THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

Brookings Cafeteria Podcast: Weapons of mass destruction and global health security

July 28, 2017

CONTRIBUTORS:

HOST

FRED DEWS

BONNIE JENKINS

Visiting Fellow

(music)

DEWS: Welcome to the Brookings Cafeteria. The podcast about ideas, and the experts who have them. I'm Fred Dews. Weapons of mass destruction and the global spread of infectious disease are two global threats that my guest today has worked to address throughout her career. Ambassador Bonnie Jenkins served from 2009 to 2017 as the U.S. department of state coordinator for threat reduction programs where among many activities she coordinated the department's efforts related to securing all vulnerable nuclear material. She also worked on the global health security agenda to reduce infectious disease threats and has served in a number of public and private sector roles, including service in both the U.S. Air Force Reserve and U.S. Naval Reserve. Bonnie Jenkins is now a joint visiting fellow with Brookings and the University of Pennsylvania Perry World House. Stay tuned during the interview for a new installment of Wessel's economic update featuring David's take on inflation. You can get the latest show information by following the Brookings Podcast Network on Twitter @policypodcasts. And now on with the interview. Bonnie, welcome to the Brookings Cafeteria.

JENKINS: Thank you very much Fred.

DEWS: You're pretty new here at Brookings and so I'd like to open with some getting to know you kind of questions your CV is quite fascinating. Let's start with where are you from originally?

JENKINS: Thank you. I'm actually from Bronx, New York so I'm a New York City girl.

DEWS: OK. Awesome. So I remember when I was a high school student going into college I had a lot of ideas and influences that kind of guided me in what I had wanted to do which was working in the field of Soviet and Russian studies and diplomacy and now here I am hosting a podcast, which is awesome. What was your career idea when you were going into college?

JENKINS: When I entered college I didn't really know exactly what I wanted to do. I knew I wanted to have a liberal arts education. I wanted to have a general understanding and education in a lot of different areas and how to approach different areas and to be able to be flexible to do different things, which is why I want liberal arts education but I didn't really have a focused idea of exactly what I wanted to do and so that's why when I graduated I took two years off to kind of find exactly what I wanted to do with my career.

DEWS: Then how did you come around to the idea of a career in arms control and the kinds of things that you started getting involved in?

JENKINS: Actually that found me. I was fortunate to do internship at the Pentagon after I graduated and received my master's in public administration and my law degree and I did an internship called a presidential manager's internship which is now called a Presidential Management fellowship. And during that time I did a rotation at the Department of Defense and their legal advisers office and I worked in international law and during the time I was there I was working with a lawyer who was actually doing work on a number of treaties including the START treaty, Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty. That was my very first exposure to arms control disarmament nonproliferation issues. And

once I was exposed to that I decided that that's something I wanted to do because I found it actually fascinating.

DEWS: One of the things that's in your CV, I did mention it in the intro, but you served as counsel to the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States which is known as the 9/11 Commission. How did you get involved in that?

JENKINS: That was quite a few years later while I was at University of Virginia pursuing my Ph.D. I also worked with a number of people there and some of the folks who were involved with the 9/11 Commission and asked if I'd be involved in that.

DEWS: So you served for eight years in the Obama administration and the State Department. Is there one anecdote you can share from that time something particularly memorable? A trip, a meeting, a policy outcome?

JENKINS: There were several. There were a lot of really interesting things that happened in the eight years that I was there, probably the most memorable would be the summits. There were actually for them that occurred in the 8-year period. They incurred in 2010, 2012, 201,4 and 2016 and those were always really excellent events where leaders from around the world about 55 or so got together here in Washington and also we had a summit in The Hague and also in Korea. And it was an opportunity to focus on issues of securing all vulnerable nuclear material. And so just being at those summits preparing for the summit but actually being up to summits and watching the leaders all work together and have a conversation around the table on the important issue of securing vulnerable nuclear material.

DEWS: Well that's a great segue into the next segment of our conversation which was about weapons of mass destruction. What exactly is unsecured nuclear material? That sounds really frightening.

JENKINS: Well unsecure nuclear material refers to highly rich uranium and plutonium, the materials that need to be used for developing a nuclear weapon and the idea here is that if those are secure if you secure all vulnerable nuclear material around the world, you're able to reduce the chances of non-state actors with the intent to do harm to somehow find a way to get their hands on that material. So it was a global effort really to really focus on how to ensure that we secure that material and also that we do other things related to securing material not just from securing material at the site or facility but also securing borders and educating individuals about the importance of securing nuclear material and a host of other activities that are all dedicated toward trying to prevent nuclear terrorism.

