What do Think Tanks do? Chatham House in Search of the United States

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About the Author.

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Abstract

Created in 1920, the London-based 'British Institute of International Affairs' (in 1926 renamed the Royal Institute of International Affairs) has for a century been at the forefront of an ongoing 'Anglo-American ' conversation about world politics. Yet even though the Institute was regarded from the outset as the institutional expression of a very 'special relationship' between the UK and the United States, it did very little independent research of its own on US foreign policy. This however began to change in the 1990s when the United States appeared to have become a 'superpower without a mission'. It then took on a more organized form following the attack of 9/11. At this critical juncture Chatham House decided to establish a new Study Group – the 'United States Discussion Group' (USDG) - which went on to discuss US foreign policy in depth. What this article sets out to do is look at the rise of Chatham House as a new kind of policy-oriented Think Tank before examining the origins of the USDG, the main contours of what was discussed within the Group, the degree to which these discussions were different to those then underway within the US itself, and finally assess the contribution it made in helping encourage further debate on the United States within Britain's foremost foreign policy Think Tank.

Key words: US foreign policy, Chatham House, Think Tanks, Bill Clinton , 9/11, G W Bush

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Introduction

What do Think Tanks do other than think and how much of a difference do the six thousand or more now in existence actually make to public policy? Unsurprisingly, scholars who have studied the phenomenon have come up with very different answers to the same questions. Indeed, the divide between those who write about Think Tanks is almost as great as the division between the Think Tanks themselves. Yet whether or not we view Think Tanks as something akin to a 'fifth estate' that has improved the quality of policy-making by providing disinterested 'research, analysis, and advice', or, by critics, as self-appointed advocates of special interests (and in some cases whole states) that do more to distort discussion than enhance it – apparently only 17% of those polled trust what Think Tanks say[1] - the fact of the matter is that Think Tanks have by now become increasingly important 'thought leaders' in the global policy discourse. As one of the more prolific writers on the subject has put it: 'Today, the effects of globalization, and the increasing demand for public policy responses to the world's array of political, economic, and social issues, have placed think tanks in a critical position as advocates, researchers, and policy advisers'. [2]

The extraordinary proliferation of Think Tanks raises several questions, but one much less discussed in the literature is not what do Think Tanks actually do but rather how and why did they come into being in the first place?[3] The answer normally provided is because of the challenges facing the world - the United States in particular - in the period immediately after WWII, followed many years later when a new generation of Think Tanks, often from outside the US itself, entered into the market-place of ideas. Yet Think Tanks specifically designed to discuss strategy or foreign policy have a much longer pedigree going as far back to the formation of the London-based Royal United Services

[1] Cited by Sasha Havlicek in Robin Niblett, *The Future of Think Tanks*, Chatham House, 21 November 2018, p.2.

[2] Quotes from Jim McGann, *The Fifth Estate: Think Tanks, Public Policy and Governance.* Brookings Institution Press, 2016.

[3] But see Priscilla Roberts, 'A century of international affairs think tanks in historical perspective', *International Journal* 70 (4), 535-555

Institute promoted by the Duke of Wellington to study the future of warfare in the light of the Napoleonic War.[4] This was followed in 1910 with the creation of a somewhat more pacific body in the shape of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. 1916 then saw the establishment of the Institute for Government Research which later merged with two other institutions to form the Brookings Institution in 1927'. [5] Nor were these the only 'non-governmental organizations' that reflected on international affairs. Indeed, long before the First World War, influential people within Britain in particular were already starting to think about how to preserve and promote what they saw as the benefits of 'Anglo-Saxon' civilization based on a heady mixture of 'Burke's theory of organic unity, social Darwinism, the absolute certainty of the superiority of 'white culture' (and in particular English), the sense of responsibility towards non-Europeans, and finally the idea of Imperial mission' [6]

But it was the huge crisis occasioned by the First World War and the desire to build a new world order on the debris left behind that compelled leading figures on both sides of the Atlantic to look towards establishing new kinds of institutions that would, it was believed, contribute towards a more 'scientific' understanding of world affairs.[7] However, underlying the establishment of these new bodies - including what soon came to be known as the 'British Institute of International Affairs' - was a wider set of objectives. In the British case this included, amongst other things, a desire to maintain what was then seen as the benefits of a sometime shaky Anglo-American relationship while exploiting London's position at the heart of an integrated system known as the British Empire within which the new Institute might be able to play a very influential role indeed. [8] The founders were also aware that they had been presented with

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[4] Shelford Bidwell, 'A History of the Royal United Services Institute', Commentary, 18 October 2005 from the *RUSI Journal*, 1991. https://rusi.org/commentary/history-royal-united-services-institute

[5] Donald E. Abelson, 'Old World: new world, the evolution and influence of foreign affairs think Tank Tanks' *International Affairs* 90: 1 (2014) p. 125.

[6] Andrea Bosco, 'The Round Table Movement and the Fall of the "Second" British Empire: 1909-1919' *Cambridge Scholars Publishing*, 2017, p3.

[7] The original idea was to create a joint body between New York and London. This however foundered and two separate and independent bodies emerged. The British Institute did attract some financial support from across the Atlantic but it was always quite modest. Thus in 1926 the London based Institute received support of £3000.00 each from both the Carnegie UK Trustees and Mr John D Rockefeller. By 1936 it reported it had received an additional research grant of £7937.17.2 from the Rockefeller Research Group. Figures from Stephen King-Hall, *Chatham House : A brief account of the origins, purposes, and methods of the Royal Institute of International Affairs*. Oxford University Press, 1937, pp. 21, 110.

[8] For further background on the origins of Chatham House see Andrea Bosco and Corneli Navari eds; *Chatham House and British Foreign Policy, 1919–1945: The Royal Institute of International Affairs during the Inter-War Period*, London: Lothian Foundation Press, 1994; and Edward Carrington Cabell and Mary Bone, *Chatham House: Its History and Inhabitants*. Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2004

a golden opportunity to develop such a body by virtue of having attended the peace conference in Paris in 1919. As one of its more senior members later declared, 'the idea of the Institute did not spring out of nothing at all'. It was not some 'fancy scheme'. Rather, it arose out of the 'concrete experience' of actually being in Paris at a crucial juncture in time when a large number of senior figures had gathered there 'under one roof in the Hotel Majestic'.[9] Here, after much deliberation, they came to the conclusion that what was needed was a collection of organized experts who could not only proffer sound advice to government but also provide a forum where informed people could gather together to discuss the major issues of the day.

