Survey or Review

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University-Government-Foundation Collaboration on Arms Control and Security Policy in the United States from Truman to Trump

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Abstract: The relationship between the United States government, private foundations, and university-based researchers working on peace and security policy has evolved over time. Since the end of World War II we can identify four main phases: (1) secret government funding into the 1960s; (2) a Golden Age of foundation support in the 1970s and 1980s; (3) decline of support after the end of the Cold War; (4) a revival of interest in the wake of the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, with government funding through the Pentagon's Minerva grants and new foundation support representing an unusual alliance between leftwing and realist critics of US military expansionism on the one hand and rightwing neoisolationists on the other. To illustrate these phases, the article draws, among others, on documents from Cornell and Harvard universities and materials from the Ford, MacArthur, and Koch foundations. It represents an idiosyncratic account, based in part on the author's experiences.

Keywords: arms control; peace research; Cornell University; Harvard University; Ford Foundation; MacArthur Foundation

1 Introduction

The relationship between the United States government, private foundations, and university-based researchers working on peace and security policy has evolved over

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time.[1] Since the end of World War II we can identify four main phases or eras. We might think of them as "ideal types" because we find elements of each era present in the others. The first era is that of secret government involvement in university research, through the Office of Strategic Services during World War II and its successor, the Central Intelligence Agency, starting with the administration of US President Harry S Truman. It extended from the war into the 1960s. The second era was the Golden Age of foundation-funded academic research, beginning in the 1970s, when nongovernmental organizations such as the Ford Foundation, the Carnegie Corporation, and the MacArthur Foundation supported university research on arms control and security policy. The third era began with the end of the Cold War, and extended through the 1990s, as most of the major foundations lost interest in security policy and funding decreased substantially. The fourth era followed the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 and the period of endless wars that characterized the so-called Global War on Terror. It led to the fracturing of the postwar consensus on US security policy, and an unusual alliance between leftwing and realist critics of US military expansionism on the one hand and rightwing neoisolationists on the other.

To illustrate these eras this article makes reference to a number of universities, including my own, Cornell, and to the interdisciplinary institution that carried out research on security policy there: the Peace Studies Program, now known as the Judith Reppy Institute for Peace and Conflict Studies.

2 Secret Funding

Cornell missed out on the first era of secret government funding of research. That money went mostly to Princeton University and to Yale University, which were also major recruiting grounds for CIA agents (Graham 2020; Ofgang 2020). In 1951, Yale's president objected to the "policy-relevant" nature of the research at its Center of International Studies. With support from the Rockefeller Foundation, the Center relocated to Princeton and many of the Yale professors joined the faculty there (Thomson 1951).

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1 This article is based on a seminar presentation at the event, "Up Patriots to Arms," sponsored by the Rete delle Università italiane per la Pace in Trento, Italy, 14 March 2025. My account is idiosyncratic and based in considerable measure on my own experiences and those of my university, Cornell (I leave out any discussion of the outstanding program at Princeton University, for example), but I have sought to substantiate all of my points with primary evidence and have consulted with colleagues to verify my recollections. I am grateful particularly to Sarah Kreps, Jason Lyall, Steven E. Miller, and Judith Reppy. I thank Massimiliano Rinardi, Alessandra Russo, and Mirco Elena for inviting me to the valuable Trento meeting, and Raul Caruso for suggesting that I turn my talk into an article.

Although not favored by secret government funding, Cornell faculty individually did conduct some research on security policy in the early postwar years. Hans Bethe, one of the leading physicists of the Manhattan Project that built the atomic bomb, was a Cornell professor (portrayed in the movie *Oppenheimer* by the Swedish actor Gustaf Skarsgård). Bethe worked as a consultant to the Los Alamos nuclear laboratory but was also a proponent of arms control, expressing his views in important articles for the magazines *Scientific American* and the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, for example (Bethe 1950a; 1950b).

This first era also saw the founding of the RAND Corporation (in 1946), originally a project of the US Army Air Forces, but one that involved university-based researchers, or people who went back and forth between RAND and their universities. Thomas Schelling, Albert and Roberta Wohlstetter, and Daniel Ellsberg are some of the better-known examples (RAND 1963; Kaplan 1983). Another government advisory group involved mainly physicists and other scientists who would work on technical aspects of security during their summer leaves from their academic work. It was known as Jason, from Greek mythology, and was founded in 1960. One of its more controversial projects came in support of the US war in Vietnam, as Jason scientists developed an electronic barrier that would detect and destroy troops infiltrating from North to South (Finkheimer 2006; Schwartz et al. 1972).[2] During this period, scholars at Cornell University were mainly involved in educating and protesting *against* the Vietnam War rather than supporting it. George Kahin, a specialist on Southeast Asia in my Department of Government, for example, was a featured speaker at the first National Teach-in on the Vietnam War in Washington DC in 1965 (Crawford 2000). Kahin's younger colleague, John Lewis, a China specialist, also participated in activities opposing the war. He left Cornell in 1969 for Stanford, where he founded what is now called the Center for International Security and Cooperation (Newburger 2017). In addition to antiwar activism and scholarship, the mid-1960s also saw the beginning of the academic field of Peace Science in the United States and Europe; one of its founders, the economist Walter Isard, moved from the University of Pennsylvania to Cornell in 1979 (Caruso 2010).

