

**The Role of Think Tanks and Diaspora Associations on  
Shaping US Foreign and Security Policy in the Eastern Mediterranean Region**

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Think tanks and Diaspora Associations are by definition two separate entities which often advocate for similar results. Far too often Think Tanks, due to funding, can achieve their goal much faster than any Diaspora Association.

Think tank: The term denotes a group of people who are paid to do nothing but read, discuss, think, and write, usually to address and redress a matter of vital importance to humanity.

You can think of a think tank as a research university blessed with a complete absence of students and where, as a consequence, none of its professors has to teach---all they have to do is research, research, research.

*“At last count, the United States had 1,984 think tanks---nearly a third of the world's total. American think tanks are constantly researching solutions to a variety of the world's problems, and then arguing, advocating, and lobbying for policy changes at local, state, and federal levels. Some think tanks, such as the Brookings Institution or the Heritage Foundation, have become household names and are cited frequently by major news corporations. Others are cited by outside organizations less frequently, or perhaps not at all, but publish their own articles and books for a select---and at times even sizable---audience.”<sup>1</sup>*

Using think tanks has become common place and it has become a big business. Universities, schools of higher learning and organizations value the process of “thinking” but they have turned into a business, like everything else. When financial reward is at the source of critical thinking, how long before the funds can direct the thought? It is very important to understand the usefulness of think tanks but there is always a cost, the TRUTH!

The following 10 top think tanks represent several disciplines, and it is important to note the amount of funding they receive since that may be one of the benchmarks of their perceived success. It is important to see where these think tanks are located and where the funds for support are derived. The majority of the think tanks which influence a great number of readers are headquartered in Washington, D.C. yet many are located in other areas such as New York, Boston, and various cities in California. Many retired politicians, state Department officials and other governmental employees find comfortable positions at these well-funded institutes. One can determine that the think tanks attract politicians to their cause because politicians bring

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<sup>1</sup> <https://thebestschools.org/features/most-influential-think-tank> The 50 Most Influential Think Tanks in the United States AUG 06, 2020 TBS STAFF

connections and access to these think tanks in an effort to collect even more funds for their papers and research. It is a business.

### **TOP TEN RATED THINK TANKS**

1. *Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs – Harvard University:*  
\$7.7M value a month, with 3.2M hits a month.
2. *Earth Institute – Columbia University:* \$5.2M value per month, 2.1M hits per month.
3. *The Heritage Foundation-* \$112.M a year, 300K hits a month.
4. *Human Rights Watch -* \$60M a year, 200K hits a month.
5. *Kaiser Family Fund -* \$127M a year, 182K hits a month.
6. *Council on Foreign Relations -* \$61M a year, 147K monthly hits.
7. *Brookings Institution –* \$107.5M a year, 113K monthly hits.
8. *CATO Institute -* \$30M a year, 87.5K hits a month.
9. *Ludwig von Mises Institute -* \$5M a year, 66.2K hits a month.
10. *American Enterprise Institute -* \$64M yearly, 62.1K monthly hits.<sup>2</sup>

Think tanks were originally created in an effort to bring about thoughtful discussion and change for issues and to challenge the leadership class in society. There are notable think tank type organizations throughout history which discussed a variety of topics from financial to cultural. Think tanks play a vital role in the development of policy in the United states today. Arguments can be made that these discussions are not purely undertaken for the betterment of society but for the incorporation of ideas which would benefit a narrow group of individuals instead of society in

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<sup>2</sup> <https://thebestschools.org/features/most-influential-think-tank> The 50 Most Influential

total. Modern think tanks in the U.S. have been able to discuss issues and develop policy to legislate long term change. There are think tanks which advocate conservative thought, liberal policy advancement and even far left of right thought. It is one thing to develop discussion for investigative purposes; it is radically different to develop programs which would actually and drastically change the essence of a nation or society. In recent years, these entities have been continually active in the development of legislation and policy which governments far too often and too easily adopt for long term change. In an effort to be clear on what think tanks SHOULD be doing, we must return to an age-old philosophy which revolves around Plato's writing of Justice. A ruler (or in this case the ruling class) must be honest and fair, he must be truthful and unafraid, he must want justice to prevail. In modern day think tanks, the truth is not of paramount importance; rather, ideas and control are more important. There are those who believe that pure constructive thought and ideas can come from think tanks and there are others who have a more cynical view.

The important thing to understand is the ROLE that think tanks play and the importance that we place on them. Modern policy development depends on think tanks for ideas and direction; but with so many issues ranging from environment to poverty, one wonders how anyone can hear anything when everyone is shouting. Despite my personal view of think tanks, they can perform a function to bring about discussion. Only with fair and equal deliberations can ideas be brought to the forefront. Is there really a reason to debate climate change? Poverty? Tax reform? YES, do we do anything about it? NO. There are highly active and useful purposes for think tanks.

