Chapter 1

Theoretical Models and Approaches to Understanding the Role of Lobbies and Think Tanks in US Foreign Policy

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Editors' Introduction

Many who visit Washington, DC have heard of K Street, which runs from east to west, several blocks north of the White House and Capitol Hill. It is home to some of the highest powered lobbyists in the United States and is synonymous in the eyes of critics with the victory of special interests over the public interest. Lobbyists no longer rely on the sorts of "smoke-filled room" tactics that citizens still tend to associate with them. They tend to be highly sophisticated organizations that employ experts whose job it is to package information and arguments, and present them to policymakers, in order to influence public policy.

This turns out not to be very different from what think tanks do. Scattered throughout Washington, but concentrated within about a one mile radius of the stretch of Pennsylvania Avenue that runs from the White House to Congress, are hundreds of organizations whose function is to influence policy. They attempt to do so directly, through their impact on policymakers, or indirectly by shaping the public conversation on an issue. But either way it is the force of the information and ideas that they generate and communicate that is the basis of their influence.

In this chapter Donald Abelson examines the sprawling and complex world of lobbyists and think tanks that cluster around issues of America foreign policy. He identifies three theoretical approaches for the understanding of foreign policy lobbies and four main models for the understanding of think tanks and their influence. Lobbyists use expertise, but think tanks embody expertise. "[W]hat can think tanks offer corporate America that lobbyists cannot?", Abelson asks. The answer, he says, is "credibility and respectability." But beyond this insight, generalization, including generalization about who is influential in what circumstances, becomes elusive. "[A]s the policy-making community in the United States becomes increasingly crowded," Abelson says, "it has become difficult, if not impossible, to identify those groups that have had a direct impact on specific policy decisions."

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In his recent study, *Foreign Policy, Inc.: Privatizing America's National Interest*, Lawrence Davidson (2009) reflects on what he considers to be a disturbing and damaging trend in American politics. He argues that amidst growing voter apathy, ignorance, and indifference about America's role in world affairs, a handful of highly organized and well-funded interest groups and ethnic lobbies have hijacked American foreign policy. Rather than advocating a stronger and more coherent foreign policy that would benefit the United States, Davidson contends that these organizations are motivated solely by the pursuit of their own narrowly defined interests. It is in this environment, which the author describes as a "factocracy," factions battle among themselves for control over the nation's political agenda.

Davidson's admonition about the growing influence of interest groups, think tanks, lobbies, and other non-governmental organizations and the untold damage they may cause to the national interest is hardly breaking news. Several scholars and observers of American foreign policy, including John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt (2007) and John Hostettler (2008) have expressed similar concerns. But in the history of the United States, no one has made a more compelling and articulate case about controlling the pernicious influence of factions than James Madison.

In Federalist Number 10, the Virginia statesman and fourth president of the United States observed that "Among the numerous advantages promised by a well constructed Union, none deserves to be more accurately developed than its tendency to break and control the violence of faction" (Hamilton et al. 1788: 61). For Madison, a faction referred to "a number of citizens, whether amounting to a majority or a minority of the whole, who are united and actuated by some common impulse of passion, or of interest, adverse to the rights of other citizens, or to the permanent and aggregate interests of the community" (Hamilton et al. 1788: 62).

Although it is unlikely that Madison had ethnic lobbies, trade associations, or think tanks in mind when he penned his famous essay for the people of New York in 1787, he undoubtedly would have regarded many of these organizations as factions "actuated by some common impulse of passion" that can and have acted in ways adverse to the nation's interests. To control the effects of faction, or in this case, to curb the influence of hundreds of non-governmental organizations, Madison would likely have prescribed the same remedy: create a republican form of government based on separate branches sharing power which, among other things, can prevent minority groups from seizing control of the nation's agenda. He writes: "If a faction consists of less than a majority, relief is supplied by the republican principle, which enables the majority to defeat its sinister views by regular vote. It may clog the administration, it may convulse the society; but it will be unable to execute and mask its violence under the forms of the Constitution" (Hamilton et al. 1788: 65).

The purpose of this chapter is not to revisit the historic debates between federalists and anti-federalists about the advantages and disadvantages of creating a political system based on separate branches sharing power, nor is it to chronicle the growth of interest groups and other non-governmental organizations in the United States. Our focus here takes us in a very different direction.

Lobbies, Think Tanks, and the Foreign Policymaking Process

While dozens of scholars have studied the activities of interest groups and their ongoing efforts to influence US foreign policy, far less consideration has been devoted to understanding how some of America's most prominent lobbies and think tanks have become immersed in the foreign policymaking process. This is surprising given the amount of negative media attention in recent years that has focused both on the so-called "Jewish or Israel lobby" and on a select group of neoconservative think tanks, including the now defunct Project for the New American Century (PNAC) and the American Enterprise Institute.[1] Often portrayed as elite organizations that exercise a disproportionate amount of influence on Capitol Hill and in the White House, they have been demonized by several scholars and journalists on both sides of the Atlantic.[2] Among other things, they have been blamed for pressuring US policymakers to deploy troops to Afghanistan and Iraq and for the ongoing turmoil in the Middle East. But as we will discover in this chapter, failures in US foreign policy should not be blamed on organizations whose sole purpose is to advance their institutional goals. Lobbies, interest groups and think tanks specializing in US defense and foreign policy are simply doing what they are supposed to—convincing policymakers to pursue policies compatible with their organizational interests. In a political and economic culture that rewards and celebrates success, it makes little sense to criticize non-governmental organizations (NGOs) for being "too influential." Unlike the US government, NGOs cannot legitimately claim to speak for what is in the national interest. Although these and other organizations should assume some responsibility for shaping the way the electorate and policymakers think about particular issues, it is ultimately the responsibility of elected officials in Congress and in the Oval Office to navigate America's way through turbulent waters. Put simply, interest groups, lobbies, and think tanks should not be condemned for taking advantage of a political system that affords them multiple opportunities to influence the way policymakers think. If their policy recommendations damage the integrity and standing of the United States in the international community, the blame must reside with elected officials who have accepted their advice. For NGOs to exercise influence in policymaking, there must a willingness on the part of policymakers to be influenced.

Several recent studies have documented the rise of lobbies and think tanks in the United States, and in other advanced and developing countries, as well as their efforts to shape public opinion and public policy.[3] But given the complex world these organizations inhabit, scholars are only beginning to consider the types of theoretical models and approaches that are best suited to explaining their active involvement in the policymaking process. In the pages that follow, we will evaluate different theoretical approaches that may help us to better understand the role of lobbies and think tanks in the United States and their efforts to shape US foreign policy. In the process, we will clarify what lobbies and think tanks are and why scholars often confuse the two.