JENKINS: So we know that the United States and Russia and Great Britain and seven or eight or nine countries have declared nuclear weapons arsenals and so obviously they have this nuclear material. But then I guess there are a lot of countries that have nuclear materials and don't necessarily have nuclear weapons programs. Is that the case?

JENKINS: Right, and there's also I mean the idea is that you know even if a country doesn't necessarily have nuclear material on its territory they have to be concerned about it because of globalization and the fact that people can move around and that things are a lot easier now in terms of you know travel and everything. And we've seen that non-state actors would intend to do harm do want to get their hands on these materials. We

have to ensure that everyone is aware of it and everyone works on it and that everyone cares about it. And so there are many things that are part of the effort that states can be a part of regardless of whether they actually own any nuclear material on a territory that includes you know joining relevant treaties, implementing those treaties, ensuring that the borders are secure as I mentioned before, making sure they have a security culture to make sure that people are aware of this issue, making sure that the private entities private sector entities that have nuclear material work are aware of these issues. So there is a number of things that countries need to do to be involved in this whether a country actually has nuclear material or not.

DEWS: Do you expect the Trump administration will continue these nuclear security summit in the coming year?

JENKINS: I have not heard anything to that effect that they would continue those. So I can't really say whether they will or not. But I know that during the past eight years those were very important in terms of what the international community saw as an important issue in nuclear terrorism.

DEWS: Well now the answer to this next question may have just been answered, but maybe not. What do you think is the most significant weapons of mass destruction, WMD, threat in the world today?

JENKINS: That's a very hard one to answer and I always think about that because there's a lot of unique things that are happening for example in the chemical weapons area we're actually seeing actual use of chemical weapons which is a very important issue that we need to figure out how to deal with the use that has happened

DEWS: Like in Syria.

JENKINS: In Syria, in the bio area also very important. We have new challenges of biotechnology trying to figure out how do we do with new technology that's an issue. How do we deal with security issues on those and also concerns about the biological weapons convention and what will happen in the future of that convention in light of some concerns about finances and there being able to hold meetings and then in the nuclear area there's always a desire for a non-nuclear weapon states to have a treaty on disarmament and as you know there was one that was agreed to at the U.N. very recently about a couple of years ago. Unfortunately, none of the nuclear weapons states were part of that discussion or negotiation.

DEWS: Was that the U.N. treaty for the Prohibition of nuclear weapons?

JENKINS: Yes.

DEWS: I do want to talk about that in a few minutes, and you wrote a piece about this for order from chaos blog on the Brookings website. On biological weapons, you mentioned the biological weapons convention. Now, I'm familiar with nuclear arms treaties like the start treaty the new START treaty because I studied that in college, it was a long time ago. What is the biological weapons convention?

JENKINS: The biological weapons convention is really a convention like the other ones a nuclear and chemical, very much a disarmament convention to try to ensure that states do not develop biological weapons and if they had biological weapons to not to keep biological weapons so it’s basically a disarmament convention.

DEWS: Let's turn to this piece that you wrote for the site, that I just mentioned. It's about the U.N. treaty for the Prohibition of nuclear weapons. And you have a really interesting take on one major aspect of the treaty and that has to do with the inclusion of women and civil society in the formulation of the treaty. But more generally in the international security process what is important about thinking about women and civil society and these kinds of things that we think of you know this is like a government government state department to the ministry or whatever on the other side.

JENKINS: Well the interesting thing about the treaty when I read it is one of the first times that I can recall seeing a reference directly to entities outside government like and not like civil society or women for example and also I talk about the importance of education. These are all referenced in the preamble of the treaty which I thought was very unique. So while I think it's very important to look at that treaty to see what the possibilities are for you know discussions and with countries that have nuclear weapons to see if there are ways to we can move toward disarmament. I also think it's important to look at the fact that this is a new way of actually approaching these treaties by looking at the importance of having as many voices as possible in these discussions and in the implementation of this work. As I mentioned we haven't really seen that before and I thought it was a very unique take in the treaty and of course not one that I think most people will pay heed to because one it's in the preamble and also because it's not the focus of the treaty which is about disarmament. But I wanted to raise that because I think it's important to have all voices there including women who have played a role in negotiations in the past and the fact that women I think have a lot to bring to the table in terms of you know just different perspectives and ways to look at these issues. The same

with having the non-governmental sector which has played a long historical role in nuclear nonproliferation issues and also in the treaty that was just negotiated. So I think it's important to highlight that role and also highlight the importance of education and making sure that we have a citizenry in America that is a lot more educated on these issues.

