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American Foreign Policy Think Tanks and their Views on Baltic Security

Recent events have created a sense of urgency within the U.S. foreign policy establishment to update its strategy towards Russia. The Baltic states are seen to be particularly vulnerable and because of its NATO commitments and its history of underwriting security in the region, the U.S. is under pressure to develop an appropriate response. Policy and research institutes—or think tanks—are an important part of the U.S. foreign policy establishment, and given the influence they often have on American foreign policy, it is sensible for any student of Baltic security to evaluate the think tanks' current perspectives on the viability and desirability of U.S. security commitments in the region. To that end, this article evaluates the outputs of twelve prominent U.S. foreign policy think tanks according to the views they expressed across four general groupings of issues: positions on U.S. grand strategy, perceptions of Moscow's intentions and capabilities, assessments of NATO's health and its value to U.S. security, and the level of commitment to, and assessment of, the security vulnerabilities of the Baltic states. The findings dispel a common misperception that U.S. foreign policy think tanks are generally shifting towards a realist perspective on the Baltic states; they generally do not support U.S. retrenchment, most consider Russia as having revanchist motives, and as a whole support bolstering the defences of NATO's easternmost flank. However, it would also be an exaggeration to conclude that the U.S. think tank community overall were staunch defenders of the Baltic states, as for many there is a prevailing inattentiveness to Baltic security issues.

Introduction

The Baltics have recently been thrust onto the agenda of U.S. foreign policy-makers. Russia's annexation of Crimea, hostilities in Ukraine, its alleged interference in the U.S. election process, and a new U.S. administration that has had enigmatically kind words for Mr Putin, have all put pressure on the U.S. foreign policy establishment to form a coherent position and develop policies which address the issue of Baltic security. Policy and research institutes—or think tanks—are an important part of the U.S. foreign policy establishment, and given the influence they often have on American foreign policy, it is sensi-

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ble for any student of Baltic security to evaluate their current perspectives on U.S. security commitments towards the Baltic states.

Many amongst Baltic audiences may not be entirely familiar with the world of U.S. think tanks. They are nevertheless likely to have at least encountered them through reading high-impact outputs in popular periodicals such as *Foreign Policy*, *Foreign Affairs*, and *National Interest* by prominent academic realists and think tank scholars, and over the past two years, a noteworthy number of these outputs have encouraged the U.S. government to reassess its overseas security commitments. Consider the recent statement from Stephen Walt in *Foreign Policy*:

Expanding NATO didn't strengthen the alliance; it just committed the United States to defend a group of weak and hard-to-defend protectorates that were far from the United States but right next door to Russia. Ladies and gentlemen: This is a textbook combination of both hubris and bad geopolitics.¹

Compare this with a widely circulated article in *National Interest* by Doug Badow, Senior Fellow of the Cato Institute, a high-profile libertarian think tank. Responding to the RAND Corporation's war-game exercise which revealed that NATO, as it currently stands, would be unable to defend the Baltic states in the event of a Russian invasion, Badow writes:

[RAND's] conclusion illustrates the folly years ago of treating NATO as a social club and inducting new members which were irrelevant to the continent's security and possessed minimal military capabilities. At the time, Russia was too weak to make much of a fuss and U.S. officials assumed that mere words would suffice to defend those inducted. NATO expansion was considered a great success. But now the alliance realizes that it is obligated to war against nuclear-armed Russia on behalf of three essentially indefensible countries.²

Judging by this, it would not be unreasonable to ask whether influential U.S. foreign policy think tanks were perhaps being swayed by the arguments of academic realists, and increasingly growing critical of America's liberal internationalism and its commitment to defend NATO's easternmost flank.

The aim of this article is, quite simply, to test this assumption. The first section will review several outputs by prominent realists—including John Mearsheimer, Barry Posen and Stephen Walt—which have spurred debate about U.S. grand strategy, Russia's motives, NATO's future, and U.S. strategy towards the Baltic states. Despite being widely read and debated, Stephen Walt has

¹ "What Would a Realist World Have Looked Like?" *Foreign Policy*. Accessed February 17, 2017. <http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/01/08/what-would-a-realist-world-have-looked-like-iraq-syria-iran-obama-bush-clinton/>.

² Badow, Doug. "Why on Earth Would Russia Attack the Baltics?" *The National Interest*. Accessed February 21, 2017. <http://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-buzz/why-earth-would-russia-attack-the-baltics-15139>.

pointed out that he and his fellow realists are having little impact on the media or the foreign policy establishment, and critics such as Thomas Wright and Daniel Drezner have suggested compelling reasons for why that may be the case; most likely, because academic realists are quite removed from the prevailing views in Washington.

Unlike realist academics, however, think tanks have enjoyed a long history of influence on the U.S. foreign policy establishment. Indeed, it is their explicit mandate to do precisely this: to inform and influence policy-makers through research and advocacy. The question is, while academic realists may not currently be making much of an impact on either the media or the U.S. government, are their ideas finding more resonance among think tanks? This requires an introduction to the academic literature on think tanks, and the second section will discuss how to define them, how to characterize their activities, and most importantly, how to assess their impact on foreign policy making. This enables us to, in the third section, turn our attention to an analysis of the outputs of leading think tanks and conclude that they have, by and large, not taken anything even resembling a realist stance towards the Baltic states, with only a few exceptions.

1. A Realist View of the Baltics

In its essence, the current foreign policy stance of several prominent American academic realists towards the Baltic states was foreshadowed by George Keenan, the former U.S. Ambassador to the Soviet Union (1952) and author of the “Long Telegram (1946)” and “The Sources of Soviet Conduct (1947)”, which became pillars of the Truman doctrine of containment. In a New York Times interview in 1998, Keenan, then 94, was asked his opinion on the recent Senate ratification of NATO expansion to include Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic (which won by an overwhelming vote of 80 to 19). His disapproval of the move was unequivocal:

I think it is the beginning of a new cold war, ... I think the Russians will gradually react quite adversely and it will affect their policies. I think it is a tragic mistake. There was no reason for this whatsoever. No one was threatening anybody else. This expansion would make the Founding Fathers of this country turn over in their graves. We have signed up to protect a whole series of countries, even though we have neither the resources nor the intention to do so in any serious way. [NATO expansion] was simply a light-hearted action by a Senate that has no real interest in foreign affairs ... Of course there is going to be a bad

reaction from Russia, and then [the NATO expanders] will say that we always told you that is how the Russians are -- but this is just wrong.³

More recently, and prompted by Russia's aggression in Ukraine, the prominent realist John J. Mearsheimer wrote a widely read and debated essay in *Foreign Affairs* entitled "Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West's Fault: The Liberal Delusions That Provoked Putin (2014)". Mearsheimer, echoing Keenan's argument fifteen years earlier, claims:

Putin's pushback should have come as no surprise. After all, the West had been moving into Russia's backyard and threatening its core strategic interests, a point Putin made emphatically and repeatedly. Elites in the United States and Europe have been blindsided by events only because they subscribe to a flawed view of international politics. They tend to believe that the logic of realism holds little relevance in the twenty-first century and that Europe can be kept whole and free on the basis of such liberal principles as the rule of law, economic interdependence, and democracy.⁴

According to this perspective, Putin's response to NATO enlargement, EU expansion, and democracy promotion is perfectly predictable and attributable to the simple geopolitical principle that "great powers are always sensitive to threats near their own territory."⁵ Realists like himself, Mearsheimer argues, are opposed to the West's expansion eastward, primarily because "a declining great power with an aging population and a one-dimensional economy did not in fact need to be contained. And they feared that enlargement would only give Moscow an incentive to cause trouble in eastern Europe."⁶

Under this view, the tension between Moscow and the West is fundamentally one between dissenting worldviews of global politics, and each direct their foreign policies according to 'different playbooks': "Putin and his compatriots have been thinking and acting according to realist dictates, whereas their Western counterparts have been adhering to liberal ideas about international politics. The result is that the United States and its allies unknowingly provoked a major crisis over Ukraine."⁷ Mearsheimer implicitly councils the West to abandon their playbook and adopt something akin to Putin's; Putin, whatever else he may be, is at least playing by rational geopolitical rules.

The overarching theoretical perspective that informs this particular view

³ Friedman, Thomas L. "Foreign Affairs; Now a Word From X." *The New York Times*. May 01, 1998. Accessed February 17, 2017. <http://www.nytimes.com/1998/05/02/opinion/foreign-affairs-now-a-word-from-x.html>.

⁴ Mearsheimer, John J. "Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West's Fault." *Foreign Affairs*. January 28, 2016. Accessed February 17, 2017. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russia-fsu/2014-08-18/why-ukraine-crisis-west-s-fault>.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

of Russia is described in detail by Barry R. Posen, whose book *Restraint: A New Foundation for U.S. Grand Strategy* (2014) is held up by many prominent realists as a particularly sophisticated and compelling description of U.S. grand strategy.⁸ Briefly, Posen argues that the past twenty years of U.S. foreign policy has been driven by what he calls ‘Liberal Hegemony’. That is, at the end of the Cold War, the U.S. suddenly recognised that it was the sole world power—the ‘unipower moment’.⁹ It was a fortunate and enviable position to find oneself in, and was one which it sought to maintain; the U.S. foreign policy establishment coalesced around a grand strategy of using U.S. capabilities to maintain its superiority by a very comfortable margin. The world order it sought to oversee was one with free markets, democracy and liberal institutions, all backed up by unmatched U.S. power and ordered in such a way as to maintain America’s primacy.

