



Research and advice in foreign and security policy

**AN ANALYSIS OF THE GERMAN
THINK TANK LANDSCAPE**

submitted by Christoph Bertram and Christiane Hoffmann
in cooperation with: Phineo gAG
(Julia Nast and Annalena Rehkämper)

COMMISSION BY

**Robert Bosch**
Stiftung

**STIFTUNG
MERCATOR**

Research and advice in foreign and security policy

AN ANALYSIS OF THE GERMAN THINK TANK LANDSCAPE

submitted by Christoph Bertram and Christiane Hoffmann
in cooperation with: Phineo gAG
(Julia Nast and Annalena Rehkämper)

COMMISSION BY



CONTENTS

Preface – 7

Introduction: the era of the think tank – 9

I. Mapping the German think tank landscape – 11

Methodological approach – 11

The think tank landscape: a dynamic field – 12

Academic research institutes – 15

Policy institutes – 15

Activists/do tanks – 16

Part-time-think tanks – 17

Funding in flux – 18

Independence and transparency – 19

Demand and impact – 19

Demand from policymakers and government – 19

Demand in the foreign policy community – 20

Demand in the media – 22

The perspective of funding organizations – 23

II. How others do it: think tanks in Washington, London and Brussels – 25

Washington – 25

London – 26

Brussels – 26

**Differences and advantages:
what do others do better than German think tanks? – 27**

III. Weaknesses and deficits – 29

Specific shortcomings of many think tanks – 29

Shortcomings on the part of the target group – 31

Deficits on the part of funders – 31

IV. Recommendations – 33

Think tanks: become more effective – 33

Users in politics and government: communicate more – 34

Funding organizations: suggest and supervise strategic research – 34

Structural elements of a new policy institute – 35

Conclusion and outlook – 36

Dear reader,

In a globalized world the most pressing challenges can no longer be resolved at the national level. This is one reason why our foundations promote international communication and cooperation. Mutual understanding and trust are the basic prerequisites for successful and solution-oriented collaboration above and beyond national borders. Such collaboration has become more difficult in today's complex and multipolar world – as not least the corona pandemic has illustrated. Since the international rule-based order finds itself in crisis, Germany is increasingly losing its framework for foreign policy action. We see it as an important task for our foundations to help provide advice to German foreign policymakers by generating knowledge and ideas.

Think tanks are essential partners in our international work. They prepare data and facts, work together with decision-makers in politics and society to draw up practical action recommendations, and bring these into political and public debates in a targeted manner. Free from the constraints of day-to-day politics, they can adopt comprehensive and long-term perspectives and contribute to the strategic further development of German foreign and security policy by providing impetus. As a funding institution with clearly-defined interests in terms of content, Stiftung Mercator has established think tanks itself and funds numerous think tanks in Berlin. The Robert Bosch Stiftung has been working together with international think tanks in various contexts and constellations for decades.

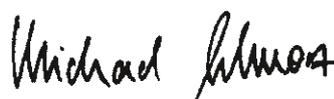
The German think tank landscape has become larger and more diverse in recent years. New think tanks have been founded and international think tanks have opened branch offices in Germany. The changing landscape has the potential to become an effective platform for applied research and political advice. For this to happen, a reflective discussion about the role, work, impact, funding and structure of think tanks is necessary.

In cooperation with Julia Nast and Annalena Rehkämper from Phineo, Christoph Bertram and Christiane Hoffmann have provided a basis for such a discussion in the form of this study, and for this we thank them most warmly. The study is the first comprehensive overview of foreign and security policy think tanks in Germany. It highlights those deficits and weaknesses that still exist, and offers action recommendations designed to increase impact; these are directed at the think tanks themselves and their funders, as well as at those in politics and government who use their services. Now it is up to us to discuss the findings and action recommendations of the study with the relevant persons and institutions.

We hope the study makes for stimulating reading!



Sandra Breka
Member of the Board of Management
Robert Bosch Stiftung



Michael Schwarz
Executive Director
Stiftung Mercator

INTRODUCTION: THE ERA OF THE THINK TANK

At the Munich Security Conference in February 2014, the then President of Germany Joachim Gauck defined a new objective for German foreign and security policy that was intended to reflect Germany's growing importance in the EU and in the world since the end of the Cold War. This new objective was linked to a call for a new strategic culture in the reunited Germany.

This is still very much needed today, more than six years after Gauck's speech. Furthermore, the changes to which Germany's new foreign policy is having to act also came a lot more quickly and were much further-reaching than had been anticipated at the time. There is now a question mark over European unification and the transatlantic alliance, and indeed over democracy and the rule of law in some countries of the West; the rise of Asia, the crisis of multilateralism and global challenges ranging from corona and migration to climate change are forcing Germany and Europe to rethink their international role.

After decades of limited sovereignty during the Cold War, German foreign policy, unpractised in defining and pursuing its own interests, suffers to this day from a strategic deficit. More than ever, it therefore needs intellectual support if it is to analyse and understand the transformation process and its future effects. The advice and creativity of independent thinkers and institutions are needed more than ever because, unlike official politicians with their practical constraints and limitations, they are able to identify and explore the consequences of shifts in the international strategic landscape. The first think tanks were established during the turbulent era following the First World War. The demand for independent placing in context and perspective is no less great today. This is the era of the think tank.

Germany's increased foreign policy importance is reflected in the think tank landscape: the number of research institutions in Germany that study foreign and security policy has grown impressively, especially in Berlin. At the same time, the landscape - like the subject of its research - has become more complex and confusing. To this date, however, no comprehensive overview has been compiled of applied foreign and security policy research in Germany. The two largest private foundations in Germany, Stiftung Mercator and Robert Bosch Stiftung, therefore commissioned a "map of the German think tank landscape" in September 2019; its aim is to analyse non-commercial organizations in Germany that focus on foreign and security policy issues. The analysis is presented in this study.

Our key questions were as follows: Who does what, with which resources and with which objectives? What works well and what does not, and why? To this end, a map of the think tank landscape was drawn up and different types of institutes identified. 50 individual interviews with think tanks, politicians and a number of funders enabled us to paint a comprehensive picture of supply and demand, and of methods, goals, needs and criticism. Part I contains this detailed presentation and categorization of the various think tanks, while Part II provides a comparative analysis of the think tank landscapes in Brussels, London and Washington.

This report is intended not only to give an overview of the situation as it currently is, but also to highlight areas of need with a view to defining how it should be. Part III thus describes weaknesses and deficits in the think tanks themselves, as well as in the target groups and funders of their work. Finally, Part IV recommends concrete action that think tanks, politicians and funders can take to increase the effectiveness of the institutions.

The working conditions for think tanks have changed radically in recent decades. The technological revolution in knowledge transfer poses a threat to the relevance of those institutions that fail to embrace the high-paced nature and possibilities of the new media. Social media are accelerating and heightening the debate on foreign policy issues, too. Furthermore, the rise of populism in some parts of Western societies has resulted in disdain for experts; this is also a matter of concern for think tanks.

At the same time, think tanks are facing increased expectations. There is growing competition between think tanks; this could be exacerbated if public-and private-sector funding becomes tighter as a result of the corona crisis.

However, other organizations also compete with conventional think tanks. Some political foundations for example are creating new strategic planning departments. Conferences on questions of foreign and security policy are also being staged by foundations and international network organizations, such as the Munich Security Conference. The Bundesnachrichtendienst, Germany's foreign intelligence service, also increasingly sees itself as having a political advisory role, while some ministries fund in-house research departments.

The culture of foreign policy in Germany remains influenced to this day by the country's experience of National Socialism and the German war of aggression, as well as by the historically exceptional situation of the Cold War. German foreign policy will and should remain anchored within this tradition; at the same time, it often follows a moralizing approach. Giving rise to blinkered views and thought control, this influences some foreign policy think tanks that in any case tend to shy away from controversies and fail to follow a strategic-political approach.

What is therefore needed is nothing less than a cultural shift in the way German foreign and security policy is defined and implemented. Our hope is that this shift will be triggered and fostered by think tanks, and that our recommendations in this study will contribute to the process.

I. Mapping the German think tank landscape

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

What is a think tank, and what is foreign and security policy – and what is not? It is not easy to give a categorical answer: opinions about what essentially constitutes a think tank are changing, as is the question of which fields of political activity are encompassed by foreign and security policy. For the purposes of this study, think tanks will thus be regarded explicitly as “moving targets”, based on a broad working definition:

Think tanks in the area of foreign and security policy are non-commercial research institutions that aim to influence public debate and political decision-making via their products. Think tanks set their own research and policy agenda, are permanent organizations and are formally independent. Consideration will not be given to consulting firms, temporary panels of experts, internal government think tanks that are bound by instructions, or institutes that primarily conduct contract research.

In describing the think tank landscape in the area of foreign and security policy, the study is interested in learning the following: What characterizes the German think tank landscape and which trends can be identified over time? How does the Berlin scene differ from that in Washington, London and Brussels? Which deficits are revealed, and what is needed to further develop the landscape in an effective manner?

