Visibility and Activity: Foreign Affairs Think Tanks in the United Kingdom

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Abstract: If politics is about transforming 'reality', then think tanks are in the business of interpreting politics. However, there is a lack of research dealing with the way think tanks disseminate ideas. Although think tanks are publicly recognised, researchers face a number of difficulties in determining their exact impact on the policy process. As think tanks are mostly concerned with the climate of opinion, we aim to explore the 'visibility' and 'activity' of a comparable sample of three United Kingdom (UK) foreign policy think tanks, namely Chatham House, the International Institute for Strategic Studies, and the Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies. These are ranked amongst the most influential 'foreign affairs' think tanks in the UK. 'Visibility' signals the presence of think tanks on the Internet and in the media. 'Activity' reflects the understanding of 'the political' as outcomes generated by their publications, and networking activities of their members and staff. For this purpose, we combine the usage of digital methods for 'visibility aspects', and elite methods for 'activity aspects' as a means to explore a possible reconceptualisation of 'influence' by encouraging the academic debate to approach this concept beyond the conventional quantitative and/or self-referential inquiry.

Keywords: Think tanks, Britain, 'influence', 'visibility', 'activity', concept, comparison, Chatham House, International Institute for Strategic Studies, Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies.

1. Introduction

In trying to define the concept, James (1993) noted three particular characteristics about think tanks. First, although being intellectually independent from governments, their output is geared by government needs. Second, they undertake public interest and strategic research. And, finally, most of them are politically aligned. We can add a fourth characteristic related to their purpose: think tanks are involved in the business of ideas; hence political parties are not the only actors attempting to shape ideology.

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Ideology, a contested concept indeed, is revitalised in public debates, often transcending national boundaries, and is subject to abstract approaches, situational needs, structural crises, and election results. Opinions are transformed, replaced, and sometimes completely changed in a fiercely competitive political climate. In this process of crafting ideas, which has proven to be fluid and flexible, think tanks[3] have become a prominent discussion partner in the political sphere. Along with other actors – for instance, interest groups, social movements, and intellectuals – think tanks seek to transform the perceived 'reality' by seeking authority of ideas purporting to political questions. Think tanks need to interpret the landscape of ideas in order to propagate their own impact in an ever-changing environment (Abelson, 2004). Albeit think tanks have become publicly recognised, the task of determining their exact influence in policy processes remains a major philosophical and methodological issue for researchers.

In this article we attempt to explore two critical aspects that define the political strength of think tanks; namely, their 'visibility' and 'activity'. We find that a promising approach to decipher the potential contribution of think tanks to politics is to examine their public recognition and the means they deploy to disseminate ideas. These two features will cover the *visibility aspects* of think tanks. Certainly, public recognition is a vague concept as well, at least to perform as a proxy for *visibility*. However, public recognition follows a straight-forward path so as to be operationalised as number of citations in newspapers and on various Internet platforms (Abelson, 1999, 2002). As discussed throughout the text, the variety in the intensity of these channels can be understood as preference for a certain channel for diffusion of ideas and interaction with the general pool. 'Activity', on the other hand, refers to the understanding of 'the political' as outputs generated by publications, in addition to networking activities of members and affiliated staff. To the extent that newspapers, academics and politicians make use of think tank material, it is an important variable in this study (McGann and Johnson, 2006). The interest in examining the activity of think tanks is to know their thematic priorities, their ability to obtain and generate resources, and their ability to penetrate areas of intellectual prestige. For palpable reasons, there are a number of issues that this article will not deal with. Perhaps the most significant issue we do not

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[3] Think tanks are also known as "policy research institutes" (Stone and Garnett, 1998: 1), and "independent public research policy organizations" (McGann, 2010: 11). See Stone (2007) for a discussion concerning 'meanings' of the term 'think tanks'.

examine is the actual influence of think tanks in public debates. The rationale for such a decision relates to not knowing 'the power games' – whether public or private – of the many actors involved in this process. There are many decisions that define power relations between the actors that are clearly unavailable to researchers. Since many decisions are made without providing information, researchers may overlook relevant information on a permanent basis. Thus there is always the possibility of being inaccurate in indicating the real influence of think tanks (Rich, 2004; 't Hart and Vromen, 2008).

The difficulty of quantifying influence does not hide the aspiration of think tanks to influence policy framing, especially in foreign policy matters. This fact has been recognised by members of governments elsewhere. For instance, Richard Haass, Director of Policy and Planning, United States (US) Department of State (2002) pointed out the following: "Of the many influences on US foreign policy formulation, the role of think tanks is among the most important and least appreciated". Whilst being aware of such methodological drawbacks, this article aims to contribute to the understanding of think tanks following the words of Evert A. Lindquist (1998: 127): "Despite the prominence of think tanks, most policy elites and citizens know relatively little about how they attempt to exercise influence, and how they manage to survive". The study of the channels of influence of think tanks is based on the experiences of three think tanks in the UK, namely Chatham House, the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), and the Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies (RUSI).

The article is structured as follows. First, we introduce a general debate concerning the use of ideas in politics, as well as a brief look at think tanks in the UK. Second, we highlight the main features of the selected think tanks. Third, we discuss the various forms that think tanks have followed to organise activities. Finally, we compare the visibility of think tanks in newspapers and social networks.

2. The debate over ideas and the think-tank tradition in the UK

2.1. The 'reality' of ideas and the idea of 'reality'

Two major issues in think tanks research relate to determining their influence on public policy (Abelson, 1999; Stone, 2004). Comprehensive attempts have been executed, such as that of McGann's (2010) *Global Go-To Think Tanks* ranking. However, this effort and other studies have prompted a number of dubious methodological issues associated with the study of these particular fields, for example the high degree of self-referential data. To the extent that the influence, or impact, of think tanks in the policy process is defined by their very nature as actors generating ideas, it is necessary to define their contribution to the early stages of the political process – in the agenda-setting and the definition of public concerns – and also the latter stages of the political process; in other words, in the normative assessment of the results of government activities. It is important to note that the diffusion of social conflicts and political activity assessment are exercises embedded with great subjective connotation.

