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Development Status and Implications of American Policing Think Tanks (Postprint)

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Abstract

In the context of the national government's coordinated strengthening of think tank development in higher education institutions and the Ministry of Public Security's construction of new public security think tanks, this paper takes the U.S. Police Foundation as a case study to examine in detail its development trajectory, organizational structure, scope of work, and influence, exploring the organizational, operational, and construction experiences of this most representative American policing think tank to provide transferable experiences and development pathways for China's new public security think tanks.

Full Text

The Construction of American Police Think Tanks and Its Implications

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Abstract

Against the backdrop of the national government's coordinated efforts to strengthen think tank construction in higher education institutions and the Ministry of Public Security's initiative to build new-type public security think tanks, this paper takes the Police Foundation as a case study to examine its development history, organizational structure, work content, and influence. By exploring the experiences of this most representative American police think tank in organization, operation, and construction, this study aims to provide reference and development pathways for China's new-type public security think tanks.

Keywords: New-type Public Security Think Tanks; Think Tank Construction; American Police Think Tanks

In July 2015, the Ministry of Public Security issued the *Opinions on Strengthening the Construction of New-Type Think Tanks for Public Security Organs* and the *Work Plan for Establishing Ministerial-Level Public Security Think Tanks*, emphasizing the need to rely primarily on police academies and universities to build a batch of ministerial and provincial-level public security think tanks that are urgently needed for public security work, distinctive in character, institutionally innovative, and development-leading. In September, the Political Department of the Ministry of Public Security announced the first list of ministerial-level new-type public security think tanks, designating the People's Public Security University of China as the host institution for the "Ministry of Public Security Public Security Development Strategy Research Institute" and Jiangsu Police Institute as the host institution for the "Ministry of Public Security Modern Policing Reform Research Institute." In this new era of public security think tank construction, it is necessary for China's public security think tanks to absorb experiences from foreign think tank construction in related fields, thereby exploring a development path for new-type public security think tanks with Chinese characteristics.

1. Basic Conditions of Think Tank Construction in the U.S. Public Security Sector

In the *2014 Global Go To Think Tank Index Report* published by the Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program at the University of Pennsylvania, think tanks are defined as organizations that conduct public policy research and analysis on domestic and international issues to assist policymakers and the public in making informed decisions. They may be affiliated with various social organizations or operate as independent entities. Think tanks should position themselves as a link between policy formulation and academic research, with their findings needing to be transformed into tools that help policymakers and the public understand major issues.¹ The report also ranked think tanks with outstanding research achievements in domestic security and homeland security research, with major U.S. institutions including the Center for Strategic and International Studies, RAND Corporation, Brookings Institution, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Atlantic Council, Center for a New American Security, and Council on Foreign Relations.² While these large comprehensive think tanks contain specialized groups studying policing issues and produce numerous police research reports—such as RAND's "Public Safety" research group and Brookings' reports on the use of armed police forces in Latin America—they are not professional think tanks specifically serving public security decision-making. Therefore, using search terms combining "think tank," "police," "USA," or "American," this study identified the Police Foundation as an organization that meets the definition of a think tank and can serve as a representative case of American think tanks specializing in modern policing research, warranting

in-depth analysis.

2. Basic Conditions of the Police Foundation

The Police Foundation is the world's first international policing research institution. It defines itself as a non-profit, non-partisan, and non-government-led research organization, committed to leading policing development through innovative thinking and scientific technology from a neutral standpoint in service of what it considers America's noblest profession—policing. Based on the foundation's self-description, it fully conforms to the definition of a think tank.

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2.1 Development History

The Police Foundation was established in 1970 with funding from the Ford Foundation. During the 1960s, the United States experienced rising crime rates year after year, a problem that even the most elite police agencies could not solve. The issues focused on two aspects: first, the role of police in managing social disorder, and second, how police could balance civil rights at both individual and societal levels while maintaining social order. This urgent need for solutions directly 促成了 the birth of the Police Foundation.

