

مركز البيدر للدراسات والتخطيط

Al-Baidar Center For Studies And Planning



Report Summary

The Performance of Think Tanks and Research Centers in Iraq Challenges and Opportunities

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Introduction

Think tanks and strategic study centers represent a profound civilizational achievement that transcends mere intellectual production. They serve as a true mirror reflecting a nation's commitment to scientific methodology, future forecasting, and the preservation of its knowledge heritage. Given the exceptional quality of their research and the high caliber of experts they employ, these institutions have rightfully earned the title "Think Tanks," playing a pivotal role in empowering decision-makers with evidence-based options and innovative solutions to navigate complex crises.

Recognizing this vital importance, these centers receive significant state support as fundamental pillars for shaping public policy and driving national development. In the Iraqi context, these institutions currently stand at a crossroads of challenges and opportunities, necessitating a strategic investment in their potential to enhance their role in national decision-making and the pursuit of sustainable development.

Think tanks and research centers:

The existence of think tanks serves as definitive evidence of a nation's intellectual maturity and institutional development. However, their true value lies not in their mere presence, but in their actual capacity to influence the triad of knowledge, authority, and society. These institutions operate as "intellectual factories" with structured production lines, managed by specialized experts who deliver high-quality research across vital sectors such as security, economics, and technology aiming to provide pragmatic solutions rather than existing as symbolic titles.

The identity and sustainability of these centers are fundamentally tied to the extent to which state apparatuses and policymakers rely on their outputs to navigate crises and formulate policies. While some narrow their scope to political

or educational roles, they are, at their core, deep research institutions designed to offer comprehensive strategic alternatives. For these centers to successfully realize their vision, they must adopt a clear intellectual framework built on four essential pillars:

1. Research Field: The orientations of research institutions vary according to the field in which they operate. Some institutions may focus on natural sciences and technology, while others focus on social sciences or humanities. The intellectual orientation is determined based on the specific research fields of interest to the institution.

2. Goals and Vision: The intellectual orientation of think tanks is determined based on goals and vision.

3. Values and Principles: Their orientations can be influenced by the values and principles they adopt.

4. Geographical and Cultural Orientation: The geographical and cultural context can influence the orientation of think tanks, as local needs and challenges may be reflected in the orientation of research and innovation conducted by these centers.

Think tanks serve as the cornerstone for nations aspiring to build a solid scientific renaissance, acting as “vigilant guardians” of stability and national assets. By monitoring potential risks and providing evidence-based forecasts, these centers enable decision-makers to take proactive measures before crises escalate. The objectives of these institutions vary significantly depending on their founding entities; while some offer noble humanitarian contributions in medicine and technology through global collaboration, others focus on political and strategic research that carries sensitive security implications—particularly those in major

powers with vast resources and interests reaching beyond their borders.

Conversely, in countries with more modest resources, research centers tend to concentrate their efforts inward, diligently analyzing potential threats across political, economic, and social dimensions. This research endeavor aims to formulate precise insights that translate into national strategies, ultimately safeguarding the state's resources and fortifying national security against both internal and external challenges.

Challenges facing think tanks in Iraq:

1. Weakness of Funding.

Researchers in Iraq face “funding shortages” as a fundamental obstacle preventing the

stability of their centers and the achievement of their strategic goals, as the absence of government support and reliance on unstable or external funding threatens the independence and neutrality of these centers, weakening the quality of their research and depriving them of the actual capacity to influence public policy-making.

2. Human Competencies.

Research centers in Iraq suffer from a “competency shortage” due to a massive brain drain driven by security and economic instability and a lack of incentives, leading to a leadership vacuum that lacks the strategic vision necessary to guide research and develop public policies.

3. Legal, Political, and Security Constraints.

Political and security constraints stand as a major obstacle limiting the independence of research centers in Iraq, as the unstable reality since 2003 has imposed pressures aimed at directing research to serve the interests of specific entities. This prevents the provision of neutral recommendations and narrows the space for dialogue and constructive criticism on sensitive issues.

Lack of Autonomy, Freedom, and Influence on Decision-Making.

The core issue of think tanks in Iraq lies in the absence of autonomy and academic freedom, as they operate under the influence of political entities and donors. This dependency strips their research outputs of scientific neutrality and diminishes their impact on decision-making. Since academic freedom serves as the essential “fuel” for research development, its restriction—especially in the humanities—due to political realities, ruling ideologies, and power dynamics has rendered research superficial. Researchers often avoid addressing objective causes to escape administrative penalties or external pressures. Ultimately, this lack of independence is a natural byproduct of a fragile democracy and an authoritarian culture governing these institutions.