The problem with this doctrine, for realists like Posen, can be summarised as follows:

The strategy has been costly, wasteful, and counterproductive. The United States has spent hundreds of billions of dollars on unnecessary military preparations and unnecessary wars, billions that it can no longer afford. The wars have needlessly taken the lives of thousands of U.S. military personnel and hurt many thousands more. The strategy molds the U.S. military in a way that will leave it simultaneously large, expensive, and fundamentally misshapen. The strategy makes enemies almost as quickly as it dispatches them. The strategy encourages less-friendly states to compete with the United States more intensively, while encouraging friendly states to do less than they should in their own defense, or to be more adventurous than is wise. This in turn creates additional defense burdens for the American people.¹⁰

Rosen’s proposed solution is a move away from the strategy of liberal hegemony towards the gradual adoption of a grand strategy marked by ‘restraint’. It is a strategy which focuses more narrowly on the geopolitical interests of the U.S; its sovereignty, safety, and territorial integrity. Its power position should be conceived of as primarily and strictly a means to those three ends. In practice, Rosen advocates

... a phased reduction in U.S. political commitments and military deployments. The ultimate goal is to place the responsibility for the security of major and minor U.S. allies squarely on their shoulders; the last vestiges of Cold War alliance organization and commitments should be ended.¹¹

⁸ A similar, more digestible argument is made by Gholz, E., Press, D. G., & Sapolsky, H. M. (1997). Come home, America: The strategy of restraint in the face of temptation. *International Security*, 21(4), 5-48.

⁹ Charles Krauthammer, “The Unipolar Moment,” *Foreign Affairs* 70, no. 1 (1990/1991).

¹⁰ Posen, Barry R. *Restraint: A New Foundation for U.S. Grand Strategy*. Cornell University Press, 2015. p. 24.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

In a recent interview with *The Atlantic*, Rosen quips that if the “Russians were going to conquer all of Western Europe and create some new Putin Napoleonic empire, that would be a threat to American security”.¹² However, Rosen does not believe it is “even remotely plausible that Russia is in a position to make a bid for hegemony in Europe”, although he does admit that it is “capable enough to assert its interests on its own periphery”.¹³ That ‘periphery’ includes the Baltic states, which Rosen claims elsewhere is within “Russia’s historical sphere of influence”.¹⁴ Rosen expects Russia will indeed assert its interests in its immediate vicinity, whereupon the U.S. will “have to think about how much those interests really matter to us, and how much of those interests we should accommodate”.¹⁵ It is important to note that while Rosen laments NATO’s expansion, he does concede that defence commitments have been made and they should presumably be honoured; in his words, it is ‘baked into the cake’. That said, it is not hard to imagine that Rosen does not count NATO’s eastern-most flank to be amongst America’s vital interests.

Realists do, of course, count Europe as one of the three regions of the world which are particularly important to U.S. security—Northeast Asia and the Persian Gulf being the other two. Acknowledging that isolationism is not a viable option, realists have urged a return to what they judge to be an historically advantageous strategy of the U.S., namely, offshore balancing.¹⁶ Mearsheimer, writing in *National Interest* (2011), describes it as follows:

... [offshore balancing] sees the United States’ principle goal as making sure no country dominates any of these areas [Europe, Northeast Asia and the Persian Gulf] as it dominates the Western Hemisphere. This is to ensure that dangerous rivals in other regions are forced to concentrate their attention on great powers in their own backyards rather than be free to interfere in America’s. The best way to achieve that end is to rely on local powers to counter aspiring regional hegemon and otherwise keep U.S. military forces over the horizon. But if that proves impossible, American troops come from offshore to help do the job, and then leave once the potential hegemon is checked.¹⁷

¹² Beauchamp, Scott. “America Doesn’t Need to Lead the Free World.” *The Atlantic*. November 14, 2014. Accessed February 17, 2017. <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/11/posen-grand-strategy-restraint-isis-russia/382730/>.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Kagan, Robert. “Backing into World War III.” *Brookings*. February 06, 2017. Accessed February 18, 2017. <https://www.brookings.edu/research/backing-into-world-war-iii/>.

¹⁵ Beauchamp, “America Doesn’t Need to Lead the Free World”, 2014.

¹⁶ Not only do many prominent realists believe that offshore balancing ought to form the backbone of American grand strategy, they also view it as a better alternative to *selective engagement*, which calls for protecting the three strategically important regions by permanently stationing U.S. troops to both deter aspiring hegemon and to prevent conflict in those regions.

¹⁷ Mearsheimer, John J. “Imperial by Design”. *The National Interest*. No. 111, Jan/Feb 2011.

Mearsheimer and Walt, writing in *Foreign Affairs* (2016), elaborate on what offshore balancing would require, specifically in Europe:

In Europe, the United States should end its military presence and turn NATO over to the Europeans. There is no good reason to keep U.S. forces in Europe, as no country there has the capability to dominate that region. The top contenders, Germany and Russia, will both lose relative power as their populations shrink in size, and no other potential hegemon is in sight. Admittedly, leaving European security to the Europeans could increase the potential for trouble there. If a conflict did arise, however, it would not threaten vital U.S. interests. Thus, there is no reason for the United States to spend billions of dollars each year (and pledge its own citizens' lives) to prevent one.¹⁸

This marks a radical departure from the status quo, and allies who have depended on the U.S. to underwrite their security are likely to find such arguments disconcerting. More alarming still would be if these arguments were finding a receptive audience. The pressing question is, then, how influential are these academic realists?

2. Impact of the Realist Perspective

For realists, the answer is: not nearly enough. Walt, writing in *Foreign Policy*, complains that realists are underrepresented in U.S. media outlets.¹⁹ As for newspapers, none of the regular op-ed columnists at the New York Times, Washington Post, and Wall Street Journal have a realist bent, and Walt notes, quite rightly, that the Post and Journal are, at times, quite openly hostile to realist ideas.²⁰ Neither, he claims, do any of the major news broadcasters, such as Fox, CNN, or MSNBC, regularly have realists among their pundits or guests. Walt takes a rather feeble and aggrieved guess at what may be the reason: "I suspect it is because contemporary foreign-policy punditry is mostly about indulging hopes and promoting ideals, rather than providing hard-headed thinking about which policies are most likely to make the United States more prosperous and more secure."²¹

A more plausible explanation for why realists are so underrepresented

¹⁸ <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2016-06-13/case-offshore-balancing>.

¹⁹ Walt, Stephen. "What Would a Realist World Have Looked Like?" *Foreign Policy*. Accessed February 17, 2017. <http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/01/08/what-would-a-realist-world-have-looked-like-iraq-syria-iran-obama-bush-clinton/>.

²⁰ As if to prove Walt's point, see Cohen, Roger. "The Limits of American Realism." *The New York Times*. January 11, 2016. Accessed February 17, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/12/opinion/the-limits-of-american-realism.html?ribbon-ad-idx=5&rref=opinion>.

²¹ Walt, Stephen. "What Would a Realist World Have Looked Like?" *Foreign Policy*. Accessed February 17, 2017.

in the U.S. media is provided by Thomas Wright, writing for the Brookings Institution. Neither Democrats nor Republicans, he claims, seem to want to weaken alliances, although they may differ over the extent to which America should burden-share with their allies. Certainly, there is widespread support for the U.S. led international order, and few, if any, amongst the foreign policy establishment favour retrenchment on the scale that realists have been proposing. This leaves academic realists quite secluded from policy-makers:

It is academic realism's new direction, more than anything else, that has detached it from the policy debate in Washington. Academics often discuss how to be policy-relevant, but now they find themselves in an unusual position. They are writing on topics that are relevant and of great interest to policymakers, but their ideas on alliances and retrenchment are so far out of the political mainstream to ensure that they will be cast aside.²²

In another reply to Walt, Daniel W. Drezner writes in the *Washington Post* that realists may not be represented in major U.S. news outlets because, quite simply, realists would consider publishing in them to be fruitless. That is, realists'

belief in the persistence of structural regularities, taken to its logical extreme, creates an internal logical contradiction in the public writings of realists. If systemic forces are really that constraining, then realists should not care about whether they engage the public or not. Structuralists have to believe that columnists have no ability to influence calculations of the national interest.²³

Drezner also points out the decline in the numbers of realists in U.S. universities. TRIP's 2014 Survey of International Relations Scholars found that only roughly 18% of U.S. respondents identified the paradigm that they were primarily committed to as realism,²⁴ compared to 25% in 2004.²⁵ Drezner also makes the interesting point that certain politicians who may subscribe to some of the same foreign policies as realists, tend to have rather noxious views on other policy matters. For instance, Trump's critical comments on NATO during the presidential campaign are views that, in principle, many realists would not

²² Wright, Thomas. "Realism's utopia: Why academic realism almost never works in Washington." Brookings. July 29, 2016. Accessed February 17, 2017. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2016/01/13/realisms-utopia-why-academic-realism-almost-never-works-in-washington/>.

²³ Drezner, Daniel W. "Do the greatest op-ed pages in America discriminate against foreign policy realists?" *The Washington Post*. January 11, 2016. Accessed February 17, 2017. https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2016/01/11/do-the-greatest-op-ed-pages-in-america-discriminate-against-foreign-policy-realists/?utm_term=.dbf3ae933be8.

²⁴ Maliniak, Daniel, Susan Peterson, Ryan Powers, and Michael J. Tierney. 2014. *TRIP 2014 Faculty Survey*. Williamsburg, VA: Institute for the Theory and Practice of International Relations. Available at <https://trip.wm.edu/charts/>.

²⁵ Maliniak, Daniel, Amy Oakes, Susan Peterson, and Michael J. Tierney. 2011. International Relations in the US Academy. *International Studies Quarterly*, 55:437-464.

entirely disagree with; however, to publicly support even a single policy position of Trump's may carry reputational risks.

In short, academic realism's recent forays into Baltic security in highly visible media forums may give the impression of a more general attitudinal shift towards those positions; perhaps even signalling a change in the U.S. foreign policy community's zeitgeist. It is only natural for allies so dependent on the goodwill of the U.S. to be rattled by the advocacy of such positions. However, it should be emphasized that academic realists are currently quite out of step with current U.S. foreign policy positions, and their influence is rather marginal.

Besides academic realists, however, Baltic security has also become a hotly debated topic amongst U.S. foreign policy think tanks, and like academic realists, there, at least on the surface, appears to be a shift towards questioning U.S. security commitments in the Baltics. Unlike academic realists, however, think tanks have traditionally enjoyed more access to and influence on American policy-makers.