Shaped by their experience in Paris, and led by several well known figures of whom perhaps the most crucial was the liberal imperialist Lionel Curtis - one of the driving forces behind the *Round Table* -[10] the newly created British Institute quickly established itself as one of the foremost organizations of its kind in the world. Launched in July 1920 in temporary accommodation, three years later it received a major boost when a wealthy Canadian, Colonel Leonard, purchased 'Chatham House' on St James' Square.[11] In the previous year it then launched its own in-house journal. In 1924 it appointed its first, and most famous Director of Studies, Arnold Toynbee; in the same year Toynbee then brought out the first of his landmark Surveys. A year later the Scottish philanthropist Sir Daniel Stevenson (who also went on to fund the Chair in International History at the LSE) created an endowment that helped fund the publication of further volumes on the important *History of the Peace Conference.* Then, in 1926, the Institute transitioned from being merely the British Institute of International Affairs to acquiring the 'Royal' seal of approval. And a year later it established its world famous Chatham House 'rule'.

Meanwhile, the Institute set about delivering on its promise of creating a space for policy-focused debate on world affairs. Its activities ranged far and wide from hosting keynote speakers of importance, bringing out sets of documents on international affairs, reviewing books (not all them published in English) and establishing links between different sets of professionals including academics –

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[9] 'Record of Proceedings at the Meeting of the Institute held at Chatham House on Friday, November 9th, 1923', *Journal of the British Institute of International Affairs*, Vol.. 2, No.6, November 1923, pp. 222-232.

[10] 'The aim' of The Round Table was 'to ensure the permanence of the British empire by reconstructing it as a federation representative of all its self-governing parts'. Quoted in Alex May, 'Curtis, Lionel George ((1872–1955) *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 23 September, 2004.

[11] Lionel Curtis's appreciative obituary on Leonard can be found in *International Affairs,* Vol. 10, No. 1, Jan., 1931, pp. 1-3.

notably those at the LSE, Oxford and Aberystwyth – who were engaged in the up-and-coming field of international politics. Nothing it did suggested any interest in theory: empirical analysis of real countries in real time was the order of the day. And even though it took more than a passing interest in the League of Nations and its activities, there was never anything especially idealistic or utopian about its attitude towards it. It did however seek to promote research and one of the vehicles it developed for doing this was 'Study Groups'.[12] Originally conceived in the late 1920s, these groups went on to look at a number of key questions in some detail leading to a major report on gold and the gold standard (in which Keynes played a role), another on the 'colonial question', and two reports on the key challenges facing the world economy in the 1930s: mass unemployment and the depression in world agriculture. In 1936 the Institute also set up a study group to look at the problem of nationalism. The published result in the shape of an Oxford University Press volume published in 1939 could hardly be described as intellectually earth shattering. [13] As one observer put it rather kindly, it fell 'short of success'. [14] But work within the group did contribute in important ways to more significant studies by the group's Chair, E.H.Carr, in the form of his classic *The Twenty Years' Crisis* (1939) and *Nationalism and After* (1945)

Study Groups leading to weighty, if not always the most scintillating of publications, thus form an interesting and important part of the early Chatham House story. Moreover, this continued through the war and then into the post-war period with several more books being published on a variety of topics ranging from Soviet foreign policy to the Middle East, through India and on (inevitably) to Britain's never easy relationship with Europe. Yet in spite of this impressive output, and indeed in spite of the historic link between the Institute in London and its sister organization in New York – the Council on Foreign Relations [15] - there was very little organized debate within Chatham House itself about US foreign policy. There had, it is true, been a group which had looked at the 'USA' back in the 1920s. However, it had only held four meetings.[16] Over the years there had also been a whole tranche of US-related articles

[12] Roger Morgan, 'To Advance the Sciences of International Politics: Chatham House's early Research', *International Affairs,* April 1979, Vol. 55, No 2, pp. 240-251.

[13] *Nationalism* Oxford University Press, 1939.

[14] Wilfred Knapp, 'Fifty Years of Chatham House Books', *International Affairs*, Special Issue, Vol. 46, 5, November 1970, p.145.

[15] See his *Special Interests, The State and the Anglo-American Alliance, 1939-1945*, Frank Cass, 1995.

[16] See Roger Morgan, op. cit, p.244.

published in the house journal. But these had not been the result of any Study Group. And there was of course no end of transatlantic discussions about the state of the 'special relationship' and whether or not it remained special. But these in the main tended to focus more on the relationship between the two countries and not on the drivers of US foreign policy itself.

This brings us then to the main purpose of this article which is less concerned to explain what Chatham House did not do or why (though we will touch on the issue) but rather explain why the discussion on US foreign policy began to shift into an altogether different gear toward the end of the twentieth century. As we shall see, this unfolded in three stages. It began in the 1990s with the shock caused by the quite unexpected collapse of the USSR and the publication of a Chatham House book which asked the not unreasonable question about what impact this would have on US foreign policy as well as the world at large? It was then another shock in the shape of 9/11 – a new 'Pearl Harbour' as some characterized the attack – that led to an even deeper engagement leading to the establishment of a designated 'United States Discussion Group' in 2001. Finally, as America's contested but still vital role in the world continued to be disputed at home and abroad as one presidency gave way to another in 2008 , Chatham House moved to establish a more permanent programme looking at the United States on a more consistent basis. In what follows we shall therefore look at each of these three 'moments' and examine in some detail the discussions which were undertaken within Chatham House and the broader contribution these have made to the wider debate on America's international role in the modern world.

A Director's lament

There is nothing that well established institutions like doing more than commemorating anniversaries, and in 1995 Chatham House commemorated its seventy fifth; and who better to reflect on three quarters of a century of activity than its then Director, Laurence Martin? [17] Martin in turn looked back to 1970 when it was celebrating its fiftieth anniversary and discovered something rather surprising: that for all its resources and the many books it had published since the 1920s, Chatham House had written little over the years on US foreign policy. Indeed, the author of the article pointing this out -

[17] Laurence Martin was appointed Director at Chatham House in 1991. Between 1964 and 1968 he held the Woodrow Wilson Chair at Aberystwyth before being appointed Professor of War Studies at King's (1968-1978) and then Vice-Chancellor at Newcastle University. He gave the Reith Lectures in 1981 later published as *The Two-Edged Sword: Armed force in the Modern World* , New York, Norton, 1982.

Wilfred Knapp- had commented that 'the reader' of its many 'books over its first fifty years…would know next to nothing about American foreign policy'. Knapp did not fully explain why, though suggested it may have been because 'the history of the of the United States appeared too short for it to occupy a central place in the range of research and publications' of the institution. Whatever the reason, the fact of the matter was that in spite of its 'impressive' publishing record, Chatham House had been US foreign policy lite. [18] Martin not only seemed to agree; he thought this a most 'deplorable tendency'. This though was about to be rectified in the not-too-distant future with the appearance very soon of a new Chatham House book (its first) on US foreign policy. [19] Where this might lead to was anybody's guess. However, it was clearly implied that this could easily be the start of something new which might over time lead to a more sustained engagement with US foreign policy.

