

FOREIGN FUNDING OF THINK TANKS IN AMERICA



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FREEMAN**
FOREIGN INFLUENCE
TRANSPARENCY INITIATIVE



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While investigations into Russian influence in the 2016 election regularly garner front-page headlines, there is a half-billion-dollar foreign influence industry working to shape U.S. foreign policy every single day that remains largely unknown to the public. The Foreign Influence Transparency Initiative is working to change that anonymity through transparency promotion, investigative research, and public education.

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This report also benefitted immensely from many individuals outside the Center for International Policy, most notably from off-the-record conversations with current and former employees at a number of think tanks mentioned in this report. They helped to fill in some of the gaps in our data and provided anecdotes of foreign funding's impact. This report also relied heavily on insights from exemplary work on foreign funding at think tanks conducted by a number of organizations, including The Intercept, The New York Times, and the Project On Government Oversight.

Finally, this report was made possible by the financial support provided to the Foreign Influence Transparency Initiative by the Open Society Foundation and the Arca Foundation. All of the Center for International Policy's funders can be found on our website.

Cover Photo: Bills from various parts of the world, including Singapore, Thailand, the US, Sweden and Hong Kong. Credit: www.Japanexperterna.se.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Most Americans outside the Washington establishment have little, if any, understanding of what a think tank is or does. Yet, despite largely flying under the public's radar, think tanks have long played a critical role in shaping U.S. public policy. Think tanks conduct in-depth research on public policy, help write laws, testify before Congress, are a go-to source for media on the political issue of the day, serve as springboards for future government officials, and are a home for former government officials.

Think tanks vary considerably in terms of their objectives and organization, but many think tanks in Washington D.C. share a common trait—they receive substantial financial support from foreign governments. While these are often democracies with interests closely aligned with those of the U.S., a significant number of these foreign donors are undemocratic, authoritarian regimes whose aims often diverge significantly from U.S. interests. In a variety of instances, the public has learned that this foreign funding can significantly influence think tanks' work. It can lead to a think tank producing reports favorable to a foreign power,¹ think tank experts offering Congressional testimony in support of a foreign powers' interests,² or its scholars working closely with a foreign funders' registered lobbyists.³

Yet, we only have anecdotal examples of the impact foreign funding has on think tanks for a simple reason: think tanks are not required to publicly disclose their funding. Without a legal requirement for disclosure many think tanks are reluctant to reveal the full scope of their foreign funding. They rarely mention any potential conflicts of interest in their published reports or commentary, and think tank experts often fail to report financial ties to foreign governments when testifying before Congress. Hiding these potential conflicts of interest leaves the public and policymakers with the impression that they're hearing from a truly objective expert, when in fact they may be listening to someone that is, at least de facto, on the payroll of a foreign power.

In an effort to move towards greater transparency of think tank funding in America, this report analyzes foreign funding at the top fifty think tanks in America, as ranked by the University of Pennsylvania's Global Go To Think Tank Index, based on criteria like the quality and reputation of the think tanks research and the reach of its publications.⁴ The analysis includes all foreign funding received by these think tanks from 2014-2018. 2014 was chosen as the starting point for analysis because that was the year *The New York Times* published the expose "Foreign Powers Buy Influence at Think Tanks."⁵ The hope here is to increase the scope of that analysis to even more think tanks and expand it five additional years. The data collected for this analysis comes primarily from think tanks' publicly available information, supplemented by media reports of funding not publicly disclosed by think tanks themselves and through voluntary disclosures by think tanks after requests from the Foreign Influence Transparency Initiative (FITI). From this analysis we found:

- More than \$174 million in foreign funding went to these top think tanks;
 - The top recipients of foreign funding were the World Resources Institute, the Center for Global Development, and the Brookings Institution;
- Nearly 900 different foreign donations were given to these think tanks;
- Donations to these think tanks came from more than 80 different countries and international organizations;
 - The top donor countries were Norway, United Kingdom, and the United Arab Emirates;
- There were widely varying levels of transparency about funding sources at top think tanks, ranging from full disclosure of all funders and exact amounts donated, to think tanks that disclose absolutely no information about foreign or domestic funding sources.

This analysis points towards a simple policy recommendation: think tanks should be required, by law, to publicly disclose funding from foreign powers. This is essential for the public, the media, and policymakers to better identify potential conflicts of interest when consuming information provided by think tanks.

INTRODUCTION

Think tanks serve a specialized niche in the American political system. In theory, they're a bridge between academia and government. In practice, they can literally write our nation's laws and fill positions within the federal government. They're the political expert you see on TV and the author of that op-ed in your favorite paper. They are the driver of political discourse in America. Yet, despite this immense influence on government and policy debates in the U.S., think tanks are largely unknown to most Americans. This introduction seeks to remedy that by providing a brief explanation of what think tanks are and do, how that work is driven by their funders, and thus why it's critical for the public to have unfettered access to information about a think tanks' funders.

THE ROLE OF THINK TANKS IN THE U.S. POLITICAL SYSTEM

Most Americans outside D.C. have little, if any, understanding of what a think tank is. The idea that there are organizations who pay people to “think” is, in fact, an absurd concept to many. In attempting to explain their profession, think tank scholars can face vexing questions from friends and relatives outside D.C. akin to, “Wait, you get paid to just sit there and think?” While think tank scholars do more than just think—they also write and speak about all that thinking—the fact remains that outside of Washington few realize what an extraordinary impact think tanks have on the American political system.

Despite largely flying under the public's radar, think tanks have long played a critical role in shaping U.S. public policy. When Ronald Reagan was elected President of the United States in 1980 the prominent conservative think tank, the Heritage Foundation, provided the president-elect's transition team with a more than 1,000 page set of recommendations called the “Mandate for Leadership” covering everything from taxes to national defense.⁶ By Heritage's counting, the Reagan administration ultimately adopted or attempted fully two-thirds of Heritage's recommendations.⁷ On the other side of the aisle, after serving as Chief of Staff to President Bill Clinton, John Podesta founded perhaps the most prominent liberal think tank in Washington D.C., the Center for American Progress (CAP), in 2003. CAP has since worked extremely closely with Democratic Members of Congress, the Obama administration, and presidential candidates. Podesta himself was Chairman of the 2016 Hillary Clinton Presidential campaign.

Just as think tanks can directly shape public policy and elections, they play a large role in shaping the public narrative about U.S. government policies. Many of the experts discussing the most pressing political issues of the day on TV networks, like CNN and Fox News, work at think tanks. The op-ed pages of *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* are filled with the musings of think tank scholars. Most of the astute political analysts you hear on National Public Radio and other radio outlets also work at think tanks. In short, think tanks are the engine driving public debate about public policy.