3 The Golden Age

From the beginning of the 1970s through the 1980s, private, nongovernmental foundations began to support international security studies and what became known as arms control. We consider this the second major phase of government-university relations. Arms control was controversial among those in the United States who

2 A list of unclassified Jason reports is available here: https://irp.fas.org/agency/dod/jason/.

favored an unrestrained arms race with the Soviet Union. They thought the United States could win that race, so they opposed engaging in negotiations toward mutual disarmament (Evangelista 1990). Arms control turned out to be a conservative alternative to nuclear disarmament. Throughout the 1970s US-Soviet arms control agreements codified an ongoing arms race rather than ending it, with each side accumulating tens of thousands of nuclear weapons in the course of negotiations (Myrdal 1976).

Arms control received support from mainstream organizations with close ties to prominent universities such as Harvard. With connections at the Ford Foundation, Harvard scholars such as the chemist Paul Doty and the political scientist Henry Kissinger did not need to devote much time to filling out research proposals – something that nowadays can require an army of grant-writing specialists. In the early 1960s, Ford funded an arms-control study group consisting of faculty members from Harvard and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) (Paullin 2010). In 1973 Ford offered Harvard money to establish what became the Center for Science and International Affairs (CSIA) and it supported a series of meetings between Soviet and US scientists, known as the Soviet-American Disarmament Study Group (SADS) that contributed much to mutual understanding and development of certain arms control initiatives (Evangelista 1999a).

How was Harvard able to get this money through such an informal process? It has mainly to do with who was president of the Ford Foundation at the time. McGeorge ("Mac") Bundy served in that position from 1966 to 1979. He was a former Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences at Harvard – appointed at age 34, he was the youngest dean ever – and then he went on to become national security advisor under US President John F. Kennedy. One of the "best and the brightest," as journalist David Halberstam ironically called them, Bundy played a key role in promoting expansion of US military involvement in Vietnam (GR Editors 2019). During the Kennedy administration Bundy had been opposed to informal contacts between US and Soviet scientists when they were proposed by the maverick physicist Leo Szilard (Evangelista 1999a: 42–43). But the more establishment scientists received his support when the Ford Foundation provided funding in 1973 and later an endowment for Harvard's CSIA.[3] It is now known as the Belfer Center after it was "reendowed" in 1997 with money from the family of that name.

Steven E. Miller, longtime CSIA affiliate and director of its International Security Program, assembled the story of the center's founding based on documents and reminiscences (some of which, he emphasizes, may not be fully accurate). Aside from

3 In Halberstam's view, "the world of McGeorge Bundy had never been marked by originality of thought or social view; it was not his particular trademark, for his specialty was really in attempting to follow conventional wisdom in an intelligent manner" (quoted by GR Editors. 2019).

Bundy on the Ford side, the key figure on the Harvard side was Paul Doty. Doty had attended the first meeting of the Pugwash organization of scientists in 1957, when he served as president of the Federation of American Scientists, and was, in his words, a "close personal friend" of Soviet physicist Petr Kapitsa. Doty had served on an advisory committee on disarmament at US President Dwight Eisenhower's invitation in 1960 and became one of the country's leading scientific experts on the topic (Doty 1986: 31, 34). In Miller's account, Doty shared with Bundy a concern "that as the World War II generation of arms control experts passed from the scene, there would be no successor generation to replace them. Where were the future arms control specialists, advocates, and policymakers going to come from? How was arms control going to progress without an arms control community?" (Miller 2000: 1) According to "local lore," the idea for university-based centers for the study of arms control and security "was developed by Paul and Mac over a pitcher of martinis at the then-annual summer meeting" of the Aspen Arms Control Consortium, held in Aspen, Colorado. "In the received narrative the idea was originally sketched out on the proverbial napkin. It's it good story and might even be true!" (Miller 2025a). What is certainly true is that at Bundy's urging, "the Foundation, on its own initiative, bestowed large, long-term grants on a small number of universities that it believed possessed the capacity to provide intellectual leadership in the field…Because Bundy made this a personal priority and avoided the normal Foundation procedures and bureaucracy, this program moved forward swiftly and effectively" (Miller 2000:1).