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[1] For more on this, see Michael Meacher, "This War on Terrorism is Bogus," *Guardian*, 6 September, 2003 and Michael Massing, "The Storm over the Israel Lobby," *The New York Review of Books*, 8 June, 2006.

[2] See Walt and Mearsheimer. For more on the Israel Lobby, see Edward Tivnan, *The Lobby: Jewish Political Power and American Foreign Policy*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987 and Dan Flesher, *Transforming America's Israel Lobby: The Limits of Its Power and the Potential for Change*. Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2009.

Lobbyists

Lobbyists represent every imaginable domestic and foreign policy concern. There are lobbies advocating for the tobacco industry, the oil industry, telecommunications, transportation, alcohol, and the list grows daily. But in the literature on US foreign policy, no lobby has generated more interest and scrutiny than the "Israel Lobby." While several studies have documented the history and evolution of the Israel Lobby and the important role played by the America Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), the organization responsible for coordinating many of its activities, several gaps in the literature nonetheless remain.[4] Among the most glaring, is the reluctance of scholars to develop appropriate models to assess the influence of the Israel lobby and other ethnic lobbies on the formulation and execution of US foreign policy. Rather than determining an appropriate set of metrics or measurements to evaluate how and to what extent this and other lobbies have shaped US foreign policy, most scholars and journalists continue to rely on anecdotal evidence.

As an organization committed to Israel's security, the Israel lobby relies on various channels to convey its concerns to the media, to various government agencies and departments responsible for foreign and defense policy, and to members of Congress and to the White House. But this is not unusual. Indeed, all lobbies, whether they represent domestic or foreign policy concerns, pursue similar strategies. But what distinguishes the Israel Lobby from all others, is the commonly held perception that it wields an overwhelming amount of influence over American foreign policy toward the Middle East. Why, according to Walt, Mearshiemer and other scholars, is the Israel Lobby so successful? That's simple according to the familiar narrative that has developed over the years. Not only is the lobby well organized, but the thousands of individuals and organizations that support it donate millions of dollars in campaign contributions each year to members of Congress. Moreover, as the storyline goes, because Florida and New York are heavily populated with Jewish voters, it stands to reason why members of Congress from these states would line up to support a pro-Israel foreign policy. And if this argument isn't sufficiently compelling, scholars encourage voters to pay close attention to the individuals who occupy the president's inner circle. As revealed during the Bush 43 administration, AIPAC enjoyed close ties to several top advisers.

Unfortunately, in their attempt to portray the Israel Lobby as an organization that takes advantage of its economic resources to "buy votes in Congress," and to strengthen its connections to the White House, most scholars, including Walt and Mearsheimer, have neglected to consider key questions that would allow students of foreign policy to ascertain if a causal connection exists between the policy preferences of the Israel Lobby and America's posture toward the Middle East. Not only is the literature deficient in this respect, but it fails to provide a thoughtful analysis about how and under what conditions influence can be achieved. These and other shortcomings will be addressed in the following section where we will discuss appropriate conceptual frameworks within which to analyze the involvement of lobbies in US foreign policy. Before we proceed, it is also important to acknowledge the limitations in the literature on US foreign policy regarding treatment of think tanks.

Think Tanks

Despite the growing presence of think tanks in the United States (some 2,500 of them today) and their ongoing efforts to influence the policy preferences and choices of decision-makers, political scientists have been slow to recognize their involvement in the policymaking process. As Joseph Peschek points out, given the propensity of scholars to explain policy decisions either as an outcome of intergovernmental politics or interest group competition, this is not entirely surprising: "The acceptance of a split between 'private' and 'public' uses of power may help to account for this dismissive attitude. Political scientists who examine policy only as an outcome either of intergovernmental processes or of overt interest group pressure from outside the government will miss the significance of [think tanks] in the political process," which, Peschek notes, is more strongly felt during the initial stages of the policy cycle when the parameters of public debates are being framed (Peschek 1987: 19).

Even if one were prepared to acknowledge that intergovernmental and interest group bargaining occur in separate policy domains, it does not explain why so little attention has been paid to the contribution of think tanks to both political processes. As a matter of course, think tanks interact on a regular basis with officials in Congress, the White House, and throughout the bureaucracy. Indeed, policy experts from the Brookings Institution, the American Enterprise Institute, the Heritage Foundation, the Center for Strategic and International Studies, and

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[3] See, for example, Donald E. Abelson, *American Think Tanks and their Role in U.S. Foreign Policy*. London and New York: Macmillan and St. Martin's Press, 1996 and *Do Think Tanks Matter? Assessing the Impact of Public Policy Institutes*. Second Edition. Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009. Also see James G. McGann and R. Kent Weaver (eds), *Think Tanks & Civil Societies: Catalysts for Ideas and Action*. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 2000; and Diane Stone and Andrew Denham (eds), *Think Tank Traditions: Policy Research and the Politics of Ideas*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004.

[4] See Flesher, Walt and Mearsheimer and Tivnan.

other think tanks that focus on defense and foreign policy studies also maintain close contact with key departments and agencies engaged in foreign policy such as the State Department, Defense Department, and the National Security Council. In short, scholars would be hard pressed to *miss the significance* of think tanks even if they differentiated between the public and private uses of power.

It is more likely that scholars have downplayed or underestimated their impact in policymaking because unlike interest groups and lobbies, whose motivations and goals are relatively transparent, the role and function of think tanks is ambiguous and therefore more difficult to define. To sum up, since think tanks can and do assume multiple and conflicting roles, making general observations about their behavior often difficult. Furthermore, because their involvement in policymaking is not as easily understood as the contribution made by interest groups, it stands to reason why they are often ignored. It is far simpler to pretend that think tanks do not exist, or to assume they play only a modest role in policymaking, than to construct a conceptual framework which would allow scholars to evaluate their influence in policy development.

Theorizing about Lobbies and Think Tanks: Competing Visions and Conceptual Approaches

As noted, the primary function of lobbies is to persuade policymakers to either adopt a position that advances the goals of their organization or to discourage them from pursuing a policy that could jeopardize or compromise their interests. To this end, lobbies rely on a host of strategies ranging from arranging seminars, conferences and workshops with key members of Congress and their staff to distributing various publications to key stakeholders that will lend greater support and credibility to their policy preferences.

