Cooperation between American Think Tanks and the Media on Public Diplomatic Policies

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ABSTRACT

Public diplomatic decisions are one of the main themes of the American think tanks, they are committed to the sustainable development research of the national policy and they utilize the media in a variety of ways. This paper offers an overview on the classification of American think tanks and mainly chooses CNAS (Center for a New American Security); CSIS (Institute of International Relations Strategy); Brookings (Brookings Institution) as examples to discuss the cooperation between think tanks and the media on public diplomatic policies in three periods: prior to the release by the media; while promoting of the policy; encountering problems after implementing. This paper concludes by emphasizing on the use of media for think tanks on public diplomatic policies, especially for counter-terrorism cooperation, and proposes several suggestions for China.

INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of the 20th century, public diplomatic decisions are one of the main themes of the American think tanks, they committed to the sustainable development research of the national policies; and they utilized the media as their first choice of communication, and the think tank expanded the influence and remained an important channel to voice out. One case in point is the counter-terrorism has been a major issue for think tanks world-wide since 9-11, which media favored for more than a decade. The 2016 Taiwan elections and the United States General elections are important events that globally and dramatically changed the international relations, in particular for US-China relations. Though different media channels, CSIS Senior fellow Bonnie S. Glaser stated in her China Power Project Report, Taiwan election has a major impact on US-China relations and concerns about the South China Sea issue as well. With media channels, Patrick from Center for a new American security (CNAS)
holds the view that a bilateral trust is of vital importance for the development of good relations between the two countries. But it is not enough, considering further feasible corporations. And these think tanks are good at using media channels while influencing the public diplomatic policies. This article concludes a variety of ways, through which media participates with think tanks, thus creating an impact on government public diplomatic policies and international relations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Think tank was first introduced during the Second World War in the United States. Lan Xue and XuFeng Zhu studied think tanks in China and concluded that think tanks in China are mainly Independent institutions giving constant policy suggestions and consulting service. [1]

The 2011 Global Go To Think Tank Rankings address that think tanks have enjoyed massive growth—both in number and in their role in global policymaking—over the last decade. 1815 think tanks from the United States are in the ranking while China has 425. [2]

Public diplomacy is an important form of diplomacy. Formal Chinese president Jingtao Hu had addressed the concept of public diplomacy as a non-traditional diplomatic activity, in his speech “Diplomatic work in new China and its 60 years long diplomacy history” in 2009, emphasizing that public diplomacy is of vital importance and is being indispensable.

Media, serving as important channels, creates opportunities for think tanks to participate in policy making process, especially those concerning public diplomacy and counter-terrorist approaches. Gilboa, E’s study offers 6 conceptual models that serve in defining and analyzing the role of the media in contemporary diplomacy. [5] Chinese scholars indicate a shift from hard power to soft power, that China has sought to supplement its traditional use of hard power with soft power, and thus the Chinese government has paid more and more attention to public diplomacy. [6] Think tanks have been making steady progress for counter-terrorism approaches, such as CNAS. And according to media research, media coverage of terrorist events are delivered with a theoretical media event framework. Scholar illustrate “1985 TWA airliner hijacking event” as an example, and showed that the counter-terrorism function of the government is strengthened after the media reported. [3] And Chinese scholars concluded that the US television media's reports on terrorism have typical characteristics of "media events": live, pre-planned, dramatic, mandatory viewing, highly personalized, and the role of the media as a master of ceremonies. These reports, on one hand, amplify the spread of terrorism influence. On the other hand, they strengthen, as other media events, both the mainstream American society Social order, values and prevailing rules, to enhance the priority and recognition of counter-terrorism in the public agenda. [4]

In all, former studies in china and abroad has covered fields of public diplomacy, think tanks and media respectively, but studies focusing on media and think tanks’ cooperation, especially in public diplomatic policy making process haven’t been emphasized before. Thus this paper offers an overview of the case in United States and analyzes the cooperation between media and think tanks on public diplomatic topics and proposes several suggestions for China.
PRESTIGIOUS AMERICAN THINK TANKS AND THE MEDIA RELATIONS

