



RESEARCH PAPER

The Power of Ideas: Diplomatic Think Tanks' Contribution in Shaping Pakistan's Foreign Policy"

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ABSTRACT

This research paper investigates the essential role of diplomatic think tanks in shaping Pakistan's foreign policy. Think tanks are non-profit and non-partisan research organizations that perform extensive research regarding issues such as social policy, political strategy, foreign affairs, economy, defense, technology and culture etc. The primary objective of this study is to assess the degree, scope and level of influence exerted by various diplomatic think tanks on the policy makers involved in formulating foreign policy of Pakistan. It examines in details the evolution of these entities, contextual factors influencing their effectiveness, and various strategies to enhance their impact. Over recent decades, Pakistani diplomatic think tanks have proliferated, offering timely analyses yet facing limitations in directly influencing policy outcomes. The study utilizes case studies of Pakistani diplomatic think tanks, comparative analysis with global counterparts, and secondary literature review, employing elitist, statist, pluralist, and institutional approaches. Diplomatic think tanks in Pakistan affect foreign policy-making by generating new ideas, providing expertise, facilitating debates, educating citizens, and contributing to conflict resolution. To bolster effectiveness, these think tanks should prioritize financial sustainability, forge partnerships, increase transparency, and engage a broader array of stakeholders in the policy process.

KEYWORDS Diplomatic, Economics, Foreign Policy, Think Tanks, Pakistan

Introduction

Bipolar Think tanks, both general and diplomatic in nature, have become increasingly significant in shaping public policy, particularly in the realm of foreign affairs. While operating largely out of the public eye, their influence on policy formulation, including defence strategies and international relations, is substantial. Think tanks are non-profit, non-partisan organizations focused on public policy research, akin to civil society organizations. They vary widely in size, focus, and ideological orientation, but generally aim to provide informed analysis and advice to policymakers.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, think tanks began to evolve structurally and functionally, gaining greater relevance in governmental debates and decision-making processes. This evolution has been particularly pronounced in foreign policy spheres, where think tanks play a crucial role in information gathering, analysis, and intelligence provision. Pakistan's think tanks, in particular, have emerged as influential actors in the foreign policy landscape, garnering attention from policymakers and shaping the discourse on strategic issues.

Think tanks contribute to policy formulation through various means, including mediating between government and the public, identifying and evaluating emerging issues, organizing policy debates, providing independent analysis, and facilitating exchange among stakeholders (McGann & Weaver, 2000). Despite their intellectual independence, think tanks

often align with certain political perspectives and cater to government needs while serving the public interest.

The rise of think tanks globally, including in both developed and developing countries, underscores their growing importance in the policy arena. Their role in shaping ideology and informing policy discussions is increasingly recognized, highlighting the diverse ways in which they contribute to the policymaking process. Ultimately, think tanks represent a vital component of contemporary governance structures, offering expertise and insights to navigate complex policy challenges, particularly in the realm of foreign affairs (Pop, 2012). Think tanks generally encompass non-profit, non-partisan organizations involved in the study of public policy. Just like NGOs, think tanks comprise a diverse and dynamic subset of civil society (Couper & Conrad, 2017).

This research paper argues that think tanks play a crucial and constructive role in shaping Pakistan's foreign policy by providing independent and reliable information for informed decision-making. Given the scarcity of policy-relevant data in Pakistan, think tanks serve as vital sources of analysis and research, augmenting the capacity of public authorities. Moreover, they are regarded as integral components of civil society, acting as catalysts for ideas and actions within emerging and advanced democracies. While the influence of diplomatic think tanks on foreign policy is acknowledged, there remains a lack of consensus on how to objectively measure this influence. This paper aims to address this gap by proposing context-specific criteria for analysis, drawing from both academic literature and practical experience.

Despite the global recognition of think tanks as policy actors, there is a dearth of authentic scholarship on their role in Pakistan's foreign policy landscape. Existing literature often overlooks the unique political and social context of Pakistan, hindering a comprehensive understanding of the impact and challenges faced by think tanks in the country. Thus, this paper seeks to explore this relatively unexplored area within foreign policy studies, with the hope of stimulating further research and analysis in the future (Hauck, 2017). By critically examining the policy discourse of Pakistan's think tanks and their role in shaping and contesting state narratives, this thesis aims to challenge assumptions about their influence and effectiveness. Additionally, it seeks to evaluate the extent to which think tanks impact public policies and proposes recommendations to enhance their efficacy and linkages to policy formulation processes.

