SELF-BLINDED ORACLES IN DC'S FUTURE MARKET FOR SECURITY*

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Abstract: This paper studies the making future claims of security by a large selection of experts in D.C.'s think tanks. Although the future is a shared concern on D.C.'s marketplace of ideas and in think tanks, as knowledge producers, experts appear as 'self-blinded' and produce 'self-blinding prophecies'. This paper studies the language of future claims and the role of think tanks in the production of anticipatory knowledge. It discusses how claims about the future are prioritised and highlights the focal points around which experts converge. It analyses the reasons for such homogeneous thinking lying in the experts' social profiles, in the structure of D.C.'s marketplace and in its norms. The 'future' has two major latent functions. On the one hand, past-oriented thinking helps create surprises when political events break away from the limited sets of issues studied by experts. On the other, the 'future' has integrative functions: it serves as a communication tool for experts that gather around shared horizons of expectation and create a collective web of meaning.

Keywords: sociology, future, security, think tanks, experts

This article studies the future claims of a wide range of security experts in a selection of think tanks from the Washington DC area. While sociology has mostly discussed self-fulfilling prophecies[1], this paper sheds light on another function of future claims. For both social and epistemic reasons that will appear in this article, as collectives, think tanks act as 'self-blinded' oracles and produce 'self-blinding prophecies'.[2] I argue that future claims are one main dimension of the epistemic limits of the DC's industry of applied knowledge. Indeed, future claims concentrate on focal points

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1   Robert K. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure* (New York: Free Press, 1968), pp. 475–490. Since then, this question has been taken over by other sociologists. Donald MacKenzie, *An Engine, Not a Camera: How Financial Models Shape Markets* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006); M. Biggs, 'Self-Fulfilling Prophecies', in P. Hedström, P. Bearman (eds.), *Oxford Handbook of Analytical Sociology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). An alternative is also the 'self-negating prophecy'. For an overview in the context of international politics, see: David Houghton, 'The Role of Self-Fulfilling and Self-Negating Prophecies in International Relations', *International Studies Review,* 1(2009), pp. 552–584. This is, of course, an underlying theme in the discussion of the 'security dilemma' and other perception based social and psychological mechanisms. Robert Jervis, 'Cooperation under the Security Dilemma', *World Politics*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (1978), pp. 167–213.
2   On the blindness of defence intellectuals see B. Kuklick, *Blind Oracles Intellectuals and War from Kennan to Kissinger* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

and, as such, contribute to the making of surprises when events break away from these pre-established sets of issues and trajectories.[3]

Future claims have another latent function.[4] They act as facilitators of social integration and are not necessarily about the future. In the interstitial position think tanks occupy, future claims' role is to form a strong bond between different overlapping groups, mostly expertise and government.[5] As shown in this paper, experts are deeply embedded in the policy world. The 'future' is a language and a topic that experts, the media and policy makers share and as such, it operates as a potent cement in the social fabric of DC and is a web of meaning that brings together experts and their audience. In his days, while promoting the use of scenarios and 'alternative futures', Herman Kahn, one of the most well-known experts at the Rand Corporation and the founder of the Hudson Institute in the early 60s, already stressed the importance of their ability to "improve intellectual communication and cooperation".[6] Contemporary DC perpetuates this tradition.

The future as a social construction appears as a relevant theme of study in the literature on risk and security. Drawing from Foucault, sociologists of international relations point at the role anticipations about security threats have as they participate in the emergence and consolidation of a 'governmentality of catastrophe' and a 'governmental *dispositif* of risk'.[7] Anticipatory claims are one of the features of 'fields of expertise' or constitutive of social 'fields' where mechanisms of habitus prevail.[8] Hence, ideas would be misleading, because knowledge producers are manipulated by power. This analysis is shared in the wider community of commentators of international politics and prevails in Bourdieusian political sociology.

My analysis differs from these various explanatory and normative accounts. The purpose of this paper is to highlight the deliberately approximate epistemic status and content of security future claims and to explain their social role. Future claims are not the expression of think tankers' surbordination to power. They are a mode of existence for think tanks that act as facilitators in the circulation of ideas in DC and the integration of its different players, that is, experts and policy makers.[9]

Although it analyses the production of expertise, the wide political science literature on think tanks does not specifically discuss the making of future claims.[10]

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3 On focal points, see Thomas Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960).

4 On manifest and latent functions: Robert Merton, *op. cit.*, pp. 74–94.

5 On interstitiality, see: Gil Eyal, L. Buchholz, 'From the Sociology of Intellectuals to the Sociology of Interventions', *Annual Review of Sociology*, 36 (2010), pp. 117–137.

6 Herman Kahn, 'The Alternative World Future Approach', in Morton Kaplan (ed.), *New Approaches to International Relations* (New York: Saint Martin's Press, 1968), p. 84.

7 See Claudia Aradau, R. van Munster, *Politics of Catastrophe Genealogies of the Unknown* (London: Routledge, 2011); Louise Amoore, Marieke de Goede (eds.), *Risk and the War on Terror* (London: Routledge, 2008).

8 Didier Bigo *et al*, *The Field of the EU Internal Security Agencies* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2007). For a Bourdieusian approach in the sociology of international security, see Frédéric Mérand, 'Pierre Bourdieu and the Birth of European Defense', *Security Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (2010), pp. 342–374; Didier Bigo, 'Pierre Bourdieu and International Relations: Power of Practices, Practices of Power', *International Political Sociology*, 5 (4), (2011), pp. 225–258; Rebecca Adler-Nissen, *Bourdieu in International Relations Rethinking Key Concepts in IR* (London: Routledge, 2012); Ariel Colonomos, *Selling the Future. The Perils of Global Predictions* (London and New York: Hurst and Oxford University Press, 2015).

9 It is also possible to elaborate an empirically informed normative analysis of future claims. From a normative perspective, one of the direct consequences of the sociological analysis I develop in this article is to show the conformism of think tanks and analyse its moral consequences. However, normative analysis is not the purpose of this article, I develop a normative analysis elsewhere.

10 Among others, see: John L. Campbell and Ove K. Pedersen, *The National Origins of Policy Ideas* (Princeton:

Think tanks are often described as operators on a marketplace of ideas.[11] However, the temporal dimension of their ideas is a question that fails to be addressed. It is nonetheless one of the major idiosyncrasies of this epistemic community as it will appear in this article and one of its self-proclaimed landmarks.[12] This article underlines this dimension while, from this angle, developing a better understanding of the social role of ideas in DC security circles.

This article also wishes to contribute to the growing literature in the social sciences on predictions and scenarios in international politics.[13] It complements the analyses of future claims by epistemic communities such as nuclear specialists, demographers, rating agencies or international relations experts.[14] This article's goal is also to discuss another case of a well structured epistemic community that responds to a specific demand of future oriented expertise, to describe how these future claims are elaborated and converge as well as to analyse their effects.

The sociological methods I use are both qualitative and quantitative. I have undertaken forty interviews mainly in Washington and in New York, with members of leading think tanks and personnel in military academies and governmental agencies including intelligence experts.[15] The purpose of these interviews was to understand the role of those analysts whose manifest function would be to add value to an already existing body of knowledge while studying their modes of socialisation in

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Princeton University Press, 2014); Diane Stone, *Capturing the Political Imagination Think Tanks and the Policy Process* (London: Frank Cass, 1996); James G. McGann, Kent Weaver (eds.), *Think Tanks and Civil Societies* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2000); Donald Abelson, *A Capitol Idea Think Tanks and US Foreign Policy* (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006); Diane Stone and Andrew Denham (eds.), *Think Tanks Traditions Policy Research and the Politics of Ideas* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004); Donald Abelson, *American Think tanks and their Role in US Foreign Policy* (London: Routledge, 1996); Thomas Medvetz, *Think Tanks in America* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2012); Andrew Rich, *Think Tanks, Public Policy and the Politics of Expertise* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

11   Diane Stone, *Capturing the Political Imagination Think Tanks and the Policy Process, op. cit.* See 'Chapter 9: *Second Hands Dealers in Ideas'*, pp.137–151; James G. McGann, Kent Weaver (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 13; Donald Abelson, *A Capitol Idea, op. cit.* See 'Chapter 4: *Open for Business: Think Tanks and the Marketplace of Ideas'*, pp. 110–126.

12   On epistemic communities: Peter Haas, 'Introduction: Epistemic Communities and International Policy Coordination', *International Organization*, Vol. 46, No. 1 (1992), pp. 1–36.

