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Selling the Future in DC
Marketing Stability for International Security

Ariel Colonomos



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Selling the Future in DC

Marketing Stability for International Security

Abstract

What kind of future worlds do experts of international security envision? This paper studies the role of experts in DC's think tanks, a relatively small world socially and culturally highly homogeneous. It underlines the characteristics of this epistemic community that influence the way its analysts make claims about the future for security. The DC's marketplace of the future lacks diversity. The paradigms analysts use when they study international politics are very similar. Moreover, the range of issues they focus on is also relatively narrow.

The paper highlights three main features of the relation between those who make claims about the future of security and those to whom these claims are addressed (mainly policymakers). First, it shows that, for epistemic but also for political reasons, the future imagined in think tanks is relatively stable and linear. This future also contributes to the continuity of political decisions. Second, the paper shows that think tanks are also "victims of groupthink", especially when they make claims about the future. Third, it underlines a paradox: scenarios and predictions create surprises. Claims about the future have a strong tunneling effect. They reinforce preexisting beliefs, create focal points, and operate as blinders when, inevitably, the future breaks away from its linear path.

Vendre le futur à Washington

Le monde stable des experts de la sécurité internationale

Résumé

Les experts en matière de sécurité sont régulièrement sollicités pour donner leur avis sur le futur de la politique internationale. A Washington, le petit monde des think tanks est un véritable « marché du futur ». Son homogénéité culturelle et sociale est très forte, la diversité des idées qui s'y expriment très réduite. Dans ce marché des idées, le spectre de futurs possibles est dès lors très étroit.

On note trois caractéristiques principales de cette énonciation du futur. Premièrement, pour des raisons épistémiques et politiques, le futur est linéaire, et ainsi conforte la stabilité et la continuité des décisions politiques. Deuxièmement, ces savoirs de l'expertise sont fortement enracinés dans un « groupthink », une pensée collective entravée par des biais qui s'auto-entretiennent et qui conduisent à lisser fortement prédictions et scénarios. Troisièmement, c'est là un paradoxe, les anticipations de la sécurité internationale contribuent à créer un effet de surprise. Par des effets de tunnel, l'attention des praticiens de la sécurité tout comme celle du public se concentre sur des points focaux, les empêchant de voir les inévitables ruptures avec les trajectoires linéaires émerger et se réaliser.

Selling the Future in DC Marketing Stability for International Security

Ariel Colonomos *Sciences Po/CERI*

"The American-Soviet conflict is not some temporary aberration
but a historical rivalry that will long endure."¹

"The Cold War is not over."²

"I don't think that anybody could have predicted
that these people would take an airplane and slam into the World Trade Center,
take another one and slam into the Pentagon."³

Brzezinski's quote reflects what was once the mainline of the analysis in Soviet Studies and in the field of international relations in American universities and think-tanks, and more generally throughout the Western world. No matter how surprising this might seem today, this opinion prevailed until the late 1980s, as can be seen in Scowcroft's statement. Two decades later, Condoleezza Rice expressed the surprise many analysts and policymakers felt on September 11. This quote was in response to some of the criticism of US policy that was made public during the hearings organized by the September 11 Commission that started in 2003.

Both Brzezinski and Rice come from academia and both were caught off guard by major turning points in international politics. It should be added that Scowcroft also worked in think-tanks and in consulting. What does this situation tell us about the structure of applied knowledge in international relations? The theory practice nexus is a well-studied issue in international relations,⁴ that is of concern for both academics and policy experts. However one aspect of the role knowledge plays in the realm of practice needs to be more thoroughly investigated.

¹ Zbigniew Brzezinski, 10th US National Security Advisor, 1986, in Brzezinski, 1986: XIII.

² Brent Scowcroft, 9th and 17th US National Security Advisor, January 22, 1989, in Mann, 2009: XIII.

³ Condoleezza Rice, US Secretary of State, February 7, 2004.

⁴ Snyder, 2004; Walt, 2005.

How are claims about the future made in a professional realm that is obsessed with knowing the future? How are these claims "sold" in the public marketplace of ideas? Is anticipating the future of international politics about anticipating change? These are the questions this study aims to answer at a time when the issue of predicting the future is widely debated in the policy world⁵ and attracts scholars from different disciplines.

Claims about the Future in International Politics: the Stability of Change

"The inclination to predict is deeply embedded in U.S. institutions."⁶

Policymakers rarely make any decision without trying to anticipate the consequences of their decision or at least without claiming to do so. Whether they have an accurate sense of what these consequences are likely to be, if they are correct or not, if it is even possible to have a vision of the future are different matters. Anticipating the future—in most cases envisioning a set of different possible futures—is inherently part of the exercise of decision making. Anticipating is therefore one important aspect of the study of international politics and more widely of international relations. There are specialists devoted to this task and it is indeed essential to explain and understand how this knowledge is developed.

This study focuses on the claims about the future made by experts working in DC's think-tanks which are leaders in the realm of international politics. It highlights where those specialists look when they envision the future of the world and it underlines the important issues that these experts consider to be relevant for the next decades. The future—i.e. a claim about what international politics will look like in the mid- or the long- term—relies in great part on the nature and the framing of these questions.

This study relies on the assumption that the work experts produce reflects and nurtures a "horizon of expectation".⁷ What this terminology suggests is that some visions of the future are "future made present". They are true visions for the future grounded in the present. For example, policy debates during the 1990s were dominated by the idea that democracy and the market had won over communism and failed states. In this case, capitalism and pluralism would be the new horizon for international politics.⁸ Historically, every phase of international politics is characterized by one or more visions of the future, each built on a collection of

⁵ Danzig, 2011.

⁶ Richard Danzig, Chairman of the Board, Center for a New American Security (CNAS), in Danzig, 2011: 8. Danzig is also a senior analyst at CNAS and at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) and other US institutions.

⁷ Koselleck, 1959.

⁸ For a reaction to this consensus, see Mearsheimer 1990. Interestingly, Mearsheimer tried to counter the teleological future claims made by a majority of policymakers, experts, and academics about the post-Cold War era in Europe. His predictions have proven to be even less accurate than those of his counterparts.

expectations about what the future will look like.⁹ More often than not, these anticipations merge and contribute to forging focal points.¹⁰

This study attempts to draw the lines of the "web of meaning" that policy experts weave in their publications when they address the issue of the future of international politics, and in the social life that they create in their tightly-knit world of greater DC. It emphasizes the importance of the relationship between the supply of ideas about the future of world politics and the demand for anticipatory knowledge. There are numerous think-tanks and many are willing to be oracles in DC. The demand for predictions is also strong. This is especially true at the Department of Defense.

It is difficult to predict the future, or, as the famous baseball player Yogi Berra used to say, "predicting is difficult, especially about the future". Scholarly work and conventional wisdom would agree on this point. This study takes note of the fact that there are some difficulties and hurdles in knowing the future (how could it be otherwise?). Yet, it refutes the idea, often implicit in this statement, that these constraints are only epistemic. There are other reasons why predictions are necessarily approximative. The prevailing view of the future is found at the intersection of the demand for knowledge and the supply of predictions. This study underlines the important role of the knowledge practice nexus in the framing of expectations and how it orients future claims. Indeed, anticipations—both their format and their content—greatly depend on the relation between the predictor and those requesting predictions. In other words, the quality and the content of claims about the future depends to whom they are addressed and on whose behalf they are made, and not solely on the knowledge of the provider.

Moreover, the traditional vision according to which predictions are just "difficult" suffers from some serious problems. It discourages any attempt to improve their quality through changes in some aspects of the relationship between knowledge providers and policymakers. This vision also serves the purpose of exculpating the experts who are less responsible for their mistakes given that the exercise is so difficult (or just impossible to perform).

Policymakers are also less responsible for their own mistakes and less constrained in their decision-making. Indeed, if there were precise methods for knowing the future, policymakers would just have to follow the indications given by those who make them. To a certain extent, one may also question whether policymakers *really* want to know the future. Indeed, reluctance to change is very characteristic of the world of politics.¹¹ Whereas, of course, a willingness to actually know the future relies on quite the opposite, i.e. the acceptance of change.

This clearly stands as a paradox. On the one hand, there is a strong demand for anticipatory knowledge. On the other, there is a preference for stability and thus a reluctance to accept change. This paradox stands at the core of the subtle relation between predictors and policymakers.

This study explores the role of claims about the future in the field of security in the US. It builds on a research about the world of expertise in DC. These analysts address their views

⁹ On the post-Cold War, see Betts, 2010.

¹⁰ Schelling, 1960.

¹¹ Danzig, 2011: 14.

about the future of international politics, directly or indirectly, publicly or not, to American policymakers.¹² This study builds on data collected on the websites of the think-tanks those experts belong to.

A great number of their views are available in the public realm, in reports, op-eds, articles or books and now widely on the various think-tanks' internet websites. Claims about the future differ from intelligence although there is necessarily some overlap between the two. And of course the intelligence community relies on predictions made available by both governmental and non-governmental experts. Claims about the future are also of great concern to the general public, the media, international organizations, and leaders from other countries. Given the role the US plays in international affairs it is important, to say the least, for other players to take into account how US experts envision the future. Those experts are mostly to be found in governmental agencies, in the military, and in think-tanks, which are numerous in the DC area.¹³

Why Now?

There is a wide consensus that we live in a turbulent world, especially when we compare the current state of international affairs to the system that prevailed during the Cold War. The international system during the Cold War is now seen as having been fairly stable, a period in which the balance of power and deterrence successfully played their role, mainly stabilizing the relations between the two superpowers.¹⁴ According to this vision, total war was avoided because its anticipated costs were too high and therefore had a dissuasive effect. There was an overall consensus that nuclear stability would prevail (it did in the fairly limited time of the Cold War, and, so far and luckily, has continued to prevail). There was also a consensus about the permanence of the USSR (a prediction that proved to be wrong). These analyses relied on rational choice theory, cost benefit analysis, or behavioral studies.¹⁵ They focused on the

¹² I made two trips to DC in 2011 (March and May) during which I interviewed some of these experts. I also did interviews in New York in April 2010 and May 2011. I've collaborated extensively with Thomas Richard (University of Clermont-Ferrand) who worked on the quantitative data and statistics we collected, with Sciences Po's atelier de cartographie (Sciences Po's maps and geography unit, <http://cartographie.sciences-po.fr/>) and with Sciences Po's Medialab (<http://www.medialab.sciences-po.fr/>). I wish to thank Benoit Martin, Marie-Françoise Durand, Patrice Mitrano and Thomas Ansart from the atelier de cartographie, as well as Tommaso Venturini, Mathieu Jacomy and Paul Girard from the Medialab.

¹³ <http://www.gotthinktank.com/thinktank/>. Among the great number of think-tanks that can be found in DC, a portion of them has been selected from this ranking list (the top portion) and some other organizations that are significant for the purposes of this study have been added. The study on the experts' profile (first section) includes 15 organizations (Appendice 1-A). The study on the language they use when they make anticipations (second section) includes 11 organizations (Appendice 1-B). The study on the sites' content (fourth section) includes eight organizations (Appendice 1-C). Some of the members of these organizations have been interviewed and some of the data available on their website has been processed. This study is therefore based on qualitative and quantitative research. For confidentiality reasons, the names of the interviewees will not appear in this paper, but can be found in Appendice 2. Some governmental experts have also been interviewed.

¹⁴ This is mainly the Realist vision of the Cold War, which was also prevalent before the Fall of the Wall. For a defense of the stability of the Cold War, see Waltz 1964.

¹⁵ There is an ample literature on the stability created by nuclear deterrence. Its best theorist, spokesman, and advocate is still Kenneth Waltz. See Sagan and Waltz 1995. Neo-realism includes the possibility of anticipation, when it explains what it sees as "continuities". See Waltz, 1979: 69.

explanation of political and strategic stability. The methods used when making assumptions about the future were pretty homogenous and the knowledge system on which these assumptions relied remained unchallenged until the end of the Cold War.

Experts are now facing a bigger challenge. Conflicts in Africa or in the Middle East are considered less predictable than the nuclear behavior of the US and the USSR. There is some degree of truth to this. Indeed, the number of players on the nuclear scene is more limited than the number of participants to ethnic and civil wars; nuclear players formed a more homogeneous group than the participants to post-Cold War conflicts, both domestic and international. Nuclear games included fewer variables than experts now must take into account when they discuss the future of terrorism or ethnic conflicts. New types of conflicts are thought to be more difficult to anticipate than basic games within a set of limited players sharing the same kind of interests and a set of homogenous values (such as in a bipolar nuclear arena).

International politics is often seen as the realm of unpredictable, tragic, and catastrophic events, especially in the aftermath of September 11. The (plausible) perils of civil wars and terrorist attacks have superseded the vision of improbable mutual destruction.

"Global politics" was introduced in the 1990s as a descriptive and analytical concept that would help better understand the realm of international politics. This vague terminology implicitly suggests that there is a growing interdependence and that micro and social or cultural factors can easily affect the macro-system of international politics and interstate relations.¹⁶ Because the chain of consequences of a single decision is considered to be so ample, predicting them all is a very serious challenge. There is a growing sense that we are living in a "global risk society" or in a "world risk society".¹⁷

Anticipating the future is meant to play a new role. As the view that we live in an era of uncertainty is reinforced, so is the interest in predictions. The number of experts who discuss the future has significantly increased over the last two decades.¹⁸ Claims about the future are justified as an attempt to master the risks that are the cause of uncertainty. This, of course, is a paradox. Indeed, given that the world is more uncertain, claims about the future are more hazardous and less trustworthy. Are they not there creating more uncertainty, as they might be the source of approximate information?

Another question arises. Have predictors adapted the knowledge upon which they rely to make claims about the future to the new environment in which international politics is viewed as a scene where unexpected events happen and break the routine of stability of interstate relations?

Visions of international politics change at radical junctures. As in the case of Minerva's owl, they change only once change has occurred. This affects both the academic scene and the domain of more policy-oriented expertise. As the Cold War ended, the lenses through which the world was

¹⁶ We see here a convergence of different approaches. Sociological theory focusing on the micro-macro nexus (Badie and Smouts, 1992; Rosenau, 1990), liberal theory (Nye, 1992), and cultural approaches (Huntington, 1996) appear to be strange bedfellows.

