

Analysis of the Operational Mechanism, Research Output, and Main Characteristics of the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) Postprint

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Abstract

Abstract: [Purpose/Significance] This study analyzes the operational mechanisms, research output, and main characteristics of the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), providing references and insights for the construction of new-type think tanks in China. [Method/Process] The research primarily employs case study and website investigation methods, referencing relevant publications and activity descriptions released by CSIS, as well as consulting research literature related to think tanks, to analyze the establishment and positioning, operational mechanisms, research content and output, and main characteristics of CSIS. [Results/Conclusion] CSIS holds important reference value for the construction of new-type think tanks in China in terms of research perspective, operational mechanisms, technical methods, and forms of research output.

Full Text

Analysis of the Operational Mechanism, Research Output, and Main Characteristics of the Center for Strategic and International Studies

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Abstract

[Purpose/Significance] This paper analyzes the operational mechanism, research output, and main characteristics of the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) to provide reference and insights for the construction of new-type think tanks in China. **[Method/Process]** The study employs case study and website investigation methods, drawing on CSIS publications, activity descriptions, and relevant think tank research literature to examine its establishment and positioning, operational mechanism, research content and output, and main characteristics. **[Result/Conclusion]** The findings indicate that CSIS offers valuable references for China' s new-type think tank development in terms of research scope, operational mechanisms, technical methods, and research output formats.

Keywords: Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS); Think Tank; Operational Mechanism

Classification Number: C931.5

Think tanks serve as a nation' s “external brain” and “advisor,” representing a crucial source of national wisdom and an important manifestation of soft power. Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, General Secretary Xi Jinping has proposed a series of new ideas, viewpoints, and requirements regarding the construction of new-type think tanks with Chinese characteristics. On January 20, 2015, China promulgated the “Opinions on Strengthening the Construction of New-Type Think Tanks with Chinese Characteristics” [?], marking the acceleration of China' s new-type think tank construction process.

The United States possesses the strongest think tank development in the world. According to data from the University of Pennsylvania' s Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program (TTCSP) “2016 Global Go To Think Tank Index Report” [?], the United States is home to 1,835 think tanks, ranking first globally. Moreover, among the top 10 comprehensive think tanks worldwide, six are American institutions, accounting for 60 percent. The Center for Strategic and International Studies (hereinafter referred to as CSIS) ranks fourth among global top think tanks and first among American top think tanks.

CSIS is a strategically and policy-oriented research institution with conservative leanings, known as the “home of hardliners” and a “Cold War think tank” [?], occupying an important position among strategic and policy research institutions in the United States and globally. In 2007, Ban Ki-moon, the eighth Secretary-General of the United Nations, delivered his first speech after taking office at CSIS [?]. In recent years, CSIS has placed great emphasis on Asia-Pacific and China-related research, becoming one of the most influential think tanks on U.S.-China relations. In 2016, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi delivered a speech titled “China on the Move: China and Its Foreign Policy” at CSIS [?]. Given CSIS' s achievements in think tank construction and its significant influence on U.S.-China relations, this paper selects CSIS as a case study to provide

references for China' s current new-type think tank construction.

2.1 Development History

CSIS was originally founded in 1962 during the most intense period of the Cold War by former U.S. Navy Admiral Arleigh Burke and conservative scholar David Abshire at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. Its original purpose was straightforward: to find solutions for America' s national survival and prosperity. Since its establishment, CSIS has been dedicated to research on U.S. foreign policy and national security issues, with its findings exerting significant influence on U.S. government decision-making. For example, in 1966, a CSIS study prompted the U.S. government to hold House hearings on the Sino-Soviet split, with numerous similar cases throughout its history. In 1987, CSIS formally separated from Georgetown University to become an independent non-profit organization. Today, CSIS has become one of the world' s most renowned public policy research institutions on foreign policy and national security issues, employing 220 full-time staff members and maintaining a vast network of part-time scholars, with its headquarters located in a prime Washington, D.C. area. Beyond traditional defense and security programs, its research also addresses global issues such as health and energy, extending its scope to every corner of the world and striving to provide strategic analysis and policy solutions for global decision-makers [?].