This raises several questions about the political usage of reality. The ever-timely discussion over the analysis of 'reality', in any of its forms, is in permanent connection with the way that individuals and groups understand the world around them and the distribution of power that benefits or harms their interests. There is no real, objective *social* world existing detached from human minds, but imagined realities from which we are able to propose ideas and confront speeches (see Crotty, 2003). An example is Benedict Anderson's definition of nations and nationalism as imagined communities (Anderson, 1983). In fact, normative debates doubt the existence of a common 'reality' insofar as it is socially constructed and varies depending on cultural structures and contextuality (see Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Bourdieu, 1977; Giddens, 1984).

This would pose a world where multiple realities, or ways of understanding the world, want to impose a complete rationality, perhaps exclusively. None of them is likely to be suppressed in democratic contexts where freedoms of individuals are recognised. However, the acceptance of competing realities does not mean that they all provide empirical-based ideas. Nor does it mean that there is a true reality, or that we are able to assign intellectual privileges to certain think tanks. One way to deal with these issues is to think that the right ideas are usually those that are accepted by the government. We can also take as a basis that the right ideas are those accepted by the majority of public opinion. However, these two statements do not provide a clear solution. As Grant (1985) suggests, there is a strong political component when it comes to categorising

social demands, interest groups and the like – including ideas – into 'insider/outsider' positions. From the perspective of governments, legitimate interests must have links with their political manifesto. For example, green ideas (environment) tend to have greater acceptance in leftist governments. Electoral swings become, therefore (and in an erroneous way) the principles that legitimise the ideas. This assertion stems from studies imparting that ideas are a strong means for social change, even though they must overcome many political and institutional filters over time. The history of social movements provides numerous examples. The answer to what ideas are the most appropriate is presumed impossible or, at least, incompatible with scientific neutrality, as long as these ideas do not contradict the basic principles of democracy.

Therefore the inquiry into the notion of 'influence' is not one of objectivist ontology, nor of a positivist epistemology. Although propagating that there is a countable world "out there" (i.e. numbers of citations), we do not equate this to a fixed boundary concerning the *meaning* of a total sum (see Crotty, 2003; there are no contradictions between a realist ontology and constructionist epistemology). We build our arguments on this basis by assuming there can be alternative 'realities' and ways of interpreting our collected data, which effectively are aligned with the interpretivist underpinning of the study and above-mentioned research philosophical outlook. Lessons learned should relate to the contestable nature of 'who speaks' (for me) and, indeed, that the portrayed 'reality' is socially constructed and the decision to display a particular 'reality' can indeed be politicised. Furthermore, the dynamic and ever-transforming relationality between the boundaries of different 'realities' call for alternative approaches to quantitatively measure influence of think tanks as an identifiable and static value.

2.2. Think tanks in the UK: A brief outline

The British 'think tank' tradition started with the 'Philosophical Radicals' in the eighteenth century. But it was not until the 1990s that the press heralded the salience of the so-called 'think tanks of the New Right' (Denham and Garnett, 1996). On the other side of the Atlantic, however, American scholars have devoted much more attention to such 'thinking factories' by considering them as essential for the functioning of both its political system and its democracy (Ahmad, 2008). It has been argued that the differences between Britain and the US in terms of the spread of think tanks can be ascribed to institutional, cultural, and political aspects, which benefit the latter "from a

tradition of corporate giving that is not apparent elsewhere" (Stone and Garnett, 1998: 6; Sherrington, 2000). This is reinforced by an apparent privileged access to American decision-makers (Weiss, 1992). British think tanks, on the contrary, manage smaller budgets and recruit fewer staff, whereas their influence on governments' initiatives can arguably be perceived as relatively moderate.

Denham and Garnett suggest four stages to make sense of the evolution of think tanks in Britain. The utilitarians were the first group of people interested in pressuring the government by employing their writings and intellectual prestige. They served as a notable example for Auguste Comte's positivist disciples, as well as for the Fabians who intended somehow to adjust liberalism's fundaments. The second stage stemmed from the inter-war period. The devastating consequences of the First World War led to the establishment of think tanks concerned predominantly with the perils of a war revival. During the 1970s, several think tanks were formed (or transformed) to support Margaret Thatcher's monetarist policies. They were chiefly 'policy advocacy tanks' in the sense of being "passionately committed and concerned only with providing arguments for those already half-persuaded" (Wallace, cited in Denham and Garnett, 1998: 31). They perceived themselves as 'universities without students' (Hames and Feasy, 1994). Finally, Denham and his colleagues observed how the ideological reaction to Thatcherism encouraged the establishment of left-wing rivals to neoliberal think tanks. Accordingly, Pautz (2010) has documented the linkages between left-wing think tanks and the Labour Party. The Institute for Public Policy Research, the Social Market Foundation and Demos are examples of such left-wing think tanks.

3. Foreign policy-oriented think tanks in the UK

In this article we analyse three London-based foreign affairs think tanks, namely Chatham House, the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), and the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI). The identification of the most suitable think tanks within this policy field was based on the James McGann's *2009 World Rankings of Think Tanks*.[4] It is an annual report sponsored by the 'Think Tanks and Civil Societies Programme' of the International Relations Programme at the University of Pennsylvania. The report "is the first comprehensive ranking of the world's top think

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[4] We acknowledge that the methodology employed in compiling this ranking can be argued to be too self-referential.

tanks, based on a worldwide survey of hundreds of scholars and experts" (McGann, 2010: 5). The *2009 Top 50 World-wide Think Tanks* (excluding the US) ranks Chatham House as the most influential think tank, ahead of Transparency International (2nd) and Amnesty International (5th). The two following British foreign affairs think tanks are the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), which is placed in sixth position, and the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), which is the 25th entry on the list.