¹⁷ These terms became mainline following the publication of Ulrich Beck's work (Beck, 1992 and 1999).

¹⁸ For an overview, see my blog that lists a sample of these organizations and companies: <http://blogs.sciences-po.fr/recherche-predictions/2010/02/03/forecasting-as-business/>

being scrutinized changed. On the academic scene, this meant the relative decline of Realism and concomitantly the emergence and the strengthening of a constructivist vision of international politics as well as the consolidation of Liberalism. Within think-tanks, experts needed to diversify their skills. Sovietology became "*passé*" and came under heavy criticism as "transitology" (the study of the shift to democracy and to the free market) boomed.¹⁹ The latter replaced the former.²⁰

This change is in itself extremely telling. Indeed, balance of power and deterrence are rather past-oriented concepts. The role of structures—and therefore the role of the past—are paramount when these models are applied to explain the present and possibly to make extrapolations about the future. In the 1990s, the vision of international politics became more future-oriented as transition became a major reference point of international studies.²¹ Transitology is future-oriented, since it tries to capture a moment of change within a teleological framework. Democracy and the free market are the horizons of the future to which newly post-communist societies were said to converge. This idea was well laid out in Francis Fukuyama's global bestseller, which is one of the most illustrious examples and reflections of this *Zeitgeist*.²²

The events of September 11 are a radical juncture of critical importance in the recent history of expertise and predictions. The shock created by the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon gave more weight to the arguments of those who previously defended the idea that there was a need for sound intelligence and anticipatory analysis because uncertainty was a real danger for the US. New approaches to forecasting became known to the public. The road to the future was set on a new track. A new vision was sold on the market where it still occupies a leading share. The origins and the future of Islamic networks and their leaders became a leading topic of discussion.

Since September 11, the US has led two major wars. US troops recently left Iraq. They remain in Afghanistan. The US is involved in many other combat operations, tracking individual targets and using drones in countries such as Pakistan or Yemen. The common feature of these military operations has been "prevention".²³ The US claimed it did not want to be caught off guard again and the presidency of G. W. Bush has defined a new direction and a set of goals. Its purpose was to anticipate the dangers from which the US might suffer if it were to remain passive. Although there has been a significant change of discourse and tone with the election of President Obama in 2008, there has not been a radical departure from the preventive framework that was set in place in the wake of September 11. Anticipations fuel preventive action and predictions are needed in order to justify the preventive use of force. The US still targets combatants who are said to be terrorists on the basis of the danger that they are likely to pose if they were to pursue what are considered to be their goals.

¹⁹ For a historical account of Sovietology, see Engerman, 2010.

²⁰ Among many other examples, the Soviet Studies graduate program at Sciences Po, "*Cycle supérieur d'études soviétiques et est-européennes*", was renamed in 1994 and became "*Cycle supérieur d'étude comparée de la transition démocratique dans l'Europe post-communiste*" (my emphasis).

²¹ Colonomos, 2011b.

²² Fukuyama, 1992.

²³ Colonomos, 2009.

The purpose of this study is to explain the role of claims about the future by describing and analyzing those who make such claims and the methods they employ. This is a study of a very specific "marketplace of ideas"²⁴: *the DC futures marketplace*. It seeks to capture the essence of this market defined as the meeting point of a strong demand for predictive knowledge and a supply of predictive ideas rooted in different kinds of knowledge.

Most publications on predictions focus on one main question. Are predictions accurate? They usually stress the limitations of predictive knowledge and therefore underline the epistemic fallacies of predictions.²⁵ This paper argues that the ultimate goal of those claims might not be truth seeking. Predictors are aware of the limitations of their expertise. Policymakers also know that these tools are largely imperfect. Given these limitations, what other purposes might their ideas serve?

Predictions are a reflection of US policy, because of the great symbiosis between those who elaborate them and those in charge of policy. They operate, as it is argued in this study, as *focal points* for international security policies. They are a mode of communication, a common language, and an interface between those who have an opinion about what statesmen eventually ought to do and policymakers who have an opinion about how experts should think and what they should study.

I — DC'S SMALL WORLD OF EXPERTISE

A Brief Historical Reminder about the Think-Tanks' Social Club

Think-tanks are numerous in the United States compared to other parts of the world, where for cultural, political, fiscal, and legal reasons they play a much less important role. There are about 1,800 think-tanks in the United States,²⁶ nearly 400 in DC alone. Their role is to provide expertise in the realm of public policy and "sell" their ideas. They seek to have their views quoted by policymakers, statesmen, politicians, the military, or the media and increase the impact of their views on public policy and thereby enhance their credibility and their reputation.

The history of think-tanks in the US is well known.²⁷ It parallels the history of the dominance and hegemony of the US in international politics. Think-tanks originated in the early twentiethth century with the initiatives of Robert Brookings and Andrew Carnegie. The Institute for Government Research, the precursor of Brookings Institution (1927) was one of the earliest think-tanks. The United States has a long tradition in philanthropy and think-tanks benefit heavily from private donations.

²⁴ Kaufman, 2004.

²⁵ Choucri and Robinson, 1978; Jervis, 1991-2; Doran, 1999; Freeman and Job, 1979. On the biases of experts, see Tetlock, 2005.

²⁶ McGann, 2011: 18.

²⁷ Abelson, 1996; Rich, 2004.

The role of think-tanks is to provide knowledge and information relevant for public policy. Officially, their expertise is said to be impartial. Yet, think-tanks do have political and ideological identities that serve as labels in order to differentiate them from their competitors. As will be shown below, these proclaimed differences and identities play a lesser role than one might think in the selection of the issues which they study and the perspectives they take.

Science plays an important role in think-tanks. After World War Two, the Rand Corporation fully embodied this scientific turn. The Rand Corporation—which is a highly relevant player in this study—introduced new scientific models mostly used to deal with security and nuclear issues. It hired experts and scholars from the hard sciences who worked with social scientists. This was the golden age of Rand when Nobel prizes laureates such as Gary Becker, Edmund Phelps, or Paul Samuelson were among their staff and consultants. Forecasting was and remains at the core of Rand's activities.

Think-tanks also have a social function: they operate as "gentlemen's clubs". The perfect example is the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), whose principal headquarters are in New York, in a townhouse located in the Upper East Side in Manhattan two blocks away from Central Park. The CFR was modeled on the Chatham House in London that was established one year earlier, in 1920. The CFR also has a DC branch situated near the White House. The CFR—as it is the case for other organizations—hosts conferences where business leaders, statesmen, politicians, and diplomats intermingle with experts. It operates as a club in the sense that you become a member by invitation.²⁸ The CFR can pride itself on being a prestigious organization where ideas that have strongly influenced US foreign policy have been drafted and discussed. "The Sources of Soviet Conduct" written by US diplomat George Kennan appeared in *Foreign Affairs*, the journal published by the Council. This article was the basis for the containment policy during the Cold War. A few decades later, in 1993, Samuel Huntington published his article "The Clash of Civilizations" in the same journal.

Think-tanks are therefore a locus for the exchange of ideas. Attending the conferences they host gives their members the impression that they are part of the inner circles of power. As I will underline by analyzing the content of the websites of those organizations, the "future" is often a subject of debate at think-tanks. This is consistent with the atmosphere of exclusiveness that think-tanks—especially at the CFR—deliberately create. For the members of this club, access to future oriented analysis about international security is a mark of "distinction". The "future" is something secret and only a happy few are entitled to consult the oracles. Nevertheless, there is such strong pressure on think-tanks to be visible in the public arena that many of their findings are available in their publications and online.

This paradox—the willingness to be highly visible and also preserve a degree of confidentiality—is well expressed in the "Chatham House rule" that the CFR and many other think-tanks apply. Accordingly, participants are free to use the information received during a meeting at the think-tank, but neither the identity, the affiliation of the speaker, nor that of any other participant may be revealed. Future telling also combines the need for publicity and the preference for confidentiality. They go hand-in-hand. If their analyses were not ultimately made public the

²⁸ <http://www.cfr.org/about/membership/>

think-tanks would have no voice in public debates and their members would have no interest in having early, private, privileged access to their studies and experts.

Since the end of the Cold War, think-tanks have moved from the study of US-Soviet issues to other questions that have included ethnic conflict, the rules and goals of the transition to democracy, terrorism and Islam and so on. As it will clearly appear in this study, think-tanks are *followers* and are slow to change. This, of course, contradicts their primary ambition, which is to see "the real world" and be ahead of their times.²⁹ Therefore, the fall of the Soviet Union was a shock in American think-tanks as much as everywhere else. These organizations were required to adapt and direct their efforts to the study of issues that were more compatible with the unipolar setting that characterized post-Cold War international politics. They also reinforced their role in foreign policy formulation and some of them became strongly involved in the debates on NATO enlargement.

This study focuses on think-tanks in the DC area, where a great proportion of them are established. The DC area is also the place where most think-tanks that focus on international, security, and foreign policy issues traditionally have their headquarters. The 15 organizations from which this data is drawn from are all located in the DC area.³⁰ They are among the largest and most highly ranked think-tanks in the US and in the world.³¹ They have a particularly important voice and are highly respected. The data used in this section is based on the profiles of 398 researchers working in those organizations³². This list includes only those who have a senior experience and status. Due to their size, the number of researchers they employ and, for a great number of them, the prestige that they have, these 15 organizations produce most of the work that policymakers refer to when they look for external advice in the field of international politics. They are the most quoted in the media³³ and many highly trained students from prestigious universities hope to work for them.

Who Are the Experts?³⁴

What is the social profile of security experts who work in think-tanks in the DC area? When discussing their role, it is important to know about their background and the social and cultural environments in which they operate.

²⁹ This was very much their ambition at their origins in places such as Rand. They investigated new issues and developed innovative tools of analysis that were a breakthrough.

³⁰ As it is the case for Rand and the Lexington Institute.

³¹ Thirteen of them come from *the Think-tank to Go Global Ranking*. Two other organizations that are not on this list have been added: *The Lexington Institute* and *The Washington Institute on Near East Policy*. Their area of specialization is highly relevant for this study. See Appendix 1-A.

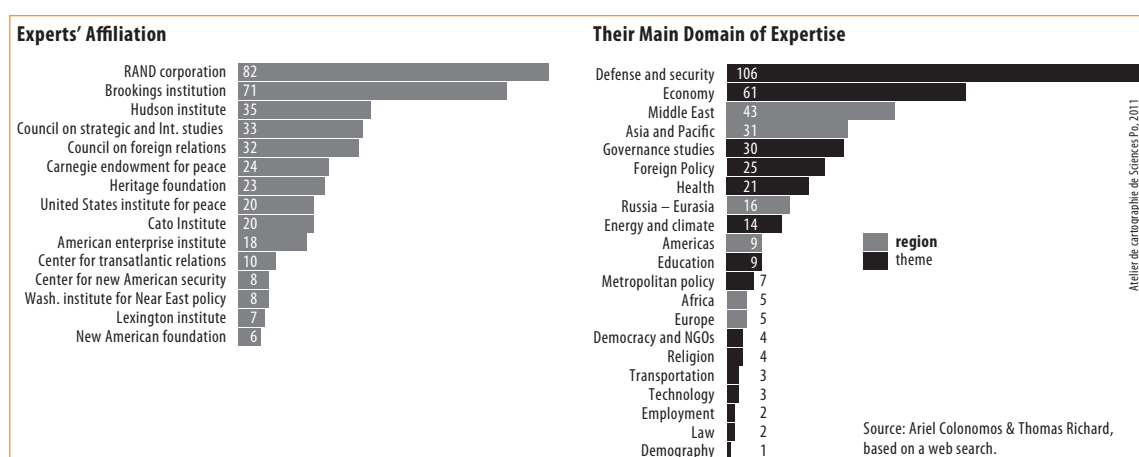
³² This data is based on the information that is given on their web pages where their c.v. appears.

³³ Although data needs to be updated, in terms of media citation, ten out of 15 of these organizations come first in a list that would capture their presence on the media. See <http://www.fair.org/index.php?page=1182>. For a recent assessment of their public impact that includes their media appearances, see the *Go Global Ranking* ("Greatest Impact of Public Policy", #26, 48-49).

³⁴ As for the other information provided in this paper, data was collected on September 12, 2011. The web's cartography was processed on October 5, 2011.

Security experts in DC form an "epistemic community".³⁵ The definition of an epistemic community captures well the characteristics of the group they form. Indeed, security experts use a common set of analytical scientific tools, mainly those of the social sciences. A great number of them are trained in economics, political science, or international relations. Their knowledge is applied to policy issues. Finally, they share a common set of values, in so far as the organizations they are part of expressly want to contribute to preserving US security and maximizing its interest.

The vision they develop when anticipating the future is heavily influenced not only by their education and the norms and values derived from their backgrounds but also by their interest in having access to the "real world" and to policymakers who share their values and vision of the world. As this first series of data will easily shows, the social world of expertise is a fairly small and homogenous one.



The organizations that appear above are the leading centers that provide knowledge in the field of politics and the majority of them clearly focus on international politics. Experts whose primary domain of research is "defense and security" form a large majority. Actually, experts on security and defense (106) outnumber the experts who primarily work on all geographical areas combined. The Middle East is the most researched regional area (43), followed by Asia-Pacific (31)³⁶ and Russia (16). Only five researchers are specialists on Europe. This tells us what the priorities of think-tanks are and what knowledge is available in those organizations.

Although this data does not include any specific information about the vision of the future that these experts might share, it does give some indications about the social expectations to which these professionals must respond. "Defense and security" is the area where these expectations converge. Indeed, most area specialists also have an expertise in this field. "Defense and security" is the "horizon of expectation" of this small world, which echoes a very traditional tragic vision of world politics. The Middle East, Asia (notably China), and Russia

³⁵ Haas, 1992.

³⁶ Six of them rank China as their number one area of expertise.

are foreign policy "experiences", i.e. they are in Koselleckian terms "spaces of experiences" (loci where the US has been or is being challenged as a power in international politics).