Three methods of obtaining these insights were selected: first, mapping of the think tank landscape was carried out. Online research was conducted to identify those organizations which describe themselves or are regarded by others as think tanks in the area of foreign and security policy. This list was checked against the working definition. The websites, annual reports and mission statements of the remaining 24 organizations were analysed, and their products, thematic priorities and forms of funding were noted.

Second, indicators were drawn up relating to the question of impact, needs and deficits, and 50 qualitative, semi-structured interviews were conducted. For the purposes of the study, impact is not considered to be directly measurable; instead, it is assessed by investigating the demand for a think tank’s analyses, advice and publications. This is based on the simple assumption that a think tank’s services cannot have impact if they are not used. On the other hand, demand indicators do not allow any conclusions to be drawn about whether the services have actually helped to change opinions, attitudes or even decisions. A distinction is made between three dimensions of think tank impact: first, direct impact on parliament and government; second, impact on opinion-forming within the closer foreign political community, that is to say interested specialists from think tanks, media, civil society, business, politics and government; third, impact on broader public discussion, which in turn can influence political decisions.

To reflect these three dimensions, interviews were conducted not only with think tanks (18 interviews), but also with executive (9 interviews) and legislative bodies (7 interviews), with the media (3 interviews) and with funders (the aforementioned interviews with executive bodies plus 5 interviews with foundations). In addition, three discussions took place with other persons familiar with the think tank scene. The interviews conducted between December 2019 and May 2020 deliberately selected different hierarchical levels and age groups and reflected the diversity of the think tank landscape. The interviews were supplemented by two group discussions with younger think tank members. The interviews took place on a confidential basis. During the analysis process the data was encoded according to topic, with categories and clusters being identified on this basis.

Third, an international comparison was carried out. This involved obtaining expert reports of the situation in Washington, London and Brussels; these reports analysed the size and quality of the think tanks operating there in the area of foreign and security policy and their impact on political decision-making processes and public opinion.

The findings will be presented below for each of three groups of actors: the think tanks themselves, which seek to influence foreign and security policy matters in the political arena and in the public sphere via their products and recommendations; the service users in ministries, parliament and the media; and the funding organizations that finance the work of the think tanks.

THE THINK TANK LANDSCAPE: A DYNAMIC FIELD

In all, 24 institutions can be identified that correspond to a broad understanding of think tank work and foreign and security policy (see Figure 1).

FIGURE 1: List of think tanks in the area of German foreign and security policy

Name	Think Tank type ¹	Thematic fields and regions in the area of foreign and security policy	Based in	Established ²	Size ³ / staff
Arnold Bergstraesser Institute (ABI) for cultural scientific research at the University of Freiburg	Academic research institute	- Transformation of state structures and social conflicts in developing regions	Freiburg	1960	< 50
Peace Research Institute Frankfurt (PRIF)	Academic research institute	- Peace and security - Global and local interrelationships	Frankfurt am Main	1970	< 250
Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg	Academic research institute	- European peace and security policy - Arms control and new technologies - Climate and its impact on security and peace	Hamburg	1971	< 250
Institute for Security Policy at Kiel University	Academic research institute	- Maritime strategy and security - International crisis management - Strategic development in Asia-Pacific	Kiel	1983	< 50
Bonn International Center for Conversion (BICC)	Academic research institute	- Violent conflicts - Violence and society	Bonn	1994	< 250
German Institute for Global and Area Studies (GIGA)	Academic research institute	- Peace and security in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East - Growth and development - Power and ideas - Political responsibility and participation	Hamburg	2006	< 250
Centre for East European and International Studies (ZOIS)	Academic research institute	- Eastern Europe, South Caucasus, Central Asia - Society and social policy - Border regions and conflict dynamics - Migration and diversity	Berlin	2016	< 50
German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP)	Policy institute	- Geopolitics - International order - Migration - Security - Technology	Berlin	1945	< 250
Institute for European Politics (IEP)	Policy institute	- European foreign and security policy - EU and Turkey	Berlin	1959	< 50

Name	Think Tank type ¹	Thematic fields and regions in the area of foreign and security policy	Based in	Established ²	Size ³ / staff
German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP)	Policy institute	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - German foreign and security policy - EU - Arms and arms control - Turkey - USA, Latin America - Asia - Middle East, Africa - Eastern Europe 	Berlin	1962	<250
Bertelsmann Stiftung	Policy institute	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - European foreign, security and economic policy 	Gütersloh	1977	>250
CAP - Center for Applied Policy Research at the University of Munich	Policy institute	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Global transformation processes - Europe 	Munich	1995	< 50
Global Public Policy Institute (GPPi)	Policy institute	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Peace and security - Global order - Humanitarian aid - Human rights and democracy - Migration - Technology 	Berlin	2003	< 50
Stiftung Neue Verantwortung	Policy institute	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - International cybersecurity policy - Artificial intelligence - Autonomy in weapons systems 	Berlin	2008	< 50
Mercator Institute for China Studies (MERICS)	Policy institute	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - China in the world - Germany's China policy 	Berlin	2013	< 50
Jacques Delors Centre	Policy institute	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Foreign and security policy - Digital Europe - Institutions and democracy - Migration - Economic policy 	Berlin	2014	< 50
The German Marshall Fund of the United States (GMF)	Transnational policy institute	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Transatlantic relations 	Berlin	1972	< 250
European Stability Initiative (ESI)	Transnational policy institute	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - European asylum policy - Refugees and migration 	Berlin	1999	< 50
European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR)	Transnational policy institute	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - European foreign and security policy - Digital policy - European sovereignty - Middle East/North Africa - Asia 	Berlin	2007	<250
Centre for European Reform (CER)	Transnational policy institute	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Brexit - EU reform - European foreign and security policy 	Berlin	2018	< 50
Das Progressive Zentrum	Activist/do tank	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Europe and the world - International relations - Transatlantic relations 	Berlin	2007	< 50
European Democracy Lab	Activist/do tank	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Alternative concepts for Europe's political order - Europe of regions - Culture 	Berlin	2014	< 10
Polis180	Activist/do tank	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - European foreign and defence policy - Global questions - USA, Latin America, Eastern Europe 	Berlin	2015	< 50
Center for Liberal Modernity	Activist/do tank	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Security in times of change - Europe's East - Future of liberal democracy 	Berlin	2017	< 50

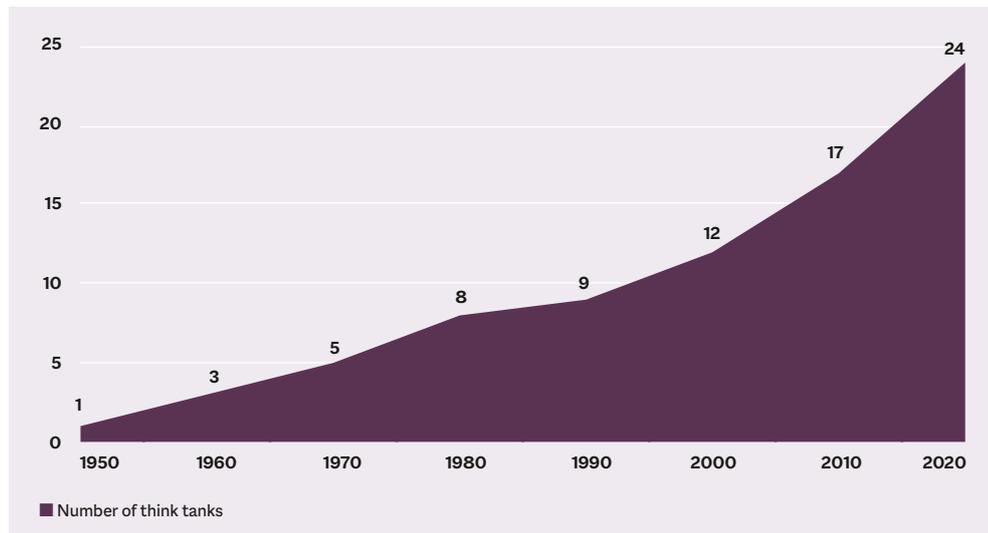
1 See page 15 for explanation

2 For the transnational policy institutes, this is the year in which an office was established in Berlin; for all the others, this is the year in which they were first established under their current name, even if the legal form of the institutes has changed over time.

3 The size refers to the number of staff as stated on the websites of the think tanks and should therefore be regarded merely as a guideline, for example because the proportion of part- versus full-time employees is not taken into account. For the transnational policy institutes, the staff at all locations were included in the calculation. The indication of size is based on the EU recommendations for categorizing small and medium-sized enterprises.

The scene has grown constantly, especially since the start of the Millennium. During this time the number of institutes has doubled again (see Figure 2). As one interview partner put it, “The entire sector in Berlin has exploded”.

FIGURE 2: Changes in the absolute number of think tanks over time (N=24)



The think tank landscape is not only growing, however; it is also becoming more nuanced. In many respects the products and services offered by the institutes are similar. Five clusters can be identified: research and analysis, advisory services, networking and debate, capacity building, and outreach. Not all think tanks provide services in all of these areas.

