

## CHAPTER FOUR

## Open for Business: Think Tanks and the Marketplace of Ideas

In “Federalist No. 10,” James Madison, the Virginia statesman and fourth president of the United States, observed, “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.”<sup>1</sup> 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.”<sup>2</sup>

Although it is unlikely that Madison had 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 think tanks, 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.”<sup>3</sup>

Madison’s essay on controlling the effects of faction may have helped to allay, temporarily, the concerns of those suspicious of how individual rights

and liberties could be safeguarded in a large and extended republic. However, it did little to discourage individuals and organizations representing a multiplicity of interests from taking advantage of a more fragmented and decentralized political system to impose their preferences on the electorate. As many anti-federalists anticipated, rather than providing a remedy for the “mischiefs of faction,” the constitutional framework conceived by the founding fathers created innumerable opportunities for both the federal government and private interests to exercise undue political influence. Indeed, as we will discover in this chapter, not only have think tanks, interest groups, and other non-governmental organizations proliferated in great numbers, but they have, through various channels, become firmly entrenched in the policy-making process. Rather than simply commenting on the range of policy options available to decision-makers, think tanks have, in Diane Stone’s words, sought to capture “the political imagination”<sup>4</sup> of the nation. Or, to be more blunt, they have made a concerted effort to capture the “political agenda” of the nation.

Think tanks, as discussed in chapter 2, can no longer be perceived as detached observers of American politics. On the contrary, they have a vested interest in participating, directly and indirectly, in the conversations taking place between power-brokers on Capitol Hill, in the White House, and in the sterile corridors of bureaucratic departments and agencies. As think tanks have undergone a transformation from institutions devoted to policy research to organizations more often committed to political advocacy, their priorities, not surprisingly, have changed. Although they may have “squander[ed] their potential influence”<sup>5</sup> in the process, a concern expressed by Andrew Rich, their ultimate goal has remained the same – to shape and mould American domestic and foreign policy.

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the world think tanks inhabit so that we can better explain why they are able to become active participants in the policy-making process. We begin by focusing on features of the American political system that have facilitated the access of think tanks to the executive and legislative branches of government and to the key agencies and departments involved in foreign policy. In the process, some comparisons will be made to similar institutions found in Westminster parliamentary systems and in countries such as Germany, where many think tanks, by virtue of their formal ties to political parties, are in a special position to influence policy-making.<sup>6</sup> Attention will also be paid to the various incentives policy-makers have to turn to think tanks for policy advice and why policy entrepreneurs and philanthropic foundations and private donors have played such a critical role in think tank development.

THE DISTINCTIVE WORLD OF AMERICAN  
THINK TANKS

There are aspects and features of every culture and society that are distinct. And in most of the social sciences and humanities, including anthropology, sociology, history, and political science, scholars have identified characteristics of nations and states that help to distinguish them from other members of the international community. Some of these differences relate to language, religion, geography, culture, government, architecture, food, and sport. In his classic account of the United States, *Democracy in America*,<sup>7</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, a young, aristocratic French lawyer who came to America in the early 1830s to study its penitentiary systems, commented on several features of American society that he deemed noteworthy. These included the existence of a free press and the propensity of Americans to join associations.<sup>8</sup> Had he written his seminal study a century and a half later, he undoubtedly would have considered other things distinctively American, such as theme parks, fast food, and think tanks.<sup>9</sup>

At the turn of the twentieth century, think tanks had been established in Great Britain, Germany, and a handful of other countries, but it was in the United States that their presence began to be most strongly felt. As the Russell Sage Foundation, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, the Brookings Institution, and several other think tanks shared their insights on social, economic, and foreign policy with leading decision-makers, it became clear that they could, and most likely would, come to play an important role in the Progressive Era. In fact, as think tanks assumed more visibility and prominence in the political arena, some scholars, including James McGann, noted that, in many respects, they had become an American phenomenon.<sup>10</sup> When dozens of new think tanks emerged on the political landscape in the ensuing decades, there was little reason to challenge what had become a generally accepted observation. In the post-World War II era, think tanks were considered as American as hamburgers and apple pie. Yet in recent years, as the number of think tanks has skyrocketed throughout the international community, McGann and others have acknowledged that they are no longer uniquely American;<sup>11</sup> they have become a global phenomenon. Still, few would dispute that the United States, with more than half the world's think tanks within its borders, more than any other country, provides fertile soil for them to develop and grow. This conclusion begs an obvious question: Why, relative to other advanced industrialized countries, has the United States become a popular home for think tanks?