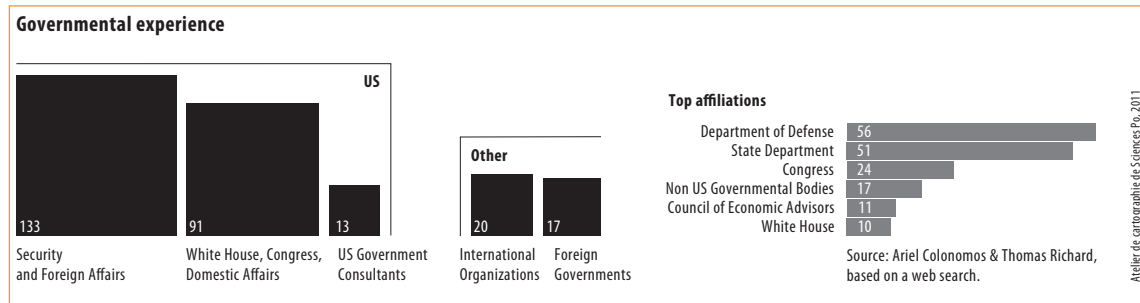
"Soft" issues such as demography, education, or law gather a fairly small number of people. The think-tank world reflects the traditional Cold War dominance of "hard issues", those that are paramount for the explanation and understanding of international politics. Alternative views are clearly not well represented. For example, although it has become a fashionable concept at the UN and in some academic circles, the concept of "human security" is definitely not very prominent in this small world. The areas of expertise of these professionals are also a fair reflection of a world vision in which conflict is the predominant mode of interaction between international players. Hence, few of them concentrate on the study of the law or cooperation. Indeed, trade is usually seen as an antagonistic mode of relating with competitors. There is one difference with the traditional thinking of the Cold War: the strong interest in the Middle East and a definition of security that also includes violence brought by non-state actors, as in the case of terrorism.

This calls for further analysis based on other observations and on qualitative work. The experts' major focal points of analysis have not radically altered since the end of the Cold War, except for the study of the role of Islam and terrorism. This shows the inertia of those institutions and the challenge they face when it comes to adapting to change in international politics. Indeed, those who work in the realm of "defense and security" have a very traditional understanding of international politics. The number of experts on Russia is quite high, as compared to the number of experts on countries of similar importance such as India or Brazil, and higher than the number of China specialists. This also testifies to the legacy of the Cold War. Many experts of the former USSR followed the "transition" and, since then, have specialized in post-Soviet Russian society.

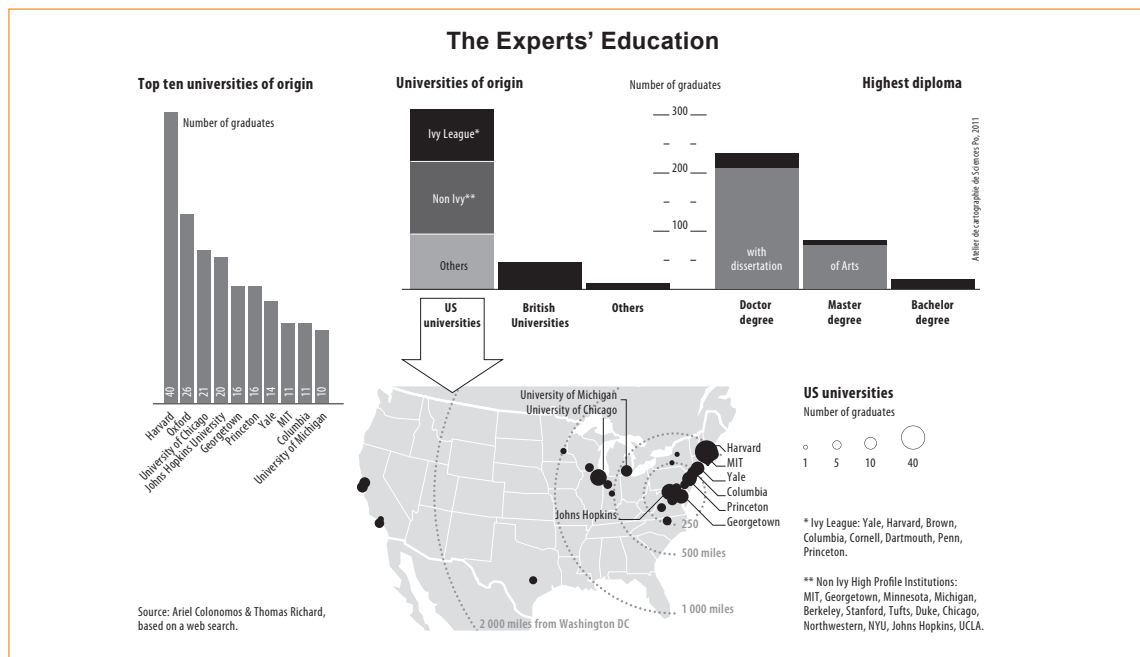
Another variable which explains why this vision leaves aside important areas of the world and novel issues is the chain of production for ideas in think-tanks. Some major think-tanks partly rely on funding made available by very large foundations. These foundations speak the same language that experts use and share the same keywords. In some cases, there is a time span of five to ten years between the moment when a decision on a theme of research is made within the foundations and the moment when the think-tank delivers its work. This accounts for the inertia of expertise. This linear continuity also hampers dramatically the experts' capacity to anticipate the future. It should be noted that, from this perspective, the division of labor between, on the one hand the policy arena and the world of think-tanks that would supposedly be flexible and fine-tuned to "real" events, and on the other the academic scene that is supposedly slow to react to the changes of the outside world.

Another variable is the logic of politics and the policy world. Leaders have their own vision of the world, rooted in their past. Their experience orients their thinking on what the most important current issues of the world are. They are also caught in another temporal chain. Defining what those key issues are also depends on past events such as a war or a terrorist attack that are of great concern to their constituents and therefore important if they want to be reelected.

Senior researchers often have policy and governmental experience—the kind of trajectory sought by their younger colleagues. They have worked within previous administrations. The State Department and the Pentagon have been their primary affiliations. Some are retired diplomats and military officers. In addition to working at a think-tank a number of them also hold teaching positions, in most cases as adjunct professors,³⁷ but in some cases as permanent faculty. A few of them are former journalists or academics.³⁸



What is the usual profile of an expert who writes reports on international security? He or she—mostly he since very few women occupy this position—works in a think-tank in greater DC, has a masters or increasingly a PhD in public policy and/or international affairs from a high profile university most likely located in the North-East.

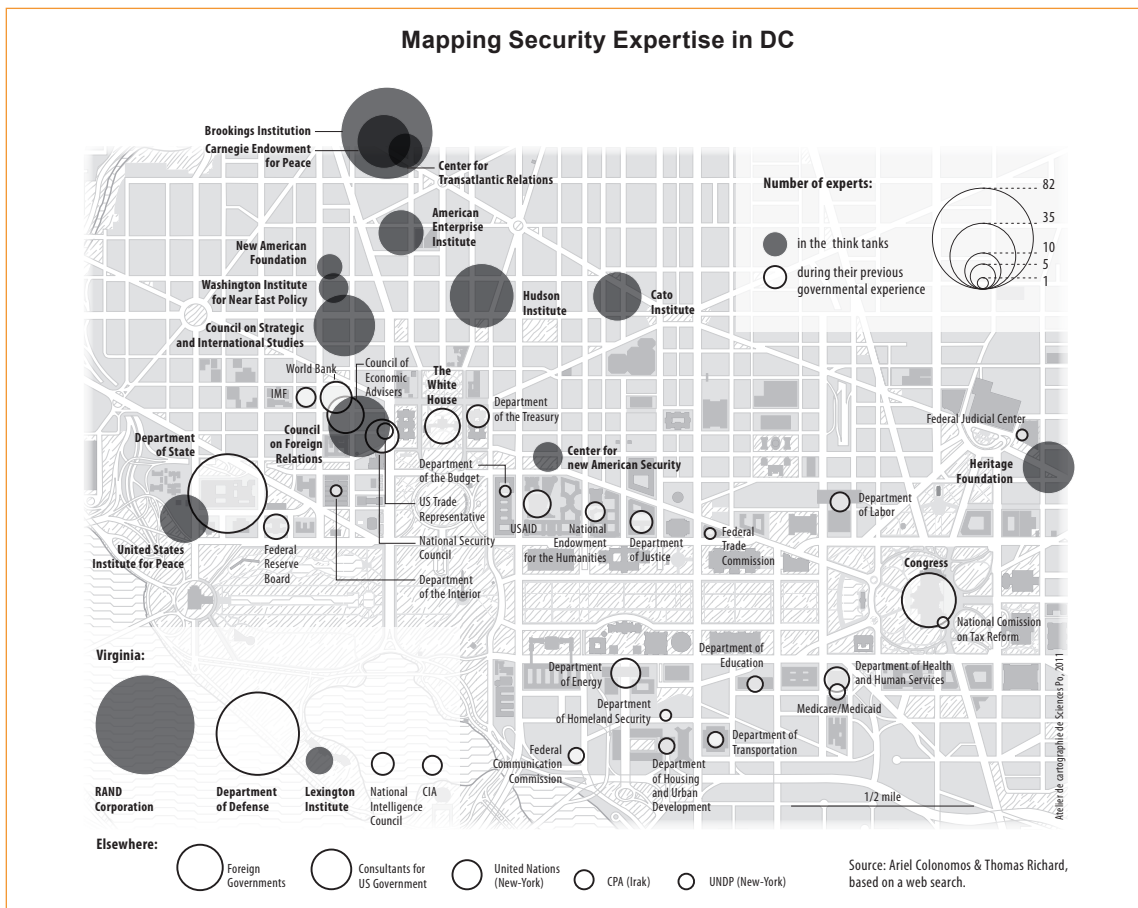


³⁷ A great number of them teach at Georgetown, which has a longstanding tradition in the training of young diplomats.

³⁸ The data collected on the web pages of these researchers is also a reflection of how the analysts want to be perceived by the general public. Very few of them (3) indicate that they have had working experience with the CIA.

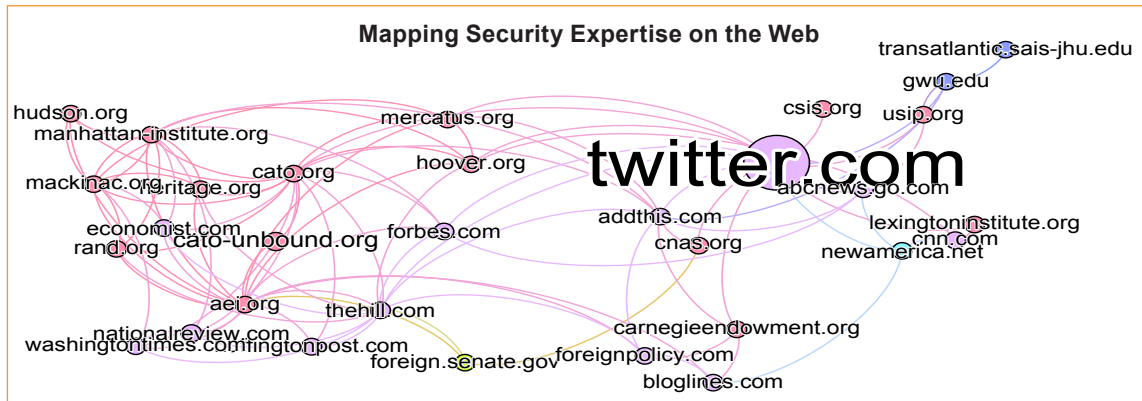
Very few analysts are non-American. A few of them are Europeans. Occasionally, think-tanks hire experts from the Arab world, China, India, or Pakistan, if those analysts have received basic training in the US. Some experts have studied at prestigious universities in the UK such as Oxford. The training that they received there (the topics on which they have focused on and the paradigms they have learned), however, does not significantly differ from the education that their colleagues received in American universities. We also have to bear in mind that a great number of these analysts acquired their diplomas during the Cold War (in the 1970s and the 1980s) when international relations as a discipline was heavily dominated by one single paradigm, Realism. Despite the fact that Realism was the dominant paradigm when they acquired their diplomas, today liberal ideas are also prominent. Indeed, they are part of the traditional American vision of international politics. These ideas also boomed in the 1990s.

Overall, the world of experts in DC is very small. It is also quite parochial. Many of these experts were acquainted before entering the world of think-tanks. Data shows the great social and cultural homogeneity of this milieu. Therefore, DC's concentration of power is not merely a myth for bogus conspiracy theorists, fans of Michael Moore or Marxists.³⁹ As the two maps below clearly show, the proximity of centers of expertise, governmental offices and political institutions as well as universities and the media is a true social and geographical reality.



³⁹ In the US, the first sociological study on the concentration of power by homogeneous elites is C. W. Mills' book *The Power Elite* published in 1956.

What can we learn from the observation of another world that parallels the physical and urban world we live in? The map below shows the links between the different organizations on the web.⁴⁰ It is an illustration of their density and their strength. It also shows what are the common nodes these sites share, i.e. the websites where one of the webpages of two or more websites can lead to (their one degree of separation).⁴¹



What we learn from this graph confirms what we already knew: that the social and political worlds of DC's think-tanks is fairly insular and cohesive. While think-tanks compete for influence, there is a certain degree of homogeneity in the content of the websites. This also shows that most of these professionals attend events that are organized by their peers and therefore participate to the buildup of the community as such.

The density of the links within the conservative group of organizations on the left side can be explained by the fact that these organizations feel the need to "stick together". Conservative organizations seem to feel threatened by what they perceive to be an intellectual environment favorable to liberal ideas. These organizations have solid ties to the media and to other centers that share their conservative views (both politically and economically), such as for example the Mercatus Center or the Catounbound website. Twitter is the only social network that ties together the members of these websites. Yet, it appears to be very central. Indeed, many of these experts have a twitter account and its reference appears on their webpage.

In both worlds—greater DC as well as on the internet—think-tanks form a dense and integrated epistemic community that is tightly linked to its urban environment and the media world. It is not just selected opinions and projects that they share. As the data collected in this first section and these two graphs testify, they are part of a collective "web of meaning".

⁴⁰ Unfortunately, two think-tanks are missing from this graph, the CFT and the Brookings Institution. Their websites are protected against the internet tools—such as NaviCrawler—that are used to draw this map.

⁴¹ In the field of IR, scholars of NGOs have started to make use of this research technique when they analyze which themes humanitarian and civil organizations try to push forward and put on the agenda. See Carpenter, 2007.