Research and analysis: comprehensive analysis forms the basis of the work done by think tanks; this can result in longer studies, but its main purpose is to pave the way for further services.

Advisory services: advice is provided in the form of written products such as policy briefs, visualizations or charts; furthermore, nearly all think tanks offer confidential settings for individual persons or groups, for example in bi- or trilateral dialogues, study groups and in track 1.5 or 2 formats. Think tanks also provide advice in panels and committees.

Networking and debate: most think tanks stage events at which the foreign policy community can exchange ideas and experiences. Expert debate is also shaped by opinion pieces such as op-eds or social media; though these are publicly accessible, they are read primarily by experts with an interest in the subject.

Capacity building: occasionally, think tanks work in the area of capacity building, offering summer schools or continuing education courses, designing courses for future leaders, or taking part in the training of diplomats.

Outreach: last but not least, almost all think tanks offer at least minimal services aimed at the wider public. These may encompass a media presence, helping for example to explain and provide context for events on television or the radio. A small number additionally offer political education services, for instance at schools, or link their events and activities to art and culture with a view to reaching out to a wider public.

Despite their similar portfolios, however, the think tanks differ in the ways in which they view themselves and in which they act. These are described below in three think tank types, though there are of course overlaps in practice, and organizations may change their self-image. We have consciously decided not to make the frequent distinction between academic and advocacy organizations. Rather than describing think tanks in terms of their “neutrality” or “partiality”, patterns in the way they view themselves will be revealed.

Academic research institutes

Academic research institutes are characterized by their focus on their own scholarly activities and their links to academic discourse. Their key target group is always the academic community. This is clear from the topics they select, and from their contributions to scholarly journals. Though target groups also include policymakers, government, the public sphere and civil society, these do not determine the orientation of their work. This type of think tank most closely resembles what others have described as “universities without students”.

For such institutes, impact is synonymous with knowledge transfer. Accordingly, they are often reluctant to describe themselves as a think tank: as the director of one such institution insisted, “We are a social science research institute with think tank functions”. It is not their objective per se to draw up new solutions for policymakers, but rather to make expert knowledge available for the debate, and on this basis to issue recommendations. Academic research institutes can certainly supply products that will prove useful when addressing issues of foreign and security policy – yet this is not the core element of how they perceive themselves. They are more distanced from the political process; this is also reflected in the topics they research, which are selected according to their own priorities with respect to academic debates. In many cases, the research framework is geared to the longer term, with the result that these institutes often react more slowly to topical issues.

Academic research institutes recruit their staff on the basis of academic criteria and qualifications. Most of their employees have a doctoral degree; some also have a dual role and teach at a university at the same time.

Policy institutes

By contrast, policy institutes essentially see themselves as political and governmental advisors. In addition, the foreign political community and the (social) media play an important role as information disseminators. Policy institutes have no ideological orientation, but they do have clear standpoints. The way they generate impact takes different forms.

“Conventional” policy institutes tend to take a more analytical and informative approach; this is reflected in the kind of advice they give and in their products, and in some cases results in their using rather academic language. Though these institutes are in close contact with policymakers and government, they nonetheless regard themselves as maintaining a certain distance: as one of their representatives put it, “To contribute to rational discourse within the government, you do not start with the latter’s own inhibitions but with experts and their idea”. Accordingly, recommendations relate to what is necessary and desirable for the matter in hand, and are not limited from the outset by political imperatives.

Other policy institutes, especially those established more recently, place greater political and strategic emphasis on their advice and attempt to develop solutions to specific problems. These institutes believe that it is vital to be close to their target groups and to take political mechanisms into account if they are to properly understand the starting situation and be able to contribute ideas quickly and directly.

Transnational policy institutes have been increasingly basing themselves in Berlin, not least as a consequence of Brexit. Their activities are similar to those of more recently-established policy institutes. They maintain offices in several countries, have excellent networks as a result, and are better able than German think tanks to bring actors and informa-

tion together through pan-European collaboration that is based on multiple perspectives. Depending on the institute's particular orientation, this can result in advice that is more political and strategic in nature or in advocatory commitment to specific political solutions.

All policy institutes base their work on political developments: "We seek out the problems that we believe to be most pressing". Some products, as well as providing brief and rapidly-available analyses, use charts and visual graphics. Advice often proves particularly effective when specific tasks are initially conceived of in the ministries. Methods such as prognoses, foresight and forecasting are therefore becoming increasingly interesting, as are big data and the analysis of public opinion polls. In this respect the transnational and more recently-established policy institutes are often more innovative than some "conventional" policy institutes.

The employees of policy institutes are no longer simply academics; they also understand the relevancies and logics of the target group, can communicate accordingly and are in many cases more politically motivated.

Activists/do tanks

Activists/do tanks see themselves as helping to shape debate in the foreign political community and the broader public sphere; they wish to contribute perspectives that are lacking and to define new topics. All of them want to strengthen democratic engagement and regard civil society dialogue as a prerequisite for European integration. Frequently these are smaller organizations established in the more recent past that make collaboration with external partners a central principle of their work. In many cases their name reflects their mission, and they are influenced to a considerable extent by individuals whom they describe as "public intellectuals". Their approaches and often unconventional formats also offer food for thought for other think tanks.

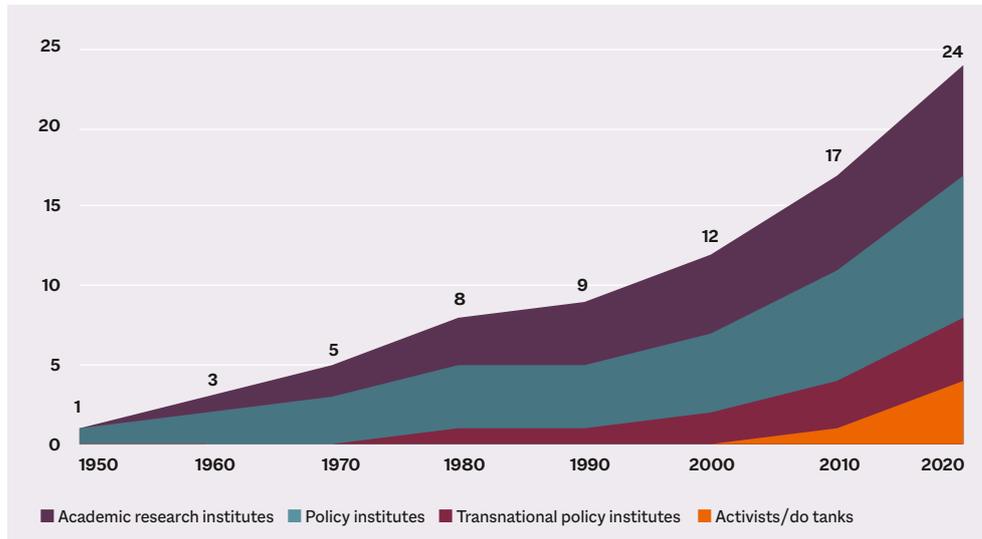
Many activists/do tanks are interested only indirectly in making concrete contributions to German foreign and security policy. Their focus is on topics and perspectives that they believe do not receive sufficient attention. Do tanks do not necessarily distinguish between domestic and foreign policy. Some intentionally reach out to a wider public with their research and events. They want to bring citizens who are not primarily interested in foreign policy back into the political arena and to "shape [...] the future agenda in dialogue".

Their working methods are characterized by participation and collaboration with external fellows, experts and other organizations. Though this reflects on the one hand their limited financial scope, it is intended above all to generate innovative impact through cooperation with academics, policymakers, NGOs, civil society and the media. "We create spaces for free thinking in which people can meet informally and talk to intelligent peers. Strategy debates, opinion-forming and brainstorming about new ideas can then take place in a safe space", explains one think tank representative. Unconventional formats may sometimes be selected, or art and culture used.

Staff working for do tanks want to "build bridges", communicate with different actors and develop ideas. It is often the case that highly visible individuals with strong opinions play a role here.

The time line reveals that the think tank landscape - since the early 2000s at the latest - has featured not only academic research institutes and policy institutes but also transnational policy institutes and activists/do tanks (Figure 3).

FIGURE 3: Changes in the absolute number of think tank types over time (N=24)



Part-time think tanks

Besides the “full-time” think tanks, a number of other institutions in Germany contribute to expertise in the area of foreign and security policy. These include organizations like the Munich Security Conference and Körber-Stiftung that stage primarily international meetings on foreign and security policy issues and provide participants with accompanying material on the subject, as well as German political foundations with their international offices.

Conference organizers have considerably more “convening power” than “full-time” think tanks, and the resources needed to bring together senior government representatives, politicians, and academic and media experts. Their events have become almost mandatory for the foreign policy community in Germany and beyond. The majority of these organizations do not see themselves as making their own research statements but rather as “forums for debating foreign policy”, as the director of one such institute put it.

