



The role of think-tanks in foreign policy strategy and public diplomacy

Katarzyna Rybka-Iwańska

Course on Public Diplomacy 2017



What are think-tanks?

- Analysis and engagement
- Advisory and/or vs advocacy
- Policy-oriented research and advice on domestic and foreign affairs
- To enable policymakers and the public to make informed decisions about various public policies (*evidence- and knowledge-based policies/decisions*)
- A bridge between the academic and policymaking communities, between states and civil society
- Serving in the public interest as **independent voices** that translate applied and basic research into a language that is understandable, reliable and accessible

Source:

http://repository.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1011&context=think_tanks



What are think-tanks?

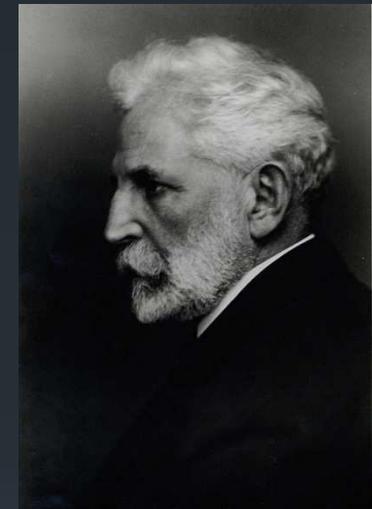
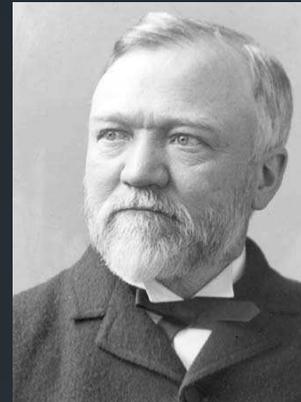
- Key characteristics:
 - Organisational independence and permanence
 - Their own, defined field of research
 - Priority: policies
 - Public service
 - Specialisation and professionalism
 - Deliverance of products
- Key functions:
 - Analytical
 - Programming
 - Educational
 - Mobilisational
 - Shaping elites
 - Controlling

Authority needs knowledge and analysis. Sometimes to base its decisions on it. Sometimes just to provide these decisions with a touch of rationale.

Wojciech Ziętara (i.e. after Diane Stone), Stasiak Dorota

A little bit of history – early 20th century

- Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies (1831)
- London's Fabian Society (1884)
- **Carnegie** Endowment for International Peace (1910)
- Institute for Government Research (1916) → **Brookings** Institution (1927)
- **Hoover** Institution (1919)
- Royal Institute of International Affairs (1920), today known more as Chatham House
- Council on Foreign Relations (1921)



Source: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Andrew-Carnegie>
<https://www.brookings.edu/a-century-of-ideas/>
<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Herbert-Hoover>

A little bit of history – mid-20th century and later

- American Enterprise Institute (1943)
- RAND Corporation (1948)
- Foreign Policy Research Institute (1955)
- International Institute for Strategic Studies (1958)
- Hudson Institute (1961)
- Center for Strategic and International Studies (1962)
- Institute for Policy Studies (1963)
- Center for Defence Information (1972)
- Heritage Foundation (1973)
- Worldwatch Institute (1974)
- Carter Center (1982)
- Nixon Center for Peace and Freedom (1994)
- Project for the New American Century (1997)
- Center for Security Policy (1998)
- Center for a New American Security (2007)
- Foreign Policy Initiative (2009)



RAND Corporation: we look at trends rather than headlines.

- A blend of a think-tank, a university, and a consultancy
 - RAND's role is to help ensure that the most important decisions are made with the best available evidence:
 - The best data
 - The best lessons from history
 - The best policy options based on the best ideas
 - The best analytical methods (even if they have to be yet invented)
 - The best analysis
 - The best anticipation of implementation barriers
- And so on and so forth.

Source:

https://www.rand.org/pubs/corporate_pubs/CP878.html



RAND Corporation: Pattern of Sevres?