Both Table 1 and Figure 1 show some key characteristics of the think tanks. Generally the differences are quite remarkable in terms of staff. Chatham House happens to be better connected with the academic community and prone to attract academic experts to participate in its events and publications. We argue this to be a result of the higher numbers of academics and the usage of academic titles (for example, *Associate Fellow* Professor Shaun Breslin). Considering this, it can be expected that Chatham House is likely to perform strategic advising by taking advantage of the academic voices and networks (see Stone, 2007). Linkages with academics become a source of legitimacy and a resource for disseminating ideas to specialised academic communities. The other two think tanks have developed a different model by investing in satellite offices overseas. From the point of view of the benefits to members, having set up such offices generates other sorts of resources, for example, gaining access to first-hand information, influencing the implementation of foreign policies, getting involved in all types of networks abroad, and so forth. After showing a series of basic characteristics of the three think tanks, the following pages discuss in greater depth the organisational and leadership of each of the think tanks. As far as possible we make reference to the historicity and ideas that have been most important in defining their ideology.

[TABLE 1 about here]
[FIGURE 1 about here]

3.1. Chatham House

Chatham House is by far one of the most prestigious British think tanks both in the UK and overseas (Denham and Garnett, 1998a: 22). Its early establishment in 1920, as well as its public recognition thanks to its qualified publication service, which periodically launches scientific journals and academic works, has prompted Chatham House to become the model for other similar think tanks (Denham and Garnett, 1998b: 29). Also

known as the Royal Institute of International Affairs (RIIA), it was established following a desire first mooted by Lionel Curtis of promoting peace on the basis of a shared Anglo-American standpoint. After the Paris Peace Conference organised in 1919, the British delegates begot the British Institute of International Affairs in London, whereas their American counterparts formed the Council of Foreign Relations (CFR) in New York. According to the ideological mainstream of their times, both think tanks shared a set of beliefs based on liberal internationalism, institutional independence, 'Anglo-Saxonism' elitism, Christianity, and non-partisanship in foreign affairs (Parmar, 2004a, 2002).

Back then, the government overtly opposed the attempt to build a 'rival civil service' (Higgott and Stone, 1994: 30). Hence during the 1930s the institute acquired public sponsorship, as well as strengthened its advising functions and research contributions (Wallace, 1994). Experiences since the Second World War onwards demonstrate Chatham House's intimate closeness with the Foreign Office in assessing threats and priorities, whilst controversies are mainly concerned on "tactics, details, timing and emphases" (Parmar, 2004a: 105). With such statements in mind, it can be plausibly argued that Chatham House's main commitments are: first, to mobilise public opinion by employing several means of consciousness such as academic journals, presence in the media, and expert events; second, to advise the government on strategic actions by anticipating future crises according to expert analysis; and, third, to permit its leaders to act as unofficial diplomats when the Foreign Office request its help (Parmar, 2004b).

Chatham House relies on its non-partisan nature to defend its encompassing voice aimed at being representative of all UK-based parties. In its corporate message, it can be observed how Chatham House stresses to be an 'independent international affairs think tank and membership organisation'. Her Majesty the Queen is the organisation's patron, while well-known personalities from all parties such as Lord Ashdown, former Member of Parliament (MP) and Lib-Dem leader, Sir John Major, former Prime Minister (PM) and Tory leader, and Lord Robertson, former MP and Defence Secretary under New Labour's government, are responsible for the presidency. As Lindquist points out, the intellectual reputation of an institute is 'a critical resource when attempting to attract respected academics'. Members thus participate in institute affairs in a restricted way so as not to compromise the integrity of inquiry (Lindquist, 1993: 574). However, it may

be rather located "somewhere between the state and civil society, not quite the independent body that it claims to be and not a simple instrument of state power" (Parmar, 2004a: 167). These positions of responsibility ought to be understood as an attempt to expand its lobby capacity, to strengthen contacts with political parties, to gain better access to all institutional forums, and to capture more media presence.

Furthermore, Chatham House explicitly refuses public funding, though Brewin (1992: 122) argued 'the choice of questions is closely tailored to perceived government needs and inhibited in posing unwelcome topics research'. In fact, while some governmental departments are among its members, 'Chatham House often responds to requests from Downing Street to organise round table discussions among academic and political figures from countries where informal contact may be preferred to direct contact' (Dickie, 1992: 298–9). Parmar (2004a) strongly insists about Chatham House's elitist component by demonstrating the connections between the institute and representatives from sectors such as business, armed services, academia and politics from its early inception. In relation to this, Parmar (1992, 1995) also documents several outstanding donations made by big fortunes in the City of London and Wall Street in its origins and later on.