While much of the work in which lobbies are engaged takes place behind closed doors, it is not difficult to determine the positions they are trying to advance. By accessing the websites maintained by these organizations and perusing their publications and newsletters, it is relatively easy to assess their goals and priorities. What is more difficult to track is the interaction that takes place between lobbies and elected officials. Scholars are generally not privy to these conversations, nor are they likely to obtain strategy documents that outline how lobbies intend to generate the support they require on the floor of the House of Representatives and/or in the Senate to sway a key vote. Moreover, while one can quickly discern which members of Congress support policy initiatives consistent with the priorities of a particular lobby, determining which factors ultimately influenced their decision is inherently problematic.

Scholars may not know for certain if a member of Congress voted a particular way because of pressure being exerted by a lobby, but the outcome of the vote is rarely cloaked in mystery. In the final analysis, what matters most to a lobby is achieving its desired goal. Conversely, what matters most to members of Congress is satisfying the needs of their constituents so they can remain in office. When the interests of a lobby coincide with the larger interests of a member's constituency, a perfect union is formed. What is important to remember, however, is that lobbies, like think tanks and interest groups, do not measure their success by short-term results. They may suffer occasional losses, but remain committed to advancing their long-term institutional interests.

In the United States, non-governmental organizations can take advantage of a highly decentralized and fragmented political system that provides them with multiple channels of access to elected officials. Additional access is made available to the senior level of the bureaucracy which changes with incoming administrations. When these features of the American political system are combined with a weak party system that does not require members of Congress to tow the party line and a philanthropic culture that generously supports the work of think tanks and interest groups, it creates an ideal environment for groups to compete for the attention of policymakers.

In a highly competitive political arena where thousands of lobbies, interest groups, think tanks, and other non-governmental organizations try to influence the political agenda of the nation, how should scholars assess their performance? What theories or conceptual approaches should be considered in trying to make better sense of how lobbies and interest groups engage with policymakers and other stakeholders? Seven theories on lobbies and think tanks will altogether be examined.

We begin by identifying three major conceptual approaches that may help students to better understand the role and function of lobbies in US foreign policy. First, we will examine how lobbies function in a pluralist or hyper-pluralist political environment—the most common approach embraced by scholars. Among other things, pluralists maintain that lobbies simply represent one of many actors competing for power in the political arena. Following this, we will look at lobbies through the eyes of elite theorists who regard these organizations as a select group that by virtue of their vast resources and strong ties to policymakers enjoy privileged access to the nation's most powerful decision-makers. And finally, we will consider a more holistic approach to understanding the role of lobbies by concentrating on how these institutions employ different strategies to enhance their visibility and influence in US foreign policy. Rather than looking at lobbies as one set of actors vying for power, this approach requires a more in-depth understanding of the institutions themselves and how they adapt to an ever changing political environment. Once we have completed our discussion of lobbies, we will proceed to consider four theories and conceptual approaches to understanding the role of think tanks. The first two approaches—elite theory and pluralism—closely resemble those adopted to study lobbies. The final two—statism and an institutional approach—require students to think more critically about the relationship of think tanks to the state as well as the efforts of these institutions to participate in various stages of the policymaking process. Both approaches will reveal why scholars need to develop new approaches to understanding the role and impact of think tanks.

Lobbies and Interest Groups in a Hyper-pluralistic System

Commenting on the growing size and diversity of the marketplace of ideas, James McGann recently noted that the United States now embodies a hyper-pluralistic political tradition.[5] While the government, according to pluralists, is still expected to preserve a level playing field by requiring all participants to abide by the rules of the game, the sheer number of combatants often makes it difficult to determine who is influencing the political agenda. According to those that adhere to this tradition, policy decisions made in the legislative and executive branches theoretically reflect the outcome of group competition. However, given the sheer number of participants exchanging ideas with policymakers, it is often difficult for scholars to ascertain which individuals and organizations left the strongest fingerprint on government legislation. Put simply, tracing the origin of idea to a particular source is often akin to locating a needle in a haystack. As Martin Anderson of the Hoover Institution has observed, "Every successful policy idea has a hundred mothers and fathers. Every bad idea is an orphan." Yet, despite, the growing number of actors that compete for power in the political arena, this approach can yield interesting results, particularly when narrowly defined policy areas are examined.

While pluralists observe the pulling and hauling of politics from a macro-level, they are not precluded from asking why some organizations succeed more than others, a subject that we will return to shortly. For pluralists, two assumptions must be accepted as gospel: first, that in the American political system, which embraces the democratic ideals of the founding fathers, groups representing a plethora of interests have the freedom and the opportunity to express their views. And second, that the government remains impartial while groups compete with each other to shape the political agenda, an assumption that will be examined more closely when we discuss the role of think tanks.

For scholars studying the role of lobbies in foreign policy, this approach can be useful if the right questions are asked. As noted, unlike interest groups which focus either on one or multiple issues, lobbies are umbrella organizations representing a cluster of groups that share similar concerns. Given the size of their membership, lobbies generally occupy more political space than interest groups. For instance, in addition to AIPAC, the Israel Lobby includes religious organizations, academics, interest groups, journalists, and several other non-governmental organizations that support its mandate. The challenge then is to explain why certain lobby groups enjoy greater prominence than others. Why is it that the Israel Lobby is perceived as being more influential than the Arab Lobby or the Cuban Lobby? Is the Israel Lobby better organized? Does it employ a more effective strategy to communicate with policymakers? Does it have more resources on which to draw? Is it because of the long-standing ties between Israel and the United States that provides the lobby with greater political leverage? Or are Walt and Mearsheimer right? Is it because of the political influence Jewish voters can exercise in key electoral states that give the Israel Lobby more political traction? In other words, what factors influence the outcome of group competition? To answer this, scholars can conduct a series of statistical tests to ascertain, for instance, what independent variables are most likely to influence how a member of Congress casts his/her vote on a domestic or foreign policy issue.

Those embracing a pluralist or hyper-pluralist approach may, through quantitative and qualitative analyses, find some answers to this important question. However, other scholars may prefer to focus more on the interaction between lobbies and key stakeholders. To do this, they may wish to consider how some lobbies constitute part of the power elite.