- Helping governments at all levels with:
 - Primary data collection, including sophisticated surveys, extensive field work, and case studies,
 - Deep historical analysis, including the legal and regulatory basis for policy
 - Extensive international benchmarking and performance measurement
 - Sophisticated modeling and simulation, as well as gaming
 - Policy formulation and program design
 - Thorough programme evaluation using the world's best multidisciplinary analysis
 - Independent cost assurance
 - Capacity building for clients in both formal and informal settings

Source:

https://www.rand.org/pubs/corporate_pubs/CP878.html

Categories of think-tanks

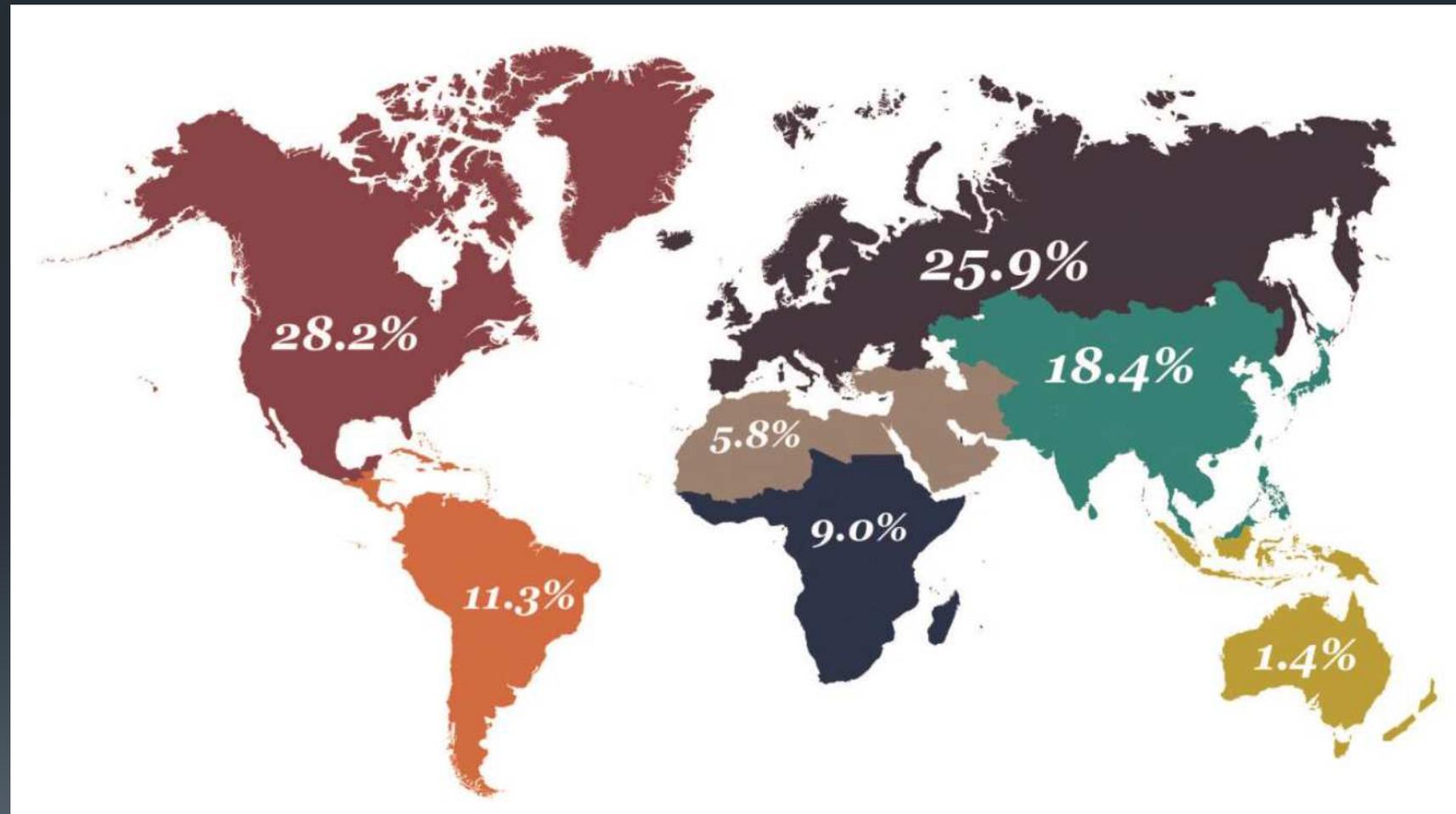
Katarzyna Rybka-Iwańska

CATEGORY	DEFINITION
AUTONOMOUS AND INDEPENDENT	Significant independence from any one interest group or donor and autonomous in its operation and funding from government.
QUASI INDEPENDENT	Autonomous from government but controlled by an interest group, donor, or contracting agency that provides a majority of the funding and has significant influence over operations of the think tank.
GOVERNMENT AFFILIATED	A part of the formal structure of government.
QUASI GOVERNMENTAL	Funded exclusively by government grants and contracts but not a part of the formal structure of government.
UNIVERSITY AFFILIATED	A policy research center at a university.
POLITICAL PARTY AFFILIATED	Formally affiliated with a political party.
CORPORATE (FOR PROFIT)	A for-profit public policy research organization, affiliated with a corporation or merely operating on a for-profit basis

Source:

http://repository.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1011&context=think_tanks

Global distribution of think-tanks



Source:

http://repository.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1011&context=think_tanks

But: the number of think-tanks decreases

- ← Political and regulatory environment growing hostile to think-tanks and NGOs in many countries
- ← Decreasing funding for policy research by public and private donors
- ← Tendency toward short-term, project-specific funding instead of investing in ideas and institution (*gig economy!*)
- ← Underdeveloped institutional capacity and the inability to adapt to change
- ← Increased competition from advocacy organizations, for-profit consulting firms, law firms and 24/7 media
- ← Institutions having served their purpose and discontinued their operations