13   Heikki Patomäki, *The Political Economy of Global Security War, Future Crises and Changes in Global Governance* (London: Routledge, 2008); Chiara De Franco, Christoph Meyer (eds.), *Forecasting, Warning, and Responding to Transnational Risks* (Houndmills: Basingstoke, Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); David Houghton, *'The Role of Self-Fulfilling, op. cit.*; Ariel Colonomos, *Selling the Future, op. cit.*

14   Benoît Pelopidas, 'The Oracles of Proliferation. How Experts Maintain a Biased Historical Reading that Limits Policy Innovation', *Nonproliferation Review*, vol. 18 n°1 (March 2011), pp. 297–314; Hervé Le Bras, 'L'horoscope des populations', *Vingtième Siècle*, 1, Janvier (1984), pp. 75–85; Roundtable, '"General, I Have Fought Just as Many Nuclear Wars as You Have': Forecasts, Future Scenarios, and the Politics of Armageddon", *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 117, No. 5 (2012), pp. 1431–1460. Grégoire Mallard and Pierre Pénet, 'Seeing Like a Credit Rating Agency: The constitution of Financial Uncertainties During the Greek Sovereign Debt Crisis', in Cooper Hawthorne (ed.), *Financial Crises: Identification, Forecasting and Effects on Transition Economies* (New York: Nova Publishers, 2013), pp. 164–174; Ariel Colonomos, *'La notation financière des Etats', Communications*, 93 (2013); Philip Tetlock, *Expert Political Judgment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

15   I undertook fieldwork in Washington (March and May 2011) and New York (2010, 2011 and 2012). Quantitative data has been extracted from the web in August 2011.

their interstitial role.[16] I have used extensive quantitative data,[17] as well as internet tools in order to process data available on the web pages of these organisations and establish a web mapping and a cartography of these organisations.[18] I have also worked on reports published by the think tanks and governmental agencies.[19]

The three major political ruptures of the last decades (the fall of the Berlin wall, 9/11 and the fall of some of the major Arab regimes) have caught security experts off guard.[20] Indeed, as a collective, experts expressed views that did not capture these turning points and looked at the future in other directions.[21] Based on an analysis of contemporary security issues, this article explains why experts are 'self-blinded', that is, why their opinions converge on linear paths and why, therefore, their future claims help create surprises when radical changes happen in international politics. However, making very approximate future claims does not seem to be a problem in DC's small world as these future claims have an integrative function in DC's security world. In turn, these social integration mechanisms reinforce experts' blindness as they strengthen the homogeneity of this milieu and the biases of its members.

Sections 1 and 2 describe and analyse the formation of future claims. In section 1, I discuss how the future is formatted in DC's marketplace of ideas and the predominant role of the US national interest in future scenarios. Section 2 explores the different focal points around which future claims gather and their 'tunnelling effect'. Sections 3 and 4 explain why ideas about the future converge and participate to the self-blinding of think tanks experts. While stressing the homogeneity of the experts' community, section 3 explains the formation of these focal points by looking at the social profiles of a sample of about 400 think tank analysts. Moreover, as I discuss in section 4, DC's future market for security is structured by solidarism within the think tanks' world that reinforces conformism and the self-blinding mechanism in the face of the future. This solidarism is reinforced by groupthink, as, notably, experts face important normative pressures when they deliberate over future events.[22]

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16   See annex for the list of these organisations. Among the great number of think tanks that can be found in DC, a portion of them has been selected from the ranking list http://www.gotothinktank.com/thinktank/ (the top portion); some other organisations that are significant for the purposes of this study have been added, because they are relevant as opinion providers about the future of international politics (and therefore security). The study on the language they use when they make anticipations (section 1) includes 11 organisations. The study on the sites' content (sections 2) include 8 organisations. The study on the experts' profile (section 3) includes 15 organisations. For the sake of clarity and because focal points are determined by the biggest organisations, I've reduced the number of think tanks in the second section. In section 3, I have used a wider sample in order to track possible anomalies in the experts' profiles. Section 1 looks for what is the experts' common language and does not necessitate a wider sample of organisations.

17   I have worked on quantitative data and statistics based on the ample information available on these organisations' websites. Many of them include more than 50,000 pages and in some cases the number is superior to 100,000. I have collaborated with Sciences Po's Medialab and Sciences Po's Map department to process a wide collection of these data.

18   In collaboration with the Sciences Po Medialab, I have mostly used Navicrawler data processing programme (figure 4) as well as other data processing tools, which show the percentage of pages (figure 1) on these organizations' sites where the term searched appears at least once (a Lippmannian device operating as a Google scraper, https://wiki.digitalmethods.net/Dmi/ToolLippmannianDevice).

19   I have used the NIC (CIA) report that establishes scenarios for the future (NIC, 2008 and 2013).

20   On 9/11 and the failures of intelligence in think tanks: Donald Abelson, *A Capitol Idea, op. cit.,* p. 209.

21   On turning points, see: Andrew Abbott, *Time Matters: On Theory and Method* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2001), pp. 240–260.

22   On groupthink, see Irving Janis, *Victims of Groupthink* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1972).

Section 1: FRAMING THE FUTURE IN DC'S MARKETPLACE

Think tanks are numerous in the United States, as compared to other parts of the world, where for cultural, political, fiscal and legal reasons they play a much less important role. There are about 1800 think tanks in the United States, nearly 400 in DC alone.[23] Their role is to provide expertise in the realm of public policy and 'sell' their ideas. They seek to have their views quoted by policy-makers, statesmen, politicians, the military or the media and increase the impact of their views on public policy and thereby enhance their credibility and their reputation.

This high concentration of expertise in DC makes it a unique case among the different cities and countries where think tanks are based.[24] DC characterises itself by a very intense level of interaction within the think tanks world and between think tankers and practitioners and journalists. Ideas about the future resonate all the more in DC, where the future of the world is said to depend upon the decision of US policy makers. Future claims are in part a response to collective expectations. Practitioners, journalists and scholars who visit DC are looking for signposts of the world's future that they will find both in policy decisions and the comments that are made by think tankers.

Futures as intermediate public goods

Future claims are being 'sold' in DC's archetypal marketplace in the field of security. When traded on a 'marketplace', ideas are shared public goods structured in packages.[25] In such a marketplace, these centres strive for their reputation and for donations. However, these organisations operate within the same environment and are also highly cooperative.[26] Indeed, as will be shown in the further sections, experts share the same paradigms, ideas circulate widely and openly and there is a high degree of solidarity among experts.

Yet, future claims are a specific genre of public goods.[27] The two principles that define public goods – that is, non rivalry and non excludability – can apply. Indeed, as for the former, once research is being published, sharing these ideas is costless. On the contrary, it is very important to have one's own work quoted by colleagues. Their non excludable character is more an open question since future claims have both a public and private dimension. On the one hand, they are made publicly and appear in reports and in the numerous publications that are made available online on these centres' websites. On the other, they are also being debated within some of the private meetings that think tanks organise. Therefore, future claims are not pure public good.

23   J. McGann, *The Global "Go-To Think tanks"*: *The Leading Public Policy Research Organizations in the World Final United Nations University Edition*, 2011, p. 18. Available at: http://www.gotothinktank.com/global-%E2%80%9Cgo-to-tanks-leading-public-policy-research-organizations-world/

24   On contrasting knowledge regimes and traditions, see John Cambpell and Ove Pedersen, *op. cit.* Diane Stone, Andrew Denham and Mark Garnett (eds.), *Think Tanks across Nations a Comparative Approach* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998).

25   Richard Sparrow, Robert Goodin, 'The Competition of Ideas: Market or Garden?', *Critical Review of Social and Political Philosophy*, Vol. 4, No. 2, Summer (2001), p. 48.

26   Donald Abelson, *A Capitol Idea,* p. 110 and ff.

27   On ideas as public goods, see Alvin Goldman, *Knowledge in a Social World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 203. Future claims are a specific category of ideas that are both public and confidential.

Think tanks' ideas about the future show a certain degree of ambivalence for another reason. Although these ideas have a global reach, they are mostly addressed to US institutions from a very local perspective and thus could not entirely be defined as global goods.[28]

Future claims in think tanks combine some of the characteristics of global public goods and other characteristics of local club goods.[29] Indeed, the worthiness of the private value of think tankers' analyses largely depend upon the public reputation of their organisation, hence the degree through which their ideas spread and are quoted in the media. Overall, these future claims fall into the category of intermediate global public goods.[30]

Futures as conversational topics

As we are reminded by Richard Danzig, chairman of the Board of the Center for a New American Security (CNAS), "the inclination to predict is deeply embedded in U.S. institutions."[31] By producing future claims, think tanks respond to the demand that emanates from these institutions. Indeed, the title of one of the CNAS latest annual conferences (2012) – 'Rethinking US Security: Navigating a World in Transition'– is very telling of how think tanks frame the future of international security and to whom these ideas are addressed and the reasons why they are publicised.[32]

One of the very distinctive features of the language that its participants make use of – that is, the prevalent keywords in their sessions – lies precisely in the future-oriented mode of framing international security. This also very strongly appears in the keynote address ('the Asia Pacific Century'). As it is very often the case, this public event gathers members of the host organisation and other think tanks, policy makers, retired military, journalists, private consultants, academics. It is also an opportunity for its participants to establish connections and networks (this is *explicitly* stated in the programme). As this example clearly shows, future claims have a hybrid status. Indeed, think tanks are ranked and strive for social recognition and celebrity. They therefore need to build a strong public image, diffuse and share their ideas. However, think tanks also operate privately and confidentially and deliberately create an atmosphere of exclusiveness. In this private space, the access to future oriented

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28   Joseph Stiglitz, 'Knowledge as Global Public Good', in Inge Kaul, Isabelle Grunberg, Marc Stern (eds.), *Global Public Goods: International Cooperation in the 21st Century* (New York: Oxford, 1999, pp. 308–325. DC's think tanks are deeply anchored in local traditions. Diane Stone and Andrew Denham, *op. cit.* p. 48.