3.2.International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS)

Sir Michael Howard, a British military historian, along with Denis Healey, Labour MP and Secretary of State of Defence (1964–70), and journalist Alastair Buchan formed the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) in 1958. The IISS emerged in response to the nuclear tension in the aftermath of the Cold War. International troubles such as ethnic conflict, political change, local arms control, and peacekeeping became, in this sense, central fields for its intellectual concern. As stated in its mission statement, the IISS has "five major goals: (1) provide objective information on military and political developments; (2) provide policy analysis over international peace and security; (3) convene government ministers, officials, international civil servants, independent analysts, business people and journalists; (4) enlarge an international network of influential and knowledgeable individuals, corporate entities, governments and other bodies; and (5) influence and promote the adoption of sound policies to maintain and further international peace and security and civilised international relations". In this regard IISS appears to play a pragmatic political role by combining its

goal of influencing policy-makers along with local advisory task forces in "conflicts of all kinds in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East' which have allowed the IISS to have 'held conference in Costa Rica, Egypt, Jordan, Korea, Mexico, Pakistan, Russia, Thailand, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates and Zimbabwe … often in collaboration with local institutes and universities".[5]

The IISS openly exposes its budget structure as a way of deriving its institutional independence from its members' reliability. The IISS offers different types of membership that permit different access to benefits and services. In fact, the institute was constituted as a company limited by guarantee and registered as a charity of which its executive committee members act as the charity's trustees.[6] IISS' 2009 budget rose up to £7.7 million supported by fees and donations from international bodies, foundations, and individual members. Half of the budget expenditure goes to cover conferences costs (27%) and operations (23%), whereas other minor contributions are associated with the library (3%), publications (8%), interest expenses (8%), indirect funded expenditure (12%), and directly funded expenditure (19%). The basic membership category welcomes students to consult the library and be selective for IISS events. The executive corporate membership is the highest category allowing corporations to participate actively in IISS events, as well as to use restricted databases and consultancy services. All of them receive a set of IISS publications including journals (*Survival*), monographs (*Adelphi Papers*), annual surveys and inventory (*Strategic Survey*, *The Military Balance*), and regular briefings (*Strategic Comments*). The institute assures it represents 2,500 individual members and 450 corporate and institutional members from more than 100 countries.

3.3. *Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies (RUSI)*
The Duke of Wellington founded the Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies (RUSI) in 1831, making it the oldest defence and security think tank in the whole world. Its promoters' commitment, including Commander Henry Jones and the Duke of Clarence, was to establish a professional, scientific institution, rather than a club. This was an attempt to include military affairs in scientific circles, raising their

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[5] This is an excerpt from comment raised by the IISS in the presentation of its history on its website. This can be found at: http://www.iiss.org/about-us/history/ (Retrieved 05/01/2011).
[6] See the 2007 Memorandum of Association of the International Institute for Strategic Studies for more information about the IISS statutory features.

level of importance for the life of citizens. Therefore there was a necessity to attract relevant military professionals into the executive bodies: Sir Howard Douglas, a leading expert on naval gunnery, became the first director of the Institute. Bidwell (1991: 70–1) comments that:

> [t]he intellectual drive would depend on the imagination and liberty to freely express their ideas of the ordinary members. To this end the founders were politically astute enough to invite thirty of the most distinguished officers of the day to become vice-presidents, but they also perceived that the future of the institution would depend on attracting as many of the youngest and most junior officers as possible.

In its inception and according to the war procedures of the epoch, the International Institute for Strategic Studies was mainly concerned with military and naval issues. Today, however, it covers "vital policy issues to both domestic and global audiences" by specialising in the analysis and discussion of "developments in military doctrine, defence management and defence procurement". RUSI's six major conferences indicate concerns relating to land forces, maritime security, air power perspectives, C4ISTAR (Command, Control, Communication, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance, Target Acquisition and Reconnaissance), critical national infrastructure and ballistic missile defence. Moreover, RUSI's publications enjoy a high recognition among professionals and international relations (IR) scholars. For instance, the RUSI journal, founded in 1857, is one of the leading journals covering international relations topics, along with other monographs series and policy papers such as RUSI *Defence Systems*, RUSI *Monitor*, *Whitehall Papers*, and *Whitehall Reports*.

RUSI aims to organise high-level events as a means to bring academics, policy-makers, officials and businesspeople closer together. The short distance between RUSI's central Whitehall location and the Ministry of Defence and parliament partly accommodate for such an endeavour. Contrary to other think tanks, RUSI is committed to transparency even when it comes to its 'established client list, which includes the Ministry of Defence (UK), the Department of Defence (US), the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (UK), the State Department (US), the European Union and a large number of international defence and security companies (see *RUSI Corporate Brochure*: 5). The

contribution of these official bodies to RUSI's financial maintenance through commissioned research initiatives is remarkable.

As proof of its reputation in British military circles, several media echoed the decision of former US President George W. Bush to only deliver a speech at an event co-hosted by RUSI in November 2003, ignoring the requests to attend parliament. During recent years, RUSI's members have witnessed speeches delivered by US General David H. Petraeus, Ambassador Mark Sedwill, and Liam Fox (UK Secretary of State for Defence). Furthermore, international expansion is among its latest strategies. Since 2007 RUSI has established satellite offices in Qatar and in the US in order to strengthen its global connections. As RUSI points out, 'the launch of RUSI (Qatar) is part of the institute's strategy to expand its defence and security research activities to key regions of the world'.[7] In other words, the opening of offices in the US and Qatar reflects main areas of conflict (the Middle East) and influence (US) of British foreign policy in the early twenty-first century.

4. Activities, topics and reputation

The aim of think tanks is to push governments towards a certain ideological direction. Ideology-related objectives are complex and pose temporary challenges. There is the challenge of influencing the overall direction of government policy, but there is also the need to influence specific decisions taken every day. The activities of think tanks attempt, thus, a dual function: to share daily concerns with decision-makers as well as spreading slogans through media. The way of analysing think tanks' contributions to the political debate is therefore manifold. Since many of the daily contacts are private, publications published by think tanks are a remarkable way to grasp the efforts of these kinds of actors to form opinions. One of the values of the publications is their proactive or reactive nature, being sensitive to government proposals or launching new proposals. In this sense, think tanks publish a wide range of publications, from books to newsletters. Organising events proves to be a useful way to convene members and experts under one roof whilst seeking media coverage.

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[7] Extract from RUSI's website. This refers to the reasons for establishing an office in Qatar. The text can be found at: http://www.rusiqatar.org/about_us.php (last accessed 05/01/2011).