In a different sense, think tanks are directly connected to the federal government, in that they're filled with former and future government officials. Many think tanks pride themselves on employing former government officials, including former Senators, Representatives, and their staff, as well as former Executive branch employees. The oldest think tank in D.C., the Brookings Institution, for example, is headed by retired four-star General John Allen and amongst its more than 300 experts are two former Chairs of the Federal Reserve—Janet Yellen and Ben Bernanke.⁸

Just as importantly, think tanks are filled with future government officials. In this role, think tanks serve as incubators for scholars and bureaucrats looking to make the leap into public service. Think tanks, particularly those with an ideological leaning, are also fertile ground for new presidential administrations looking to fill political appointments in the Executive Branch. They also can serve as something of a holding tank where prominent officials go to work when an administration of the opposing party comes to power, waiting to rejoin a future administration more in line with their ideological leaning.

In short, while think tanks may not be widely understood, they play an enormous role in shaping the U.S. government and public policy in America.

Perhaps because of this extraordinary influence, we are living in something of a heyday for think tanks in America. The Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program at the University of Pennsylvania, which tracks and ranks think tanks annually, found that there are now 1,872 think tanks in America, more than double the number of think tanks in existence in 1980 when the Heritage Foundation provided its recommendations to Ronald Reagan.⁹ And, no two think tanks are identical. They focus on different issues, have differing objectives, are organized differently, and, most importantly for this analysis, have differing funding streams.

Those working at think tanks often argue that funding doesn't impact their work and that their scholars' "Independence is sacred," as the president of the prominent Middle East Institute (MEI) has publicly proclaimed.¹⁰ But, it's naïve, to say the least, to actually believe that funding sources have no impact on the work a think tank does. Most funding comes with explicit strings attached, like writing research reports or hosting public events about specific topics. While we may or may not agree with funders' objectives, they place constraints on what a think tank can and cannot do, nonetheless.

At a very basic level funders are unlikely to continue funding an organization that advocates for positions they oppose. In this case, funders give money to organizations they are already in ideological alignment with. Think tanks that don't compromise their positions and simply have more resources to advance those positions. This avenue of influence need not be explicit and is often simply a Darwinian process—think tanks doing work counter to a funder's interests shouldn't expect that funding stream to survive long. But collectively, this gives the positions of the largest funders of think tanks a larger voice in Washington.

Funders directing what think tanks do is an obvious form of influence, but funders can

also wield considerable power by paying for what think tanks don't do. In fact, one of the most valuable commodities funders buy is a think tank/s silence. This was readily apparent after the brutal murder of Jamal Khashoggi at the Saudi consulate in Turkey. Think tanks with financial connections to the Saudis or their close allies, the United Arab Emirates, were slow to condemn the Saudis heinous act and remained largely silent as the Senate passed a resolution to punish the Saudi's and end U.S. support for their war in Yemen.¹¹ The Center for American Progress also significantly watered down its public statement chastising the Saudis for murdering Jamal Khashoggi at the request of a scholar with close ties to the Emiratis.¹²

THE IMPORTANCE OF TRANSPARENCY IN THINK TANK FUNDING

Think tanks have an immense impact on the U.S. political process and funders have considerable sway in determining what think tanks do (or don't do). This extraordinary influence on the U.S. political system is coupled with an extraordinary lack of transparency of think tank funding. In fact, think tanks, like most non-profit organizations, aren't required to disclose any of their donors, be they foreign or domestic. For most think tanks, this information is included in IRS forms called Schedule B's, which are not made publicly available. The result is that think tanks can keep their funding sources secret.

Some think tanks do publicly provide information about their funders, but U.S. law doesn't require them to. Amongst those that disclose funding sources, there is considerable variation in what information they provide to the public. This ranges from think tanks that simply provide the names of some funders to think tanks that provide the names of all funders and the precise amounts of their donations to the think tank. Most think tanks that do disclose information fall somewhere in between, typically providing the names of funders and listing them in rather broad ranges of financial support.

Unfortunately, most consumers of think tank expertise aren't afforded the opportunity to understand how a think tank's funding might bias the information they're receiving. It's incredibly rare for media outlets quoting or interviewing think tank experts to bring up their potential conflicts of interest. Even more troubling, think tank experts testifying before Congress often fail to disclose potential conflicts of interest even when the law requires this of testimony in the House (though not for Senate testimony).¹³

THE ROADMAP

In an effort to move towards greater transparency of think tank funding in America, the remainder of this report analyzes foreign funding at the top fifty think tanks in America, as ranked by the University of Pennsylvania's Global Go To Think Tank Index, based on criteria like the quality and reputation of the think tanks research and the reach of its publications.¹⁴ The analysis includes all foreign funding received by these think tanks

from 2014-2018. 2014 was chosen as the starting point for analysis because that was the year *The New York Times* published the expose “Foreign Powers Buy Influence at Think Tanks.”¹⁵ The hope here is to increase the scope of that analysis to even more think tanks and expand it five additional years. The data collected for this analysis comes primarily from think tanks’ publicly available information, supplemented by media reports of funding not publicly disclosed by think tanks themselves and through voluntary disclosures by think tanks after requests from the Foreign Influence Transparency Initiative. This analysis found:

- More than \$174 million in foreign funding going to these top think tanks;
 - The top recipients of foreign funding were the World Resources Institute, the Center for Global Development, and the Brookings Institution;
- Nearly 900 different foreign donations given to these think tanks;
- Donations to these think tanks came from more than 80 different countries and international organizations;
 - The top donor countries were Norway, United Kingdom, and the United Arab Emirates;
- Widely varying levels of transparency about funding sources at top think tanks, ranging from full disclosure of all funders and exact amounts donated, to think tanks that disclose absolutely no information about foreign or domestic funding sources.

This analysis points towards policy recommendations that could help improve transparency of foreign funding at think tanks and allow the public and policymakers to better identify potential conflicts of interest when consuming information provided by think tanks. These recommendations are outlined in the report’s conclusion.

FOREIGN FUNDING AT THE TOP 50 THINK TANKS IN AMERICA

This section lays out the findings from an analysis of foreign funding at the top 50 think tanks in America from 2014 to 2018. It first discusses the methodology we used to acquire the nearly 900 different instances of foreign donations to think tanks that we've tracked from 2014 to 2018, and then lays out the results of that analysis—highlighting the top recipients of foreign money and the most generous foreign donors.