29   They do not match the characteristics of club goods either as it is very rewarding for think tanks to reach a great audience at a global scale notably through the media. James Buchanan, 'An Economic Theory of Club Goods', *Economica*, Vol. 32, No. 125, 1965, pp. 1–14.

30   Inge Kaul, Isabelle Grunberg, Marc Stern (eds.), op. cit., p. 13. See also Charles P. Kindleberger, 'International Public Goods without International Government', *The American Economic Review*, Vol. 76, No. 1, March, (1986), pp. 1–13.

31   The literature on think tanks has not emphasised this idiosyncrasy sufficiently, which makes think tanks in DC different from expertise in other countries. Richard Danzig, *Dancing in the Dark Ten Propositions About Prediction and National Security*, Washington DC, Center for a New American Security, October 2011, p. 8. Danzig is also a senior analyst at CNAS as well as at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) and other US institutions.

32   http://www.cnas.org/CNAS2012. On foreign policy as the most prestigious domain of research in think tanks: Diane Stone, *Capturing the Political Imagination, op. cit.* See Chapter 12, 'The Foreign Policy Club'.

analysis about international security is a mark of distinction.[33] The 'future' is something secret and only a happy few are entitled to consult the Oracles.[34]

Whether DC meetings such as these serve as para-diplomacy, as can be seen in other parts of the world where think tanks have a relational role in drafting ideas that are part of diplomatic processes, is highly questionable.[35] DC serves as a hub in the global marketplace of ideas in international security and foreign leaders are invited to give presentations in the main think tanks in Washington. However these occasions hardly prolong into fast track negotiations or diplomatic agreements. Moreover, a high degree of insularity prevails despite the fact that there are some attempts to internationalise think tanks.[36]

These meetings where think tanks open their doors to practitioners and journalists have a primary social function. They are facilitators of a process of socialisation where the future is a gathering point for DC's small world of security. One of the best examples of this operative mode is the Council of Foreign Relations, that has in fact launched a monthly *Contingency Plan Roundtable Series* of meetings that are not accessible to the wider public. The *Center for Preventive Action* (CPA), one of the CFR's units, provides at the beginning of each year, a list of scenarios about events that might occur over the next 18 months time frame.[37] The group that is composed of CFR staff and members who mostly come from the US government gathers with an informed expert to discuss a possible scenario about the future of a conflict, the likelihood of an attack that would hurt US interests or the future of a political regime. Although the meetings are private, the scenarios are then made public online.[38] Another good example is also the work of the National Intelligence Committee (CIA) that regularly publishes reports on the future of world politics. The CIA regularly gathers experts from think tanks and uses these discussions in the drafting of their reports (NIC, 2008 and 2013). This paradox – the willingness to be highly visible

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33 Pierre Bourdieu, *La Distinction critique sociale du jugement* (Paris: Minuit, 1979).
34 We may however question the fact that the closed seminars they organize provide some information that is radically different from the one that is publicly available. Indeed, most of the information processed by experts is open access.
35 Security centres and transnational epistemic communities may facilitate unofficial policy dialogues. David Capie and Brendan Taylor, 'The Shangri-La Dialogue and the Institutionnalization of Defence Diplomacy', *The Pacific Review*, Vol. 23, No. 3, (2010), pp. 359–376. Experts can play a role within epistemic communities that include governmental officials and NGOs in Track II diplomacy. Sheldon Simon, 'Evaluating Track II Approaches to Security Diplomacy in the Asia Pacific: the CSCAP Experience', *The Pacific Review*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (2002), pp. 167–200. However, even in contexts where those dialogues exist, we see an inability of think tankers to rise above the views of their national governments. See Amitav Acharya, 'Engagement or Entrapment? Scholarship and Policymaking on Asian Regionalism', *International Studies Review*, 13 (2011), pp. 12–17. As it will be shown further, this is most extreme in the case of experts in DC. Non-American think tanks seem to be more willing to adopt a global and diversified approach to the framing of their research. Although, even in this case, the globalisation of think tanks may have been part of a set of expectations that prevailed in the late 90s and in the early 2000s about the role of non-state actors in international politics and that have, in part, remained unfulfilled. Diane Stone, 'The 'Policy Research' Knowledge Elite and Global Policy Processes', in Daphné Josselin, William Wallace (eds.), *Non-State Actors in World Politics* (London, Palgrave, 2001), pp. 113–132.
36 Some US think tanks have affiliates in other countries. See Stone and Denham, *op. cit.*, p. 48. Some of these centres have contacts with foreign institutions as is, for example, the case of the Center for Transatlantic Relations that has partnerships with various German foundations. http://transatlantic.sais-jhu.edu
37 http://www.cfr.org/thinktank/cpa/index.html
38 http://www.cfr.org/projects/world/center-for-preventive-action-contingency-roundtable-series/pr1412#publications

and also preserve a degree of confidentiality – is well expressed in the 'Chatham House rule' that many think tanks are proud to apply.[39]

Publicly and privately, the future is both a space of discussion that brings together members of DC's security world, think tanks being key players and most often the hosts of these events. The future is both a communicative tool and a conversational topic. To a certain extent, think tanks are comparable to a 'gentleman's clubs' where, in 19th century England, betting (therefore making future claims) was one of the main activities of their members.[40]

Semantic, epistemic and strategic divisions of labour in future telling

In the think tanks' community, the future appears to be a mode of establishing one's identity, notably vis-à-vis the academic world.[41] As we are told by one of your interviewees, academics mostly study the past[42], as, for example, their preference for issues such as the First World War would illustrate.[43] This expert followed by saying that there was initially in the discipline of international relations a reluctance to study novel issues that look at how future events unfold, such as private military companies or child soldiers. Ultimately, according to his view, these became part of the academic discussion, but researchers in think tanks initiated and pushed the debate significantly further because they were given more freedom to investigate new global challenges. Experts are eager to differentiate themselves from old-fashioned academics and adopt the future as an ethos that is meant to signal modernity. The preference for the future in think tanks also signals action over passivity.[44]

The 'future' operates as a label within the DC security world. It is indeed one of most used terminologies on the think tanks' websites. At Brookings, the term future appears on 37,900 pages. It shows on 34,200 pages at NAF, or 18,400 at the CFR.

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39 Accordingly, participants to a meeting are free to use the information received (during a meeting at the think tank), but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker, nor that of any other participant may be revealed.

40 P. Rhode, K. Stumpf, 'Historical Political Futures Markets: An International Perspective', *NBER Working Paper*, No. 14377 (2008), p. 4. It is also worthwhile noting that the Chatham House rule was established in London. CFR membership is by invitation only. Chatham house served as a model for the CFR when it was founded.

41 Think tankers often see academic scholars as too disconnected from reality. A future oriented approach clearly signals their interest in policy relevant issues. John Campbell and Ove K. Pedersen, *op. cit.*, pp. 57–59.

42 This view leaves aside an important debate within the international relations community about whether scholars of the field should focus on the past, the present or, eventually, the future. On the one hand, a majority of scholars would agree that the discipline of international relations focuses essentially on the past. See Alexander Wendt, 'Driving with the Rearview Mirror: on the Rational Science of Institutional Design', *International Organization*, Vol. 55, No. 4 (2001), p. 1022. Moreover, working on contemporary issues presupposes that these events have already occurred and that they are already past. On the other hand, albeit it is a difficult task, few specialists make the case that international relations can and or should establish scenarios. Steven Bernstein, Ned Lebow, Janice Gross Stein, S. Weber, 'God Gave Physics the Easy Problems: Adapting Social Sciences to an Unpredictable World', *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 6, No. 43 (2000), pp. 43–76. Heikki Patomäki, op. cit. Even fewer would say that social sciences should establish predictions. Bruce Bueno de Mesquita, *Predicting Politics* (Athens: Ohio State University Press, 2002). Some historians would also underline that IR is future-oriented because its specialists have faced a social demand from outside this emerging discipline by those who have wanted to know about the future of war and peace. John Lewis Gaddis, 'International Relations Theory and the End of the Cold War', *International Security*, Vol. 17, No. 3 (1992/1993), pp. 5–58.

43 This fact (the role of the study of the First World War in IR scholarship) is not inconsistent. The conclusions drawn from these premises are less convincing.