On July 22, 1970, then Ford Foundation President McGeorge Bundy announced the establishment of the "Police Development Foundation" with \$30 million in startup funding for its first five years of operation and development. The Police Foundation was independent of both the Ford Foundation and the government, composed of elites from policing, academia, and law. Shortly after its establishment, the "Police Development Foundation" was formally renamed the "Police Foundation," maintaining its independence and distinctive character. From its original 13 board members to the present, after nearly half a century of development, the Police Foundation has gradually become a catalyst for policing reform. All its services and research follow scientific principles, respect facts and actual data, with the goal of producing absolutely neutral and unbiased perspectives—its greatest difference from other law enforcement research institutions. Over its 45-year history, the Police Foundation has conducted numerous scientific studies in policing research through funding and independent research, including classics such as the Kansas City Patrol Experiment. These research

outcomes not only optimized policing practices at the time but continue to influence contemporary policing research.

2.2 Organizational Structure

The Police Foundation's development and growth are inseparable from its rational organizational structure and personnel composition. The foundation's research is conducted by experienced researchers from various professional fields who collaborate through research teams. The board of directors serves as the highest leadership level, with the president and vice presidents responsible for specific operations. Other staff members are divided into full-time and collaborative personnel.

2.2.1 Board of Directors The highest leadership body is the board of directors, currently comprising 14 members selected from academic research, business institutions, legal organizations, government departments, law enforcement agencies, and medical groups. The current chair is Mr. Wilton J. Roux, who took office in 2011 and previously served as Managing Director of Boley & Associates Government Relations. The president is Mr. Jim Bueermann, who assumed the position in 2012 after serving as Chief of Police in Redlands, California, for over 30 years. He is familiar with all aspects of police work and has served as a policing research consultant at Cambridge University and George Mason University.

2.2.2 Full-Time Staff President Jim Bueermann, as a board member, primarily leads the foundation's daily operations. The Executive Committee, directly under the president, includes two vice presidents. Mr. Jim Burch is responsible for the foundation's strategic planning, ensuring all activities align closely with its primary mission of leading policing reform through innovative thinking and technology, while also overseeing overall strategic planning and management. Ms. Blake Norton serves as vice president and chief operating officer, primarily supervising daily operations.

Beyond the three leadership positions, there are currently 13 full-time staff members across various functional departments responsible for basic administrative work and leading research projects. The Research Department has six staff members, with researchers leading various studies and research assistants supporting projects. Researchers possess extensive research experience and police professional backgrounds, with some having worked at large comprehensive think tanks and half holding doctoral degrees. The Finance Department has two staff members: the chief financial officer, responsible for developing overall financial strategy and ensuring sound financial health, and the grants and contracts manager, responsible for receiving donations and managing their use. The Policy Department has three staff members, including two senior policy analysts and one program assistant. The Public Relations Department has one manager responsible for developing market expansion strategies, handling daily public

relations operations, and supervising publication printing. The Administration Department has one manager responsible for daily administrative work.

2.2.3 Collaborative Personnel The Police Foundation employs a large number of police officers from law enforcement agencies and research scholars from academic institutions as collaborative personnel for various projects, falling into three main categories. The first category is senior police collaborators from various U.S. criminal justice organizations, who are current or retired police executives with extensive knowledge and experience in policing. They help the foundation develop and grow by serving as members of the president's Police Industry Advisory Committee and as regional representatives, ensuring all research and services remain grounded in practical policing needs. Members participate in specific projects and regular seminars while also writing commentaries from a police perspective on issues arising in current cases. The second category is police officer collaborators—active-duty officers with rich practical experience who participate in practically-oriented research projects, providing hands-on experience to ensure research results and solutions effectively address real-world problems. The third category is research collaborators, divided into senior researchers and research fellows. Senior researchers generally hold doctoral degrees and are primarily lecturers or professors from police training institutions worldwide with extensive project research experience. Their research areas include policing reform, organizational reform and development of public security organs, law, criminal justice, criminology, and crime mapping, and they are experts in these fields, with most having police experience.