II — WORDS FOR TELLING THE FUTURE

Providing a well-documented, coherent, and appealing anticipatory analysis of world politics is one of the most important aspects of the experts' work in think-tanks, if not the most important one. Policy work ought to be future-oriented. Let us first compare their activity to the role of other knowledge providers. These experts chose careers in the policy world considered more vibrant than what is often seen as a more subdued career in academia. The distinction between academia and non-academic expertise is indeed worth exploring. In the field of international relations, academic scholars mostly study present or past issues. Traditionally, they would put a strong emphasis on the past and use past examples as canonical case studies upon which they could base their theories.⁴²

The case of the realist analytical model is very illustrative. Realist scholars draw inferences about the behavior of states using historical examples. One of the most well-known and debated issues within the Realist literature is World War One. There is one important and simple reason for that. The behavior of states during this conflict largely validates the basic concepts of Realism and especially defensive Realism, such as the security dilemma, the spiral model, and offense-defense balance.

Academics are often criticized by students who want to follow a career in the policy world where they can apply their knowledge to the "real world".⁴³ A common complaint is that academia is too anchored in the past, that it reproduces paradigms that do not keep up with social reality, and avoids new themes of research that challenge their pre-established views about state behavior.

Quite symmetrically, experts in think-tanks (or in governments) study the present and/or provide opinions about the future. Because the task of think-tanks is to provide an analysis that is relevant for public policy they strongly emphasize this aspect of their work. Policymakers consult think-tanks on issues they consider to be the most salient problems of our time. They are interested in having information and views about the dynamic of unfolding events when they believe these events affect their interests and those of their country, i.e. the US, since most of the think-tanks' clients are American entities. Therefore, one aspect should be particularly underlined: these issues are important to think-tanks because they are important for the US and its foreign policy and consequently for the rest of the world. This circle is auto-validating.

Different terminologies are meant to describe what is a forward-oriented analysis or a "vision" of what international politics will be in the future. We tend to use the term "prediction". But what is a prediction? A prediction is commonly understood as the anticipation of a specific event, or the anticipatory analysis of a single trend that leads to a predicted outcome. It can also be expressed in probabilistic terms, as the probability of seeing the event that is being predicted occur. A forecast traditionally has another meaning. A forecast is an anticipation in

⁴² Colonomos, 2011b.

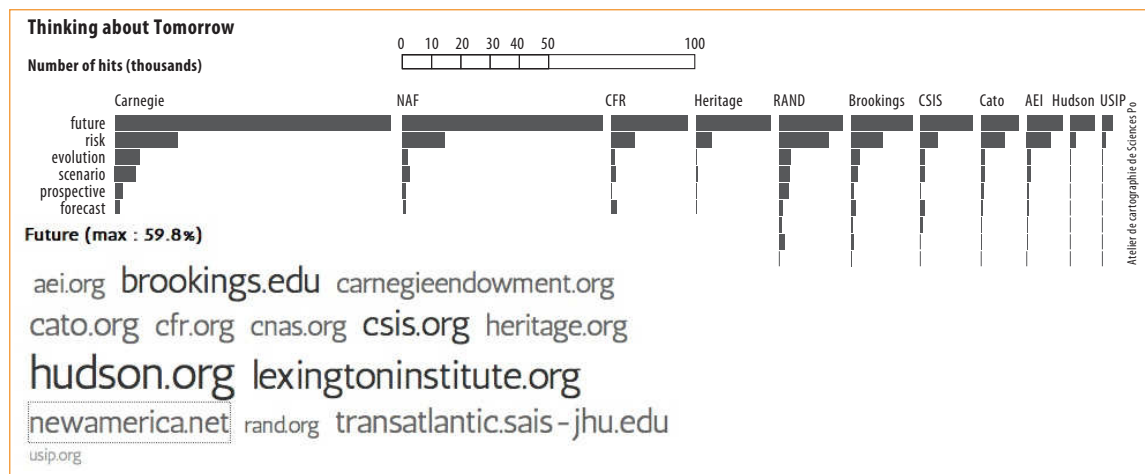
⁴³ This is particularly the case in professional schools of Public Affairs, where many political scientists and specialists of international relations teach.

probabilistic terms of the occurrence of an event that is conditioned by other events that are also valued in probabilistic terms. If event A occurs (probabilities for it to occur are "x"), then C will occur (probabilities, in this context, for C to occur are "y"), the overall probability for C to occur is "z" ("x*y").⁴⁴ Depending on the different options created by the probabilities, a forecast might include different scenarios. A forecast might include a time range, within which this event is likely to occur. "Anticipation" is a more generic term that designates a future-oriented analysis of unfolding events. These definitions are useful conceptually in so far as they help differentiating different kinds of anticipations. There are less pertinent when analyzing these experts' work since these different aspects overlap and are not thoroughly differentiated by the practitioners.

Moreover, their use might depend on what the experts perceive as the criteria that will be used when judging their findings based on the term they use to describe what they deliver. When interviewed, "predicting" is a terminology that most of these experts are clearly reluctant to use.

There is indeed a degree of uneasiness in this regard. Experts are caught in a *linguistic dilemma*. On the one hand, experts cannot say they ignore future-oriented analysis. If they were to hold publicly to that position, their credibility as experts who serve as advisors would be incredibly damaged. On the other hand, they seem to believe that "prediction" implies a high degree of precision in their analysis, as if they needed to anticipate the occurrence of single events in the future and therefore be judged based on that criteria. However, in most cases, a future-oriented analysis—one that is based on the anticipation, the assumption, that certain events will occur—includes a sum of predictions.

As we can see from the next graph, strong linguistic rules prevail in this small world. Experts speak the same language, which is another component of their social and cultural homogeneity.



⁴⁴ Freeman and Job, 1979.

Experts fashion the term "future".⁴⁵ On the various websites the term "future" usually appears in more than 30 per cent of the total number of pages.⁴⁶ This is due to the fact that a great number of publications talk about the future of the world, a region, a conflict and so on. A very important number of conferences include future in their title because they want to attract an audience that is eager to learn about the unknown. "Future" clearly operates as a magnet and as a label. As we can see from this tag cloud, the Lexington institute (which is not included in the graph above) is the only anomaly. This organization has a blog called "early warning", thus a great number of entries with this keyword.⁴⁷



As a comparison:



What else do we learn from this graph? There are multiple ways of naming future-oriented analysis. The simplest is to use the term "future" which serves as a rallying point and as a contrasting feature of the think-tanks' world. However, experts use other terms as well. "Risk" appears to be the second most used word when the analysis experts elaborate and make public is future-oriented. This is very telling of a choice and a bias that characterize the whole community. "Risk" has become a very popular term both in academic circles—in sociology and in political science—and in the policy arena, echoing fears that prevail among the general public. It therefore does not come as a surprise that experts have adopted it. Companies that sell political risk indexes have developed strongly over the last decade, as for example the

⁴⁵ These charts show the number of pages where these different words appear on those institutions' web pages. We have used the "google advanced search" engine (http://www.google.fr/advanced_search). This search engine still has some fallacies that affect all the different searches, but this should not be a major problem since those charts are made to indicate the comparison between the different issues and organizations (and the same kind of bias apply). Each tag cloud provides another kind of information that is complementary. It indicates the percentage of the use of keywords within the different websites (the percentage of the pages where the term appears). For each organization, it can also compare the use of different keywords. Bars in black indicate that the number of hits found by the search engine are superior to the average number of the different hits of all the words searched, when in grey they indicate that the number of hits are bellow that average. For the sake of clarity, the number of think-tanks has been restricted to eight in the different charts. These are among the most important ones and there is a certain ideological diversity. The CFR, Carnegie and Brookings are seen as fairly centrist, whereas USIP and NAF are considered more liberal, and Heritage and Hudson have a conservative agenda; The tag cloud technique and format made it easier to include all the different organizations that have been searched in the first section.

⁴⁶ From 10 per cent to nearly 60 per cent (Hudson). This data comes from another web search, the source of all the "clouds" presented in the study, provided by Sciences Po Medialab : <http://jimmy.medialab.sciences-po.fr/colonomos/>

⁴⁷ <http://www.lexingtoninstitute.org/early-warning-blog>

Eurasia Group.⁴⁸ Ian Bremmer, a political scientist, who is the President of the Eurasia Group, clearly understood that "risk" was a new catchword that the market and companies were ready to incorporate.⁴⁹ Other companies that specialized in audits and who now also do some anticipatory analysis on political and economic issues, have also adopted this language.⁵⁰

This is also consistent with one of the characteristics of expertise. The future is usually seen through the prism of *pessimism*. Researchers would very seldom speak about the future in positive terms. They usually reveal a threat and their analysis includes some negative consequences that can be avoided, if one were to follow the recommendations provided by the analyst. There is no track record of expertise. Indeed, experts are often wrong, but they will rarely suffer from their mistakes or their lack of insight. However, being overly optimistic is something that most experts would want to avoid. During the Cold War, a consensus prevailed in DC: the USSR was a "threat". If an expert distanced him or her self from this view, he or she might have sounded overly optimistic, or worse, looked naïve or foolish.

When Kenneth Pollack—a well-known specialist of the Middle East at the Brookings Institution — published his book in 2002 on the coming war against Iraq, he claimed that it had WMD and that—even this was not an easy choice to make—the US ought to go to war against Saddam Hussein because it was too big of a threat to be left unchallenged.⁵¹ He predicted that eventually, the US would defeat Saddam Hussein and would create a new balance of power that would be favorable to US interests.

Some of these claims are just truth errors, as in the case of WMD. Others are indeed predictions that just turned out to be wrong, as in the case of the consequences of toppling Hussein. The case of the Iraqi war shows that experts do make predictions. They do so when there is a prevailing consensus and a strong social pressure that orients their vision. It is rather disturbing to note that many in DC believed that the consequences of the war would be positive. This was partly based on an erroneous assumption about the WMD. Post September 11 patriotism also played a role. This account of the future is also very consistent with a tragic interpretation of what was or ought to be the US' national interest. Within this "regime of truth", the interest of the US was to bring democracy to the world, by force if necessary.

In the eyes of his or her community, an expert is never to be faulted for being wrong so long as he or she is just as wrong as every other member of the group. Indeed, there is a strong solidarity between the members of a community of experts. Kenneth Pollack's reputation was not hurt by this error. On the contrary, Pollack was praised for having addressed publicly his errors in an interview that he released once it became clear that there were no WMD to be found in Iraq and that the consequences of the war were less positive than what he assumed before the intervention.⁵² He continues to be seen as a very prominent, widely quoted expert

⁴⁸ <http://www.eurasiagroup.net/>

⁴⁹ Eurasia group developed a "top risks" index. See: <http://www.eurasiagroup.net/pages/top-risks>.

⁵⁰ See for example, Booz Allen Hamilton, <http://www.boozallen.com/>

⁵¹ Pollack, 2002.

⁵² Pollack, 2004.

and has released numerous publications after the intervention, including two edited volumes in 2011: one on Iraq⁵³ and the other on the future of the Arab World.⁵⁴

Experts feel the need to point to specific events, because it attracts the attention of the media, and is expected of them. If they were to avoid participating to debates about the future, they would be progressively isolated. In a democracy such as the US, the public space of debate—in the media or in other forums, such as public conferences—is nurtured by questions about the future. Those questions are a reflection of the current state of mind in US society.

There is today in the United States an important debate about the future of US power. This reflects the anxiety of US leaders and the shock created by September 11 in American society at large. The 1990s have been traditionally considered a "unipolar moment". Some major international events such as September 11 or the 2003 Iraqi war and its consequences have weakened the feeling of self-confidence of the US. Therefore, it does not come as a surprise to see experts arguing about the future role and the status of the United States. According to Johan Galtung, a social scientist who has specialized in forward-oriented analysis and who claims to have a good track record, the United States will lose this status of superpower by 2020.⁵⁵ Even if they are less explicit about the date when this reversal of fortune will happen, many other analysts share this view. According to the report published by the National Intelligence Council—an organization that is part of the CIA—by 2025 new competitors will have rendered obsolete America's hegemonic and unipolar power obsolete.⁵⁶ However, according to the authors of this report, the power of the US will still outweigh the power of the other states. True, there are some analysts who express the view that the US will remain the sole superpower in 20 years, but their number is smaller than what it used to be during the 1990s.⁵⁷

III — ON SCENARIOS, COLLECTIVE INTELLIGENCE, PREDICTIVE MARKETS AND ALGORITHMS

Knowing the future is an essential part of strategy. Indeed, "gaming" or "war games" have existed for a long time. For example, *Kriegsspiel* was part of a German tradition, where gambling between soldiers and strategists was a preparation to war. Colonel von Reisswitz, an adviser to the ministry of War in nineteenth century Prussia is considered to be the inventor of this technique. This precedes

⁵³ *Unfinished Business: An American Strategy for Iraq Moving Forward*, Washington, DC, Brookings UP, February 2011.

⁵⁴ *The Arab Awakening: America and the Transformation of the Middle East*, BUP, November 2011. The internet search tool "Publish or Perish" indicates there is no significant change between the average yearly number of quotes of K. Pollack's work before the Iraq war (1998-2002) and after (2004-2011).

⁵⁵ Galtung, 2009. See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qm1HrQOV238&feature=related>

⁵⁶ NIC, 2008.

⁵⁷ In the academic world, some authors have challenged the perspective of the decline of US power and argue that the US will continue to prevail. See Brooks and Wohlforth, 2008.

more contemporary forms of gaming, where video games and computers are used to train soldiers for military combat and where experts make anticipatory claims based on the simulations.

In the US, the evolution of military thinking is consistent with this approach. Important resources are devoted to research programs aimed at anticipating future threats. Battles are also sometimes fought "at a distance", when drones—now a very common device—are being used. Robots are part of this evolution. Soldiers fight like in a game, operating lethal devices that they follow on a screen.⁵⁸

This section focuses on the five different categories of methodologies used by experts in think-tanks. Some of them are well known to the general public, others are not.

Scenarios

Experts favor the use of *scenarios*, a term they frequently use when they describe their work.⁵⁹ Building scenarios has many advantages as compared to other forms of anticipations. A scenario draws the picture of a possible world among other alternatives. At its best, a scenario is an approximate vision of what the future might look like. A scenario is the anticipation of an event or a trend⁶⁰—usually a combination of the two—that is conditioned on the occurrence of a series of events that are hypothetical. The quality of a scenario does not depend on the answers that might be given to a specific question—"Will there be a war against country X by 2020?"—but rather on the coherence of the anticipation and the quality of the methodology that is being used.