44 As we will see in the further section, these lines of divide are highly questionable.

Other data coming from Google scraping show that, on average, the word appears, in the fifteen organisations I have investigated, on more than thirty per cent of the total number of pages of their sites.[45] The Hudson Institute perpetuates the tradition set by

Future (max : 59.8%)

aei.org brookings.edu carnegieendowment.org cato.org cfr.org cnas.org csis.org heritage.org hudson.org lexingtoninstitute.org newamerica.net rand.org transatlantic.sais-jhu.edu usip.org

its founder: 'future' appears on nearly 60 per cent of its webpages.[46]

Figure 1

Although 'future' is the prominent and generic label that signals future telling, there are different categories of future claims. Epistemically, we can dissociate at least two analytical models.[47] A prediction is understood as an act of stating beforehand the coming of a specific event or an identified outcome. It can be conditional and also be expressed in probabilistic terms. Mathematical models or predictive markets are used to make predictions, notably in the field of international security.[48] Bruce Bueno de Mesquita does consulting with security agencies. As for predictive markets, the Pentagon announced in 2003 that it wanted to launch a prediction market on the future of security that, among other things would have indicated the likelihood of a future terrorist attack.[49] However, think tanks do not favour predictive markets for reasons that will be discussed below.[50]

A forecast is an anticipation of a course of action. It can be expressed in probabilistic terms of the occurrence of an event that is conditioned by other events that are also valued in probabilistic terms. If event A occurs (probabilities for it to occur are 'x'), then C will occur (probabilities, in this context, for C to occur are 'y'), the overall probability for C to occur is 'z' ('x∗y').[51] Depending on the different options created by the probabilities, a forecast might include different scenarios that rely on 'plots' and include 'wild cards'.[52]

These epistemic differences are worthwhile noting. However, in practice, the line between predictions and scenarios is considerably blurred. The future is an intermediate public goal whose production requires craftsmanship. As craftsmen, think

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45   For a list of these organisations, see Annex.

46   This tag cloud indicates the percentage of the use of keywords within the different websites (the percentage of the pages where the term appears).

47   On the epistemology of future claims, see: Nicolas Rescher, *Predicting the Future: An Introduction to the Theory of Forecasting* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998). Gregor Betz, *Prediction or Prophecy? The Boundaries of Economic Foreknowledge and their Socio-Political Consequences* (Wiesbaden: DUV, 2006).

48   Bruce Bueno de Mesquita, *op. cit.*; J. Wolfers, E. Zitzewitz, 'Prediction markets', *Journal of Economic Perspectives,* 18 (2004), pp. 107–126.

49   The FutureMap project was developed by The Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA). The Congress blocked this initiative. However, IARPA (Intelligence Advanced Research Projects Agency at the Pentagon) has launched a new experiment. Its first step was to assess the value of predictive markets as reliable predictive tools in policy (formerly at http://forecastwe.org/) . It is now in its third phase, the good judgment project, where new experiments are carried out, see http://www.goodjudgmentproject.com.

50   Rand is experimenting with its own predictive markets, but it is internal to the organisation, therefore looses its meaning as future markets are designed to aggregate diverse opinions and mitigate the biases of shared mindsets.

51   J. Freeman, B. Job, 'Scientific Forecasts and Predictions: Problems of Definition and Epistemology', *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (1979), pp. 113–143.

52   Steven Bernstein et al, *op. cit*.

tankers assemble different forms of knowledge in order to make their product attractive primarily in the small world they live and eventually beyond DC and the US. A forecast might include multiple scenarios and a time range, within which this event is likely to occur. When think tankers make future claims, these two modes, predictions and scenarios, overlap. Indeed, forecasts often include predictions as elements of the more comprehensive forecast.

Mostly for strategic rhetorical reasons that differ from epistemic concerns, experts do not favour the use of the term 'prediction'. Among the different terms that can be used to refer to future events, it is ranked very low. In relative terms, it appears the most frequently on the New America Foundation website (2.3 per cent) or the Rand Corporation (2 per cent). As opposed to predictions, experts usually make scenarios, a term that is much more significantly used on their sites.[53] A scenario is essentially a 'story' where two temporal points are bridged by the analysis of a chain of events whose plausibility ought to be tested. It is a qualitative analysis of social interactions, as in the scenarios elaborated during the CFR's Contingency Plan Roundtable series of meetings.

Moreover, there are strong reasons for members of think tanks to favour scenarios over predictions. As predictions are more and more elaborated through the use of mathematical models or predictive markets, if these tools were to become predominant, this would seriously harm experts whose social role runs the risk of becoming obsolete.

Scenarios operate as magnets that attract converging views in the public arena created by the collaborative efforts of think tanks and the media. As in the formation of knowledge from a Kuhnian perspective, scenarios about the future aggregate around 'normal science'.[54] The structure of scenarios is cumulative; every future teller adds his or her findings to its initial core. Experts are similar to the flies depicted by Popper who assemble in clouds, they meet and converge around a question while adding their share to an initial debate.[55] They respond to a social demand that calls for intrigue solving where pessimism and the logic of fear are usually prevalent.[56]

The national interest as a plot

When they make claims about the future, experts usually develop scenarios that follow two narrative rules. As a starting point, these stories are to be told because they are part of what is believed to be a domain of high importance for the 'US national interest'. Then, as these narratives unfold, they are based on trends.[57] They start with what is perceived as the current state of affairs and then extend them to the horizon, to which it is anticipated the forces at play will lead.

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53 It appears on more than 8 per cent of the pages of the Hudson Institute or on 7 per cent of the pages of the Carnegie website.
54 Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1962).
55 Karl Popper, *Objective Knowledge: an Evolutionary Approach* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972).
56 Risk is the only other temporal category that think tanks use significantly in their vocabulary. It appears on average on twelve per cent of their websites. 'Risk' is a more contextual category recurrently used in the study of terrorism and the Arab and Muslim world, which is one of prevailing areas of research of think tanks in DC.
57 See for example *Global Trends,* NIC's reports at 2025 or 2030 (NIC, 2008 and 2013), which gather the work of many experts from DC.

In the framing of these scenarios, the national interest operates as a unitary plot.[58] Indeed, thinking outside the box of the national interest, is a rare phenomenon.[59] This preference for the national interest as a plot orients the different future claims and, for both political and epistemic reasons, it operates as a blinker. Although this concept is widely used, implicitly and explicitly, there are very few instances where the conceptual framework upon which the use of this notion is grounded is explained. The national interest belongs to the culture of Realism, both as a social science paradigm and as a mode of foreign policy (*Realpolitik*). However, there are no indications of what its constitutive elements consist. Moreover, as the future of the US is important, the future of the national interest should also matter. In order to make significant future claims that would have strong informational value, think tanks would need to inform their public about what would be the definition of the US national interest in the future.[60] However, this question remains ignored. The national interest operates mainly as a filter when discriminating between the security issues that would be of concern for the think tanks and reduces the informational value of the future claim. This plot is a common grammar members of the expertise community and their interlocutors share and which reinforces their sense of belonging to DC's small world.

Moreover, the future as intermediate public goods is attractive in the global media, as it also informs about what the US national interest is believed to be in the US. Foreign journalists mingle with security experts and are invited to some of their meetings and use this information in their reports on US foreign policy. This foreign demand has a retroactive effect. It reinforces the circularity of DC's expertise that is also constructed from the outside and validates for think tankers the need to set a vision for the future of their country and, ultimately, for the future of world politics.

Section 2: FOCAL POINTS AND TUNNELLING EFFECTS

Experts speak the same language and prioritise security issues according to very similar criteria. They are constrained by the needs of the policy organisations to which their studies are addressed and on the rules established by other institutions that fund their activities. As in the case of the CFR or when experts meet and work on NIC Global Trends, these institutions mostly favour qualitative scenarios on specific regions of the world that are said to be relevant for the US and its national interest.

Scenarios are forecasting tools that echo the scientific tradition of the Delphi method established after the Second World War at the Rand when the US Air Force inquired about the future uses of technology in warfare. The Delphi method's purpose is to find a consensus by iteration within a group that deliberates about future events.[61] In think tanks, the social practice of future-oriented working seminars that

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58   Bernstein, *op. cit.*

59   I have never heard from the different experts that I have interviewed that the issues they were investigating need not be prioritised. Data from Google scraping is consistent with this observation. Keywords that would signal the preference for different epistemic and political worlds such as for example 'multilateral' appear marginally on the think tanks' websites. Among the different organisations, SAIS is the organisation where this term is more referenced: it appears on 2.5% of its pages (it is virtually inexistent on most of the other websites).

60   On the futurity of the concept of national interest: Stephen G. Brooks, 'Dueling Realisms', *International Organization*, Vol. 51, No. 3, (1997), pp. 445–477.

61   Norman Dalkey, 'The Delphi Method: An Experimental Study of Group Opinion', *US Air Force Rand*, 1969.

produce collective intelligence[62] has perpetuated itself while contributing to the socialisation of expertise and to the social integration of experts and policy makers.[63]

The focal points that we see (figure 2 and 3) are the result of a double process of tunnelling. Indeed, within the think tanks future claims are often the byproduct of consensus searching. Themes and countries are prioritised and scenarios also reflect common paradigms and horizons of expectations. Moreover, on the DC marketplace, future claims are not dispersed, since, as one of our interviewees pointed out, 'running after the ball' is one of DC's favourite social activities. As one topic emerges in the public sphere, experts from the different organisations are bound to produce comments and engage in future telling. There are many examples of this phenomenon, the case of Iran's nuclearisation being one of them. This scenario that calls for different policy responses (the dilemma of intervention) has been prevalent in the think tanks' world for more than ten years.