The Chosen Few: Lobbies as Elites

The United States prides itself on being the land of opportunity, but according to scholars who study elite formation, access to the corridors of political power is generally reserved for a select group of individuals and organizations. These individuals and organizations become part of the elite by virtue of who they are and what they can contribute to those occupying positions of political power. Ethnic lobbies which enjoy strong ties to key members of Congress and the Executive would naturally fall into this category. Scholars who study elites understand the importance of institutional relationships that form between government, industry, and key organizations in the private and not-for-profit sector. Indeed, it is the interaction that takes place among these different stakeholders that may help explain support for policy initiatives emanating from Congress and the White House. For example, it is common knowledge that one of the many reasons why health care reform in the United States is so difficult to pass is because of the lobbying efforts of the pharmaceutical industry. It is hardly a secret in Washington, DC that the industry staunchly opposes President Obama's health care plan. The lobby representing brand name pharmaceutical companies has engaged in the same venomous attacks against Obama as they orchestrated against President Clinton when he tried to introduce meaningful reforms. The pharmaceutical industry, like various foreign policy lobbies, donates millions of dollars each year to help elect and re-elect members of Congress sympathetic to their interests. Many former policymakers also serve on the boards of directors of major pharmaceutical companies. In a foreign and defense policy context, this dynamic is known as the Iron Triangle. In the 1950s, President Eisenhower referred to the relationship between Congress, the Pentagon and Defense contractors as the Military-Industrial-Complex.[6] Over the years, the terminology has changed, but the observations remain the same—government agencies cooperate with other elites to enact legislation that is mutually beneficial.

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[5] McGann made these comments during his presentation on think tanks at the Israel Democracy Institute.

[6] For more on the Iron Triangle and the Military-Industrial-Complex, see C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1956 and Hedrick Smith, *The Power Game: How Washington Works*. New York: Random House, 1988.

The rise to prominence of several foreign policy lobbies fits neatly into this conceptual framework or paradigm. This is not only because of the close ties foreign policy lobbies have established with Congress, the Executive, and various government departments and agencies, but because of the corporations who support their lobbying efforts. Major corporations that have aligned themselves with lobbies can benefit enormously when the United States pursues a foreign policy consistent with their investment goals and priorities. For example, in his book, *Defending the National Interest*, Stephen Krasner (1978) describes in considerable detail why American copper companies based in Chile exerted considerable pressure on the Nixon Administration to prevent President Salvador Allende from nationalizing the copper industry. Kennecott was one of the companies profiled by Krasner that engaged in intense lobbying in Washington. Similar arguments can and have been made about the efforts of oil companies to support the US invasion of Iraq, an argument Vice-President Dick Cheney was all too familiar with. A key member of Bush's inner circle, Cheney was CEO of Halliburton before joining the Bush administration. Following the invasion of Iraq, Halliburton received billions of dollars in government contracts to conduct operations in Iraq.[7] This may explain why companies such as Halliburton and Kennecott support the work of lobbies in their efforts to influence US foreign policy.

Working within a power elite framework affords scholars an opportunity to probe more deeply into the relationship between lobbies and power brokers in Washington. Moreover, documenting the personal and professional ties that bind prominent lobbies with policymakers adds yet another dimension to our understanding of how political power is exercised in decision-making circles. Still, it is important to keep in mind that the pluralist and elite paradigms we have discussed are largely intended to provide scholars with a lens through which to observe political power in the United States. For pluralists, power is dispersed among large numbers of groups, including lobbies and think tanks that seek to shape public policy. For elite theorists, power is concentrated in the hands of a few individuals and organizations who exercise enormous influence. But regardless of which paradigm students of foreign policy embrace, it is essential to pay close attention to the institutional characteristics of the organizations being examined. As important as it is to monitor the process by which Congress and the Executive conduct foreign policy,[8] one cannot afford to overlook how lobbies and think tanks inject themselves into important policy debates. But to do that, scholars must first explore the nature and structure of these organizations.

A Holistic Approach: Lobbies from the Inside Out

In public administration and public policy courses, students analyze the internal workings of government departments and agencies. They also study how other types of public and non-governmental organizations are managed. Careful attention is paid to the how institutions are organized and governed, to budgetary planning, and to the strategic use of resources. The purpose of exploring how these institutions function is not only to determine their level of efficiency, but to assess the various factors that influence their performance. At the heart of many studies in this sub-field of political science, is the question of efficiency and accountability. Students who study the role of non-governmental organizations in US foreign policy could gain valuable insights from their colleagues in public administration. At the very least, they should understand that the institutional structure of organizations significantly influences whether lobbies, interest groups, and think tanks succeed in the political arena.

It is not surprising that few scholars have analyzed the internal workings of foreign policy lobbies. Why construct flowcharts detailing the management structure of lobbies and interest groups when you can speculate about how much influence these organizations wield. It is far more exciting to attribute a key foreign policy decision to a prominent lobby or to clandestine meetings between high-powered lobbyists and members of Congress than to wade through hundreds of memos about board meetings, human resources issues, and annual retreats. But as tedious as this process might seem, much can be learned about how lobbies interact with policymakers by studying the internal dynamics of these organizations. By embracing a more holistic approach to the study of lobbies, which would include an assessment of its organizational structure, scholars can acquire vitally important information about how and at what stages of the policymaking process lobbies attempt to make their presence felt. It is also important to consider the types of resources a lobby has at its disposal.

It is often assumed that the work of lobbies is confined to the period just before Congress votes on an important resolution or piece of legislation. We imagine lobbyists placing last minute phone calls to members of Congress and their staff in a last ditch effort to confirm their support. However, most of the work lobbies undertake occurs much earlier. Indeed, for lobbies to be successful, they often have to devote years to establishing strong and effective channels of communication with multiple stakeholders. The most prominent lobbies are those that have the capacity to create and maintain vast personal and professional networks with policymakers, bureaucrats, journalists, and leaders of industry and commerce. This is why any systematic study of lobbies should involve a detailed examined of how these institutions interact with various target audiences.

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[7] Dick Cheney's involvement with Halliburton has been documented in several recent studies. See Lou Dubose and Jake Bernstein, *Vice: Dick Cheney and the Hijacking of the American Presidency*. New York: Random House, 2006 and Barton Gellman, *Angler: The Cheney Vice-Presidency*. New York: Penguin Press, 2008.

[8] For more on the relationship between Congress and the Executive in foreign policy, see Barbara Hinckley, *Less Than Meets the Eye: Foreign Policy Making and the Myth of the Assertive Congress*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994 and Thomas E. Mann (ed.), *A Question of Balance: The President, The Congress and Foreign Policy*. Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1990.

A holistic approach requires scholars to acknowledge that lobbies are complex and highly integrated organizations that must think strategically about how best to engage with the policymaking community. Lobbies, like interest groups and think tanks, must constantly adjust to a changing political climate. This requires planning, foresight, vision and most importantly, tenacity. The various approaches discussed in this section are intended to help students of foreign policy to think more critically about how to study the role of lobbies. The parameters of these conceptual approaches are intentionally broad to allow scholars the flexibility to pursue different, though related, avenues of inquiry. In the following section, we will revisit some of these approaches as they can also be employed to study the involvement of think tanks in US foreign policy.