Carl Kaysen, a former MIT professor and government adviser, recalled in an obituary for Bundy that in March 1973 the Ford Foundation's "board made a special appropriation of $4.5 million for the support of research and teaching on international security and arms control, on the basis of the report of a panel of consultants that Bundy had convened. Harvard received the first and largest grant from these funds, permitting it to organize the Center for Science and International Affairs. Stanford, Cornell, and MIT received similar grants about the same time, and created new centers for security studies" (Kaysen 1998: 464). According to the Foundation's annual report, the first grants went to Harvard, Cornell, MIT, and the Graduate Institute of International Studies in Geneva (Ford Foundation 1973: 72). Harvard's share was $3 million (Miller 2000: 2). Cornell's was $400,000 for a five-year period (Long 1984). Consistent with Miller's understanding of the intentions of Doty and Bundy, the report described the purpose as "training and support of leading scholars and scientists able to provide expert guidance on arms control issues and replenishment of the intellectual capital of fundamental concepts and doctrines in the field" (Ford Foundation 1973: 72).

In its first year of Ford support (academic year 1973–74) Harvard funded eleven graduate and postdoctoral fellows. By the following year, it had hired a directing staff of four, led by Doty, and included 21 research fellows. "Over the next quarter of a century, more than 400 research fellows passed through the Center" (Miller 2000).

Cornell, with less funding, pursued more modest objectives. It certainly benefited from that initial grant of Ford money, although, contrary to Kaysen's recollection, the university had already established its center, or at least a program. Cornell chemist Franklin Long founded both the Science, Technology and Society Program, now a department, and the Peace Studies Program in 1970. Long's experience in arms control dated to his service on the President's Science Advisory Committee during the Eisenhower administration, and he served as assistant director of the United States Arms Control and Disarmament Agency in the early 1960s. He had been nominated to direct the National Science Foundation in the late 1960s, but President Richard Nixon rejected the nomination when he learned that Long opposed the development of antiballistic missile defenses (Saxon 1999).

When Long founded Cornell's Peace Studies Program it was explicitly interdisciplinary. Its first research project was a study of civilian casualties from the US air war in Indochina, carried out by physicists and political scientists, drawing on open sources. Although conducted by opponents of the war, the Cornell study, published in 1972 by a trade press, was widely regarded as the most detailed and objective investigation of the US bombing campaign. Unusual for its time, it focused not only on direct civilian harm but also on long-term environmental consequences of the massive aerial destruction (Uphoff and Littauer 1972). The book found its way onto the reading lists of courses at US military academies well into the 21st century (Evangelista 2007).

When the Ford Foundation provided its major grant in 1973 Cornell's program was the only one that had "peace" in the title rather than "international security." That was intentional. Even if the research explored problems of war more than peace, its founders were committed to a more peaceful world. It is sometimes said about Ithaca, the town where Cornell is located, that it is "centrally isolated." No train station, an hour's drive from a major highway, a small airport with flights to very few places. Perhaps for that reason Cornell faculty do not spend as much time commuting to Washington and trying to influence government policy directly as some of their peer institutions do. Unlike Harvard and Stanford, the Cornell program, for example, never produced any secretaries of defense like Ashton Carter (Harvard) or William Perry (Stanford). It was better known for critics of the arms race and military interventions, such as Kurt Gottfried, Dorothy Nelkin, Carl Sagan, and Peter Stein (Applebome 1986; Fiske 1982; Hovis 2022; Nagourney 2003; Nelkin 1972).

The 1980s were probably the heyday of private support for nuclear arms control, with the Chicago-based MacArthur Foundation leading the way. MacArthur's support for work on international peace and security dates to 1984 and owes largely to the efforts of Ruth Adams. Adams was the only woman and non-scientist to attend the first Pugwash conference of scientists in Nova Scotia in 1957 (where, challenged by one of the Soviet participants to a swimming race, she won handily). As longtime

editor of the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, also based in Chicago, she became a leading figure promoting understanding of the nuclear danger. She served as the first director of MacArthur's program on peace and international cooperation. "During her seven years as director," as Elaine Woo wrote in her excellent obituary of Adams, "she helped dispense $133 million to 655 recipients, from institutions such as Harvard and Cornell to individuals such as Pentagon Papers whistle-blower Daniel Ellsberg. She encouraged scholarship in fields not traditionally associated with international security, such as anthropology, sociology and literature" (Woo 2005; Reppy 2025).

MacArthur supported Cornell for some 25 years, providing fellowships for graduate students, an occasional postdoctoral visitor, and support for workshops, seminars, and publications (Reppy 2025).[4] A number of MacArthur-supported physicists combined research on nuclear-weapons policy with antinuclear activism. Cornell produced several experts on antiballistic missile defense who criticized the Reagan administration's plans for a Strategic Defense Initiative, colloquially known as Star Wars. They considered it technically infeasible, but nevertheless destabilizing and dangerous, and a barrier to nuclear arms reductions. They, along with colleagues at the University of Illinois, organized a national boycott and urged scientists not to work on the program. By 1987 more than half of the physicists at the top 20 US physics departments had pledged not to work on Star Wars, and a majority of faculty members in 120 other engineering and physics departments had done the same (Kogut 1987).