Figure 2
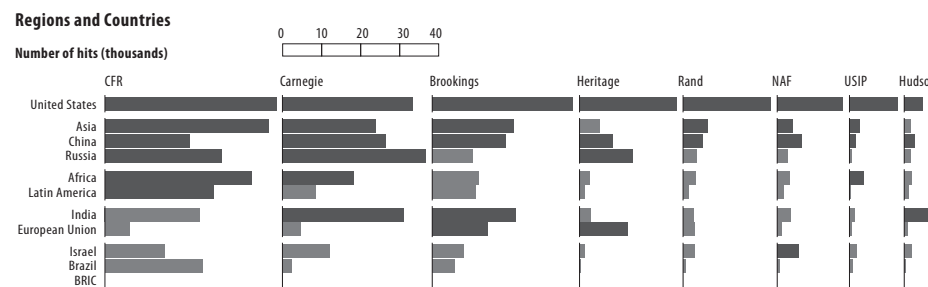
Source: based on a web search.

These data show the great homogeneity of the social milieu of think tanks whose members share the same epistemic and political interests. The the lows and the peaks are very similar (figure 2).[64] The most referenced countries are China and Russia. As a regional area, the European Union is clearly not a priority. Using other data, on average, 'Russia' appears on 16 per cent of the webpages of these organisations, a score very comparable to that of 'Iran' (15.8 per cent), 'Iraq' was in 2011 a much greater concern and showed on 45 per cent of the webpages.

Except for the CFR, Brazil, a country of significant importance in contemporary international relations, is clearly neglected.[65] Not taking into account Brazil is also very telling of the kind of paradigms still en vogue in international politics. As a military conflict with that country is very unlikely to happen and as its emergence as a new power in international politics is relatively recent, think tanks' literature on Brazil is scarce and anecdotal. This is also very symptomatic of the difficulty for experts to renew their workplace and change the lenses through which they look at the world (see section 3).

Occasionally, Rand still uses Delphi.

62 James Surowiecki, The Wisdom of Crowds: *Why the Many Are Smarter Than the Few and How Collective Wisdom Shapes Business, Economies, Societies and Nations* (New York: Doubleday, 2004).

63 These meetings differ from the explicit Delphi methodology, since the responses to initial questions are not anonymous, however the focus on collective intelligence of expertise is similar.
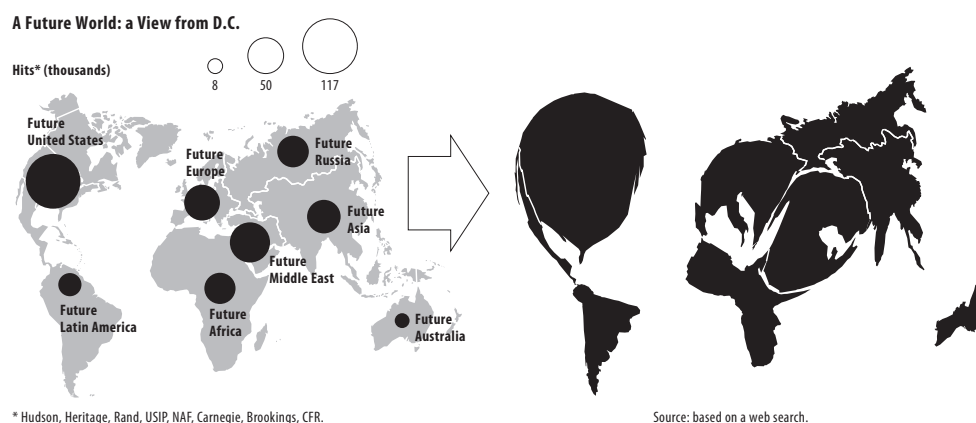
64 In grey, the number of hits that fall beyond the average within each organisation.

65 See the CFR's initiative on Brazil: http://www.cfr.org/brazil/global-brazil-us-brazil-relations/p25407?co =C007303. There is also a lack of expertise on Brazil in the academic field of international studies.

Shared horizons of expectation[66]

These organisations are betting on very similar horses. China is one of the most if not the most important issues they want to investigate when thinking about the future. This shows when we searched the number of pages of those referenced organisations on figure 2 where the terms 'future' and 'China' would appear simultaneously. This preference reflects a strong interest for big countries likely to be competitors of the US and a very traditional vision of international politics, where the most important issues are war and peace.

Figure 3

A Future World: a View from D.C.

Hits* (thousands)   8   50   117

Future United States
Future Europe
Future Russia
Future Asia
Future Middle East
Future Latin America
Future Africa
Future Australia

* Hudson, Heritage, Rand, USIP, NAF, Carnegie, Brookings, CFR.   Source: based on a web search.

This map (figure 3) aggregates data from the same organisations we find on figure 2. It includes the number of entries of the term future associated with a regional area. As such, it is a reflection of what are for those organisations those regions that are most important for the future. What primarily emerges is a teleological and tragic vision of the world, where the US struggles with its main competitors. On this map, we clearly see the relevance of three large entities: the US, the Middle East and Asia. Such preference coincides with two most prevalent paradigms in post-Second World War international relations. Firstly, it is an interpretation of what a US policy vaguely defined in terms of national interest should be, that is, to stand firm *vis-à-vis* its competitors (balance of power), in this case confronting the threat of Islam and the new rise of Asia and more specifically the power of China. It is also a picture of world that is driven by the rise and fall of civilisations as we find here a reflection of Huntington's Islamic-Confucian alliance.[67]

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66   Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past on the Semantics of Historical Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).
67   Samuel Huntington, 'The Clash of Civilizations?', *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 72, No. 3 (1993), pp. 45–47.

Section 3: A SELF-BLINDED COMMUNITY

Security experts in think tanks form a dense and integrated epistemic community. The cement of this community is both social and epistemic and the future is one of its most important structural features that binds together its members. However, although the future is of great concern for these analysts, their thinking is grounded on very traditional frameworks and, unlike what is often claimed, their expertise is also plagued by inertia.

This section will highlight the lack of diversity that characterises the milieu of expertise in DC, which is one of the major factors explaining the tunnelling effect that hampers the think tanks' production of knowledge and creates blindness. Indeed, not only can diversity reflect in a plurality of centres of interests, but it produces results that are epistemically more robust than those reached by groups that are culturally and socially more homogenous, especially in the case of future-oriented analysis.[68] This is not something about which think tanks are unaware, however they have not made any significant attempts to mitigate the effects of this bias.

Past-centred social and epistemic identities

Experts whose primary domain of research is said to be 'defence and security' form a large majority that outnumbers the experts who work primarily on all geographical areas combined.[69] 'Defence and security' is the meta-narrative of this small world. The think tank world reflects the Cold War dominance of 'hard issues' where alternative views or 'soft' issues are clearly not well represented. For example, although it has become a fashionable concept at the UN and in some academic circles, the concept of 'human security' is definitely not very prominent in this small world.

It does not come as a surprise that the number of experts who specialise in regional areas and large countries, is primarily concerned with the Middle East and Russia.[70] This reflects US foreign policy and the priorities for the US over the last decades. As for the Soviet Union, this area is, in Koselleckian terms, a 'space of experience' (a moment in time that has become a model for action and future-oriented action). History becomes a model for learning and for the making of future claims (*Historia Magistra Vitae* as Koselleck points out). This rear view mode of thinking is consistent with classical Realism and also with the teaching experts have received in the schools of international practice they attended, notably in the 1970s and the 1980s.[71] The number of experts on Russia is rather high, as compared to the number

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68   Miriam Solomon, 'Groupthink versus The Wisdom of Crowds the Social Epistemology of Deliberation', *Southern Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. XLIV, No. 1 (2006), pp. 28–45; Carl Sunstein, 'Deliberating Groups versus Prediction Markets (or Hayek's Challenge to Habermas)', *Episteme: A Journal of Social Epistemology*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (2006), pp. 192–213; Philip Tetlock, *op. cit.*; Philip Tetlock,, Barbara Mellers, 'Intelligent Management of Intelligence Agencies Beyond Accountability Ping-Pong', *American Psychologist*, 6 (2011), pp. 542–554.

69   The data used in this section is based on the profiles of 398 researchers working in those organisations, as it appears in the curriculum vitae on their webpage. It is also a reflection of how the analysts want to be perceived by the policy world and the media. Among these 398 experts, 106 primary research theme is 'defence and security'.

70   Among our sample, we find 43 experts on the Middle East and 16 on Russia (and Eurasia).

71   In the case of Harvard where many of these analysts are trained, see Richard E. Neustadt, Ernest May, *Thinking in Time – The Uses of History for Decision Makers* (New York: The Free Press, 1986). The authors emphasise

of experts on countries of similar importance such as India or Brazil. This testifies to the legacy of the Cold War and shows the inertia of those institutions and the challenge they face when it comes to adapting to change. Many experts on the former USSR followed the 'transition' and, since then, have specialised in post-Soviet Russian society.

