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LOOKING TO THE EAST

CHATHAM HOUSE 2.0

April Gow of Canongate Partners looks at the importance of think tanks like Chatham House as it celebrates its centenary, and the values behind why we need them more than ever in today's complex world

THE CHATHAM HOUSE RULE

“When a meeting or part thereof, is held under the Chatham House Rule, participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any participant, may be revealed.”

We require more than intelligence, we require wisdom

On 20 November 2019, the Chatham House Prize was presented to Sir David Attenborough by its Royal Patron HM The Queen. As I sat in the audience in the basement of No. 10 St. James's Square, the former home of three British Prime Ministers including the 1st Earl of Chatham, I was inspired by the two nonagenarians on the stage. One, the mother figure and guardian of a nation who remains vital at the age of 93, and the other, a father figure and guardian of our planet, also brimming with vitality at the age of 93. I could not help but think about how their long lives mirrored the life of the institution presenting the award, as Chatham House was about to mark its 100th anniversary in 2020. When The Queen spoke about the ability of the older generation to remain productive and contributing members of society to an advanced age, the audience smiled and nodded. One could feel the gratitude in the room for these two amazing individuals, each an exemplary leader in their own right. Sir David was clearly delighted to receive this recognition. His acceptance speech was upbeat and inspirational, but what I most remember were his closing words, “We require more than intelligence, we require wisdom.” Those words spoken at Chatham House on that particular evening could not have been more convincing for it is indeed the purpose of why an institution like Chatham House exists.

Early Origins

The concept of an international institute dedicated to the scientific study of international affairs was formulated on the sidelines of the Paris Peace Conference in May 1919. With the backing of Woodrow Wilson, British diplomat Lionel Curtis convened members of the British and American delegations to advocate for the formation of an international institute that would have the rigour

to develop policies based on scientific study and that the method of expert analysis and debate should be continued when the delegates returned home. Ultimately, British and American delegates formed separate institutes; the British set up the Institute of International Affairs, aka Chatham House, in 1920, and the Americans created the Council on Foreign Relations in New York in 1921. Interestingly, the British wanted to create an institute that would look at global issues from an international perspective, and the American delegates felt the need to assist in developing American foreign policy.

Chatham House became a blueprint for others and the Institute staff helped found and influence institutes in Australia, Canada, East Africa, Japan, Nigeria, South Africa and elsewhere. World leaders continue to be drawn to Chatham House as a unique forum to share views, engage in debate, and push for change.

Mahatma Gandhi came to Chatham House on his first visit to Great Britain in 1931, telling the audience that “the best way of arriving at a solution to any problem, political or social, is for the protagonists of rival views to meet one another and talk things out with sincerity and candour.”



Since that early origin, there are now 8,248 think tanks around the world with 1,872 in the US and 321 in Great Britain. As think tanks spread around the world, so too has the *Chatham House Rule*. From the time it was formally adopted in 1927, the *Chatham House Rule* has been used to facilitate frank and honest discussion on controversial or unpopular issues by speakers who may not have otherwise had the appropriate forum to speak freely.

The University of Pennsylvania publishes an annual review, called *Global Go To Think Tank Index Report* in which Chatham House was ranked the Think Tank of the Year in 2017, and the second-most influential in the world, after the Brookings Institution, and the world's most influential non-US think tank.

The 2019 *Global Go To Think Tank Index Report*, published in June 2020, refers to a list of reasons for the growth of think tanks in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, including:

- information and technological revolution
- end of national governments' monopoly on information
- increasing complexity and technical nature of policy problems
- increasing size of government
- crisis of confidence in governments and elected officials
- globalisation and the growth of state and non-state actors
- need for timely and concise information and analysis that is "in the right form, in the right hands, at the right time."

Crisis of confidence in governments and elected officials

The mission and work of independent institutions such as Chatham House are more relevant and necessary than ever before. As it looks to its second century, Chatham House has rightly identified that its work must be disseminated more widely as the world is desperate for an informed citizenry and better equipped policy makers and public servants for today and tomorrow. The increasing complexity and technical nature of policy problems makes the work of running government institutions in an effective manner in the twenty-first century impossible for amateurs. One hundred years after World War I, we are again experiencing another great transition and are beset by a deadly global pandemic. Against that backdrop we are also witnessing the fraying of global institutions that have preserved the world order since World War II, the age of disinformation in the digital world that connects us all, the loss of American leadership and democracy in retreat. We have entered a disruptive time when people are experiencing a severe crisis of confidence in governments and elected officials to lead nations, which has resulted in the rise of leaderless revolts by ordinary people who are protesting and clamouring for a better way forward aided by the use of social media.

Think tanks can no longer keep their output for the inner circle of policy experts and government officials. With the rate of change accelerating, forward thinking institutions like Chatham House believe an informed citizenry is important to the future of the planet.

Under its Director and Chief Executive, Dr Robin Niblett CMG, along with its Chairman, Lord Jim O'Neill, three Co-Presidents including Sir John Major, Baroness Manningham-Buller and Lord Alistair Darling, and the governing Council, the Institute has mapped out its second century goals and repurposed its mission and values in order to imagine a better world.

Along with many admirers of this respected institution, I have observed in recent years, especially since Dr Robin Niblett joined in 2007, that together with the international team of committed policy experts, backed by a global group of donors and funders, Chatham House has successfully accelerated its growth and change. They have been resolute in their response to the array of challenges that have beset think tanks, and have been determined to move this 100-year-old institution forward and evolve the role it must play in its second century. At this pivotal time, they see their mandate as a bridge between knowledge and policy in the critical areas of international peace and security, globalisation and governance, sustainable resource economics, pressing environmental issues, information and society, poverty alleviation, healthcare and global health.

Happy 100th Anniversary, Chatham House! Long may your work continue to inspire and motivate the next generation of wise policy makers – the world requires more than intelligence, it requires wisdom.

www.chathamhouse.org

CHATHAM HOUSE MISSION:

To help governments and societies build a sustainably secure, prosperous and just world. We pursue our mission through dialogue, analysis and solutions-based ideas, and by empowering the next generation to build a better world.

SECOND CENTURY GOALS

SUSTAINABLE AND EQUITABLE GROWTH:

Design pathways to sustainable growth that protect the planet and reduce inequalities within and between countries.

PEACEFUL AND THRIVING SOCIETIES:

Promote the rule of law over the rule of force, so as to reduce levels of human insecurity, enhance resilience and prevent large-scale conflict.

ACCOUNTABLE AND INCLUSIVE GOVERNANCE:

Enable greater political accountability and more inclusive governance at global, regional and sectoral levels.

THE VALUES

INDEPENDENCE:

The independence of our thinking, as much as its rigour and creativity, is what makes it influential.

INCLUSIVITY AND DIVERSITY:

We ground our analysis and solutions in an inclusive approach. We bring diverse voices to the table to find common solutions to shared problems. We ensure our research and outputs are widely accessible, so people can develop their own voice in international affairs.

COLLABORATION:

Collaboration is a core competence for our staff. It inspires our relationships with associates, partners, supporters and members and helps us develop global networks to find positive, durable solutions to policy challenges. We do not take institutional positions on policy issues and owe no allegiance to any government or political body.