Advisors within and outside the government also develop scenarios designed to orienting decisions. According to how events unfold and how the scenarios are being used, the initial scenarios are being redrafted and they constantly evolve as events unfold. A new terminology is being used to characterize this process. This interactive dialogue is now called "sense-making".

Scholars have discussed the rules that ought to guide the framing of scenarios.⁶¹ Three of them are most relevant here: writing scenarios implies the finding of a plot, a thread that will guide the trajectory of future events. There is also a need to make hypotheses about unexpected events that will reorient its trajectory away from its linear path. When writing a scenario about international politics, technology is also a variable that needs to be thoroughly analyzed. It is a challenge for those who want to make an interesting and plausible forecast to point to some of the technological innovations that might play a role in the middle term, over the next two or three decades.

Therefore, those who build scenarios must aggregate the skills and the competencies of different analysts and bring together different forms of knowledge. Doing so will increase the coherence of the story they are writing. Writing scenarios is very often a collective exercise.

⁵⁸ Singer, 2009.

⁵⁹ This appeared particularly well during the interviews.

⁶⁰ On the uses of trends in political anticipations and their pitfalls, see Jouvenel, 1965.

⁶¹ Bernstein, Lebow, Gross Stein, Weber, 2000.

This has several advantages. Experts compare their hypotheses and their views to those of their peers. It becomes a learning-by-doing process.

This is also precisely what attracts those for whom those scenarios are made. A number of consulting companies offer the service of their analysts to policymakers who want to know more about the future of certain countries or the possible development of certain issues. Policymakers can hire private consultants who will organize sessions during which both experts and policymakers will work on the writing of scenarios.

This has numerous advantages. It is a learning process and for the practitioners a prelude to decision-making. As a collective endeavor, it dilutes the responsibility of those who make claims about the future. Consensus building is seen as the best way to approach the future, since this should work as a correction of the individual biases of the members of the group. This method is attractive in so far as it is a mode of socialization and integration for political and economic elites who work on a common project in collaboration with experts who are seen as authorities in the field they explore. These exercises strengthen the social cohesion of a group and motivate its members around common goals. This example shows that making claims about the future (in this case scenarios) has social functions.

Schools of public affairs also teach the scenario approach, as for example NYU's Center on Global Affairs. The Center on Global Affairs Scenarios Initiative is headed by Michael Oppenheimer. It aims at building "across-disciplinary, forward-looking thinking on countries and issues critical to U.S. national interests".⁶² Oppenheimer has been a consultant to US governmental agencies for a long time and has been the President of Global Scenarios, a New York based consulting company. Oppenheimer organized working sessions where both experts and those who hired them would meet and elaborate scenarios about the future of world politics.

Oppenheimer gathers students and faculty in a discussion on the possible scenarios for the future of given countries that are of interest to the US. The first one held in 2007 imagined "the future of Iraq after a substantial drawdown of U.S. forces in 2010". In 2008, the CGA discussed the case of Iran. Then followed China (2009), Russia (2010), Turkey (2010) and Pakistan (2011). The purpose of these workshops is to draw possible scenarios. For example, three different paths were envisaged for China: China's survival would be at risk because of domestic pressures and social unrest, China would remain a strong and highly autocratic state, China would partially democratize and maintain its power.

These choices reflect the priorities of think-tanks (i.e. the domain of expertise of their members). They also coincide with what are the most discussed countries in the media. There is a public space of debate of international security issues where China and Islam are the poles of attraction. These countries are seen through the lenses of the old balance of power model (China is an emerging superpower, it will become predominant and balance US power) and a cultural vision to IR (identities do play a role in world politics and Islam is the most radical counter-civilization to the West). The trajectories of these countries are then analyzed using concepts such as "authoritarianism" that is often invoked to discuss the case of non-democratic and non-Western regimes.

⁶² <http://www.scps.nyu.edu/areas-of-study/global-affairs/cga-scenarios/>

Collective Intelligence

The history of predictions, forecasts, and scenarios shows that experts traditionally look for a consensus. This may seem a paradox as we may think of experts as members of a highly competitive community where each member has to distinguish himself or herself from his or her competitors. To a large extent, this appears to be incorrect. One of the first methods to be used in policy circles in the United States was the "Delphi Method". It was introduced by the Rand Corporation after World War Two, when the US Air Force asked Rand to develop a methodology for predictions.⁶³ The Delphi method sets the standards for deliberation within the experts' group of a single issue that will go through an iterative process until a consensus is found. This anticipates and reflects quite well the debates within the community of expertise at large. Diversity is limited and there is a willingness to be part of a wide circle of people who share a similar analysis.

As other forecasting and prediction techniques do, the Delphi Method implicitly or explicitly relies on the idea of "collective intelligence". This paradigm was made popular by a best-selling book by James Surowiecki, *The Wisdom of Crowds*. The author uses several examples illustrating that the intelligence or the wisdom of a group is superior to the intelligence of single individuals. Surowiecki's claim however differs in one crucial aspect from the Delphi method. Surowiecki and the social psychology research he refers to claim that collective intelligence is more powerful than the intelligence of individuals even when the members of the collective are not experts on the question they have to elucidate, whereas the individuals against whom they compete are experts. In other words, a group of non-experts beats an expert.⁶⁴

Prediction Markets

Over the last decade, we have witnessed the development of a new tool for making predictions: "futures markets" or "prediction markets", alternatively "predictive markets". According to their advocates—mainly those who have elaborated it—this tool is more precise than any other technique and, notably, more precise than what expertise based on qualitative work can deliver. Prediction markets are not new. The technology it uses—computer science and the internet—is. However, the idea has a long-standing tradition, when groups of people gathered to bet on the occurrence of single events. The result of the bet—the odds in favor or against—was meant to give an indication of the probability of the occurrence of the event. Some examples go back as early as the Renaissance when Cardinals used to place bets on the election of the next Pope.⁶⁵

⁶³ Dalkey, 1969.

⁶⁴ Surowiecki, 2004.

⁶⁵ Rhode and Strumpf, 2008.

Prediction markets are an example of political betting. In this case, individuals bet on the internet.⁶⁶ The market indicates a probability of the occurrence of an event given by the value of its stock. Let us assume that people bet on whether there will be a military intervention in Syria by the end of 2012. The price of the stock bought by those who believe that there will be an intervention is 40 cents. This indicates that the probability for an intervention to happen is 40 per cent. Correlatively, the price is 60 cents for those who believe that there will not be any intervention and indicates that, in this case, the probabilities are 60 per cent.⁶⁷

Prediction markets have recently expanded and there are now several websites where it is possible to bet on a list of events that include, social, economic, and political issues. The users of the website are able to launch a new bet by posting a new question online. This phenomenon is extremely interesting for various reasons. As the history of political betting and betting *tout court* illustrates, there is a resistance on behalf of governments to accept this initiative. In nineteenth century England, although betting was common in gentlemen's clubs, rulers feared that betting would have negative effects on the masses. People would be distracted from their work and easily become idle. This addiction would have a negative effect on society. There were also some fears that the profits of this gamble might benefit those who lived at the margins of society, that it would finance illegal activities and create social unrest. There is another possible interpretation. Political betting threatens the authority of the state. It shows that a group of citizens knows more about the future than its leaders. Therefore, citizens will be all the more able to criticize the leader's decisions if the latter fails to take account of accurate predictions. This bottom up approach to politics and democracy goes against the power of the established elites.

In 2003, the Pentagon announced that it would launch a prediction market on the future of security. Based on the bets that would be placed online, the market would indicate the likelihood of a future terrorist attack.⁶⁸ Robin Hanson—an economist at George Mason University—was one of the leaders of this project. However, the Congress blocked this initiative and the Pentagon was forced to abandon it. This market is criticized on moral grounds; betting on the death of innocent people was seen as morally inappropriate. This is an interesting moment in the history of futures markets. This technique now has many supporters and this example shows that the military is, to a certain extent, ready to accept and use this innovation, as one source of information. However, as the reaction of the Congress illustrates, there are still strong political reservations against the use of these tools. It should be noted that an ongoing experiment is being funded by IARPA (Intelligence Advanced Research Projects Agency at the Director of National Intelligence office).⁶⁹ It aims to assess the value of predictive markets as reliable predictive tools and to evaluate whether they could be more effective than other methods used in policy.

⁶⁶ One of the most widely used website is intrade (<http://www.intrade.com/v4/home/>). See also: <http://blogs.sciences-po.fr/recherche-predictions/2010/02/04/futures-market/>

⁶⁷ In fact, the symmetry is not quite as perfect, because of the transaction costs charged by the website.

⁶⁸ It was called the FutureMap project and was developed by The Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) at the DoD. See: <http://www.iwar.org.uk/news-archive/tia/futuremap-program.htm>

⁶⁹ <http://forecastwe.org/>. IARPA's home page: <http://www.iarpa.gov/>

Experts in think-tanks are, for obvious reasons, usually very much against prediction markets. In some other cases, they are even unaware that they exist. However, some organizations worry about being caught off guard in the wake of a technological change. Rand has developed an internal project on prediction markets. This is, of course, a very cautious initiative, because the result of the betting would not be made public and be available exclusively to those experts at Rand and eventually other people whom Rand would want to include in their experiment. This is not consistent with the principle on which prediction markets are based. Betting should be open to a wide variety of people and it is very important to diversify the members of the group in order to neutralize the biases of the individuals within the group.

The Algorithms of the Future

Another predictive method has recently gained some publicity. Rational choice social scientists and computer scientists have developed algorithms designed for the prediction of political outcomes. Even though computers were much less powerful than what there are today, this dates back to the 1970s when social scientists argued that rational choice could be used to anticipate individuals' decisions. It would also enable them to calculate the outcome of the interactions between the individuals who are part of the decision-making process. "Utility models" were being developed and mathematics provided the knowledge to elaborate algorithms that would formalize these models. This view is based on one premise: people maximize their interests. One of the pioneers of the use of algorithms in the prediction of political outcomes is Bruce Bueno de Mesquita, who is today a professor of political science at NYU. Bueno de Mesquita has focused his scholarly work on rational choice theory applied to the analysis of both domestic and international politics. He has also devoted much of his efforts to the development of predictive tools, i.e. an algorithm that would formalize his utility model. Bruce Bueno de Mesquita is also a partner in the company *Mesquita & Roundell*,⁷⁰ that sells its predictions to companies or governmental agencies such as the CIA.

Obtaining information about the identity of the key players in a decision—within a government, in civil society, in an international organization and so on—is one step of the process. Those who use algorithms and sell their predictions will usually consult experts on the single issue that needs to be investigated. Using the algorithm, they then process this information in order to predict the decisions of these players and most importantly the outcome of the interactions between the various players.

Both from an epistemic and political perspective, the stakes are quite high. From a knowledge perspective, this approach is diametrically opposed to contextually based social science, notably area studies. Quite provocatively, Bruce Bueno de Mesquita claims that knowing the language of the country that one studies is counterproductive and creates biases. He argues that an abstract and formalized approach to social issues would lead to more satisfying results. Bueno de Mesquita started his academic career in political science as a specialist of India. He

⁷⁰ <http://mesquita-roundell.com/>

recalls that he was unable to anticipate the results of Indian elections. On the contrary, when he became interested in the mathematics of predictions, he claims that he was able to predict the results of elections in Iran without having any specific knowledge about this country. This happened at an American Political Science Association (APSA) meeting in 1984, when Bueno de Mesquita predicted that Khomeini and Rafsanjani would emerge to lead the country together after the death of Khomeini.⁷¹

From a political and institutional perspective, this phenomenon can have important consequences. If policymakers believe that Bueno de Mequita is correct, this would alter the status of expertise within governments and jeopardize their role and their legitimacy in society. This change has not taken place yet, and it is not possible to know whether this will.

Indeed, these models have no official and transparent track record given that list of the clients that have consulted these companies is confidential. One phenomenon needs to be underlined. Experts within governments, think-tanks, and academia resist this evolution. As they are extremely numerous they could present an obstacle to this change.

"Futures Studies": the Future of the Future?

Prediction markets and quantitative approaches to forecasting are part of a growing trend that we witness in circles other than those of policy. Global academia has proven to be rather favorable to what is being called "futures studies". A "futures studies" epistemic community has now developed. This community aims to develop tools that would make predictions possible in any field. Predicting or forecasting is in the process of becoming a sui generis field or science. Prestigious universities such as Oxford have created centers for the study of the future, where predictors from different disciplines convene and publish their work.⁷² Conferences are held periodically which gather scholars from the hard and social sciences. Members of this community publish regularly in journals such as the *International Journal of Forecasting*.⁷³ This community is very active in Europe and in the United States as well as in Asia.⁷⁴ Its members are also very involved in consulting and other policy work.

⁷¹ In this case, Bueno de Mesquita was right, whereas experts on Iran who were present and heavily criticized his approach made a wrong prediction.

⁷² <http://www.fhi.ox.ac.uk/home>

⁷³ http://www.elsevier.com/wps/find/journaldescription.cws_home/505555/description

⁷⁴ For a list of centers and universities where futures studies are taught and where more generally courses on how to make predictions are part of the curriculum, see <http://blogs.sciences-po.fr/recherche-predictions/2010/02/03/forecasters-as-epistemic-communities/>

IV — FOCAL POINTS

As documented in the first section, "defense and security" is the prevailing meta-future that orients the experts' vision of the future worlds we might live in, i.e. the world where US interests are at stake. It should be noted that prioritizing certain regions of the world that appear today as vital security issues for the US might not be the best way to address the issue of future worlds. Indeed, US national interest might change: its very definition as well as the issues that are of most concern to the US might evolve. The national interest of the US will also derive from facts that do not appear on today's horizon. More broadly and substantively, the future of the world might not be a world in which US interests structure the relations between its players.

"Defense and security" as a meta-future is compatible with an interest in those different parts of the world where the US tragic struggle for power seems to be at play. It nurtures itself on the information provided by the study of those specific regions. In the two decades that followed September 11, the Arab world has been analyzed through the lens of terrorism. Previously, other focal concepts such as "totalitarianism" and "authoritarianism" were the constituent elements of Soviet studies.