Additionally, the Research Advisory Committee is a permanent traditional institution of the Police Foundation, composed of senior and emerging scholars in policing studies, serving two-year terms. Currently chaired by Dr. David Weisburd, a prestigious recipient of the Stockholm Prize² in criminology, the committee is primarily responsible for proposing innovative ideas and participating in and assisting various research projects. Every four members form a group responsible for one U.S. Policing Thought Lecture series, which is dedicated to disseminating the freshest policing theories and practical methods. The committee organizes two meetings annually to develop research plans for the foundation.

2.3 Main Work Content

Since its establishment, the Police Foundation has served as a crucial bridge connecting public security organs, research scholars, and various community members. Its development depends on continuously maintaining and building relationships with police leadership, scholars, government agencies, social groups, and national organizations to explore problems and difficulties in law enforcement and judicial systems, actively using these as research starting points and transforming findings into actionable solutions. Based on this premise, the Police Foundation currently conducts several main types of work.

2.3.1 Police Research and Technology Development (1) Basic Research

The foundation's full-time and collaborative researchers conduct basic research and experiments on various policing issues. Researchers employ multiple traditional and innovative sociological and behavioral science research methods and evaluation approaches to explore and address fundamental problems in police work. The Police Foundation also participates in various experimental studies, such as randomized controlled trials. In addition to independent research, the foundation has established long-term cooperative relationships with various organizations, including academic institutions such as Cambridge University, Temple University, and George Mason University, as well as social organizations including federal government agencies, private institutions, and charitable organizations.

(2) Technology Development

The Police Foundation maintains vigorous vitality and innovative consciousness in the process of policing reform and development, demonstrating high sensitivity to new trends, situations, and technologies to actively address future challenges in policing development. Collaborating with multiple enterprises and organizations, the foundation develops new technologies and methods aimed at reducing crime and improving law enforcement capabilities. Such cooperation serves dual purposes: first, introducing the latest technologies into law enforcement activities to improve efficiency and technological content, and second, helping technology enterprises understand police needs for new technologies, expand application fields, test new products in policing practice, and make timely improvements. Currently involved technologies primarily include unmanned aircraft systems, sensor technology, virtual reality technology, and information analysis.

2.3.2 Training Programs and Technical Support (1) Training Programs

Another contribution of the Police Foundation to policing is providing training services for police agencies and judicial departments. Funded by federal departments, training constitutes part of the foundation's revenue. Training content covers various policing-related hot topics, such as crime analysis. The foundation also maintains long-term cooperation with the International Association of Crime Analysts to provide basic and targeted training services.

(2) Technical Support

Another major task of the Police Foundation is providing technical support to local police departments and criminal justice agencies, primarily through strategic decision-making advice and recommendations, summaries of key practical areas, verification of scientific evidence and general phenomena, and design and implementation of team project strategies. Content is customized according to specific organizational problems, including problem identification, strategy development, organizational or policy issues, practical problems, and critical case

reviews. Additionally, under federal government funding, the Police Foundation has long provided technical support to the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services and the Bureau of Justice Assistance's Law Enforcement Forecasting Group.

2.3.3 Organizational Management Research and Evaluation (1) Organizational Evaluation

As an independent third-party institution, the Police Foundation provides organizational evaluations for national and local-level policing agencies using comprehensive, data-based analytical methods and offering action-oriented recommendations.

(2) Program Evaluation

The foundation also provides evaluation services for various policing agency programs, covering topics such as preventive patrol, violent crime reduction, youth violence, immigration, police education levels, domestic violence, shift work systems, community policing, police legitimacy, evidence-based policing, legitimate use of force, police technology, and investigative techniques.