The Greek Diaspora in America has developed over time. Since the beginning of the immigration from Greece to all parts of the world, America has been a beacon for opportunity followed closely by Australia, Canada, and many European countries. The Diaspora in America has been

transformative over the years. Since the Greek Revolution in 1821 and migration to the US in the mid 1800's and with a massive exodus of Greeks in the early part of the 20th Century, Greek enclaves sprouted throughout the country, and with it, churches, and social groups. The immigrant slowly became an American. The hard-working immigrant took any job they could find in the beginning, shoeshine boys, bus boys, mine workers, anything that paid money to the newly arrived immigrant. The basic principles that were ideas and concepts which the immigrant, in search of new opportunities, quickly adopted. Hard work and dedication brought forth emerging middle class of Greeks. In the 20th Century the hard-working Greeks in America worked, saved, and sent money to Greece which was desperately needed and used to help Greece.

All across America, these new Americans made inroads in business, and by doing so were viewed as an emerging power base in the United States. Politics, education, law, and many other areas of American society were slowly being occupied by children of these new immigrants. After the second World War, America began to play a new role in the world and, so of course, did the Greek immigrants and their children. Education was of paramount importance to all these growing Greek American communities and Greek American society was flourishing in a country which allowed freedom and encouraged business to flourish. The children of these Greek immigrants were attending and graduating school on every level. The 2010 Census in the United States, information showed that the Greek American community was first in education and second in income; the Jewish-American community was second and first respectively. Greek-American stated objectives as a "hyphenated community", are similar as the Jewish-American, Armenian-American, and other similar communities.

The purpose and value of the Greek Diaspora has changed over time and since 1974 and the Turkish Invasion of Cyprus, it began to have a focus, a purpose which would leave a mark in American political circles.

*“In the 1990s, however, with the end of the Cold War and the disintegration of the Balkans, Greece experienced an influx of economic migrants from neighboring countries, including Pontic Greeks from the diaspora communities in the former USSR. The arrival of these migrants and the increasing recognition of the rights of minorities has meant Greece has rapidly developed into a more multicultural, open, and diverse society. Moreover, since the restoration of democracy in 1974, expatriate lobbies, particularly in the USA, have been used to support or promote Greek foreign policy, a strategy which received new impetus after 1989 with the ‘Macedonian issue’ and the emerging economic or cultural aspirations of Greece in the Balkans and in parts of the former USSR”<sup>3</sup>.*

The role of any Diaspora organization for any ethnicity has traditionally been developed and created to assist the ‘mother country’ with aid. This aid can be in the form of monetary donations to the programs directly in need of assistance. More importantly in the United States and on behalf of the Greek American community, Greek diaspora has played and continues to play a valuable function. Many organizations have been created and try to represent the Greek American community. Only one has the longevity and integrity to provide input for the betterment of the issues Greece and Cyprus in the Eastern Mediterranean. Since 1922, the Order of the American Hellenic Educational Progressive Association (AHEPA) has played a critical role in shaping policy for Greece and Cyprus in times of need.

Organized in 1922 in an effort to assist the massive influx of immigrants coming to America and fleeing the terrible persecution of the Ottomans in the Asia Minor regions, Greek American

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<sup>3</sup> special issue see the special issue ‘The Odyssey of the Pontic Greeks’, Journal of Refugee Studies, 4 (4) 1991.

businessmen in Atlanta formed the AHEPA and took the lead to make the immigrant good Americans. Throughout the years of service to the community, the organization has supplied nearly 100 years of service and support of our community. During World War II, and the reconstruction times in Greece, AHEPA played a critical role both here in the United States and overseas. Our \$400 Million collection of funds by selling War Bonds was the single most impressive benchmark in America. AHEPA paid for over 10% of the total cost of World War II. AHEPA built hospitals in Greece and sent billions of dollars' worth of food and clothing in War aid. One of the greatest exhibits of political support came in 1974 when the Turkish government invaded the Republic of Cyprus. AHEPA mobilized thousands of people to March on Washington, and met with the State Department and the President of the United States to assist the people of Cyprus.

Historically there is documentation that shows in October 1528 off the west coast of Pensacola Florida the first Greek or the first person of Greek descent arrived in America. This individual has been identified as Teodoro or Theodoros. He was a sailor, a ship caulker, that was on a Spanish ship that arrived in Florida. The captain of the ship which sailed from Europe to the Americas used Theodoros as a bartering chip with the local Indians. The captain of the vessel needed freshwater, the Indians wanted a hostage to make sure that they would not be short changed or robbed or pillaged in anyway while the sailors collected the water. It was agreed that Theodoros would be given to the Indians until the water was collected. Theodoros was never seen of again.

In 1768 an English expedition into the lower colonies of America landed the first Greek settlement named New Smyrna in Florida. This colony was named after Smyrna in Asia minor where the leader of this colony Andrew Turnbull had married a Greek woman in London and in honor of her birthplace, he named the new settlement New Smyrna Beach.

The colonists in this new opportunity in America died quickly; within two years, half of the number of colonists had died either to dysentery or hard work that was forced upon them because most of them were indentured servants for 5 to 8 years in order to get their freedom and a piece of land for the opportunity to live their lives in the New World escaping the Tierney of Europe. Eventually by 1777, the remaining colonists picked up and moved to Saint Augustine because New Smyrna was a failure as a colony due to the massive number of deaths due to the environment. Today, there is a shrine in honor of those great colonists which was paid in full by the Order of AHEPA it is called Saint Photios Shrine in New Smyrna Beach, Florida. As a community, we are proud of these trailblazers that left a mark on American history.