2.2 Basic Positioning

Based on CSIS's origins, development history [?], and relevant research literature [?], its basic positioning can be summarized as follows:

1. **Institutional Nature:** A non-profit, non-partisan, non-governmental policy research institution.
2. **Mission and Objectives:** Aims to exert policy influence, committed to providing strategic analysis and policy solutions for governments, international organizations, the private sector, and civil society.
3. **Research Content:** Encompasses defense and security, regional studies, and transnational challenges worldwide, including energy, trade, global development, and economic integration.
4. **Social Evaluation:** Ranked among the world' s and America' s top think tanks, particularly first in the defense and national security think tank category, as detailed in Table 1 .

Table 1 CSIS Rankings in the 2016 Global Go To Think Tank Index Report

Category	CSIS Ranking	Change from 2015
Global/US Top Think Tanks		
Global Top Think Tanks	4	-
US Top Think Tanks	1	-

Category	CSIS Ranking	Change from 2015
Top Think Tanks by Research Area		
Top Defense and National Security Think Tanks	1	-
Top Energy and Resource Policy Think Tanks	2	-
Top Foreign Policy and International Affairs Think Tanks	3	-
Top Domestic Health Policy Think Tanks	2	-
Top Global Health Policy Think Tanks	3	-
Top International Development Think Tanks	2	-
Top International Economic Policy Think Tanks	3	-
Top Think Tanks with Special Achievements		
Think Tanks with Most Innovative Ideas or Paradigms	2	-
Best Use of Social Media and Networks	3	-
Best External Relations and Public Engagement Programs	2	-
Best Use of Internet	3	-
Best Use of Media (Electronic/Print)	2	-
Most Innovative Policy Proposals/Recommendations	3	-
Think Tanks with Greatest Impact on Public Policy	2	-
Best Policy-Oriented Research Programs	3	-
Best Independent Think Tanks	2	-
Think Tanks with Best Policy Study/Report Produced in 2016	3	-

Note: Data sourced from the 2015 and 2016 Global Go To Think Tank Index Reports. “ ” indicates ranking increase from previous year, “ ” indicates decrease, “-” indicates no change. Institutions in subcategories are listed alphabetically; rankings are not ordinal.

3.1 Organizational Structure and Personnel

The Board of Directors serves as CSIS’ s highest decision-making body, responsible for designing the organization’ s overall development direction and major policies. The current Board Chair is Thomas J. Pritzker, Chairman and CEO of the Pritzker Organization. The current Honorary Board Chair is John J. Hamre, Vice President of the Nuclear Threat Initiative, who also serves as CSIS’ s President and CEO. A national missile defense and cybersecurity expert, Hamre previously served as U.S. Deputy Secretary of Defense and Chairman of the Defense Policy Board. His research interests include politics, economics, and U.S. foreign policy. The Board comprises 46 directors and 4 emeritus directors.

CSIS’s Advisory Committee consists of 13 individuals with distinguished achievements in policy research and leadership positions in public institutions or private enterprises, including former U.S. Senator and Secretary of Labor William E. Brock and former U.S. Secretary of Defense Harold Brown, some of whom also serve on the Board. Advisory members provide comprehensive intellectual support to CSIS, particularly offering crucial guidance on complex global issues.

The management layer comprises 18 senior executives responsible for overall operations and management. CSIS' s expert team includes over 100 world-class full-time experts and a large network of part-time specialists providing comprehensive research support. Daily operations are conducted by more than 100 assistant researchers distributed across eight departments: President' s Office, Development Planning, External Relations, Human Resources, Finance, Information Systems, Facilities, and Program Operations.

3.2 Financial Status

As a non-profit, non-partisan, non-governmental policy research institution, CSIS' s primary funding source is donations. Closely associated with oil consortiums, over 40 petroleum groups led by Rockefeller serve as its relatively stable supporters and funders. Since 2000, annual revenue has increased year by year, rising from \$16.2 million in 2000 to \$43.8 million in 2016, as shown in Figure 1 [Figure 1: see original paper].