German party political foundations are independent organizations that base their work on the political agenda of their respective parties. Their activities range from political education and student funding to active support of German development policy. Around 90% of their funding comes from Germany’s federal budget, primarily from the development budget. These foundations maintain a large number of staff and their own branch offices in European and non-European countries; furthermore, they publish expert reports on foreign policy issues, among other things. The political foundations describe their party-political stance as being the key factor that distinguishes them from the full-time and politically independent think tanks. They aim primarily to serve actors within their own political party and affiliated organizations, even though their publications are also read by other interested experts. Some of the political foundations are in the process of expanding their planning and strategic capacities in the area of foreign and security policy.

FUNDING IN FLUX

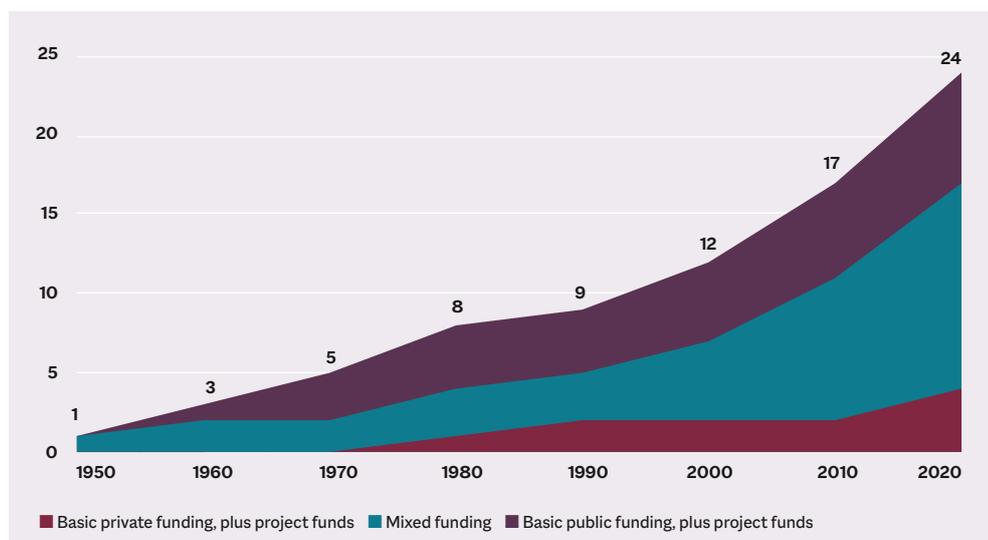
Think tanks active in the area of foreign and security policy are based on different funding models. Three clusters can be defined:

Some think tanks receive institutional funding from Germany’s federal or state governments, covering at least 50% of their total costs. In addition, third-party funding is acquired in the form of public-sector funding or endowments. In some cases, they have associations of friends that contribute additional funding in the form of membership fees or donations. Academic research institutes in particular receive institutional funding at federal or state level; for example the Leibniz institutes and institutes affiliated to universities. However, there are also policy institutes that are well-provided-for by institutional funding. This applies especially to the German Institute for International and Security Affairs, which is fully funded from Germany’s federal budget.

However, the majority of think tanks depend on a combination of funding, either with or without minimal institutional support. This funding mix comprises project funds from public-sector donors, private foundations or international organizations such as the UN or EU. They also receive small amounts in the form of donations from companies or individuals and from membership fees. The mixed funding model is used mainly by policy institutes and activists/do tanks. A higher proportion of corporate donations can be identified for some of the transnational think tanks. Other policy institutes are also increasingly discussing whether and in which form business could fund think tank work to a greater extent. The funding of activists/do tanks is often particularly precarious; in some cases they also resort to their own resources.

In addition, there are organizations that are primarily funded by private foundations. Though it was long the case that German think tanks only rarely tended to receive basic private funding, private foundations are becoming increasingly important, also for think tanks in the area of foreign and security policy.

FIGURE 4: Funding models for think tanks over time (N=24)



Independence and transparency

Any institution wishing to provide political advice must determine how and by whom its work will be funded and whether this will influence the content of the advice given. Though this aspect has always been relevant, it appears to have gained in importance of late. This is due to the increased international interest in Germany. Furthermore, the rise of right-wing populist parties in European parliaments is leading to greater scepticism about the independence of public-sector funding, which in Germany was long considered a guarantee of independence. However, funding that depends on business or foundations can also lead to think tanks embracing the presumed preferences of the funder, with the result that certain topics disappear from the focus of their work. Against this backdrop, think tanks discuss which funding models will best ensure the independence of their content. Most nowadays publish the sources of their income, while others are considering the introduction of quotas so that individual companies or sectors do not account for the lion's share of their overall budget. In addition, think tanks think about which criteria should prompt them to reject funding on principle (fund screening).

DEMAND AND IMPACT

Our mapping indicates that the think tank landscape is growing and becoming increasingly diverse. However, rival actors are entering the scene at the same time, and rapid analyses in social media are gaining in importance. Will think tanks lose their impact against this backdrop?

It is not possible to ascertain directly whether think tanks influence the political debate, let alone political decisions, and if so in what way. Politics is always determined by a wide range of influential factors. Only approximate assessments of impact are possible, in other words. Demand is one useful variable that allows indirect conclusions to be drawn about impact. Three dimensions are analysed in this context:

- Is there demand from policymakers and government for the advice offered by think tanks?
- Does the foreign policy community pay attention to their analyses and recommendations?
- Do think tanks have a media presence, and do they influence public debate?

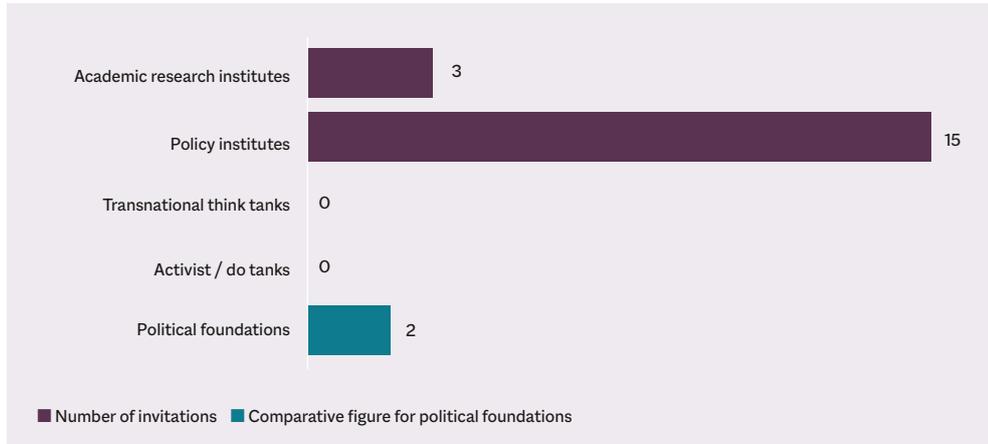
Demand from policymakers and government

It is above all the established institutions that are known in parliament and ministries. More recently-founded and transnational policy institutes were also mentioned frequently in our interviews, however – and often specifically praised. Activists/do tanks do not appear to play a significant role for policymakers and government. By contrast, think tanks from the USA and the UK are valued in many cases.

Members of parliament describe how think tanks help them form their opinions: “Did I completely change my position? I don’t believe so – but during the course of a conversation my stance certainly did evolve!” Parliamentarians take advantage of think tanks to familiarize themselves with new topics or to check facts. They also appreciate the kind of strategic assessments and concrete recommendations offered by some policy institutes.

Think tanks are involved in the formal consultation process when they are invited to join committees. Being represented on a committee can indicate the relevance of the think tank and provide it with an opportunity to exert influence. We evaluated the frequency with which the think tanks in our mapping were invited to join relevant (sub-) committees in 2019. Policy institutes were in particular demand in the Committee on Foreign Affairs, the Committee on Human Rights and Humanitarian Aid, and the Defence Committee (Figure 5). The established institutions with a broad thematic profile dominated here, alongside a number of more recently-founded policy institutes. Interestingly, the transnational think tanks are not invited to committees despite parliamentarians frequently naming them as important discussion partners.

FIGURE 5: Absolute number of times think tanks joined relevant committees in 2019



Generally speaking, however, only a relatively small number of think tanks are ever invited to join committees. This is the case with only 44% of policy institutes and 43% of academic research institutes (see Figure 6).

FIGURE 6: Relative presence in committees by think tank type in 2019



Think tanks are also described in ministries as having only indirect and long-term impact, if at all: “Rather than influencing specific individual cases, the expert knowledge flows constantly into foreign and security policy decision-making processes that evolve over long periods of time.” In this context direct conversations are the main way in which the knowledge is conveyed: “Influence is exerted in relationships and direct contact; that is more important than particular products”, is how one decision-maker expressed it.