In order to evaluate the extent to which U.S. foreign policy think tanks are embracing a more realist attitude towards Baltic security, context is required; the following section will detail an understanding of the purposes and impact of think tanks, and will introduce contemporary debates about their role.

3. What is a Think Tank?

While scholars have found it difficult to reach consensus on the definition of a think tank, a widely accepted and inclusive description is provided by James G. McGann:

Think tanks or public policy research, analysis, and engagement institutions are organizations that generate policy-oriented research, analysis, and advice on domestic and international issues in an effort to enable policymakers and the public to make informed decisions about public policy issues. Think tanks may be affiliated with political parties, governments, interest groups, or private corporations or constituted as independent nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). These institutions often act as a bridge between the academic and policymaking communities, serving the public interest as an independent voice that translates applied and basic research into a language and form that is understandable, reliable, and accessible for policymakers and the public.²⁶

²⁶ McGann, James G. *Think tanks and policy advice in the United States: academics, advisors and advocates*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2007. p. 11.

According to the latest annual *Global Go To Think Tank Index Report* (2015), there are 1,835 such think tanks in the United States, 90.5 per cent of think tanks were created since 1951, and their number has more than doubled in the United States since 1980.²⁷

If there is such a sizeable supply, there must be a demand. Why do U.S. policy-makers rely so much on their advice? One of the more convincing answers is offered by Donald Abelson, who stresses how critical it is that the United States does not have a permanent civil service, unlike Westminster systems such as in the UK or Canada. He writes:

... in the United States the top layer of the bureaucracy changes every four or eight years when a new administration assumes power. The result is that it takes years for the new bureaucracy to develop its own institutional memory. This lack of continuity in the bureaucracy may undermine not only the quality of expertise that is offered but also the confidence that elected officials have in government. Moreover, since members of Congress are not bound by the parliamentary principle of strong party unity, they are free to solicit advice from the external policy research community.²⁸

Several other explanations have been given for their growth in the U.S., including the division of powers between branches (judicial, legislative, and executive) and levels (state and federal), a highly developed civil and philanthropic culture in the U.S., and a political system which has several points of access.²⁹

There have also been several attempts to categorise the various and diverse types of think tanks. The Think Tanks and Civil Society Program (TTCSP) has created a useful typology which classifies think tanks according to their affiliations: autonomous and independent; quasi independent; government affiliated; quasi governmental; university affiliated; political party affiliated; and corporate (for profit).³⁰

Of course, the question of why think tanks deserve to be given scholarly attention needs to be raised. The simple justification is: their impact. What influence do think tanks have on the decision-making process and the foreign policy establishment? Typically, this question is asked with two broader objectives in mind. The first is to evaluate whether think tanks' impact is for good or ill. The second objective is to evaluate whether, in a rapidly changing intellectual milieu, think tanks are losing their influence and perhaps even becoming obsolete.

²⁷ McGann, James G, "2015 Global Go To Think Tank Index Report" (2016). *CSP Global Go To Think Tank Index Reports*. Paper 10. http://repository.upenn.edu/think_tanks/10.

²⁸ Abelson, Donald E. "Old world, new world: the evolution and influence of foreign affairs think tanks." *International Affairs* 90, no. 1 (2014): p. 137.

²⁹ McGann, 2007, p. 21.

³⁰ McGann, 2016.

As to the first question, for many in the U.S., think tanks should be examined either because of what “their involvement in the policy-making process might say about the role of unelected experts or whether their participation enhances or undermines democracy”, or because they should be monitored in order to give the American public “a better sense of who and what are the driving forces behind major policy initiatives”.³¹

Related to this is the question of what the primary purpose of a think tank is. An alternative typology to McGann’s, for instance, is offered by Weaver, who classifies think tanks according to their aims (rather than their affiliations), and proposes three categories: universities without students, contract researchers, and advocacy tanks. Indeed, most think tanks can, at bottom, be described as either focusing primarily on policy research, or focusing primarily on political advocacy.³²

In terms of policy research, traditionally, think tanks were intended to be ‘brain trusts’, producing research and recommendations intended to assist policy-makers in making sound, evidence-based policy decisions. This purpose is typified by the think tanks of the turn of the century, often founded by well-meaning philanthropists (such as Carnegie or Brookings) or named after respected statesmen (Woodrow Wilson Center, the Hoover Institution).

The second type of think tank, those that primarily advocate politically motivated or ideological policies, are a growing phenomenon and have been accused of becoming little more than “lobbyists for various political causes”. Advocacy is often understood to entail at least one of the following: “arguing for specific position-based results as opposed to open-ended analysis; using scientific methodology primarily to influence policy in ideologically preferred directions; or focusing on marketing ideas rather than research.”³³

These advocacy-focused think tanks in particular have been blamed for undermining democratic processes.³⁴ Their wealth may give them outsize influence over the foreign policy apparatus, and the sources of that wealth may ideologically bias the policy recommendations.³⁵ For instance, the contri-

³¹ Abelson, 2014, p. 128.

³² Ibid., p. 127.

³³ McGann, 2007, p. 15.

³⁴ Abelson, 2014, p. 128. For more on the advocacy and lobbying arms of think tanks, see Tevi Troy, ‘Devaluing the think tank’, *National Affairs*, no. 10, Winter 2012, pp. 75–90; Bryan Bender, ‘Many DC think tanks now players in partisan wars’, *Boston Globe*, 11 Aug. 2013.

³⁵ Lawrence Davidson, *Foreign Policy, Inc.: Privatizing America’s National Interest* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2009).

butions from philanthropic foundations and corporate donors have brought scrutiny to the organisation and activities of the Heritage Foundation, the American Enterprise Institute, and the Center for New American Security. Some think tanks' access to not only the foreign policy establishment, but even the executive branch, has similarly raised concerns.³⁶

This raises the second overarching objective of studying think tanks: do think tanks as a whole really have significant influence and impact? To begin measuring their impact, it is necessary to identify the various strategies think tanks use to disseminate their research findings and influence policy. Abelson has identified four broad strategies: i) research products (books, articles, academic journals, opinion magazines, policy briefs, social media and newsletters); ii) media exposure (op-ed articles in major US and international newspapers, commentaries on radio and television talk shows and newscasts, blogs on institutes' website, and, when invited, testifying before congressional committees and subcommittees); iii) sponsoring activities (lectures, conferences, seminars and workshops) at which policy-makers, academics, journalists and leaders of commerce and industry exchange ideas; and iv) meetings (often private, with policy-makers on Capitol Hill, in the White House, and throughout the bureaucracy).³⁷

Not unlike the pressure academics face in modern universities, whose research funding and career progression often depend on proving the impact of their research outputs, think tanks have devised creative indicators to monitor and measure their impact. These include: column inches in newspapers or number of citations; number of website hits and/or page requests; incidence of interviews on radio or television; number of peer-reviewed publications; public, professional, and political attendance at institute events, lectures, and conferences; establishment of new programs, recruitment of new staff, renewal of projects; increased capacity to attract foundation grants, government contracts, and other sources of funds on previous years; appointment of research staff to government advisory boards; and career progression of researchers into government or international organizations.³⁸

It is, of course, self-serving for think tanks to “create the impression

³⁶ For an examination of the relationship between several think tanks and US presidents, see Donald E. Abelson, *A Capitol idea: think tanks and US foreign policy* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006), pp.23–42.

³⁷ Abelson, 2014, p. 137; see also Abelson, 2016, and McGann, 2007.

³⁸ Stone, D., Maxwell, S., and Keating, M. 'Bridging Research and Policy', *An International Workshop: Funded by the UK Department of International Development, Radcliff House, Warwick University*, 16–17 July 2001, pp. 29–30.

that they wield tremendous influence”; they measure their impact in order to attract donors, gain prestige, and justify their existence.³⁹ For those sceptical of the accuracy of think tanks’ own estimation of their impact, academics tend to focus on other measures, including: relationships/contacts with policymakers/implementers; relationships of board members, advisors, etc. with policymakers; extent of/quality of circulation of research products; utilization of products by policymakers (public references); utilization by other influential elites: editorial boards, columnists, media commentators; utilization by political pressure groups and other civic actors; cumulative media references to research products; references made to research and analysis in scholarly journals, new media, public testimony, etc.⁴⁰

It is important to note, however, that although there may be more academic means of measuring impact, the way in which think tanks themselves measure their impact may affect their behaviour. For instance, gaining access to the media has always been given a special priority by think tanks, and they have begun to adapt to the changing social media landscape, adding additional indicators of their impact such as the number of YouTube and TED talks views, Facebook likes, tweets and retweets, etc. The need to adapt to social media has had the effect of watering down their research findings and policy prescriptions to easily digestible tweets and video clips. This, in turn, may subvert the very purpose of think tanks: in the enthusiastic pursuit of clicks and tweets, the limited resources of think tanks may be diverted from research into marketing. Andrew Schwartz, a senior vice president at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, has even claimed that “We have become our own media company”.⁴¹ Some, however, emphasise the benefits of new media. Jessica Matthews, former president of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, argues that

the massive proliferation of largely unedited new media has made it easier to locate top-quality work and to identify the individuals and institutions that are consistently producing it. There is a tremendous amount of clutter on social media, of course, but it can be navigated around. More importantly, we’re seeing the best and most important information more quickly rise to the top.⁴²

³⁹ Abelson, 2014, p. 130. See also Abelson, Donald E. *Do Think Tanks Matter?: Assessing the Impact of Public Policy Institutes*, 2nd edition. Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2014.

⁴⁰ McGann, 2017, p. 41.

⁴¹ Bennett, Amanda. “Opinion | Are think tanks obsolete?” *The Washington Post*. October 05, 2015. Accessed February 17, 2017. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/in-theory/wp/2015/10/05/are-think-tanks-obsolete/?utm_term=.daa8414edf50.