As think tanks have to come to occupy a more visible presence in both advanced and developing countries, scholars have employed various theoretical approaches to explain their role, significance and impact in the policymaking community. In this section, we explore what these approaches are and what steps can be taken to provide more informed insights about their efforts to shape public policy. In the process, we will reveal the strengths and limitations of each and suggest how they can be integrated more effectively. What will become clear is that it is necessary to move beyond the existing literature to develop a more useful and challenging conceptual framework within which to evaluate think tanks and their involvement in policymaking. It will also become apparent that it is necessary to resist the temptation to base our observations about think tanks on one particular theoretical approach. As we will discover, no one theory can adequately explain the behavior of think tanks and their conduct in the policymaking community. With this is mind, it is important to consider how think tanks have been studied and what assumptions scholars have made about their conduct in the United States.

Think Tanks as Policy Elites

For several scholars, including Joseph Peschek, Thomas Dye, William Domhoff and John Saloma, think tanks not only regularly interact with policy elites; they help comprise the nation's power structure.[9] Particularly in the United States, where think tanks frequently serve as talent pools or holding tanks for incoming presidential administrations and as retirement homes for former senior-level policymakers, think tanks are portrayed as elite organizations that are both capable and willing to influence public policy. The multimillion dollar budgets enjoyed by a handful of American think tanks and the many prominent and distinguished business leaders and former policymakers who serve on their boards of directors and trustees help to reinforce this image. The close and intimate ties between corporate and philanthropic donors and several think tanks suggest to Marxists and elite theorists[10] that think tanks are indeed instruments of the ruling elite. The argument they advance is straightforward: in exchange for large donations, think tanks use their policy expertise and connections with key policymakers to advance the political agendas of their generous benefactors. On the surface, this seems entirely plausible. After all, it is unlikely that corporations and philanthropic foundations would donate thousands, and sometimes millions, of dollars to think tanks that are acting contrary to their interests. They fund think tanks that share similar ideals and concerns about the nation. However, it is important to question the type of return donors are expecting on their investment. While it makes sense for philanthropic foundations to fund like-minded think tanks, it is less important for corporate donors to use think tanks to help them make contact with senior-level policymakers. Through their sizeable donations to congressional and presidential candidates, not to mention their personal friendships with dozens of politicians, corporations and heads of philanthropic foundations hardly need think tanks to introduce them to the world of politics. Moreover, since corporations can and do hire lobbyists to represent their interests on Capitol Hill, it is unlikely that they would turn to institutions like think tanks that are prohibited under the Internal Revenue Code from engaging in overt political lobbying. And since professional lobbyists have an incentive to work tirelessly on behalf of their clients, what can think tanks offer corporate America that lobbyists cannot? The answer is simple: credibility and respectability.

Corporations and philanthropic foundations turn to "elite" think tanks such as Brookings, the Carnegie Endowment, and the Hoover Institution, not so that they can take advantage of their political connections (although this could help periodically), but rather so that they can benefit from the access these and other think tanks have to the media, to universities, and to other power centers in America. But even more importantly, corporations and philanthropic foundations can take advantage of the reputation think tanks have cultivated as scientific, neutral, and scholarly organizations to more effectively shape public opinion and public policy. Donating large sums of money to political campaigns may buy corporations access, but it does not necessarily buy them credibility. On the other hand, supporting think tanks that provide the media and policymakers with a steady stream of information, expertise, and policy recommendations may allow donors to secure both. This may in part explain why corporations and philanthropic foundations also lend support to several other types of research organizations and university departments that can draw on their credibility to influence both the policymaking environment and specific policy decisions. By closely examining the interaction between the largest American think tanks and key officials in government, scholars may be justified in concluding, as some have, that think tanks play a critical role in influencing public policy. However, since very few institutes resemble Brookings, Heritage, or RAND for that matter, we must question the utility of employing an

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[9] See, for instance, Peschek, *Policy Planning Organizations*; Thomas R. Dye, *Who's Running America? The Conservative Years.* New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1986; William G. Domhoff and Thomas R. Dye, *Power Elites and Organizations*. London: Sage, 1987.

[10] John S. Saloma, *Ominous Politics. The New Conservative Labyrinth.* New York: Hill and Wang, 1984.

approach which assumes that think tanks, by their very nature and purpose, are well positioned and equipped to promote the interests of the ruling elite. We must also question whether think tanks, as nonprofit organizations engaged in policy analysis, should be treated as elites.

Think tanks are in the business of shaping public opinion and public policy, but as noted, have very different ideas of how various domestic and foreign policies should be formulated and implemented. Several think tanks, for instance, may embrace the views of some elites who advocate free market solutions to economic problems. The Heritage Foundation, the Cato Institute, and the American Enterprise Institute, among others, would certainly favour such an approach. But there are many other think tanks, including the left-leaning Washington-based Institute for Policy Studies that have profoundly different views of how governments should resolve economic and social problems. Should think tanks that often oppose the interests of the ruling elite, be considered part of the elite?

Despite some limitations which will be explored in more detail below, adopting an elite approach to the study of think tanks has some advantages. As Domhoff and others have discovered, examining the close and interlocking ties between members of think tanks and leaders in business and government can provide interesting and useful insights into why some policy institutes may enjoy far more visibility and notoriety than others. Moreover, by keeping track of who sits on the boards of directors of think tanks, we may be able to explain why some institutes generate more funding than their competitors. Nonetheless, it is important to keep in mind that while members of think tanks frequently interact with high-level business leaders and policymakers, their corporate and political connections do not necessarily allow them to exercise policy influence. Such ties may facilitate access to important officials in the Executive, Congress, and the bureaucracy, but their ability to influence public policy depends on a wide range of factors.

It is tempting for scholars to treat think tanks as policy elites because it enables them to make sweeping assertions about who controls public policy. But as appealing as this might be, it is also problematic since it tells us little about the ability or inability of think tanks to exercise influence at different stages of the policy cycle. It tells us even less about how to assess or evaluate the impact of think tanks in policymaking. In short, an elite approach assumes that with the right connections, think tanks can and will be able to influence public policy. Unfortunately, it offers little insight into how this will be achieved.