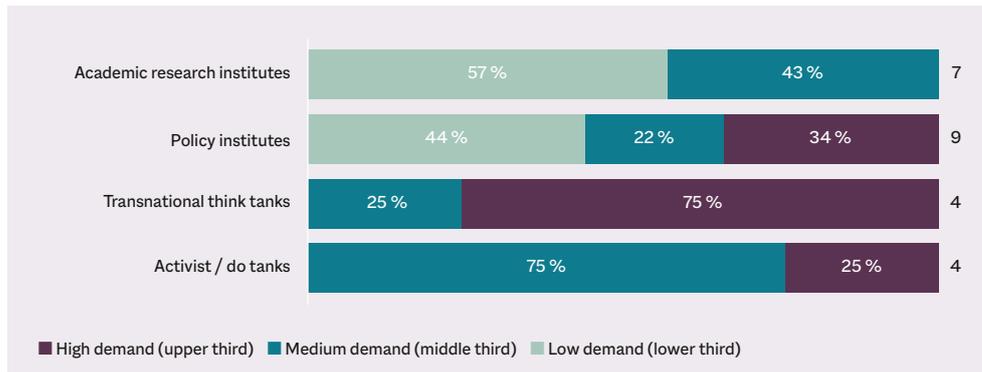
Demand in the foreign policy community

What additional role is played by think tanks within the expert foreign policy community? Social media are one important forum. As one think tank representative explains: “We do not use social media to form political will from the bottom up - we use them to reach our filter bubble”. The frequency with which think tank statements and posts are viewed in social media therefore allows initial conclusions to be drawn about their impact.

To this end, a “social media index” comprising the following demand indicators was drawn up: the number of followers on Twitter, the number of views of YouTube channels, and the number of subscribers on Facebook. For each indicator the think tanks were

ranked, with an average value calculated on the basis of their respective rankings (see Figure 7). Those institutes in the upper third are very successful (by comparison with the others) in generating demand in the social media, while there is comparatively little demand for the think tanks in the lower third.

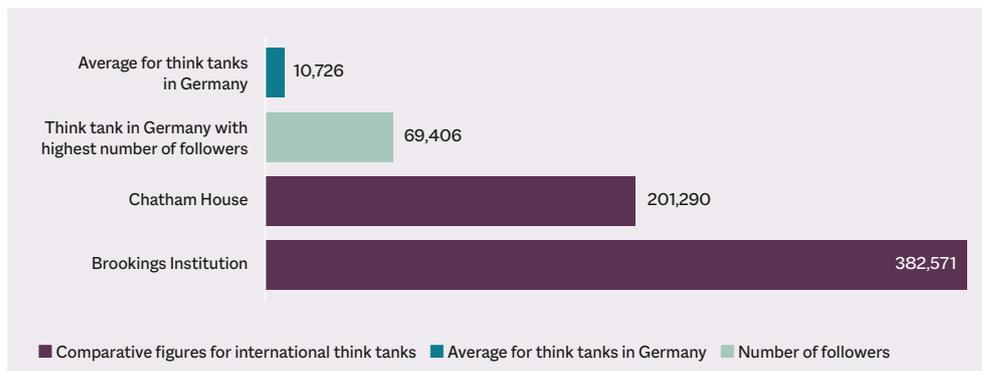
FIGURE 7: “Social media index” of demand, by think tank type
(as per December 2019, N=24)



It is particularly the transnational think tanks that are successful in this respect: a large proportion of the institutes from this group is to be found in the upper third of the “social media index”, followed by the policy institutes, no fewer than 33% of which likewise rank in this third. Most of the activists/do tanks are positioned in the midfield. By contrast, the academic research institutes do not score particularly well, with most of them ranked in the lower third.

However, as compared with institutions such as Chatham House in London or Brookings Institution in Washington, think tanks operating in Germany score significantly less well across the board in terms of social media demand (see Figure 8). This cannot be attributed solely to the fact that institutions such as Chatham House and Brookings communicate in English, and therefore potentially reach a wider public. It also suggests that think tanks in Germany should make greater efforts to communicate more actively and concisely. The relative success of the transnational think tanks can likewise serve as a guideline for how to use social media successfully.

FIGURE 8: International comparison of Twitter followers
(as per December 2019, N=24)



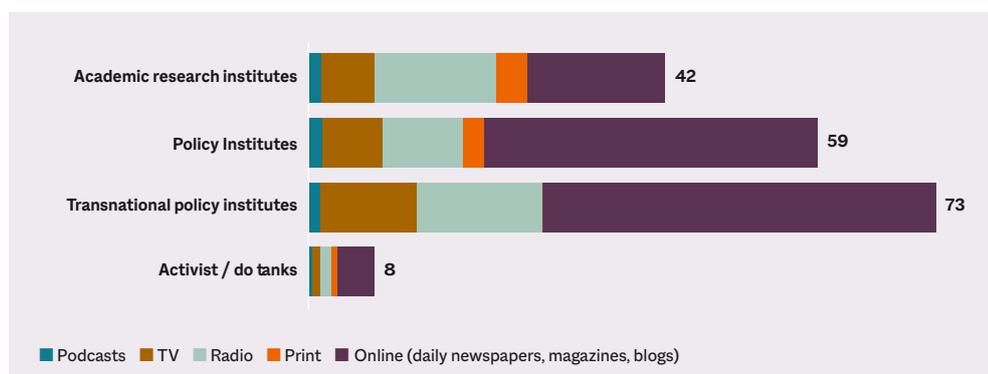
Demand in the media

What role do think tanks play in terms of public debate? The journalists we surveyed gave a rather muted assessment of their impact in this respect: “There is a lot of room for improvement; no German think tank has remotely the same impact as Brookings”, explained one respondent. But do think tanks manage at all to position themselves in the media? And which think tank types succeed in doing this? To obtain an approximate answer to these questions, the media presence of the institutes in 2019 was analysed. As our resources were limited, we relied on the information that the think tanks in our mapping provided themselves on their websites. Think tanks that do not describe their media presence on their websites are not included in the following analysis. This applies to five of the 24 think tanks we studied: two of the seven academic research institutes (PRIK, BICC) and three of the nine policy institutes (SWP, GPPi, Bertelsmann Stiftung). Although this limitation reduces the validity of our results, findings relating to the media presence of all think tank types are available and will be compared in the following.

We found a high level of diversity in terms of demand: some institutes feature in the media on a weekly basis, while others appear only once or twice per year. Overall, think tanks appear on radio and television, publish in daily newspapers, magazines and blogs, and are take part in debates as discussion or interview partners, by making guest contributions or by being quoted.

The think tanks we analysed appeared on average 46 times each in German-language media in 2019. Leading the field was the German Council on Foreign Relations with 222 media appearances, followed by the European Stability Initiative with 148; the European Democracy Lab appeared the fewest times. Looking at the think tank types, it is first and foremost the transnational institutes (73 appearances), followed by the policy institutes (59 appearances), that manage comparatively well to position themselves in the media. If consideration had been given to those policy institutes not included in the analysis (for the reasons given above), it can be assumed that this would have further increased the frequency of media appearances for this think tank type. However, those academic think tanks that were considered in the analysis also have a voice in the media (42 appearances). By contrast, activists/do tanks manage an average of only eight appearances each across the board (see Figure 9).

FIGURE 9: Average frequency of media appearances by think tank type in 2019
(information provided by think tanks themselves on their websites, N=19)



It is often individuals who make an important difference when it comes to a media presence: “[What is needed are] interesting people who are well-known and suitable for chat shows”, explains one journalist. The relevant data indicate that virtually every think tank employs one or two people who have public impact. Some organizations rely entirely on their well-known “public intellectuals”, while others are represented by various people.

In summary, it can be noted that there is demand for the expertise offered by think tanks even if their impact is viewed critically in many cases. In this respect considerable differences between the think tank types are evident. When it comes to directly advising policy-makers and government, it is the policy institutes, and in particular the transnational institutes, whose working methods reach the target group and can thus be deemed to provide effective advice. Think tanks also play a role for the foreign policy community – judging by the demand in social media, transnational think tanks and policy institutes appear to be especially successful in this area, too. An international comparison highlights unequivocal scope for further improvement, however – a trend that continues in the media analysis, where transnational think tanks and policy institutes are also well-positioned. In contrast to social media, academic think tanks are also represented on the radio, television and in daily newspapers. It can be presumed that an important role is played by an organization’s networks, the media capabilities of its staff and its resources for media relations. Analysing the demand and then comparing the results for the different think tank types thus reveals some initial potential for development and possible areas to tackle. Part III takes a detailed look at the shortcomings behind this potential.

THE PERSPECTIVE OF FUNDING ORGANIZATIONS

How do funding organizations monitor and influence the developments we have described in the think tank landscape? Think tanks in Germany are funded mainly by the public sector and by foundations. A number of the country’s federal ministries support think tanks by funding research in individual projects; others, such as the Federal Foreign Office, provide regular funding. The federal and state-level governments make institutional funding available to academic think tanks. Foundations also fund merely individual projects in some cases; only few fund entire think tanks or support the think tank landscape as a whole. A marginal role is also played by foreign governments, non-profit organizations, the EU and the UN, and in exceptional cases by businesses, especially industrial firms.