⁴² Matthews, Jessica. “Opinion | Why think tanks should embrace ‘new media.’” *The Washington Post*. October 08, 2015. Accessed February 17, 2017. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/in-theory/wp/2015/10/08/why-think-tanks-should-embrace-new-media/?tid=a_inl&utm_term=.c947ebaa1a4f.

Broader questions about the changing ‘information ecosystem’ and the increasing competitiveness of the ‘marketplace of ideas,’ has led to questions about whether the influence of think tanks may be fading. In 2015, the *Washington Post* published a series of responses by academics, policy-makers, and think tank leaders to the question “Are think tanks obsolete?”. Alongside the issue of new media, the forum raised questions about the potentially dwindling impact of think tanks due to their increasingly partisan perspectives, the toxic ideological gridlock in Washington, particularly in Congress⁴³, and how a demand for instant results is discouraging deep research and analysis.⁴⁴

The most forthright of think tank scholars have also generally acknowledged that measuring influence is challenging. Measuring impact where it counts—on Congress, the Executive branch, and on the media—is complicated by the fact that influence tends to be highly “episodic, arbitrary, and difficult to predict”.⁴⁵ Indeed, due to these difficulties, Abelson concludes that academics “may have no alternative but to assess think tanks and the policy issues in which they are engaged on a case-by-case basis”.⁴⁶ Foreign policy-making is tremendously complicated, and it is difficult to isolate the precise influence that think tanks, or even a specific think tank under certain circumstances, has on a leader’s foreign policy decisions.

Nevertheless, evaluating the policy positions of think tanks is a valuable exercise; they do have influence, however difficult it may be to pinpoint, and they are a staple of U.S. foreign policy-making. Abelson has pointed out that think tanks which place an emphasis on public outreach may transform public opinion, while other think tanks may garner little publicity but successfully operate to influence policy-makers behind closed doors.⁴⁷ Think tanks are also much more likely to represent the attitude of the foreign policy establishment as they are in the ‘front lines’ and are by nature responsive to the needs and current priorities of policy-makers. McGann has concluded, for instance, “that think tanks are most influential in the early stages of the policymaking process, particularly in the problem definition and agenda-setting phases”.⁴⁸ If think

⁴³ Harman, Jane. “Opinion | Are think tanks too partisan?” *The Washington Post*. October 07, 2015. Accessed February 17, 2017. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/in-theory/wp/2015/10/07/are-think-tanks-too-partisan/?utm_term=.dd4a2c6ecf0e.

⁴⁴ Laipson, Ellen. “Opinion | Why our demand for instant results hurts think tanks.” *The Washington Post*. October 09, 2015. Accessed February 17, 2017. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/in-theory/wp/2015/10/09/why-our-demand-for-instant-results-hurts-think-tanks/?utm_term=.dd19ed239723.

⁴⁵ Abelson, 2014, p. 142.

⁴⁶ Abelson, 2006, p. 230.

⁴⁷ Abelson, Donald, E. *Do Think Tanks Matter? Assessing the Impact of Public Policy Institutes*, Montreal, McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2002, p. 65.

⁴⁸ McGann, 2007, p. 41.

tanks are pressing an issue, it is not unreasonable to assume that there is a demand for it amongst foreign policy leaders, whether they solicited it or not.

4. Perspectives on Baltic Security: an Analysis of U.S. Foreign Policy Think Tank Outputs

Think tanks have been scrambling over the past few years to articulate their responses to the high demand for coherent policy positions on the security of the Baltic states and NATO's role in their defence. In a crowded house those who shout the loudest are heard, and an impression amongst foreign audiences has been created that think tanks are hastily reassessing U.S. security commitments and advocating for retrenchment, under the direction of a realist grand strategy. This is a misleading impression, however, and the following analysis of the outputs of several prominent U.S. think tanks will aim to dispel it.

4.1. Selection of Think Tanks

The selection of think tanks for analysis was largely determined by the 2015 *Global Go To Think Tank Index* (GGTTI) 'Nomination and Ranking Criteria', which contains twenty-eight criteria by which to evaluate the relative reputation, quality, and impact of 6,486 think tanks worldwide. Twelve think tanks in the United States were selected based on their rankings in three categories: 'Top Think Tanks Worldwide', 'Top Defense and National Security Think Tanks', and 'Top Foreign Policy and International Affairs Think Tanks'. In approximate order of ranking, these include: Brookings Institution, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), Council on Foreign Relations, RAND Corporation, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars (The Keenan Institute), Cato Institute, Heritage Foundation, Center for American Progress (CAP), Center for a New American Security (CNAS), Atlantic Council, and Hoover Institution. It should be noted that the first six think tanks are included in the top ten of the 'Top Think Tanks Worldwide' list.

4.2. Overview of Outputs

Think tanks' outputs are quite diverse, and different think tanks vary in their use of certain formats. In most cases, outputs are produced by affiliated

or resident scholars. The wide variety of formats included in this study include all of the following: reports, memos, print (newspaper articles, journal articles, manuscripts), web articles and blog posts, and notices and transcripts (of interviews, lectures, conferences and congressional testimonies).

Mention of the Baltic states between 2004 (the year the three Baltic states joined NATO) and 2016, by the twelve think tanks, occurred in 1,238 outputs. Almost entirely, these mentions were in the context of NATO, Russia, Eastern European security, democratisation, economic liberalisation, or energy security. Outputs which focused primarily on Baltic issues in a sustained way—as opposed to mere mentions—occurred far less frequently, numbering in total 126. Figure 1 illustrates this disparity across the twelve think tanks.

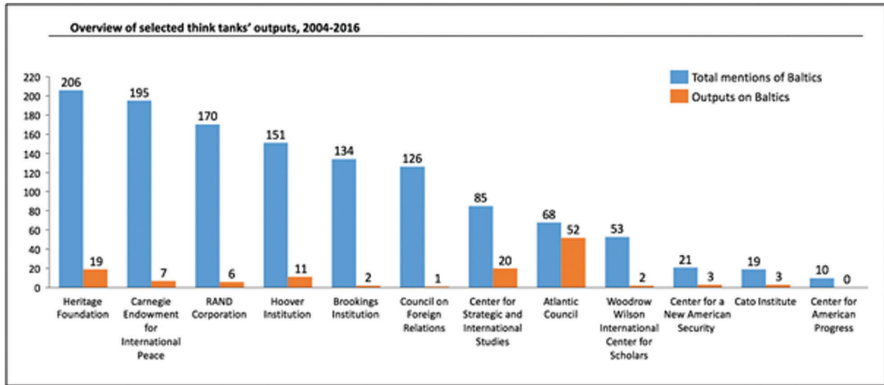


Figure 1. **Overview of number of selected think tanks' outputs between the period of 2004-2016.**

There was a significant surge in attention paid to Baltic security beginning in 2014, presumably attributable to Russia's annexation of Crimea. Interest in the Baltics remained steady afterwards, due to the on-going conflict in Ukraine, and criticisms expressed by Mr Trump about NATO and his transactional view of U.S. defence commitments throughout the 2016 presidential campaign.

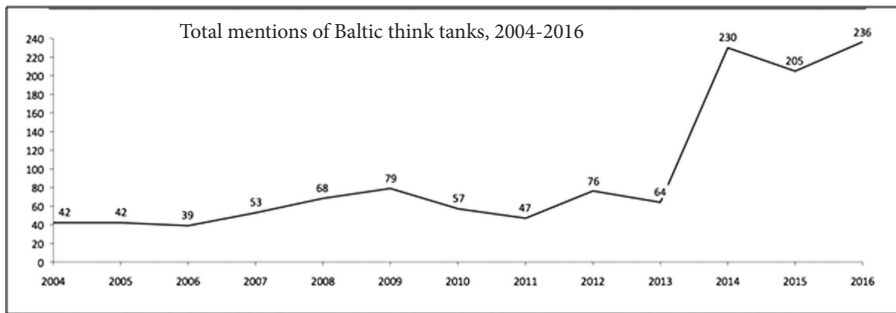


Figure 2. **Number of outputs with mentions of the Baltic states between the period of 2004-2016**

In order to make conclusions about each selected think tanks' aggregate perspectives of U.S. foreign policy and the Baltic states, a series of attributes and rating scales were designed to evaluate the content of each output. Outputs were evaluated according to the opinions they expressed across four general groupings of issues: positions on U.S. grand strategy and orientation, perceptions of Moscow's intentions and capabilities, assessments of NATO's health and its value to U.S. security, and the level of commitment to and assessment of the security vulnerabilities of the Baltic states. The study of outputs was limited to the 126 which dealt exclusively or primarily with Baltic security; as mentioned above, nearly all of the other outputs that mentioned the Baltic states did so only in passing, and while many of these expressed opinions or research findings on U.S. grand strategy, Russia, and NATO, extending their logic to the Baltic states when they have not themselves explicitly done so could be distortive. That said, think tanks' views on these three issue areas—not to mention their ideological commitments—certainly influence their views of the Baltic states. The broader foreign policy views of each think tank must be taken into account, then, but care is taken not to jump to conclusions about their likely stance on the Baltics, based exclusively on their wider views.

4.3. Heritage Foundation

The Heritage Foundation, established in 1973, had the largest number of outputs which mentioned the Baltics, and the third highest number of outputs focusing primarily on the Baltics. It is ranked by GGTTI as eighth in both the 'Most Significant Impact on Public Policy' and 'Top Think Tanks in the United States' categories, however, it ranks rather low in the 'Defense and National Security' (36) and 'Foreign Policy and International Affairs' categories, at 36th and 24th respectively.

