Think Tanks and Their Impact on US Foreign Policy in the MENA Area: Do They Matter?

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Abstract
This paper examines the impact of US think tanks on US foreign policy in the MENA area using the Multiple-Streams theory with a focus on three Presidents. First, while Clinton and Obama heavily relied on foreign policy experts from many types of think tanks, Bush predominantly relied on advocacy think tanks, which had an impact on the Presidents' foreign policies. Second, we found strong connections between policy recommendations of think tanks and foreign policies of the three Presidents; however, these connections cannot be causal relationships for two reasons. First, the alignment between the Presidents' foreign policies and think tanks' policy recommendations cannot always be attributed to the reputation of a particular think tank which aims at influencing policies. Second, it is unclear whether the shift in a president's foreign policy in the region is due to the political constraint of the opposition party in Congress or it is because of the strong pressure from think tanks.

1. Introduction

The use of the phrase *think tank* originated during World War II and referred to a secure place where military arrangements and strategies could be established and discussed (Ladi, 2005 :44).

Nowadays, defining think tanks remains problematic. Merriam-Webster's Dictionary defines a think tank as, "an institute, corporation, or group organized to study a particular subject (such as a policy issue or a scientific problem) and provide information, ideas, and advice" (*Merriam-Webster's Dictionary, 2019*). Oxford Dictionary defines a think tank as "a body of experts providing advice and ideas on specific political or economic problems" (*Oxford Dictionaries, 2019*). Many prominent scholars have given different definitions to the term 'think tank' (Abelson, 2009; McGann and Weaver, 2000; Smith, 1991; Stone and Denham 2004). However, they seem to agree on their nature and function as independent, non-profit organizations that aim at affecting policies through producing and spreading research.

The role of think tanks in the US remains more important than the one of European think tanks due to several factors which include party discipline. While the executive and legislative representatives of political parties in Europe generally respect the policy advice provided by their political parties, American presidents and members of Congress are unlikely to conform to their parties' policy commands (Stone, 2004).Therefore, they tend to seek help from think tanks to provide them with policy recommendations. This paper discusses the impact of US think tanks on US Presidents' foreign policies in the Middle East and North Africa in the light of three case studies: Bill Clinton (1993-2001), George Bush (2001-2009) and Barrack Obama (2009-2017).

2. The Typologies of Think Tanks in the US.

It is important to point out that size has not been considered an important defining characteristic of think tanks because think tanks can range from one or two staff members to several hundreds. Abelson (2009) argues that think tanks differ in their "specialization, research output and ideological orientation, and greatly in terms of their institutional independence."Thus, he distinguishes between five types of think tanks: Universities without Students, Government Contractors, Advocacy Think Tanks, Legacy-Based Think Tanks and Policy Clubs. Similarly, McGann and Weaver (2000) identified four types of think tanks: Academic, Contract Researchers, Advocacy Tanks, and Party Think Tanks. A close look at the definition of each type reveals that what McGann and Weaver called 'Party Think Tank' share almost the same characteristics with Abelson's 'Legacy-Based Think Tanks' and 'Policy Clubs'. That is, their staff are all former or current members of a political party and their work reflects that of the party's orientation (McGann and Weaver, 2000). Therefore, the typology of think tanks can boil down to three major categories about which there is a consensus in the literature.

2.1. University Without Students/Academic Think Tanks.

The staff of these think tanks are usually well-known prolific academicians and researchers. They are called universities because their main function is to foster a better understanding of significant political, economic and

social issues that encounter society, which remains the major mission of all universities (Abelson, 2009:18). However, the academicians of academic think tanks do not teach as there are no students. An example of such think tanks includes the Brookings Institution which remains one of the most famous academic think tanks in the US.

According to Abelson (2009), academic think tanks have the following characteristics. First, they tend to focus on long and medium-term research projects which examinine issues that might be considered by policy makers in the future. The findings of such projects are published in lengthy books. Second, Academic Think Tanks are often described as independent organizations whose research standards are strictly objective. Their funding comes from various foundations, corporations and individuals and their agenda is usually set internally by their staff (McGann and Weaver, 2000:7) Nevertheless, the level of independence of these think tanks as well as the objectivity of their research often clash with their main mission to influence policies.

2.2. Contract Think Tanks.

Contract think tanks share some characteristics with the academic ones and differ in others. They both employ strong academicians and endeavor to keep objectivity and credibility as the main characteristic of their research. However, contract think tanks differ from the academic ones in their sources of funding, their main client, how they set the agenda and the type of research they produce. Contract think tanks usually receive funding from government agencies; these agencies play an important role in setting the agenda which should be carried out by contract think tanks. The fact that the agenda is mostly set by the funders, who are mostly policy makers, might put the objectivity and credibility of their research in question, especially if the funders try to put pressure on their contractors to alter the research findings or prevent them from being published in case they are not in line with the funders' policy convictions. Furthermore, contract think tanks present their research findings to their funders first in the form of reports rather than books or articles that are publicly circulated. In so saying, government agencies may choose to make the research outcomes publicly available. RAND and the Urban Institute are examples of contract think tanks.

2.3. Advocacy Think Tanks.

These think tanks aim at informing policymakers about current critical issues; therefore, they are interested in selling their ideas to specific targets rather than striving to maintain objectivity in their research as it is the case with academic and contract think tanks. Consequently, their research is often characterized as 'less objective and balanced' (Abelson, 2009:21).