As far as funding objectives are concerned, it is often a question of the public sector meeting its own demand: “We see ourselves as catalysts for new branches that we want think tanks to consider to a greater extent – if something is missing, we provide funding”, explains a ministry official. Foundations also view the availability of knowledge as crucial when it comes to making decisions and conducting critical analyses: “With think tanks, the path from the production of knowledge to its practical use in politics, government or other groups is shorter than with academic, university-based research.” In addition, debate is the focus for funding organizations. Foundations do not base their funding primarily on the demand of the political system but on their own funding priorities. It is important for funding organizations that think tanks are noticed by the professional public and by the media. The broader public is also becoming increasingly important in this context, at least for some funding organizations.

Sponsors prefer to fund projects, as this gives them greater scope for control. Their response to the criticism of this model that is often expressed by think tanks differs considerably: some stress that even project funding gives think tanks the scope to react flexibly to topical issues, claiming that the key point is how think tanks are organized internally and plan their project resources. Other funding providers take more of an institutional approach, on the other hand. This is primarily an option for foundations when a new think

tank is to be established, an existing one wishes to restructure its operations, or there are high levels of trust in an institute's quality and those involved in it. There are also new approaches that combine aspects of institutional and project funding, such as long-term projects with a flexible budget. Joint funding of more extensive projects by several sponsors is also becoming increasingly popular. In addition, initial attempts are being made to bring different think tanks together by funding a network, passing on resources or sending fellows from one institution to another.

II. How others do it: think tanks in Washington, London and Brussels

The Berlin think tank landscape is relatively young. Think tanks enrich the foreign policy debate, yet they do not have the same standing as some of their counterparts in Washington, London or Brussels. Nonetheless, Berlin think tanks are often compared with those abroad, so what characterizes these different locations? And how do Berlin, Brussels, London and Washington differ? As our comparison reveals, the biggest differences relate to the political proximity of the various think tanks and to their funding.

WASHINGTON

Think tanks have considerable political importance in the USA. This is boosted significantly by the fact that in Washington, unlike in Berlin, questions of foreign and security policy are the subject of lively and contentious debate. One long-term observer of America describes “how think tanks there vie for the attention of politicians. If someone has said something important, they will have churned out a two-page text within seven hours that will have immediately landed on the desks of the decision-makers.” The big think tanks often have hundreds of employees and attempt to offer the broadest possible expertise. Many have party-political or ideological leanings and derive their financial support from those of similar persuasions.

The staff of the leading institutes are closely linked to the business of politics, not least thanks to the revolving door practice. With every new government, numerous former think tank employees normally move into government, while departing government members switch to the think tanks. Consequently, arguments and policy recommendations can be fast-tracked into the political decision-making process. That said, the advantages of the revolving door system are also controversial. Their desire to land the top political jobs can influence the independence of think tank staff because they will gear their activities to whatever seems opportune and feasible in politics. Under President Trump, the shift in personnel between think tanks and politics has been greatly reduced, if not entirely suspended, and the same is true of the advisory role of the former.

Institutional state funding is largely unknown, with the exception of those research institutes created by Congress by law, such as the Wilson Center and the US Institute for Peace. Some of the major institutes are foundations themselves. Generally, funding comes in the form of donations from businesses, foundations and private individuals plus membership fees, though grants from foreign governments also play a role. To avoid any appearance of political influence being brought to bear, the larger organizations nowadays make successful efforts to increase the transparency of their financial structures.

Think tanks have been under pressure for years due to a decline in funding and rising demands for media visibility, however. In addition, there is growing competition not only from advocacy organizations that present “their” facts, but also from commercial consulting companies and law firms that operate in the background, making appropriate analyses available directly to decision-makers. Furthermore, the media landscape is changing, especially in the USA; now it is not only a question of being available 24/7 to issue statements about key events, but also of having one’s own social media presence – first and foremost in the form of instant comments on Twitter.

LONDON

London's think tanks also cultivate close contact with government and parliament, though British government practice in terms of foreign and security policy is far more separated from expert public debate than is the case in Germany. Think tanks have influence primarily in the sense that they help the informed public to form opinions, and secondarily in the advice they provide for political processes.

The British think tank landscape is dominated by well-established institutes such as Chatham House, the Royal United Services Institution, the International Institute for Strategic Studies and the more recent Centre for European Reform. All claim to provide comprehensive expertise on most foreign and security policy topics. In addition, reputable advisory institutions have been set up at some universities such as the LSE and King's College, though their international reach is fairly limited.

Think tanks influence public opinion through their publications and their staging of public information events, exchange and discussion sessions, and workshops. Furthermore, London think tanks demonstrate that they are taking advantage of the opportunities offered by technology: they are digitizing their archives and making expertise available in the form of videos and podcasts. Online access and user-friendly formats make it possible to reach a broad public and thereby to expand the expert community.

Their advisory role is executed in two ways. Firstly, they provide government officials with a "neutral space" in the form of confidential study groups in which the former can meet with representatives of parliament, business or civil society. Secondly, in their capacity as experts and advisors, London think tanks work with parliamentary committees of the House of Commons or the European Parliament. The exchange of personnel between ministries and think tanks generally takes place in only one direction: from think tanks into politics. Occasionally think tank employees are appointed to ministerial advisory boards, and some embark on a political career themselves.

The established policy institutes do not see themselves as targeting the UK public alone. Their membership tends to be international, and some maintain offices abroad. They organize annual conferences and international meetings, many of which are public. Some have set up international education and training centres for "young leaders". This wide range of activities, in conjunction with their readily accessible communication in the international lingua franca and impressive use of social media, explains their considerable international reach.

The leading think tanks are state-funded to only a minor extent. Almost all derive their basic funding from membership fees paid by private individuals and firms, and from revenue from publications, while the remainder of their activities benefit from project funding and donations from companies, international organizations and foreign governments. The latest economic developments and Brexit are forcing think tanks to brace themselves for difficult financial circumstances, however. A general trend is already evident today: away from academic research and towards politically-useful advice, also beyond the UK's own borders.

BRUSSELS

Brussels differs significantly from Washington and London. The think tank marketplace is comparatively new and primarily targeted at the institutions of the EU. With deepening European integration, Brussels think tanks have established themselves as relevant actors for politicians, though in line with EU competencies they focus only on the limited area of foreign and security policy.

Four types of think tank can be found in Brussels: EU policy institutes with their headquarters in Brussels, branches of primarily American think tanks such as Carnegie or the

International Crisis Group, internal EU advisory organizations such as the European Commission's IDEA, and a number of think tanks from EU member states that have offices in Brussels. The well-known EU-related policy institutes are funded for the most part by EU programmes, and additionally by private institutions and foundations. Like their counterparts in London, they receive significant revenue from membership fees. The Belgian state funds the national Egmont Institute. The Brussels offices of national institutes and the International Crisis Group receive government funding from other countries.

They all use various publications and events to exert influence on the European debate. EU officials, diplomats and media representatives are invited, alongside paying members, to non-public information and discussion meetings. All major think tanks host a signature event in the form of a large-scale annual conference.

The positive attitude of EU institutions towards think tanks is clearly evident in two ways: the European Commission's transparency register keeps a record of think tanks operating in Brussels, of which there are 880 at present. These are given simplified access to the European Commission and Parliament. In addition, the "Think Tank Review" of the General Secretariat of the European Council and the Council of the EU lists the monthly contributions made by think tanks (including those outside Brussels) to various topics. Especially those think tanks that are often mentioned in this study are invited to attend confidential discussion formats.

DIFFERENCES AND ADVANTAGES: WHAT DO OTHERS DO BETTER THAN GERMAN THINK TANKS?

More exchange with politicians and policymakers: Washington's revolving door tradition would not work in Europe. That said, former civil servants and soldiers are in demand as employees in all three cities, with academic qualifications not being a prerequisite for recruitment. It is also more common practice to include employees from the political scene in the study groups and confidential discussions hosted by think tanks so that they can contribute to the advisory process. The positive attitude of EU institutions towards think tanks in Brussels gives rise to close contact.

More internationally oriented: like the major Washington think tanks, many of their British counterparts have set up branches abroad. Their publications are aimed at both a national and international readership, their membership is often international, and occasionally they are also consulted by foreign governments. This allows them to shape international public opinion on foreign policy issues to a greater extent than German think tanks. Some organize international leadership programmes for young talents.

More outreach: think tanks in all three cities organize events for their members; those in Brussels and London additionally host annual conferences and public symposia that frequently meet with considerable media interest. The large British institutes publish their own magazines, as well as annual overviews of international trends in many cases.

Use of technology: Anglo-Saxon think tanks in particular differ from their German counterparts in terms of the quality and diversity of their use of social media and digital technologies. Their websites tend to be more informative and more contemporary. They digitize their archives, make expertise available in the form of videos and podcasts, and take advantage of big data.

Funding: while think tanks are typically funded by the public sector in Germany and by the European Commission in Brussels, this is very rarely the case with Anglo-Saxon think tanks. Most of their funding comes in the form of donations from foundations, private

sponsors and companies, in addition to occasional support provided by foreign governments. The not inconsiderable revenue derived from membership fees constitutes a source of independent funding for many of them.