Source:

http://repository.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1011&context=think_tanks

A complex environment for think-tanks – a global market place of ideas

Threats:

More issues
More actors
More competition
More conflict



Competitive challenges
Resource challenges
Technological challenges
Policy challenges



4M:

Mission
Market
Manpower (*brains*)
Money



Develop national, regional, and global **partnerships**
Create **new, innovative platforms** to deliver their knowledge (products and services) to an ever-expanding audience
Adopt **entrepreneurial and tech-savvy communication** strategies while continuing to produce **rigorous, policy relevant analysis**

Source:

http://repository.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1011&context=think_tanks

Think-tanks must be able to communicate effectively with multiple stakeholders

They do so mainly through their various research products:

- Books
- Articles
- Academic journals
- Opinion magazines
- Policy briefs
- Social media
- Newsletters
- The importance of generating timely and relevant policy research
- Under constant pressure to keep on top of current policy issues



Think-tanks role in (public) diplomacy

- Attracting media exposure:
 - Op-ed articles
 - Commentaries on radio and television
 - Maintain blogs on their institute's website
 - When invited – testify before parliamentary committees
- Shaping public opinion and public policy:
 - Sponsor lectures, conferences, seminars and workshops where policy-makers, academics, journalists and leaders of commerce and industry exchange ideas [memorise the term „Chatham House rule”]
 - „behind-the-closed-door”, „off-the-record” discussions and consultations with decision-makers
 - Work-shops for members of parliaments and other decision-makers and stakeholders

American think-tanks played a role in huge initiatives of several administrations, two big examples:

- Ronald Reagan's Strategic Defence Initiative (SDI, „Star Wars Program”) – supported by the analysis of the High Frontier and the Heritage Foundation and later also by the Center for Security Policy
- George W. Bush's Iraq campaign was influenced by the Project for the New American Century as well as the American Enterprise Institute



Source:

<https://www.reaganfoundation.org/wallpaper/>
<http://www.bushcenter.org/people/george-w-bush.html>

Donald E. Abelson

But: who should think-tanks earn their money from?