Unlike academic and contract think tanks, which aim at influencing future policies, advocacy think tanks focus on influencing current policy debates through providing policymakers and nmedia with very short studies in the form of one or two-page briefing notes. Additionally, most advocacy think tanks recruit young individuals who hold masters or PhD degrees in addition to experienced practitioners in business, government and on Capitol Hill. Thus, the staff of advocacy think tanks tend to have a little or no experience in research. Advocacy think tanks raise their funds mainly from their members who provide individual contributions. However, they also receive some contributions from corporations and foundations. This has enabled advocacy think tanks to market themselves as independent organizations as they mainly rely on self-funding. Another characteristic of advocacy think tanks is their use of media to influence policymakers and the public opinion.

Table 1. Similarities and Differences Between Different Types of US Think Tanks

Characteristics	Academic	Contract	Advocacy
Source of funding	Grants, endowments, corporations and individuals	Government agencies	Mainly members but also foundations and corporations.
Who set the agenda?	Staff/researchers	Government needs	Ideology
Staff	Highly experienced academicians	Highly experienced academicians	Inexperienced young researchers and experienced practitioners from different sectors.
Research focus	Long and medium-term projects aiming at influencing future policies.	Long and medium-term projects aiming at influencing future policies.	Market their ideas to influence current policies.
How is research presented?	Lengthy books and articles	Reports	Short one-to-two briefing notes and the media.
Ideology	Strive to be neutral	Strive to be neutral	Liberal/conservative

A close look at the characteristics of the three types of think tanks in the US reveals two important facts. First, they can influence policies through the research they publish or the ideas they market. Second, none of the types can claim a perfect independence because not all of them are 100% neutral, some of them have a certain

level of restrictions on agenda setting and none of them are 100% self-funded. However, we can say that while academic think tanks are the closest to being independent and neutral, contract think tanks can be positioned in the middle of the continuum and advocacy think tanks are more considered lobby groups than think tanks because their major goal is not to conduct research but to win the 'war of ideas'. There are similar types of think tanks, often called 'party think tanks', which collect published research to support their party's positions on various issues.

3. The Political Impact of Think Tanks.
3.1. Scholarly debates and methodological constraints.

The impact of US think tanks on US foreign policy has been widely debated among political scientists. David Ricci (1993:3) argues that US think tanks play a crucial role in shaping US foreign policy; however, he thinks that political scientists have not recognized their new, important and institutional impact on American foreign policy decision making. Abelson (1998) argues that because of methodological constraints, it is very difficult to assess the impact of think tanks on foreign policy decision making, especially establishing a causal relationship between the policymakers' decisions and the policy recommendations of think tanks. Similarly, Stone (1996:2-3) describes the impact of think tanks on policymaking as diffuse, variable and hard to measure.

Some scholars explain the impact of think tanks on US foreign policy by the fracturing of the policy making process, which results from the system of checks and balances in addition to the weak party order (Katz, 2007:7). In other words, the US system of checks and balances allows one party to control the executive branch while the opposing party rules the legislative one. This allows think tanks to gain more importance in terms of influencing policymaking through marketing their ideas and offering their expertise, especially in a political system where political parties play an insignificant role in terms of providing policy recommendations.

Although it is difficult to establish a causal relationship between think tanks' recommendations and foreign policy decision making, Abelson (1998) claims that researchers can draw some important conclusions on the role of think tanks in the political decision making through finding some connections between think tanks' policy recommendations and the policies adopted by decision makers. In so doing, scholars use some helpful indicators which include media presence, congressional testimonies, the number of book sales, consultations with government departments and agencies as well as the fact that some think tanks' former fellows work as high ranking officials in US administrations (Gehenna, 2005:35-36).

According to McGain (2017:34), not all of these indicators are to be considered 'impact' indicators. He differentiates between four types of indicators: Resource, utilization, output and impact. First, resource indicators refer to the capacity to hire and maintain pioneer academicians who carry out objective research and produce opportune and insightful analyses. Resource indicators also include the ability to retain stable and important funding as well as to maintain close and reliable contacts with decision-makers, academic communities and the media. Second, utilization indicators include qualitative and quantitative citations and presence in media, web hits, hearings in legislative and executive entities, official meetings, book sales, consultations by members of Congress and government departments/agencies, the number of participants in conferences and seminars organized by each think tank, and the number of references to their research and analysis in high-ranked scholarly sources. Third, output indicators refer to the quantity and quality of policy recommendations, the number of publications produced, media interviews conducted, conferences, seminars, and briefings organized, and the number of nominations for highly-ranked government posts among their staff. Finall, impact indicators focus on the policy recommendations that are adopted or taken into consideration by decision makers, the number of advisory posts held to political parties and political candidates, awards granted, publications in academic journals, the number of subscribers and website visits, and the ability to question the ordinary knowledge and conventional operating strategies of policymakers.

3.2. The Multiple-Streams theory.

The Multiple-Streams theory was developed by John W. Kingdon in his book *Agendas, Alternatives and Public Policies* (2010). Kingdon argues that the process of establishing policies has three distinctive and independent streams which would converge to form the policy agenda. According to Kingdon, think tanks play a key role in these streams resulting in influencing the policy agenda through marketing their ideas to policymakers. The theory's streams are: *The Problem Stream, the Policy Stream* and *the Political Stream.*

First*, the Problem Stream* refers to the type of issues under discussion in a particular society, which include politics, science, technology, diplomacy, economy and education. This paper's problem stream deals with US foreign policy in the Middle East and North Africa. Second, the *Policy Stream* focuses on the quality of professional research and ideas produced by think tanks and how attractive are these ideas for policy makers. Our paper examines the US think tanks' ability to attract US Presidents' attention pertaining to US foreign policy in the MENA area through prospective connections between think tanks' policy recommendations and the Presidents' foreign policy decisions from Clinton to Obama.