DEWS: You wrote about the principle of an educated global citizenry in the piece. So what kinds of actions could citizens in the United States and other countries around the world take with respect to global arms reduction treaties?

JENKINS: I think taking more of an interest in that and realize that these are issues that do impact everyone, I think a lot of times when you look at some of these international security issues there's very often there’s a step taken back from that because many people see these as just very big issues that they really don't feel like they can have an impact on. But I really believe that you know it should be taught in school these issues should be taught in school. There should be much more of an interest in what's going on in these very what they call hard security areas where you're talking about weapons of mass destruction because we have more people who are educated then we can have more of our impact I believe and decisions have to be made about whether we will ratify treaties how we implement treaties where just questions of budgeting and whether we're going to fund treaty implementation bodies because we can't do those things unless they get funding and attention. And it's very difficult to wait until something comes up and then we worry about whether senators are hearing from their constituents on these issues which they may not be following at all. So we should be educating people and have that part of what's being done in terms of not just young people but also older people as well.

DEWS: I think that the issue of treaty ratification is really solely in our country and our government system is the U.S. Senate ratifies treaties, meaning they vote on it, meaning citizens can actually influence their elected representatives or senators on which way to vote.

JENKINS: Right, and I think that's very important. We saw that with the recent Start Treaty in 2010 where there was a lot of effort really emanating from Washington D.C. for a lot of noncriminal sector entities but really an effort to push out the information outside of the Beltway and to the rest of America through you know reaching out to college campuses you know encouraging people to write their senators about the treaty and supporting gratification doing speeches and going around the US and writing op-ed pieces. These are things that are very helpful in terms of raising the consciousness of people around us on issues that they may not be following on a regular basis. And it's good that we were able to do that at the time we needed. But you know being able to keep that going on a regular basis would be very good I think.

(music)

DEWS: Let’s take a quick break here for another installment of Wessel’s economic update. Here’s David on the issue of inflation.

WESSEL: I’m David Wessel, and this is my economic update. For most of the last quarter of the 20th century the problem with inflation was there was too much of it. But for most of the past decade the problem has been the opposite, too little inflation. Despite keeping interest rates extraordinarily low and printing lots of money, the Fed can't seem to get inflation up to its 2 percent target. The Fed's favorite inflation measure shows prices

of all sorts have risen by only 1.4 percent over the past year. Now a few months ago inflation seemed to be creeping up as the employment rate fell and the economy finally recovered from the Great Recession. That's pretty much what economic models predicted. But the past few months have been different. The inflation rate has been falling. A surprise, and a worry for the Federal Reserve. Now you might wonder, why worry? Why would the Fed want prices to rise faster? So first remember that every price you pay is someone else's income. So the Fed isn't talking about just getting prices at the supermarket. They want prices and wages to rise more rapidly throughout the economy. Second, too little inflation poses problems for an economy. One big problem is this. When little inflation is expected, interest rates set by the markets tend to be very low. And when interest rates are very low the Fed has little room to cut them when a recession hits. After all, you can only hit zero or go a little bit below. So the Fed and other central banks around the world figured that a 2 percent inflation is low enough so it doesn't screw up the economy but it gives them a little maneuvering room if they want to cut rates. Now the Fed has confronted a problem. Inflation has been persistently below its target, yet they are raising interest rates and talking about raising them further. Why? Well many, but not all, Fed officials figure that the last few months are an aberration reflection of some price cutting among cell phone providers one month something else the next month. With unemployment at a 16-year low, they basically believe inflation is around the corner and they need to act preemptively. But that may not be what's going on. One possibility is that the economy isn't as close to full employment as the experts say. There's more slack, as economists put it there are enough people on the sidelines of the economy now looking for work that employers still don't have to give across the board raises. Another possibility

is that the economy has changed in some big way. More competition from Amazon, weaker unions, and the impact of globalization, are something that makes it harder to raise prices and wages. Interestingly this is a global phenomenon. The European Central Bank has been frustrated in inflation there has been so stubbornly low. Mario Draghi the president of the ECB says inflation is not where we want it to be nor where it should be. And the Bank of Japan, they've done everything anybody can think of, and they've managed to get prices to climb at less than half a percentage point a year, and recently they said they don't expect to meet their 2 percent target until 2020.

(music)

DEWS: You can listen to more segments from Wessel's Economic Update on our Soundcloud channel. Now back to the interview.

(music)

DEWS: Let's turn our attention to global health security as I said in the introduction you worked on the global health security agenda. What is global health security?