While this was a labor intensive effort that yielded an expansive database of think tank funding, we have no illusions that this is the entire universe of foreign money these think tanks received during this time period. This is true for at least two reasons. First, as discussed in much greater detail in the next section, think tanks aren't required to disclose their foreign donors and many don't. Intrepid journalists have been able to fill in some of these blind-spots, but there undoubtedly remains a sizeable amount of foreign funding that hasn't been publicly disclosed or reported. Second, most think tanks that disclose foreign funders don't list the amount of funding received or list the amounts in ranges, from, say, \$25,000 to \$100,000. Because we can't determine the precise amount of these contributions, we report only the minimum amounts of these ranges (e.g. \$25,000 instead of \$100,000) to provide the most conservative funding estimates possible. Thus, all of the figures listed in this report are a floor, not a ceiling, for the amount of foreign money that flowed to America's top 50 think tanks.

METHODOLOGY

While analyzing the foreign funding profiles at all of the more than 1,800 think tanks operating in America would have been ideal, this analysis focused on the more manageable (though still sizeable) pool of the top fifty think tanks in America, as ranked by the University of Pennsylvania's Global Go To Think Tank Index, based on criteria like the quality and reputation of the think tanks research and the reach of its publications.¹⁶ This list is topped by the Brookings Institution—which was voted the top think tank in both America and the world—and other staples of the Washington think tank scene, including the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, the Center for Strategic and International Studies, and the Heritage Foundation. A full list of the top 50 think tanks, sorted alphabetically, is in Table 1.

Table 1: The Top 50 Think Tanks in America

Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty	Heritage Foundation
American Enterprise Institute	Hoover Institution - Stanford
Asia Society Policy Institute	Hudson Institute
Aspen Institute	Human Rights Watch
Atlantic Council	Information Technology and Innovation Foundation
Belfer Center for Science & International Affairs - Harvard	Inter-American Dialogue
Brookings Institution	James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy - Rice
Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs	Manhattan Institute for Policy Research
Carnegie Endowment for International Peace	McKinsey Global Institute
Cato Institute	Migration Policy Institute
Center for a New American Security	National Bureau of Asian Research
Center for American Progress	National Bureau of Economic Research
Center for Climate and Energy Solutions	New America Foundation
Center for Global Development	Peterson Institute for International Economics
Center for International Development - Harvard	Pew Research Center
Center for Strategic and International Studies	Rand Corporation
Center for the National Interest	Reason Foundation
Center on Budget and Policy Priorities	Resources for the Future
Chicago Council on Global Affairs	Stimson Center
Council on Foreign Relations	The Mercatus Center
Earth Institute - Columbia University	United States Institute of Peace
Economic Policy Institute	Urban Institute
Foreign Policy Research Institute	Wilson Center
Freedom House	World Resources Institute
German Marshall Fund of the United States	Worldwatch Institute

FITI took these fifty think tanks and first searched for all publicly available information the think tanks themselves provided about their foreign funders. Most of this information came from think tanks' Annual Reports and through disclosures on their websites. We then conducted rigorous searches for any publicly available information about these think tank's foreign funding, which consisted primarily of documenting any journalists accounts of previously undisclosed foreign funding sources at these institutions. This includes, for example, when media reports revealed that funding for an anti-Qatar conference hosted by the Hudson Institute had come, albeit circuitously and without Hudson's knowledge, from the UAE.¹⁷ Finally, when information on each think tanks' foreign funding could not be obtained through either of these channels, the information was requested via e-mail. While several think tanks responded and provided the requested information, many did not respond to multiple requests, keeping their foreign funding sources hidden.

Appendix A provides a complete breakdown of each think tank's foreign funders, and Appendix B provides a complete breakdown of the think tanks each foreign funder gave to.

Amongst think tanks that did disclose their foreign funders there were widely varying levels of transparency, as the law doesn't require them to disclose any of this information. Two think tanks—the Center for Global Development and the Chicago Council on Global Affairs—reported the exact amount received from foreign donors. The much more common practice, however, was for think tanks to report that funders fall into one of many ranges of funding amounts. The Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), for example, lists foreign government donors in categories of \$5,000-\$99,999, \$100,000 to \$449,999, and \$500,000 and up.¹⁸ Without knowing the precise amounts of these donations, and to provide conservative estimates of foreign funding, we use the low end of these ranges for think tanks that report funding in this manner. Thus, unless otherwise noted, all of the figures reported here should be viewed as the minimum amount of known foreign funding. Even with this conservative approach, we were able to track more than \$174 million in funding from foreign powers going to these top think tanks.

THINK TANKS RECEIVING THE MOST FOREIGN FUNDING

This analysis identified at least \$174.1 million in foreign funding going to the top 50 think tanks in America. The breakdown of that funding, by think tank, is provided in Table 2.

Table 2: Ranked List of Think Tanks Receiving the Most Foreign Funding

World Resources Institute	\$63,000,000
Center for Global Development	\$37,580,000
Brookings Institution	\$27,350,000
Atlantic Council	\$12,192,000
Aspen Institute	\$8,418,574
Carnegie Endowment for International Peace	\$7,025,000
German Marshall Fund of the United States	\$6,249,998
New America Foundation	\$2,804,058
Center for American Progress	\$2,490,000
Center for Strategic and International Studies	\$1,930,000
Urban Institute	\$1,060,000
Hudson Institute	\$870,000
Center for Climate and Energy Solutions	\$806,000
Peterson Institute for International Economics	\$725,000
Chicago Council on Global Affairs	\$624,177
Inter-American Dialogue	\$464,000
Center for a New American Security	\$360,000
National Bureau of Economic Research	\$80,000
Resources for the Future	\$75,000

The World Resources Institute received, by far, the most funding from foreign sources of the fifty think tanks we analyzed, raking in a whopping \$63 million. This funding came from at least 27 different foreign sources, most of which were governments in Western democracies. There were, however, a noticeable number of donors to the think tank from Asia, including China, Japan, Singapore, South Korea, and the Asian Development Bank. A full list of the World Resources Institute's foreign funders can be found in Appendix A. That the World Resources Institute receives such extensive foreign funding is perhaps unsurprising given that the organization has offices in eleven countries and conducts research on issues related to natural resources in more than 60 countries.¹⁹

The Center for Global Development (CGD) was the next highest recipient of foreign funding, with more than \$37 million coming from foreign sources, including nine European governments, the World Bank, and the African Development Bank. Most notably, the Center for Global Development received a \$9 million contribution from the United Kingdom's Department for International Development in 2016. Given the troubling lack of transparency about funding sources at many think tanks, as is discussed in much greater detail in the next section, it's well worth noting that the Center for Global Development is remarkably transparent about its funding sources, listing all funders and the exact amount of contributions. This openness is a matter of policy at the think tank, as its website notes, "CGD is committed to transparency and accountability, publishes all funding sources on our website, and does not accept funding that seeks to impose limits or restrictions on our independence."²⁰

With at least \$27 million in foreign funding, the Brookings Institution was the third highest receipt of foreign money in our analysis.²¹ This iconic Washington institution received funding from 22 foreign sources, mostly Western democracies, but with notable contributions coming from decidedly undemocratic regimes in Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia. Notably, Brookings has a branch in Qatar and the Embassy of Qatar is annually in Brookings' exclusive category of donors that give "\$2,000,000 and above."²² While it's uncertain exactly how far "above" \$2 million this funding is, some estimates place the figure as high as \$14 million.²³

Though the Atlantic Council was the fourth highest receipt of foreign contributions, with just over \$12 million in donations from foreign powers, it had thirty different foreign funding sources, which was tops amongst the think tanks analyzed here. True to its name, the vast majority of these donors were across the Atlantic Ocean, including eighteen European nations, the European Union itself, and NATO. The Atlantic Council, like Brookings, also had several donors from the Middle East, including Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates.