Have think tanks emerged in unparalleled numbers in America because there is a shortage of policy expertise in universities and in government? On the surface, this answer appears to make perfect sense. After all, if the research capacity in universities and in various government departments and agencies is insufficient to meet the policy needs of decision-makers, it might explain why hundreds of think tanks with specific areas of expertise have been created and why even more may be required. This is a theory that Steven Simon and Jonathan Stevenson, two think tank residents, believe warrants closer consideration. In their 2004–05 article in *The National Interest*, they argue that there are some policy issues, such as how to neutralize “a stateless, religiously inspired network of militants who seek to bring down great powers,”<sup>12</sup> that necessitate the development of think tanks which can think “outside the box.” It is not that universities, government departments, and other institutions which engage in research and analysis are in short supply. Rather, it is that with respect to some policy concerns, including the war on terror, experts in universities and in government are not prepared or equipped to contribute to an informed and enlightened public policy.<sup>13</sup> This is why, Simon and Stevenson claim, institutions capable of thinking in new and innovative ways are required.

Their argument that additional think tanks may be required to better serve the interests and needs of policy-makers compels us to reconsider the response to our initial question. To explain why America, relative to other advanced Western democracies, has become a home for think tanks, we suggested that perhaps they have emerged in large numbers to compensate for the lack of policy expertise in the country. However, this does not seem to be the case. The faculty listings at American universities and colleges confirm that many of the brightest minds in the country reside in the hallowed halls of academe, where scholars tackle some of the most pressing concerns in the arts, humanities, social sciences, and sciences. Similarly, in every government department and agency, including the Executive Office of the President,<sup>14</sup> hundreds of policy experts armed with advanced degrees examine and analyze issues and trends that are of profound importance to members of Congress, the White House, and the electorate. In the process, they can draw on financial and staff resources that far surpass those available to even the most affluent think tanks in the country. If anything, there is an abundant supply of policy expertise in the United States.

Hundreds of think tanks have not taken root in the United States because of a perceived shortage of policy expertise. They have proliferated, if we follow the logic of Simon and Stevenson's argument, because of a lack of *specialized* expertise. New think tanks may be required to address the complex

set of issues that have arisen in the post-September 11th world, just as think tanks were created before and after World War II to assist policy-makers confront a wide range of economic, social, and security concerns. What Simon and Stevenson are suggesting is not radically different from what Robert Brookings, Andrew Carnegie, and a group of engineers at Project Rand proposed decades ago.

The rise of think tanks is also closely associated with the type of expertise and services they offer and their ability to satisfy the needs of policy-makers, journalists, opinion leaders, philanthropists, and corporate and private donors in ways that other institutions engaged in research and analysis cannot. For example, unlike university professors, who in most instances must balance the demands of teaching, research, and administration, policy experts at think tanks have the luxury of concentrating on what they do best – monitoring, analyzing, and commenting on timely and relevant policy issues. Experts at think tanks often publish books and articles that stimulate discussion in the academic community, but they are concerned primarily with generating a range of research products that will be of immediate interest to policy-makers and to the public. They cannot afford, as their colleagues in universities often can, to invest five, ten, or even fifteen years on a research project. Moreover, most private or independent think tanks do not have the luxury of relying, as many academics at universities do, on government support for their research. Although a handful of prominent think tanks continue to draw heavily on government funding, many, including the vast majority of advocacy think tanks, look to philanthropic foundations, corporations, and private donors for assistance. Furthermore, like the institutes they fund, donors have a vested interest in influencing the political climate of the day. This in large part explains why so many advocacy think tanks have been created over the past several decades. They have struck a responsive chord with donors who are prepared to support their vision of how the United States ought to be governed.