Another variable which explains why this vision leaves aside important areas of the world and novel issues is the circular chain of production of ideas of which think tanks are part. Some major think tanks partly rely on funding made available by very large foundations. These corporate foundations (where experts frequently consult) speak the same language that both experts and policy makers use and share the same keywords. Some think tanks also receive funding from governmental agencies and through grants. In some cases, there is a time span of several years between the moment when a decision on a theme of research is made within the donor bodies and the moment when the think tank delivers its work. This accounts for the inertia of expertise.

The logic of politics and the policy world are a backward-oriented driving force. Leaders have their own vision of the world, rooted in their past. Their experience orients their thinking on what are the most important current issues of the world. They are also caught in another temporal chain. Defining what those key issues are also depends on past events such as a war or a terrorist attack, that are of great concern to their constituents.

One point should be stressed: although China is of great concern to think tanks and is widely discussed, notably from a future-oriented perspective (see section 2), the number of China specialists is rather low. Among those 398 senior experts, we find 31 Asia specialists out of which only 6 of them rank China as their primary area of expertise. This is due to the fact that think tanks are constrained by the same inertia that prevails in academia and that it takes a long time to renew a generation of scholars and build up a field. Surprises are then all the more likely to appear when focusing on a theme without having done thorough research.

Although some organisations are older than others and, as in the case of CFR for example, may have a more authoritative voice in future telling, the trajectories of their members are similar in a world which is extremely fluid and where professionals move easily from one think tank to another. The homogeneity of this social milieu is also the reflection of the education and the training these professionals have received (figure 4).

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the need of "how to use experience" (foreword, xxii).

Figure 4

Source: based on a web search.
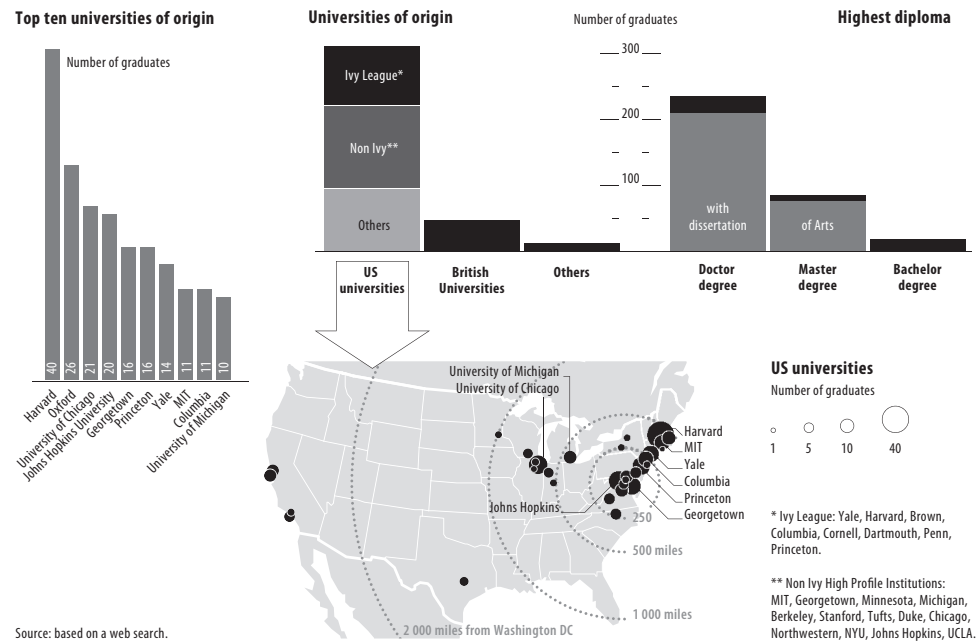
Although these experts have strong academic credentials, they have made the choice of a policy world considered to be more vibrant than what is often seen as a more subdued career in academia. A significant number of those professionals have a PhD. This is particularly the case for the younger generation. Very few analysts are non-American. A few of them are Europeans and, occasionally, think tanks hire experts from the Arab world, China, India or Pakistan, if they have received basic training in the US. Some experts have studied at prestigious universities in the UK such as Oxford. The training that they received there (the topics on which they have focused and the paradigms they have learned) does not significantly differ from those of American universities.[72] Over a time span of thirty years, their Realist approach and their Huntingtonian world vision (section 2) are a good reflection of the academic training they have received.

Closed circuits

Ideas widely circulate between the different organisations as it shows on this map that illustrates the links on the web between the different organisations and the density of their interconnections (figure 5).[73] The map also shows what are the common

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72   It will be interesting to see how other more contemporary forms of knowledge such as constructivism, computer sciences or global history will translate into the interstitial spaces of expertise in 10, 20 or 50 years and how major events such as the fall of the Berlin Wall and 9/11 and the current changes in the Arab world will reflect in their thinking. It will also be interesting to see how the feminisation of IR studies will affect think tanks as their members are today primarily males.

73   Two think tanks are missing from this figure, the CFR and Brookings. Their websites are protected against data processing internet tools.

nodes these sites share, that is, the same websites where one of the web pages of two or more websites can lead to (their one degree of separation).

Figure 5

Mapping Security Expertise on the Web

transatlantic sais-jhu.edu
gwu.edu
csis.org   usip.org
hudson.org
manhattan institute.org   mercatus.org
mackinac.org heritage.org   cato.org   hoover.org   twitter.com
economist.com   abcnews.go.com
rand.org cato-unbound.org   forbes.com   addthis.com   lexington institute.org
                                               cnas.org   cnn.com
aei.org   thehill.com   newamerica.net
nationalreview.com   carnegieendowment.org
washingtontimes.com huffingtonpost.com
           foreign senate.gov foreignpolicy.com
                        bloglines.com

The social and political worlds of DC's think tanks are fairly insular and cohesive. While think tanks compete for the access to the public sphere, there is a certain degree of homogeneity in the content of the websites. This also shows that most of these professionals attend events that are organised by their peers and therefore participate in the creation of the community as such.
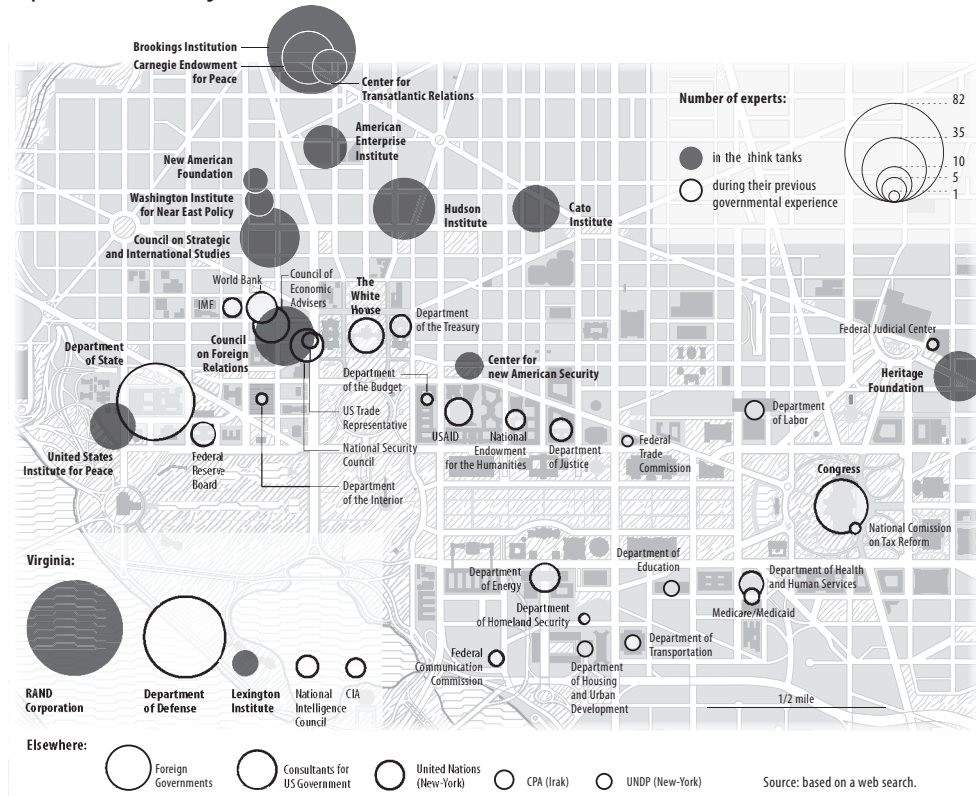
As we can see from this figure, the left part is more dense that the right one. This left part (ironically) includes the more conservative of these organisations, notably the Hudson Institute, the Cato Institute, the Heritage Foundation, and the American Enterprise Institute. On the right side, the only conservative think tank is the Lexington Institute. The density of the links within the conservative group of organisations on the left side can be explained by the fact that these organisations feel the need to 'stick together'. Conservative organisations seem to feel threatened by what they perceive to be an intellectual environment favourable to liberal ideas. These organisations have solid ties to other centres that share their conservative views (both politically and economically), such as, for example, the Mercatus Center or the Catounbound website.