According to the 2016 financial report [?] (covering October 1, 2015 to September 30, 2016), CSIS' s revenue for the year totaled \$43.8 million, comprising corporate funding (34%), government project funds (27%), foundation grants (23%), individual donations (10%), other contributions (3%), and other income (3%), as detailed in Figure 2 [Figure 2: see original paper].

In recent years, to attract individual donations, CSIS has continuously launched various initiatives, such as naming research programs, projects, and funds after donors and inviting them to participate in relevant discussions and activities.

4. Research Output

4.1.1 Research Themes

CSIS organizes its research around seven major thematic areas:

1. **Cybersecurity and Technology:** Analyzes how technological change transforms interconnectedness, development, and security pursuits domestically and internationally, covering intelligence, surveillance, encryption, privacy, military technology, and space. Relevant programs include the Technology Policy Program and the International Security Program.
2. **Defense and Security:** CSIS is a global authority on defense and security issues, examining resources, homeland security, strategy, reconstruction, nuclear issues, and terrorism. Led by the International Security Program, specific initiatives include Defense Budget Analysis, Defense-Industrial Initiatives Program, Missile Defense Project, Nuclear Program, Civil-Military Relations, Proliferation Prevention Program, Aviation Security Program, and Seven Revolutions.
3. **Economics:** Analyzes the relationship between economics and national security, examining economics' impact on foreign policy and diplomacy'

s role in improving economic outcomes. Related programs include the Simon Chair in Political Economy and the Scholl Chair in International Business.

4. **Energy and Sustainability:** Analyzes global and domestic energy landscapes, particularly regarding sustainable development, technology, markets, and policy. Under the Energy and National Security Program, this research examines policy frameworks, commercial structures, and technological solutions to identify future energy trends while balancing economic, environmental, and security considerations.
5. **Global Health:** The relationship between health and security receives significant attention. The Global Health Policy Center bridges U.S. foreign policy and public health by developing U.S. engagement strategies in global health, covering family planning, maternal and child health, immunization, and infectious diseases.
6. **Human Rights:** Analyzes human rights issues amid global changes that threaten human security and freedom. The Human Rights Initiative examines critical issues affecting human rights and human security worldwide.
7. **International Development:** Analyzes U.S. leadership in promoting development and creating efficient, effective, and sustainable foreign assistance programs to maintain Washington's discourse power on international development while formulating new, actionable policy recommendations to address current challenges. Related programs include the Prosperity and Development Project, U.S. Leadership Project, and Global Food Security Project.

4.1.2 Regional Studies

CSIS conducts comprehensive regional analysis across seven areas:

1. **Africa:** Focuses on Sub-Saharan Africa and Maghreb issues. The Africa Program and Middle East Program examine political, economic, and security trends in Sub-Saharan Africa and North Africa, respectively. The Global Health Policy Center, Human Rights Initiative, Prosperity and Development Project, and Global Food Security Project conduct specialized research on African issues.
2. **Americas:** Covers issues from the Arctic Circle to U.S. border concerns and southern economies, analyzing numerous foreign policy and national security issues in the Western Hemisphere. The Americas Program leads regional research, supplemented by the Prosperity and Development Project, International Security Program, Simon Chair in Political Economy, Scholl Chair in International Business, Transnational Threats Project, and Global Health Policy Center.
3. **Arctic:** Provides analysis and policy recommendations on the Arctic'

s growing geopolitical and strategic challenges. CSIS holds a dominant position in Arctic research. Through research projects and analytical reports, it engages in comprehensive discussions with officials from Canada, Norway, Denmark, Finland, and the United States on Arctic political, economic, and social trends and their implications for U.S., European, and transatlantic relations, enhancing policymakers', researchers', and the public's understanding of Arctic issues while offering constructive recommendations for U.S. and international responses to regional changes. This research is primarily conducted by the Europe Program and Energy and National Security Program.

