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The Relationship Between Think Tanks and Political Decision–Makers

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Introduction

The process of political decision-making is one of the most complex operations in political systems, involving multiple factors, including political, security, economic, social, and cultural dimensions. Crafting mature political decisions requires careful study, which falls within the specialization of research and study centers. These centers play a crucial role in providing objective perspectives that facilitate precise and informed decisions based on the analysis of complex issues and the presentation of alternatives and solutions grounded in scientific studies, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of public policies and ensuring the achievement of national interests.

Sometimes, the recommendations of research centers are not adopted by decision-makers, as they may be influenced by factors such as personal experience, internal and external pressures, or personal interests. This raises an important issue regarding the extent to which the perspectives of research centers align with the judgments of decision-makers and how reconciliation between the two visions can be achieved.

This research paper aims to illuminate the interaction between the perspectives of research centers and the judgments of decision-makers, clarify the relationship between the two parties, and examine the impact of this relationship on the effectiveness and success of political decisions in achieving the state's strategic objectives. It also examines the reality of research centers in Iraq, the challenges they face in their work, and the mechanisms to overcome these challenges, thereby producing wiser and more realistic decisions.

The Political Decision-Making Process

The political decision-making process involves a series of steps and interactions undertaken by decision-makers to select the most suitable alternatives to address a specific problem. This process involves first identifying the problem, then researching available options, choosing the most suitable one, and implementing it. The process is affected by several internal and external factors, such as political, social, and cultural values, the nature of the political system that organizes the work of institutions within the state, natural and cultural resources, interactions with the international community, as well as the nature and personal characteristics of the leader, media, public opinion trends, and pressure groups such as parties, unions, and companies. All these factors influence the political decision-making process.

Several theories have emerged to explain political decision-making, most notably Rational Theory: Assumes the decision-maker makes decisions based on rational and logical analysis; Game Theory: Focuses on the interactions between different parties and making decisions based on expectations of others' behavior; Bureaucratic Theory: Studies the role of institutions and bureaucracy in the decision-making process; Public Interest Theory: Emphasizes that political decisions aim to achieve the public interest of society, not just the interests of decision-makers or influential groups; Systems Theory: Views the political process as an integrated system consisting of inputs, processes, and outputs; Organizational Behavior Theory: Focuses on the role of institutions in the decision-making process and how administrative regulations and procedures affect political outcomes; Psychological Analysis Theory: Examines the psychological and personal aspects of political decision-makers, including their values, psychological pressures, and beliefs that influence their decisions.

The judgments of political decision-makers are crucial in crisis management within the political system and its institutions. The effectiveness of these judgments depends on the ability to accurately perceive reality, anticipate the future, and make well-informed decisions at the right time. Decision-makers may rely on various tools to inform their decision-making, including research centers, studies, and consultations with experts and advisors.

The judgment of decision-makers refers to the set of opinions and ideas adopted by those authorized to issue orders and directives, based on their analysis of available information, study of alternatives, assessment of situations, and anticipation of future outcomes to reach the best possible solutions. This process relies on several factors, including political experience, awareness, political intuition, and crisis management skills.

The judgment of decision-makers is governed by several factors, including the nature of the available information (data, statistics, reports), analytical tools (scientific methods for information analysis), personal experience, and the principles and values upon which the state's political and social system is based. The most important of these elements can be summarized as follows:

1.   Awareness and understanding of reality, enabling the decision-maker to make the most appropriate decision.

2.   Balancing different interests at both internal and external levels.

3.   Flexibility and the ability to adapt to changing and emergency circumstances.

4.   Calculated risk-taking and making bold decisions when necessary.

5.   Future vision and assessment of short- and long-term impacts.

Decisions made by the decision-maker can be classified by type: Strategic

Decisions: Focus on long-term actions such as central defense or economic policies; Tactical Decisions: Aim to achieve immediate goals or address emerging problems; Preventive Decisions: Involve taking proactive measures to avoid potential crises; Consensus Decisions: Issued to balance different parties and reach compromise solutions.

Decision-makers face several challenges, most notably the scarcity of information, as data may be incomplete or unreliable. Time constraints for making decisions add pressure, especially during emergencies. Internal and external pressures, such as public opinion or international forces, also pose challenges, as does reconciling conflicting interests, which require precision and skill.