Experts at think tanks understand the importance of responding to the needs of policy-makers and therefore make this a priority. They need not be reminded that securing a captive audience on Capitol Hill and/or in the White House can pay handsome dividends. By contrast, scholars at universities are rarely concerned about meeting the daily demands of policy-makers. Instead, they prefer to engage in long-term research in the hope that their findings, based on years of rigorous analysis, will help to advance the public interest. In short, scholars working at think tanks and universities have very different priorities, objectives, and timelines. This is why universi-

ties cannot be a substitute for think tanks and why think tanks cannot take the place of universities.

Rather than competing with each other, think tanks and universities have carved out their own niches in the knowledge industry. But what about government departments and agencies? Do they threaten the survival of think tanks? Apparently not. Despite being able to draw on extensive resources in the bureaucracy, policy-makers on Capitol Hill and in the White House often solicit “outside expertise.” The absence of a permanent senior civil service in the United States, combined with a general distrust of government, may in part explain the reluctance of members of Congress and the Executive to rely exclusively on the bureaucracy for advice. Moreover, as Rich and others have argued, think tanks can provide many valuable services to policy-makers, not the least of which is offering ideological reinforcement for their political views, a service that bureaucrats cannot offer publicly.<sup>15</sup> Think tanks can also be of great assistance to congressional aides, who often do not have the time or the inclination to produce independent research for members of Congress. The opposite appears to be the case in Canada and Great Britain, where elected officials and their staff are more likely to heed the advice of public servants than to turn their attention to the external policy research community, although this pattern appears to be changing.<sup>16</sup>

The existence of a large and well-staffed bureaucracy has not rendered think tanks redundant. In fact, there are many bureaucratic departments that have established a close and enduring relationship to some of the nation’s most visible think tanks. The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), for example, enjoys strong ties to the Urban Institute, and the Department of Defense continues to provide the lion’s share of RAND’s \$200-million-plus annual budget. Several other departments and agencies contract work out to think tanks.<sup>17</sup>

Turning to think tanks for their expertise can benefit bureaucratic departments in many ways. Not only can think tanks offering specialized expertise help departments to provide more informed advice to policy-makers, but soliciting an outside perspective can often reinforce or augment the work of government policy experts. In addition, relying on research-oriented (as opposed to more advocacy-motivated) think tanks that operate at arm’s length to government can at times lend credibility and legitimacy to policy debates. This reinforcement becomes particularly important when departments and agencies come under fire for being overtly partisan.

By examining the differences between policy experts working at universities and in government and their counterparts in think tanks, we can begin

to understand why there is a need in the United States for organizations capable and willing to offer independent policy expertise. Clearly, think tanks operating outside the formal parameters of government can assist policy-makers in ways that scholars in other environments cannot. But their distinctive institutional characteristics – for example, their ability to provide timely and succinct position papers – does not account entirely for why hundreds of think tanks have made their home in the United States.

The United States has not become their sanctuary because of an unlimited demand for both policy research and ideologically driven think tanks. It has become a sanctuary because, unlike political systems that actively discourage the participation of non-governmental organizations in the legislative process, the institutional structure of the American government invites them to become engaged in policy-making.<sup>18</sup> Put simply, the highly decentralized and fragmented political system enshrined in the US Constitution, combined with weak parties and considerable turnover in the upper echelons of the bureaucracy, provides think tanks with unparalleled opportunities to shape public opinion and public policy. This factor becomes particularly clear when administrations change and the revolving door between think tanks and government is in full swing. Supported by generous benefactors, inspired by policy entrepreneurs, embraced by a voracious media searching for controversial and provocative ideas, and lured by political power, think tanks have become permanent fixtures in the political arena.

#### THE LAND OF OPPORTUNITY: THINK TANKS IN THE AMERICAN POLITICAL SYSTEM

In a country where political power is dispersed among separate branches, where legislators are free to vote as they wish, and where a growing number of congressional and presidential candidates look to policy experts for advice, think tanks find themselves in an enviable position. Like foxes holding the keys to the chicken coop, they have found a captive audience. More specifically, they have identified multiple target audiences with whom to establish and maintain contact. These range from policy-makers assembled around conference tables debating policy options to journalists searching for a ten-second sound bite.