Think-tanks are not the only knowledge providers that share this dual vision. It also prevails in academia. International relations specialists traditionally coexist with "area specialists", scholars who study a given country or a part of the world. In academia as well, countries and geographical areas have often been prioritized based on current events and for political reasons. Departments of Soviet studies proliferated during the Cold War and are now an extinct species (Russian specialists are only its pale descendants), then Middle Eastern Studies departments took the lead for 20 years. Given the role of China, the number of Chinese students who come to the US to earn doctoral degrees, and the number of US students who travel to China, one can easily forecast that they might be superseded by Chinese studies (except if another region or country suddenly challenges the US or seems threatening to US interests). Another possible scenario—not incompatible with an increase in knowledge about China⁷⁵—is the decline of area studies themselves. This is already very much the case in American academia — the area studies approach has considerably lost ground—yet it has not materialized in think-tanks, which have to face strong demand on the part of those who have a specific interest in specific parts of the world.

This section discusses empirically the themes that are of interest to think-tanks and their researchers. Think-tanks follow world events and prioritize them according to the criteria that are relevant for those who employ their services. This section is based on the assumption that the priorities that emerge from an analysis of the content of their websites and the literature they produce are a reflection of how think-tanks and their clients see the world developing.

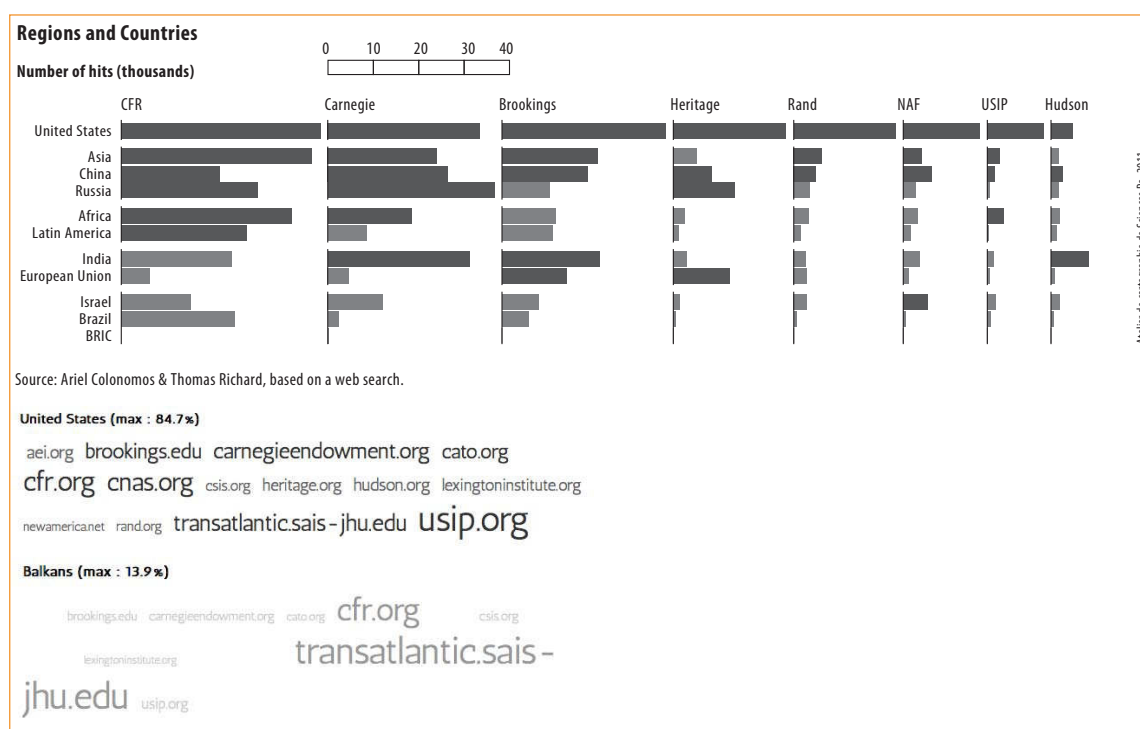
It should be added that think-tanks are caught in a dilemma. They sell their expertise to their clients by drafting reports that are sometimes made available only to those clients. There is, as it was underlined in the first section, a secrecy dimension in their activities. However, think-

⁷⁵ China could be framed as an international relations / global issue.

tanks also need to be highly visible in the public sphere. In so doing, they aim at building their credibility and their reputation. What they release is also constitutive of their identity. Therefore, the great amount of information publicly available is a good indicator of their priorities and how they see the world.

This section discusses the content of the websites of those think-tanks where a very large collection of data is made available.⁷⁶ My purpose is to assess the number of times certain themes and geographical areas appear on the think-tanks' websites (the number of pages where these words appear). This data should give an indication about the priorities of each think-tank.

This section discusses these preferences, which are another key element in the analysis of the small world of expertise. I have looked at three sets of data: (1) the number of entries of specific regional areas or countries, (2) the number of entries of specific international issues, (3) the number of entries indicating an interest in the future of a region and/or an international issue.



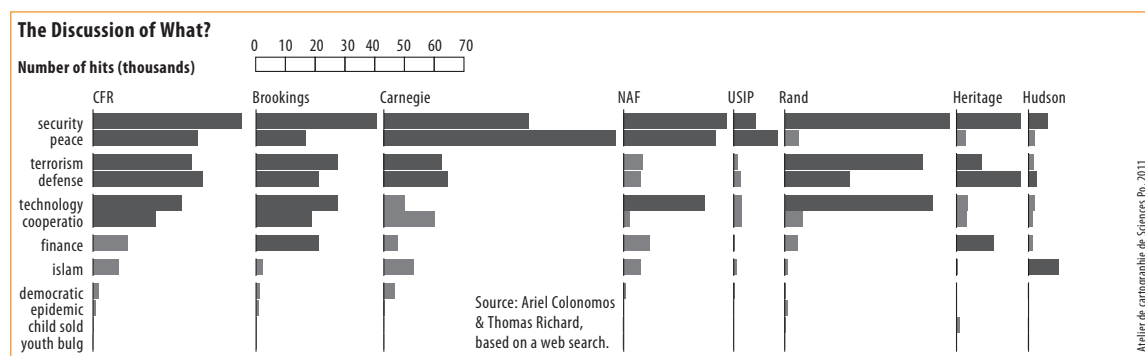
The first two lessons we can draw from this graph are the following. As with the other data we collected, this data shows the great homogeneity of the social milieu of think-tanks whose members use the same language and share the same interests. This is consistent with the findings of the first section. We can clearly see that the lines are parallel, the lows and the peaks being very similar. In the areas that are not considered part of US national interest—the Balkans, Sudan or Congo—the number of hits is very low. In contrast, a small country such as Cuba that has a great symbolic value and also is an issue at the domestic level appears quite

⁷⁶ As I did in the previous section, I used the "Google advanced search" engine.

frequently on the websites, at a level comparable to that of Taiwan.⁷⁷ The most referenced countries are Iran, Iraq, Israel, or Pakistan. The European Union is at the bottom of the list.

Except for the CFR, Brazil,⁷⁸ a country of significant importance in contemporary international relations, is clearly neglected. Not taking into account Brazil is also very telling of the kind of paradigm still en vogue in international politics. As there is no possibility of military conflict with that country and as its emergence as a new power in international politics is relatively new, think-tanks' literature on Brazil is scarce and rather anecdotal. This is also symptomatic of the difficulty experts face to have a unique vision of the future. Indeed, one of the keys of accurate anticipation is to select what the important issues will be tomorrow, instead of trying to project old frameworks and taking issues that were relevant in the past in order to envision possible future worlds. Under this later approach, the imagined future becomes the image of what are the current "devils du jour". Claims about the future reflect the values and obsessions of the time period when they are made.⁷⁹

Salient International Issues and Popular Futures



Security issues are discussed much more than social ones or legal ones. This does not come as a surprise given who those experts are and also what the DC environment is. As with the other data collected, the graphs are parallel, indicating a deep consensus within a very homogeneous social world.

Within the category of security, the terms that are used the most are those that convey the impression that we live in a dangerous environment where Western democracies and primarily the US have to defend themselves / itself against the danger of terrorism. "Homeland security" is a priority dictated by what is considered to be in the US national interest. This language

⁷⁷ This data does not appear in the table above. For the sake of clarity, we have not published all the data we have processed.

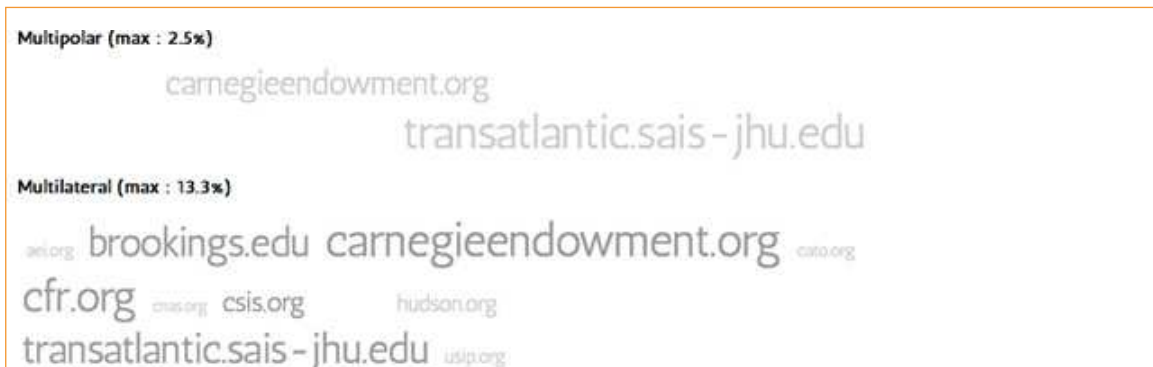
⁷⁸ See the CFR's initiative on Brazil: <http://www.cfr.org/brazil/global-brazil-us-brazil-relations/p25407?co=C007303>. There is also a lack of expertise on Brazil in the academic field of international studies.

⁷⁹ This is very much the case in other areas where social sciences are being used by policy, as in the case of demographical forecasts. See Le Bras, 1984.

however never tells us what the definition of national interest is. This lexicon contributes to the dramatization of international politics and creates an horizon of fear. This vocabulary clearly reflects a linear and teleological meta-future. There is no issue in international politics other than threat and fear, and terrorist attacks are the supporting evidence of such a tragic destiny. "Threat" appears very regularly on the majority of the think-tanks' sites; overall one page out of 5 or 6 includes this terminology (see below). The frequency of its use does not depend on the political identity of the think-tank.

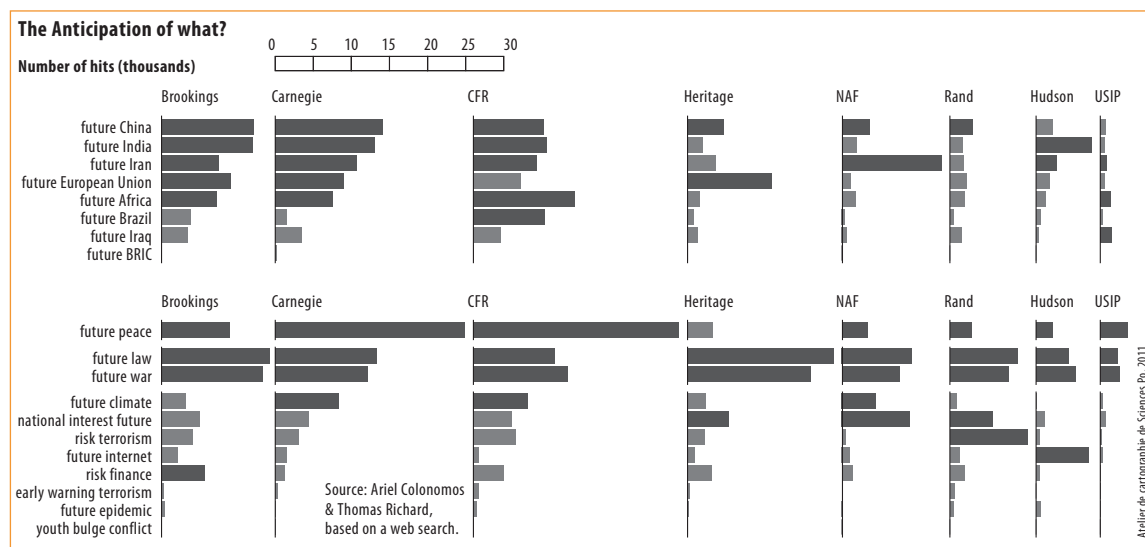


Peace is part of the lexicon of think-tanks. Peace is the logical counterpart to war and is therefore widely used in international politics, even outside the realm of "peace studies" where idealist and legal approaches prevail. Peace reflects a linear vision of the future as if international politics were always caught in a dialectic between war and peace. Peace is the opposite of what is considered for historical reasons the reference point of the study of international politics, namely war. Ultimately, peace would be the goal of those who master the grammar of war and therefore know how to avoid its trap. As the opposite to war, peace becomes a label used to characterize the boundaries of international politics. But there are few experts on the social logics of peace except at USIP and Carnegie, whereas the town is full of experts of war and terrorism.



As it can be seen from the tag cloud above, there is no particular interest in the issue of multipolarity. The use of multilateralism is not very widespread. It also depends on the political identity of the think-tank. Conservative organizations clearly tend to deliberately avoid it (AEI, Hudson, Heritage).

Among social issues, there is a preference for "technology", "energy" and "health". "Climate" operates less as a magnet than one could have thought given the media attention given to natural catastrophes.⁸⁰ The three entries mentioned above clearly reflect a materialistic vision of the world and echo the importance given to an analysis of the available resources on which peoples and states can rely. Those issues often fuel a reflection on conflicts, both international and domestic. The entry "technology" includes discussions about the internet and its possible misuses by violent groups.



This graph shows the number of pages that include both the term "future" and the name of a country or an issue. These different organizations are betting on very similar horses. For most of them, China is one of the most if not the most important issues they want to investigate when thinking about the future. It reflects a strong interest in the future of big countries that are likely to be competitors of the US and a very traditional vision of international politics, where the most important issues are war and peace. However, there are relatively few China experts at these think-tanks.