Diplomatic think tanks in Pakistan provide an excellent opportunity for initiating a study with these objectives. Pakistan is a developing country going through socio-political and economic changes. The political environment is often fractious and unstable. There are a number of socio-economic and governance challenges including corruption, high rates of poverty, and social inequality (Muzaffar, et. al., 2016) At the same time, Pakistan has a vibrant civil society, an active media, and a long tradition of community-based organizations, taking advocacy roles. Although the emergence of think tanks in Pakistan is a relatively recent phenomenon, it currently ranks 7th highest among Asia in terms of the numbers of think tanks in the country, after China, India, Japan, Taiwan, South Korea, Taiwan and Bangladesh (McGann, 2012). Resultantly, based on the Pakistan case study, this piece of research has the potential to offer important insights on the dynamics of diplomatic think tanks in developing country contexts and contribute to the growing body of literature engaged in study and analysis of the phenomenon of think tanks.

Literature Review

Research on policy research organizations, particularly diplomatic think tanks, is scarce in South Asia, with a notable dearth of studies focusing on Pakistan's context. While existing literature often addresses the role of non-state actors such as civil society and NGOs in governance and policymaking, diplomatic think tanks remain relatively understudied. Director of policy and planning at the State Department, think tanks significantly influence

U.S. foreign policy formulation, despite operating outside the media spotlight (Haass, 2002). Their impact is multifaceted, encompassing the generation of original ideas, the provision of experts for government employment, facilitation of high-level discussions, citizen education on international affairs, and mediation in conflict resolution. From the perspective of U.S. policymakers, think tanks offer five primary benefits: stimulating new thinking, supplying experts for government service, facilitating shared understanding among policymakers, educating citizens about global issues, and providing mediation services for conflicting parties.

Donald E. Abelson, a professor of Political Science at the University of Western Ontario, highlights the global emergence of think tanks, particularly in the United States, where they play a significant role in policy-making (Abelson, 2002). While traditionally seen as an American phenomenon, think tanks have proliferated worldwide, occupying prominent positions in policy discourse across various regions. These organizations, funded by diverse sources including philanthropic foundations, corporations, and political parties, have become influential actors in shaping public policy.

Stuti Bhatnagar, an adjunct fellow at the University of Adelaide and the University of New South Wales, specializes in Indian foreign policy and has authored a book titled "India's Pakistan Policy: How Think Tanks Are Shaping Foreign Relations." The book critically examines the role of think tanks in India's foreign policy landscape, particularly regarding the India-Pakistan dispute (Ahmad, 2008). It explores the origins and evolution of Indian foreign policy think tanks, their changing relevance, and their impact on policy-making processes. Through comparative analysis, the book delves into the research discourse of prominent Indian think tanks, offering insights into their methodologies and contributions during key diplomatic initiatives. By shedding light on the role of these non-state actors, the book provides valuable perspectives for researchers, policymakers, and students interested in international relations, foreign policy analysis, and South Asian politics.

The important role of civil society, NGOs, and think tanks in Bangladesh, tracing their origins back to colonial times (Denham & Garnett, 1999). Civil society in Bangladesh has evolved over centuries, actively engaging in political and social issues. From the end of colonial rule to the war of independence and beyond, civil society has played a significant role in shaping Bangladesh's history. It has not only acted as watchdogs but also contributed to political and social actions.

The Origin and Typology of Diplomatic Think Tanks in Pakistan

In Pakistan, long periods of military rule and a centralized state have stifled freedom of expression, hindering independent research and leading to narrow and conformist social science studies. This culture of patronage and favouritism prioritizes personal gain over institutions and legality, fostering a sycophantic environment where individuals seek benefits from those in power. The influx of Western aid post-independence, particularly from the US, UK, Canada, and Australia, made it challenging to resist international influences. Initially, the focus was on economic planning, with economists dominating think tanks and emphasizing policy-relevant research in development and planning. The influence of US and British experts was significant during the 1950s and 1960s (Hart & Vromen 2008).

During Pakistan's early years, external agencies such as the Ford Foundation played a crucial role in shaping policies, including setting up the Planning Board and drafting initial five-year plans (Talbot, 2002). They also supported education initiatives. International foundations aided the establishment of think tanks like the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE) in 1957, which focuses on development economics and interdisciplinary studies. Another significant think tank, the Institute of Development Studies in Peshawar, merged with the Agricultural University in 1981 to conduct research and teaching, aiming to enhance socio-economic wellbeing.