Faced with limited resources, the majority of think tanks, like interest groups, must think strategically about how and to what extent to become involved at various stages of the policy cycle. The various factors that influence their decisions will be considered in the following chapter, but in the section below, our attention will focus more generally on where in the politi-

cal system think tanks try to make their presence felt and the many institutional and societal factors that have enabled them to become active participants in the policy-making community. We begin, as the US Constitution does, by looking at Congress, a favourite destination for many Washington-based think tanks.

#### A CAPITAL IDEA ON CAPITOL HILL

Edwin Feulner, the Heritage Foundation's charismatic president and resident visionary, is well known in Washington's policy-making community. A graduate of the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School of Business and the University of Edinburgh, where he obtained a PhD, he is a leading figure in the conservative movement. In January 1989 President Reagan conferred on him the Presidential Citizens Medal for "building an organization dedicated to ideas and their consequences." Rarely shy about his institute's mission, Feulner has proclaimed that Heritage's role is to influence what goes on in Congress, in the White House, and in the media.<sup>19</sup>

With over two hundred researchers and staff members and an annual budget of \$35 million, the Heritage Foundation extends its tentacles into virtually every branch, department, and agency of the US government. But as Feulner has acknowledged on numerous occasions, Congress is his institute's principal target. It is also the focus of attention for countless other think tanks that have tried to emulate Heritage's success. They realize, as Feulner did over thirty years ago when he and Paul Weyrich were working as congressional aides, that gaining access to members of Congress and their staff, as well as important committees and subcommittees, is critical in waging successful battles in the war of ideas. After all, it is Congress, not the president, that is primarily responsible for making legislation, and it is Congress that approves the nation's budget. Moreover, it is the responsibility of the Senate to confirm presidential appointments, including US ambassadors, cabinet secretaries, the directors of the CIA and FBI, the national security adviser, and other key officials.<sup>20</sup> And it is the Senate that has the authority to ratify or reject international treaties and to regulate trade and commerce. But even more importantly than exercising these powers, Congress is the key institution responsible for responding to the needs of the electorate, a civics lesson that think tanks have committed to memory. By establishing strong lines of communication with Congress, they can tap into a direct pipeline to the American people. For many think tanks, this pipeline is the life-support system they depend on to shape public opinion and public policy.

With so much power and responsibility at their disposal, members of Congress naturally attract the attention of think tanks, interest groups, lobbyists, and other NGOs. House and Senate staff members and advisers are also courted by think tanks eager to enlighten them about the costs and benefits of supporting or opposing proposed legislation. That is why some think tanks, including Heritage, maintain liaison offices with both houses of Congress to closely monitor current and emerging issues. Think tanks must also pay close attention to hearings organized by various congressional committees and subcommittees. Testifying before a high-profile congressional committee can offer think tanks a valuable opportunity to plant ideas in the minds of influential members of Congress who are looking either for a different perspective on important and controversial policy matters or for some additional reinforcement for their position. Even if think tank staff do not testify before a particular congressional committee, they can ill afford to lose sight of the recommendations being made. Providing timely and relevant policy advice, the mantra for think tanks, necessitates remaining informed about the issues policy-makers are thinking about and the steps they are considering taking to transform their beliefs into public policy.

For the various reasons outlined above, Congress remains an important and inviting target for think tanks. And by virtue of the weak party system in the United States, a system that encourages representatives and senators to support the wishes of their constituents and those of organized interests over the needs of their party, it is also a highly accessible institution. Since members of Congress, unlike members of the British and Canadian parliaments, are not bound by party unity, they need not be concerned that their association with particular think tanks or their endorsement of some of their policy ideas will undermine party cohesion. Rather than evaluating ideas emanating from think tanks in terms of whether they would be compatible with party interests and policies, members of Congress can evaluate them on their own merits. As Weaver argues, political systems with weak parties have not only opened doors for think tanks<sup>31</sup> but, in some ways, increased the demand for them.