Here the analysis is mainly based on events, journals, and publications for the period 2005–10. To begin with, we have documented the events into eight categories according to topics. Categories fall within an activity or a region (see Table 2). On the one hand, three categories were created to differentiate between issues relating to security and terrorism, economy and governance, and climate change. These three areas are particularly different from each other; items are grouped into: weaponry and military strategy (security and terrorism); economic crisis and government (economy and governance); and energy crises and climate (climate change). On the other hand, five categories account for issues related to five geopolitical areas in international relations. The first stands for United Nations (UN) affairs and the United States. The transatlantic issues and Latin America are included in this category, although they are proportionately small. The second category includes matters related to Russia and Asia; for example, politics in China and Russia, the emerging countries of the region, the state of democracy, and so on. The third category numbers events in Europe, the European Union and the United Kingdom, while the fourth category deals with events featuring themes with a focus on African countries. The last category focuses on a geographical area of particular importance in the last decade: the Middle East, including the conflicts in Iran, Iraq, Palestine, Israel, Qatar, Pakistan, and so forth.

[TABLE 2 about here]

Data indicate three general trends regarding think tanks' topics. First, three topics are covered by most think tanks, namely security and terrorism; the Middle East; and Russia/Asia. This is to a greater extent congruent with the government's policy priorities in the foreign realm. For instance, permanent references to *Terrorism* and *Afghanistan* could be found in UK government's national strategies such as *A Strong Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The National Security Strategy and Foreign and Commonwealth Office's Business Plan 2011–2015*. References to China and Russia are also frequent in the government agenda as well.

Second, Chatham House focuses on a larger number of topics in comparison with IISS and RUSI. Chatham House shows special interest in economy, climate change, and Africa. This allows Chatham House to forge a discourse not merely based on military issues, allowing a more heterogeneous membership base. Finally, IISS shows little

concern about UK and European issues. This reinforces the idea that the IISS seeks a membership different from other think tanks.

Reputation is an interesting point. One way of assessing reputation is by observing how prestigious the people invited to events are. For instance, referring to 2009 events, Chatham House was able to schedule talks from a large list of professors, researchers, MPs, ministers, Her Majesty's (HM) ambassadors, military, foreign presidents, international organisations' staff, business executives, non-governmental organisation (NGO) directors, and journalists. To name a very few, there were contributions from academics coming from prestigious universities (Oxford, Manchester, Warwick, Toronto, Leipzig, Sheffield); high representatives from the United Kingdom, United States, Denmark, Brazil, Lithuania, Hungary, and Namibia; staff from Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International; as well as newspaper correspondents from *Die Zeit*, *Newsweek*, and *Financial Times*. The IISS was also prominent in inviting experts and decision-makers such as Gordon Brown, David Miliband, and Asif Ali Zardari. RUSI shows a similar capability for organising events attended by experts. Overall, no big differences can be highlighted in terms of reputation. Perhaps Chatham House shows a larger network of contacts due to its extensive events programme, which reflects a higher number of resources indeed.

In fact, resources do matter, especially in funding a vigorous publishing service. Tables 3, 4 and 5 illustrate think tanks' publishing strategies. Chatham House provides a higher number of publications including two academic journals, summaries and briefing papers. On the contrary, the IISS is not particularly interested in supplying a large amount of publications. IISS has devoted special efforts in updating its 'Armed Conflict Database' and 'Strategic Survey', rather than focusing on competing with other think tanks' journals. Indeed, IISS' recruitment logic seems to be more focused on holding specialised summits (*Global Strategic Review*, the *Shangri-La Dialogue*, the *Manama Dialogue*, the *Bahrain Global Forum*, the *India Global Forum*, and the *IISS-JIIA Tokyo Conference*). Finally, RUSI is less ambitious than Chatham House, but remains fairly constant in the publication of its RUSI journal and the *RUSI Newsbrief*.

[TABLE 3 about here]
[TABLE 4 about here]

[TABLE 5 about here]

5. Public visibility

As a notion of power, the concept of visibility indicates quite accurately the public recognition of a given actor by considering that any grouping purporting to influence the government will fail unless its name appears in the media on a regular basis. Visibility becomes, therefore, a core ambition for think tanks. In this respect, "much of the important work in lobbying is in setting the agenda, in defining the alternatives for decision-makers, in gathering evidence, and in convincing others that certain types of evidence are germane to the decision at hand" (Baumgartner and Leech, 1998: 37–8). Think tanks want newspapers to echo their proposals to create the impression that some particular ideas they defend do really matter. Moreover, the impact of the Internet in politics is undeniable (Chadwick and Howard, 2008; Coleman and Blumler, 2009). That is also the case with the growing salience of blogs, Google, and YouTube as means of interacting politically. According to this, there is some practical interest in observing the think tanks' Internet visibility as well.

First, this paper explores visibility in terms of newspapers' citations. On the one hand, citations have been collected from 11 UK newspapers for the period 2005–10 (Table 6). On the other hand, we have gathered citations from newspapers all around the World, including UK newspapers (Table 7 and Figure 2). Table 6 depicts that Chatham House is the most cited think tank in UK newspapers, followed by the RUSI and the IISS. A more detailed analysis suggests that Chatham House's prominence is due to the frequency of its events. In general, newspapers echo key results in surveys, press releases, and speeches. They tend to warn of dangers associated with terrorism, the war in Iraq, the Middle East conflict, the situation of British troops abroad, and the role of government in international forums. Regarding ideological bias, data does not confirm any striking conclusion. Newspapers, whether conservative (for example, *The Times*, *The Daily Telegraph*) or liberal (such as *The Guardian*, *The Independent*), publish pieces of news from Chatham House in similar shares. *The Guardian*, a liberal newspaper, highlights the activity of RUSI, but *The Independent*, which is also a liberal newspaper, opts for limited coverage. *The Times* and *The Guardian*, probably the two British newspapers with higher prestige, mainly quote the IISS. Table 7 evidences that the IISS has less coverage in the international arena than Chatham House and RUSI, if

we take into account British newspapers. However, the number of citations of IISS increases if we only analyse foreign newspapers. In this case RUSI loses international prestige, while Chatham House remains the think tank with better access to international newspapers.

