

AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

Notes on the AIIA Roundtable: Connecting Theory and Policy: Reflecting on the Work of Institutes of International Affairs

*51th Annual Convention,
International Studies Association
New Orleans, Thursday 18th of February, 2010*

Aim

The Roundtable provided an opportunity for representatives of institutes of international affairs to discuss the role that such institutes play in crossing the divide between theory and practice in international affairs.

Representatives from around the world shared their experiences on the differing roles of their institutes in facilitating communication and discussion between academics, policy makers and the general public – whether as a forum for public debate, a knowledge-generator or policy advisor.

The Roundtable also provided a forum for participants to share experiences and learning between institutes and identify areas for future growth and collaboration. This followed on from a meeting of 39 representatives of institutes of international affairs at the Australian Institute of International Affairs' 75th Anniversary National Conference in August 2008.

Discussion

Ms Melissa Conley Tyler **Australian Institute of International Affairs, Australia**

Ms Conley Tyler opened the Roundtable with discussion of the topic of institutes of international affairs and the various models that can be identified among the more than 100 institutes worldwide.

Each participant was then called on to speak about their institute including on the following:

1. *Aims and Activities* – What is the role of your institute and its main activities? What model does your institute follow in fulfilling its mission?
2. *Connecting Theory and Practice* – How does your institute attempt to connect theory and policy? Are there areas where this is particularly successful or difficult to achieve?
3. *Challenges* – How does your institute balance factors such as an academic v. policy orientation, influence v. independence from decision-makers, regional v. global focus and impartiality v. policy engagement?

Professor Jan Melissen **Netherlands Institute of International Affairs, Netherlands**

The institute, generally known as Clingendael, is 26 years old and has several component parts and a focus on four areas: diplomatic studies, European studies, security and conflict, energy. It is composed of 80 staff members. The institute also has a diplomatic training academy to train future diplomats, combining education with practical training.

The institute has a research role, particularly in policy-oriented research. This is relevant for government and the institute is partly dependent on government for finances. Nevertheless, Clingendael is independent and its director is a non-government employee. Government funding does not translate into the institute's views. The institute has an independent research agenda which it strives to keep relevant, by staying connected with theory for instance. Clingendael does not officially endorse any specific view and there is often difference of opinion between their own researchers.

Clingendael has strong links with media and often receives calls for immediate comment when there is a major world event. The institute's goal is "to be visible in government, in academics and in our own journals."

Looking at challenges that the institute faces, the main one identified was the issue of newer think tanks having more and more impact. As a consequence, Clingendael also wants to have more impact and one change is that its original agenda, which was focusing mainly on Trans-Atlantic issues, has now become much wider.

Dr Cornelius Adebahr

The German Council on Foreign Relations, Germany

The German Council on Foreign Relations has around 1500 members including corporate members and youth group. In addition, the Council is a research institute, with its own journal, a library and documentation. The Council produces around 150 publications, 1200 interviews and 150 events per year.

The Council's aim is to promote dialogue and play a role connecting theory to practice: invitation lists for events include academics in order to remain connected with theory; the Council also has PhD students working and researching for its policy work.

The Council historically also had a Trans-Atlantic focus but now is tackling issues such as China or energy security. However there is less focus on the Middle-East or the Global South.

On the question of independence, research is mainly funded by recipients while a total of 18% of funding comes from the Foreign Office.

Mr Mats Braun

Institute of International Relations, Czech Republic

The Czech Institute of International Relations is a research organisation with 19 research Fellows and a library open to the public. The Institute has an exhaustive research agenda with a strong policy orientation. The institute aims to produce quality research on international relations, build the prestige and status of international relations as a science, assist the conduct of Czech Republic policy making and promote public awareness of international issues. The focus is on both global and regional issues.

The Institute helps connect theory and policy through its links with universities, its PhD program and through its publications: books, textbooks, journal articles and a monthly journal. Institute research is policy-oriented and the Institute brings academia and practice together at seminars and policy briefings. He explained that for him “theory understanding helps policy work”.

The Institute has a permanent budget from Ministry of Foreign Affairs to support several projects such as seminars. This help constitutes 50% of its budget, with the other half coming from research grants based on performance. The Institute is independent in its policy briefings – while it is invited to look at particular areas, there is no pressure on what to say – and the Institute has some media appearances.

Dr Laurence Weinbaum
Israel Council on Foreign Relations, Israel

The Israel Council on Foreign Relations includes a focus on bringing policy-makers and academics together both through events and the Council’s own journal.

The Council is not government sponsored – funds come from the World Jewish Congress – and it has managed to preserve its independence. While government may occasionally ask the Council to look at a particular area, it has never been told what to say.

On the issues it tackles, the Council takes an interdisciplinary vision but doesn’t endorse any particular view. The Council has a commitment to being non-partisan which is necessary but hard to fulfil all the time. The Council is valued by government as a non-government platform for visiting figures, especially controversial speakers, who may prefer to speak outside government.

Ms Aurora Adame
Consejo Mexicano de Asuntos Internacionales, Mexico

The Mexican Council on Foreign Relations follows a similar model to the US Council on Foreign Relations. It has 450 members, 22 corporate sponsors and a tiny staff. She added that to become a member of council, the approval of 24 people is necessary and it is viewed as highly prestigious. The Council has created trust to build up its endowment. The Council does not have its own any researchers but tries to join efforts with others. “We don’t want to be a second ministry of Foreign Affairs”.

Nevertheless, she said that she was jealous of the independence some other institutes might have. The Council is mainly sponsored and funded by corporation sponsors and membership fees. To be precise, 18% of the funds come from scholars, 18% from public officials and the rest from the private sector.

Mr Alberto Sepulveda
Instituto de Relaciones Internacionales, Chile

The Chilean Institute of International Relations was outlined, including differences between it and some of the other institutes on the panel. It has a focus on Latin American issues.

The issue of diplomatic academies was discussed and the idea was put forward that Chile needs urgent program of training. He suggested the benefits of trying to organise and establish a network of such academies in Latin America.

Dr Eduardo Platon

World Affairs Council of America (New Orleans chapter), US

The nationwide network of World Affairs Councils was are presented with 90 world affairs councils across the U.S.A. The New Orleans chapter is one of these and it works actively with other councils in the region.

The Council is a non-partisan organization and that one of its missions is to educate New Orleans people on international issues. This is achieved through a range of events and engagement activities. The Council is very focused on public awareness and involvement.

Conclusion

Discussion identified a number of common themes and challenges faced by institutes of international affairs from around the world:

- funding is a key preoccupation and priority of all institutes;
- issues of independence, linked with funding, was also a concern for all of the institutes;
- institutes were conscious of the need to engage with policy-making and provide a bridge between theory and practice;
- each institute is also aware of the importance of visibility for its work.

An interesting aspect of discussion was to see the different ways that various institutes deal with these common issues.

All agreed on the value of the role that institutes play – and the difficulties inherent – in their role “in the middle” between government and academics.

It was agreed by participants that the discussion had been valuable. It was suggested that more opportunities be developed to exchange experiences and views between institutes of international affairs. Specifically, it was proposed that a similar roundtable be held at the next International Studies Association Convention in Montreal in February 2010.