Rounding out the top five highest grossing recipients of foreign donations was the Aspen Institute, which received over \$8 million from foreign sources. This funding came from thirteen different foreign countries and institutions which, like the rest of the top five, were primarily Western democracies, though they too accepted sizeable donations from undemocratic regimes in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

THE TOP FOREIGN DONORS TO U.S. THINK TANKS

Another way to look at the data we've amassed on foreign funding at think tanks is from the funders' perspective. Specifically, we can track how much funding came from each of the more than 80 nations and foreign institutions that donated money to the top 50 think tanks between 2014 and 2018. The top 20, ranked based on amount donated, are listed in Table 3 and a complete list of all the think tanks each foreign nation or institution donated to is in Appendix B.

Table 3: Top 20 Foreign Donor Countries & Institutions to U.S. Think Tanks

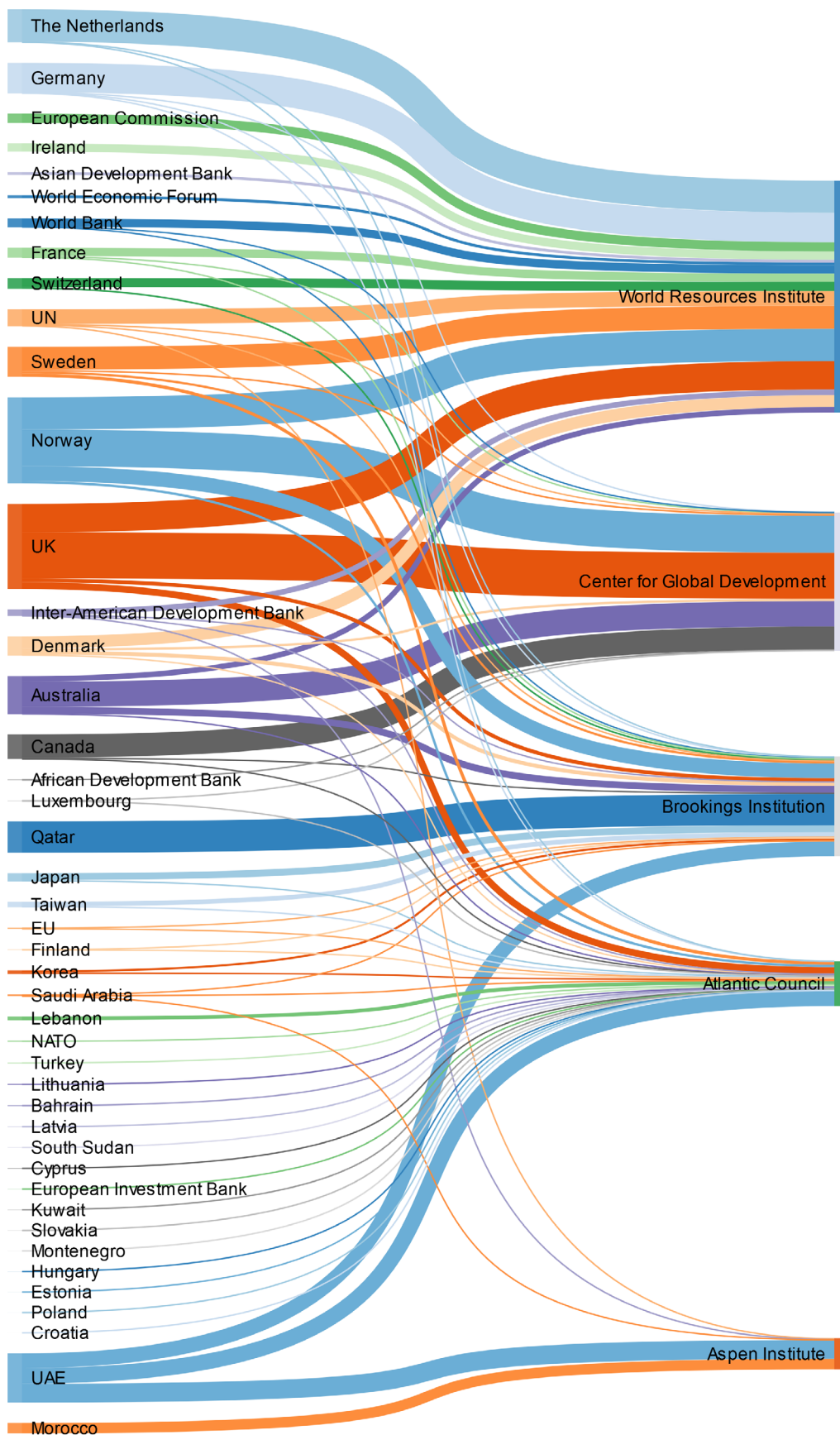
Norway	\$27,681,856
United Kingdom	\$27,123,775
United Arab Emirates	\$15,406,016
Germany	\$12,250,999
Sweden	\$9,313,999
Australia	\$9,231,000
The Netherlands	\$9,200,050
Qatar	\$8,500,600
Canada	\$6,712,250
Denmark	\$5,543,000
Japan	\$4,856,774
United Nations	\$4,720,500
World Bank	\$3,485,700
Switzerland	\$3,395,500
Taiwan	\$3,250,000
European Commission	\$2,951,000
Morocco	\$2,831,458
France	\$2,701,050
Ireland	\$2,250,050
Inter-American Development Bank	\$1,941,100

As Table 3 indicates, the vast majority of foreign funding at the top 50 think tanks came from Western democracies. In fact, the nine European countries and Canada listed in Table 3, accounted for more than \$106 million of the \$174 million in total foreign funding that we identified.