4 The Post-Cold War Drought

By the early 1990s, following the end of the Cold War and the superpower nuclear arms race, private support for university research on security policy greatly diminished. During this third era, the Ford Foundation reoriented to domestic work on social justice and education, pursuing its former president Bundy's longstanding concern about racial relations and other problems of US domestic politics and society (Kaysen 1998).[5] The MacArthur Foundation, however, continued its program of grants for research and writing on matters of international security until 2005, but it broadened its ambit to include sustainability, migration, and refugees. The foundation had spent $460 million over three decades on nuclear security and would return to that topic again in 2015 (MacArthur Foundation 2025). Yet for other topics in

4 For a list of research carried out at Cornell on peace and security (not all funded by MacArthur), see: https://einaudi.cornell.edu/programs/reppy-institute-peace-and-conflict-studies/publications/institute-supported-books.

5 Ford did, however, support a project at Cornell that resulted in the book, *Beyond Zero Tolerance: Discrimination in Military Culture* (Katzenstein and Reppy 1999).

peace studies, including, for example, legal and ethical dimensions of war, nonviolence, and conflict resolution, there was less funding available.

After supporting some of Cornell's work on ethnic conflict, MacArthur ended its institutional support for the Peace Studies Program. An important exception was its initiative, launched in 2002, for "Strengthening Scientific and Technical Advice on International Peace and Security Policy" (MacArthur Foundation 2002). It was intended to create faculty positions for scientists with training in biological or physical sciences to teach and conduct research on security policy as a major part of their regular academic work. MacArthur offered to fund the position and related activities for an initial period on condition that the universities would maintain funding for the positions continuously thereafter. Many recipients of the award used it to fund existing positions, but Cornell, with the support of its provost, followed the terms of the grant and created a new position held jointly in the Peace Studies Program and the Department of Science and Technology Studies.[6] As part of the same initiative, MacArthur funded the Managing the Atom Project at Harvard's Kennedy School, whose contributions to the denuclearization of the former Soviet republics of Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine count as some of its many achievements (MacArthur Foundation 2024).

It is worth mentioning that neither the United States government nor the state governments supported anything like the peace research institutes of Copenhagen, Frankfurt, Hamburg, Oslo, or Stockholm that emerged during the 1960s and that continued to operate even after the end of the Cold War. As a report on the state of peace studies in the United States and Europe at the turn of the millennium described, European peace studies programs

> tend to be well supported, with their own faculty and sufficient funding to maintain an ongoing academic program, which is often not the case in North America. The strength of the peace research tradition in Europe lends legitimacy to the field, which is still lacking to some extent in North America despite the many courses and programs that have been initiated (Harris, Fisk, and Rank 1998).

In 1984 a government-funded United States Institute of Peace was founded, but it did little more than provide fellowships for doctoral students at universities. Later it became involved in conflict resolution in various parts of the world – a valuable endeavor, but one distinct from supporting university-based research in peace studies.

The Ford Foundation had anticipated the possibility that universities would lose interest in peace and security studies. In 1978, as its initial five-year grant to Cornell

6 The first holder of the position was Kathleen Vogel, the second and current holder is Rebecca Slayton. The grant also supported the hiring of the physicist George Lewis as a research scientist.

was winding down, the foundation proposed a solution for maintaining the Peace Studies Program indefinitely. That first grant had supported various research and other activities of the Peace Studies Program, including a weekly seminar series that continues to this day. The purpose of the second grant was "to ensure that research, publication, training and teaching in international security and arms control" of the kind supported in the first grant be continued for the next 10 years (until 1988), and thereafter "to assure for the period after 1988 a permanent endowment for perpetuation of such activities." The conditions for accepting the grant included that Cornell match Ford's endowment of $500,000 with a Cornell contribution of $250,000. So the initial value of the endowment was $750,000. Ford required and Cornell agreed that the university make a second commitment as a condition of accepting the Ford endowment funds. It was a commitment to maintain the level of support – beyond the income the endowment generated – comparable to what Ford had been providing in the first grant. As the letter stipulates,

> This commitment is to be assured by the University making available to the Program over and above income from the Fund an annual amount which, in the first year of full operation, will be $30,000 and which will be projected to increase, as a response to inflation, in accord with the total increase in the university's annual operating budget (Hertz 1978).