Katarzyna Rybka-Iwańska

More than a dozen prominent Washington research groups have received tens of millions of dollars from foreign governments in recent years while pushing United States government officials to adopt policies that often reflect the donors' priorities, an investigation by The New York Times has found.

The money is increasingly transforming the once-staid think-tank world into a muscular arm of foreign governments' lobbying in Washington. And it has set off troubling questions about intellectual freedom: Some scholars say they have been pressured to reach conclusions friendly to the government financing the research.

Source:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/07/us/politics/foreign-powers-buy-influence-at-think-tanks.html>

Brookings Institution \$41 million received

The think tank, which has one of the highest profiles in the world, receives about 12 percent of its annual funding from foreign governments. Oil-rich nations such as Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Norway are among its biggest foreign donors.

Atlantic Council Amounts not disclosed

The think tank has received contributions from more than two dozen countries since 2008, a fact that drew attention in 2013 after former Senator Chuck Hagel, who was then chairman of the council, was nominated to serve as secretary of defense. Foreign government donors have made up between 5 and 20 percent of its annual budget in recent years, according to its president.

“It is particularly egregious because with a law firm or lobbying firm, you expect them to be an advocate,” Mr. Sandler added. “Think tanks have this patina of academic neutrality and objectivity, and that is being compromised.”

The arrangements involve Washington's most influential think tanks, including the [Brookings Institution](#), the [Center for Strategic and International Studies](#), and the [Atlantic Council](#). Each is a major recipient of overseas funds, producing policy papers, hosting forums and organizing private briefings for senior United States government officials that typically align with the foreign governments' agendas.



Numbers matter – how to measure the importance of a think-tank

- The number of citations by the print and broadcast media
- The number of interviews experts have given
- The number of followers on Twitter, Facebook and other platforms
- The number of times their colleagues have been asked to testify/be consulted by MPs and the government
- The number of publications that have been downloaded from their websites
- The number of visits to their websites
- The number of their staff that served in various gov posts (applicable mainly to the US)

BUT: there is a vast difference between public visibility and policy relevance



Questions for discussion:

- Do think-tank matter when decision-making is concerned?
- How do think-tanks differ from universities, academia?
- Where can they play a bigger role: in strategic thinking or in public diplomacy?
- Should politicians and officials be think-tankers?
- Are think-tanks a part of the global educational/knowledge market or they rather play at the market of ideas?

Literature used for this presentation and further reading

- Abelson Donald E., *Old world, new world: the evolution and influence of foreign affairs think-tanks*, in: *International Affairs*, vol. 90, No1, January 2014, pp. 125-142.
- Rich Michael D., *The Role of Think Tanks in Modern Governance – Remarks at the China Development Forum 2016*.
https://www.rand.org/pubs/corporate_pubs/CP878.html
- McGann John, *The Global Go To Think Tank Report 2016*, University of Pennsylvania.
http://repository.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1011&context=think_tanks
- Ziętara Wojciech, *Definicje, funkcje i klasyfikacje think-tanków*, in: Bąkowski Tomasz, Szlachetko Jakub H., *Zagadnienie think-tanków w ujęciu interdyscyplinarnym*, Gdańsk 2012, pp. 9-31.
- Stasiak Dorota, „Pomiędzy”, czyli gdzie? *Polskie think-tanki w poszukiwaniu recepty na siebie*, in: Bąkowski Tomasz, Szlachetko Jakub H., *Zagadnienie think-tanków w ujęciu interdyscyplinarnym*, Gdańsk 2012, pp. 107-134.



Thank you very much for your
attention!

Let's stay in touch:

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/katarzyna-rybka-iwa%C5%84ska-08856b133/>