The book itself was finally launched at a Chatham House event where a large crowd came along to hear the keynote speaker, the former UK Ambassador to the United States, Robin Renwick, saying a few very positive things about the volume before going on to recall some of the more fascinating episodes from his own life as a working diplomat (apparently Mrs Thatcher's favourite!) [20] But what about the book itself? [21] What did it actually say? Nothing veryradical; nonetheless, it did ask, and try to answer a simple but important question: namely, had the United States become a 'superpower without a mission' now that the old Soviet enemy had disappeared? The majority of analysts believed that it had; the volume made the case for the opposition and suggested that even if the Clinton foreign policy may have lacked a grand narrative, his administration had after some hesitation developed a coherent enough strategy designed to deal with a world quite different to that which had existed until the final collapse of the other superpower in 1991.[22] This did not assume the international system had become a safe place: terrorism was to remain very

[18] Wilfred Knapp, (1924-2011) Citation from his 'Fifty Years of Chatham House Books', *International Affairs*, Special Issue, Vol. 46, 5, November 1970, pp. 138-149.

[19] Laurence Martin, 'Chatham House at 75: the past and the future', *International Affairs*, October 1995, Volume 71, No 4, p.701

[20] Renwick recalls that at a meeting with Mrs Thatcher in June 1987 she said (approvingly) 'Well at least you're not a diplomat'. Quoted in his memoirs, *Not Quite a Diplomat: A Memoir,* London, Biteback Publishing, 2019.

[21] Michael Cox, *US Foreign Policy After the Cold War: Superpower Without a Mission,* Pinter, The Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1995.

[22] A writer more sympathetic to Clinton than most put it more vividly. 'Clinton' he argued 'seemed almost genetically designed to understand why the US had to find a new consensus in the post-cold war era'! See Martin Walker, 'The case for Clinton', *Prospect*, August 20, 1996.

high on his agenda throughout his two terms.[23] Nor in fact did his team ignore power at the expense of what his administration was sometimes accused of being: naïvely Wilsonian. But it still had a strategy of sorts which, in simple terms, aimed to consolidate America's position of dominance in the new global economy while ensuring domestic support for a US role abroad at a time when many feared the country was retreating into isolation. Moreover, he tried to do this though not by talking up threats – the old staple of the Cold War - but rather by stressing opportunity, and in particular the new economic opportunities that were out there in a world where ideological barriers were coming down and where the kind of market economics always favoured by the United States was now sweeping all before it. To this Clinton then added a gloss about promoting democracy - thus keeping his liberal base on side;[24] but being Clinton, he never forgot the 'economy stupid' and so married the idea of democracy with the goal of gaining market access for US corporations abroad - thus keeping the business community on board too.[25]

Needless to say, the new Chatham House book was not the only attempt to detect more coherence in Clinton's foreign policy than was commonly assumed at the time. [26] Even one well known realist later attempted to mount some kind of defence of it [27] (which he subsequently recanted).[28] Nonetheless, the volume did challenge the mainstream view which at one end of the spectrum claimed that Clinton was taking the United States on a 'holiday from history' - and was therefore failing to take the opportunity presented to him by the collapse of the USSR- [29] or at the other, had become so focused on his own domestic agenda that he had little to say about foreign policy at all.[30] Even so, the volume (all

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[23] See Thomas J. Badey, US Anti- terrorism policy', *Contemporary Security Policy*, Vol. 19, No. 2, August 1998, pp. 50-70.

[24] For a discussion on Clinton's strategy of democracy promotion see Michael Cox, G. John Ikenberry, and Takashi Inoguchi eds, *American* Democracy Promotion. *Impulses, Strategies, and Impacts*, Oxford University Press, 2000.

[25] See Douglas Brinkley, 'Democratic Enlargement: the Clinton Doctrine' *Foreign Policy,* No. 106 (Spring, 1997), pp. 110-127

[26] See for example John Dumbrell, *Clinton's Foreign Policy: Between the Bushes 1992-2000*, London, Routledge, 2010.

[27] See Stephen Walt, "Two Cheers for Clinton's Foreign Policy." *Foreign Affairs* 79, March-April 2000, 63-79.

[28] See Stephen Walt, 'I Changed my Mind', *Foreign Policy*, March 13, 2015.

[29] For defence of the Clinton team against the charge of taking a' holiday from history' see Kurt Campbell, 'What Holiday from History?' *The New York Times,* 23 November 2007.

[30] For a sample of articles on Clinton's foreign policy, none especially favourable, see Michael Mandelbaum, "Foreign Policy as Social Work", *Foreign Affairs*, 75 , (January-February, 1996), 16-32; Stephen Schlesinger, 'The End of Idealism', *World Policy Journal*, 24 (1998-99), 36-40; A. Z. Rubinstein, 'The New Moralists on a Road to Hell', *Orbis*, 40 (1996), 31-41; Richard N Haass, "Fatal Distraction: Bill Clinton's Foreign Policy", *Foreign Policy*, 107 (1997), 112-23. See also the later attack on Clinton by John Lewis Gaddis, 'A Grand Strategy of Transformation', *Foreign Policy*, No. 133 (Nov. - Dec., 2002), pp. 50-57

150 pages of it) was widely reviewed and most of the reviews turned out to be reasonably favourable.[31] Even some friendly Americans read and liked it; indeed, one even referred to it as being 'splendid', another as being 'informed and stimulating', a third even claimed that it was 'balanced', and last but by no means least a fourth reviewer - in a moment of hyperbole no doubt - suggested that it was possibly 'the most authoritative assessment yet of American foreign policy after the Cold War'. [32]

Yet in spite of caused a minor ripple at least on one side the Atlantic (if not the other) the volume did not open up the floodgates at Chatham House itself. No more books on US foreign policy were forthcoming, even though a number of very interesting articles were to be published in *International Affairs* on US related topics including important pieces on the role the US was then playing in the Irish peace process,[33] as well as a measured article by Joseph Nye wondering about the future of the transatlantic relationship in a post-Cold War world.[34] But if Martin was expecting a real breakthrough he was bound to have been disappointed. Perhaps though he should not have been so surprised. After all, as a UK-based Think Tank Chatham House had many other pressing foreign policy issues it needed to address at the time. Moreover, there were few incentives to become more permanently involved given that there were already so many Americans in the US itself already working on the subject. Many years earlier one of the wisest writers on international politics, Stanley Hoffmann – born in Austria but since 1955 a teacher at Harvard – made the telling comment that IR by the 1970s had become what he called (not uncritically) an 'American social science'. He did not go on to discuss US foreign policy in any detail. However, the implication was clear. Institutional opportunities and the need for advice by the US policy elite about how to run

[31] In a thoughtful, but not uncritical review, Fred Halliday said my book was a 'welcome corrective and a pretty persuasive one to much of the current academic literature and endless editorial pages' which took it as read that since the end of the Cold War the United States was on either on the slide or had 'lost its way'. On the other hand he felt that I was being both 'too serene about the problems facing the United States and the world' and possibly too easily led into talking up the 'benefits of a continued global role by the United States'. *Millennium,* March 1996, pp. 174-175.