War, law, and peace are the keywords that are most frequently used. Their scores are similar, this is mostly due to the fact that they are being used together in the same context in order to describe a situation of conflict or correlatively a situation of post-war peace agreement. "Future" and "peace" appear together more in liberal organizations such as Carnegie (in absolute terms, a very big website), whereas they are found much less on the Heritage website. This reflects the political orientation of these think-tanks, yet it is the only striking difference between liberals and conservatives which both associate with the terms war or peace to the word future with similar frequencies.

⁸⁰ Some of these entries are not to be found in the charts, for the sake of clarity.

These think-tanks focus on a world vision that reflects teleological vision of the world, i.e. a vision of the tragic destiny of the US struggling with its main competitors. This is consistent with the fact that these organizations prioritize the US national interest when they choose their research projects. Issues that are not a priori part of this narrative or cannot be easily included—such as internet, epidemic, or the youth-bulge—are hardly mentioned.

Two Future Worlds' Laboratories: The CFR and the NIC

Two institutions deserve specific attention, the Council on Foreign Relations and the National Intelligence Council (NIC-CIA). Indeed, these two organizations have an explicit interest in future-related issues and in forecasting future events.

The CFR's interest in the future is very consistent with the emphasis on prevention that prevailed over the last decade, either from a unilateral perspective when the US uses force preventively, or from a multilateral one when the UN seeks to prevent civil wars and genocides.

One of the CFR's special units, the Center for Preventive Action (CPA),⁸¹ provides resources they recommend be used to prevent major political and economic crisis. In 2009, the CPA decided to launch a new initiative. At the beginning of each year, a list of scenarios would be established about events that might occur over the next 18 months time frame. According to an explicit rule, these events are prioritized depending on their importance to the US national interest. The CPA has launched a *Contingency Plan Roundtable Series* of meetings that takes place every month. The group, composed of CFR staff and members, who come mostly from the US government, gathers with an informed expert to discuss a possible scenario. During these meetings, the plausibility of the scenario is tested and discussed. The memo that summarizes the findings of the group is subsequently published and put online.⁸² A contingency plan is established at the end of the meeting. The advantages of these meetings are numerous. The CFR operates as a bridge between the experts' world and policy circles. It is also a meeting place where people within the government can meet and exchange views.

The summary memos are well documented and extremely balanced and, even in retrospect, insightful. They address issues of great concern at the time the meeting is being held. Their aim is to provide the administration and policymakers with possible responses to the scenarios discussed.

A report on Egypt's instability was drafted in August 2009: unrest and revolution were considered to be possible scenarios for 2010 or 2011. Two options were considered and discussed in this report: "a military intervention resulting from a contested succession" and "an Islamist push for political power".⁸³ This is interesting since indeed Egypt faced unrest and Mubarak was ousted from power. This testifies to the insight of the CFR and those who participated to

⁸¹ <http://www.cfr.org/thinktank/cpa/index.html>

⁸² <http://i.cfr.org/projects/world/center-for-preventive-action-contingency-roundtable-series/pr1412>

⁸³ <http://i.cfr.org/egypt/political-instability-egypt/p19696>

the meeting. It also elicits two further comments. First, these two scenarios reflect the two issues and paradigms that have prevailed over the last decades in Middle Eastern Studies: authoritarianism and Islamism. They also reflect a vision shared by US policymakers who have traditionally supported authoritarian regimes such as Egypt or Saudi Arabia and have feared and denounced Islamism. What prevails in this scenario where the future is the prolongation of the past is the sense of continuity.

The Egypt case was chosen in great part because of the importance for the US of Egypt and Saudi Arabia. The scenario was based on a preexisting prevailing concern. Had the exercise been more divorced from US security imperatives (or what they were considered to be), the scenario might have been different. It might have included other states such as Tunisia, Libya, or Syria which, while not critical US allies in need of protection, were equally important to the evolution of the so-called "Arab spring" of which Egypt was also a part.

The CIA-NIC Reports

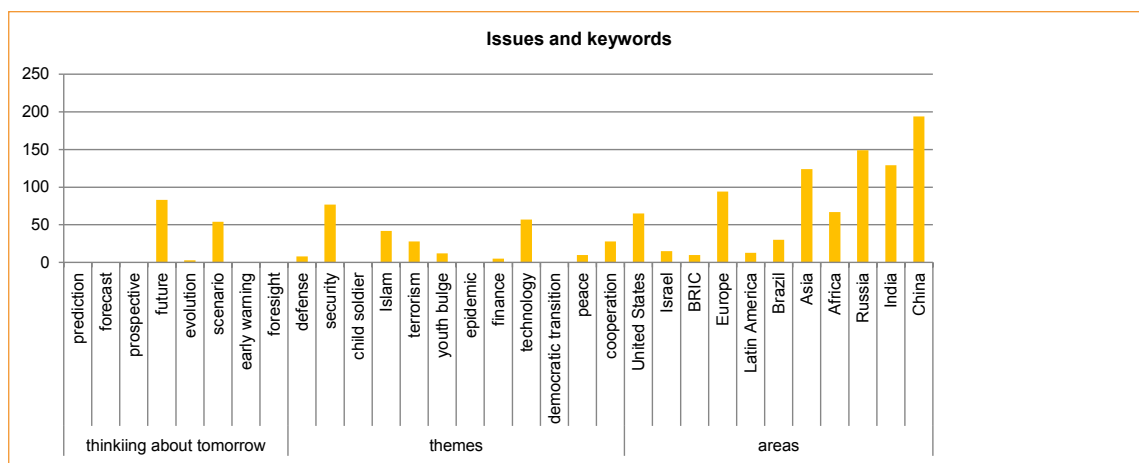
The National Intelligence Council (NIC) is not a think-tank. Yet it occupies a central role in the life of experts, notably because of the report it produces on the future of international politics. This document is widely circulated within the DC security experts community, many of whose members are consulted during the drafting process. It is therefore a reference point used in the "future claims" made in DC. For the sake of this study, it requires special attention.

The history of the NIC goes back to the surprise attacks on Pearl Harbor. This event highlighted the necessity of making anticipatory analyses of major events that risked damaging US power available. In 1950, a Board of National Estimates which would function as a council of "wise men" was created. Although the NIC was not officially created before 1979, the CIA began to draft those estimates in the aftermath of World War Two and the Director of Central Intelligence (DCI) performed this task.

The future is on the bureaucratic agenda each time a major international crisis occurs or when the world undergoes radical change. Therefore, the 1990s have been a particularly active period for the NIC. In 1996, the idea was launched to have reports named "Global Trends" published regularly. The first, released in 1997 developed scenarios to describe the major political issues of the world as they would appear in 2010. It stressed "trends", in this case the weakening of state order and the growing power of non-state actors, and the growing number of intra-state wars as opposed to inter-state wars. It also made some specific predictions such as the creation of a "de facto or de jure" Palestinian state by 2010. It also expressed the view that Saddam Hussein "will be gone" by 2010.⁸⁴ It would be interesting to explain why and how these claims were made. Interestingly, some of them have a certain degree of truth. Whether they were expressed for valid reasons remains an open question. Some of these claims—as in the case of ancient oracles—are sufficiently vague that they appear accurate no matter how events unfold.

⁸⁴ http://www.dni.gov/nic/special_globaltrends2010.html

The CIA-NIC report is of specific importance because of the status of the CIA in the intelligence community and for US policy in general. Given its role, the CIA attracts analysts and experts from within and outside the intelligence community. It convenes a great number of analysts —experts from the think-tanks or academia—to its meetings. Consequently, the NIC sessions have become a locus of socialization for the community of security experts in DC. The NIC reports reflect these exchanges and are a clear picture of what the experts think collectively at a given time.



NIC reports have been discussed in diplomatic circles and other countries have decided to emulate the US. South Africa has its own report. China wants to develop its own study as a counter to the US vision. Russia has criticized Global Trends 2025, but Russians also plan to make their own report. The British Ministry of Defense has its own strategic trends program. Some contacts have been established with the Quai d'Orsay. The NIC built some intergovernmental networks and its reports have become focal points for diplomatic discussions. These non-US reports are modeled on the NIC's initial format.

These reports and the intergovernmental discussions that follow on the basis of their findings create horizons of expectations. The report is used in the Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR). In principle, the purpose of this work is not to make predictions. The report develops trends. However, as shown earlier in the paper, trends, predictions and forecasts tend to overlap.

The number of hits of certain issues and themes that can be found in the document tells us a lot about the cognitive map of those who have elaborated the report. It is very much consistent with the preferences within the think-tank community as they appear on their websites. The report is a picture of the world at 2025 seen through the prism of what is considered to be the US interest in maximizing its security. Although there is no definition of what constitutes the US "national interest", let alone what it will be in 2025 (although when making a sound claim about the future of security, this aspect of the anticipation is essential), the report considers new challengers that would put the hegemonic role of the US in world affairs at risk and eventually damage US security.

The report indicates significant interest in Russia, India, and China. It does not make use of the BRIC category very much, and considerably neglects the role of Brazil, which is seen to be, at best, a growing regional power. This is truly a shortsighted vision. There are good reasons to think that the world at 2025 might be organized around a structure in which Brazil has an increased role and the definition of power might be different from what it is today.

China, in contrast, attracts a great deal of attention. China is seen as a serious competitor, both in economic and military terms. The scenarios the report draws on point to an increase in influence of China in world affairs, although, quite reasonably, the document points to a likely slowdown in China's economic growth. China's intellectual and scientific resources will be of considerable weight and will contribute to the development of the country as it becomes one of the major players in world affairs. These conclusions are strikingly linear and are very much a reflection of what is being said about the current situation of China in world affairs. The report rarely makes reference to possible discontinuities in China's development, although China's political cohesion could be imperiled by social movements and the increase of economic inequalities.

The NIC report echoes the preferences and the concerns of the two worlds of expertise—that of the think-tank community and that of policymakers in governmental agencies. It expresses a strong preference for linearity and continuity and draws from very classical models. It is loosely inspired by a very traditional approach to international relations grounded in realism and neo-realism. It is grounded on a discussion about the polarity of the international system. It reflects the opinions of many analysts whether in academia or in think-tanks according to whom the era of American unipolarity is over. They see an ongoing shift toward multilateralism and emerging powers as the true challenges to US power. In their view, international relations will find an equilibrium on the basis of this multi-polarity and the logic of balancing—a concept drawn from neo-realism—will prevail. The report also echoes another idea that was quite prevalent in the IR literature during the 1990s. It stresses the importance of the divide between state and non-state actors, arguing that this will continue to be an important feature of tomorrow's world. Except for some wild cards and unexpected events that are described in some hypothetical scenarios such as a tsunami that destroys Wall Street in 2020, the report focuses on trends that describe a linear evolution of international politics. Interestingly, the hypothesis of a natural disaster that would harm New York has been shown to be plausible, when the recent storm Irene hit New York at the end of August (2011). The storm raised concerns about possible damage to the New York's population and infrastructures as well as to coastal areas.

V — WHAT DOES IT TAKE FOR AN IDEA TO BE HEARD IN DC?

Those who make claims about the future abide by certain rules, in great part because, in order to be heard, their ideas need to have a certain format and adapt to those to whom they are addressed (and to their expectations): nothing else will fly. Thus, in the leading think-tanks, radicalism is clearly not the best way to make oneself heard. Extreme-right or extreme-left ideas are very scarce if not absent all together.⁸⁵ Experts speak the same language and are interested in similar issues that are prioritized according to very similar criteria. The members of this community are constrained by rigid formats that also depend on the needs of the policy organizations to which their studies are addressed and on the rules established by other institutions that fund their activities. Experts elaborate ideas that are caught in temporal cycles. They necessarily lag behind the evolution of world politics, notably because of the inertia of bureaucratic politics.

The temporal cycles in which these experts are caught also reflect their education, which has influenced how they see the world. Until today, their choices have tended to reflect a preference for a realist vision of the world, which was highly predominant when they started to socialize in an academic environment and when they earned their University degrees. Given the importance of Islam and the lack of attention to Latin America, this picture of the world is also consistent with Huntington's thesis about the "Clash of Civilizations". It will be interesting to see through what lenses experts will see the world in 10, 20, or 50 years and to what extent their analyses will reflect what IR and social sciences have been in the last two decades. It would also be interesting to see the impact of major events such as the fall of the Berlin Wall and September 11 and ongoing changes in the Arab world on the vision of the future of those who have been educated in the 2000s.⁸⁶

Not diverging from an established norm is very important for an idea to be heard in DC's public space. Ideas about the future strongly converge in *focal points*. How can we account for this phenomenon? The think-tanks community is a very solid illustration of what social psychologist Irving Janis called "groupthink"⁸⁷ Janis studied some major foreign policy decisions, such as the invasion of the Bay of Pigs, the war in North Korea, and the decision to escalate in Vietnam. He was surprised by the errors that were being made and that resulted from the analysis of a group of heavily trained and competent experts. Think-tanks gather more people than the small circles studied by Janis did. They gather professionals that are not necessarily in direct contact with each other. Finally, the experts and the organizations that are examined in this study are not directly involved in decision-making. Therefore some of the groupthink criteria do not apply to them.

⁸⁵ Some experts can have conservative views, but would not express racist views. If so, they would face the risk of being ousted by their community.

⁸⁶ To what extent experts will use constructivist theories that greatly developed in the 1990s and beyond? Will rational choice and computer sciences be prevalent? To what extent global history will be one possible outlook?

⁸⁷ Janis, 1972.

Janis lists eight characteristics of the major symptoms of the groupthink syndrome⁸⁸:

- 1 – An illusion of invulnerability is predominant within the group and encourages the group to excessive optimism and risk taking decisions.
- 2 – There are collective efforts to rationalize in order to discount warnings.
- 3 – Beliefs in the group's inherent morality are unquestioned.
- 4 – Stereotyped views of enemy leaders are predominant.
- 5 – There is a pressure on any member who expresses strong arguments against the decision of the majority.
- 6 – Self-censorship of deviations applies.
- 7 – There are shared illusions of unanimity.
- 8 – We see the emergence of self-appointed mind guards.

There is some overlap between the groupthink phenomenon in decision-making and the thinking elaborated by security experts in DC. Some of the groupthink criteria are particularly relevant here, namely 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7.