Decisions may sometimes be influenced by personal emotions, family, political, or sectarian backgrounds, or succumb to public opinion pressure, leading to hasty or inaccurate decisions that prioritize appeasing the public over effective crisis management. In times of crisis, emotions and fear can escalate, leading to impulsive rather than rational decisions.

The decisions made by political decision-makers have significant effects on the political system. Well-studied decisions based on analytical vision enhance political stability, while hasty or ill-considered choices may lead to unrest and instability. Decisions that align with public aspirations and interests strengthen the legitimacy and credibility of the political system. At the same time, those based on accurate studies and data enable the political system to achieve its goals efficiently and effectively.

Think Tanks and Political Decision-Makers

Think tanks, or research centers, are institutions or entities specialized in conducting research and analysis in various fields to provide knowledge and

answers regarding different issues—political, security, social, economic, cultural, scientific, etc. These centers may be affiliated with government institutions or be non-governmental organizations.

Research centers contribute to analyzing various issues through scientific research and in-depth analysis, which helps in making decisions based on scientific and methodological foundations. The role of research centers in decision-making can be summarized as follows:

1. **Scientific Analysis:** Providing research based on precise scientific foundations and offering information that contributes to analyzing issues from multiple perspectives, free from bias or emotion. Centers prepare reports and provide realistic, actionable recommendations to decision-makers based on scientific analysis.

2. **Data Analysis:** Collecting and analyzing data related to various issues to provide accurate information that helps decision-makers understand the current situation and make appropriate decisions. They also offer future predictions to help avoid uncalculated risks.

3. **Public Policy Support:** Guiding public policies by analyzing existing laws, regulations, and policies, and proposing amendments or changes to improve their effectiveness.

4. **Providing Multiple Perspectives:** Offering diverse viewpoints on issues, helping decision-makers reach balanced solutions that consider all aspects and interests.

5. **Raising Public Awareness:** Increasing public awareness of important issues that may affect society by publishing research results through media and public publications, thus shaping public opinion and enhancing transparency

in political decision-making.

6. **Supporting Decision-Makers:** Organizing workshops and training for decision-makers and government advisors to improve their data analysis and decision-making skills.

7. **Creating a Scientific Environment for Discussion:** Providing forums for dialogue and discussion among researchers, experts, and decision-makers on various issues through workshops and conferences, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the problems at hand.

Like other institutions, think tanks are governed by the nature of the political system and the interactions within it. They have direct contact with decision-makers in the state, and the attitudes of decision-makers towards research centers and their outputs vary. In authoritarian systems, the contributions of research centers may be overlooked, especially on issues that do not align with the interests of those in power, as recommendations may threaten or impact their interests. Research centers may also face political influence, especially those affiliated with the state or political parties, which affects their scientific independence and the neutrality of their research and recommendations, posing a challenge to their independent operation.

Differences in opinions are among the challenges facing the relationship between centers and decision-makers. Each research center may have its own intellectual and ideological foundations, leading to recommendations that differ according to these foundations or the orientation of their funding sources. This can result in differing views on the issues at hand and weaken the trust of decision-makers in these centers and their outputs. In democratic systems and countries that value the role of these centers, they become indispensable partners in the decision-

making process due to their scientific independence, and their recommendations are taken into account.

Balancing the judgment of decision-makers and the vision of research centers is crucial in the political decision-making process, particularly on issues that impact the state's system and institutions. Decision-makers may believe they possess the necessary experience to make informed decisions, drawing on personal skills and political experience, and are continuously informed about political developments. This proximity may give them a clearer view, especially in crises, enabling them to manage affairs correctly from their perspective. However, the pressures decision-makers face from internal parties, public opinion, the media, or external pressure groups may affect their decisions. In contrast, research centers, which are not subject to the same pressures, can study the information presented to them accurately and provide objective, scientific analyses. They show available alternatives and provide decision-makers with a future vision, offering a comprehensive view that includes solutions and future directions, free from the pressures and influences that decision-makers typically face, making them more precise and professional.

Continuous communication between decision-makers and research centers is essential for exchanging perspectives and analyzing reality, which helps improve the quality of decisions and enhances the shared understanding of problems, thereby facilitating the development of possible solutions. The role of research centers and studies is crucial in supporting political decision-makers by providing objective analyses and recommendations based on scientific foundations, thereby achieving a balance between the vision of these centers and the judgments of decision-makers. This can be achieved through the following steps:

- **Enhancing Cooperation:** Establishing official communication channels between research centers and government agencies is necessary to ensure the

flow of information and ideas between the two parties. Providing centers with the required data from state institutions enables them to conduct accurate and realistic research. Sharing ideas between research centers and decision-makers contributes to essential and effective decisions. This can be achieved by inviting representatives from centers to participate in advisory committees and relevant government meetings, as well as by enhancing cooperation with universities and academic institutions.