[TABLE 6 about here]

[TABLE 7 about here]

[FIGURE 2 about here]

Second, Table 8 shows the Internet visibility of Chatham House, the IISS and the RUSI in comparison with other UK, US, and European think tanks. The inclusion of think tanks follows McGann's 2009 list. The list has no thematic exclusion. Motivation for exclusion related to scarce presence on Facebook, YouTube and Twitter. This is the case for, for instance, the French Institute of International Relations (France), the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (Sweden), and the Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (Germany). Three comments may be noted: first, public policy think tanks have more followers and therefore more visibility. This gives them more opportunities to spread their messages. They are better able to raise awareness about sensitive issues by issuing crude campaigns to support, say, minorities. Second, Chatham House, the IISS and the RUSI's visibility on the Internet is very modest in comparative terms. Chatham House manages to be as visible as other American think tanks, but not as much visibility as the Council of Foreign Relations. And, third, one might think that such small presence on the Internet may well be caused by a rational, voluntary argument. Think tanks aiming to craft ideas on such contested issues as security and defence would be likely to avoid conflicting messages. They would rather prefer a much more elaborated debate in private events. In fact, think tanks have considerably increased the number of events in recent years. Considering an opposite point of view, the limited public dissemination of debates and opinions on sensitive issues can generate a democratic deficit. Getting opinions of think tanks could only be achieved through affiliation. This leads to deeper discussions about elitism in decision-making and citizen control of political activity.

[TABLE 8 about here]

6. Conclusion

This article has dealt with the challenging issue of think tanks' involvement in the political process. We have discussed theoretically the limitations related to the use of ideas in politics, as well as consistently presented the main characteristics and historical evolution of three major think tanks that are part of the network of actors focused on UK foreign policy and world affairs. After raising serious doubts about the quantification of the influence think tanks can exert on the government, we have chosen to focus the analysis on two aspects ('visibility' and 'activity'). In concert, these facets can, somehow, capture a consistent picture of the channels to exercise influence in the field of promotion and creation of ideas. Despite these methodological difficulties 'influence' is likely to remain one of the core topics in think tank research, and indeed for think tanks during their everyday activities. Influence, as decision-makers point out, is a key resource for think tanks. This section has shown that the way in which such influence is exerted varies from case to case. Chatham House defends its reputation as a less political invested and research-based venue. In this particular case, Chatham House relies on an ample research branch including a large academic collaboration. In so doing, Chatham House can be labelled as a 'research institute' which aims to shake the government's opinion. In terms of prestige, think tank scholars have broadly perceived Chatham House as the most influential institution, and our data confirm such a stance.

However, we should not forget the increasing salience of the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS). The IISS is less committed to public research than to convene well-known experts to discuss over specialised issues. This is a resource to attract new members looking for specific information in a non-academic format.

At this point, we challenge a critical dilemma: what is it that makes an influential think tank? Hybrid models as the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) seem likely to fail to be leaders in any field, whereas models designed to enhance network or either academic collaborators (Chatham House) or experts (IISS) are better able to concentrate efforts and resources and, therefore, be more effective. However, this statement is simple enough to lose explanatory strength. Other factors should be considered, such as the government's willingness to promote think tanks, showing friendly approaches, good performance of the leaders in penetrating the bureaucracy and generating political capital among officials, the typology of the think tanks' members and their demands,

and so forth. Because many questions remain unanswered, future research may be conducted as a multi-method study where new qualitative empirical data are collected. A wider selection of cases can benefit future research endeavours. It would be interesting to examine think tanks with different backgrounds and ideologies. And above all, future research should deal with the following question: do they employ different approaches, and if yes, why?

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Table 1. Think tanks' basic facts					
	Established	Location		Staff	
		Main	Other	Researchers	Others
Chatham House	1920	London	-	165	62
International Institute for Strategic Studies	1958	London	Singapore Bahrain US	25	41
Royal United Services Institute	1831	London	Qatar U.S.	77	24

Source: Selected think thanks' portfolios as mentioned in:

Chatham House: http://www.chathamhouse.org/

IISS: http://www.iiss.org/

RUSI: http://www.rusi.org/

(Last time acceded 05/01/2011)

Table 2. Think tanks' topics on event (2005-2010)								
Chatham House								
	Security & Terrorism	*Economy & Governance*	*Climate Change*	*World politics & U.S.*	*Russia & Asia*	*Europe*	*Africa*	*Middle East*	*Total*
2005	12	16	1	9	9	15	6	22	*90*
2006	15	19	5	20	17	12	12	20	*120*
2007	24	17	12	18	36	26	23	32	*188*
2008	28	47	15	26	83	26	40	40	*305*
2009	28	42	27	22	82	44	48	51	*344*
2010	43	49	13	20	91	50	53	33	*352*
IISS								
	Security & Terrorism	*Economy & Governance*	*Climate Change*	*World politics & U.S.*	*Russia & Asia*	*Europe*	*Africa*	*Middle East*	*Total*
2005	8	0	2	5	16	0	1	19	*51*
2006	24	0	0	9	18	6	1	28	*86*
2007	19	1	0	15	24	2	2	28	*91*
2008	17	0	0	10	36	8	3	19	*93*
2009	25	1	7	16	35	9	0	27	*120*
2010	40	3	7	13	26	10	3	33	*135*
RUSI								