The Pluralist Tradition: One Voice (One Think Tank) among Many

Members of think tanks may occasionally travel in elite policy circles, but according to some political scientists, including David Newsom (1996), they represent but one set of organizations in the policymaking community. According to this perspective, which is deeply rooted in the American pluralist tradition,[11] think tanks, like interest groups, trade unions, and environmental organizations, compete among themselves in the political arena for limited resources. The gains achieved by one group or organization are frequently offset by costs incurred by others.[12] Since the government is perceived simply as a moderator or referee overseeing the competition between these groups, pluralists devote little attention to assessing government priorities. They view public policy not as a reflection of a specific government mandate, but rather as an outcome of group competition.

Studying think tanks within a pluralist framework has its advantages. For one thing, it compels scholars to acknowledge that despite the widely held view that think tanks have become important actors in the policy-making community, they remain one of many organizations engaged in the ongoing struggle for power and influence. This approach also serves as a reminder that think tanks, like other non-governmental organizations, rely on similar strategies to shape public policy. However, as noted, the pluralist approach has serious weaknesses. To begin with, although pluralists assume that public policy is an outcome of group competition, they provide little insight into why some organizations may be better positioned than others to influence public attitudes and policy decisions. Is it simply a matter of which groups have the most members, largest budgets, and staff resources that determines who does and does not have influence? Or, do other factors such as the amount of money groups donate to political campaigns, or the number of advertisements they can afford in the print and electronic media offer better insight into which organizations are destined to succeed or fail in the political arena?

The major deficiency of the pluralist approach is not that it assumes that all groups can influence public policy, but rather that it cannot adequately explain why some do. This is why, as we noted in the section on lobbies, it is incumbent upon scholars employing this approach to ask the right questions. By treating think tanks as simply one of many voices in the policymaking community, pluralists may inadvertently overlook why policy institutes are often better positioned to shape government priorities than interest groups, lobbies, and other non-governmental organizations. Think tanks may indeed be part of the chorus, but they possess unique attributes that enable them to stand out. By identifying the differences between think tanks and other NGO's (that is, the privileged status of some think tanks), pluralists would have to acknowledge that all groups do not compete on a level playing field. Think tanks, by virtue of their expertise and close ties to policymakers, may compete among themselves for prestige and status, but they do not necessarily compete with the hundreds of other participants in the policymaking community. In fact, in some policy areas, think tanks may face little competition at all.

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[11] The American pluralist tradition is deeply rooted in the belief that society is composed of individual groups that compete for power and status in the policymaking community. Two studies in particular have had a major impact in shaping this perspective: David B. Truman, *The Governmental Process: Political Interests and Public Opinion*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1951; and Arthur F. Bentley, *The Process of Government*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1908.

[12] See Leslie A. Pal and R. Kent Weaver (eds), *The Government Taketh Away: The Politics of Pain in the United States and Canada*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2003.

Pluralists must also acknowledge that policymakers often have a vested interest in influencing the outcome of group competition. Instead of behaving as referees, policymakers representing various government branches and departments can and do rely heavily on organizations that will help them to achieve their goals. In fact, at critical stages of the policymaking process, members of Congress and the Executive often turn to specific think tanks for advice on how to tackle difficult policy issues. At other times, they rely on other think tanks to help frame the parameters of important policy debates.

Marxists and pluralists disagree about the extent to which think tanks are entrenched in the policymaking process and the willingness of the state to embrace their ideas. However, both acknowledge that think tanks have the ability to play an important, and at times, decisive role in public policy, a position that has been questioned by proponents of state theory. While scholars employing the first two approaches isolate various societal and bureaucratic pressures to reveal how public policy is shaped and moulded, those advancing the so-called statist paradigm look no further than the state to explain who makes policy decisions.

In the National Interest: A Statist Approach to the Study of Think Tanks

As multinational corporations, media conglomerates and powerful special interest groups have established a strong foothold in the nation's capital, it is not surprising that we have lost sight of who ultimately is entrusted with protecting the national interest. It is not Bill Gates, Ted Turner, or leaders of other blue chip companies that speak on behalf of the United States and take steps to promote its economic, political, and security interests. It is the president and the people who surround him who make decisions that are intended to serve the needs of the nation. To remind us of this, a handful of scholars, including Theda Skocpol[13] and Stephen Krasner (1978) have emphasized the relative autonomy of the state in making difficult policy decisions. State theory, according to Aaron Steelman, advances the argument "that while the public can indeed impose some restraint on the actions of the bureaucracy and elected officials, the state retains a degree of autonomy and works according to its own logic" (Steelman 2003: 165).

In *Defending the National Interest*, Krasner elaborates on the theory of statism. He notes: "[Statism] is premised upon an intellectual vision that sees the state autonomously formulating goals that it then attempts to implement against resistance from international and domestic actors. The ability of the state to overcome

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[13] See Peter B. Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer and Theda Skocpol (eds), *Bringing the State Back In*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985.

domestic resistance depends upon the instruments of control that it can exercise over groups within its own society" (Krasner 1978: 11). For Krasner, it is the central state actors—the president and the secretary of state, and the most important institutions—the White House, and the State Department that control foreign policy.

If Krasner, Skocpol and other proponents of state theory are right, what impact could think tanks possibly have in influencing state behavior? Although one might assume that think tanks would be relegated to the sidelines, Steelman suggests that state theory leaves ample room for think tanks to make their presence felt: "State theory can help explain the seeming anomalous cases of former think-tank staffers who enter government pledging to work for a certain set of ideas and then enacting policies that are quite different. In some cases, these individuals have been co-opted by the system; in others, they are generally doing their best to reach their goal, however slowly or circuitously. But either way, the state itself is an important actor" (Steelman 2003: 165).

There are several advantages to incorporating state theory into studies of think tanks. First, it helps to explain how think tank staffers can become directly involved in making key policy decisions. If we accept Krasner's argument that the president and the secretary of state, and the two institutions they represent—the White House and the State Department—are the most important participants in the foreign policymaking process, it becomes very clear which think tanks have or do not have access to the highest levels of government. Rather than trying to monitor the efforts of think tanks to influence Congress and the media, scholars could simply explore the relationship between the president, the secretary of state and their closest advisers. If it appears that members from think tanks have served in an advisory capacity, or been recruited to serve in the White House or in the State Department, we could assume that they have had direct access to the policymaking process. After all, if the president and secretary of state are the most influential participants in policymaking and often rely on think tank experts for advice, it would be logical to conclude that think tanks are in a position to influence policy decisions. Conversely, if there is little evidence to suggest that think tanks have gained access to the upper echelons of government, scholars could, according to state theory, conclude that they have had little impact in influencing state conduct. In short, state theory can both explain when think tanks have or have not been influential.