In Pakistan, there are action-based think tanks working on civil rights, particularly women's rights, social welfare, and rural development. These are mostly led by urban elites like doctors, lawyers, and retired officials. However, their impact in rural areas is limited due to feudal power structures and the dominance of rural elites who also hold sway in the government, hindering the effectiveness of these think tanks (Kingdon, 2013).

During the Zulfikar Ali Bhutto regime from 1971 to 1977, there was a more liberal environment for academia and research in Pakistan. The government funded several think tanks, often affiliated with universities. For example, the Applied Economic Research Centre was established at the University of Karachi in 1973, and the Pakistan Study Centre was formed under an Act of Parliament in 1976. Bhutto's regime also made significant foreign policy moves, such as signing the Shimla Treaty with India in 1972 and strengthening relations with China and Saudi Arabia. Hosting the Organisation of the Islamic Conference in Lahore in 1974 highlighted the importance of research in foreign policy and international affairs. This period also saw the establishment of the Institute of Strategic Studies in Islamabad in 1973 by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in response to India's similar institute in New Delhi (Carden & Neilson, 2005).

During Zia ul Haq's autocratic rule, the Institute of Regional Studies was established in Islamabad in 1982 to research international affairs, with a focus on South Asia, Southwest Asia, China, Central Asia, and the Indian Ocean region. However, his regime ended the liberal environment for think tanks, shifting focus towards Islamic conceptions of nationhood and orientations in research. Under Zia's rule, disciplines like economics and anthropology adopted Islamic perspectives, and history was promoted mainly related to the Pakistan Movement (Krastev, 2001).

The democratic reign from 1988 until 1999 under the Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif regimes witnessed the birth of a number of new think tanks in Pakistan, to which different international agencies and the government of Pakistan extended varying degrees of support. These addressed a wide range of issues, from development to environment, consumer rights and education. The Social Policy and Development Centre, Karachi (1995), is funded by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). The Mahbub ul Haq Human Development Centre (1995) is funded by the UN Development Programme (UNDP). The Sustainable Development Policy Institute was set up in 1992 on the recommendation of the Pakistan National Conservation Strategy to, 'serve as a source of expertise for policy analysis and development, policy intervention, and policy and program advisory services'. This is funded by the government as well as CIDA. Other think tanks established during this period are the Social Policy Development Centre, Karachi (1995); the Islamabad Policy Research Institute (1999); the Consumer Rights Commission of Pakistan, Islamabad (1998); the Policy Research Institute, Islamabad (1999); and the Institute for Educational Development at the Aga Khan University (1993) (Globescan, 2011).

In the 1990s, action-based think tanks gained recognition in Pakistan, partly influenced by programs like the World Bank and ADB Social Action Programme. However, international institutions like the World Bank and IMF heavily influenced Pakistan's economic policies, leading to public protests against neoliberalism (Mcnutt & Marchildon, 2009). In response to religious violence in the 2000s, the Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies was established to analyse security-related conflicts. Despite this, think tanks' involvement in policymaking has been limited, except for occasional inclusion of NGO leaders in government, which remains rare.

Pakistan's think tanks are heavily influenced by both state visions and global frameworks, leaving little room for alternative perspectives. Military and semi-authoritarian rule has hindered critical research efforts. The state has supported think tanks focusing on economic, developmental, and international issues, often driven by international agencies, due to its despotic orientations. Increasing donor funding has turned research into a means

of income rather than serving society, leading to a donor-led research agenda that may prioritize skewed objectives detached from local realities. There's also a focus on policy-relevant research, with fields like political science and history viewed as less practical. Knowledge in Pakistan is thus constrained by the dominance of the state and its alignment with international agencies and global frameworks.

Typology of Diplomatic Think Tanks in Pakistan

Scholars disagree on what defines a think tank, but they've sorted them into categories. Albeson lists five types, like Universities without Students and Advocacy Think Tanks. McGann and Weaver suggest four, such as Academic and Contract Researchers. Despite these differences, all think tanks are non-profit and rely on funding from government or private sources. While some align with specific ideologies, most in the West are independent organizations. However, they often have close ties to government agencies. Overall, true independence is rare for think tanks (McGann & Johnson 2005). They offer a broad categorization of think tanks in the global context. These categories to group diplomatic think tanks in Pakistan are analysed below.