Leading the way amongst these donors was the government of Norway, which donated more than \$27.6 million to the top 50 U.S. think tanks from 2014 to 2018. Norway donated to thirteen of the top 50 think tanks during this time period and gave the lion's share of funding to the Center for Global Development and the World Resources Institute, which received \$10 million and \$8.75 million, respectively. Large sums also went to the Brookings Institution (\$4 million) and the New America Foundation (\$2.2 million).²⁴

The United Kingdom was a close second to Norway on the list in Table 3, donating at least \$27.1 million to the top 50 U.S. think tanks from 2014-2018. Like Norway, the United Kingdom made contributions to thirteen of the top 50 think tanks and gave a majority of this money to the Center for Global Development and the World Resources Institute, which received \$12.5 million and \$7.75 million from the U.K., respectively. The U.K. also made a total of \$3.8 million in contributions to the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and gave at least \$1.85 million to the Atlantic Council.

Figure 1: A List of Foreign Donors to the Five Think Tanks that Receive the Most Foreign Funding



A notable deviation from the trend of top donors hailing from democratic countries is the United Arab Emirates, which gave \$15.4 million to these top 50 think tanks. The UAE's contributions went to six different think tanks, with the vast majority going to just three—the Aspen Institute, the Atlantic Council, and the Brookings Institution, all of which received at least \$4 million from the UAE. And, all three conducted work that was either decidedly uncritical or outright flattering of the UAE.

Amongst many other connections with the UAE, the Aspen Institute co-organized “Abu Dhabi Ideas Weekend 2018,” at New York University's Abu Dhabi campus.²⁵ While this event was billed as bringing together the world's leading thinkers for a discussion of the world's most pressing issues, faculty at the NYU Abu Dhabi campus, where the event was held, have faced serious infringements on their academic freedom with course texts being redacted or outright banned and academic debate being stilted.²⁶ The UAE has even gone so far as to imprison academics. Matthew Hedges, for example, was arrested in the UAE while completing work on his doctoral dissertation and unjustly imprisoned for nearly seven months in 2018.²⁷ In fact, Hedges, who was convicted of espionage after a five minute trial, was being held in solitary confinement as the Aspen Institute event was taking place.

The Atlantic Council's ties to the UAE have given the UAE the opportunity to shape the think tank's reports prior to publication. The former Director of the Atlantic Council's Middle East Peace and Security Initiative, Bilal Saab, was a confidant of the UAE's Ambassador to the U.S., Yousef Otaiba, and leaked e-mails showed that Saab gave advanced copies of an Atlantic Council report on the future of U.S. policy towards Iran to Otaiba.²⁸ Saab gave Otaiba the opportunity to provide comments on the report and even to make edits to the foreword of the report that was to be published under the name of retired four-star General and former Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, David Petraeus.²⁹ A spokesman for The Atlantic Council told The Intercept, which first reported on this, that it wasn't an uncommon practice for donors to provide comments on research prior to publication, stating, “We work through these issues with corporate partners, with government partners...we hear their opinions when they're rendered and then we give them to the authors of the papers.”³⁰

Like the Atlantic Council, the Brookings Institution has received sizeable contributions from the UAE, yet many of the think tank's scholars haven't shied away from lambasting the Emiratis. One Brookings scholar, for example, offered a scathing rebuke of the UAE and Saudi Arabia's role in Yemen, calling their strategy “disastrous.”³¹

Other Brookings scholars, however, have been decidedly uncritical of the Emiratis. For example, in December 2019 a Brookings expert published a piece extolling the values of UAE's economic strategy “as a model...for African economies.”³² The piece failed to mention that the UAE is a haven for money laundering and the economy is built on the backs of migrant workers, who constitute approximately 90% of the workforce, and face rampant abuse and exploitation.³³

Outside of these top three recipients of contributions from the UAE, the Emiratis have paid a number of other think tanks to influence debate about their spat with Qatar and

to produce other work in the Emiratis' interests.³⁴ Most notably, in 2017 leaked e-mails between Ambassador Otaiba and Michelle Flournoy, the Chief Executive Officer of the Center for a New American Security (CNAS), showed that Otaiba agreed to pay \$250,000 to CNAS for a study on the impact of allowing the UAE to join the Missile Technology Control Regime, which would effectively allow the U.S. to sell military drones to the UAE.³⁵ CNAS ultimately was paid \$250,000 to produce the private report for the UAE, and in a public report released later the think tank unabashedly made the case for selling military drones to the UAE and other countries, even going so far as to recommend the Trump administration, "loosen restrictions on drone exports, treating them more like traditional aircraft."³⁶

It's important to note that the \$15.4 million in funding we tracked from the UAE does not include enormous donations the UAE made to think tanks focused on the Middle East that were not amongst the top 50 think tanks covered in this analysis. Specifically, the UAE gave at least \$20 million to the Middle East Institute in a "secret" donation orchestrated through UAE's Ambassador to the U.S. Yousef Al Otabia.³⁷ This also doesn't include a large donation to the Foundation for Defense of Democracies (which was not amongst the top 50 think tanks), which circuitously came from the UAE, to host a conference critical of the UAE's rival Qatar.³⁸

VARYING LEVELS OF DISCLOSURE

While understanding what think tanks do can be a bit tricky, it's downright daunting to learn precisely how think tanks are funded to do that work. That is by design in many cases. Some funders prefer to remain anonymous. Some think tanks prefer to keep funders anonymous to avoid political blowback or questions about funding biasing their work. Regardless of the reason, many think tanks simply don't provide information about their funders and are reluctant to do so even when prompted.

The problem begins with the fact that think tanks have no legal obligation to reveal their funders, whether they be foreign or domestic. Think tanks typically operate as tax-exempt non-profit organizations and, according to the Internal Revenue Service, "a tax-exempt organization is generally not required to disclose publicly the names or addresses of its contributors set forth on its annual return."³⁹ This exemption from disclosure does not apply to private foundations or "political organizations," but most think tanks, despite doing a considerable amount of political work, aren't registered as political organizations with the IRS.

Because the law doesn't require think tanks to disclose any information about their foreign funders, there's considerable variance about what think tanks do reveal. In fact, our analysis of the top 50 think tanks in America found that there are nearly as many approaches to disclosing this information (or not) as there are think tanks. In Table 4, however, we attempt to group these varying approaches into five basic categories, those that: 1) don't disclose any information about their foreign donors (red); 2) don't accept donations from foreign governments (green); 3) list funder names without providing

information about contribution amounts (orange); 4) list funder names in ranges of contribution amounts (blue); 5) list funder names and exact contribution amounts (yellow).