“The United States think tanks are divided into officials, universities and independent think tanks of three types.”[7] Many of the influential think tanks have their own specialties: The Brookings (The Brookings Institution) focus on the Studies of economy, foreign affairs and administrative management of public policy. Center for a New American Security (later referred to as CNAS) is a think tank for the Obama administration, which is small in size but influential. Center for Strategic and International Studies (later referred to as CSIS) is a think tank Center focusing on International defense policy. And the Center of Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, the Heritage Foundation and the Hoover Center with academic background, are centers studying the International affairs, etc. This paper presents with examples from CNAS, CSIS, and Brookings for discussion on public diplomatic policies.

CNAS is a small, relatively new think tank established in February 2007. Its history is not long but a lot of influential politicians are from the think tank, such as former U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Kurt M. Campbell. CNAS aim to build a strong, pragmatic and principled national security and defense policy. CNAS research is independent, nonpartisan, mainly focusing on the Obama administration's policies, especially the design of national security policy. Its experts provide innovative thinking and analysis to shape and promote research on national security and propose the opinions to the government. The center hold various seminars, roundtable, forums and conferences, etc., as media strategy, and invited decision-making experts from the think tanks and the government to participate in news programs, so as to enhance the long-term cooperative relations.[8]

Center for strategic and International Studies (CSIS) is a non-profit, non-partisan think tank organization in Washington. CSIS mainly provide strategic insights and solutions for the defense department, policy makers, and relevant government agencies. The experts’ key issues in the media covers: defense and security, economic and reconstruction, energy and climate change, global health, global trends and forecasting, government management, etc.

The Brookings institution mainly focuses on researches in international relations, and financial policy etc. As one of the most influential think tanks, the Brookings can fully communicate with the media, with sufficient capital support, providing expenses for experts to lobby and communicate. Brookings institution pays high attention to the relationship between the media, and more than 300 famous experts appear in various media channels, with its professional media department and the excellent media hardware. Brookings Institute experts could have live or recorded video/audio interview programs with the media department. And the studio staffs also could support the program to be sent to the designated equipments. [9]

Four experts from the Brookings Institution with the most media interviews are: Michael E. O'Hanlon, Bruce Katz, William A. Galston, William G. Gale in recent years. They are leading experts in the following fields: the policy and elections, international relations, metropolitan life, financial policy, census, discrimination and national topics, etc.

United States have a number of media coverage from think tanks. The Washington Post, The New York Times, Voice of America, The New Republic Reported, Bloomberg News Service, Associated Press, Reuters and others have numerous interviews with various think tank experts. One case in point is C-SPAN television in
the United States. It was founded in 1979, had taken local comparative advantage in number and influence. It has main cable channels with five other radio and websites, including C-span broadcast House, C-SPAN2, C-SPAN3, lawmakers on speech, the election debate, etc. C-span also have their own hotline programs, convenient to communicate with the public, to provide regular, open platform, and can also directly report with the election officials or other people, and the opportunity to directly contact with reporters. Henry Aaron and other 26 more the Brookings Institution scholars chose C-span for regular platform to communicate on economic public diplomatic policies and other related topics.

What’s worth mentioning is that these institutions have advanced new media sites reflected professionalism. These new media interactive platforms provide rich content and timely updates, and a large amount of data support to constitute a good communication with viewers and media.

**COOPERATION BETWEEN THINK TANKS AND THE MEDIA**

**Before Polices Released**

Prior to the release of policy making, media reports with various think tank experts with all kinds of voices. Politicians and experts lobby with each other though the media. Influential experts were more likely to be reported, no matter on which side. Media act more neutral.