III. Weaknesses and deficits

The landscape of think tanks active in the area of foreign and security policy in Germany has grown and become more nuanced in recent years. Nonetheless, the contribution they make to foreign and security policy knowledge and debate in Germany is not optimal in many cases.

The critical verdicts of the target group in politics and the media form one basis for this assessment. Although the target group does not doubt the scientific quality of the think tanks, the products of the latter often fail to meet the expectations of the former. The degree of their dissatisfaction ranges from general approval with only a few wishes for improvements to blanket criticism. There is by no means any consensus as regards the key question of whether think tanks can or should exert political influence, either. Answers ranged widely from comments such as “Their potential for influence is certainly considerable” to “One should get away from the idea that think tanks can act as political advisors; that is simply unrealistic”. “If all think tanks in Berlin were to shut down tomorrow, the political system would not suffer as a result”, was the self-critical verdict expressed by one think tank employee.

We do not share all of these assessments. However, we do believe that the key points of such criticism spotlight the most serious deficits in the work of think tanks today. That said, they apply to the individual think tanks to very varying degrees. As our analysis of demand has also shown, many of the points of criticism do not apply – or apply hardly at all – to some of the more recently-established and transnational policy institutes; it is above all the large, traditional think tanks that are viewed more critically, both by many people in the target group and indeed by us. Furthermore, we see scope for improvement not only for the think tanks themselves, but also for the political target group and in terms of promoting the work of think tanks.

SPECIFIC SHORTCOMINGS OF MANY THINK TANKS

A lack of practical relevance: many think tanks in Germany give insufficient consideration to the constraints and opportunities of the political process and do not gear their work enough to the needs of the target groups. In many cases, this means that their products lack practical usefulness for parliament and ministries. “Politics is a battle of interests, not a battle of ideas. The problem is not how to develop a good idea but to understand how it can be implemented”, was the harsh verdict of one political practitioner. “To put it bluntly, I would say that I have little interest in academic advice; what we need is practical political advice”, explains another decision-maker.

From the perspective of the demand side, many think tanks show too little understanding of the fact that there is a certain “window of opportunity” in politics and government during which issues can be addressed and implemented. As one government representative put it, “it is not about what the best policy is with respect to a specific question; it’s about what the political leadership happens to be interested in right now, what the hot topics are and where a solution is needed, what the public is focusing on, and when there is a chance to organize majority support for an issue”.

Nonetheless, practical usefulness cannot be the sole yardstick by which to judge research institutes that provide political advice. No matter how much they need to bear them in mind, it is not, as one interviewee put it, “the job of think tanks to try to help resolve the institutional constraints faced by politicians.” Their edge lies precisely in their freedom from such constraints. They must use this freedom, while at the same time giving sufficient consideration to the laws of politics to ensure that their findings actually reach their target groups.

Weaknesses in products: besides their analytical and informative content, which is certainly valued, products frequently lack strategic perspective, are insufficiently tailored to specific needs, and do not provide clear action recommendations. In many cases, the language of the products is “too academic” and long-winded: by contrast, the ideal is the clear and concise way in which Anglo-Saxon institutes express themselves. German think tanks use too few alternative formats such as the possibilities of graphic visualization, podcasts and videos.

Products are not tailored enough to the target group and their concrete needs. They rarely consider the considerable time constraints that politicians and consumers face, and their recommendations are often too long and too vague. “It’s pretty off-putting when we open a document and find it has 24 pages”, explains one respondent. Think tanks also neglect the right timing and the window of opportunity when political advice is needed, and do not ask the following questions often enough: When does an idea have any chance of being implemented? When is what advice needed? Their reactions are frequently sluggish so their analyses are “behind the wave” rather than thinking ahead, and they tend to avoid new questions.

Uniformity and insufficient controversy: while think tanks in general enjoy a high level of credibility, their ideas and products are in many cases too uniform. They are based too much on the consensus and lack the courage and willingness to express alternative opinions and spark controversy. This may also be due to the fact that the German foreign and security policy debate often has a moralizing undertone. Dissenting opinions are seen as being of lower moral value, which does not encourage lateral thinking.

This could be related to the way staff are recruited, the insular areas of academia, business, media and politics and government posing a constant obstacle. Some policy institutes, especially conventional ones, often attach too much and too one-sided value to academic merit when recruiting employees. They lack a recruitment policy that specifically seeks out people of different qualifications and temperaments, i.e. employees who are also able to think laterally and politically rather than simply researchers with a proven track record. “What is needed first and foremost is not money but people who can think politically in the think tanks”, was one piece of advice given by the target group. Bright candidates capable of strategic thinking in foreign policy end up all too often in business or (in English-speaking countries) abroad rather than in German think tanks. Too little importance is attached to the media, business and market capabilities of staff. Think tanks often lack talented communicators with a good instinct for topical issues, timing and political discussion partners. The scope for continuing education in political advice is underdeveloped as yet in Germany.

Thematic deficits: though foreign and security policy think tanks in Germany generally cover a wide spectrum of themes, a number of blind spots remain. Often these are areas that have become more relevant, or indeed have acquired relevance in the first place, as a result of the upheavals in the international arena that is of such importance for Germany. They frequently deviate from the prevailing consensus in Germany and are therefore handled with kid gloves by politicians and funding organizations. Like German foreign policy, German think tanks lack a culture of strategic thinking that reviews and defines German interests with a long-term view.

Specifically, topics that we judge to be insufficiently investigated by German foreign and security policy think tanks include above all controversial security policy issues and how they relate to a strategic consideration of German interests. Armament and arms control, nuclear doctrines and deterrents, military threats and in particular military developments in Europe, do not receive the attention they merit in this era of strategic shifts. The way Germany’s strategic interests are interrelated with those of key partners such as France and the USA, the development of Russia and China, the strategic effects of migration, environmental problems and - as we have recently learnt - health risks all belong in this catalogue of topics that should be given more attention.

Organizational and methodological weaknesses

Internet/social media: though all of the German think tanks we surveyed maintain an on-line presence, they have not – with just a few exceptions – fully embraced the digital age. Unlike many Anglo-Saxon think tanks, they do not feature sufficiently in social media for the most part, and their activities are often limited to advertising individual products.

Lack of international orientation: German think tanks frequently focus too much of their attention on the German perspective and debates. However, the European and international orientation of German foreign and security policy demands that increasing consideration is given to foreign expertise and perspectives. As a result, German users tend to resort to the services offered by Anglo-Saxon think tanks. Especially when they have their own branches in European capitals, foreign institutes are often more attractive to them than German think tanks, as the latter tend to lack international staff and liaison offices abroad.

Lack of coordination: some think tanks complained that there has so far been too little coordination and exchange between institutes, with respect to their working methods and to the specific content of their work.

Too little impact in society: think tanks have so far had virtually no success in exerting any impact on society in the sense of generally arousing interest in foreign and security policy issues and encouraging debate beyond the relatively small foreign policy community itself. That said, their current structure in terms of personnel and resources means that they are hardly in a position to play a role that even the media and politicians fail to master.

SHORTCOMINGS ON THE PART OF THE TARGET GROUP

Lack of communication: the fact that political advice is often tailored to an insufficient extent to the needs of the target group is the fault not only of think tanks themselves and their products, but also of the demand side. Politicians and government representatives do not adequately communicate their requirements and expectations to think tanks. Exchange with think tanks is often accorded too little priority in their tight schedules.

Lack of staff transfer: the insufficient understanding of the needs of the target group is one consequence of the low level of staff transfer between politics, government and think tanks. There is a marked gap between politics in practice and political advice, which leads to a lack of mutual understanding and does not permit the sharing of ideas. Although it is true that more and more think tank representatives do spend some time in ministries, this is hardly ever the case the other way around. This is partly because good people in politics and government do not believe that working in a think tank will benefit their careers.

While the American revolving door practice would not be feasible in Germany due to the entirely different traditional relationship between politics and think tanks, the relevance of think tanks could nonetheless be increased considerably if there were more staff transfer in both directions.

DEFICITS ON THE PART OF FUNDERS

Confused funding situation: the increase in different types of funding, with small projects carried out by various actors, is resulting not only in greater competition for resources but also in a more confusing situation. In many cases the lack of coordination means that funding is provided in parallel or that similar projects are funded.

“Projectitis”: although no small number of think tanks receive a basic level of funding - usually from public-sector organizations - most funding is for projects that are limited in terms of their content and duration. This is not always satisfactory for recipients or funders. Recipients complain that too much work time has to be spent on drumming up funding and that laborious approval procedures prevent them from responding swiftly to current demand. Furthermore, project funding in many cases does not allow expertise to be built up in the area of communication. In addition, no long-term personnel structure can be established. “This is not the way to develop intellectual firepower”, remarks one think tank director.

