Buzan popularized, I think that is common security (where you take the other side into account) plus non-provocative defense equals peace and security. In other words, common security implied moving towards minimum nuclear deterrence. So it was really MND, minimum nuclear deterrence, plus, CS, common security, equals international peace. But that still implied that there would be a minimum of nuclear weapons in the international system that would also be positioned in ways that are very non-provocative –ff hair trigger alert, in safe storage that would give plenty of lead time in a crisis. So that is my analytical best guess, the best that we can hope for in 50 years' time is a nuclear world that operates on the basis of minimum nuclear deterrence, plus other alternative approaches. But I can't imagine zero nuclear weapons.

Michal Onderco: And now I'm going to push you, and that's also a question that I ask every interviewee. Which is, imagine there is a world without nuclear weapons, what does security in such a world look like?

Geoffrey Wiseman: If there are no nuclear weapons through international agreements that there are no hidden bombs anywhere,, how do you minimize the risk of conflict and war in a non-nuclear world, which means developing new conventional weapons strategies that minimize that risk. And my approach would basically be to come back to the idea of conventional strategies and structures that are as non-provocative as possible. Thus, if you think about Russia and Ukraine today as an example, even before the Russian invasion, Russian troops were mounting on the border. Now, even if they were there for genuine military-exercise purposes, then that was a complete abrogation of the non-provocative principle. So, in a world of conventional weapons, any country would not position its forces within, say, 50 kilometers of a neighbor's border. And if you have military exercises, then you invite observers from neighboring countries. And you don't use live ammunition in exercises. So I would envisage a conventional dynamic or international security order based on the non-provocation principle. That would be my short response.

Michal Onderco: That, of course, assumes a major transformation of international system. Am I correct?

Geoffrey Wiseman: Oh, yes. You bet, yeah. But if you can pull off total nuclear disarmament, I would say you could you have a good chance of pulling off a non-provocative defensive order. That would be my normative future.

Michal Onderco: I want to finish off with a question that I also ask everyone, which is, is there something that I shouldn't have asked, and I didn't, that you think I'm is a big sort of blind spot that I have, on the way how I'm thinking about this problem?

Geoffrey Wiseman: I might take that under consideration and send you an email. Of course, the great responses always occur after the event. What I would say Michal is that I think you're absolutely on the

right track to focus on this question of policy impact. I think it's a fabulous project. And I think to do it, in retrospect, is a very nice idea.

But one point that I would make is that there was probably a stronger sense of evaluation, what you're calling policy impact, at the time. There was probably a bigger awareness of that at the time than people would guess. It's just that it wasn't articulated as explicitly as you are trying to do nowadays.

Michal Onderco: So perhaps this is a little provocative question. But one of the interviewees that I talked to earlier said: "If the NPT was not extended, we actually would have had a better chance to get rid of nuclear weapons. Because there would be more attention to it. There will be more funding, people would still keep it on the forefront, on the front burner."

Geoffrey Wiseman: It's an interesting counterfactual. But the problem with counterfactuals is that they can never be proven, right? We know from the counterfactual literature that that's the case. But I am an NPT supporter. And my guess is I would take the opposite position. One of the things that I like about review processes in general, take the 1975 Helsinki Agreement or the NPT, is that they bring these issues back on the international agenda every five years or so? So, I think the review process is a pretty good one and serves international security pretty well, in many fields, not just NPT. But I would say the NPT regime has done well. It didn't quite pull off resisting counter-proliferation. Nonetheless, the nuclear weapon states are still, enhancing their vertical capacities. Nonetheless, I would not want to risk the alternative counterfactual approach.

Michal Onderco: Geoff, thank you very much for your time.