Janis underlines the role of morality. Among think-tank based security experts, there is a prevailing belief in the rectitude of the group's norms and paradigms through which international politics is being analyzed and the format to be used in order to deliver the experts' findings. These are formatted in a narrative whose thread is the importance of advancing the national interest of the US. This creates strong normative pressure that is rarely questioned publicly within the group. Stereotypical views of enemy leaders and more generally of what and who the enemy is are predominant. We are today at the end of a cycle that has lasted for two decades, when experts clearly focused their attention on Islamic terrorist networks, whereas during the Cold War the Soviet Union was the common enemy.

The marketplace of ideas makes it very difficult for experts to express ideas that diverge from the norm of what is expected from them. Self-censorship applies because experts know that expressing divergent views will make it less likely they will be heard. Traditionally, most of them will bandwagon and participate to an already existing debate—the necessity for the US to intervene in given country X, being the most frequent example—and will try to develop an argument that only differs slightly from the already prevailing opinion.

There are indeed shared illusions of unanimity. The number of senior specialists of China is limited, yet China is an often discussed theme. Most of the views expressed about China reflect a linear vision of China's future according to which China's power is growing and will continue to do so, thereby endangering US primacy in international affairs. There are very few alternative views. It would be indeed difficult for dissonant voices to be heard. China's future as it is envisaged today reminds us of the way experts once looked at the USSR. The same linear path was anticipated. Betting on the breakdown of the Soviet system was as risky and bold as outlining the problems the Chinese system produces which might disrupt its domestic political cohesion.

⁸⁸ Ibid.: 197.

There is another reason why such a tunneling effect prevails on the DC marketplace of ideas about the future. Experts have a sense of what visions of the future are likely to be accepted by the public: those futures generally imply decisions that are not too costly for policymakers. It will be very difficult for an expert to bring into the public policy discussion an idea the implementation of which would require a costly shift from actual policy. That is the reason why anticipating that a challenger will be in place for a long time is an accepted and such a common view. Policymakers are used to having state X as a competitor, breaking away from this routine would be very disruptive.

"Future claims" are not only about the future. Possibly they serve other purposes that this study aims to highlight. One of the most significant is to trigger dialogue about policy through the exchange of ideas and methods. Another is to ensure that there are good relations between experts and practitioners. The future serves as a topic for conversation between the two communities. Discussing the future solidifies the bridges between the two groups whose members already have many overlapping interests due to their common background and their similar career.

This is a paradox, but anticipations are about bringing stability. Linear futures stabilize the present and give more weight to decisions that do not break away from well-established paths. Linear futures consolidate a system of norms. Institutions need to elaborate and follow norms. Indeed, rules of behavior and doctrines need to rely on some empirical assumptions about the future that imply some regularity. True, the expression "war on terror" suggests that there might be some very abrupt and sudden events that would disrupt the social and political order of democracies. Yet, this assumption is based on a linear vision according to which terrorist networks are developing. According to this vision, which is based on the claim that terrorism is a social trend, potential terrorist attacks are not the exception, they become the normal state of US security. Therefore, new rules have to be established to challenge this new situation. Eventually this vision can backfire, since focusing on a trend that is rooted on a backward-oriented vision of international politics is likely to divert attention from ongoing changes that will break with this linear past.

VI — WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM NOT ANTICIPATING THE ARAB REVOLUTIONS?

This study started in late 2010 and most of the empirical research was carried out during March-May 2011. What is now being called the "Arab spring" which actually went into the fall has been an interesting moment for the study of predictions. The series of revolutions that started with the uprisings in Tunisia came as even more of a surprise than the Fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet bloc.

The parallel between those two unanticipated major events is striking. In both instances the events were unanticipated by the experts working in the area.⁸⁹ They explicitly favored the hypothesis of continuity. A considerable number of experts worked on both areas. It must be noted that both Soviet and Middle Eastern studies can be considered fields that were in great part developed in the US for political reasons and where political ideas (different in the two cases) played a significant role.⁹⁰ Even beyond academia, over the last 20 years, the "Arab and Muslim world" has been the focal point of attention of the media and a majority of security experts. This was also the case for the Soviet Union during the Cold War.

Social sciences provided tools that necessarily implied continuity. It was therefore very unlikely that social scientists would anticipate change. During the 1950s and the 1960s, "totalitarianism" was the concept en vogue to characterize the Soviet Union, which was then replaced by the term "authoritarianism". The worldview that prevailed until the end of the 1980s was that there was a "balance of power" between the United States and the Soviet Union. In the case of the Arab and Muslim world, "authoritarianism" was widely used in the literature to depict Arab secular regimes that were using their political and military power to put a stronghold on societies where, otherwise, according to this narrative, Islamic movements would have prevailed. This also implied a strong degree of continuity. In both cases, social sciences—whether in academia or as applied knowledge in the field of policy—operated as blinders.⁹¹

Those two radical moments of rupture were not anticipated because strong social pressure was put on a community of experts, leaving no room for those who could have argued that instability and change were likely. Arguing that the Soviet Union would fall and that Eastern European societies would challenge their governments would have signaled that the Soviet Bloc was less of a threat than seemed.

Such claim would have been seen as anti-patriotic, fool hearted and naïve. Claiming that the Soviet Bloc would fall would also have called for substantive and therefore costly changes in US foreign policy. In the world of think-tanks, claiming that Arab governments would fall and that a revolutionary and democratic project was underway could also have been interpreted as a naïve and dangerous historical vision, given that Islamism was described as the only plausible alternative to the stability of authoritarianism.⁹² If policymakers had been required to validate this hypothesis, they would have had to change drastically the orientation of their foreign policy. Their support for autocratic leaders in Tunisia and Egypt clearly shows they were unwilling to do so.

⁸⁹ On the "Arab spring", see Gause, 2011.

⁹⁰ Colonomos, 2011a. The case for the Middle Eastern Studies as an "American invention" has been discussed by Martin Kramer, himself an expert on the Middle East, in a controversial book highly critical of the field (Kramer, 2001).

⁹¹ Available online at: <http://www.liberation.fr/monde/01012333746-1989-2011-les-illeres-des-sciences-sociales>

⁹² Things are different in Academia. The focus has been on the specificity of the Arab world and many scholars have strongly criticized the possible use of democracy as a concept to analyze Middle Eastern societies. Indeed, some see this notion as a Western construct that lacks universality. According to Kramer, Middle Eastern studies moved away from the dominant paradigms of modernization and political development that dominated the social sciences in the 1950s and 1960s and then coalesced around Saïd's idea of "Orientalism". Orientalism becomes a meta-paradigm, upon which relies the study of a set of different social and political issues.

Once radical change happened, the prevailing view was that the former Soviet Bloc was building its market economy. Today the prevailing framework used to characterize change in the Arab world is democratization, and eventually transitional justice. In both cases, two teleological narratives have replaced two narratives of permanence serving as operational focal points for policy. Concepts that indicate linear change alternate with notions that dismiss the possibility of change. It is very likely that new concepts that will indicate permanence and stability will emerge to characterize the situation of Arab countries once new leaders and new rules replace the old system. In countries such as China systemic change has not happened (yet). Although this society is evolving rapidly, in part because of a strong economy, many China experts stress the logic of political continuity that cannot be overwhelmed by economic and social transformations. This view is, for example, well portrayed in the notion of "authoritarian resilience".⁹³

CONCLUSION: THE FUTURE PRACTICE NEXUS

The community of predictors and the political world of practitioners are strongly tied together. Not only, are they socially intertwined as it is shown in the first section of this study, there is also a deeper nexus—both social and epistemic—between the two universes and the two forms of practice. On the one hand, practitioners of international security, although well aware of the limitations of predictions have not shown a great willingness to stimulate and encourage innovation in this field. On the contrary, they take these limitations for granted and have accepted them. On the other, predictors are aware that practitioners will not drastically change their behavior, even if their anticipations were to suggest that change in actual policy is called for. This does not encourage them to change the way they think about the future.

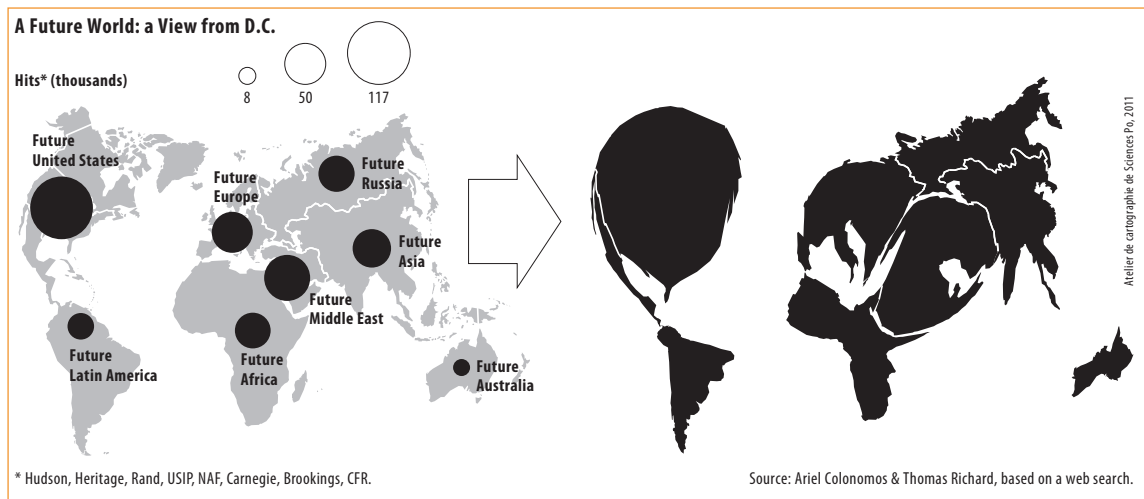
There is a future practice nexus. As in scenarios, "future claims" are mostly linear. There are epistemic reasons for that. It is, indeed, difficult to anticipate and formalize change. There are other important reasons for predictions to be linear. Predictors are trained in the habit of making linear anticipations because these predictions will not deviate from an existing norm inside and outside their community. They know that these predictions should not deviate from the expectations of the policy arena if they are to gain acceptance: predictions are not designed to trigger major changes in the actual decision process. This is a social self-reinforcing mechanism: linearity reinforces the bias for inaction and vice-versa.

Does that mean that anticipation as a form of knowledge is to be dismissed? First, there are attempts to change the nature and the quality of predictions, possibly leading to more accuracy. However, the preference for stability over accuracy is a major obstacle to this process. Second, anticipations have an important social function. This system has a stabilizing function. "Future claims" stabilize the present.

⁹³ Nathan, 2003.

Predictions also operate as a socialization mechanism that creates social integration reinforcing the ties between expertise and practice. This creates regularities of behavior within the two communities and shared expectations about their counterparts' behavior. Norms such as security doctrines, strategic rules, and laws (domestic laws or laws of armed conflict) are nurtured by this commerce of future worlds, no matter how approximate and inaccurate those visions might be. In contrast, precision and accuracy would be disruptive because those norms would rely on variables that are too volatile.

In conclusion, the following map aggregates data found on the think-tanks' websites. It collects the number of hits when, on the same page, the term "future" is associated with the different regions of the world as shown on the map. Although very approximate, this picture illustrates what might be an interest in the future of these parts of the world. This is a good indicator of the actual foreign policy of the US. This consensus view of what the future of the world might be does not imply any need to change actual policy. We can make a final prediction. This picture fuels and reinforces expectations and beliefs. Thereby increasing the likelihood that when change occurs it will come as a surprise. We will be all the more surprized when a non-linear event altering the structure of international politics occurs.



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Appendice 1 Think-tanks list¹

A - First section, "DC's small world of expertise"

- Brookings Institution (1)
- Council on Foreign Relations (2)
- Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (3)
- Center for Strategic and International Studies (4)
- RAND Corporation (5)
- Heritage Foundation (6)
- American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research (AEI) (7)
- Cato Institute (8)
- United States Institute for Peace (16)
- Hudson Institute (21)
- Center for New American Security (23)
- New America Foundation (24)
- Center for Transatlantic Relations SAIS, Johns Hopkins University (48)
- Washington Institute for Near East Policy (unlisted)
- Lexington Institute (unlisted)

B - Second section, "Words for telling the future"

- Brookings Institution (1)
- Council on Foreign Relations (2)
- Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (3)
- Center for Strategic and International Studies (4)
- RAND Corporation (5)
- Heritage Foundation (6)
- American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research (AEI) (7)
- Cato Institute (8)
- United States Institute for Peace (16)
- Hudson Institute (21)
- New America Foundation (24)

C - Fourth section, "Focal points"

- Brookings Institution (1)
- Council on Foreign Relations (2)
- Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (3)
- RAND Corporation (5)
- Heritage Foundation (6)
- United States Institute for Peace (16)
- Hudson Institute (21)
- New America Foundation (24)

Appendice 2 List of interviewees

- Michael Barone (AEI)
- Nora Bensahel (Center for a New American Security)
- Richard Betts (Columbia University, Institute of War and Peace)
- Ian Bremmer (Eurasia group)
- Stephen Biddle (CFR-DC)
- Bruce Bueno de Mesquita (NYU, Mesquita & Roundell)
- Matthew Burrows (CIA-NIC)
- Daniel L. Byman (Georgetown University, Saban Center for Middle East Policy)
- Michael Eisenstadt (the Washington Institute on Near East Policy)
- Roger George (National Defense University)
- Dan Goure (Lexington Institute)
- Robin Hanson (George Mason University)
- Bruce Hoffman (Georgetown University, Center for Peace and Security Studies)
- Robert Hunter (RAND)
- Robert Jervis (Columbia University, Institute of War and Peace)
- Stuart Johnson (Rand)
- Christopher J. Lamb (INSS)
- Bowman Miller (National Intelligence University)
- Leo Michel (NDU)
- Robert Lieber (Georgetown University)
- Michael Oppenheimer (NYU, CGA)
- Harry Roundell (Mesquita & Roundell)
- Emile Servan-Schreiber (Newsfuture)
- Peter Singer (Brookings)
- Jack Snyder (Columbia University, Institute of War and Peace)
- Paul Stares (CFR-DC)
- Moeed Yusuf (USIP)
- Micah Zenko (CFR-NY)

¹ The number between brackets is the ranking of the organization as it appears on *the Global Go to Think-tank* report (latest edition, 2011)