This graph (figure 5) illustrates the role of the media in the flow of this circulation of ideas. Think tanks are connected to several online media such as *The Washington Times*, *The Huffington Post*, ABC, Forbes or CNN. With the exception of George Washington University, we see no other entrepreneurs of ideas on this map (such as NGOs, other academic institutions or non-American think tanks). The media are the only other actors that are virtually significantly connected with the think tanks' world. This shows how ideas are diffused in closed circuits and how they reverberate from one think tank to the other through the media.[74] This graph validates some more qualitative analyses on the collaboration between think tanks. Indeed, think tankers often move from one organisation to the other and remain in close contact with their former colleagues with whom they share their ideas. Although what is predominant is the high degree of interconnectivity between think tanks, this graph also shows that there are some bridges between experts and the media. The relative absence of academia on the map shows the relative divide between the two worlds and the competition between think tankers and scholars although, individually, some professors might be affiliated to think tanks and experts teach as adjuncts in major universities, notably in DC.

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74   When, individually, they want to communicate with the outside world, many of these experts have a twitter account. Its reference appears on their webpage and therefore shows on the graph.

Figure 6

Experts' Location in Washington DC

Brookings Institution
Carnegie Endowment for Peace
Center for Transatlantic Relations
American Enterprise Institute
New American Foundation
Washington Institute for Near East Policy
Council on Strategic and International Studies
Hudson Institute
Cato Institute

Number of experts:
82
35
10
5
1
in the think tanks
during their previous governmental experience

World Bank
Council of Economic Advisers
The White House
Department of the Treasury
IMF
Council on Foreign Relations
Federal Judicial Center
Department of State
Department of the Budget
Center for new American Security
Heritage Foundation
US Trade Representative
National Security Council
Department of the Interior
USAID
National Endowment for the Humanities
Department of Justice
Federal Trade Commission
Department of Labor
United States Institute for Peace
Federal Reserve Board
Congress
National Comission on Tax Reform

Virginia:
Department of Education
Department of Energy
Department of Health and Human Services
Department of Homeland Security
Medicare/Medicaid
Department of Transportation
RAND Corporation
Department of Defense
Lexington Institute
National Intelligence Council
CIA
Federal Communication Commission
Department of Housing and Urban Development
1/2 mile

Elsewhere:
Foreign Governments
Consultants for US Government
United Nations (New-York)
CPA (Irak)
UNDP (New-York)
Source: based on a web search.

This map (figure 6) brings further evidence that testifies to the uniformity of this social milieu. It shows the extent to which these centres of expertise are embedded with governmental offices and political institutions as well as universities, and that the media is a true social and geographical reality.

Think tanks' experts are, indeed, deeply embedded with the policy world. A majority of these analysts – sixty percent – have political and governmental experience, the kind of trajectory sought by their younger colleagues. The State Department and the Pentagon have been their primary affiliations. Some are retired diplomats and military officers. In addition to working at a think-tank a number of them also hold teaching positions, in most cases as adjunct professors and in some cases as permanent faculty.[75]

Think tanks form a dense and integrated community tightly linked to its urban environment. It is not just selected opinions and projects that their members share. As the data about their education and their socialisation (figures 4 and 6) as well the virtual mapping of their social existence on the web (figure 5) testify, they are part of a collective 'web of meaning'. The topics they focus on are homogeneous (figure 2 and 3), their ideas circulate in closed circuits. The cultural and social homogeneity

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75 A great number of these professors teach at Georgetown, which has a longstanding tradition in the training of young diplomats.

of this milieu reflects well the directions the members of this community look at and the futures to which they point.

Section 4: FUTUROLOGISTS' SOLIDARISM AND GROUPTHINK[76]

As intermediate public goods, future claims are highly visible and are the landmarks of expertise. However, although experts refer to scientific methods in their work, these future claims are hardly subject to the scrutiny of the members of the DC community. Indeed, there are no peer review mechanisms or similar tools that would discriminate and improve the epistemic quality of these claims about the future of world politics. Other than from practitioners, the media is the only social world with which think tanks are in direct contact. Journalists very rarely criticise experts' opinion. They would lack the legitimacy to offer counter-arguments. Moreover, the media need experts in order to build the news. Finally, the methodology used by experts is also hardly questioned and they are rarely in competition with other techniques of forecasting.

We find two greater social dynamics that account for think tanks' uniformity that narrows their vision of the future. One is external, the other one internal. Although my work focuses on the latter, it is important to note that those who make claims about the future, in order to be heard, have to meet their interlocutors' expectations, that is, the specific governmental agencies or private companies that fund their activities. As appears in several interviews, experts have a sense of what visions of the future are likely to be accepted on the market: those futures generally imply decisions that are not too costly for policymakers. It will be very difficult for an expert to bring into the public policy discussion an idea the implementation of which would require a costly shift from actual policy. Accordingly, in the leading think tanks, radicalism is also clearly not the best way to make oneself heard. Extreme-right or extreme-left ideas are very scarce if not altogether absent.[77]

Mostly from an internalist perspective, we have to take into account two potent vectors of uniformisation that strongly affect the claims about the future experts in think tanks regularly produce: the structure of the marketplace itself and the normative pressure that exerts on the experts.

Solidarism on the marketplace

DC's entrepreneurs are competitive *vis-à-vis* the outgroup (notably academia and predictive markets), however they express solidarity *vis-à-vis* their peers within the ingroup. Indeed, it is rare to see an expert being outcast by his peers for the errors

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76 Futurologist is a terminology that was coined in the 1960s. Rand was involved in the process of bringing futurology's expertise in the policy arena as well as in the public debate. See Nicolas Rescher, *op. cit.* Experts about the future developed scientific methods based on game theory and computer science. Herman Kahn, Bertrand de Jouvenel or Alvin Toffler became gurus that were or still are well known to the general public.

77 Some experts can have overtly conservative views, but would not express racist views. If so, they would face the risk of being ousted by their community.

he or she would have made. This appears to be all the more true in the case of future claims.

First, as scenarios are the most current mode of future telling, this helps to protect experts from the risk of reputational sanction.[78] It remains difficult to qualify a scenario as 'wrong'. These narratives are always judged in relative and qualitative terms, whereas ruling over a prediction would be more definitive.

Although truth would not be the criterion upon which they would be judged, scenarios could however be the subject of some normative assessment. Truthfulness would be appropriate in this case. Truthfulness presupposes sincerity, the search for the truth and the use true and objective elements that would support one's analyses or deeds.[79] Moreover, truthfulness presupposes that one's cognitive capabilities are fit for the task one desires to perform.

Let us go back to the case of China. One must underline that 'rise of China' has been for ten years the most searched 'story' in the media.[80]. As we have seen in section 2, think tanks echo this concern and the assumption that China will continue to rise is also prevalent.[81] They are pushed by this social demand and contribute to this debate. However, as a collective, think tanks clearly lack truthfulness when future claims about China are being produced, as so few experts are trained in this area. This fact does not seem to be problematic in DC's small world of expertise: from within the think tanks' world, we hear no criticism of the quality of China studies.

Think tanks hardly face any significant criticism from the policy world either. The DC's marketplace is indeed based upon a dialogal form of 'connivance'.[82] As some of the most important events of these last ten years testify, DC is a good example of the shortcomings of such a marketplace.[83] More specifically, it is a typical example of a 'Low Low' game, where experts 'pretend to know' (while they are aware that those to whom these ideas addressed know about the low quality of their outcomes) and practitioners 'pretend to listen' (as if they would change their behaviour based on the information that is provided).[84]

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78 Intellectuals are very seldom sanctioned for making 'silly predictions'. See Gil Eyal, L. Buchholz, 'From the Sociology of Intellectuals to the Sociology of Interventions', *Annual Review of Sociology,* 36 (2010), pp. 117–137.

79 Bernard Williams, *Truth and Truthfulness an Essay in Genealogy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

80 According to the *Language Monitor*, "rise of China" this has been the case for the last ten years (the sample includes 50.000 media in the world, both on paper and on the internet). See http://www.languagemonitor. com/predictive-quantities-indicator/bin-ladens-death-one-of-top-news-stories-of-21th-century/ (last accessed, January 23rd 2013. See also M. Beckley, 'China's Century? Why America's Edge Will Endure', *International Security*, 36, 3 (2011/2), p. 41.

81 There are three main possible narratives about the future of China. The first and prevailing one is pessimistic: it tells that China is the peer competitor to the US and that it constitutes a threat to US hegemony and its interest. The second considers that, although China will rise, the US will still prevail. The third states that China's rise is an opportunity to develop trade relations and therefore can be beneficial to US interest.

82 Bertrand Badie, *Diplomacy of Connivance* (New York: Palgrave, 2012).

83 Charles Kaufman, 'Threat Inflation and the Failure of the Marketplace of Ideas the Selling of Iraq War', *International Organization*, Vol. 29 No. 1 (2004), pp. 5–48. Originally, in the liberal tradition set by John S. Mill, the term 'marketplace of ideas' was introduced to characterise the virtues of liberal public spaces where freedom was the necessary condition for the optimisation of knowledge and the production of truth. Sparrow and Goodin, *op. cit.*, p.45.