Third, the *Political Stream* is mainly focusing on the direct relationship between think tanks and the government, especially the think tanks' personnel who are recruited to serve in different branches of government. For the purpose of this paper, we focus on think tanks' high-ranking personnel who were recruited to serve in the three administrations, and whose posts relate to foreign policies.

4. The impact of US think tanks on US foreign policy in the MENA: Case Studies.
4.1. William J. Clinton (1993-2001).
The Clinton Administration was first associated with the Progressive Policy Institute (PPI) which was established to be affiliated with the Democratic Leadership Council (DLC) in which Clinton had been the chair before he was elected the 42nd US President.[1] According to James McGann (2017:18), the "PPI serves as the research arm of the Democratic Leadership Council, a centrist democratic group that provided the intellectual and policy framework for the Clinton campaign and later the 'Clinton Agenda". As the President, Clinton tried to apply the PPI's policy recommendations as they were outlined in its "*Mandate for Change*" (Abelson, 2006:38). In fact, there were many strong similarities between the PPI's *Mandate for Change* and Clinton's first State of the Union Address (Abelson, 2009:189; Bill Clinton's State of the Union Address, 1993). However, most of the *mandate's* policy recommendations revolved around domestic issues such as welfare reform. This is explained by the fact that all of the PPI's staff who joined Clinton's administration worked in the domestic policy departments. These include Al From, William Galston, Elaine Kamarck, and Bruce Reed.

As far as foreign policy is concerned, Clinton sought the expertise of staff from other think tanks. The most prominent was Madeline Albright who was the President of the Center for National Policy (CNP) from 1989 to 1992 before joining the Clinton Administration as the US Ambassador to the United Nations (1993-1997) and, then, the Secretary of State (1997-2001). Since 2001, Albright has rejoined the world of think thinks as the Director Emerita on the Board of the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR).

The second prominent personality was Anthony Lake who served as a Foreign Service Officer in the State Department for eight years before joining the Clinton Administration in which he served as one of the chief foreign policy advisers and the National Security Advisor from 1993 to 1997. Before joining the Clinton Administration, the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) singled out Lake to conduct an analytical study on the impact of US foreign policy in Vietnam on the American society (Lake, 1976).

Before joining the Clinton Administration as US Ambassador to NATO from 1993 to 1998, Robert Hunter had been affiliated with the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) from 1981 to 1993 and served in the National Security Council (NSC) during Carter's presidency. After finishing his government service, he worked as a senior advisor at RAND Corporation.

These examples illustrate the fact that Clinton sought the expertise of think tanks' staff to serve in key foreign policy positions which include the State Department, the United Nations, NATO and the NSC. Another example which illustrates a reverse phenomenon is Strobe Talbott who was not part of the think tank circle before joining the Clinton Administration as Madeleine Albright's Deputy Secretary of State. Talbott joined the think tank community after finishing his government service and served as the President of Brookings Institution from 2002 to 2017.

We noticed that Clinton resorted to different types of think tanks to recruit his foreign policy staff. The Center for National Policy (now called the Truman Center for National Policy) is considered an advocacy think tank because it was founded by former liberal cabinet members and mainly funded by left-wing foundations such as MacArthur Foundation, Carnegie Corporation and The Open Society Foundations, to advocate for liberal and progressive values. RAND Corporation and CSIS are generally considered contract think tanks because their main sources of funding come from contracts with government agencies and departments and they mostly present their research in reports and articles (RAND and CSIS websites, accessed April 17, 2019). As for the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), it is considered an academic think tank due to the fact that it is funded by diverse sources which do not include government contracts and include individuals, corporate memberships, revenues from *Foreign Affairs* magazine in addition to donations from foundations and endowments (*Council on Foreign Relations website*, funding, accessed February 4, 2019). Additionally, the CFR produces their research in different forms including lengthy books. RAND, CSIS and CFR are all known for their independent research and strive for neutrality.

The fact that all of Clinton's key foreign policy staff came from independent or progressive think tanks may explain Clinton's foreign policy strategy of "assertive multilateralism" which was credited to Madeline Albright. This strategy focuses on multilateral cooperation to reduce military expenditure and human losses associated with US international military participation (Sterling-Folker, 1998:277-304). This foreign policy strategy was adopted in the first-half of Clinton's first term through endorsing the United Nations Security Council

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[1] The US Democratic Party founded the DLC in 1985 in order to alter the leftist policies it took in the late 1960s, 1970s and the 1980s and take back the white middle class voters through designing policies that meet their needs.

Resolutions 661 and 687 against Iraq, including imposing economic sanctions on this country, applying no-fly zones, and inspecting Iraq's potential acquisition of weapons of mass destruction (UNSC Resolution 661 and 687). However, the Assertive Multilateralism tactic diminished after the 1994 US elections which was a turning point in Clinton's foreign policy in the Middle East.

The 1994 US elections, which were held in the middle of Clinton's first term, was known as the *Republican Revolution* because Republicans won sweeping majorities in both the House, the Senate and governorship. This marked the end of the Democratic control for the first time in 40 years and allowed Republicans to maintain their control of both chambers of Congress for the remaining six years of Clinton's tenure (Clymer, 1994). This drastic change coincided with a harsh criticism of Clinton's foreign policy including the one in the Middle East, especially from conservative think tanks such as Heritage Foundation and American Enterprise Institute (AEI) (Newsom, 1996:147). This criticism was intensified with the establishment of a fledgling neoconservative think tank in 1997; that is, the Project for the New American Century (PNAC). PNAC's *Statement of Principles* described the US as the "world's preeminent power" which encounters a challenge to "shape a new century favorable to American principles and interests" through advocating for an "increase in defense spending" and "challenge regimes hostile to our interests and values" (PNAC, 1997). By hostile regimes, PNAC was mainly referring to Saddam Hussein's Iraq. PNAC increased its criticism of Clinton's foreign policy in this country, especially during his second term.