[32] It was Mel Leffler of the University of Virginia (author of *A Preponderance of Power*) who said my book was 'splendid', Ron Steel (biographer of Walter Lippmann) 'informed and stimulating', David Hendrickson writing in *Foreign Affairs*, March-April 1996 'balanced', and Benjamin Schwarz (then at the *World Policy Journal*) who suggested it might be the 'the most authoritative assessment yet of American foreign policy after the Cold War'. See his review in *International Affairs,* vol. 72, 2, April 1996., p. 425.

[33] Adrian Guelke, 'The United States, Irish Americans and the Northern Ireland Peace Process', *International Affairs,* Volume 72, No 3, 1996, pp. 521-536.

[34] See Joseph Nye,' US and Europe: Continental Drift?' *International Affairs*, Volume 76, Issue 1, January 2000, Pages 51–60

the world made it virtually inevitable that the study of US foreign policy would for the foreseeable future remain very largely in American hands. [35]

Crisis and Response

Even if a Think Tank based in London would never be able to challenge what amounted to a near American monopoly on the study of their own foreign policy, there was still no reason why it could not have been doing more. As it turned out, the necessity of doing so arose very shortly after Clinton left office to be replaced by a very different kind of politician in the shape of George W. Bush, a man of limited intellect but from a very powerful republican dynasty whose rise to the White House was bizarre by any standards. As a Brookings report was later moved to observe, 'no work of fiction could have plausibly captured' the many 'twists and turns' which finally led to Bush becoming President. [36] Nor of course could it have anticipated what happened a few months later when on September 11th four planes acting as flying bombs not only killed close to three thousand people, but completely changed the direction of US foreign policy. It also occasioned a major rethink inside Chatham House itself. Here it not only had the unintended effect of leading to a noticeable 'rise in membership' but more generally 'raised consciousness of international affairs to an' almost 'unprecedented degree'[37] Moreover, when the original attack of 2001 segued into a wider 'war on terror' followed by a full scale military attack against Iraq in early 2003, it was evident that Chatham House would have to become more engaged. It had not been indifferent to what was going on of course. Indeed, by the end of 2003 it had already published a number of articles examining the background to the attack itself,[38] how and why Bush had launched a war in the Middle East which made little sense in realist terms ,[39] whether or not his policies represented a break with tradition or not,[40] and what impact all of this was likely to have on transatlantic relations?[41] But something more was required. After all, over in the United

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[35] Stanley Hoffmann, 'An American Social Science: International Relations', *Daedalus*, Vol. 106, No.3, Summer 1977, pp. 41-60. See also Ole Waever, 'The Sociology of a Not So International Discipline: American and European Developments in International Relations', *International Organization,* Vol. 52, No. 4, Autumn 1998 , pp. 687-727.

[36] Thomas E. Mann, 'Reflections of the 2000 U.S. Presidential Elections', *Brookings,* January 1st 2001.

[37] Quote from the Director, Victor Bulmer-Thomas, *Chatham House Annual Report*, 2004-2005, p.3

[38] See my 'American power before and after 9/11: Dizzy with Success?' *International Affairs* Vol 78, No 2, April 2002, pp.261-276.

[39] Mark Mazarr, 'G W Bush Idealist', *International Affairs*, Volume 78, Issue 2, April 2002, pp. 261–276,

[40] See Melvyn Leffler, '9/11 and the Past and Future of American Foreign Policy', *International Affairs*, Volume 79, Issue 5, October 2003, pp. 1045–1063,

[41] See the Special Issue on 'The Transatlantic Relationship' *International Affairs*, Volume 80, Issue 4, July 2004

States most Think Tanks were talking talk about little else. Chatham House therefore had to make its own contribution.

Ironically, the idea of establishing a United States Discussion Group did not come from an American specialist within Chatham House, but its new Director, Victor Bulmer Thomas, a Latin Americanist.[42] His first idea was to establish an integrated Americas programme comprising two study groups and one project looking at the US, Latin America and the Caribbean together. However, the crisis which was fast unfolding in the United States meant that an increasingly large amount of traffic quickly started flowing along the foreign policy highway marked "USDG". In fact, it very soon became apparent that what might have been conceived at the start as a relatively modest project, was fast growing into something much more significant. This not only meant more work for the very small USDG team comprising the Chair and one part-time assistant. It also required more financial support. This initially came from within Chatham House itself, though this in turn was supplemented by other, very modest donations from the Rockefeller Foundation, J. P. Morgan, Goldman Sachs, and the Canadian High Commission. In its early days at least, the Group was also able draw upon the support from an Advisory Board composed of a number of well known people in London. Significantly though the more active members of the Board were not British, but rather a group of American businessmen then living in London who were keen to back what they considered to be a worthwhile intellectual project housed in a Think Tank with serious credentials of its own.