Its low ranking in the foreign policy and defence lists is partly attributable to where its priorities fundamentally lie: on domestic and economic issues, where it traditionally supports free markets and limited government. It is a well-established conservative think tank with deep ties to the Republican Party, a relationship that began when Ronald Reagan extensively drew upon its lengthy policy document, *Mandate for Leadership: Policy Management in a Conservative Administration*; it has been estimated that 60% of the policies it spelled out had been adopted by the Reagan administration by 1982.⁴⁹ While it has suffered reputational damage and fallen out of favour with many Republicans over the past five years due to a change in leadership and direction,⁵⁰ it may be experiencing something of a resurgence, reportedly having had a large influence on the formation of Mr Trump's transition team⁵¹. It is also a large think tank, boasting more than 500,000 members, a sizeable staff, and its 2015 total liabilities and net assets amounted to nearly \$270 million.⁵²

Heritage generally takes an entrepreneurial approach to policy analysis and advice, and in terms of its foreign policy positions, Heritage has been a staunch advocate of what Posen would call a liberal hegemonic grand strategy, encouraging the projection of American power to promote economic liberalization and democratization. In as early as 2005, one of its Visiting Fellows urged President Bush, ahead of his visit to Riga, to “acknowledge our new allies’ great achievements in transitioning to democracy, adopting market economies, and becoming a part of NATO”.⁵³ Also in 2005, NATO was praised for its ‘amazing transformation’ and expressed blanket support for its expansion: “From bringing the Central European states back into their European home, whole and free, to extending membership to the former captive nations of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, NATO has done very well indeed.”⁵⁴

Heritage was one of the first to characterize Russia as a threat to U.S. re-

⁴⁹ Abelson, 2006, p. 34.

⁵⁰ Ball, Molly. “The Fall of the Heritage Foundation and the Death of Republican Ideas.” *The Atlantic*. September 25, 2013. Accessed February 19, 2017.

<https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2013/09/the-fall-of-the-heritage-foundation-and-the-death-of-republican-ideas/279955/>.

⁵¹ Glueck, Katie, Kenneth P. Vogel, Edward-Isaac Dovere, Hadas Gold, Taylor Gee, James Kitfield, Jack Shafer, and Gregg Carlstrom. “Trump’s shadow transition team.” *POLITICO*. Accessed February 19, 2017. <http://www.politico.com/story/2016/11/trump-transition-heritage-foundation-231722>.

⁵² “The Heritage Foundation’s Financial Information.” *The Heritage Foundation*. Accessed February 19, 2017. <http://origin.heritage.org/about/financials>.

⁵³ Cohen, Ariel. “President Bush’s Messages to the Baltic States, Russia, and Georgia.” *The Heritage Foundation*. Accessed February 2017. <https://www.heritage.org/europe/report/president-bushs-messages-the-baltic-states-russia-and-georgia>

⁵⁴ Cohen, Ariel. “NATO’s Frontiers: Eurasia, the Mediterranean, and the Greater Middle East.” *The Heritage Foundation*. Accessed February 20, 2017. <http://www.heritage.org/defense/report/natos-frontiers-eurasia-the-mediterranean-and-the-greater-middle-east>.

gional interests and allies, raising alarm in as early as 2004 about Moscow's interference in Ukraine, and expressing concern about its motives and long-term strategy. At that point, containment was not recommended as a response; instead, "The biggest challenge is to keep Russia open and engaged with the West, moving toward democracy and free enterprise and living in peaceful coexistence with the countries along its periphery".⁵⁵ Heritage consistently followed events throughout the next decade, however, and it increasingly characterised Russia as revanchist, and reversed its policy recommendations to include a show of strength and deterrence; it strongly opposed Russia's new European Security Treaty,⁵⁶ and by 2014 was labelling Russia an 'existential threat', advising that "The U.S. and NATO must set in place a robust, long-term strategy to bolster the collective defense of NATO member states and help secure the Nordic and Baltic region".⁵⁷

Heritage, over all the others, has become the most ardent activist for U.S. underwriting of Baltic security in the face of Russia's perceived threat. In a flurry of reports and commentaries between 2013-2016, its support of the Baltic states gained momentum and culminated in the articulation of five policy positions: i) the U.S. must be prepared to reinforce the Baltics quickly; ii) the U.S. and NATO must establish a permanent base in the region; iii) the U.S. and NATO must adamantly state that the 1997 NATO-Russia Founding Act does not prohibit permanent bases in Central and Eastern Europe; iv) the four 'battalion plus'-size units which currently have a 'persistent' presence in the region must be integrated into each Baltic country's defence planning; and v) a Baltic Air Defence mission must be established.⁵⁸

In sum, Heritage categorically supports a strong defensive posture:

The U.S. needs to make it very clear to Russia that there is a line on the map that Russia cannot cross without serious consequences—from countries that are in NATO and countries that are not. The U.S. is obligated by treaty to defend NATO countries. Any response that NATO makes to reinforce its members' territorial integrity would be a responsible defensive measure designed to defend the Alliance, not to provoke a war with Russia.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Brookes, Peter. "The Bear is Back." The Heritage Foundation. Accessed February 20, 2017. <http://www.heritage.org/europe/commentary/the-bear-back>.

⁵⁶ McNamara, Sally. "Russia's Proposed New European Security Treaty: A Non-Starter for the U.S. and Europe." The Heritage Foundation. Accessed February 20, 2017. <http://www.heritage.org/europe/report/russias-proposed-new-european-security-treaty-non-starter-the-us-and-europe>.

⁵⁷ Coffey, Luke. "Russia's Provocations in the Nordic-Baltic States: The U.S. Needs a Strategy to Support the Region." The Heritage Foundation. Accessed February 20, 2017. <http://www.heritage.org/europe/report/russias-provocations-the-nordic-baltic-states-the-us-needs-strategy-support-the>.

⁵⁸ Coffey, Luke. "NATO Summit 2016: The Alliance Must Defend the Baltic States." The Heritage Foundation. Accessed February 20, 2017. <http://www.heritage.org/global-politics/report/nato-summit-2016-the-alliance-must-defend-the-baltic-states>.

⁵⁹ Coffey, Luke. "The U.S. Needs to Get Its Baltic Force Posture Right." The Heritage Foundation. Accessed February 20, 2017. <http://www.heritage.org/europe/report/the-us-needs-get-its-baltic-force-posture-right>.

4.4. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (CEIP)

The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (CEIP) has the second largest number of outputs that mention the Baltics, with seven outputs dealing primarily with the region. It is ranked by TTGGI as the second top think tank in the U.S., as having the second most significant impact on public policy, seventh in national security and defence, and third in foreign policy and international affairs. It is a large organization with over 200 staff members, total liabilities and assets valued at over \$345 million⁶⁰, and offices in D.C., Moscow, Brussels, Beirut, Beijing, and New Delhi.

Founded in 1910 by the industrialist and philanthropist Andrew Carnegie, its original aims were “the education of the public for peace, to spread arbitral justice among nations and to promote the comity and commerce of the world without the dangers of war”.⁶¹ It has become one of the most respected think tanks in the U.S., and its political ideology is firmly center-left, and its foreign policy position is largely liberal-internationalist.

Concern with the Baltics has come relatively late to CEIP, but a coherent position—albeit an insubstantial and non-committal one—has emerged during the past year. While the general consensus amongst its contributors and staffers appears to be that it must be admitted (and lamented) that Russia has failed to integrate with the West, they broadly attempt to play down the threat Russia poses. For instance, the Director of Carnegie’s Moscow Centre, Dmitri Trenin, wrote recently that

... the most urgent task of Western policy: avoidance of a head-on collision with Russia. Such a collision is unlikely as a result of a Russian bid to reconquer the Baltic countries or to invade Poland in an attempt to split the NATO alliance. Moscow has neither an intention nor an interest of doing so, all the historically-grounded Polish and Baltic fears notwithstanding.⁶²

This policy of engagement is typical of CEIP, with another contributor arguing it was the best response to Russia’s military build-up in Kaliningrad, urging that de-escalation should be the objective, and that the West should “engage frankly and directly with Russia on the future status of the enclave”.⁶³

⁶⁰ Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Accessed February 20, 2017. <http://carnegieendowment.org/about/annualreport/2015>.

⁶¹ See Abelson, 2006, p. 57.

⁶² Trenin, Dmitri. “The West and Russia: For Now, Do No (Further) Harm.” Carnegie Middle East Center. Accessed February 20, 2017. <http://carnegie.ru/2016/04/10/west-and-russia-for-now-do-no-further-harm-pub-63301>.

⁶³ “Kaliningrad and the Escalatory Spiral in the Baltics.” Carnegie Europe. Accessed February 20, 2017. <http://carnegieurope.eu/strategieurope/?fa=66402>.

The strongest show of support for the Baltics amongst Carnegie contributors was laced with largely empty rhetoric, arguing not that the Baltic region is strategically important, but rather that it deserves the West's support because it is "one of the most rewarding tourist destinations in Europe, by the way, with exciting cities like Tallinn, Riga, and Vilnius, wild forests, and beautiful coastlines."⁶⁴ In CEIP's outputs, Baltic security has not, at least not yet, received much serious attention.

4.5. Hoover Institution, Brookings Institution, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Council on Foreign Relations, Center for American Progress, and Center for a New American Security.

Much like the Carnegie Endowment, these five respected foreign policy think tanks have paid the Baltic states little mind. This does not suggest they are not producing outputs which mention and acknowledge them. They do, and usually in the context of Russia's belligerence, which has captured their attention and which they are all highly critical of. But sustained, serious and substantive attention to Baltic security, and U.S. and NATO's commitment towards them, is very limited; the outputs rarely amount to little more than short op-ed pieces.

For a recent and representative output from each think tank, see the following: i) Hoover Institute, "Trump To NATO: Pay Up, Or We Won't Protect You!"⁶⁵ (2016); ii) Brookings Institution, "Russian 'countermeasures' to NATO are coming"⁶⁶ (2016); and iii) Woodrow Wilson Centre, "NATO Deterrence and the Russian Specter in the Baltics"⁶⁷ (2016).

Typical CNAS outputs are largely like the previous three, with one notable exception. In an exercise not entirely unlike what RAND Corporation conducted in 2014-2015, CNAS conducted a tabletop exercise in February 2016,

⁶⁴ "In Defense of the Baltics." Carnegie Europe. Accessed February 20, 2017. <http://carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/?fa=64244>.