AEI's David Frum, the Canadian-born and American-educated pundit whose conservative credentials and biting prose helped land him a speech-writing position in the first term of the Bush administration, agrees that the absence of a strong party system in the United States has resulted in a higher demand for think tanks. Quoting from Gilbert and Sullivan's *HMS Pinafore* – "I always voted at my party's call and I never thought of thinking for myself at all" – Frum wryly observes that "parties do not have a coherent call." He adds that in Congress and in the Executive "you have to think for

yourself, and of course, most policy-makers find this physically impossible. [It is] impossible for any representative to think for himself on every issue, to do all the preparatory work on every issue that is going to come before him in the course of a legislative or executive career."<sup>32</sup> Moreover, according to Frum, in the United States "you have a tremendous need for incoming politicians in the executive and legislative branches to arrive with specific, not general proposals. They [policy-makers] must not only lay down general ideas about policy but actually devise and answer many of the specific and highly technical questions, and they need expertise ... So if you're an idea entrepreneur, as all national political leaders are, you can cast about and find expertise to help you in a way that no one else will."<sup>33</sup>

There are a handful of congressional research institutes or public think tanks, including the Congressional Research Service and the General Accounting Office, that members of Congress can rely on for "objective" information and data about the economy, the environment, and other important matters.<sup>34</sup> However, these institutions cannot be expected to provide policy-makers with the range of services that many private think tanks offer. They certainly cannot be called upon to support or advance their ideological goals. Although they can assist members of Congress to obtain more in-depth knowledge about a particular issue, public think tanks are not in the business of marketing ideas. In short, they can be found in the federal government directory, not in the burgeoning "advocacy think tank" section of the Yellow Pages.

For a brief period of time, members of Congress could turn to another government body for policy expertise. The Congressional Policy Advisory Board was established in March 1998 to allow experts to discuss several policy issues with the House leadership. Of the twenty-eight policy experts who comprised the board, twenty-one were affiliated with US think tanks, including the board's chair, Martin Anderson, a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution.<sup>35</sup> But while it appeared that the board had the potential to play an important role in advising members of Congress, it was disbanded with little notice or explanation in 2000.<sup>36</sup>

#### *Yes, Mr. President: Inside the Oval Office*

Congress may remain the principal target for many think tanks in the United States, but they also keep the White House clearly in their sights. The authority of the president to fill thousands of positions in the bureaucracy when he assumes power affords think tanks opportunities to influence policy-making in ways that their counterparts in parliamentary systems

such as Canada and Great Britain cannot even fathom. As previously noted, the absence of a permanent senior civil service in the United States creates an incentive for think tanks to supply personnel for key positions throughout the bureaucracy. While a Canadian or British prime minister may elect to fill a handful of senior bureaucratic positions with career civil servants or faithful party members, the president can appoint close to ten thousand people. "By and large, everybody from deputy assistant secretary level and above is a political appointee."<sup>27</sup> In short, the president has the opportunity, not to mention the authority, to reward thousands of policy experts with government positions.

It is a familiar scene on NBC's *The West Wing*: The door to the Oval Office swings open, and the president finds himself surrounded by White House staff and a handful of policy experts exchanging ideas about an emerging political issue. After carefully outlining the major issues involved, the policy expert or experts who have been summoned to the White House leave the president and his inner circle of advisers to deliberate. With their arms folded and eyes fixed like a laser beam on the leader of the most powerful nation in the world, those who remain in the inner sanctum are left to shape the course of history. Although the events that unfold on *The West Wing* may not necessarily mirror reality, presidents often rely heavily on their trusted advisers, many of whom are recruited from think tanks, to address a wide range of policy concerns.

As noted in chapter 1, several presidents, including Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, and to a lesser extent, Bill Clinton and George Bush, have turned to experts from think tanks for advice both during their campaigns and in their administrations.<sup>28</sup> Many think tank staff members have gone on to serve in senior positions in government, while countless others have assisted the president by participating on advisory boards or task forces. The strong ties that have been developed between think tanks and various administrations will be examined in greater detail in the case studies that follow, but what is important to understand is that think tank staff have much to gain by securing access to the White House. Indeed, by becoming one of the president's key advisers, as several think tank alumni have, they are in a position to exercise extraordinary influence.