84 Diego Gambetta, Gloria Origgi, 'The LL game: The Curious Preference for Low Quality and Its Norms', *Politics, Philosophy and Economics,* Vol. 12, No. 1 (2013), pp. 3–23. When they analyse this game of false pretences, Gambetta and Origgi consider that this low quality exchange is sustained by 'cartels of mutually satisfied mediocrities'. Socially and epistemically, this is true in the think tanks arena and in the policy world.

Let us examine one individual case. Kenneth Pollack – a well-known specialist of the Middle East at the Brookings Institution - published his book in 2002 on the coming war against Iraq, arguing that the US ought to go to war against Saddam Hussein because it was too big a threat to be left unchallenged and that US victory would create a new balance of power that would be favourable to US interests.[85] Retrospectively, Pollack's future – mostly the part on the consequences of toppling Hussein – can be easily challenged by facts.

Pollack did not suffer from making a hasty scenario that could have been questioned in terms of truthfulness (and also in terms of truth as regards the WMD). His reputation was not hurt and his peer group did not sanction him. The media did not sanction him either. On the contrary, Pollack was praised for having addressed publicly what were considered his errors in an interview that he released once it became clear that that there were no WMD to be found in Iraq and that the consequences of the war were less positive than what could have been assumed before the intervention.[86] Pollack continues to be seen as a very prominent expert, widely quoted and has released numerous publications after the intervention, including two edited volumes in 2011, one on Iraq and the other on the future of the Arab World.[87][88] Unlike other markets where producers want to differentiate themselves based on the quality of their goods, DC's marketplace gathers entrepreneurs who share a deep sense of solidarity. They are aware that an attack against one of their members (either an expert or the organisation he or she belongs to) would put into question their own method, their work and their ethos.[89]

Normative pressures and groupthink

The think tanks' community is an interesting illustration of 'groupthink'.[90] Although think tanks gather more people than the small circles studied by Janis did and gather professionals that are not necessarily in direct contact with each other, some of the groupthink criteria pointed out by Janis apply to security expertise.[91]

Norms both from the ingroup and the outgroup are the major driving force of this groupthink. Among security experts, there is a prevailing belief in the rectitude of the group's norms (one of Janis' criteria). The experts' findings are formatted in a common narrative as indeed these scenarios all refer to the pursuit of the US national interest. This creates strong normative pressure that is rarely questioned publicly within the group. An interesting example is the case of the studies on the Middle East.[92] During the 2000s, 'upgraded authoritarianism', a term coined by an expert

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85   Kenneth Pollack, *The Threatening Storm* (New York: Random House, 2002).
86   Kenneth Pollack, 'Interview: Weapons of Misperception', *The Atlantic Monthly*, January 13th 2004.
87   Kenneth Pollack, *Unfinished Business: An American Strategy for Iraq Moving Forward* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, February 2011); Kenneth Pollack, *The Arab Awakening: America and the Transformation of the Middle East* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, November 2011).
88   '*Publish or Perish*' indicates there is no significant change between the average yearly number of quotes of Kenneth Pollack's work before the Iraq war (1998–2002) and after (2004–2011).
89   Large think tanks and their experts are comparable to financial rating agencies, as ratings about the creditworthiness of states or companies are also claims about the future. In some cases, these accounts proved to lack truthfulness. However, this did not hurt the rating agencies' reputation. Frank Partnoy, 'The Paradox of Credit Ratings', University of San Diego, *Law and Economics Research Paper*, 2001, No. 20.
90   Irving Janis, *op. cit.*
91   *Ibid.*, p. 197.
92   For an excellent account of the community of Middle East experts' shortcomings, see Gregory Gause, 'Why

from Brookings was one of the pivotal concepts in the public debate on the Middle East.[93] In his paper, Heydemann's purpose was to challenge Wilsonianism and its emphasis on the promotion of democracy, because of the damage it causes to the US national interest. This vision is primarily inspired by a normative account (in this case Realism) that orients factual and future-oriented analysis. The explanatory and the normative overlap: Arab authoritarian regimes will not fall and the US should not try to encourage democracy. Moreover, as it is important to make the case for Realism against Idealism, it is also important to show the stability of authoritarianism. In this context, the uprising against authoritarian regimes in countries such as Tunisia, Libya, Syria, Yemen or Egypt came as a surprise.

As in Janis' model, stereotypical views of enemy leaders and more generally of what and who is the enemy are predominant. This implies strong normative and moral pressures exerted on the experts' community and that orient consensus. During the times of the Cold War, it was difficult to make public claims about the fall of the Soviet Union due to its fragility.[94] Such opinions were the exception, one of the main reasons was that they were morally criticised by those who considered that they underestimated the threat from the Soviet Union and were, as such, irresponsible and unpatriotic.[95]

Other criteria used by Janis to define groupthink are particularly relevant in the case of think tanks. Self-censorship applies because experts know that expressing divergent views will make it less likely they will be heard. Traditionally, most of them will be co-opted and participate to an already existing debate and will try to develop an argument that differs only slightly from the already prevailing opinion.

CONCLUSION: THE PREFERENCE FOR BLINDNESS

Future claims are intermediate public goods that are produced in an epistemically imperfect marketplace of ideas and are not only about the future. It is indeed difficult to anticipate the future and notably to formalise change.[96] However, neither experts nor policy makers have shown a great willingness to encourage innovation on the DC's marketplace future market.[97] When new issues emerge that were not part of the think tanks' horizon scan or when ruptures happen, these facts are all the more likely to create surprises. Think tanks' conformism and lack of innovation are the reflection

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Middle East Studies Missed the Arab Spring: the Myth of Authoritarian Stability', *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 90, No. 4, pp. 81–90.

93   S. Heydemann, *Upgrading Authoritarianism in the Arab World*, (Washington D.C.: The Saban Center for Middle East Policy, Brookings, No. 13, 2007).

94   I have interviewed several former Sovietologists who underlined this particularity of their field. For an example of an isolated voice that provided a truthful account of the future of the Soviet Union, see Karl Deutsch, 'Cracks in the Monolith Possibilities and Patterns of Disintegration in Totalitarian Systems', in Carl Friedrich (ed.), *Proceedings of a Conference Held at the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1954), pp. 308–333.

95   See Jeane Kirpatrick's reaction to what she referred to as 'liberal masochism' when some tried to challenge the belief in the longevity of the Soviet Union. Jeane Kirkpatrick, 'Dictatorships and Double Standards', *Commentary*, Vol. 68, No. 5 (1979), p. 45.

96   Nicolas Rescher, *op. cit.*

97   The limitation of expertise in future claims is well established and publicly addressed. Philip Tetlock, *op. cit.* Interestingly, although both policy and expertise are aware of these methods, there has been a lack of support for predictive markets or alternative tools and methods to expertise based qualitative scenarios.

of their aversion to change that is expressed in two ways. Firstly, they do not foresee structural changes in international politics and are subject to 'omission bias'.[98] Secondly, the level of tolerance in the face of errors and untruthful claims is high within the community (section 4).

We see here a contrast between the epistemic futility of the future and its social utility. Experts need to create a collective and circular web of meaning that ties them together with their audience in DC's social fabric. The future plays a pivotal role in this dynamic. It reflects in the common ethos experts share (section 1 and 4), in their language when they make anticipations (section 2), in the information they produce and their collective thinking (section 2), in their education (section 3) and in the norms by which they abide (section 4).

This mechanism helps create surprises although, in principle, anticipations should be instrumental in protecting the political community to which they are addressed from unexpected changes. Yet, this negative consequence does not seem to outweigh the benefits of the integrative functions of self-blinding prophecies.

Annex

Section 1[99]

Brookings Institution (1)
Council on Foreign Relations (2)
Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (3)
Center for Strategic and International Studies (4)
RAND Corporation (5)
Heritage Foundation (6)
American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research (AEI) (7)
Cato Institute (8)
United States Institute for Peace (16)
Hudson Institute (21)
New America Foundation (24)

Section 2

Brookings Institution (1)
Council on Foreign Relations (2)
Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (3)
RAND Corporation (5)
Heritage Foundation (6)
United States Institute for Peace (16)

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98   J. Baron, I. Ritov, I., 'Omission Bias, Individual Differences and Normality', *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes,* 94 (2004), pp. 74–85.

99   The number between brackets is the ranking of the organisation as it appears on the *Global Go to Think Tank* report (latest edition, 2011).

Hudson Institute (21)
New America Foundation (24)

Section 3

Brookings Institution (1)
Council on Foreign Relations (2)
Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (3)
Center for Strategic and International Studies (4)
RAND Corporation (5)
Heritage Foundation (6)
American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research (AEI) (7)
Cato Institute (8)
United States Institute for Peace (16)
Hudson Institute (21)
Center for New American Security (23)
New America Foundation (24)
Center for Transatlantic Relations SAIS, Johns Hopkins University (48)
Washington Institute for Near East Policy (unlisted)
Lexington Institute (unlisted)