Table 4: The Top 50 Think Tanks in America Labeled According to Type of Foreign Funder Disclosure

Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty	Center for a New American Security
Center for the National Interest	Center for American Progress
Earth Institute - Columbia	Center for Climate and Energy Solutions
Hoover Institution	Center for Strategic and International Studies
Information Technology and Innovation Foundation	German Marshall Fund of the United States
Manhattan Institute for Policy Research	Hudson Institute
Wilson Center	Inter-American Dialogue
Belfer Center for Science & International Affairs - Harvard	New America Foundation
Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs	Peterson Institute for International Economics
Center for International Development - Harvard	Urban Institute
Foreign Policy Research Institute	Center for Global Development
Freedom House	Chicago Council on Global Affairs
James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy - Rice	American Enterprise Institute
Migration Policy Institute	Asia Society Policy Institute
National Bureau of Asian Research	Cato Institute
National Bureau of Economic Research*	Center on Budget and Policy Priorities
Rand Corporation	Council on Foreign Relations
Resources for the Future*	Economic Policy Institute
Stimson Center	Heritage Foundation
World Resources Institute*	Human Rights Watch
Worldwatch Institute	McKinsey Global Institute
Aspen Institute	Pew Research Center
Atlantic Council	Reason Foundation
Brookings Institution	The Mercatus Center
Carnegie Endowment for International Peace	United States Institute of Peace

Legend:

Foreign Donors Not Publicly Disclosed	Foreign Funder Names and Exact Contribution Amounts
Foreign Funders Listed Without Contribution Amounts	Does Not Accept Donations From Foreign Governments
Foreign Funders Listed With Ranges of Contribution Amounts	

*Mix of some funders just listed by name without contribution amounts and others listed with contribution amounts

For seven of the top 50 think tanks (denoted in red in Table 4) we were unable to discover any information on their foreign funders (or any of their funders in most cases), and thirteen of the top 50 think tanks (denoted in green in Table 4) either publicly state they do not accept funding from foreign governments or their publicly reported information on funders does not include foreign governments. Of course, given that think tanks aren't required to disclose any of their funders, it's possible that these think tanks simply aren't reporting their connections to foreign governments even if they do publicly state they don't accept foreign government funding. Until think tanks are required to disclose their foreign donors, however, this is our best assessment of those that do not accept funding from foreign powers.

This leaves 30 think tanks that are supported by foreign powers and disclose some information about them. Think tanks that do voluntarily provide information about their funders, then, should be commended. Even providing just the bare minimum of information about which countries donations come from—as 14 of the think tanks (denoted in orange in Table 4) analyzed here do—is more than the law currently requires. Several of the think tanks that fall into this category are marked with an asterisk indicating they provide information on contribution amounts for some, though not all, foreign funders.

Sixteen of the think tanks analyzed here go beyond this basic level of disclosure and provide information about the amount of support they receive from each foreign funder. Fourteen of these (denoted in blue in Table 4) list their foreign funders and place them in ranges of contribution amounts from, say, \$25,000 to \$100,000 or, in the case of the Brookings Institution, "\$2,000,000 and above."⁴⁰ As previously mentioned, because we can't determine the precise amount of these contributions, we report only the minimum amounts of these ranges to provide the most conservative funding estimates possible.

Just two think tanks—The Center for Global Development and the Chicago Council on Global Affairs—provide foreign funder names and the precise funding amounts provided by nearly all of their foreign funders. Some of the think tanks denoted in blue in Table 4 do provide exact funding amounts for some foreign contributions, but none provide this for a majority of their foreign donors, as the Center for Global Development and the Chicago Council on Global Affairs do. For the Center for Global Development, this exemplary level of disclosure is by design, as its website notes, "CGD is committed to transparency and accountability, publishes all funding sources on our website, and does not accept funding that seeks to impose limits or restrictions on our independence."⁴¹ And, the Chicago Council is so transparent about its funding that we were able to identify even incredibly small contributions the think tank received from foreign governments, like the \$100 they reported receiving from the Quebec Government Office in 2018.⁴²

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Many think tanks in Washington D.C. receive substantial financial support from foreign powers. As the analysis here attests, most of those donations come from democratic governments that are close allies of the U.S. and have similar interests to the U.S. Yet, a significant amount of foreign funding at think tanks comes from authoritarian regimes whose aims often diverge significantly from U.S. interests. In a variety of instances, some of which have been discussed here, we've learned that this funding can significantly influence the work being done at think tanks.

Yet, think tanks are not required to publicly disclose their funding. They rarely mention any potential conflicts of interest in their published reports or speeches and think tank experts often fail to report financial ties to foreign governments when testifying before Congress. In fact, a Project On Government Oversight (POGO) analysis of think tank experts testifying before Congress found that many don't report their employer's foreign funders even when the rules of the House require them to.⁴³ According to the POGO report, this keeps, "Congress and the public in the dark about the extent of foreign governments' financial relationships with Congressional witnesses."⁴⁴

Hiding these potential conflicts of interest in Congressional testimony or in think tanks' published work leaves the public and policymakers with the impression that they're reading unbiased research or hearing from a truly objective expert, when in fact they may be listening to someone that is, at least de facto, on the payroll of a foreign power. While this money may not actually influence a think tanks' work, the public and Congress have a right to know about at least the potential for a conflict of interest.

Fortunately, there's a simple solution to this problem: require think tanks to publicly disclose any foreign funding they receive. IRS Form 990 Schedule B's require think tanks, and all non-profits, to disclose all donors contributing more than \$5,000 to the organization.⁴⁵ So, think tanks already have this information and are already required to report it to the IRS. The IRS simply does not make it publicly available and doesn't require think tanks to either. That should be changed and the IRS should make all think tanks' Schedule B's publicly available. If not, ideally, the entire Schedule B, at least any contributions from foreign funders, should be made publicly available. This information should include the name of the foreign funder and the exact amount of funding the think tank received from them. It's fair to say this is not unnecessarily burdensome as two of the largest and most prominent think tanks—the Center for Global Development and the Chicago Council on Global Affairs—are already doing this and making the information publicly available, and all think tanks are already providing this information to the IRS.

The information made available through this reform can then be used by a number of others—including the media and Congress—to understand any potential conflicts of interest in the information they're receiving from think tanks. If think tanks are truly maintaining their intellectual independence from funding sources as many claim, they'll be able to prove it when there is full transparency of their funding sources.