⁶⁵ "Trump To NATO." Hoover Institution. Accessed February 20, 2017. <http://www.hoover.org/research/trump-nato-pay-or-we-wont-protect-you>.

⁶⁶ Pifer, Steven. "Russian "countermeasures" to NATO are coming." Brookings. July 29, 2016. Accessed February 20, 2017. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2016/05/10/russian-countermeasures-to-nato-are-coming/>.

⁶⁷ "NATO Deterrence and the Russian Specter in the Baltics." Wilson Center. January 03, 2017. Accessed February 20, 2017. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/nato-deterrence-and-the-russian-specter-the-baltics>.

which gathered 50 high-level participants in order to “explore assumptions about possible national and multinational responses to future Russian provocations and to examine in real time the threshold for action on the part of international organizations such as NATO and national capitals”.⁶⁸ The eighteen page report is well worth reading in full, and its conclusions compliment RAND’s assessment:

The net result was a series of stark conclusions, so stark in fact that they cannot be ignored. First, there is a significant gap in threat perception that falls along geographical lines. The alliance has grown so large, and its individual national security interests so varied, that it is increasingly difficult to reach consensus on the challenges facing these countries. Secondly, NATO is no longer as strong or resilient militarily or institutionally as it should be. Its disinvestment in force structure over the past generation, even as its core decision-making bodies have become calcified in their approaches to challenges, have left the organization inflexible in the face of emerging hybrid threats. Lastly, the alliance has become increasingly aware that it no longer has a coherent strategy to confront a rapidly changing world, and that the world knows it. This conveys a sense of institutional vulnerability, inviting a response. Russia’s aggression on the eastern flank of Europe and the unrest in the Middle East with its ensuing migration crisis both reflect the strategic vacuum that is Europe, drawing in conflict as a black hole draws in matter. NATO must gather its collective wisdom and present a united strategic front to the world.

Neither the Council on Foreign Relations or the Center for American Progress have produced anything of note on the Baltics.

4.6. RAND Corporation

The RAND Corporation, founded in 1948, has the third most outputs which mention the Baltic states, with only six outputs focused on the region. However, those limited outputs should not suggest it is not interested in Baltic security; on the contrary, one of its most recent outputs had perhaps the highest impact of all amongst the selected twelve think tanks.

It is ranked by GGTTI as seventh in the “Top U.S. Think Tanks” category, twelfth for impact, and third for defence and national security. Beyond the rankings, however, RAND is rather unique amongst U.S. foreign policy think tanks. Unlike the other eleven, which tend to be focused on policy-enterprise or advocacy, RAND is primarily a consulting or contracting institution. Although broadly centrist in its ideology, that is somewhat moot; as a consulting/contracting institution, it works in close relationships with government

⁶⁸ “Assured Resolve.” Center for a New American Security. Accessed February 20, 2017. <https://www.cnas.org/publications/reports/assured-resolve-testing-possible-challenges-to-baltic-security>.

agencies and relies on government contracts. It is something of a behemoth, with nearly 1,900 staff,⁶⁹ and total liabilities and net assets worth \$450 million.⁷⁰

RAND has, over the past two years and through a series of publications, articulated an extraordinarily coherent worldview, which is remarkably consistent from the level of grand strategy, all the way down to the particulars of Baltic security. Its U.S. grand strategy stance was outlined in a forty-page manuscript by Hal Brands in 2016, which sets out to critique calls for a shift in U.S. policy along realist lines—retrenchment, offshore balancing and a zero-sum approach—and instead promotes selective engagement in order to ‘retake the offensive’ and protect the international liberal order:

... the most detailed and compelling historical work indicates that American power and activism have been necessary—if not sufficient—conditions for the erection and preservation of that order. ..., insofar as the United States benefits from a world that is more peaceful, more stable, more economically open and prosperous, and more respectful of individual rights and democratic values, it would seem that the liberal order has been a good thing for America as well.⁷¹

Accordingly, Russia is perceived as a threat, and additional outputs from RAND lay out their position; Brian Jenkins, Senior Adviser to the RAND President, writes in a lengthy report⁷² that a “nationalistic and revanchist Russia” is set on “intimidating its neighbors, destabilizing Europe and undermining NATO”.⁷³

To facilitate his ambition of a sphere of influence from the Baltic republics in the north to Bulgaria in the south, Putin believes that these countries should see that NATO is unwilling or unable to defend them. In the Kremlin’s view, they must be kept weak and subservient, undermining Europe’s currently fragile unity and the entire Western alliance.⁷⁴

RAND’s development of its doctrine as it pertains to the Baltics culminated in a widely-cited report of a series of wargame exercises conducted over

⁶⁹ About the RAND Corporation | RAND. Accessed February 20, 2017. <http://www.rand.org/about.html>.

⁷⁰ Financial Statements, Fiscal Year Ended September 30 2016, Rand Corporation. Accessed February 20, 2017. https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/corporate_pubs/CP600/CP665/RAND_CP665-2016.pdf.

⁷¹ Brands, Hal, *American Grand Strategy and the Liberal Order: Continuity, Change, and Options for the Future*, 2016. Accessed February 20, 2017. http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/perspectives/PE200/PE209/RAND_PE209.pdf.

⁷² Jenkins, Michael Brian, “A Revanchist Russia Versus an Uncertain West: An Appreciation of the Situation Since the 2014 Ukrainian Crisis”, 2016. Accessed February 20, 2017. http://www.rand.org/pubs/external_publications/EP66776.html.

⁷³ Jenkins, Brian Michael, “Dealing with a Revanchist Russia.” Accessed February 20, 2017. <http://www.rand.org/blog/2017/02/dealing-with-a-revanchist-russia.html>.

⁷⁴ Jenkins, Brian Michael, “Dealing with a Revanchist Russia.” Accessed February 20, 2017. <http://www.rand.org/blog/2017/02/dealing-with-a-revanchist-russia.html>.

two years by RAND,⁷⁵ which sought to determine the consequences if Russia decided to ‘reclaim’ the territories of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, and what, if anything, could be done to prevent it.

Their findings confirmed what many in the security community had long suspected; NATO, in its current configuration and posture, is incapable of defending the territory of the Baltic states:

... that if Russia were to conduct a short-warning attack against the Baltic States, Moscow’s forces could roll to the outskirts of the Estonian capital of Tallinn and the Latvian capital of Riga in 36 to 60 hours. In such a scenario, the United States and its allies would not only be outranged and outgunned, but also outnumbered.⁷⁶

The report concluded that it was possible to ‘avoid such consequences’ by cost-effectively deterring Russia and that “a force of about seven brigades, including three heavy armored brigades—adequately supported by airpower, land-based fires, and other enablers on the ground and ready to fight at the onset of hostilities—could suffice to prevent the rapid overrun of the Baltic states”⁷⁷.

RAND, then, has above all the other think tanks provided the most substantial, consistent and robust outputs on Baltic security over the past few years, has taken a very hard-line on Russia, is highly supportive of bolstering the defence capabilities and postures of the Baltic nations, and has positioned itself as one of the lead policy sources for future decision makers.

4.7. Center for Strategic and International Studies

The Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) has produced the second largest number of outputs directly on the issue of Baltic security out of the twelve think tanks studied. CSIS topped GGTTI’s list of national security and national security think tanks, ranked number five in its foreign policy and international affairs list, and ranked sixth on its most significant impact on public policy list.

CSIS, established in 1962, is generally considered to be centre-right in its ideology, and its organizational characteristic is best described as ‘academic-

⁷⁵ Shlapak, David A. “Wargaming the Defense of the Baltics.” Accessed February 20, 2017. http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1253.html.

⁷⁶ Shlapak, David A. “Outnumbered, Outranged, and Outgunned: How Russia Defeats NATO.” Accessed February 20, 2017. <http://www.rand.org/blog/2016/04/outnumbered-outranged-and-outgunned-how-russia-defeats.html>.

⁷⁷ Shlapak, David A. “Wargaming the Defense of the Baltics.” Accessed February 20, 2017. http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1253.html.

diversified; a category of think tanks which “engender the credibility, support, and influence of the academic community and are afforded the respect paid to scholars and scholarly research; resemble academic institutions but are “universities without students”; staffed by academics; characterized by an academic culture and organizational structure; follow established academic disciplines; and conduct research on longer time horizons”⁷⁸ This is reflected in its outputs; unlike some of the others which rely heavily on short op-eds to advocate their policy positions, CSIS tends to publish report-length pdf’s which delve deeper into policy issues in a measured way.

CSIS began to grow alarmed by Russia in 2008, particularly over Georgia, and raised the potential for increasingly sour relations between Moscow and the West. At that time, it favoured a policy of engagement better grounded, but not unlike, the position held by the Carnegie Foundation. A 2008 report states:

In times of conflict, both Russia and NATO’s instinct has often been to walk away, to devalue the relationship, and take a more confrontational stand. While that strategy suffices in the short term, it rarely benefits either side in the long term. Whether they like to admit it or not, the United States, Europe, and Russia need one another for economic stability and the safety and security of their own citizens.⁷⁹

In 2014, the volume of outputs on Russia and the Baltics increased significantly. CSIS regretted Crimea’s annexation by Russia, yet admitted there was very little the U.S. or NATO could, or indeed should, have done:

... there was no credible military option for the West to prevent the takeover of Crimea even if we had substantial warning of Russia’s intent. At present, we have no alliance with Ukraine and no commitment to come to its defense. While we abhor Putin’s trampling of the post-Cold War order in seeking to change national boundaries by force, and fear its implications for future international security, the United States had no compelling national security interests that would have justified the risks of direct military intervention.⁸⁰

Here, and in other commentaries, CSIS writers were critical of free-loading by U.S. allies:

... do those NATO countries not now allocating the recommended 2 percent of gross domestic product to national defense need a more compelling “wake-up call” than Putin’s recent activities in Ukraine? Certainly Latvia and Lithuania, reportedly spending less than 1 percent of GDP, ought to rethink their allocations.⁸¹

⁷⁸ McGann, 2007, p. 33

⁷⁹ “The NATO-Russia Relationship.” Center for Strategic and International Studies. Accessed February 20, 2017. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/nato-russia-relationship>.