Government Affiliated or Quasi-governmental

Government-affiliated think tanks are part of the government structure and are funded by government grants. Quasi-governmental think tanks, on the other hand, receive government funding but are not part of the government. They are separate from administrative government departments and provide policy advice to top leadership without decision-making power. An example is the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) in Pakistan, established in 1973 and funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. ISSI provides objective analysis of global strategic issues and aims to promote public understanding of issues affecting Pakistan and the international community.

Autonomous and Independent Think Tanks

Autonomous and independent think tanks operate freely, without influence from any single group or donor, and fund their work independently. Quasi-independent organizations are also autonomous but may have affiliations with groups or donors that influence their operations.

University affiliated Think Tanks

In Pakistan, both private and public universities host policy research institutes, but many focus solely on academic pursuits rather than influencing policy. The number of these university-affiliated centers is growing, especially with the rise of private universities. For example, the Maritime Policy Research (NCMPR) at Bahria University engages in national and international discussions on maritime issues to represent Pakistan's interests and collaborate with other think tanks through MoUs. This paper highlights the emergence and functions of think tanks in Pakistan within the policy context. While various types of think tanks exist, they often face challenges in terms of policy processes. None of them can be considered completely independent from government or other interests, and true independence is rare. The dynamics of these organizations reflect the political climate and contextual factors in Pakistan.

Factors and Dynamics of Diplomatic Think Tanks Influence on Pakistan's Foreign Policy

Think tanks play a crucial role in modern governance, contributing significantly to national and international affairs and acting as carriers of soft power for nations. While American, German, and French think tanks have expanded globally, questions remain about their influence on policy making, particularly in Pakistan. This chapter emphasizes the

importance of diplomatic think tanks in shaping foreign policy by examining various factors like political environment, civil society, bureaucracy, donors, and funding. Understanding these dynamics is key to assessing the effectiveness of think tanks in influencing diplomatic policies.

Diplomatic Think Tanks and the Political Environment

The political context strongly shapes the role of think tanks in Pakistan. During periods of military rule, think tanks faced restrictions on offering independent analysis. After democracy was restored in 2007, conditions improved, but political institutions still affect think tank development (Hay & Sudarshan, 2010). Power is centralized, limiting policy initiatives. Pakistan's society is divided along party lines, making objective policy recommendations challenging. Research findings are often viewed through a political lens, hindering the recognition of neutral expertise. In polarized environments, research may be seen as driven by hidden agendas rather than impartial analysis.

Think Tanks Within the Civil Society and the Broader Polity

In Pakistan, the political context strongly influences the role of think tanks and research institutions. Under military regimes and even after the restoration of democracy in 2007, think tanks faced challenges in providing independent analysis. Power is centralized, limiting policy initiatives, and society is divided along party lines, making objective policy recommendations difficult. Civil society and think tanks have grown, partly due to donor support, but they are also viewed as threats by the state. The state may try to co-opt or politicize civil society actors, affecting their neutrality. In more liberal democracies, the state engages civil society in policy decisions, but in Pakistan, there are few mechanisms for this. In polarized environments like Pakistan, research is often seen through a political lens, undermining claims of neutrality by think tanks.

The Role of Bureaucracy

In Pakistan, the bureaucracy plays a crucial role in policy formulation, but it's often politicized and marked by internal conflicts. Bureaucrats tend to be conservative, elitist, and resistant to external input, including from think tanks. They see themselves as the sole experts in policy matters and resist ideas from outside sources. The politicization of the bureaucracy leads to domination over policy decisions, factionalism, and resistance to change. As a result, proposals from think tanks are often disregarded, despite their expertise and competence.

The Role of Donors

Since Pakistan gained independence, it has received significant foreign aid, which often comes with conditions and recommendations from donors (Pautz, 2007). These conditions can influence the recipient government's policy agenda, leading to a loss of ownership over policymaking. As a result, the government may rely on donors to shape its development agenda, limiting the role of think tanks in providing policy advice. Donors prioritize issues like market access and investment, sometimes at the expense of local priorities. While donor funding is crucial for think tank sustainability, it can also constrain their independence and influence over policymaking. Overall, donor dependency undermines the effectiveness of both the government and think tanks in Pakistan.