The US Constitution may bestow upon Congress far more powers in the area of foreign policy than have been entrusted to the president,<sup>29</sup> but few scholars of foreign policy can afford to ignore the authority invested in the president as commander-in-chief. Particularly during times of crisis, Americans look to the president, not to Congress, for leadership. And it is during times of crisis that presidents look to their advisers before making critical

policy decisions. As a result, it is important to understand who these advisers are and what experience they bring to office.

### *Making Their Way in Washington: Think Tanks and the Bureaucracy*

Often referred to as the fourth branch of government, the federal bureaucracy in the United States has wide-ranging responsibilities that extend into virtually every aspect of society. Among other things, it has the authority to approve new pharmaceutical drugs, to inspect safety measures in the transportation industry, to protect the environment, and to grant licences to cable broadcasting companies. It is also responsible for overseeing and ensuring the national security of the United States.

As a matter of course, think tanks specializing in foreign policy and national security matters are aware of the mandate and jurisdiction of the key agencies and departments engaged in American foreign relations. They closely monitor the issues being explored by the Departments of Defense, State, and Homeland Security and, through their contacts, try to remain informed about key concerns in the CIA, the FBI, and the National Security Council. Think tanks, like interest groups, understand that if they are to have a long-term impact on policy-making, they must at the very least establish and maintain personal ties to policy analysts and advisers in the bureaucracy. They therefore make a point of sending their publications and other relevant information about their organizations to mid-level and senior staff in the bureaucracy and why they keep a detailed list of who occupies important positions in the foreign policy-making establishment. In short, think tanks want to keep as many lines of communication open as possible, and doing so means keeping track of who's who in the bureaucracy.

How successful think tanks are in penetrating various government departments is, as we will discover, difficult to measure. But as Howard Wiarda, a long-time student of foreign policy, notes, we must begin somewhere. "Government runs, in part, on the basis of memos. If a State Department or Defense Department official, or an analyst at the CIA or the National Security Council, has your study in front of him and open at the time he is writing his own memo to the secretary or the director or perhaps the president himself – if, in short, he is using your ideas and analysis at the time he writes his own memo – then you have influence. If your study is not open in front of him or, worse, you do not even know who the responsible official is, you do not have influence. It is as simple as that."<sup>30</sup> Assessing how much or little influence think tanks have in foreign policy is hardly as simple as Wiarda suggests, but he is correct in identifying the bureaucracy as an

important channel of influence and one that warrants further consideration. In chapter 6 we will take a closer look at how think tanks seek to strengthen their ties to the bureaucracy and some factors that may impede or facilitate their access.

Thus far we have highlighted where in the American political system think tanks have sought to make their presence felt and why specifically they are attracted to these particular targets. While it is clear that they are interested in strengthening their ties to Congress, the Executive, and the bureaucracy, they also remain committed to increasing their media profile, a subject that we will accordingly examine.

Identifying principal targets or stakeholders with whom to share their ideas is not a difficult undertaking for America's think tanks. They understand that in a highly decentralized and fragmented political system – or what I have sarcastically described as a land of opportunity – think tanks can rely on multiple channels to influence public opinion and public policy. But they also understand that having good ideas does not guarantee success in the political arena. Influencing public policy, as we will discuss, requires far more than making policy-makers aware of the policy options they have at their disposal. Several factors, including the willingness of policy-makers and the electorate to embrace new ideas and the availability of resources to support additional government programs or initiatives, are among the many conditions that must be satisfied in order for individuals and organizations to exercise policy influence. Yet even before think tanks begin to concern themselves with the logistics of influencing public policy, they must secure access to funding so that they can research, publicize, and promote their ideas. To this end, they must, like major corporations in the United States, rely on strong leadership, a subject to which we will now turn.