Lack of venture capital: funding allocators often lack the courage to take risks and invest in the unknown - in new ideas that may fail. Venture capital is necessary, as one think tank representative explains: “We need a form of strategic thinking that we are neither familiar with nor used to and that cannot be generated from the typical think tank funding approach.” Instead, funding calls are too frequently based on consensus opinion and follow well-known paths.

Too little supervision: funders are often too reluctant to supervise the work of think tanks more intensively and closely. As one funder puts it, they have so far been “very reticent vis-à-vis think tanks when it comes to questions of content”, adding that American and British think tanks tend to be more open to collaboration in this respect.

IV. Recommendations

The recommendations at the end of our study aim above all to boost the creative courage of think tanks at this time of considerable foreign policy upheavals, while at the same time making their work more effective for political practitioners. However, this also requires rethinking on the part of the two other players in the German think tank landscape: the target groups in politics and the funding organizations.

THINK TANKS: BECOME MORE EFFECTIVE

The key recommendation for foreign policy institutes is to conduct more strategic analysis and gain a greater awareness of how their findings can be channelled into the political process. This means:

Giving priority to the challenges of this turbulent period: analyse individual issues in German foreign and security policy to ascertain their relevance to German strategic interests. Work out how sub-aspects such as European stability, security policy, the environment, migration and health fit into an overall consideration.

To this end, the following concrete measures are conceivable:

- Focus particular attention on Germany's strategic partnerships with France and the USA, and on strategic "problem states" such as Russia or China.
- View the environment, health and migration as strategic challenges.
- Make a conscious effort to include "hard" security policy issues such as nuclear proliferation, military policy, armament and arms control.

Resisting uniformity: critically review your own research priorities and encourage alternative approaches.

To this end, the following concrete measures are conceivable:

- Do not shy away from criticizing official positions and take contrary opinions into account; assess the pros and cons.
- Present analyses that give clear action options and recommendations.
- When recruiting staff, focus not only on professional qualifications, but also on intellectual originality and inquisitiveness.
- Invite external "lateral thinkers" to work with you and criticize your work.

Orienting your work to the target group to a greater extent: thorough research remains the prerequisite if think tank analyses are to be highly-regarded and credible; if your advice is to have the desired impact, you need to appropriately convey your findings to the target group.

To this end, the following measures are conceivable:

- Invest in and make optimal use of your social media presence: this involves efforts to publicize your latest outstanding research results and arouse the curiosity of readers. German think tanks must give priority to this area and seek support for it from their funders.
- Establish cross-think-tank training and further education workshops: improve skills in the use of social media and in moderation and presentation techniques.

- Involve practitioners as advisers and employees: recruit fellows from government, politics, business and the media and take advantage of their specialist knowledge and familiarity with political processes.
- Organize an annual Think Tank Day at which the latest findings and projects can be presented to users and the general public in Berlin.
- Stage regular cross-think-tank roundtable events to discuss the respective priorities of providers and target groups.

Increasing international orientation: German foreign and security policy needs to give consideration to the interests of partners and fellow players outside Germany and Europe. German think tanks therefore need to give them better access to their findings.

To this end, the following measures are conceivable:

- Organize staff exchanges with international partner institutes.
- Recruit international fellows.
- Run joint projects with international partner institutes if such collaboration can lend particular weight to the result.
- Together with other German think tanks, establish offices abroad in strategic partner countries following the example of Anglo-Saxon institutes.
- Set up an international leadership programme to foster and interconnect young talents from think tanks, government and politics.

USERS IN POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT: COMMUNICATE MORE

The most important users of the services offered by policy institutes are members of the Bundestag (Germany's parliament) and specialist staff in the ministries. They should make it clearer what type of decision-making support they expect from think tanks so as to increase the usefulness of the latter for their work.

This includes:

- Communicating their own needs and criticism of think tank products.
- Suggesting possible focus topics: pointing out "blind spots" and upcoming international problems to think tanks and suggesting that these be considered.
- Fostering staff exchange: ministries should make greater efforts to send suitable fellows from their own ranks on think tank placements.

FUNDING ORGANIZATIONS: SUGGEST AND SUPERVISE STRATEGIC RESEARCH

Foundations and other funding organizations have considerable influence on the work of think tanks. They should consciously use this influence so that think tanks address the challenges facing German foreign and security policy during this period of shifts in the international order. This requires closer supervision of projects, new funding approaches and wider support of personnel and organizational development in the think tanks by funders.

This includes:

- Giving funding priority to those research institutes that are ready to address Germany's strategic challenges.
- Providing incentives to tackle unconventional topics: funding organizations should encourage think tanks also to embrace unconventional and controversial aspects of Ger-

man foreign and security policy. Increasingly, these include security policy and military issues.

- Make funding more flexible: rather than funding short-term projects, consider offering trusted think tanks a five-year funding programme with a flexible budget; when calculating project budgets, factor in the think tank’s realistic overheads.
- Supervise funded projects more closely: donor organizations should play a supervisory role in longer-term projects, given that they are familiar with the subject and the researchers, and make their advice available.
- Support personnel structure and development: funders should encourage think tanks to recruit their staff more widely from the areas of politics, business, academia and the media, and to specifically seek out lateral thinkers, creative individuals and candidates with media capabilities.
- Fund senior fellowships: funders should encourage think tanks to also recruit politicians and civil servants from the upper echelons of politics and government.
- Suggest and provide funding for cross-think-tank teams, for example to tackle particular challenges such as Germany’s international interests after corona.
- Set up a special “social media” programme for think tanks, jointly financed for example by the key funders.
- Rethink ways in which to achieve impact in the wider public sphere: if funders wish to arouse broader public interest in foreign and security policy issues, beyond simply positioning think tank representatives in the leading media, they will need to make appropriate funding available for this. However, we doubt that think tanks have the right structure to achieve this.

STRUCTURAL ELEMENTS OF A NEW POLICY INSTITUTE

Based on our conclusions, we recommend considering the following key points when designing a new research institute in Germany:

- Check carefully whether the desired expertise is already sufficiently available in existing institutions or could be expanded there.
- Set a clearly defined and realistic goal: what exactly is the new institute to do and how is it to achieve this?
- Provide five years of basic financial security with the prospect of follow-up funding.
- Recruit broadly: the institute’s managers and team should be recruited from academia, the civil service and the media.
- When selecting managers, attach less importance to their academic reputation and more to their intellectual leadership abilities, their public profile and their research management capabilities.
- Gear both team and products to their jobs and the institute’s needs: employ a mixture of specialists and good all-rounders.
- Make supervisory boards international in composition, appointing individuals who are well-connected in the political arena.
- Establish an active advisory board comprising practitioners, academics and journalists.
- Organize an international young leaders programme.

Conclusion and outlook

The final phase of this study was carried out during the corona pandemic, the consequences of which will continue to affect national and international politics for years to come. Many of the premises of and conclusions drawn by this study have been confirmed or reinforced by the pandemic: the upheavals in international politics, which are giving rise to the new environment in which foreign and security policy think tanks work, have accelerated even further; forward-looking think tank activities are more necessary than ever. The pandemic has also shown once again that foreign policy and questions of security go far beyond the narrow confines of conventional international relations nowadays and also affect other areas of politics and knowledge; big data processing is becoming increasingly important as the basis for political decision-making; the demand among politicians for expert knowledge has grown even further, and politics requires academia to an extent rarely seen in the past.

At the beginning of this study, we called for a cultural shift in the way German foreign and security policy is defined and implemented. Those think tanks that will have to adapt their work to the new realities of global politics and information technology are also facing a cultural shift. This means gearing their activities to the strategic interests of Germany and Europe, becoming more open to controversial standpoints, being more diverse and courageous in their recruitment of staff and more professional in their use of social media, but also better tailoring their work to the needs of the target group.

The study shows that some institutes have already embarked on this cultural shift, whereas others have yet to take the first step. However, it is also important for this shift to include the other actors that feature in this study. It can only succeed if funding organizations and the users of think tank services rethink and adapt their roles in this triangular relationship. What is needed above all is closer cooperation.

We are directing our plea for more dialogue and supervision towards everyone involved: think tanks themselves, and their target groups and funders. We would like to see more exchange and greater coordination between think tanks and the target group, as well as between the institutes and their funders. This kind of closer cooperation has the potential to improve the effectiveness of think tank work and its funding significantly, and thereby to ensure its future survival.

Study commissioned by the
Robert Bosch Stiftung and
Stiftung Mercator,
submitted by Christoph Bertram
and Christiane Hoffmann
in cooperation with: Phineo gAG
(Julia Nast, Annalena Rehkämper)

Published by:
Robert Bosch Stiftung GmbH
and Stiftung Mercator GmbH
www.bosch-stiftung.de
www.stiftung-mercator.de

Responsible:
Henry Alt-Haaker / Kerstin Schulz /
Marcel Hadeed,
Robert Bosch Stiftung
Katharina Semmler / Jennifer Hecht,
Stiftung Mercator

Design: Ines Meyer, Gütersloh

© 2020

The authors express their personal views in this
publication; these may not necessarily
correspond to those of the Robert Bosch Stiftung
and Stiftung Mercator.