But what was supposed to be the purpose of the Discussion Group other than 'discuss' US foreign policy? It was never laid out in an absolutely precise terms. Nevertheless, some of the early statements defining the Group's purpose did point to a number of key objectives, the most important of which was to 'consider how America' was 'seen by non-Americans' and to facilitate this by establishing a forum 'for experts and practitioners to debate the US role in the world from 'an international' (note not just UK) perspective, and in this way 'improve European' (again note not just British) 'understanding of the United States and the factors that influence American foreign policy'. Great stress was also placed on the necessity of developing a 'transatlantic dialogue' in which 'European and American voices' could be 'heard'. Plans were also put in place

[42] The material which follows draws from three primary sources; Chatham House Annual Reports; communications with the then Director Professor Victor Bulmer-Thomas; and minutes and notes assembled by Dr Molly Tarhuni, assistant to the United States Discussion Group.

to make that dialogue a reality. Interestingly though there was only passing mention about how the Group might contribute to UK-US relations. Indeed, it was made clear that even if there were close ties 'between Britain and America' it would be wrong for a Think Tank based in London to 'automatically' assume that it either knew or understood the United States because of the historical closeness between the two countries. What the United States did after all was not just of concern to the UK. Rather its foreign policy was 'a matter of global concern' requiring analysis from multiple points of view. It was in this sense, much too important to be left to a small band of 'Brits' who probably thought they had some kind of special insight into what their proverbial cousins across the pond were up to. The US was a power with global reach and thus could only be properly understood from an international perspective. [43]

Into the unknown unknowns

Thus defined, the Group was duly launched into the very turbulent and choppy waters known as US foreign policy. What it might have lacked in resources and personnel it made up for in energy, and within a very short time had already held a number of meetings on a range of subjects including Homeland Security and America's perception of its role in the world, with the promise of doing a lot more in the future (which we did) on the transatlantic relationship. Naturally enough, not all discussions on the United States or with visiting Americans - of which there were now an increasingly large number coming to speak at Chatham House - were hosted by the Group.[44] Moreover, there were others in within Chatham House who had a strong interest in what the US was doing abroad, most obviously those leading on the Middle East programme. Nevertheless, the Group did manage to carve out a niche of its own, and during its first few years hosted something close to 40 meetings in London, as well as one major event in New York in September 2004 in conjunction with the Foreign Policy Association. Advertised under the somewhat provocative title of 'America as a Foreign Country', the New York meeting attracted a sizeable audience to hear a number of largely US-based speakers asking and trying to answer three key questions about the meaning of 'American exceptionalism', how to explain what seemed like a growing gap in values between the

[43] The analysis here draws from two internal documents published in 2004. 'United States Discussion Group, Chatham House (The Royal Institute of International Affairs) and 'The United States Study Group'.

[44] John Bolton for example at a Chatham House conference on defence in March 2003 In 2004 Joseph Nye spoke in a debate hosted by Victor Bulmer-Thomas. Chatham House also organized a series of events between October 2002 and March 2003 exploring the theme 'Living with a Megapower: implications of the war on Terrorism'. See the relevant Chatham House Annual Reports.

Europeans and Americans, and why the United States seemed to be in denial about something which seemed obvious even to its friends: that it was no different, and in moral terms, no better than other great powers in the history of the modern world?[45]

2004 more generally turned out to be an especially busy year for the USDG. This effectively began in February when it hosted no less than three large events: one on South Asia and the United States given by an experienced US diplomat,[46] another on US non-proliferation proliferation post-Iraq delivered by Gary Samore then based at the International Institute of Strategic Studies in London,[47] and a third more general discussion hosted by the US Embassy and led by Robert Bradtke, then Deputy Assistant Secretary for European and Asian Affairs.[48] These were then followed by several more meetings on a wide range of issues including presentations by De Anne Julius (the Chair of Chatham House) on 'US economic power', and another on the Cold War as a 'Pyrrhic victory' given by Ambassador David Newson.[49] It also held two further group discussions on the upcoming presidential elections, finally culminating with a major one day event in December 2004 which asked why did Bush win – some suggested values, others the war - and what did the next four years mean for America and the world? To liven up proceedings we also invited along a number of British journalists to explain how the press had reported the election, and possibly why a President who was becoming decreasingly popular 'over here' appeared to have become increasingly popular 'over there' ! [50]

Nor did the pace slacken much thereafter. If anything during Bush's second term it accelerated, and included along the way a presentation by a Canadian expert David Malone (the only Canadian who spoke before the Group) on the UN Security Council and Iraq, as well as one especially memorable meeting with one of Gorbachev's most senior advisers, Andrei Grachev. Meantime, in January 2006 the Group also organized a discussion 'reviewing the implications of the

[45]The US-based speakers at that New York meeting held on 27 September 2004 included Susan Carruthers then at Rutgers, Matthew Connolly of Columbia University, Henry Nau of George Washington University, and Peter Trubowitz (now at the LSE) then at the University of Texas, Austin.

[46] Ambassador Dennis Kux. Author of *India and the United States: Estranged Democracies 1941-1991* and *The United States and Pakistan, 1947-2000: Disenchanted Allies*. He served in the US embassy in Karachi in Pakistan from 1957 to 1959, followed by a tour in India. He again served in Pakistan from 1969 to 1971.

[47] Gary Samore, 26 February 2004. Samore later served as President Barack Obama's White House Coordinator for Arms Control and Weapons of Mass Destruction between 2009-2013. .

[48] Held on 19 February 2004.

[49] Ambassador David Newsom had earlier served as US Ambassador to Libya from 1965 to 1969, Indonesia from 1973 to 1977, and the Philippines from 1977 to 1978.

[50] The reporters who made up the roundtable included Bronwen Maddox and Tim Hames (*The Times*) and John Kampner of the *New Statesman.*

mid-term elections'.[51] A year later it then went on to host a major event which looked at what America and Iraq might look like going forward into the future. [52] This included contributions from Jamie P. Rubin who had earlier been part of the Clinton administration, [53] Jamie Shea then Director of Policy Planning at NATO, as well as Christopher Meyer, a former UK Ambassador to the United States between 1997 to 2003. Meyer was by any stretch a colourful figure who aside from his diplomatic postings had earlier published his autobiography entitled *DC Confidential.* [54] This had been widely reviewed, but as one less than generous reviewer noted, his book not only said just as much about the goings on in London as it did about Washington – he was especially scathing about Blair - but could hardly be described as being confidential either![55]

It was not just policy-makers however who made a big contribution to the Group. Academics also featured heavily on the speaker's list including Bob Legvold a Russian specialist from Columbia, Toby Dodge who was fast becoming the go-to person on Iraq in Britain, and Bruce Jentelson who had at one time been a foreign policy adviser to Al Gore. Indeed, one of the best attended sessions in 2005 was a paper delivered by a US academic Bill Wohlforth of Dartmouth a scholar of the Cold War (and influential voice on why it had come to an end) [56] who spoke on why 'US primacy' would endure. Nor was he the first or last academic to speak. The doyen of liberal international theorists - John Ikenberry - had already warned that the Bush administration post-9/11 was embarked on a new 'imperial foreign policy'[57] which as he later went on to point out was unsettling allies and likely to damage the liberal order of which he was fast becoming its most articulate champion.[58] Another speaker harboured no such doubts. One of the few British-based academics to endorse Bush's assertive strategy of freedom and democracy, Tim Lynch had few doubts about the wisdom of the Bush foreign policy. Bush's war on terror, he insisted,

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[51] See the section on Research in the Annual Review for 2005-2006. .