This criticism culminated in drafting an open letter from PNAC to President Clinton on January 26, 1998 asking him to seek the "removal of Saddam Hussein's regime from power" (PNAC letter to President Clinton, 1998). The letter was signed by prominent conservatives and former officials of Republican administrations many of whom would serve in key positions in the Bush administration; these include Donald Rumsfeld, Richard Armitage, Paul Wolfowitz, Elliott Abrams, John Bolton, Paula Dobriansky and Robert Zoellick. In addition to PNAC, Abelson (2009:174-176).noted that from 1998 to 2008, the Heritage Foundation, along with conservative members of the AEI, CSIS, Cato, and RAND, were more often invited to provide testimonies before the Republican-controlled Congress than the Brookings Institution which is generally known for its liberal views

The Republican pressure from Congress combined with the harsh criticism from conservative think tanks forced Clinton to abandon his ´assertive multilateralism' and adopt foreign policies characterized by a raise in defense expenditure, a decrease in US engagements in international organizations, a dedication to enlarging the NATO and a strong policy aiming at imposing more sanctions on Iraq and other *hostile* nations in the region such as Iran, Lybia and the Sudan (Boys, 2012). Since 1996, Clinton adopted a unilateral diplomatic and military approach pertaining to imposing more sanctions on Iraq and tracing Osama Bin Laden in the Sudan and Afghanistan. To illustrate, Clinton ordered the Operation Desert Strike in September 1996 against Iraqi Air Defense in response to Saddam Hussein's attempt to attack Iraqi Kurdistan. On October 31, 1998, Clinton signed the Iraq Liberation Act aiming at removing Saddam Hussein from power (H.R.4655, 1998). This law was implemented between December 16 and 19, 1998 through launching concentrated air strikes against military installations in Iraq claiming that Hussein had not cooperated with UN inspectors for WMDs.

Clinton continued his deviation from "assertive multilateralism" through signing two executive orders 12957 and 12959 against Iran, which aimed at imposing more sanctions on this country and banning American companies and their foreign subsidiaries from engaging in any kind of oil trade relations with it claiming that it is a "state sponsor of terrorism" and a "rogue state" (Clinton Executive Orders 12957 and 12959, 1995). Clinton continued his unilateral foreign policy in the Middle East to track Osama Bin Laden in Afghanistan and the Sudan. On August 20, 1998, Clinton ordered a cruise missile strikes on Al Qaeda training camps in Afghanistan and a pharmaceutical factory in the Sudan, which was suspected for hosting Bin Laden and producing biological weapons. However, these attacks failed to capture or kill Bin Laden.

To recapitulate, the Clinton's case study shows that think tanks might have played an important role in designing and shaping his foreign policy in the MENA area. First, all of his prominent foreign policy personnel were recruited from a combination of academic, contract and advocacy think tanks known for their independent or liberal views. These include Madeline Albright whose Assertive Multilateralism did not prevail long and was confronted with the rise of conservative think tanks, especially after the *Republican revolution* in 1994 elections.

The Clinton's case study does not suggest that the shift in Clinton's foreign policy was causatively related to the pressure from conservative think tanks; rather, this case presents some strong indicators which illustrate the influence that conservative think tanks could have had on Clinton's foreign policy in the Middle East. These indicators include the shift in Clinton's foreign policy in the region after the harsh criticism from conservative think tanks, especially PNAC, which coincided with a sweeping Republican control of Congress. This shift in Clinton's foreign policy was illustrated by the examples we provided on Iraq, Iran and Osama Bin Laden. Another indicator is Abelson's finding that conservative think tanks were dominantly invited to provide testimonies in Congress after Republicans took over the legislative power during Clinton's presidency.

4.2. George W. Bush (2001-2009).

The potential influence of think tanks on Bush foreign policy started during his presidential campaign in 2000 when he brought together a team of friends and policy advisers most of whom were affiliated with conservative think tanks including the Hoover Institution, the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), and the newly established Project for New American Century (PNAC) (Abelson, 2009:144). These "Vulcans" had already served in previous Republican administrations before joining the Bush Administration (Mann, 2004:xv). The most prominent among those were Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld.

Dick Cheney, Bush Vice President during his two terms (2001-2009), was affiliated with the AEI and so was his wife, Lynne. Dick Cheney frequently mentions the AEI in his memoirs more than any other think tank. After finishing his service with Bush senior's government, in which he served as Secretary of Defense from 1989 to 1993, he joined the AEI to "continue to contribute on the major policy and political debates of the day" (Cheney, 2011:241). In the acknowledgement of the same book, Cheney stated "I'd like to thank the American Enterprise Institute, with which I've been long associated, and its outstanding and visionary president Arthur Brooks for the many forums the organization has provided over the years for debate about the most important policy issues of our time" (Cheney, 2011:521).

Before serving as Secretary of Defense in Bush junior Administration from 2001 to 2006, Donald Rumsfeld served in the same position in President Gerald Ford administration (1975-1977) and US Ambassador to the NATO (1973-1974). Rumsfeld was associated with various think tanks most of which are considered conservative. These include the Center for Security Policy (CSP), the Hoover Institution, the Project for New American Century (PNAC) and RAND Corporation.