- **Objectivity:** Research centers must maintain scientific independence to provide unbiased analyses, which helps build trust with decision-makers. Centers should be kept away from political conflicts and supplied with a neutral environment for academic work.

- **Providing Funding:** Financial support is crucial for enabling centers to conduct robust and impartial research without relying on sources that may compromise their objectivity. The state should allocate funds to ensure the independence of these centers and prevent them from seeking external funding.

- **Performance Evaluation:** Setting public policies does not mean they are immune to review and reassessment of their effectiveness. The role of research centers is essential not only in shaping these policies but also in providing feedback to improve their outcomes.

- **Focusing on National Priority Issues:** Research centers should direct their efforts toward studying pressing national issues, such as security, economy, education, and health, and provide practical solutions based on scientific research.

Sometimes, there may be differences between the individual judgments of decision-makers and the recommendations of research centers. A balance can be

achieved through understanding the role of each and working together to achieve effective results.

This balance can be achieved through interaction and integration; if there is interaction between the judgments of decision-makers and the vision presented by research centers, decision-makers can benefit from the analyses provided by the centers.

Iraqi Think Tanks After 2003

Think tanks are among the most prominent indicators of a nation's development and progress, as they provide expert advice and counsel to decision-makers in various fields, including politics, economics, and security. After 2003, Iraq witnessed the establishment of several research centers focusing on essential issues in the Iraqi, regional, and international arenas, as well as their impact on Iraqi reality, and providing recommendations to decision-makers. However, the relationship between these centers and decision-makers remains weak, as many officials rely on their political or ideological orientations in decision-making, leading to decisions that may not be effective in solving Iraq's problems or may have adverse effects on the political system. The work of research centers in Iraq needs to be framed and activated so they can play their proper role in shaping and building public policy in the country.

The relationship between research centers and political decision-makers in Iraq is characterized by disparity and variation, largely dependent on the prevailing political environment. Before 2003, political decisions were subject to the judgments and interpretations of decision-makers, and even if some perspectives were presented, the decision-maker's conviction prevailed. Following the 2003 change in the political system, the establishment of research centers was delayed

and did not occur until several years later. Recently, however, these centers have begun to influence the decision-making process, albeit in a limited manner, but this influence could expand in the future. This relationship can be summarized as follows:

1. **Consultation:** The role of research centers is to provide studies and analyses on the problems and issues facing the political system in various aspects. During this period, officials and decision-makers consult with the perspectives and analyses of select research centers, but these consultations remain limited.

2. **Limited Influence:** The emergence of research centers in Iraq has been gradual. The weak institutional culture of relying on scientific research as a primary reference for decision-making has limited their influence on political decisions, as decision-makers often rely on partisan visions or succumb to political pressures.

3. **Lack of Coordination:** There are no precise mechanisms obliging decision-makers to cooperate with research centers in making decisions, which are often made based on individual judgments or political agreements, far from the perspectives and recommendations of research centers.

4. **Political Polarization:** Some research centers in Iraq are affiliated with specific parties or political entities, which may influence their work and compromise their independence and scientific objectivity. This political affiliation reduces the credibility of their outputs with decision-makers.

   In light of the crises facing Iraq, there is an urgent need to develop and support the work of research centers to guide those managing the country in making correct and successful decisions that can advance the Iraqi reality, which suffers from many problems that require realistic and practical solutions. There are several

challenges facing the work of research centers in Iraq, including:

- **Few Robust Research Centers:** Iraq is new to this type of center. Although they existed before the 2003 political change, their presence was minimal and primarily associated with government institutions. Today, there are private centers not affiliated with government entities; however, they are insufficient in number compared to the problems Iraq faces, especially those that are neutral and scientifically objective.

- **Lack of Specialization:** Iraq needs specialized centers, as many sectors—such as security, economy, culture, tourism, and science—suffer from problems that require expertise in their respective fields. The current centers have general departments, with sub-specializations that may be marginal or nonexistent. Many centers lack specialization in important issues, resulting in decision-makers lacking access to information and studies addressing these sectors and their associated problems.