JENKINS: Global security particularly the agenda is an area that the U.S. began to focus a lot more attention in 2014. The U.S. has been doing a lot of work in areas of infectious disease whether naturally occurring or accidental, but also we do a lot of work in terms of bio security and ensuring that we keep bio pathogens away from individuals with intent to develop a biological weapon. And so we recognize for a number of reasons, including the fact that we were seeing more diseases happen on a regular basis. We were concerned about the fact that there is something called antimicrobial resistance which is a fact that a lot of antibiotics being used is actually causing it much more difficult for us to

be giving antibiotics and not to work in the long run. And also an increase in costs we saw with the anthrax letters it was very expensive to deal with that. And the fact that we were recognized now many countries in the world were not able to say that they could respond adequately to infectious disease pandemic or epidemic and so all of these really converged and a desire in the U.S. in 2013, around 2013, to see what we can do to be a part of strengthening the ability of countries around the world to prevent attack and respond to infectious disease. And so we worked very closely with World Health Organization, the Food and Agricultural Organization, and also the World Organization on animal health. These are all international organizations I work in areas of animal health and human health and food security food safety issues and work with them to develop this agenda which now has over 55 countries all working together to try to prevent detect and respond to infectious disease like Ebola in Zika. And the interesting thing is this was launched before Ebola. So this was launched in February 2014 in March 2014 that's when Ebola was identified. And so the fact that Ebola happened really helped countries realize why we need to do something on a much more strategic level to ensure countries are better able to prevent, detect, and respond to infectious disease.

DEWS: I think it's a fascinating combination of public sector in terms of government and public sector health and even the private sector having to coordinate and come together to address these emerging threats, these cross-border threats, these cross continental threats, I mean how do you think the world is doing in terms of its ability to respond to these?

JENKINS: Very well so far I am of course is a lot more to do. But I do believe the global security agenda has really set a stage for how we can work in a long-term manner

in a strategic way to deal with these issues to really strengthen capacity. Countries around the world. We've done a lot of outreach to the non-governmental sector as I mentioned before. That's something that I was doing a lot during my time at the State Department. We worked with the foundations, we worked with think tanks, academic institutions, and universities, private sector. We work with young people next generation to try to bring them all into this discussion of ways in which we need to all work together to address infectious disease particularly since so much of the work is being done outside government not just government, but private sector has a huge role in issues related to infectious diseases the kind of products that they provide around the world to laboratories and others in terms of infectious disease work. Foundations do great work in terms of what they fund around the world. Academic institutions with their research with the work that they get funded to do on the ground. And it goes on and on. And so we looked at it from the very beginning as a multi sector, multi society, effort. Multi sector in the fact that all of the entities within the U.S. government were working together on it and continue to work together on it. Whether it's the public defense department of state, USAID, Health and Human Services, Center for Disease Control, FBI, we had all of these U.S. government agencies working together. In addition, we work with other countries when we talk with about you just say about security agenda. We say that you also need to have all of your entities involved. So we want their, you know their agriculture equivalent of our USDA Department of Agriculture working on it because they also have to have a multi sector response to this.

DEWS: So a similar question is what I asked earlier, do you expect that the work of this whole security alliance will continue in the coming administration?

JENKINS: My understanding is that it will. My understanding is that we are still committed to it. Secretary Price made that clear at the recent meeting World Health Organization meeting in Geneva. I think it was two months ago where he noted that we are so committed to global security agenda of course we hope that the funding will follow that statement and that we will be able to continue to fund the work that's being done around the world, because we were able to really send out a number of experts from the Center for Disease Control and give money to U.S. Agency for International Development, and others to actually do the work, because it's one thing to say all this in terms of what we want to do. But you actually have to be out in the field and actually on the ground work with countries to strengthen their capacity so that you know they can be ready for the next Ebola and Zika.

DEWS: By the time this episode of the podcast airs you will have chaired here at Brookings a discussion called the one health climate change and biodiversity interface to prevent detect and respond to infectious disease. There's a lot going on there, climate change, biodiversity, infectious disease. Can you talk about what this discussion is all about?

JENKINS: It's going to be a small discussion to look at ways in which different entities can work together to look at infectious disease but also look at other factors that impact disease as you can imagine it's sometimes very difficult to talk about multi sector. It's one thing to talk about the different areas of government but there's other things to talk about in terms of other things that affect disease that are real in the real world for example climate change very much affects infectious disease, biodiversity issues of disease. And so this is going to be an effort to talk about how we can work with

international organizations that have already recognized some of these interactions and how we can try to strengthen that effort.