The fact that George W.Bush relied on these prominent individuals in his administration cannot be explained by their affiliation with the think tanks we mentioned; rather, George W. Bush singled them out because of their political experience serving in previous Republican administrations including his father's. In fact, both Cheney and Rumsfeld were recruited by think thanks because of their political experience serving in previous administrations not because of their academic or scholarly abilities.

The two most powerful men in Bush administration, Cheney and Rumsfeld, were signatories of PNAC's founding *Statement of Principles*, which had been drafted before Bush came into power in 2001. 10 of the 25 signatories of this statement joined the Bush Administration afterwards. In addition to Cheney and Rumsfeld, there were:

- Paul Wolfowitz, Deputy Secretary of Defense.
- Eliot A. Cohen, a Counselor of the State Department and member of the Committee for the Liberation of Iraq.
- Paula Dobriansky, under Secretary of State for Democracy and Global Affairs
- Zalmay Khalilzad, US ambassador to the UN, Iraq and Afghanistan.
- Scooter Libby, Chief of Staff to Vice President Dick Cheney.
- Elliot Abrams, senior member of the National Security Council.
- Aaron Friedberg, Vice President's Deputy National Security Advisor and the Vice President's Director of Policy Planning.
- Fred Ikle, Member of the Defense Policy Board.

In 2000, PNAC has conducted a major study entitled "*Rebuilding America's Defenses.*" The study provided a clear recommendation on Iraq: "While the unresolved conflict with Iraq provides the immediate justification, the need for a substantial American force presence in the Gulf transcends the issue of the regime of Saddam Hussein" (PNAC Rebuilding America's Defenses, 2000) It is very important to note that PNAC's study was conducted before 9/11 and few months before Bush came to power with a government that constituted of 40% of PNAC's *Statement of Principles* signatories. To put it differently, it was not only due to 9/11 or Saddam Hussein's regime that George W. Bush decided to invade Iraq, but it was also because Bush key staff from PNAC had already been convinced of the necessity to maintain a strong US military presence in the Middle East. Indeed, PNAC's heavy criticism of Clinton's foreign policy in the Middle East was replaced by unambiguous boost of Bush policy in the region. The lamentable events of 9/11 provided a certain level of credibility to neoconservative think tanks, especially PNAC with its impactful connections with Republican officials. In his analysis of a wide spectrum of commentators, Donald Abelson concluded that PNAC's policies and principles, which were considered by the majority as extreme and disagreeable before 9/11, became more appealing afterwards (Abelson, 2006:212).

Few days after 9/11, PNAC sent a letter to George W. Bush to present its vision about the *war on terror*. This letter highlighted some recommendations which included pursuing military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan to topple Saddam Hussein and capture or kill Osama Bin Laden in addition to insulating Hezbollah, stopping financial support to the Palestinian Authority and increasing defense spending to accomplish all these goals (PNAC Letter to President Bush, 2001). Interestingly enough, the letter did not mention anything about

Iran and North Korea and the threats that their ballistic missile programs might pose to the security of the US.

The strong alinement between PNAC's recommendations and the vision of Bush foreign policy in the Middle East is more than a coincidence taking into consideration the strong connections that this neoconservative think tank had with Bush's inner circle. Bush's adoption of PNAC's foreign policy recommendations about the MENA region is not to be attributed to the importance of PNAC as a think tank which is supposed to provide independent and objective policy recommendations. Rather, the strong alignment is mostly attributed to those prominent Republican politicians who founded PNAC and whose neoconservative policy convictions preceded its birth. Bush never mentioned PNAC's role in providing him with policy recommendations, but he frequently mentioned Cheney and Rumsfeld for the same purpose. A further point that supports this conclusion is the fact that PNAC's prominence gradually faded away after most of its prominent founders joined the Bush administration until it ceased its function in 2006. Thus, we can consider PNAC an anomaly when we analyze the strong connections between its policy recommendations and Bush foreign policy vision in the MENA region.

The option of going to war was shared by other conservative think tanks including AEI, Heritage Foundation and the Hoover Institute. However, other major think tanks had balanced views in this regard. For example, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (CEIP) was anti-war and recommended other non-military ways to deal with potential WMD acquisition by Iraq (Laipson, 2017:289-299). While some scholars from Brookings were in favor of invading Iraq and overthrowing Saddam Hussein, others suggested more discussion in Congress. The Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) was against using force to contain or disarm Saddam Hussein's regime. The same argument was shared by Cato Institute which taught that Iraq did not threaten US security. There were also some prominent think tanks which preferred to give no recommendations about going to war in Iraq such as CSIS (Laipson, 2017:289-299).

Another very important aspect of Bush's foreign policy in the Middle East in relation to US think tanks was the *"Israeli Lobby"*. The pertinent study conducted by John Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt (2007:129-131) concluded that the number of connections between some of Bush leading pro-Israel staff and pro-Israel think tanks was abundant, especially with PNAC, AEI, CSP, Hudson Institute, the Jewish Institute for National Security of America (JINSA), the Middle East Forum and the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. These leading personnel include the following:

Elliott Abrams who was born into a Jewish family, served as a special assistant to President Bush as well as the National Security Council's senior director for Near East and North African Affairs. Abrams was a co-founder of PNAC and CSP both of which are far-right think tanks known for their strong support of Israel.