	Security & Terrorism	Economy & Governance	Climate Change	World politics & U.S.	Russia & Asia	Europe	Africa	Middle East	Total
2005	20	1	0	5	0	16	1	4	47
2006	19	0	0	8	2	21	4	3	57
2007	26	1	3	15	6	18	4	12	85
2008	23	2	3	5	8	20	6	17	84
2009	21	0	2	10	3	18	3	16	73
2010	42	1	1	1	5	19	2	10	81

Source: Selected think thanks' events archives available online at:

Chatham House: http://www.chathamhouse.org/events

IISS: http://www.iiss.org/events-calendar/

RUSI: http://www.rusi.org/Events

(Last time acceded 05/01/2011)

Table 3. Chatham House' main publications (2005-2010)						
	Newsletters	Military balance	Adelphi Series	Strategic comments	Strategic Survey	Survival
2005	4	1	7	10	1	4
2006	4	1	7	10	-	4
2007	4	1	8	10	-	4
2008	4	1	8	10	1	6
2009	4	1	5	10	1	6
2010	4	1	6	12	1	6

Source: Chatham House's publications archive

Available online at http://www.chathamhouse.org/publications

(Last time acceded 05/01/2011)

Table 4. IISS' main publications (2005-2010)						
	Newsletters	*Military balance*	*Adelphi Series*	*Strategic comments*	*Strategic Survey*	*Survival*
2005	4	1	7	10	1	4
2006	4	1	7	10	-	4
2007	4	1	8	10	-	4
2008	4	1	8	10	1	6
2009	4	1	5	10	1	6
2010	4	1	6	12	1	6

Source: IISS' publications archive

Available online at http://www.iiss.org/publications/

(Last time acceded 05/01/2011)

Table 5. RUSI' main publications (2005-2010)							
	Newsbrief	*RUSI Defence Systems*	*RUSI Monitor*	*Whitehall Papers*	*Whitehall Reports*	*RUSI Journal*	*Books*
2005	12	3	10	2	n/a	6	n/a
2006	12	3	10	2	3	6	n/a
2007	12	3	10	-	6	6	n/a
2008	12	3	10	3	2	6	4
2009	9	3	4	3	1	6	1
2010	6	3	1	2	2	6	1

Source: RUSI's document archive

Available online at http://www.rusi.org/publications/

(Last time acceded 05/01/2011)

Table 6. Think tanks' UK newspapers' citations (2005-2010)			
Newspaper	**C. House**	**IISS**	**RUSI**
The Times	186	95	108
The Guardian	116	102	141
The Evening Standard	24	6	35
Daily Telegraph	109	45	91
The Observer	51	5	23
The Independent	157	34	46
Daily Express	23	6	33
Daily Mail	53	15	49
The Sun	7	11	23
Daily Mirror	32	8	30
Sunday Times	52	20	35
Total citations	*810*	*347*	*614*

Source: referenced newspapers' news archives

Table 7. Think tanks' major World-wide newspapers citations (2005-2010)					
Chatham House		**IISS**		**RUSI**	
Newspaper	*Citations*	*Newspaper*	*Citations*	*Newspaper*	*Citations*
Times (UK)	186	Guardian (UK)	102	Guardian (UK)	141
Independent (UK)	157	Times (UK)	95	Times (UK)	108
Guardian (UK)	116	Straits Times	87	Daily Telegraph (UK)	91
Daily Telegraph (UK)	109	New York Times	52	Daily Mail (UK)	49
Christian Science Monitor	93	Inter. Herald Tribune	47	Independent (UK)	46
The Australian	78	Daily Telegraph (UK)	45	Evening Standard (UK)	35
Daily Mail (UK)	53	Christian Science Monitor	38	Sunday Times (UK)	35
Sunday Times (UK)	52	The Australian	37	Herald - Glasgow (UK)	31
Observer (UK)	51	Independent (UK)	34	Scotsman (UK)	31
New Zealand Herald	39	Washington Post	31	Daily Express (UK)	33
Daily Mirror (UK)	32	Washington Times	30	Daily Mirror (UK)	30
Total citations	*966*	Total citations	*598*	Total citations	*630*

Source: referenced newspapers' news archives

Table 8. Think Tanks' Internet Visibility (as of January 2011)					
Name	**Country**	**Typology**	**Facebook followers**	**YouTube followers**	**Twitter followers**
Chatham House	**UK**	IR	6,569	228,405	21,289
IISS	**UK**	IR	154	72,733	10,715
RUSI	**UK**	IR	4,594	42,038	5,894
Amnesty International	UK	Human Rights	57,750	2,956,807	54,928
Adam Smith Institute	UK	Economy/ Public policy	6,127	86,479	9,909
Brookings Institution	US	Economy/ Public policy	13,188	178,936	13,572
Carnegie Endowment for International Peace	US	IR	8,485	72,211	13,348
Council of Foreign Relations	US	IR	40,612	581,345	41,209
RAND Corporation	US	Public policy	7,465	21,280	11,848
Heritage Foundation	US	Public policy	421,706	2,956,134	186,307
Center for Strategic and International Studies	US	IR	63,124	124,155	2,448
Cato Institute	US	Public policy	113,236	1,826,119	128,781
International Crisis Group	Belgium	IR	14,946	10,572	23,969
Centre for European Policy Studies	Belgium	European issues	1,383	7,375	-
Bertelsmann Stiftung	Germany	Public policy	1,789	743,736	1,899
Fraser Institute	Canada	Public policy	2,448	172,267	8,133

Source: Facebook's, YouTube's and Twitter's sites for every think-tank (Last time acceded 05/01/2011)