- **Weak Support:** The Iraqi state has not provided sufficient attention to research centers, which suffer from a lack of both material and moral support from the state, forcing some to rely on external funding, which may compromise their neutrality.

- **Unstable Conditions:** Political and security instability is one of the primary challenges affecting the freedom of research centers, sometimes preventing them from addressing sensitive issues due to fear of repercussions from certain parties or groups.

- **Weak Communication with Decision-Makers:** Officials are accustomed to making decisions based on their vision and judgment, as the culture of consulting research centers is new to Iraqi officials.

- **Financial and Administrative Corruption:** This is a substantial challenge for research centers, as they may not be provided with accurate statistics or may be misled, resulting in a lack of clarity. Some issues that require solutions may involve exposing financial or administrative corruption that serves the interests of specific individuals or parties, causing researchers to hesitate to address such topics out of fear.

The success of research centers in Iraq in influencing political decision-making is not straightforward and depends on several factors, including their independence and scientific neutrality. The more distant research centers are from sectarian and partisan orientations, the more credible and influential they become, especially if they rely on scientific competence, research expertise, and the quality and relevance of their studies to the Iraqi reality. This dramatically affects their effectiveness, transparency, and ability to communicate with decision-makers, especially if there is a willingness among officials to benefit from the expertise of these centers, particularly after the accumulated mistakes and crises experienced by the current political system, making communication and influence possible due to the need for solutions to the crises facing the system.

Conclusion

Think tanks and research centers, as a relatively new phenomenon in Iraq, require time to establish trust with decision-makers and demonstrate their credibility and neutrality through the objectivity and realism of their studies. Mechanisms for cooperation with decision-makers must be established to ensure the exchange of information and the utilization of research in making realistic and practical decisions. The exchange of ideas between research centers and decision-makers in institutions, facilitated by inviting center representatives to participate in advisory committees and government meetings, ensures the involvement of

centers in political feasibility studies and the development of party programs. Effective communication channels must be established to exchange information and recommendations between research centers and government agencies, focusing on national priority issues by directing research centers to study the pressing issues facing the country, such as security, economy, education, health, etc., and provide realistic solutions based on scientific studies to address these problems.

Research centers can be an effective tool to support the stability of the political system by providing solutions to its problems, provided there is cooperation between them and state institutions, and political and administrative obstacles are overcome. This can be achieved by establishing effective and high-quality communication channels to inform decision-making and facilitating access to information for research centers by implementing mechanisms to ensure the provision of necessary data and statistics, enabling researchers to complete their work.

It is also necessary to strengthen the independent environment of research centers and issue legislation that regulates their work and protects them from political interference, ensuring the objectivity and neutrality of their research and recommendations. Additionally, providing the necessary financial, administrative, and other resources to support their work and grant them scientific independence is crucial. The government and relevant institutions should provide the support needed to ensure the continued effective operation of these centers.

Activating cooperation between research centers and the Iraqi Parliament contributes to enacting legislation that accurately and realistically addresses problems and developing successful legislative policies by consulting them when discussing policies and laws. The importance of involving research centers in shaping

and monitoring government public policies also emerges, allowing deficiencies to be identified. Necessary solutions are proposed, and their effectiveness is ensured through review and follow-up processes. All this will contribute to raising the level of the political system's output.

From the above, research centers in Iraq can play a more effective role in shaping public policies and contributing to sustainable development and political stability.

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The center seeks to contribute to developing the state and its institutions, by proposing ideas and practical solutions to the main problems and challenges facing the state, including improving public sector management, policies, and strategic planning, using reliable data and best practices. The center engages the relevant authorities in the state with regular meetings to support this objective and utilizes the support of international organizations dedicated to assisting Iraq's development. The center also seeks to support economic reforms, and sustainable development and provide technical assistance to the public and private sectors. The center also seeks to support the development of the private sector to provide job opportunities for citizens through training and upskilling, in a way that reduces dependence on government institutions and contributes to supporting and diversifying the country's economy.

The center aims to utilize the vast amount of potential in Iraq's human resources by organizing programs to prepare and develop promising young people, including leaders capable of proposing, adopting and implementing visions and future plans that advance society and preserve its value-system based on the commitment to a high moral standard and rejection of all types of corruption.

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