The language is a bit ambiguous in its stipulation of how the amount of $30,000 should increase over the years, since it names two mechanisms – increase in the rate of inflation and increase commensurate with the growth in the university's operating budget. A likely interpretation is that during an era of high inflation Ford did not want to commit Cornell to maintaining funds at the rate of inflation if its overall operating budget did not grow accordingly. In fact, university budgets expanded well beyond the rate of inflation since the 1970s, and Cornell was no exception. Even the lower amount – $30,000 – corrected for inflation was worth nearly $150,000 in 2025. The main point is that Cornell committed itself to supplement the endowment income to support the perpetuation of the Peace Studies Program's activities. It never did so, although its umbrella organization, the Mario Einaudi Center for International Studies, has provided some office space and administrative support (both diminishing over time).[7]

When Cornell President Rhodes wrote to McGeorge Bundy to accept the terms of the Ford grant in 1978, he went beyond that agreement and actually *promised to raise*

7 When Ford turned its grant to Harvard into an endowment at the same time, the Harvard administration did not provide matching funds. Instead the administration offered permanent office space in the recently built John F. Kennedy School of Government. In 1978 CSIA moved from offices in the Chemistry Department that Paul Doty had secured to the space at the Kennedy School that it occupies to this day (Miller 2025b).

additional endowment to meet Cornell's commitment. Prompted by Judith Reppy's discovery of this commitment, Cornell's Vice President Robert Barker drafted a memo to call attention to the fact that Cornell was not meeting it. He wrote:

> The main purpose of this memorandum is to suggest that we may be "delinquent" in another aspect of our commitment to the Ford Foundation. In 1978 Frank Rhodes wrote to Mr. Bundy indicating that "Cornell will search for additional endowment hoping to keep the annual yield at least as large as initially in terms of 1978–79 dollars." We have not done this (Barker 1983).

Subsequent attempts to get Cornell administrators to acknowledge the university's obligations to the Peace Studies Program proved unsuccessful (Evangelista 2016).

The main point of this excursus into Cornell's history is to suggest that when international circumstances change and universities and private funders lose interest in supporting peace studies, the private foundations – even if they seek to introduce mechanisms to provide for continuity – may prove inadequate. As their own interests change, and the institutional memory of the staff fades, they may not be able or inclined to provide any enforcement of previous agreements (by, for example, requiring repayment of an endowment). That is not to say that government support would necessarily be more reliable, as the next sections demonstrate.

5 Terrorism, Forever Wars, Nuclear Eternity, and Restraint

Two events led to a return of support for university-based research in the first decade of the 2000s. The first were the 9/11 terrorist attacks, and especially the counter-terrorist overreaction in the form kidnapping and torture of terrorist suspects, extrajudicial killings by drone, the illegal invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the seemingly endless war there and in Afghanistan. The second event was the brief reemergence of interest in nuclear disarmament. It was represented by President Barack Obama's speech in Prague in 2008, when he declared his support for a nuclear-free world (although not in his lifetime) and the statement by the four prominent former officials – known as the Four Horsemen of the Nuclear Apocalypse – who came out in favor of what was called Global Zero (Shultz et al. 2007; Evangelista 2011). They were joined by groups of dignitaries in many other countries, including Italy and France (D'Alema et al. 2008; Juppé et al. 2009).

For some, the nuclear danger became associated with the preoccupation with terrorism. George W. Bush's "global war on terror" had attracted criticism on legal and ethical grounds, especially when it led to a preventive invasion of Iraq based on faulty intelligence about its supposed possession of weapons of mass destruction

(Crawford 2003; Evangelista 2008). By 2008, even establishment figures became dissatisfied with the course of the counterterrorist wars that Bush had launched in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the secretive worldwide deployments of special operations forces whose contribution to eradicating terrorism was unclear and possibly counterproductive.

In this context, a new initiative of government-funded research emerged. It was sponsored by the Defense Department and called Minerva, after the Roman goddess of warfare and wisdom, among other things. As its website explained, "the Minerva Research Initiative is a Department of Defense (DoD)-sponsored, university-based social science research initiative launched by the Secretary of Defense in 2008 focusing on areas of strategic importance to U.S. national security policy."[8] The program was controversial from the start, especially among anthropologists who had seen the disastrous effect on their profession of CIA funding during the Cold War (Price 2016).

Many political scientists were willing to apply for funds, however. The amount of overall funding was not large compared to other areas of government-funded research. Fifteen to 20 million dollars a year (up to $46.8 million in 2024) is a rounding error on most Pentagon budgets, but it is a lot of money for academic researchers in the social sciences (US Department of Defense 2024). Critics were concerned that the money would distort the priorities of university-based researchers – and it probably did (Gusterson 2008). Much of the funding went to early-career scholars, and it was amazing to see assistant professors whose million-dollar research budgets for one project amounted to more money than others have raised in their entire careers.

The Minerva program still generates controversy and raises ethical questions. A recent Minerva-funded publication was titled, "How do we justify research into enhanced warfighters?" – a project that "explores the ethical and regulatory challenges of enhancing warfighters' biological, physiological, and cognitive capacities" with the aid of artificial intelligence. Understandably, the authors, including an Israeli scholar from the University of Haifa, justify the research mainly on grounds of improving national security (Evans 2024).