5. Weakness in Management and Coordination.

Poor coordination among research centers leads to duplicated efforts and diminished efficiency, necessitating a more agile administrative system. This issue is exacerbated by the absence of mandatory mechanisms for decision-makers, who often rely on personal judgment and political consensus rather than scientific recommendations and research insights.

6. Lack of Strategy

Think tanks and research centers in Iraq lack a comprehensive strategy essential for achieving effective and sustainable impact. This necessitates defining clear objectives and fostering strategic partnerships involving academia, the private sector, and international entities. Additionally, integrating technology and enhancing community engagement are vital for these centers to fulfill their pivotal role in societal development and in providing robust support for the decision-making process.

Opportunities for Think Tanks and Research Centers in Iraq.

1. International and Regional Cooperation.

International and regional cooperation offers a strategic opportunity for Iraqi think tanks to enhance their effectiveness by building cross-border research partnerships and establishing training agreements with global institutions. Creating channels of communication with international scholars and scientific organizations facilitates the exchange of expertise and mutual benefits. Furthermore, collaborating with international universities provides essential cognitive and financial support, enhancing the scientific viability of research outputs and ensuring alignment with global advancements.

2. Keeping Pace with Global Developments.

Keeping pace with rapid technological transformations is a strategic necessity for Iraqi research centers to refine their outputs by studying and adapting modern technologies, such as Artificial Intelligence and Information Technology, to the local context. Leveraging digitalization, electronic platforms, and advanced analytical tools facilitates data processing and information accessibility, ultimately

enhancing research quality and scientific efficiency across various fields, including medicine and technology.

3. Training and Preparation.

Think tanks play a vital role in building scientific capacities by preparing and qualifying researchers and specialists to serve as leadership competencies within state institutions and the private sector. By investing in talented scientific elites, these centers contribute to enhancing institutional performance through the organization of periodic conferences and workshops. These platforms do not merely enrich scientific discourse; they also extend to guiding public opinion and clarifying complex concepts and visions for both the citizen and the decision-maker alike.

4. Providing Solutions to Local Problems.

Think tanks serve as an “ideas factory” and a vital platform for providing innovative and sustainable solutions to the complex challenges facing Iraq, such as poverty, unemployment, climate change, and corruption. By acting as advisory bodies, these centers provide decision-makers in political, economic, and military fields with a solid knowledge base, moving away from improvised decision-making. They work on crystallizing scientific visions and identifying strategic alternatives grounded in an accurate understanding of current realities and a clear foresight of the future, making them the cornerstone for the success of modern management and societal development.

Conclusion.

In conclusion, despite the significant challenges, capitalizing on available opportunities provides Iraqi think tanks with a robust foundation for development and for contributing to the formulation of rational policies and solutions to accumulated crises. Achieving a positive societal impact and fostering a sustainable research environment requires continuous and integrated support from both the government and the academic community. Ultimately, it is essential to recognize that information—the primary output of these centers—has become a core element of national power and a defining feature of modern scientific and technological advancement and number of ideas can be highlighted:

.1Current Reality of Think Tanks: They function as pioneering instruments for designing vital projects through a scientific methodology. In the Iraqi context, however, these institutions remain in an embryonic stage, necessitating further time to mature and accumulate professional expertise.

.2Institutional Connectivity: There is a pressing need to establish collaborative frameworks between think tanks and decision-makers. This includes incentivizing both the public and private sectors to provide the necessary support and funding for scientific research.

.3Prerequisites for Success: To flourish, these centers require governmental backing, financial and administrative autonomy, and a well-defined strategic framework to optimize their contribution to sustainable development and public policy formulation.

Proposals:

Think tanks must maintain accuracy and objectivity to build trust with decision-makers and citizens, while linking their work to the state strategic planning for social problem-solving.

Developing research human resources by avoiding low-capacity staffing and providing high-level training programs locally and internationally, while encouraging twinning and expertise exchange with global counterparts.

Attracting competent and experienced researchers, providing them with necessary support, and upgrading their knowledge and skills through training and international partnerships.

Creating a supportive environment and opening communication channels with decision-makers to activate their role in political decision-making, while ensuring financial and administrative independence to maintain neutrality and avoid foreign funding issues.

Elevating the status of national research centers to match regional and international peers, while granting them the necessary flexibility and freedom for research and expertise exchange.

Establishing a clear strategy for founding research centers at the highest institutional levels.

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About center

Al-Baydar Center for Studies and Planning is a non-governmental and non-profit organization established in 2015 and registered with the NGO directorate in the general secretariat of the council of ministers in Baghdad.

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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