2.4 Publications and Online Resources

2.4.1 Publications Since its establishment in 1970, the Police Foundation has been committed to providing intellectual support for American policing, utilizing various methods to disclose information and expand public understanding and participation in public safety. Its primary methods involve publishing research reports and information bulletins, with its series of high-quality research reports serving as a powerful catalyst in modern American policing reform. Current regular online publications include: *New Perspectives on American Policing*, which focuses on reflections and recommendations regarding current policing work and issues related to improving law enforcement efficiency and social problems; *Crime Mapping and Analysis*, which primarily introduces the application of geographic information systems in American policing; *Police Foundation News*, which features analyses of specific policing issues by foundation experts; and *Five Things*, a briefing series launched at the end of 2014 that breaks down specific hot policing issues into five key points for detailed interpretation. All information on the foundation's website offers email subscription services and is publicly accessible through an online database, allowing visitors to quickly locate information through search functions.

2.4.2 Online Resources The Police Foundation's official website aggregates rich open data that plays a significant role in increasing public knowledge of policing and enhancing participation in public safety policy formulation. The open data primarily includes two components: (1) a critical incident review database storing reviews and reports of major cases by the Police Foundation and other organizations, as the foundation believes that summarizing lessons from past major cases is a shortcut for developing policing techniques and pro-

moting policing development, especially when scholars participate in the process to objectively summarize effective experiences for future application; and (2) a public safety data disclosure platform positioned as a data distribution center in this field, aggregating open data from the White House Police Data Initiative and other international organizations, as well as data collected by the foundation since its establishment.

2.5 Key Characteristics

2.5.1 Research Content Closely Aligned with Police Work All research conducted by the Police Foundation starts from practical policing work, scientifically investigating difficult problems encountered in actual police operations. Project teams include scholars with rich research experience, current and retired senior law enforcement leaders, and ordinary police officers, ensuring the research is practical and actionable. Additionally, the foundation maintains long-term close contact with law enforcement agencies at all levels, establishing good communication channels for smooth research implementation.

2.5.2 Emphasis on Scientific Objectivity in Research The scientific nature of the Police Foundation's research outcomes stems from its commitment to leading policing development through innovative thinking and scientific technology, adhering to objective and neutral principles, and following scientific methods that respect facts and utilize actual data. Furthermore, with the supervision and assistance of its traditional institution—the Research Advisory Committee—research projects can be continuously revised and optimized during implementation. The foundation's role as a bridge between high-tech research organizations and policing agencies also ensures its research projects are always accompanied by the latest scientific and technological support, undoubtedly enhancing the scientific nature of final research outcomes.

2.5.3 Focus on Promotion and Dissemination of Outputs The Police Foundation's organizational structure includes a dedicated public relations department responsible for media communication and supervision of printed publications. The think tank information and research results produced regularly by the foundation are published in various thematic formats and simultaneously updated on the website, freely accessible to the public. These are the primary methods for disseminating think tank ideas and policy viewpoints to the public, government leadership, and other social organizations. A professional website operations team is responsible for daily maintenance and database management, regularly publishing the latest research results and current affairs commentaries, with embedded search engines facilitating visitor retrieval of interested information. Additionally, the Police Foundation deepens its involvement in various related organizations through training services, seminars, and technical support, continuously expanding its influence among law enforcement agencies while consolidating its own authority.

2.6 Implications for China' s New-Type Public Security Think Tanks

As one of the most representative American police think tanks, the Police Foundation has nearly half a century of development history. Having experienced multiple American policing reforms and changes in domestic and international situations, it has become a leader in international policing think tanks. The key factor enabling the foundation to maintain its leading position in the policing think tank field lies in its consistent focus on public security policing work as its research object, producing rigorous, objective, and realistic research outcomes with high scientific research and application value, while emphasizing the transformation, application, and promotion of its outputs. These characteristics merit careful consideration and reference by Chinese policing work, particularly policing think tank builders. However, we must also recognize that due to differences in political and social environments between China and the United States, China' s new-type public security think tank construction cannot simply copy the American model. Nevertheless, Chinese policing think tanks can draw on some advanced experiences and practices to explore a new development path that conforms to China' s national conditions and actual public security work, characterized by distinctive Chinese features.