[52] USDG meeting 18 January 2007.

[53] Jamie P Rubin served as U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs in the Clinton Administration from 1997–2000. For a period thereafter he lived in London where his wife –Christiane Amanpour – then worked as the CNN's chief international correspondent. While in London he became a Visiting Professor at the LSE.

[54] Christopher Meyer, *D.C. Confidential* , London, Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 2005.

[55] See Andrew Stephen, 'George, Tony and Me', *The Guardian,* 13 November, 2005.

[56] See William Wohlforth and S. G. Brooks, "Power, Globalization and the End of the Cold War: Reevaluating a Landmark Case for Ideas," *International Security*, Vol. 25, No. 3, Winter 2000/2001, pp. 5-53.

[57] See G. John Ikenberry, 'America's Imperial Ambition', *Foreign Affairs,* 2002.

[58] See his 'Power and liberal order;:America's post war world order in transition', *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, Volume 5, Issue 2, 2005, Pages 133–152.

had been a success and it was important therefore for any successor to build on what he had achieved.[59] Unsurprisingly, this was not a view which commanded overwhelming support three years into an Iraq war that had already cost close to a $150 billion of dollars and led to the deaths of thousands. Nonetheless, as Lynch himself argued in a volume published in the same year as his talk, Bush he believed was engaged in a 'Second Cold War' against radical Islamism and it was imperative to continue the fight until victory was achieved.[60]

Lastly, what about those who gave up their time to come and listen to policy-makers and academics declaim on what was going on in the world during the Bush years? They were a very mixed group. A good number were Chatham House members, but just as many, if not more, were professionals from outside Chatham House with more than a passing interest in foreign policy. This included people from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the British Treasury, several journalists, a fair smattering from the business community, a few academics, as well as others from other programmes within Chatham House itself. Some of those who came along were American, but the overwhelming majority of attendees were not. Interestingly though in terms of impact, the Group did attract a good number of officials from the various embassies around the London, but sadly failed to attract many home grown British politicians. The numbers who attended varied, but it never much fell below 20 for seminars, and many more than that when the Group hosted a particularly well known speaker. The discussions were informal but structured; nothing was ever off the table; and even though there were moments when things looked like they might be getting out of hand the Chair intervened to restore order!

Big issues

Over the years of its active existence more or less spanning the period between the attacks of 2001 and the financial crash of 2008, the United States

[59] See also Timothy Lynch and Robert S. Singh, *After Bush: The Case for Continuity in American Foreign Policy*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008.
[60] Dr Timothy Lynch, Neoconservative Visions of Islam and the Middle East'. USDG meeting 16 February 2006.

Discussion Group discussed many questions from many points of view. Yet there were a number of big issues that tended to inform the discussions throughout.

Possibly the most discussed was what at first sight looked like the Bush administration's ill-thought out decision to go to war in Iraq without the approval of the UN and with no clear purpose in mind. Attacked by foreign policy realists as being both unnecessary and inflammatory, the path that led to the invasion was debated at great length.[61] Opinion in the Group, as elsewhere, was deeply divided between those who supported the decision on the grounds that it was the morally right thing to do and might even lead to a more stable Middle East, and others - almost certainly the majority - who opposed the decision but were by no means united about the reason why it had been taken in the first place. A few insisted that it was the tragic result of false intelligence concerning Iraq's w.m.d programme, a view soon to be popularized by UN weapons inspector, Hans Blix; [62] a few more that it was driven by the unfortunate take-over of US foreign policy by the so-called neo-conservatives;[63] others that liberalism and liberals were should be held to account for promoting a war which was self-evidently not in the national interest; [64] and a not inconsiderable number – largely British – who argued that even though the US would have gone to war without the UK, Blair himself may have played a major role by making the case for the war more coherently than Bush himself, and then selling it to the Democrats in Congress and any wavering governments there may have been in the European Union.[65]

The debate about the Iraq War was in turn embedded in a rather more academic discussion about the nature of American primacy. The 1990s had of course seen a fairly lengthy debate about what Krauthammer had earlier termed the 'unipolar moment' [66] and whether or not it could last.[67] Towards the second half of the decade this discussion had shifted in some quarters at least

[61] On realist opposition to the Iraq War see Daniel Drezner, 'IR Scholars weigh in against the Iraq War', *Foreign Policy*, October 12th, 2004.
[62] Hans Blix, *Disarming Iraq; The Search for Weapons of Mass Destruction*, London, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2004.
[63] See Brian C. Schmidt and Michael C. Williams, 'The Bush Doctrine and the Iraq War: Neoconservatives versus Liberals, *Security Studies*, Volume 17, Issue 2, 2008, pp. 191-220.
[64] See Nichoals Kitchen and Michael Cox, 'Just another Liberal War? Western Intervention and the Iraq war' in Amitav Acharya and Hiro Katsumata, eds, *Beyond Iraq: The Future of World Order*, Singapore, World Scientific Publishing, 2011, pp. 65-84.
[65] See for example John Kampner, *Blair's Wars,* London, The Free Press, 2003.
[66] Charles Krauthammer, 'The Unipolar Moment', *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 70, No. 1, 1990/91 pp. 23-33
[67] Ken Waltz, 'The Unipolar Illusion: Why New Great Powers will Rise', *International Security,* Vol. 17, No. 4 (Spring, 1993), pp. 5-51

from a fairly conventional exchange of views about the balance or imbalance of power,[68] towards a more contentious argument about empire and whether or not the United States – this 'dangerous nation' as one writer called it[69] - had become one. This was not a view with which most Americans felt especially comfortable. Nor was there a consensus within or without the Group where opinion remained divided between those who thought the term should never be applied to the United States, [70] and others who felt that the US bore all the hallmarks of an empire in terms of capabilities and global reach, and certainly looked like it was behaving like one in Iraq. Nor did supporters of the idea see this as being an especially controversial or even radical position to adopt. After all, if writers as far apart in background and outlook as Susan Strange,[71] Bush critic Andrew Bacevich,[72] and imperial apologists Niall Ferguson and Max Boot[73] had no problems in supporting the idea, then there was no serious reason, or so it was felt, for not using the concept to understand America's extraordinary role in the world. [74]

But no sooner had the Group begun debating whether or not the United States was an empire than some writers – no doubt hoping that Paul Kennedy might at last be proved right - began wondering whether, like all other great powers in history, the US was starting to show signs of imperial overstretch![75] The debate was hardly a new one, and indeed could be traced back to the Vietnam War and the crisis that overtook the United States in the 1970s. [76] Temporarily shelved in the post-Cold War years when the US seemed to be riding high in a world without serious peer rival, it began to re-emerge as the United States began facing up to the serious geostrategic problems caused on the one hand by the Iraq War and on the other by Bush's economic policies. In spite of this

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[68] See Coral Bell, A *World Out of Balance; American Ascendancy and International Politics in the 21st Century*, Longueville Media, Double Bay NSW, 2004

[69] Robert Kagan, *Dangerous Nation*, New York, Knopf, 2006.