Here is another example of a Minerva project that raises ethical concerns. Jason Lyall writes:

> As part of a Defense Department Minerva grant, I was provided with declassified airstrike data from Afghanistan and Iraq. The purpose of the project was to assess the effects of airpower on insurgent violence and civilian attitudes down to the village level. The results were dismal: airstrikes were associated with increases in the frequency and lethality of insurgent attacks in

8 Many of the websites associated with the Minerva program, such as the one from which this definition came (https://minerva.defense.gov/Minerva-News/), were no longer available after March 2025. They can still be accessed via the Wayback Machine of the Internet Archive (https://archive.org).

> and around the bombed locations. I presented my findings to several high-level audiences both in the US and overseas. After one presentation, I was approached by a group of individuals who were unexpectedly excited by my findings. Why? The insurgent responses were so predictable in location and timing that they could be used to anticipate insurgent behavior, helping the Air Force sharpen its ability to target them. This could be hugely valuable on the battlefield, they noted. Would I be willing to run my analyses in near-real time to facilitate targeting sorties, in exchange for expanded access to (near) current data? (Lyall 2022)

A Minerva project that found that harming civilians by aerial bombardment was counterproductive to defeating insurgencies had produced an invitation to contribute to even more bombing. To his credit, Lyall declined the invitation.

Lyall's research benefited a great deal from Defense Department funding and he has produced a lot of important work. Yet one of his projects was nearly derailed in the wake of the Wikileaks revelations. They entailed release of secret documents about civilian deaths in the Iraq War that Chelsea Manning provided to Julian Assange. As a result, the Pentagon banned its employees and recipients of its grants from logging into the Wikileaks website, using the Wikileaks material, or even reading the newspapers that had published some of it – *The Guardian* and the *New York Times* (Ryan and Saba 2010). Lyall had been allowed to use declassified data on Taliban attacks during his first trip to Afghanistan in July 2009. Wikileaks hit about a year later, while he was negotiating access to US Air Force data on airstrikes in the country. As a result, his declassification authorization was frozen for nearly a year until the Air Force Office of Scientific Research, his grant sponsor, intervened so that he could resume work with the datasets again (Lyall 2025). These are just a couple examples of the ethical and practical problems associated with taking money from the Department of Defense.

The second topic that received renewed attention during this fourth phase – nuclear weapons – led to several university-based initiatives, as well as support for civil-society groups. Here the main funding came from private sources, with MacArthur – which had never ceased its interest in the topic – in the lead, although sometimes playing a rather conservative role.

At Cornell, for example, Judith Reppy and Catherine Kelleher had organized a project on Global Zero, funded initially by a grant to Kelleher from the Carnegie Corporation of New York. Among other things, they organized a course on the topic at the International School for Disarmament and Research on Conflicts (Isodarco) in Andalo (Trentino), Italy and produced a book (Kelleher and Reppy 2011). But when Reppy and Kelleher applied to the MacArthur Foundation in 2015 to continue the project, the staff told them that they needed to change their focus from Nuclear Disarmament to "Nuclear Stability at Low Numbers" (Reppy and Kelleher 2017). Global Zero had been criticized by such prominent figures as Thomas Schelling, who preferred what he claimed was the stability of mutual assured destruction, founded

on the threat of mass killing of civilians (Schelling 2009). The MacArthur Foundation at that point apparently could not imagine a world without nuclear weapons and would not fund research in pursuit of nuclear abolition.

MacArthur did, however, continue funding work on nuclear weapons, with Harvard's Belfer Center as a major recipient. Its Managing the Atom Project received $20,391,531 between 1987 and 2021, working mainly within the paradigms of nuclear deterrence theory developed during the Cold War. In addition to supporting universities, MacArthur spent $100 million on "civil society" initiatives between 2015 and 2020 as part of it "Nuclear Challenges Big Bet." As the Foundation described, "this program built on the $460 million MacArthur provided over three decades to strengthen nuclear security more broadly" (MacArthur Foundation 2025).

In the realm of peace and security studies, MacArthur's Big Bet substituted for the previous approach that focused on many small grants for research and writing and institutional support for numerous university programs. The bet was that spending $100 million at once would solve a major problem. In an evaluation of the Nuclear Challenges Big Bet, published in 2021, the foundation acknowledged that the bet had not paid off. Although listing some accomplishments, the report concluded with these sobering points:

- The number of countries that possess weapons and the number of nuclear weapons held globally have not changed significantly during the strategy's time period.
- Compared to the situation at the inception of the strategy in 2015, the nuclear regime is considerably weaker in 2020.