However, state theory is not without its limitations. It may be useful in explaining why some presidents such as Richard Nixon were able to insulate themselves from Congress and the American people.[14] But by same token, it is less helpful in explaining why many recent presidents have gone to great lengths to consult with the public, members of Congress, foreign governments, international organizations, and a host of non-governmental organizations before making important policy decisions. President Bush's efforts in 1990–91 to secure an international coalition to deter Iraqi aggression are a case in point. Before deploying US armed forces to the Persian Gulf, President Bush made sure he had the support of the United Nations and several of its member states, a strategy that his son considered, but later abandoned prior to invading Iraq.[15] As the foreign policymaking process has become more transparent over time and as more governmental and non-governmental organizations have sought to become involved in shaping world affairs, proponents of state theory have had a more difficult time defending the relative autonomy of the state. They certainly have had difficulty explaining why the US Congress appears to have taken a more active interest in foreign policy.[16] In the final analysis, both advocates and critics of state theory acknowledge that the president makes decisions that can profoundly influence America's conduct in the international community. Yet, as we have witnessed in recent years, how presidents make policy decisions ultimately depends on their management style and willingness to listen to their inner circle of advisers. State theory might help to account for the management of US foreign policy under President George W. Bush, but might do little to shed light on how President Obama has governed the nation.[17]

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[14] For more on the relationship between President Nixon and the US Congress, see Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Imperial Presidency*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1989.

Thus far, we have looked at three different theoretical approaches and how they can be employed to study think tanks. Before considering how it might be possible to integrate them more effectively, it is important to consider a fourth approach that has attracted considerable attention. Focusing more on think tanks as a diverse set of organizations that have very different priorities and concerns, rather than as a member of the policy elite, the state, or the broader policymaking community, this approach appears more promising. As we will discover below, a better understanding of how think tanks function at various stages of the policymaking process can allow scholars to make more informed insights about their role and impact.

An Institutionalist Approach to the Study of Think Tanks

There are three distinct institutional approaches to studying think tanks.

1. The most common approach focuses either on the history of specific think tanks or on their evolution and transformation in particular countries. Several scholars have written institutional histories of think tanks, including the Brookings Institution, the Council on Foreign Relations, the Heritage Foundation, the Institute for Policy Studies, and RAND.[18] There are also a number of studies

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[15] See Jean Edward Smith, *George Bush's War.* New York: Henry Holt, 1992.

[16] On the relationship between Congress and the Executive in US foreign policy, see Barbara Hinckley, *Less Than Meets the Eye: Foreign Policy-Making and the Myth of the Assertive Congress.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994.

[17] On the different management styles of presidents, see Colin Campbell, *Managing the Presidency: Carter, Reagan and the Search for Executive Harmony.* Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1986.

[18] For example, see Donald T. Critchlow, *The Brookings Institution, 1916–1952: Expertise and the Public Interest in a Democratic Society.* Dekalb, Illinois: Northern

that have detailed the rise of think tanks in the United States, Canada, and in other advanced and developing countries.[19] The obvious advantage of providing detailed histories of think tanks is that it offers a wealth of information on the nature and mandate of organizations, the research projects they have conducted over time, and the various institutional changes they have undergone. The main disadvantage, however, is that many of these studies offer little empirical evidence to support or deny claims that particular think tanks have played a major role in shaping specific policies.

2. The second and more systematic institutional approach has concentrated on the involvement of think tanks in epistemic and policy communities.[20] These communities consist of individuals and organizations who, by virtue of their policy expertise, are invited to participate in policy discussions and deliberations with government decision-makers. The formation of policy and epistemic communities is often seen as a critical stage in policy formulation and regime formation. This approach has been undertaken by a handful of political scientists, including Hugh Heclo, Evert Lindquist, and Diane Stone, who regard think tanks as active and vocal participants in these communities.[21]

By examining think tanks within a policy and/or epistemic community framework, scholars can make several important observations. To begin with, by focusing on specific policy issues such as the surge in Iraq or the pursuit of national missile defense, scholars can better identify the key organizations and individuals who have been invited to share their thoughts and ideas with policymakers. In addition to determining which groups and individuals have participated in the "sub-government," a term used to describe the various non-governmental and governmental policy experts that coalesce around particular policy issues, this approach offers much needed insight into the nature of the policymaking process. Among other

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Illinois University Press, 1985; Robert D. Schulzinger, *The Wise Men of Foreign Affairs: The History of the Council on Foreign Relations.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1984; James A. Smith, *Strategic Calling: The Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1962–1992.* Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1993; Lee Edwards, *The Power of Ideas: The Heritage Foundation at 25 Years.* Ottawa, Illinois: Jameson Books, 1987; and Alex Abella, *Soldiers of Reason: The Rand Corporation and the Rise of the American Empire.* Orlando: Harcourt, Inc., 2008.

[19] See Stone and Denham (eds), *Think Tank Traditions* and McGann and Weaver (eds), *Think Tanks & Civil Societies.*

[20] For a more detailed discussion of epistemic and policy communities, see Peter M. Haas (ed.), *Knowledge, Power, and International Policy Coordination.* Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1997; and William D. Coleman and Grace Skogstad (eds), *Public Policy and Policy Communities in Canada: A Structural Approach.* Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman, 1990.

[21] See Hugh Heclo, "Issue Networks and the Executive Establishment,"; Evert A. Lindquist, "Think Tanks or Policy Clubs? Assessing the Roles of Canadian Policy Institutes," *Canadian Public Administration* 36 (4), 1993: 547–79; and Diane Stone, *Capturing the Political Imagination: Think Tanks and the Policy Process.* London: Frank Cass, 1996.

things, a policy or epistemic community framework compels scholars to delve far deeper into the process by which ideas make their way onto the political agenda and how policy experts draw on their knowledge to support or oppose government initiatives. Moreover, rather than treating policy decisions as an outcome of interest group competition or as a reflection of elite interests, this approach requires scholars to think seriously about how policy decisions can be influenced through discussions between non-governmental and governmental policy experts.

There are other advantages to adopting this approach. Once the actors involved in the sub-government have been identified, it is possible to compare the recommendations made by participants to actual policy decisions. Access to minutes of meetings, personal correspondence, testimony before legislative committees, published recommendations, and other information may not enable scholars to arrive at definitive conclusions about which participants in a policy community were most influential. Nonetheless, these and other materials can offer additional insight into whose views generated the most support.