[70] Desmond King, 'When an Empire is not an Empire: the US Case' *Government and Opposition,* Vol. 41, No. 2, Spring 2006, pp. 163-196

[71] Susan Strange, 'The Future of the American Empire', *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 42, No. 1, Fall 1988, pp. 1-17.

[72] Andrew Bacevich, *American Empire.* Harvard University Press, 2002

[73] See Max Boot, *The Savage Wars of Peace: Small Wars and the Rise of American Power*, New York: Basic Books, 2002

[74] See Michael Cox, 'Still the American Empire', *Political Studies Review,* Volume: 5 issue: 1, 2007, page(s): 1-10.

[75] See Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers; Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500-2000*, New York, Random House, 1988.

[76] The lengthy academic debate about US decline (or not) can be followed in Michael Cox, ' Whatever Happened to American Decline? International Relations and the New United States Hegemony', *New Political Economy*, Volume 6, Issue 3, 2001, pp.311-340.

however there remained strong resistance to assuming that decline – however defined - was a foregone conclusion.[77] Indeed, as one participant in the Group later pointed out, the overall tendency within the Group at the time was more to thinking about the structural power the US still retained rather than focusing on the possibility of its decline.[78]

Even if the idea of decline did not find much favour within the Group itself, there was agreement that the US was hardly deploying its still considerable assets in an especially wise fashion. As a long term associate of Chatham House was to point out, the Bush team seemed intellectually incapable of understanding that by deploying its hard power in a much disputed war, it was fast starting to lose much of its soft power.[79] This in turn had all sorts of consequences, one of which was to lead to a steep rise in 'anti-Americanism' in many countries, including those in Europe, a subject that was explored in one USDG meeting by Professor Sergio Fabbrini, a specialist on the subject.[80] How to explain anti-Americanism he asked? Bush and opposition to the Iraq War may have been the immediate reasons for the rise in the phenomenon. But this he insisted was by no means the whole story. Anti-Americanism was also a response to many other things including what he believed was a false fear in Europe of Americanization. But as he went to argue - and Pew only confirmed his findings in one of their surveys[81] - anti-Americanism reflected something more structural too: namely, a more general resentment of America's overwhelming global power acquired by the US in the post Cold War era, and the unilateral exercise of that power especially after September 11, 2001.

Given that the original attack of 2001 had emanated from a country close to the Middle East, it was inevitable that the Group would return on more than one occasion to looking at US policy towards the region as a whole. Here the discussion tended to revolve around a conundrum: why did the United States remain engaged in a region where the costs were so high and the apparent rewards of doing so seemed so meagre? Three very different types of answer were provided. The first focused on oil and America's need - or so some argued

[77] See also my 'Is the United in Decline – Again? *International Affairs*, Vol. 83, No.4, July 2007, pp. 643-653 and the robust response by Michael J. Williams, ' The Empire Writes back (to Michael Cox) *International Affairs*, Vol. 83, No. 5, September 2007, pp. 945-950. .

[78] Private communication to the author 7 August 2020.

[79] Joseph Nye, 'The Decline of America's Soft Power'', *Foreign Affairs*, May-June 2004, 83(3), pp. 16–20. 5.

[80] Sergio Fabbrini, ed, *The United States Contested: American Unilateralism and European Discontent*, London, Routledge, 2006.

[81] Pew Research Centre, 'Ant-Americanism: Causes and Consequences', December 10th 2003.

- to maintain control over a region containing over 60% of the world's oil reserves.[82] The second talked in much greater detail about the threat posed by jihadist terrorism and the necessity of 'doing something' about a region from whence it derived ideological inspiration. A third shifted the debate – controversially – to America's most reliable ally in the Middle East and the degree to which it was an Israel-inspired and funded lobby that shaped the US view of the region. This 'lobby' line of analysis certainly attracted some support when it was first promoted in a London-based magazine in 2006 after having been rejected by the American magazine, *The Atlantic*. But it would be equally true to say that it led an equal amount of strong criticism from within the USDG too![83]

Given that Chatham House was a London-based Think Tank, it should have come as no surprise that a Group tasked with looking at US foreign policy would be concerned with examining the broader relationship between the US and UK within the broader transatlantic setting. Here again the Bush administration was facing a problem, for what had previously been regarded as uncontentious and uncontested now looked to be anything but. The so-called 'special relationship' was not about to unravel. However, Tony Blair's strong backing for a controversial war which was not exactly going to plan did make many wonder whether it made much sense being too close to the Americans. Moreover, as the war continued it led to an even greater problem in US relations with many of its more important European allies. One well known American even made an international reputation for himself theorizing the divide. Robert Kagan was in little doubt. European opposition was not because the war was wrong, but rather because the Europeans were opposed to the use of force *per se*. Americans on the other hand were not opposed at all, not because they were naturally more aggressive but because their defined role in the world was entirely different to that of the Europeans. Americans as he famously put it were from Mars and the Europeans (even including the British) were from Venus! [84]

Finally, Kagan's discovery of what he believed were irreconcilable differences between Europe and United States raised one last question as to the deeper sources of this divide. For Kagan it was simply a question of power. Others thought it went much deeper and sought to explain the division not so much

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[82] See Michael T. Klare. See his book *Resource Wars: The New Landscape of Global Conflict*, Owl Books, 2002.
[83] John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt, 'The Israel Lobby', *London Review of Books,* Vol. 28 No. 6, 23 March 2006.
[84] Robert Kagan, 'Power and Weakness, *Policy Review*, No. 113, 2003.