Figure 1. Think tanks' staff and researchers (as of January 2011)
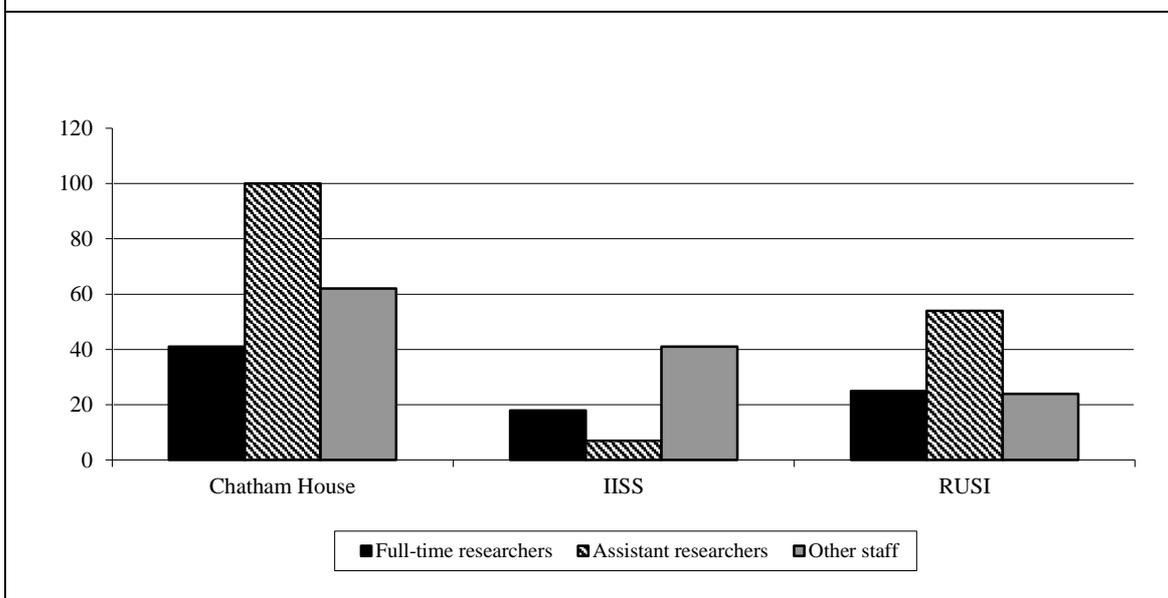
Source: Think tanks' staff portfolios available online at:

Chatham House: http://www.chathamhouse.org/about-us/staff

IISS: http://www.iiss.org/about-us/staffexpertise/

RUSI: http://www.rusi.org/about/staff/

(Last time acceded 05/01/2011)

Figure 2. Think tanks' newspapers' citations (as of January 2011)
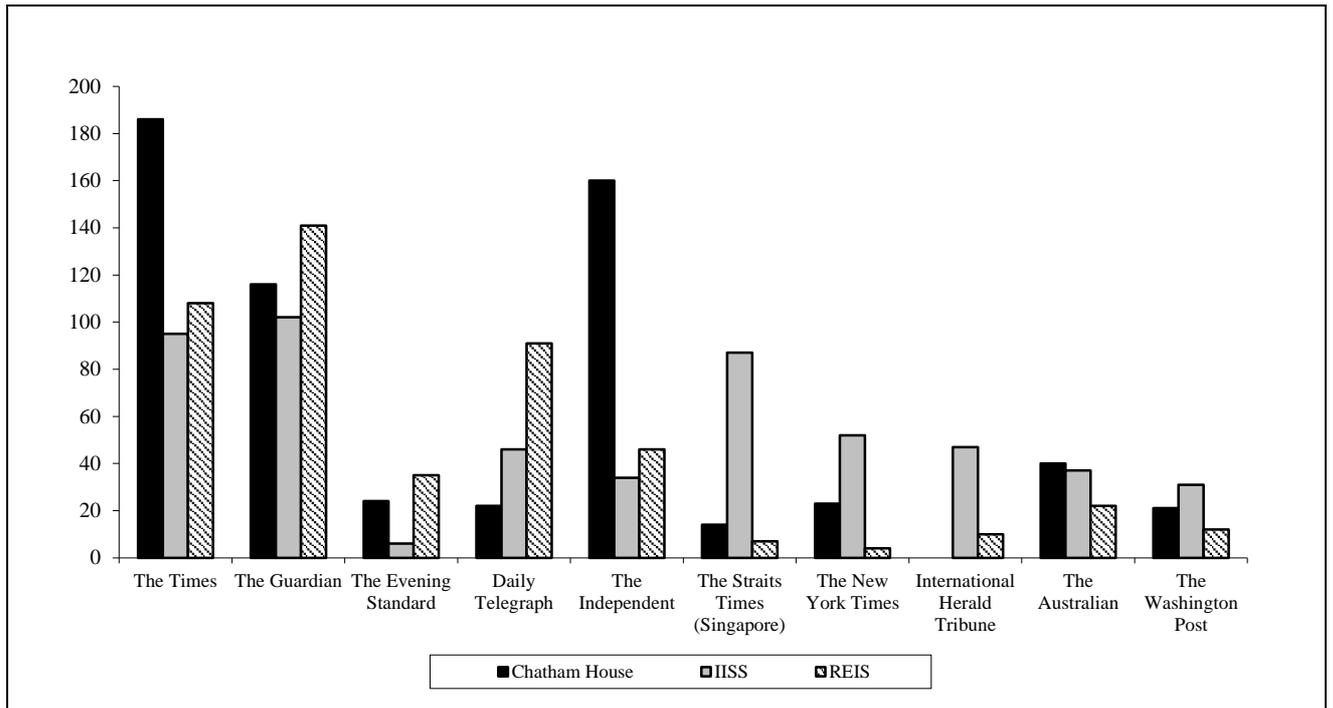
Source: referenced newspapers' news archives (Last time acceded 05/01/2011)