4. **Asia:** Emphasizes extensive and in-depth research on Asian issues. Major programs include the Freeman Chair in China Studies, Japan Chair, Korea Chair, Simon Chair in Political Economy, Wadhvani Chair in U.S.-India Policy Studies, Southeast Asia Program, China Power Project, and Pacific Forum. Additional related programs include the International Security Program, Energy and National Security Program, and Global Health Policy Center.
5. **Europe:** Focuses on European issues amid profound challenges including economic turmoil, terrorist attacks, migration crises, Russian aggression, and persistent political confidence crises in European institutions and leaders. The Europe Program examines U.S. and European responses to these crises, supplemented by the Russia and Eurasia Program, Turkey Program, and International Security Program.
6. **Middle East:** Analyzes broad political, security, and socioeconomic issues in the Middle East and North Africa, with particular attention to transregional impacts. The Middle East Program leads regional research, often collaborating with the Energy and National Security Program and International Security Program on Middle East-related issues.
7. **Russia and Eurasia:** Focuses on Russia and former Soviet states in Europe, Central Asia, and the Caucasus, examining regional security, domestic politics, economic development, trade, defense technology, and energy, as well as political and economic relations between former Soviet states and other key geopolitical actors including the United States, European Union, Northeast Asia, South Asia, and the Middle East. The Russia and Eurasia Program leads this research, supplemented by the Europe Program and International Security Program.

4.2.1 Traditional Publications

CSIS produces various publication types including research reports, books, commentaries, newsletters, and academic journals. Its two most important journals are *The Washington Quarterly* and *New Perspectives in Foreign Policy*. It also irregularly publishes conference and research reports, with the most influential being the biennial *Global Go To Think Tank Index Report*. Additionally, *The*

CSIS Evening News serves as an authoritative newsletter. In 2016, CSIS released nearly 130 formal reports, 100 commentary articles, and various monthly newsletters, including representative publications such as *Global Forecast 2017* [?].

4.2.2 Digital Products and Creative Lab

CSIS fully leverages digital information technology and media, continuously exploring emerging communication platforms to expand its influence. This includes daily original analytical commentaries and video reports, as well as an original podcast updated weekly, accessible via iTunes or directly from the CSIS website. In 2016, CSIS podcasts were downloaded over 500,000 times.

The Dracopoulos Creative Lab, established in 2011, enhances CSIS research impact through cutting-edge web technology, design, and video. CSIS experts collaborate with the lab to create graphics, videos, podcasts, websites, interactive databases, and digital research tools, effectively communicating policy recommendations globally. This initiative has enabled CSIS to transcend traditional policy report limitations, expanding the reach and implementation capacity of its policy recommendations. The lab's projects have achieved notable success, with the Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative serving as a prime example of combining traditional policy analysis with innovative media formats.

4.2.3 Academic Activities

CSIS hosts over 2,000 events annually, ranging from large public lectures to smaller gatherings, with simple registration open to the public. Representative activities include:

1. **“Schieffer Series”** : A monthly discussion series hosted by CSIS Trustee and CBS News legend Bob Schieffer, featuring senior government officials, legislators, journalists, and experts discussing critical issues in national security, foreign policy, and global challenges. 2016 topics included foreign policy issues facing the new U.S. administration, such as Syria, U.S.-China relations, and promoting global gender equality.
2. **“Global Leaders Forum”** : Provides opportunities for world leaders to address CSIS and online audiences. 2016 speakers included then-UK Secretary of State (now Prime Minister) Theresa May, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, and U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security Jeh Johnson.
3. **“Military Strategy Forum”** : A long-standing series of major speeches on U.S. national security and defense policy by the International Security Program, covering national military strategy development, military capabilities and technological advances, strategic-level defense planning challenges, intelligence's role in national security policy, and future global force posture.

4. **“Maritime Security Dialogue”** : A series on maritime security issues co-led by the International Security Program and the U.S. Naval Institute, covering maritime strategy development and security policy, naval capabilities and technology development, and future strategies for submarine warfare, surface warfare, expeditionary warfare, and naval aviation.
5. **“Smart Women, Smart Power”** : Highlights achievements and contributions of women leaders in foreign policy, security, and international affairs. 2016 speakers included top world leaders such as U.S. Secretary of the Air Force Deborah Lee James and former Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard. The program also features a podcast covering modern slavery, human trafficking, Brexit, terrorism, and philanthropy.
6. **“Chevron Development Forum”** : Established in partnership with Chevron Corporation, convenes senior officials from government and private sectors to explore new ideas and innovative approaches to global development, covering global infrastructure development, promoting labor rights, and taxation’ s role, emphasizing the private sector’ s innovative role in global development.
7. **“Global Security Forum”** : An annual conference featuring panel discussions, guest speeches, and interactive plenary sessions. The 2016 theme focused on congressional foreign and security policy priorities for the next presidential term.
8. **“Global Development Forum”** : A half-day event examining key opportunities and challenges facing developing countries, covering topics from foreign aid to private investment and innovative financing.