⁸⁰ “Responding to Putin’s Plan Post-Crimea.” Center for Strategic and International Studies. Accessed February 20, 2017. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/responding-putin%E2%80%99s-plan-post-crimea>.

⁸¹ *Ibid*

Nevertheless, the authors recommend that forward stationing conventional forces, on a routine or even perhaps permanent basis, would be advisable, and they disagree with what they report to be a popular sentiment:

Our sense from talking to numerous NATO experts in the United States and Europe, however, is that the alliance is, in fact, reluctant to step up in these areas. Some argue that planning, and related exercises, are threatening to Russia and would result in a dangerous reaction.⁸²

Later that year, CSIS suggested more substantial ways in which to bolster the Baltic states and deter Russia, including approving of Obama's \$1 billion pledge to boost the military presence in Eastern Europe, by putting European ships forward, and by staging collective defence exercises, although CSIS stopped short of advocating forward deployment, which they claimed would be an overly provocative move and in any case would be unlikely to find funding or support.⁸³ Again, CSIS reiterates that "NATO's hesitancy will further embolden Russia along NATO's periphery."⁸⁴

A sense of urgency around Baltic security had emerged from the think tank by 2015, and CSIS Senior Fellow and Deputy Director Jeffery Rathke began arguing that NATO's current inability to defend the Baltic states was ultimately destabilising for Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia: "these countries face the prospect of discovering on any given day that several Russian army divisions are on their frontier with unclear (or perhaps very clear) intentions".⁸⁵ He repeats what appears to have become the consensus view amongst his colleagues: "the predictable presence of sizeable NATO forces along the frontier with Russia will be a crucial ingredient in a new deterrence approach".⁸⁶ By 2016, CSIS advocated adding a revitalized nuclear strategy to reinforce the credibility of NATO's nuclear deterrent:

The deterrent must remain effective, including in the context of an increasing Russian anti-access/area denial challenge, which means continuing the modernization of the force and the platforms it depends on. A more active program to exercise nuclear capabilities, still separated from conventional exercises, would demonstrate concrete action by allies to deepen the credibility of this assurance. Greater participation of nonnuclear allies in such exercises would do so too.⁸⁷

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ "NATO and Ukraine: The Need for Real World Strategies and for European Partners Rather than Parasites." Center for Strategic and International Studies. Accessed February 20, 2017. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/nato-and-ukraine-need-real-world-strategies-and-european-partners-rather-parasites>.

⁸⁴ "NATO's Eastern Front!" Center for Strategic and International Studies. Accessed February 20, 2017. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/nato%E2%80%99s-eastern-front>.

⁸⁵ "Can NATO Deter Russia in View of the Conventional Military Imbalance in the East?" Center for Strategic and International Studies. Accessed February 20, 2017. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/can-nato-deter-russia-view-conventional-military-imbalance-east>.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ "NATO's Nuclear Policy as Part of a Revitalized Deterrence Strategy." Center for Strategic and International Studies. Accessed February 20, 2017. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/nato%E2%80%99s-nuclear-policy-part-revitalized-deterrence-strategy>.

By the end of 2016, CSIS had thrown its support behind Obama's European Reassurance Initiative (ERI); the funding was slotted to be quadrupled from the previous year, to \$3.4 billion up from \$789 million, and their position on Russia had deteriorated to one of deep mistrust:

The Russians have established a pattern of crying foul on any moves to enhance deterrence, particularly any steps that bring NATO forces closer to their borders, as part of their long-term effort to constrain NATO actions and undermine Europe's cohesion. By portraying the U.S. actions as aggressive and provocative, they hope in Russia to stoke fears of encirclement and in Europe to reduce ERI's impact and discourage allies from participating.⁸⁸

4.8. Atlantic Council

The Atlantic Council had 52 outputs which dealt with the Baltics in a substantive way, which makes this enigmatic think tank far and away the most engaged with Baltic security issues out of the twelve studied. Its visibility is significantly less prominent than its competitors; it is ranked by TTGGI as the 16th top think tank in the U.S., 9th in the Defence and National Security category, and 18th in the Foreign Policy and International Affairs category. In terms of its size, it reported its total liabilities and net assets in 2015 to be roughly \$33.5 million, which is less than a tenth of that of larger think tanks such as Heritage, Carnegie, or RAND.

Looks may be deceiving, however. A NATO-funded report written in 1998 stated that, "Few people outside the Washington Beltway know about the work of ACUS in part because its directors have been generally satisfied to act behind the scenes, promoting their ideas and not their institution".⁸⁹ This 'behind the scenes' activity makes it difficult to assess its impact, the NATO report adds: because "there was 'no way to prove the effectiveness' of the Council if its main function was to create a personal community of influentials".⁹⁰

These 'influentials' are key to understanding the Atlantic Council's impact. Their board of directors and international advisory board is a veritable who's who list of former high-ranking US government officials. Many members of its leadership have also left the Atlantic Council to serve in senior government positions. Under the Obama administration, to name just two of several,

⁸⁸ "The European Reassurance Initiative." Center for Strategic and International Studies. Accessed February 20, 2017. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/european-reassurance-initiative-0>.

⁸⁹ Small, Melvin. "The Atlantic Council--The Early Years, Prepared for NATO as a report related to a Research Fellowship", June 1998. Accessed April 18, 2017. <http://www.nato.int/acad/fellow/96-98/small.pdf>.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

Chuck Hagel left the Atlantic Council's chairmanship to become Secretary of Defense, and council member Susan Rice left to serve as US Ambassador to the UN. More recently, John Huntsman, chairman of the international advisory board, has been reported to have accepted the ambassadorship to Russia.⁹¹

The Atlantic Council was founded in 1961, with the express purpose of basing its activities "on the conviction that a healthy transatlantic relationship is fundamental to progress in organizing a strong international system".⁹² As one could expect from this mandate, Baltic security issues appear to be prioritised by the Atlantic Council more so than they are by most other think tanks. And little has changed since the 1998 report which highlighted that "recent administrations have asked ACUS officials to play important roles in working with Russians and East Europeans during this difficult time".⁹³

Because the Atlantic Council seems to have a distinctive understanding of 'impact', they have largely shunned seeking influence in the modern manner of most other think tanks; rather than releasing a steady stream of op-eds, tweets, and blog posts, they tend instead to focus on events, congressional testimony and research publications. A large proportion of the outputs studied for this article are simply instances of these, and their volume indicates just how actively the Atlantic Council is engaged with Baltic security issues; a conference call with a Minister of Defense or a strategy session with a half-dozen principals are much more substantive affairs than a 500-word blog post.

Their events, such as roundtables, strategy sessions, discussions, and conference calls, are more often than not conducted behind closed doors or off-the-record. Take 2012 as an example; at least three events were hosted by the Atlantic Council which pertained to Baltic security: i) an off-the-record strategy session was hosted by Rasa Juknevičienė, Minister of National Defense of Lithuania, and which included Baltic Ambassadors to the United States, for an off-the-record strategy session;⁹⁴ ii) a discussion on recent developments and future prospects of the Enhanced Partnership in Northern Europe (e-PINE), with an address by Evaldas Ignatavicius, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania, and also featured Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European

⁹¹ Savransky, Rebecca. "Huntsman accepts ambassadorship to Russia: report." *The Hill*. March 08, 2017. Accessed April 18, 2017. <http://thehill.com/homenews/administration/323050-huntsman-offered-russia-ambassadorship-report>.

⁹² Atlantic Council. "History." Atlantic Council. Accessed April 18, 2017. <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/about/history>.

⁹³ Small, Melvin. "The Atlantic Council--The Early Years, Prepared for NATO as a report related to a Research Fellowship", June 1998. Accessed April 18, 2017. <http://www.nato.int/acad/fellow/96-98/small.pdf>.

⁹⁴ Harmala, Jason. "Building Regional Security – Making Smart Defense Work in Practice." Atlantic Council. Accessed April 18, 2017. <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/events/past-events/building-regional-security-making-smart-defense-work-in-practice>.

and Eurasian Affairs, Ambassador Marie Yovanovitch, Atlantic Council Senior Fellow Robert Nurick, and Atlantic Council Executive Vice President Damon Wilson;⁹⁵ and iii) an ‘interactive conference’ titled: “Building a Secure Cyber Future: Attacks on Estonia, Five Years On,” featuring ‘representatives from Estonia, technical experts, the private sector, and both current and former US government officials.’⁹⁶ While it would be foolhardy to draw conclusions about the content of such events, it is a safe assumption to make that the Atlantic Council is a significant forum for US policy-makers and foreign government officials, and they quite obviously aim to keep Baltic security high on the foreign policy agendas of influential US officials.

Fortunately, the Atlantic Council’s stances on the Baltics are more discernible from its intermittent research publications. One of the most notable is its 2011 compendium of issue briefs titled ‘Nordic-Baltic Security in the 21st Century: The Regional Agenda and the Global Role,’ which provides “an overview of the current state of security in the region, as well as actionable policy advice on how to further deepen regional collaboration on security, defense, and foreign policy”,⁹⁷ and which stresses that the region should partner with the United States to advance issues such as European energy security and defending against cyberattacks. More recently, the Atlantic Council has stressed the importance of deterring Russia. Writing in *Foreign Affairs* in 2015, Robbie Gramer, an Associate Director of the Atlantic Council, expressed strong support for the controversial Operation Dragoon Ride:

Images from Operation Dragoon Ride are reminiscent of the days of World War II; cheering crowds lining the streets in Europe to meet U.S. armoured columns in Europe. The stark historical parallels convey the sense that Europe is once again in danger, and that U.S. security commitments and military presence remain the linchpin of Europe’s security architecture. Dragoon Ride illustrated the United States and NATO’s new emphasis on military exercises along its eastern periphery, the growing importance of strategic communications for NATO, and the shortcomings of both U.S. commitments to Europe and how it frames those commitments. Dragoon Ride is a model operation that should be emulated, but whether operations such as this goes far enough in bolstering European security remains doubtful.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Atlantic Council. “The United States and Nordic-Baltic Cooperation: An Enhanced Partnership in a Global World.” Atlantic Council. Accessed April 18, 2017. <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/events/past-events/the-united-states-and-nordicbaltic-cooperation-an-enhanced-partnership-in-a-global-world>.