A PENNY FOR YOUR THOUGHTS: POLICY  
ENTREPRENEURS, PHILANTHROPIC  
FOUNDATIONS, AND THINK TANKS

The important role that philanthropic foundations, corporations, and individual donors play in elevating the status of think tanks in the United States cannot be underestimated, nor can the contribution of so-called policy entrepreneurs to think tank development. As Abelson and Carberry point out in their comparative study of American and Canadian think tanks, “In the United States, independent policy entrepreneurs have provided important leadership in the formation of think tanks dedicated to providing infor-

mation and advice to government. In Canada, on the other hand, such leadership is likely to come from the government itself or from senior public servants. This difference reflects both the incentives created by the institutional structure of each form of government as well as cultural understandings of the appropriate repositories of policy expertise.”<sup>31</sup> John Kingdon's work on policy entrepreneurs, defined as “advocates for proposals or for the prominence of an idea,” demonstrates how these individuals can have an important impact on policy issues: “their defining characteristic, much as in the case of a business entrepreneur, is their willingness to invest their resources – time, energy, reputation, and sometimes money – in the hope of a future return.”<sup>32</sup> Why do policy entrepreneurs undertake these investments? They do so, according to Kingdon, “to promote their values, or affect the shape of public policy.”<sup>33</sup> And there is some evidence to suggest that at least with respect to the private sector, these entrepreneurs are likely to be more prominent in the United States than in parliamentary systems such as Canada.

In their study of the environmental agenda in the United States and Canada, Harrison and Hoberg observed a difference in policy entrepreneurship between these two countries.<sup>34</sup> Among other things, they discovered that policy entrepreneurs in the United States played an important role in the promotion of certain environmental issues, particularly the effects of radon, and were able to facilitate its discussion on the political agenda. They also noticed that there was an absence of similar activity in Canada. Harrison and Hoberg note how the presence of policy entrepreneurship is, in a certain sense, tied to the institutional arrangements of each political system.<sup>35</sup> As in the case of think tanks, the highly fragmented nature of the American political system, combined with an absence of strong party unity, provides incentives to private policy entrepreneurs to help shape the political agenda. Conversely, the relatively closed and party-driven system in Canada offers few allurements to such entrepreneurs.

As noted in chapter 2, several think tanks in the United States owe their existence and, indeed, their success to policy entrepreneurs intent on contributing to the national conversation. Robert Brookings, Andrew Carnegie, and the Heritage Foundation's Edwin Feulner represent but a handful of such entrepreneurs who have created think tanks as institutional vehicles to advance a particular ideological agenda. This entrepreneurial spirit is also being expressed in the form of vanity and legacy-based think tanks in the United States.

By contrast, as Abelson and Carberry argue, there are few examples of think tanks in Canada that are the direct creation of *private-sector* policy

entrepreneurship.<sup>36</sup> The Fraser Institute, under the initial guidance of British businessman Sir Antony Fisher, Patrick Boyle, and economists Sally Pipes and Michael Walker, Fraser's former executive director and now president of its foundation,<sup>37</sup> and the defunct Canadian Institute for International Peace and Security, which was inspired by former prime minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau's global peace initiative, are notable exceptions. On the other hand, the *public* sector has served as a viable source of leadership. Senior public servants, including Michael Pitfield and Michael Kirby,<sup>38</sup> played important roles in creating the Institute for Research on Public Policy, the Economic Council of Canada, the Science Council of Canada, and other governmental advisory bodies that provide policy expertise.<sup>39</sup>

The fact that major initiatives for creating Canadian centres of policy expertise generally arise from inside the government and not from the private sector, as in the United States, is not surprising. In part it reflects the different cultural understanding of the relationship between government and the provision of policy expertise in Canada. Private sector policy entrepreneurs have had a significant impact on the creation of the think tank landscape in the United States, while government has led the way in Canada. This role for governmental leadership in Canada is not unexpected, given the importance assigned to bureaucratic and party policy advice in the parliamentary process.<sup>40</sup>

The tendency for private, rather than public, endeavours in the United States is reflected in the country's extensive private and corporate philanthropy.<sup>41</sup> Several prominent American think tanks, including the Russell Sage Foundation, Brookings, Heritage, the Hoover Institution, and the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, have benefited significantly from foundation funding and charitable donations. But these activities are not as prominent in Canadian society;<sup>42</sup> so policy institutes created and supported by individual and philanthropic actions are not as common. Instead, the government is more likely to take the lead in their development and sustenance.<sup>43</sup> In the United States the Ford, Rockefeller, and Carnegie foundations, among others, have long supported social science research, much of which has been conducted at think tanks.<sup>44</sup> The generous tradition of philanthropic support for think tanks in the United States has not taken root to the same extent in Canada. Consequently, the majority of think tanks in Canada must struggle to keep afloat.