4.2.4 Congressional Affairs

CSIS remains one of the most trusted think tank resources for members of Congress on foreign policy and national security issues. In 2016, CSIS experts testified at 32 House and Senate hearings, focusing on U.S. Department of Defense reform, European terrorism, North Korea’ s nuclear program, and security in the South China Sea. Additionally, CSIS provides numerous valuable briefings and forums for Congress.

4.2.5 Executive Education

CSIS provides year-round training opportunities for corporate and government executives to enhance their understanding of geopolitical trends, Washington’ s political ecosystem, and personal leadership capabilities. These customized programs include geopolitical seminars, leadership skill-building workshops, and simulation exercises. CSIS annually designs collaborative education programs for government agencies, corporations, NGOs, and educational institutions. In 2016, CSIS launched the “Women’ s Global Leadership Program.”

5. Main Characteristics

After more than 50 years of development, CSIS has produced a vast array of diverse research outputs with broad and profound global impact, establishing its position as a world-renowned strategic and policy research think tank and a top-tier international security research institution. Analysis reveals five main characteristics of CSIS' s development:

5.1 Research Perspective: Committed to Solving American and Global Challenges

From a research perspective, CSIS, as a world-famous policy research institution, maintains high positioning and broad research vision. First, influencing and participating in U.S. government decision-making constitutes one of CSIS' s core missions, with numerous research outputs significantly impacting national policy decisions. For instance, CSIS research on U.S. military action against Iraq [?], China' s rise, and cross-strait relations [?] has influenced U.S. foreign policy. To achieve this objective, CSIS employs two primary measures: first, utilizing the “revolving door” mechanism [?] to influence government decisions; second, promoting policy positions through publications and events to shape government policy [?]. Simultaneously, CSIS does not limit itself to solving America' s own problems but strives to provide strategic analysis and policy solutions for global decision-makers. Beyond defense and national security programs, its research addresses global issues including health and energy, covering all major world regions. Its research outputs focus on global challenges, such as the *Global Forecast 2017*. Annual events like the “Global Leaders Forum” and “Global Security Forum” demonstrate global vision, and CSIS maintains close cooperation with political leaders and research institutes worldwide, playing a prominent role in addressing numerous global challenges.

5.2 Operational Mechanism: Combining Research Independence with Operational Openness

Operationally, CSIS is first and foremost a non-profit, non-partisan, non-governmental policy research institution, with its outstanding characteristic being the combination of research independence and operational openness. According to CSIS website information [?], the institution insists on conducting independent analysis and policy research, representing no government, corporate, or private interests, and strives to provide objective and pragmatic recommendations. It upholds three fundamental principles: (1) bipartisanship; (2) research independence; (3) analytical rigor. Simultaneously, to strengthen media relations, expand institutional and scholar visibility, attract sponsorship, and broaden policy influence, CSIS maintains a “maximum possible” open operational posture. Anyone can access CSIS' s website to learn about upcoming events and register for participation. Furthermore, CSIS employs various methods, such as inviting donors to deeply engage in important issues and discussions, to attract more social donations.

5.3 Technical Methods: Emphasizing Information Technology Application and Integration

Technically, emphasizing the application and integration of digital information technology represents a successful CSIS initiative. The Creative Lab exemplifies the use of cutting-edge web technology, design, and video to enhance research impact. The lab's numerous projects include the Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, which combines traditional policy analysis with innovative media formats—including satellite imagery, online mapping tools, podcasts, and infographics—to provide attractive and regularly updated information and policy communication channels on Asian maritime security issues. Since its launch in late 2014, the initiative has generated widespread global response, been cited in congressional hearings, and attracted over one million website visitors. This initiative has enabled CSIS to transcend traditional think tank research limitations and better expand its research influence.