John Bolton served as the Under-Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security (2001-2005) and US ambassador to the United Nations (2005-2006) during Bush Administration. Before joining the Bush Administration, Bolton was a senior Vice President at the AEI, one of the conservative think tanks known for its strong support of Israel. After completing his service with the Bush Administration, Bolton served as the chairman of the Gatestone Institute from 2013 to 2018; Gatestone Institute is a conservative think tank which was criticized for spreading untrue anti-Muslim information (Przybyla, 2014). John Bolton was behind the three-State solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. He suggested returning the control of Gaza to Egypt and the West Bank to Jordan (Bolton, 2009). Such a clearly biased solution, which would deprive the Palestinians from establishing their own state, showed the strong support that Bolton expressed for Israel. In fact, he described the Palestinian right to have their own state as a 'ploy'. In 2010, Bolton (2011) co-founded *Friends of Israel Initiative*, along with 12 other prominent international personalities, to counter efforts to delegitimize the state of Israel.

Douglas Feith, born to a Jewish family, is a neoconservative who served as the Under Secretary of Defense in the Bush Administration from 2001 to 2005. Feith was the director of the Center for National Security Strategies at Hudson Institute which remains an ardent pro-Israel think tank. In fact, the Gatestone Institute, which was chaired by John Bolton, started as a satellite office of the Hudson Institute in New York. Furthermore, According to Didi Ramez and Shira Beery (2010), US and Israeli tax documents revealed that Hudson is a major financial supporter of the Institute for Zionist Strategies (IZS) with hundreds of thousands of dollars over few years.

Scooter Libby, born to a Jewish family and one of the so-called *Vulcans*, served as Cheney's chief of staff and was involved in Bush endeavors to negotiate Israeli-Palestinian Road Map for Peace through taking part in many meetings with Israeli leaders in 2002 and 2003. Libby was one of the co-founders of PNAC which, as we previously mentioned, a strong pro-Israel think tank. Mearsheimer and Walt (2007:20) described Libby as Bush Administration "most fervently pro-Israel officials".

Richard Perle, the son of Jewish parents, served as the chairman of the Defense Policy Board Advisory Committee in the Bush Administration from 2001 to 2003. Perle has been involved with many conservative pro-Israel think tanks such as the Washington Institute for Near East Policy (WINEP), CSP, AEI, PNAC and the Jewish. Institute for National Security Affairs (JINSA). Perle (1996) authored, along with David Wurmser,

Douglas Feith and others, a policy document for Benjamin Netanyahu, the then Israeli Prime Minister. The document, entitled "A Clean Break: A New Strategy for Securing the Realm." proposed a new approach to dealing with the Palestinians through holding the right to "hot pursue" them and promote alternatives to Arafat's leadership. David Wurmser, Perle's co-author of *A Clean Break*, served as Dick Cheney's Middle East advisor and special assistant to John Bolton; Wurmser has been involved with the AEI as a research fellow on the Middle East.

Last but not least, there is Paul Wolfowitz who was born to a Jewish family and served as Deputy Secretary of Defense in the Bush Administration. Wolfowitz was a scholar at the AEI and one of the signatories of PNAC's Statement of Principles.

All in all, the Bush case study suggests two major findings. First, the large number of high-ranking personnel who joined the Bush administration from PNAC and the strong connections between this latter's policy recommendations and Bush foreign policy vision in the MENA region cannot be attributed to PNAC as a think tank which is supposed to provide scholarly and independent research. Rather, these facts are mainly attributed to the individuals who founded PNAC, most of whom were politicians, not academicians, who served in previous republican administrations and their neoconservative political convictions preceded the establishment of PNAC. Indeed, it was their political experience that encouraged Bush to recruit them to serve in his administration and adopt their neoconservative ideologies. The establishment of PNAC was a just a tool to channel these already-established ideologies. The second major finding pertains to the large number of personnel who joined the Bush administration from pro-Israel think tanks as we explained in details above.

4.3. Barack Obama (2009-2017).

The first term of Barack Obama's presidency was mainly characterized by managing what he inherited from his predecessor, especially Iraq, Afghanistan and Osama Ben Laden. These issues were expanded in the second term to include the Arab Spring, especially the war in Libya, the rise of ISIS, Iran's nuclear program and the conflict in Syria. To deal with these issues, Obama sought the help of what James Mann (2012) called the "*Obamians*" who greatly differed from Bush's "*Vulcans*". Donald Abelson noticed that these *Obamians* represented a newer generation of experts and were recruited from many think tanks to build Obama's foreign policies including the one in the MENA area. These think tanks included a combination of an academic think tank, the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR); a contract think tank, the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) and advocacy think tanks; namely, the Center of American Progress (CAP) and the Washington Institute of Near East Policy (WINEP) (McGann and Weaver, 2000:147).

The establishment of CAP in 2003 by John Podesta, who co-chaired Obama's transition team into the Presidency and served as his Counselor, aimed at representing the liberal view as opposed to the AEI and the Heritage Foundation which represent the conservative view. According to *Politico*, CAP, led by John Podesta, was "a key ally of Obama White House, developing policy plans that included an outline for the withdrawal of American troops from Iraq" (Smith, 2011). In fact, Obama (2013) himself clearly stated "I could not be more grateful to CAP not only for giving me a lot of good policy ideas but also giving me a lot of staff". Indeed, about one third of CAP's staff joined Obama administration (Troy, 2017). Few months before Obama became the President, CAP, along with the New Democracy Project, had published a document of about 600 pages titled "*Change for America*: *A Progressive Blueprint for The 44th President*" (Green and Jolie, 2014). This document constituted of 67 essays which examined various issues pertaining to the White House as well as domestic, economic and national security policies. The relevant policy recommendations to the MENA area included responsibly withdrawing from Iraq, reducing America's dependence on the region's oil, closing Guantanamo Bay as well as using more diplomacy or what is known as *soft power*. Indeed, the last US troops withdrew from Iraq on November 18, 2011 before they came back in 2014 with the rise of ISIL. The US imports of oil from the Arab Gulf countries were down by 40% from 2008 to 2013 (Franssen, 2014). Obama (2014) delivered a speech to talk about his plan to close Guantanamo saying that this detention facility "does not advance our (US) national security; it undermines it". Last but not least, Obama's record of the use of diplomacy and soft power in the Middle East is absolutely more positive at least in comparison to his Republican predecessors, Bush and his father. While the fact that Obama's policies in the region are in line with the recommendations in *Change for America*, this does not necessarily mean that there is a causal relationship between Obama's adopted policies and the two think tanks which came up with these policy recommendations. However, Obama's strong connections to CAP and his clear praise of its policy ideas and staff suggest that this think tank might have had an impact on Obama's foreign policy decision in the MENA region.