Although the language is somewhat opaque, the final assessment implies that the foundation's approach – its "theory of change" – failed: "Overall, the assessment of the articulated Nuclear Challenges strategy established that there is not a clear line of sight to the existing theory of change's intermediate and long-term outcomes in the Big Bet timeframe" (MacArthur Foundation 2021).

In 2022, MacArthur seemed to recognize the limitations of an approach founded on what Benoît Pelopidas has called "nuclear eternity" – the assumption that Cold War theories of nuclear deterrence are sound and the main task is to prevent further proliferation of nuclear weapons, not their elimination (Pelopidas 2021). It announced an initiative to spend "$21 Million to Support a Stronger, More Diverse Nuclear Field" (MacArthur Foundation 2022a). As part of its bid to diversify the field it decided to create a Research Network on Rethinking Nuclear Deterrence. What institution did it fund to rethink nuclear deterrence? Harvard's Managing the Atom Project (MacArthur Foundation 2022b).

Most of the major private foundations that supported university research on peace and security policy have been on the left-liberal side of the US political

spectrum. They favored arms control and international cooperation. There have always been exceptions, however, such as the conservative Smith Richardson Foundation. It funded my book project on Russia's wars in Chechnya (Evangelista 2002), but the program officer, Nadia Schadlow, asked me not to acknowledge the support (perhaps that constitutes a kind of secret research funding).[9] Schadlow was a graduate of my university (I didn't know her at the time, so this is not a case of McGeorge Bundy-style nepotism). She later went to work at the Pentagon and then to serve briefly in the first Trump administration.

A major change in the funding scene during this fourth era came when foundations set up by Charles and David Koch began making grants to universities. Koch Industries is the second-largest privately held company in the United States, involved mainly in extractive industries, mining and oil drilling. The Koch brothers' politics tend toward the libertarian, including denial of climate change and support of politicians who reject government efforts at supporting renewable energy and favor defunding and privatizing public education. On foreign policy, the Koch brothers are suspicious of US military adventures abroad, a position that makes them potential allies of the so-called restraint school representing some of the leading US realist scholars, such as John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt. As libertarian opponents of big government, the Kochs also favored foreign-policy restraint. In a 1978 essay, Charles Koch characterized "foreign adventurism and its daughter – war" as the "*single* greatest force behind the growth of government" (quoted in Gage 2019).

Starting in 2005 Koch foundations began making donations to universities, reaching the annual sum of over 112 million dollars by 2019. Of that they spent about 25 million dollars between 2015 and 2019 to found or support university research centers dealing with international security – so, they provided more money than the Pentagon's grants through the Minerva program. Among the recipients were Tufts University, the University of Notre Dame, the Catholic University of America, Texas A&M University, the University of California at San Diego, Harvard and MIT (Gage 2019; Toosi 2020). Koch offered money to my colleague Sarah Kreps at Cornell on the model of the early Ford Foundation. Admiring her work on the fiscal burden of US military spending, they offered to support her further research.[10] As a member of the faculty steering committee of the Reppy Institute for Peace and Conflict Studies (PACS) she offered to use her Koch connections to pursue an institutional grant. The institute's namesake Judith Reppy, who was still active in the program, responded in effect "over my dead body." She quoted the Peace Studies founder Frank Long, that

9 Before learning of the prohibition on acknowledging the foundation's support, I had done so in an article (Evangelista 1999b).

10 For her 2018 book, Kreps received funding from Koch for field work in the United Kingdom, Italy, and Germany "to expand my cross-national perspective" (Kreps 2018, ix).

"those who lie down with dogs wake up with fleas." Long was willing to compromise and accept money from foundations whose wealth had been earned by causing harm to society and the environment, but only after the founders had died. Since both Koch brothers were still alive at that point, and their companies were still doing harm, taking their money would be wrong according to Judith – and the steering committee agreed. One of the concerns expressed was the Charles Koch Foundation's reputation for putting political conditions on its donations (UnKoch My Campus 2019).[11] Others had heard that Koch representatives participated directly in the seminars and workshops of institutions it funded – although there was some disagreement over whether that was a good thing or a bad thing (perhaps they could learn something?).

Our so-called peer institutions in the Ivy League did not share PACS's reluctance to accept Koch money. In 2017 Harvard and MIT accepted a 3.7-million-dollar grant from Koch (Harvard Kennedy School 2017). When I asked Steven Miller, Director of the International Security Program at the Belfer Center, whether he had any moral qualms about accepting the money, he argued that if Harvard scholars did not take the money it would go to other, perhaps less competent or less scrupulous ones.