5.4 Research Output: Gradually Building a High-End Think Tank Product Cluster

In terms of research output, CSIS covers seven thematic areas—cybersecurity and technology, defense and security, economics, energy and sustainability, global health, human rights, and international development—and seven regional areas—Africa, the Americas, the Arctic, Asia, Europe, the Middle East, and Russia and Eurasia. Supported by over 50 key programs, CSIS has gradually formed its own research output cluster. Its products include not only traditional publications such as research reports, books, commentaries, newsletters, and academic journals, but also new media products like videos and podcasts, the Creative Lab, various academic events, congressional engagement, and executive education programs. This scaled output facilitates synergy effects and expands the promotion and influence of its findings.

5.5 Research Focus: Increasingly Emphasizing China and U.S.-China Relations

Regarding research focus, as China's comprehensive national power has grown, CSIS has increasingly emphasized Asia-Pacific and China-related research, conducting predictive studies on current hot-button issues in China's development, particularly those that pose or may pose threats to U.S. strategic interests, such as China's economic development, U.S.-China trade, bilateral relations, China strategy, China's rise, and Chinese foreign policy. CSIS advocates establishing and consolidating top-level U.S.-China dialogue mechanisms and maintaining positions from three decades of diplomatic relations. It also shows concern for issues including terrorism, cybersecurity, HIV/AIDS prevention, and aging in China. China-related research programs include the Freeman Chair in China Studies, China Power Project, and Pacific Forum. Through these programs, CSIS's research on China and U.S.-China relations has become increasingly

in-depth, making it one of the most influential think tanks on U.S. foreign and China policy.

6. Implications and Lessons

Regarding the overall environment for think tank construction, China's new-type think tank development enjoys favorable conditions and is experiencing rapid growth while facing numerous challenges. James G. McGann, director of the Global Go To Think Tank Index, notes [?] that two constraints hinder Chinese think tank development: first, insufficient autonomy of domestic think tanks, and second, lack of horizontal communication and cooperation among think tanks, resulting in "suppressed research capacity and efficiency of Chinese think tanks."

Regarding professional think tank construction, national security issues receive high priority. On July 9, 2015, following the implementation of the National Security Law, the People's Liberation Army established its first national security strategic think tank—the China Center for National Security Studies—at the National Defense University. Guided by General Secretary Xi Jinping's holistic national security 观, its main tasks include conducting research on major practical security issues facing China, strategic assessment, policy consultation, talent training, and international exchange, producing the *China National Security Annual Report* and other outputs.

In this context, CSIS, as a world-class policy and international security research think tank, offers valuable reference experiences for China's new-type think tank construction, particularly security-focused think tanks. This paper suggests that China should consider the following key aspects:

1. **Global Perspective:** Chinese think tank construction should focus on solving global and current Chinese practical problems, maintaining an international vision and scope in think tank construction and research.
2. **Independence and Collaboration:** Grant independence and collaborative capacity to think tank construction. Emphasize the development of non-governmental think tanks, build platforms for think tank exchange and cooperation, and enhance think tank construction vitality.
3. **Digital Technology Integration:** Emphasize the integration and application of digital information technology. For example, establish fully functional information collection, analysis, and dissemination systems, and fully recognize the value of information technology for research output.
4. **Output Quality and Clusters:** Improve the quality of think tank research outputs, form think tank product clusters, strengthen results promotion, and expand institutional influence.

This paper also identifies limitations in CSIS' s development, similar to other Western think tanks. First, overemphasis on utilizing the revolving door mecha-

nism to influence government decisions creates drawbacks, leading to excessively rapid and arbitrary turnover of think tank professionals, particularly core members, which undermines talent stability and the specialization and sustainability of the research team. Second, public questioning of its research independence persists. Despite CSIS's consistent emphasis on being a non-profit, non-partisan, non-governmental policy research institution, its significant funding from over 40 petroleum consortiums led by Rockefeller inevitably subjects its research findings to the political tendencies and backgrounds of these oil interests [?]. These limitations warrant special attention and effort to avoid in China's think tank construction.

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Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.

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