DEWS: To follow up then on climate change, a lot of people just think climate change is about the warming planet, and the Antarctic ice shelf break offs. How does climate change have an effect on the spread of infectious disease?

JENKINS: Because diseases are very much connected to weather. And if you look at Zika for example, it's very much tied to the warm weather. And so obviously a big part of it is about the weather that's going on and heating things like that. So that obviously affect the type of organisms that are around a type of in the case of Zika the type of bugs around that can be carrying these kind of diseases. So that's one way in which in which climate change can affect disease. So you know these are things that have to be looked at in terms of how they interact but also how do we deal with that. You know what how do we we're going to talk about prevent, detect, and respond. We have to think about how these other factors are also going to impact our ability to successfully implement some of the goals of each side.

DEWS: I almost hesitate but I want to ask this next question I asked before I know what how many possible responses. What do you think is the top global health threat, or at least from what you know what is one of the top emerging global health threats that you know that people in the know are looking out for are trying to prepare for?

JENKINS: Well I'm not a health expert but I would say that is probably the concern antimicrobial resistance. That's a very big issue that it's a global concern and number of international organizations that deal with health whether it’s the World Health

Organization on Food and Agriculture Organization will organization of animal health very concerned about this issue. It's seen as an issue that we haven't yet figured out how are we going to deal with the fact that you know on the one hand we often give antibiotics for all kinds of diseases. We have to think about how often we do that. What are the negative impacts of doing that in terms of building up resistance to antibiotics so that you know basic diseases you know you may not be able to use antibiotics anymore that would work. It's a strong concern it is a very basic concern for why we decided in the US to initiate the global health security agenda. And many countries around the world are taking a leading effort a leading role in this. And it's also one of the things that's a big part of the global health security agenda.

DEWS: Let's look ahead, first of all what is the fellowship that you heard on the Brookings University Pennsylvania Perry world house. Can you talk briefly about what that is and then talk about what you expect to be working on either in that capacity or otherwise in the next few years.

JENKINS: Well this is a brand new joint fellowship that was just recently started the pearl how it was just opened up last year. And so it's still developing. Bruce Jones was very fortunate here from Brookings to work with the world house

DEWS: The VP and director of Foreign Policy Studies here, Bruce Jones.

JENKINS: Yes. Thank you, to be more formal.. He reached out and so they've developed, there’s there are three of us. I'm not sure there was a woman before us who are part of this inaugural effort. And so it really means being in Philadelphia two times a week which is really great, I like traveling up there, and being here for the rest of the week

in Washington D.C. at the Brookings Institution office and as far as what I'll be doing I'll probably be working on a lot of things I've been talking about. I continue to work on weapons of mass destruction issues questions related to the future. What's the status of a number of the treaties that we have today in terms of the challenges I talked about some of the challenges already like biotechnology and how we're going to deal with the biological weapons convention, the use of chemical weapons that are actually taking place. How are we going to deal with that, some of the issues related to nuclear disarmament and a disarmament treaty. So I'll be looking at some of those issues but also looking at infectious disease. And I'm very intrigued with some of these multi-spectral issues and how do we work together with different experts to try to address the issues related to infectious disease and also continuing the work that I did in working with other entities not just talking government that outside government to try to address infectious disease threats.

DEWS: Well I look forward to following your work and I thank you Bonnie for sharing your time and expertise.

JENKINS: Thank you. Thank you. My pleasure.

DEWS: You can learn more about Ambassador Bonnie Jenkins on our Web site at brookings.edu.

(music)

DEWS: Hey listeners, want to ask an expert a question? You can by sending an email to me at BCP@brookings.edu. If you attach an audio file, I'll play it on the air. And

I'll get an expert to answer and include it in an upcoming episode. Thanks to all of you who have sent in questions already.

(music)

DEWS: And that does it for this edition of The Brookings Cafeteria, brought to you by the Brookings Podcast Network. Follow us on Twitter @policypodcasts. My thanks to audio engineer and producer Gastón Reboredo, with assistance from Mark Hoelscher. Vanessa Sauter is the producer. Bill Finan does the book interviews. Out interns are Sam Dart, Chynna Holmes, and Brian Harrington. Design and web support comes from Jessica Pavone, Eric Abalahin and Rebecca Viser. And thanks to David Nassar for his support. You can subscribe to the Brookings Cafeteria on Apple podcasts or wherever you get podcasts and listen to it in all the usual places. Visit us online at Brookings.edu. Until next time, I'm Fred Dews.