Case Study of Pakistan China Institute (PCI)

Brief Introduction of PCI

Pakistan-China Institute was established in 2009, under the Chairmanship of Senator Mushahid Hussain Syed. It is a non-governmental, non-partisan and non-political think-tank. It tends to be the principal non-governmental platform to promote people to

people ties between Pakistan and China in all areas particularly defence and diplomacy, education and energy, economy and environment with a particular focus on youth and women.

Aims and Objectives

The Pakistan-China Institute aims to envelope the rich and diverse bilateral relationship evolved between Pakistan and China. In addition to being neighbours in a dynamic and often time challenging region, it is important that Pakistan learns from the rapid economic and social progress of China and makes informed strategies to resolve the energy, security, law and order, environmental, economic and other challenges (McGann & Sabatini, 2011). By solidifying the stake of both the countries in each other's future, the Institute aims to promote the bilateral economic cooperation and trade to bring it to par with the strategic partnership that Pakistan and China share.

Research and Education

The Pakistan China Institute (PCI) launched the "Corridors, Culture and Connectivity" monograph series in 2015. This series covers topics such as regional economic integration, geostrategic significance, and socio-cultural dynamics in Asia, with a focus on Pakistan-China relations and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). PCI collaborates with academics nationwide to develop research on CPEC's impact, particularly in Baluchistan. Through conferences, lectures, and publications, PCI aims to foster discussions and analysis on diplomatic relations between China, Pakistan, and the region. PCI has become a credible institution in both countries, providing advice and information on bilateral relations. It serves as a platform for understanding the evolving dynamics of regional relations in the Asian Century, promoting people-to-people contact in the region.

Activities and role of PCI in Pakistan's Foreign Policy Making

Pakistan China Institute (PCI) commemorated the 70th anniversary of Pakistan-China diplomatic relations with various events and initiatives. PCI, chaired by Mushahid Hussain, highlighted the unique and strong bond between the two countries (Ksenofontov & Becker, 2020). They launched 'Youlin Magazine' in collaboration with the International Culture Exchange Association of Xinjiang, aiming to deepen understanding of Chinese civilization in Pakistan. Additionally, PCI introduced 'The Governance of China' by Xi Jinping to Pakistani readers, offering insights into China's governance and policies. They also organized an essay writing competition, "To China, with Love," celebrating the friendship between the two nations. The paper examines PCI's research discourse on Sino-Pakistan relations, emphasizing their role in shaping policy discourse.

Conclusion

To sum up, think tanks are research organizations that perform research regarding various topics and issues such as social policy, political strategy, economics, military, foreign matters, technology, and culture etc. They provide systematic analysis to enable them to make informed and quality decisions about domestic and international policy related issues. This study assessed the degree, scope and level of influence exerted by various diplomatic think tanks on the policy makers involved in formulating foreign policy of Pakistan. Think tanks are emerging and evolving, at a greater speed, into the debate on and design of public policies in all areas. Over the past decades, Pakistan think tanks have also been very influential in framing policy issues particularly foreign policy by providing timely analyses. In the last two decades, there is proliferation of think tank across Pakistan.

Pakistan diplomatic think tanks do have the ability to influence and contribute both directly and indirectly to the foreign policy-making process. More importantly they have set their image such that policymakers themselves turn to them for policy advice and

suggestions. There are five distinct ways in which Pakistan think tanks affect foreign policy-makers:

1. They generate original ideas and thus more options for foreign policy,
2. They provide a body of experts to act as government functionaries,
3. They offer a genuine platform for important debates and discussions,
4. They educate Pakistani citizens about the international world, and
5. They contribute to official efforts that aim to resolve international conflicts.

However, the most important task of these think tanks is to identify new and important issues early on that Pakistan will likely confront in the time ahead and also bring these issues into the knowledge of foreign policy-maker..

Recommendations

The recommendations offered below are quite broad in their approach. First, Diplomatic think tanks in Pakistan rely, like all other developing countries, on foreign governmental and private funding. Instead, they must look for other sources and diversification of funding. In addition, the research organizations should also potentially focus attention to other stakeholders by increasing responsiveness to the wider stakeholder and policy community. Similarly, Think tanks in Pakistan can possibly focus on achieving or causing intermediate influences as well as direct changes in policy. Moreover, It is significant that the Pakistan research organisations engage with a wider set of actors in the system both at domestic and international levels. Lastly, the leading diplomatic think tanks of Pakistan should also build horizontal and vertical linkages with other regional and international think tanks.

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