2.6.1 Identifying Research Objects and Methods Public security think tanks must first identify their research objects, not merely conducting academic research in an ivory tower, but rather focusing tightly on serving public security work and team construction as their fundamental purpose. They should conduct timely, in-depth, and effective research on hot issues in national political and regime security and social public safety, producing results and responses that provide decision-making references and solutions for public security work. The actual value of think tank intellectual products should serve as the basic standard for measuring think tank construction levels. Public security think tanks must also identify research methods, focusing on hot, difficult, and bottleneck issues in public safety and public security work faced by social development. They should eliminate interference from external factors such as vested interests as much as possible, earnestly follow scientific research laws, and through rigorous research methods and objective theoretical analysis, produce situation assessment reports, response strategies, and solutions with high theoretical levels and strong practicality to provide references for public security decision-making.

2.6.2 Enhancing Research Capacity and Innovation Ability Public security think tanks need to continuously improve their ability to identify, propose, analyze, and solve problems. They should scientifically plan top-level think tank design, maintain openness of public security think tanks, and through advanced management systems and mechanisms, keep think tanks vibrant and attractive to talent, thereby continuously enhancing research capacity. Strong support should be provided to pioneering policing theoretical research, encouraging researchers to boldly propose new concepts and viewpoints to lead and promote joint participation by government departments, public security organs, social

organizations, and the general public in public security think tank construction and public safety issue discussions, forming societal consensus on public security organ and policing work reform and development. Think tanks must focus on improving innovation capacity, producing high-end think tank products through theoretical and methodological innovation to firmly occupy the commanding heights in policing research.

2.6.3 Establishing a Sound Information Promotion and Dissemination

Mechanism Public security think tanks should emphasize brand building and promotion through publishing regular journals and popular works for the public, issuing current affairs briefings, organizing seminars at different levels and scopes, building official websites and specialized databases, and expanding the influence and recognition of public security think tank outcomes to enhance the authority of think tank knowledge products. They should actively maintain smooth communication channels with government departments, public security organs, media, social organizations, and enterprises to disseminate understanding and perspectives on major cases and hot events in domestic and international public safety, guiding the public to correctly understand related social security issues and improving the credibility and influence of public security think tanks. Additionally, public security think tanks need to enhance their international discourse power, expand the scope of their influence, and strive to disseminate China's voice and ideas in the public safety field through cooperative research and academic exchanges.

2.6.4 Establishing an Effective Research Team Management Mechanism

Public security think tanks should adopt project-oriented organizational methods and incentive systems to attract outstanding researchers through solid financial support, actively recruiting renowned scholars and practical experts with public security work experience. Research teams should innovate talent development methods by inviting capable senior researchers to participate in projects part-time. Smooth exchange mechanisms between public security think tanks and practical departments should be established, encouraging think tank researchers to improve their research levels and practical policing experience through temporary positions, exchanges, and advanced studies. Simultaneously, strict research outcome management and evaluation mechanisms must be established to prevent academic misconduct.

References

1. Chu Ming, *A Comparative Study of American and European Think Tanks*, China Social Sciences Press, 2013, p. 9.
2. The Think Tank and Civil Societies Program, *2014 Global Go To Think Tank Index Report*, University of Pennsylvania.

Notes

¹ The Ford Foundation was established in 1936 with funding from the Ford Motor Company. Its main tasks involve researching major domestic and international issues in the United States and providing funding to relevant domestic and international organizations and research units through establishing research institutions, awarding scholarships, dispatching experts abroad, and making donations to influence American social life, cultural and educational undertakings, and government internal and external policies. (<http://www.fordfoundation.org/about-us>)

² The Stockholm Prize is a prestigious international award in the field of criminology, primarily aimed at recognizing outstanding research in this field.

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

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