APPENDIX A: LIST OF THINK TANKS AND THE FOREIGN FUNDERS THAT HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO THEM

Aspen Institute	NATO
Canada	Norway
Denmark	Poland
European Investment Bank	Saudi Arabia
Germany	Slovakia
Inter-American Development Bank	South Sudan
Morocco	Sweden
Saudi Arabia	Taiwan
Switzerland	The Netherlands
United Arab Emirates	Turkey
United Kingdom	United Arab Emirates
United Nations (United Nations Foundation)	United Kingdom
World Bank (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development)	Belfer Center - Harvard Kennedy School
Atlantic Council	Korea
Australia	Kuwait
Bahrain	Saudi Arabia
Canada	United Arab Emirates
Croatia	Brookings Institution
Cyprus	Australia
Denmark	Canada
Estonia	Denmark
European Investment Bank	European Union
European Union (European Parliament)	Finland
Finland	France
Germany	Germany
Hungary	Inter-American Development Bank
Inter-American Development Bank	Japan
Japan	Korea
Korea	Norway
Kuwait	Qatar
Latvia	Saudi Arabia
Lebanon	Sweden
Lithuania	Switzerland
Luxembourg	Taiwan
Montenegro	The Netherlands

United Arab Emirates	Center for American Progress
United Kingdom	Germany
United Nations (United Nations Foundation)	Japan
World Bank	Korea
Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs	Norway
Japan	Taiwan
Korea	United Arab Emirates
Poland	Center for Climate and Energy Solutions
Spain	Canada
Carnegie Endowment for International Peace	Germany
Australia	New Zealand
European Union (European Commission)	Norway
Finland	Switzerland
France	United Nations
Germany	Center for Global Development
India (Karnataka)	African Development Bank
Ireland	Australia
Japan	Canada
Korea	Denmark
NATO	France
Norway	Germany
Portugal	Luxembourg
Sweden	Norway
Switzerland	Sweden
Taiwan	United Kingdom
The Netherlands	United Nations
United Arab Emirates	World Bank
United Kingdom	Center for International Development - Harvard University
Center for a New American Security	Columbia
Germany	South Africa
Japan	Center for Strategic & International Studies
Korea	Australia
NATO	Canada
Switzerland	China
Taiwan	Denmark

France	NATO
Japan	Norway
Korea	Spain
Liechtenstein	Sweden
Taiwan	Taiwan
The Netherlands	The Netherlands
Turkey	United Kingdom
United Arab Emirates	Hudson Institute
United Kingdom	Denmark
Chicago Council on Global Affairs	Japan
Armenia	Taiwan
Australia	Inter-American Dialogue
Canada (Alberta)	Canada
Japan	Chile
Korea	China
Kosovo	Denmark
Norway	Development Bank of Latin America
Sweden	Ecuador
World Bank	Inter-American Development Bank
Foreign Policy Research Institute	Japan
Korea	Korea
Taiwan	Organizacion de Estados Iberoamericanos
Freedom House	Spain
Canada	World Bank
European Union	James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy - Rice University
The Netherlands	Canada
Norway	France
Sweden	International Monetary Fund
German Marshall Fund of the United States	Ireland
Belgium	Japan
European Union (European Commission)	Kuwait
Finland	Mexico
Germany	Norway
Japan	Qatar
Latvia	Saudi Arabia

Spain	New America Foundation
The Netherlands	Denmark
United Kingdom	European Union (European Commission)
Migration Policy Institute	Germany
Canada	Norway
European Union (European Commission)	Switzerland
Finland	The Netherlands
Germany	United Kingdom
Greece	United Nations
Inter-American Development Bank	Peterson Institute for International Economics
Italy	Asian Development Bank
Mexico	European Union (European Parliament)
Moldova	France
Norway	International Monetary Fund
Spain	Japan
Sweden	Liechtenstein
Taiwan	Saudi Arabia
The Netherlands	Singapore
United Kingdom	Switzerland
United Nations	Taiwan
World Bank	RAND Corporation
National Bureau of Asian Research	Australia
France	Canada
Japan	European Union (Commission and Parliament)
Korea	Japan
Taiwan	Korea
National Bureau of Economic Research	NATO
France	Norway
Germany	Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD)
India	Qatar
Italy	Saudi Arabia
Japan	United Arab Emirates
Singapore	United Kingdom
The Netherlands	World Bank
United Kingdom	World Health Organization

Resources for the Future	Italy
Canada	Jamaica
Inter-American Development Bank	Japan
Saudi Arabia	Korea
Sweden	Norway
World Bank	Singapore
Stimson Center	South Africa
Australia	Sweden
Canada	Switzerland
Finland	The Netherlands
Japan	United Kingdom
Korea	United Nations
Norway	World Bank
Qatar	World Economic Forum
Switzerland	Worldwatch Institute
Taiwan	Asian Development Bank
The Netherlands	Germany
United Kingdom	Inter-American Development Bank
United Nations	United Nations (United Nations Foundation)
Urban Institute	
European Bank for Reconstruction and Development	
Germany	
World Bank	
World Resources Institute	
African Development Bank	
Asian Development Bank	
Australia	
China	
Denmark	
Development Bank of Latin America	
European Commission	
France	
Germany	
Inter-American Development Bank	
Ireland	

APPENDIX B: LIST OF FOREIGN FUNDERS AND THE THINK TANKS THEY HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO

African Development Bank	RAND Corporation
Center for Global Development	Resources for the Future
World Resources Institute	Stimson Center
Armenia	Chile
Chicago Council on Global Affairs	Inter-American Dialogue
Asian Development Bank	China
Peterson Institute for International Economics	Center for Strategic and International Studies
World Resources Institute	Inter-American Dialogue
Worldwatch Institute	World Resources Institute
Australia	Colombia
Atlantic Council	Center for International Development - Harvard University
Brookings Institution	Croatia
Carnegie Endowment for International Peace	Atlantic Council
Center for Global Development	Cyprus
Center for Strategic and International Studies	Atlantic Council
Chicago Council on Global Affairs	Denmark
RAND Corporation	Aspen Institute
Stimson Center	Atlantic Council
World Resources Institute	Brookings Institution
Bahrain	Center for Global Development
Atlantic Council	Center for Strategic and International Studies
Belgium	Hudson Institute
German Marshall Fund of the United States	Inter-American Dialogue
Canada (Alberta)	New America Foundation
Aspen Institute	World Resources Institute
Atlantic Council	Development Bank of Latin America
Brookings Institution	Inter-American Dialogue
Center for Climate and Energy Solutions	Ecuador
Center for Global Development	Inter-American Dialogue
Center for Strategic and International Studies	Worldwatch Institute
Chicago Council on Global Affairs	Estonia
Freedom House	Atlantic Council
Inter-American Dialogue	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy - Rice University	Urban Institute
Migration Policy Institute	