In addition to CAP, which represented the dovish wing of the Democratic view, Obama sought the expertise of other scholars from another think tank that represented the hawkish wing of the Democratic view. This think tank was the Center for New American Security (CNAS) which was established by Kurt Campbell and Michele Flournoy in 2007. These two scholars were the most prominent CNAS staff who joined Obama administration. Flournoy served as Obama's Undersecretary of Defense Policy from 2009 to 2012 and Kurt Campbell occupied

the position of Undersecretary of State from 2009 to 2013. After Campbell and Flournoy joined Obama administration, CNAS was presided by Col. John Nagl who was the advisor of General David Petraeus, then the commander of the military coalition in Iraq. This explains CNAS main focus on US national security and defense policies, especially terrorism. Interestingly enough, many scholars considered CNAS as the Democratic version of PNAC in terms of their keenness on maintaining US military presence in the world. However, CNAS advocated for less presence, especially after the very costly war in Iraq. Another fact that may explain CNAS leaning towards maintaining military presence in the Middle East was its sources of funding which came, among others, from arms manufacturers and defense companies such as Northrop Grumman Aerospace Systems, Neal Blue, Airbus, Boeing, BAE Systems, Leonardo DRS, Huntington Ingalls Industries, Leidos and Lockheed Martin (CNAS Supporters, Cash Contributions Received 3027-2018).

Before founding CNAS, Flournoy and Campbell were working with the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) where they had edited a book entitled "To Prevail: An American Strategy For the Campaign Against Terrorism" two months after September 11, 2001 (Campbell and Flournoy, 2001). This book supported Bush decision to attack terrorist groups as well as the states that support them or cannot fight them on their lands. In so doing, they justified the *war on terror.* In 2003, they, along with 13 other democratic scholars, signed the "Progressive Internationalism: A Democratic National Security Strategy" which reiterated their support of the *war on terror*, but criticized the diplomatic failure of President Bush to convince all US allies and gain their trust to support him (Progressive Internationalism, 2003). During the election campaign, Campbell and Flournoy (2007) presented their policy recommendations to the next president in a document titled "The Inheritance and the Way Forward" in which they stood against Bush concept of *preventive war* and advocated for a redirection of the *war on terror* to ensure that the US would not lose its Muslim allies.

In fact, we cannot say that Obama redirected the *war on terror* from the Middle East, but he expanded it to Africa and the focus on the Middle East became less intensive and aggressive in comparison to his predecessor through the use of more diplomatic means as recommended by "The Inheritance and the Way Forward" (Campbell and Flournoy, 2007). Obama's speech (2009) "A New Beginning", which he delivered in Egypt few months after joining the White House, was meant to rebuild US relations with the Muslim world after being critically damaged during Bush presidency; indeed, rebuilding US relations with the Muslim world was one of the recommendations of CNAS aforementioned policy document.

In addition to these two advocacy think tanks, there were other types which provided Obama with experts in foreign and defense policies. These included Susan Rice who had worked with Brookings, an academic think tank, before joining Obama's presidential campaign as his senior foreign policy advisor and Ambassador to the UN during Obama's first term.[1] From 2013 to 2017, Susan Rice served as the National Security Advisor. She strongly supported a military intervention to topple Muaamar Gaddafi's regime in Libya (Helguero, 20@1). In March 2011, after initial reluctance, Obama authorized air attacks on Lybia to enforce the UNSC Resolution 1973 to create a no-fly zone, which was advocated for by Susan Rice, then the US Ambassador to the UN (UNSC Resolution S/RES/1973, 2011). In 2012, Rice denounced the Russian and Chinese veto to a UN Security Council Resolution calling Bashar Al-Asad to step down from governing Syria (Cohen, 2012). Obama (2015) also insisted that Al-Asad "must go" in an address to the UN General Assembly. Furthermore, Susan Rice was often criticized for her combative tone against Israel, which contributed in intensifying the provisional tension between Israel and Obama, especially after Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu's speech in which he harshly criticized Obama's nuclear deal with Iran (Ross, 2015). Obama's relationship with Israel was characterized by tension, especially after his nuclear deal with Iran and the US abstention from vetoing a UNSC resolution which calls Israel to immediately stop its settlement activities in the West Bank and East Jerusalem (UNSC resolution, 2016). The US abstention allowed the resolution to pass, which was the first time the US did not use its veto against an anti-Israel UN resolution.