in terms of power asymmetries but rather as the consequence of very profound cultural differences between Europe on the one hand and the United States on the other. Indeed, the idea that US foreign policy in the age of Bush was not just a response to terror but instead reflected something more profound about America itself almost ran like red thread through all the Group's discussions. It had already become a leitmotif in the US itself amongst analysts of American foreign policy;[85] and it soon became a popular topic for discussion on this side of the Atlantic too. The British writer Anatol Lieven could not have been clearer. If one wanted to understand US foreign policy and how Americans had so enthusiastically responded to Bush's call to arms, one simply had to be aware of something those more 'sophisticated Europeans' had forgotten:the power of nationalism in a country where the bulk of its citizens (even if they hadn't voted for Bush) felt no embarrassment in singing the national anthem, pledging allegiance to the flag, and getting behind their Commander-in-Chief in a time of war.[86] Nor was this the only thing that made Americans 'exceptional'. They were also more likely to believe in God, [87] own a gun, and celebrate the virtues of the private enterprise system in ways that would have been regarded as odd even in Britain post-Thatcher. In other words, they were - as Micklethwait and Wooldridge pointed out in one of their many very well written books - just a lot more conservative than Europeans. [88] According to the polls moreover Americans more generally appeared to have less regard for international institutions, displayed a greater willingness to support unilateral actions taken by the US if deemed necessary, and opposed anything that compromised the US's freedom to act militarily abroad.[89] Of course none of this, in of itself, could explain everything about US foreign policy after September 2001. But as was pointed out at more than one Group meeting when the issue was raised - which it very often was - it did help us understand why the United States behaved in the particular way it did after 9/11 and why Bush, whose standing in Europe started to drop like a stone after 2004 seemed to remain popular back in the US itself.

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[85] Harold Hongju Koh, 'On American Exceptionalism', *Stanford Law Review*, Volume 55, 2004, pp. 1480-1527.
[86] See Anatol Lieven, *America Right or Wrong: An Anatomy of American Nationalism,* Oxford University Press, 2004.
[87] See in particular Gregorio Bettiza, *Finding Faith in Foreign Policy: Religion and American Diplomacy in a Postsecular World* Oxford University Press, 2019.
[88] See John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge *Right Nation: Conservative Power in America.* New York, Penguin, 2004.
[89] See 'The American-Western European Values Gap: American Exceptionalism Subsides' *Pew Research Center*, 29th February 2012.

Conclusion

The transition from the Bush era to Obama did not quite bring the United States Discussion Group to an end. However, as one very distinct era dominated by terrorism and war in the Middle East gave way to another increasingly shaped by what to do about the fall-out out from 2008 and the rise of China, the priorities at Chatham House began to change. So too did its desire to take the study of US foreign policy to a new level. Three new appointments to Chatham House reflected this new found drive. The first of these was Robin Niblett who had spent most of his professional life in Washington where he had worked between 1988 and 2006 for the Centre for Strategic and International Studies before being appointed as the new Director in 2009.[90] His interests were primarily European and transatlantic in nature; [91] nonetheless, he went on as Director to look at the UK's 'special relationship' with the United States[92] as well as edit a substantial volume of his own on America's role in a changing world. [93] Perhaps even more critical for the study of US foreign policy was the appointment of Xenia Dormandy in 2011 to head up a formally constituted US programme (which in 2019 came to include 'the Americas').[94] Like Niblett, Dormandy had also had extensive experience in the US, first in government and then between 2005 and 2009 at the Kennedy School's Belfer Center where she was Executive Director for Research. Dynamic and dedicated with a wealth of experience she very quickly established herself as a central player in the ongoing discussions about US foreign policy at Chatham House where she oversaw the publication of a number of key studies with a broad US focus, including a 2014 report on elite perceptions of the US in Europe and Asia,[95] a 2017 edited book on Trump's emerging foreign policy, [96] and a lengthy study on the state of the transatlantic relationship in the era of Trump.[97] Then, when

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[90] Prior to his appointment Niblett was resident associate at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, DC 1988–91 before becoming its Europe representative in 1992 and then director, strategic planning, 1997–2000; executive vice-president and chief operating officer, 2001–06. During his last two years at CSIS, he also served as director of the CSIS Europe Program and its Initiative for a Renewed Transatlantic Partnership.

[91] See his *Britain, the EU and the Sovereignty Myth,* Chatham House, 2016.

[92] Robin Niblett, Written evidence. 'Global Security: UK-US Relations', *Foreign Affairs Committee*, House of Commons, 30 September 2009.

[93] Robin Niblett ed, *Ready to Lead? America's Role in a Changed World.* London, Chatham House Paper, 2010.

[94] Xenia Dormandy (Wickett) headed up the US and Americas programme between 2011 and 2018. After leaving Chatham House she took up the position as Vice President of Political Analysis and Integrity Due Diligence at *Equinor*.

[95] https://www.chathamhouse.org/file/xenia-dormandy-elite-perceptions-us-asia-and-europe

[96] *America's International Role under Donald Trump,* Chatham House Report, January 2017.

[97] *Transatlantic Relations Converging or Diverging*? Chatham House Report, January 2018.

she left in 2018, the baton was then passed on to Dr Leslie Vinjamuri, a US academic based in London who before taking up her position at Chatham House, had worked in the Asia and Near East Bureau at the U.S. Age. Energetic and well connected in the United States, she again injected a great deal of life in what was by now a well established US programme which held regular meetings, hosted several well attended public lectures and published widely on US foreign policy in the age of Trump and beyond. [98]

This within a few years the study of US foreign policy at Chatham House had moved from being irregular and occasional to becoming a major part of the Chatham House offering. Which raises at least one obvious question: what role did the U.S. Discussion Group itself play other than 'discuss' US foreign policy in a highly congenial environment? One obvious answer is that it filled a very big gap in the portfolio following a period when, as we have seen, there had been very little ongoing debate within Chatham House itself about US foreign policy. As an early report noted, 'without the USDG, Chatham House would have been USA 'lite' at a time when it needed to be saying a great deal about the United States'. [99] Indeed, it would have looked decidedly odd if during the first few turbulent years of the 21st century when the world always felt as if it was always on the verge of something worse, if the leading Think Tank in Britain had not been engaged in an ongoing, as opposed to an occasional way, with discussing America's role in the world.

The USDG also demonstrated that there were other fora other than in the United States itself where one could engage in an informed and open dialogue about US foreign policy in which many voices – and not just American ones – could find a space. As we have shown, this did not preclude Americans from a variety of perspectives from playing a role in the Group. But it did at least expose them to other points of view in a very different environment than the one they would have encountered back in the United States itself. Finally, over the longer term, the Group performed a vital bridging role between one era when very little was being said or written about US foreign policy in Chatham House - going back to Laurence Martin's original remarks in 1995 - and another when a great deal began to be done once Chatham House had decided to develop a fully funded US programme. One might even suggest that by helping make US foreign policy a part of the intellectual furniture at Chatham House for a few

[98] For information on the US Programme go tohttps://www.chathamhouse.org/about/structure/americas-programme

[99]Chatham House. Internal document. *Americas Programme*, 13 June 2005.

crucial years, it helped prepare the ground upon which others were later able to build. If it had achieved nothing more than that, then it would have performed a valuable service for the wider foreign policy community in general and for Chatham House in particular.

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