Relying too heavily on philanthropic foundations and corporations can also prove to be risky. Like governments, which often insist that recipients of foreign aid make certain concessions, philanthropic foundations and large corporate donors must be satisfied that the organizations they are

making grants to act in a manner consistent with their institutional mission. Failing to conform to the political agenda of philanthropic and corporate donors can, as the American Enterprise Institute discovered in the mid-1980s, have serious repercussions. When AEI president William Baroody Jr was unable to satisfy several right-wing benefactors, including the Olin Foundation and the Reader's Digest Foundation, the institute was committed to pursuing a truly conservative agenda, these and other like-minded donors withdrew their significant financial support. The result was that AEI was brought to the verge of bankruptcy.<sup>45</sup> Conversely, acting in the interests of affluent donors can pay handsome dividends for some think tanks. The Washington-based conservative think tank Citizens for a Sound Economy (CSE) discovered this after it began its campaign to derail a multi-billion-dollar federal plan to restore the Florida Everglades in 1998. For its efforts, CSE received \$700,000 in contributions from Florida's three largest sugar enterprises, "which stand to lose thousands of acres of cane-growing land to reclamation if the Army Corps of Engineers plan goes into effect."<sup>46</sup>

In sum, think tank development in the American context is supported by several important cultural influences, including, but by no means restricted to, a pattern of philanthropy and the presence of independent advisers operating alongside the bureaucracy. This phenomenon has promoted policy entrepreneurship stemming from the private sector, with think tanks originating within society. The Canadian cultural context provides a different environment for think tanks, particularly with a bureaucratic ethos, which at times discourages external advice.

The picture that has been painted so far helps us to better understand why the United States, relative to other advanced Western democracies, has become a sanctuary for think tanks. The open nature of the American political system, combined with weak political parties and philanthropic foundations and policy entrepreneurs willing to support these institutions, has helped to pave the way for hundreds of think tanks. However, despite the growing presence of think tanks on America's political landscape, the literature on policy-making has, for the most part, failed to adequately address the role these organizations play. In flow charts and diagrams outlining the policy-making process, the role and responsibilities of the Executive, Congress, the National Security Council, the Pentagon, the State Department, the Central Intelligence Agency, and other intelligence-gathering agencies are clearly defined. Yet, interestingly enough, the involvement of think tanks has largely been ignored. In the next chapter we will explore how several scholars, drawing on traditional models and theories of foreign policy-making, have sought to explain America's conduct in world affairs. In the



process, the various ways that think tanks can be better incorporated into studies of foreign policy will become apparent.

## CHAPTER FIVE

# Something Is Missing: Think Tanks and the Study of Foreign Policy-Making

Despite the growing presence of think tanks in the United States and the ongoing efforts to influence the policy preferences and choices of decision makers, political scientists have been slow to recognize their involvement in the policy-making process. But as Joseph Peschek points out, given the propensity of scholars to explain policy decisions as either an outcome of intergovernmental politics or interest group competition, this neglect 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,"<sup>1</sup> which Peschek notes, is more strongly felt during the initial stages of the policy cycle, when the parameters of public debates are being framed.

Even if one were prepared to acknowledge that intergovernmental and interest group bargaining occur in separate policy domains,<sup>2</sup> 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 various levels and branches of government. Moreover, as we will examine in the following chapter, they rely on several different channels, many of them public, to communicate their ideas to those who occupy positions of power. Through their publications, conferences, and research programs, think tanks can also directly and indirectly support the mandate of interest groups, unions, trade associations, and corporations, a subject that we will return to in chapters 8 and 9. In short,