Given the involvement of think tank scholars in different policy communities, it is not surprising that this framework is frequently employed. It is important to keep in mind, however, that while this approach may be better suited to the study of think tanks than either an elite or pluralist framework, it too has its shortcomings. Examining think tanks within a policy or epistemic community is useful in identifying which institutes are called upon to offer their expertise at an important stage in policy formulation. Unfortunately, it does not tell us what, if any impact, think tanks inside policy or epistemic communities, or those operating outside the sub-government, have in shaping public attitudes and the policy preferences and choices of policymakers. In short, this approach may tell us who is sitting at the table when key issues are being discussed, but it cannot tell us whose voices have struck a responsive chord with those in a position to influence policy decisions. Since we cannot assume that all, or any important policy decisions, are made inside specific policy communities—after all, politicians, not policy experts, cast votes in the legislature—a third group of scholars have begun to consider a more inclusive approach that can be used to study the involvement of non-governmental organizations in policymaking.

3. Recognizing that non-governmental organizations vary enormously in terms of their mandate, resources, and priorities, John Kingdon and Dennis Stairs,[22] among others, suggest that rather than trying to make general observations about how much or little impact societal groups have on shaping the policymaking environment and policymaking, scholars should examine how groups committed to influencing public policy focus their efforts at different stages of the policy cycle. Although Kingdon and Stairs do not write specifically about think tanks, they do examine how groups try to get issues onto the political agenda and how they attempt to convey their ideas to policymakers throughout the policymaking process. This approach is well suited to the study of think tanks.

For Kingdon and Stairs, trying to determine which domestic and external forces shape public policy constitutes an enormous, and at times overwhelming, undertaking. In fact, as the policymaking community in the United States becomes increasingly crowded, it has become difficult, if not impossible, to identify those groups that have had a direct impact on specific policy decisions. As a result, instead of making generalizations about which groups have or have not influenced public policy, Kingdon and Stairs argue that not all organizations have the desire or the necessary resources to participate at each stage of the policy cycle: issue articulation, policy formulation, and policy implementation. Put simply, while most organizations attempt to shape the parameters of policy debates (issue articulation), others may be more inclined to enter the policymaking process at a later stage (policy formulation or policy implementation). Conversely, some organizations may be more interested in sharing their ideas with the public than in working closely with policymakers to formulate or implement a specific policy.

By acknowledging that think tanks do have different priorities and mandates, it is possible to construct a conceptual framework that allows scholars to make more insightful observations about the role and impact of think tanks in policymaking. At the very least, a framework that recognizes the diversity of think tanks and their distinct missions will discourage scholars from making sweeping and often unfounded observations about their impact.

Conclusion

After examining the four different approaches that have been employed to study think tanks and their involvement in policymaking, one central question remains: which approach or conceptual framework best explains their role and function? Unfortunately, there is no simple answer. As we have discovered, each approach encourages scholars to move in a different direction and to ask very different questions. Therefore, the question that should be asked is not which theory best explains the role and function of think tanks, but which framework helps scholars to better understand a particular aspect or feature of think tanks. For instance, scholars concerned about the relationship between think tanks and corporations could benefit far more from drawing on the assumptions underlying elite theory, than from tapping into pluralist theories of democracy. On the other hand, those interested in explaining why some think tanks seem more preoccupied with working on various policy initiatives than with grabbing the headlines would learn a great deal from Kingdon and other scholars of public policy.

In examining the efforts of lobbies and think tanks to influence key foreign policy debates, an integrated approach is required. This approach would draw on the observations made by each of the models and theories outlined in this chapter, but

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[22] See John W. Kingdon, *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies*. New York: Harper Collins, 1984 and Dennis Stairs, "Public Opinion and External Affairs; Reflections on the Domestication of Canadian Foreign Policy," *International Journal* 33 (1), Winter 1977–78: 128–49.

would not adhere rigorously to any one framework. Foreign policy and the process by which decisions are made is complex and can rarely be explained by one theory. The advantage of relying on multiple theories to explain the involvement of lobbies and think tanks in foreign policy is that it offers scholars some breathing space to test different hypotheses about when and under what conditions these organizations can have the greatest impact. The alternative is to select a theoretical framework that offers one particular perspective on the nature of their relationship to policymakers.

In the final analysis, students must select a theory or theories that will help them to understand the information they have uncovered. They should not rush to find a theory and then hope to uncover empirical and statistical evidence to make it more credible. Such an approach may be of little comfort to those looking for a grand theory to explain what think tanks do and how they achieve influence. However, as many experts of American foreign policy and international relations have learned, as tempting as it is to construct one theory or model that will explain the complexity of world affairs, such an undertaking often becomes an exercise in futility.

Chapter 2

The Political Expert: A Soldier of Fortune

Tomasz Żyro

> Justify not thyself before God, for he knoweth the heart and desire not to appear wise before the king.
>
> Book of Sirach 7: 5

Editors' Introduction

Tomasz Żyro situates the rise and role of the expert in the period since the Age of Reason. But his analysis reaches back to ancient Greece and Plato's ideal of a politics guided by wisdom and virtue. These are qualities associated with the *vita contemplative*, which is both indifferent to the passions and ideas of the crowd and does not depend on mastery of a specialized body of knowledge. Such mastery is associated with the expert in an age where science is the touchstone for truth and the legitimizer of intellectual authority.

"In a democratic society," Żyro writes, echoing Tocqueville, "knowledge replaces wisdom. Contemporary democracy needs knowledge while wisdom is of secondary importance." The expert is a necessary and emblematic figure in modern democracies, but the philosopher is relegated to the status of a rather quaint anachronism. That is unless he can wear the clothes of the expert, presenting himself as an ethicist, an expert on social justice or some other knowledge technician whose specialized knowledge rather than the "mere" contemplation of how men and women should live and how society should be organized in order to achieve virtue, harmony, goodness and the other elusive shadows chased by philosophers.

But the expert, although an indispensable figure in modern democracies, is no closer to governing the affairs of men than were philosophers in ancient Greece. The expert expresses the ideal that these affairs will be guided by reason and knowledge: in short, by rationality. But the Enlightenment cannot succeed without an enlightened citizenry. Thomas Jefferson knew this and was optimistic. Żyro, reflecting the predominant mood of our times, is less confident that this condition can be met. "The diminishing importance of the enlightened public and a lowering of the status of knowledge in everyday democratic politics," he observes, "present objective obstacles to the fulfillment of the expert's desire to see policies made on the basis of knowledge and reason."

Żyro's normative approach to understanding the role of the expert in the political and policy process is quite different from concerns with empirical theory that occupied Abelson in the preceding chapter. One detects in his analysis of