Chuck Hagel had been the President of the Atlantic Council before he joined Obama Administration as Secretary of Defense from 2013 to 2015 after which he returned to the Atlantic Council.[2] Interestingly enough, Obama's choice of Hagel is one of very few cases in which a Democratic President chooses a Republican to serve in his administration as Hagel was a Republican Senator of Nebraska from 1997 to 2009. This might be explained by Hagel's foreign policy views in the Middle East as he was his party's most outspoken critic of Bush foreign policy in the region. Hagel once stated "there will not be a military solution to Iraq. Iraq belongs to the 25 million Iraqis who live there. It doesn't belong to the United States. Iraq is not a prize to be won or lost" (Zeleny and Hulse, 2007). In December 2005, Hagel referred to Bush and the Republican Party saying "I took an oath of office to the Constitution, I didn't take an oath of office to my party or my president" (Babington, 2005). In July 2006, Hagel criticized the way Bush reacted to the 2006 Lebanon War between Israel and Hezbollah

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[1] The Brookings is considered an academic think tank because it relies on different sources of funding that excludes US government funding in addition to the fact it presents its research in books and academic journals. https://www.brookings.edu/about-us/
[2] The Atlantic Council is considered an academic think tank because it relies on different sources of funding that excludes US government funding in addition to the fact it presents its research in books and academic journals.

stating "the sickening slaughter on both sides must end and it must end now. President Bush must call for an immediate cease-fire. This madness must stop." He also said "Our relationship with Israel is special and historic... But it need not and cannot be at the expense of our Arab and Muslim relationships. That is an irresponsible and dangerous false choice" (CNN, 2006). However, as the Secretary of Defense, Hagel maintained a strong relationship with Israel's Minister of Defense, Moshe Ya'alon, who called Hagel a "true friend" (Wilber and Keinon, 2004). Despite the fact that Hagel's relationship with the White House impaired, which led to his resignation in 2015, Hagel had an excellent relationship with Israeli military officials, which was considered in stark contrast to how he was viewed before he was appointed the Secretary of Defense (Wilber and Keinon, 2004). In July 2007, he was one of only three Republican Senators who voted in favor of an Obama-sponsored bill that calls for the withdrawal of US troops from Iraq by March 31, 2008 (S.433, 2007). In 2008, accompanied by Obama, then a Senator, and Jack Reed, another Democratic Senator of Rhode Ireland, visited Iraq to meet US service members, General Davis Patraeus and Iraq's Prime Minister Nour Al-Maliki. Clearly, Obama's choice of Hagel was not because of this latter's affiliation with the Atlantic Council, but it was mainly due to his harsh criticism of Bush Administration and his foreign policy views in the Middle East.

To recapitulate, Obama's case can be considered unique in many ways. First, he sought the expertise of many staff from academic, contract and advocacy think tanks. More particularly, the advocacy think tanks, CAP and CNAS, represented different thoughts within the liberal view. Second, Obama was one of few US Presidents who clearly recognized CAP's help to provide him with foreign policy staff and policy recommendations. However, this does not mean that there was a direct influence of CAP on Obama's foreign policy decision making. Last but not least, the fact that Obama recruited the president of the Atlantic Council, Chuck Hagel, to serve in his administration did not mean that this think tank might have had an influence on Obama's policies. This choice was attributed to Hagel's previous policy views in the Middle East when he was a US Republican senator as he harshly criticized Bush foreign policy in the MENA area despite the fact that both Bush and Hagel belong to the same party.

5. Conclusion.

This paper examined the impact of US think tanks on US Presidents' foreign policies in the MENA using Kingdon's Multiple-Streams theory and focusing on three case studies: Bill Clinton (1993-2001), George Bush (2001-2009) and Barrack Obama (2009-2017).

The first conclusion relates to the types of think tanks from which US Presidents recruit their foreign policy experts and the dominance of these experts in the Presidents Administrations. Clinton and Obama heavily relied on foreign policy experts from a combination of academic, contract and advocacy think tanks while Bush predominantly relied on advocacy think tanks which advocate for conservative ideas. We noted that this choice has an impact on the Presidents' foreign policies which was reflected in the difference between the foreign policies of Clinton, Bush and Obama in the MENA area.

Additionally, unlike Clinton and Obama, whose foreign policy staff were mostly scholars in think tanks and did not serve in previous administrations, most of Bush's foreign policy staff served in previous administrations before joining think tanks. This suggests that American presidents can recruit their staff mainly because of their scholarly reputation and their affiliation with a particular think tank. On the other hand, Presidents can also recruit staff from specific think tanks due to their political experience serving in previous administrations or as members of Congress, not because of their affiliation with specific think tanks. This was the case with President Bush and most of PNAC founders in addition to Obama and Chuck Hagel.

The second conclusion relates to the strong connections that exist between think tanks' policy recommendations and foreign policy decisions of Clinton, Bush and Obama in the MENA area. Nevertheless, these connections should not be understood as causal relationships for two main factors. Initially, the alignment between the Presidents' foreign policy decisions and think tanks' policy recommendations   cannot always be ascribed to the reputation of a particular think tank as an independent institution that aims at influencing policies through providing professional research.   Bush and PNAC is a case in point. The Bush case study suggests that Bush adopted PNAC's policy recommendations because of the individuals who established it, such as Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld. These individuals are experienced politicians, not professional researchers, who served in previous Republican administrations, and whose neoconservative ideologies preceded the establishment of PNAC. Therefore, the establishment of PNAC was just an institutional medium through which these individuals could channel their political convictions.

Second, it is not clear whether the drastic change in Clinton's foreign policy in the MENA area was largely owing to the revolutionary victory of Republicans in Congress in 1994, or it was due to the strong pressure from well-known conservative think tanks such as the AEI or Heritage Foundation. All in all, the connections that may sometimes seem strong between policy recommendations of think tanks and US Presidents' foreign policies should not always be viewed as a direct impact of these think tanks on the Presidents foreign policy decisions.

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