Take Iran's nuclear issue as an example: experts from the Brookings Institution made heated discussion on Iran's nuclear program through C-span television, then put forward that the international community needs a peaceful solution. Foreign policy researcher Thomas Pickering and Pollack from the Sabin Center for Middle East policy had a debate, pointed out that Iran's nuclear threat is increasingly serious with possibility to build nuclear weapons.

Another case in point is that, at the year of 2012, the United States was planning to launch the biggest fiscal budget cuts. Media has all kinds of voice: some are against America's fiscal policies, as the Brookings Institution experts stated: The President and Congress really reach an agreement, with reform to the tax system, if the macro-policy adjustments are unsuccessful, that would lead to even lower employment.

As mentioned, prior to the release of policy making, media have all kinds of voices, and politicians and media experts try their best to win more influence during this period of time through all possible media platforms.

**During Promotion of Polices**

Once the American government policies are set down for promotion the media turn to fall either fully support or opposition. With professional teamwork, media operations with various information channels to influence the public opinion and to push or postpone the policy implementation.

In 2008, in order to support the new energy policies of the United States, the CSIS released related Wisdom Energy Report to support. Through C-SPAN channel, Henry A. Crumpton, the former Coordinator for Counterterrorism from the U.S. State Department's Bureau of Counterterrorism, pictured a smarter, safer future of the United States and called for understanding and communication globally and regionally. But
the Fox News network questioned with doubts at the same time. And these criticisms of the Government may only be ankle-deep, but not for the further promotion of the new policies or better implementation.

In the execution of policy, the role of media is fully embodied. The United States, as a representative of the Western countries, has long been used to utilize media as a platform and battlefield for public diplomacy policy making. “Four fundamental stakeholders taking part in the decision-making process are think tanks, non-governmental organization (NGO), Congress and the State Council. United States media serve as the final coordinator of the four stakeholders.” [10]

In international public diplomacy, the United States often judged energy and human rights issues in some countries such as China. These topics reflect a certain degree of conflict in the global context but remain safe for local media.

In conclusion, during the promotion period, main stream media normally choose to either fully support or to oppose. And media serve think tanks, NGO, Congress and State Council, for communication channel with public both home and abroad.

**After Implementing the Policies**

After adoption of the policies, unsuccessful results may occur. While encountering obstacles at a moment, the media turn to attribute the responsibility to the government and the leaders, instead of the think tanks who proposed or participated in it earlier.

In counter-terrorism approaches, the government responsibility of war in Iraq is one case in point, which demonstrates the government’s misjudgments ending with national wide criticizing. But very few people remembered which think tank’s report pointed out the existence of weapons of mass destruction. John Nagl from New American Center Committee conducted a C-SPAN interview on August 21, 2011 and mentioned about this issue, and interacted with Michael Schmidt—the New York Times reporter in Baghdad during the interview. Counter-terrorism needs think tanks to act with media for better communication, even international cooperation to build up public belief and social order.

The debate among Keystone XL Pipeline Project was an environmental protection topic in America. Through media report, on one hand, the U.S. state department reported that it was difficult for Mr. Obama to turn down "Keystone" project easily. On the other hand, environmental problems turn to be stereotyped and many environmental groups criticized against the government or the state council, and seldom do they blame the experts who provided assessments and consultancy.

Another study on international aid showed that the criticism from the Brooking Institution experts could even bring certain pressure for the coming foreign policy, especially when countries getting financial aids were found with severe corruption.

In all, after adoption of the policy, media assist public to seek government for the responsibility instead of think tanks. And for counter-terrorism, environmental approaches, further international communication and cooperation are needed in a global time.

**CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS**

The American media served as public diplomatic arena, with various ways: print, broadcast and new media platforms, to interact with think tanks and government. Think tanks would fully communicate with the media and cooperate with sufficient capital
support, providing experts certain media channels to make voices, lobby and participate in the policy making process. Chinese think tanks could study the strategy with media at different stages for a better cooperation, especially for counter-terrorism cooperation globally.

REFERENCE