In some cases, the Koch money went to fund institutions that appeared to duplicate or compete with existing ones. Notre Dame University for example boasts perhaps the strongest peace studies program in the country, the Joan Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies. It was founded by the heir to the fortune created by the McDonald's chain of fast-food restaurants (also related to the theme of harm to society). The Koch Foundation founded the Notre Dame International Security Center, with considerable overlap in substantive interests with the Kroc Institute (Charles Koch Foundation 2020). The same thing could happen at Cornell, where a Tech Policy Institute run by Sarah Kreps studies drone technology and other military matters and has attracted some three million dollars from the Defense Department to study semiconductor supply chain resilience, a topic "at the intersection of technology, cybersecurity, and public policy" (Brooks 2025).

In 2019 the liberal George Soros Foundation teamed up with the Koch Foundation to fund a new think tank called the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft, in an effort to end the so-called Forever Wars that followed the attacks of 9/11. The institute's name refers to former US President John Quincy Adams, who in 1821 declared that the United States "goes not abroad in search of monsters to destroy. She is the well-wisher to the freedom and independence of all. She is the champion and vindicator only of her own" (Gage 2019; Toosi 2020). Consistent with that position, many Quincy Institute scholars wish Ukraine well in its desire to defend its freedom and independence against Russian aggression but oppose US military aid in favor of

11 Some of the agreements are publicly available, such as the one with Notre Dame: https://charleskochfoundation.org/app/uploads/2021/04/2019-University-of-Notre-Dame-Agreement.pdf.

negotiations – or what some would characterize as surrender. That scholars and pundits known for criticizing US military involvement abroad would praise Donald Trump's foreign policy is a relatively new phenomenon (e.g. Beebe, Episkopos, and Lieven 2025; Stanley 2025).

6 The Trump Era

It is fair to say that the advent of the second Trump administration represents a new era in government-university relations. This era is characterized by the slashing of federal funding for university research which has affected, for example, the medical research sponsored by the National Institutes of Health. Government grants to study so-called strategic languages have been rescinded. A colleague received a letter that read: your award "is being terminated for the convenience of the US Government pursuant to a directive from US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, for alignment with Agency priorities and national interest." As the Trump administration ordered the shutting down of the Department of Education, all of its programs that supported research and teaching regarding international and areas studies also ended. The programs that most affected universities included the so-called Title VI National Resource Centers and Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) grants. The Minerva program of the Department of Defense has also been terminated (Kupferschmidt, K. 2025). At the end of March 2025, the Trump administration fired most of the staff of the United States Institute of Peace via a late-night email message (Associated Press 2025b) even though the "USIP is a congressionally funded independent non-profit" organization, not subject to executive authority (Associated Press 2025a).

The National Science Foundation, a major source of university support, is also under scrutiny. The Trump people are preoccupied with destroying efforts at enhancing diversity in business, society, and education. According to the *Washington Post*, "at the National Science Foundation, staff have been combing through thousands of active science research projects, alongside a list of keywords, to determine if they include activities that violate executive orders President Donald Trump issued in his first week in office" (Johnston, et al. 2025). The NSF has in the past funded social-science research relevant to peace and security studies. Many of the words identified as objectionable are found in that research (Table 1).

Some people would say Trump administration officials are not only determined to eliminate diversity initiatives in favor of a model of white male supremacy. They also seem opposed to universities on principle or at least opposed to the principles for which universities stand, such as academic freedom and freedom of expression. They have revoked the visas of foreign students who have committed no crimes in

Table 1: Words associated with National Science Foundation research that the Trump administration considers objectionable (Johnson et al. 2025).

Advocacy	Inequities
Antiracist	Institutional
Barrier	Intersectional
Biases	Male dominated
Cultural relevance	Marginalized
Disability	Minority
Diverse backgrounds	Multicultural
Diversity	Oppression
Ethnicity	Polarization
Excluded	Racially
Exclusion	Segregation
Equity	Socioeconomic
Female	Systemic
Gender	Trauma
Hate speech	Underrepresented
Historically	Underserved
Implicit bias	Victims
Inclusion	Women
Inclusive	

retaliation for their protests against Israel's destruction of Palestinians or even for letters published in college newspapers (Bromwich and Aleaziz 2025; Zerez and Lucas 2025). Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officers have arrested students and sent them to detention camps where they have no access to lawyers or due process (Cristantiello, R. 2025; Goldberg 2025; Kang 2025). The administration has also intervened in the governance and academic programs of wealthy private universities such as Harvard and Columba, and the universities have followed or anticipated its orders to monitor or restrict programs, especially those that study the Middle East (Khalidi 2025; Mao and Paulus 2025). Resistance to these actions has been limited. A majority of Americans who identify as Republicans believe that universities exert a negative impact on the United States (Parker 2019), so one should not expect them to oppose Trump's policies. Moreover, the universities themselves have mainly acquiesced to the Trump dictates, rather than unite to oppose them (Eaton 2025; Goldstein and Gutkin 2025; Hidalgo Bellows 2025; Undercurrents 2025). If the Trump administration is really intent on destroying universities, then it would be premature to speak of a new, fifth era of government *support* for university research on security policy. It could be the end.

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