⁹⁶ Chuck, Adrienne. “Building a Secure Cyber Future: Attacks on Estonia, Five Years On.” Atlantic Council. Accessed April 18, 2017. <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/events/past-events/building-a-secure-cyber-future-attacks-on-estonia-five-years-on>.

⁹⁷ Atlantic Council. “Nordic-Baltic Security in the 21st Century.” Atlantic Council. Accessed April 18, 2017. <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/publications/reports/nordicbaltic-security-in-the-21st-century>.

⁹⁸ Gramer, Robbie. “Operation Dragoon Ride.” *Foreign Affairs*. May 13, 2015. Accessed April 18, 2017. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/baltics/2015-05-13/operation-dragoon-ride>.

In 2016, two publications were released by the Atlantic Council that has brought their position into even more stark relief. The first, entitled “Effective Defense of the Baltics”, argues that “NATO has the capacity to win a conventional war in the Baltics, even in the face of a short-notice Russian attack—if appropriate steps are taken to provide a substantial defense”, and proceeds to list several functional strategic and policy prescriptions to achieve that level of preparedness.⁹⁹ The second publication, an issue brief entitled “Countering Russian Aggression in Eastern Europe: Leveraging US Rotational Forces” by Lt. Col. Jonathan P. Dunne, the US Marine Corps senior fellow at the Atlantic Council, advocates the utility of US rotational forces in the Baltics, arguing that:

There is a limited opportunity to recognize the ERI for what it is—a significant US effort to enhance Eastern European security—*through the use of a rotational force construct*. The ability of individual nations to embrace the operational benefits of rotational forces toward capacity building, deterrence, and reinforcement efforts, while mitigating their sustainment and force protection risks, is important. More so, a regional strategy that eliminates redundancies and otherwise promotes rotational force efficiencies, is desirable. The toil of the post-Cold War era has produced a degree of peace and stability in Eastern Europe that should be recognized and defended; a collective approach that leverages US rotational forces can help safeguard that hard-earned victory.¹⁰⁰

While these recent reports may give us more of a concrete indication of its stance on the Baltics, it is important to stress that the Atlantic Council should not be judged on their publications alone. Melvin Small has suggested that the reports themselves are not as important as the process by which they are written:

Joseph Harned, the Council official who organized, developed, and chaired many of the study groups that produced books and policy papers, acknowledges that most of those publications were not especially interesting, not only in hindsight, but even when they were published. He could see why government officials failed to find innovative or immediately useable strategies in ACUS reports. But that was not the point of the study-group activity. The key for him, which had never been clearly explicated to those who took part in the activity, was the eighteen-month to two-year process of producing a final report. During that time period, government and business leaders, often younger second-tier people, got to know and understand one another, as they created permanent relationships—“backchannel networks of continuing communication”—that lasted for decades. The bringing together of small groups of leaders and future leaders who wor-

⁹⁹ Franklin D. Kramer and Bantz J. Craddock. “Effective Defense of the Baltics.” Atlantic Council. Accessed April 18, 2017. <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/publications/reports/effective-defense-of-the-baltic>.

¹⁰⁰ Jonathan Dunne. “Countering Russian Aggression in Eastern Europe.” Atlantic Council. Accessed April 18, 2017. <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/publications/issue-briefs/countering-russian-aggression-in-eastern-europe>.

ked intimately with one another over a lengthy period of time was what was important to Harned not the publications that of necessity had to be bland.¹⁰¹

4.9. Cato Institute

The Cato Institute, while having few outputs which either mention or deal primarily with Baltic security, nonetheless warrants attention due to its viewpoint: it has, unlike all the others, taken the relatively radical stance of being against U.S. underwriting of Baltic security.

GGTTI ranks The Cato Institute as tenth overall in its ‘Most Significant Impact on Public Policy’ measure, seventeenth in ‘Foreign Policy and International Affairs,’ and thirteenth in ‘Defense and National Security.’ In terms of its size, its liabilities and net assets amount to over \$71 million,¹⁰² and it currently hosts 67 ‘policy scholars’,¹⁰³ two of whom, Ted Galen Carpenter and Doug Bandow, are vocal critics of America’s membership in NATO.

Cato is one of the few libertarian think tanks that makes forays into foreign policy, and it is a clear case of an advocacy-type institution; its research and analysis is clearly motivated by a libertarian, partisan worldview, and in terms of foreign policy, it often takes realist positions. On Baltic security issues, it has sought to carve out a unique position amongst think tanks as being particularly critical of U.S. security commitments in the region.

In terms of grand strategy, Carpenter takes his cue from Posen, Mearsheimer and Walt and writes in *National Interest*, a leading conservative magazine, that:

The goal should not be to collect allies simply for the sake of collecting allies, regardless of the costs and risks involved. Acquiring an assortment of weak, vulnerable security clients masquerading as useful allies is the height of folly. They are dangerous strategic liabilities, not assets. Yet that is what Washington has done by pushing NATO’s expansion into Russia’s traditional sphere of influence.¹⁰⁴

Elsewhere, Carpenter gives measured praise to Mr Trump for raising the issue during the presidential campaign:

¹⁰¹ Small, Melvin. “The Atlantic Council--The Early Years, Prepared for NATO as a report related to a Research Fellowship”, June 1998. Accessed April 18, 2017. <http://www.nato.int/acad/fellow/96-98/small.pdf>.

¹⁰² Cato Institute 2015 Annual Report. Date accessed February 20, 2017. <https://object.cato.org/sites/cato.org/files/pubs/pdf/cato-annual-report-2015-update-ii.pdf>

¹⁰³ “Policy Scholars.” Cato Institute. Accessed February 20, 2017. <https://www.cato.org/people/policy-scholars>.

¹⁰⁴ Carpenter, Ted Galen. “Are the Baltic States Next?” Cato Institute. March 24, 2014. Accessed February 20, 2017. <https://www.cato.org/publications/commentary/are-baltic-states-next>.

For countries that purport to worry about Russian aggression, their efforts have indeed been shockingly insufficient. For example, Lithuania's military spending climbed above a meager 1 percent for the first time in 2015. But in fairness, the free-riding of the Baltic republics on America's security exertions has been no more pronounced or outrageous than the other European members of NATO.¹⁰⁵

Citing the RAND study described above, Carpenter claims that the inability of NATO to defend the Baltic states provides a golden opportunity for the U.S. to reconsider its commitments and strategy, for "Moscow's rule was obviously unpleasant for the inhabitants, but preventing it was never a strategic priority before for the United States, and there is no compelling reason why it should be one now."¹⁰⁶ Doug Bandow puts it even more bluntly, writing in *Foreign Affairs* that "Montenegro, the Baltic states, and Ukraine, for instance, are irrelevant to U.S. security," adding that "if the Baltic states and Poland want NATO garrisons, for instance, other European nations should provide them."¹⁰⁷

Cato seems to have seized the moment offered by Mr Trump's comments on NATO and used the occasion to publicise their strategy vision, and they were successful in placing their outputs in highly visible periodicals. Whether this momentum will be sustained over the course of Trump's term, remains to be seen.

Conclusion

Several recent and widely circulated outputs from academic realists and think tanks have urged the U.S. to reassess its security commitments to the Baltic states. This may have formed the impression amongst some readers that these indicate an attitudinal shift within the U.S. foreign policy establishment. This article sought to dispel this notion. First, while some prominent realist academics are indeed advocating a grand strategy of 'restraint', their ideas are finding little resonance amongst U.S. media outlets or policy-makers, in large part because their ideas are so far from the mainstream. Think tanks, on the other hand, do traditionally enjoy more exposure in the media and access to

¹⁰⁵ Carpenter, Ted Galen. "Biden's Baltic Bombast." Cato Institute. August 25, 2016. Accessed February 20, 2017. <https://www.cato.org/publications/commentary/bidens-baltic-bombast>. Carpenter had expanded on this theme earlier, in 2014; see Carpenter, Ted Galen. "Are the Baltic Republics Serious about Defense?" Cato Institute. December 16, 2014. Accessed February 20, 2017. <https://www.cato.org/blog/are-baltic-republics-serious-about-defense>.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Bandow, Doug. "Trump and U.S. Alliances." *Foreign Affairs*. January 25, 2017. Accessed February 22, 2017. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2017-01-25/trump-and-us-alliances>.

policy-makers, and their views are therefore more likely to find a receptive audience. However, from twelve of the most prominent U.S. foreign policy think tanks, only one—the Cato Institute—has embraced a realist perspective. Six others—Carnegie Endowment, Hoover Institution, Brookings Institution, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Council on Foreign Relations, and Center for American Progress—have shown only marginal interest in the Baltics; while they are certainly concerned about Russia, generally supportive of America’s role in NATO, and seem, at least casually, alarmed about the present vulnerability of the Baltic states, they have not formulated anything resembling a robust or comprehensive research or advocacy campaign to that effect. The remaining five think tanks—Century for a New American Security, RAND Corporation, Heritage Foundation, Center for Strategic and International Studies, and Atlantic Council, are all either seriously engaged in research on the security of the Baltics, or advocating for an increased, or at least retained, U.S. military presence in the region. To the question, then, of whether U.S. foreign policy think tanks are generally shifting towards a realist perspective on the Baltic states, the answer is an unequivocal no. However, because precisely half of the think tanks that were studied are only showing marginal interest in the Baltic states, while they may be sympathetic to their predicament, it would be too much of an exaggeration to conclude that the U.S. think tank community overall were staunch defenders of the Baltic states.

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