European Investment Bank	Carnegie Endowment for International Peace
Aspen Institute	Center for a New American Security
Atlantic Council	Center for American Progress
European Union (European Commission and Parliament)	Center for Climate and Energy Solutions
Atlantic Council	Center for Global Development
Brookings Institution	German Marshall Fund of the United States
Carnegie Endowment for International Peace	Migration Policy Institute
Freedom House	National Bureau of Economic Research
German Marshall Fund of the United States	New America Foundation
Migration Policy Institute	Urban Institute
New America Foundation	World Resources Institute
Peterson Institute for International Economics	Worldwatch Institute
RAND Corporation	Greece
World Resources Institute	Migration Policy Institute
Finland	Hungary
Atlantic Council	Atlantic Council
Brookings Institution	India (Karnataka)
Carnegie Endowment for International Peace	Carnegie Endowment for International Peace
German Marshall Fund of the United States	National Bureau of Economic Research
Migration Policy Institute	Inter-American Development Bank
Stimson Center	Aspen Institute
France	Atlantic Council
Brookings Institution	Brookings Institution
Carnegie Endowment for International Peace	Inter-American Dialogue
Center for Global Development	Migration Policy Institute
Center for Strategic and International Studies	Resources for the Future
James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy - Rice University	World Resources Institute
National Bureau of Asian Research	Worldwatch Institute
National Bureau of Economic Research	International Monetary Fund
Peterson Institute for International Economics	James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy - Rice University
World Resources Institute	Peterson Institute for International Economics
Germany	Ireland
Aspen Institute	Carnegie Endowment for International Peace
Atlantic Council	James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy - Rice University
Brookings Institution	World Resources Institute

Italy	Foreign Policy Research Institute
Migration Policy Institute	Inter-American Dialogue
National Bureau of Economic Research	National Bureau of Asian Research
World Resources Institute	RAND Corporation
Jamaica	Stimson Center
World Resources Institute	World Resources Institute
Japan	Kosovo
Atlantic Council	Chicago Council on Global Affairs
Brookings Institution	Kuwait
Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs	Atlantic Council
Carnegie Endowment for International Peace	Belfer Center - Harvard Kennedy School
Center for a New American Security	James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy - Rice University
Center for American Progress	Latvia
Center for Strategic and International Studies	Atlantic Council
Chicago Council on Global Affairs	German Marshall Fund of the United States
German Marshall Fund of the United States	Lebanon
Hudson Institute	Atlantic Council
Inter-American Dialogue	Liechtenstein
James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy - Rice University	Center for Strategic and International Studies
National Bureau of Asian Research	Peterson Institute for International Economics
National Bureau of Economic Research	Lithuania
Peterson Institute for International Economics	Atlantic Council
RAND Corporation	Luxembourg
Stimson Center	Atlantic Council
World Resources Institute	Center for Global Development
Korea	Mexico
Atlantic Council	James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy - Rice University
Belfer Center - Harvard Kennedy School	Migration Policy Institute
Brookings Institution	Moldova
Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs	Migration Policy Institute
Carnegie Endowment for International Peace	Montenegro
Center for a New American Security	Atlantic Council
Center for American Progress	
Center for Strategic and International Studies	
Chicago Council on Global Affairs	

Morocco	New America Foundation
Aspen Institute	RAND Corporation
NATO	Stimson Center
Atlantic Council	World Resources Institute
Carnegie Endowment for International Peace	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)
Center for a New American Security	RAND Corporation
German Marshall Fund of the United States	Organizacion de Iberoamericanos
RAND Corporation	Inter-American Dialogue
The Netherlands	Poland
Atlantic Council	Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs
Brookings Institution	Atlantic Council
Carnegie Endowment for International Peace	Portugal
Center for Strategic and International Studies	Carnegie Endowment for International Peace
German Marshall Fund of the United States	Qatar
Freedom House	Brookings Institution
James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy - Rice University	James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy - Rice University
Migration Policy Institute	RAND Corporation
National Bureau of Economic Research	Stimson Center
New America Foundation	Saudi Arabia
Stimson Center	Aspen Institute
World Resources Institute	Atlantic Council
New Zealand	Belfer Center - Harvard Kennedy School
Center for Climate and Energy Solutions	Brookings Institution
Norway	James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy - Rice University
Atlantic Council	Peterson Institute for International Economics
Brookings Institution	RAND Corporation
Carnegie Endowment for International Peace	Resources for the Future
Center for American Progress	Singapore
Center for Climate and Energy Solutions	National Bureau of Economic Research
Center for Global Development	Peterson Institute for International Economics
Chicago Council on Global Affairs	World Resources Institute
Freedom House	Slovakia
German Marshall Fund of the United States	Atlantic Council
James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy - Rice University	
Migration Policy Institute	

South Africa	Taiwan
Center for International Development - Harvard University	Atlantic Council
World Resources Institute	Brookings Institution
South Sudan	Carnegie Endowment for International Peace
Atlantic Council	Center for a New American Security
Spain	Center for American Progress
Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs	Center for Strategic and International Studies
German Marshall Fund of the United States	Foreign Policy Research Institute
Inter-American Dialogue	German Marshall Fund of the United States
James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy - Rice University	Hudson Institute
Migration Policy Institute	Migration Policy Institute
Sweden	National Bureau of Asian Research
Atlantic Council	Peterson Institute for International Economics
Brookings Institution	Stimson Center
Carnegie Endowment for International Peace	Turkey
Center for Global Development	Atlantic Council
Chicago Council on Global Affairs	Center for Strategic and International Studies
Freedom House	United Arab Emirates
German Marshall Fund of the United States	Aspen Institute
Migration Policy Institute	Atlantic Council
Resources for the Future	Belfer Center - Harvard Kennedy School
World Resources Institute	Brookings Institution
Switzerland	Carnegie Endowment for International Peace
Aspen Institute	Center for American Progress
Brookings Institution	Center for Strategic and International Studies
Carnegie Endowment for International Peace	RAND Corporation
Center for a New American Security	
Center for Climate and Energy Solutions	
New America Foundation	
Peterson Institute for International Economics	
Stimson Center	
World Resources Institute	

United Kingdom	World Bank (IBRD)
Aspen Institute	Aspen Institute
Atlantic Council	Brookings Institution
Brookings Institution	Center for Global Development
Carnegie Endowment for International Peace	Chicago Council on Global Affairs
Center for Global Development	Inter-American Dialogue
Center for Strategic and International Studies	Migration Policy Institute
German Marshall Fund of the United States	RAND Corporation
James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy - Rice University	Resources for the Future
Migration Policy Institute	Urban Institute
National Bureau of Economic Research	World Resources Institute
New America Foundation	World Economic Forum
RAND Corporation	World Resources Institute
Stimson Center	World Health Organization
World Resources Institute	RAND Corporation
United Nations (United Nations Foundation)	
Aspen Institute	
Brookings Institution	
Center for Climate and Energy Solutions	
Center for Global Development	
Migration Policy Institute	
New America Foundation	
Stimson Center	
World Resources Institute	
Worldwatch Institute	

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