There are several notable firsts of Greeks in the United States and far too many to list here; however, it is important to note a common thread that these original immigrants came to the United States in an effort to be integrated and to become prosperous with their vision. Their drive afforded them an opportunity to thrive in a country that did not have all the social restrictions that Greece and Europe were enduring during the 1700s.

The first Greek Orthodox community in America was developed in New Orleans in 1864. This is a significant milestone and New Orleans plays a significant role in why and how this community flourished there. Greece, being a maritime country, has always had a connection to the sea and Greece remains one of the largest, if not the largest, shipping countries in the world. New Orleans has become an international port not only servicing the United States but also servicing South America and other parts of the world. It was a natural place to find Greek immigrants populate large seaport cities Baltimore, Philadelphia, Boston, New York, New Orleans, San Francisco, and Los Angeles. All of these cities had Greek influence and Greek immigrants. New Orleans was just the first that organized itself into a parish community.

During the War of Freedom of Greece 1821 to 1827 events were followed very closely by the American government. America had close connections and ties with the philosophy and the thinking of ancient Greece and thus were very compassionate towards the freedom of the Greeks from Ottoman rule. This was the first notable and major connection with the America, and it allowed for thousands of immigrants to flee Greece for America. This was the beginning of a wave of immigration that lasted over 150 years. The story of these early immigrants and the opportunities were seized by the children of those early immigrants. These individuals worked hard, and many of them worked in textile or steel mills, on railroads wherever they could make money to send back to Greece. These immigrants earned enough money to send some money home. Shoemakers, tailors, restaurants, manual labor, physical labor, or any other work they could find. They lived the American dream but now it became the Greek American dream.

In the early days of the 20th century Greek Americans sent hundreds of millions of dollars to family back in Greece. This aid and assistance helped Greece function in the darkest days of the Balkan wars and World War I. Many of these immigrants that were in the United States had a vision of working in America and eventually going back to Greece. By the early part of the 20th century, the dream of returning to their motherland faded, and a large majority stayed in the United States and became American citizens. There are stories of mass migration to go fight during the wars between 1912 and 1922 but the numbers were not the same as the ones coming here for freedom and opportunity.

*“The leading Greek-American voluntary association is the AHEPA, ever since its inception over a half century ago. The organization has a membership of around forty thousand in good standing, including female and youth auxiliaries. A much larger number of Greek Americans have been*

*initiated into the lodge at one time or another and are considered to be permanently part of the "AHEPA family." With about 430 chapters, mostly active, the AHEPA has grassroots nationwide. The association has its national headquarters in Washington, D.C., with its own building and paid permanent staff. In its first decades, the lodge served to Americanize many Greek immigrants through its official use of the English language, promotion of loyalty to the United States, and quasi-Masonic rituals. In recent decades, when the demographic balance has shifted to the American born, the AHEPA has been in the forefront of supporting Hellenic ethnicity and has often spoken for the Greek American community at large. The AHEPA, in addition to generating many local philanthropic activities, raises money at the national level for worthy causes. Among its continuing good works have been disaster relief in Greece, funding hospital and health care facilities in Greece, and the establishment of an extensive scholarship program for Greek American youth. Its most recent national project has been to foster research and treatment of "thalassemia" (also known as Cooley's anemia), a genetic blood deficiency that afflicts perhaps as many as one in nine Greeks and other peoples from the Mediterranean region. The AHEPA is most vibrant during its annual conventions attended not only by chapter elected delegates, but also by thousands of others who look forward to the premier social event in Greek America. National offices are hotly contested at convention time, and elections revolve around a two-party system whose origins in the lodge go back to the 1920s. Though substantive differences between the two parties are not always easy to discern, members feel strong allegiance to one or the other."*<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Charles C. Moskos, *Greek Americans, Struggle and Success* ( New Brunswick, NJ; Transaction Publishers 1989), pages 75-76.

The role of the Greek American lobby in the United States is almost nonexistent. In order for a lobby effort to work properly, it must be funded. Greek Americans do not donate to lobbyists. On the other hand, the Greek American diaspora organizations like AHEPA work tirelessly to visit members of Congress on the hill regularly to discuss issues of concern to our community. Members of these organizations, primarily AHEPA and the American Hellenic Institute (AHI), go to Capitol Hill on a regular basis and promote an ongoing relationship between the United States and Greece and the United States and Cyprus. They work to maintain focus on issues pertaining to the eastern Mediterranean and to limit Turkish influence. This pro bono work would cost millions of dollars if a lobbyist were hired but the Greek American community does not do that. Rather, these Greek American organizations work as hard as possibly to effectuate change for the betterment of the region in the eastern Mediterranean. They support, promote, communicate, and endorse programs that help Greece and Cyprus. Efforts have not gone waste. In 1974 and into 1975 the Order of AHEPA mobilized thousands of people to march on Washington in protest of the illegal invasion of Cyprus by Turkey. Although America was unable to resolve the situation, the AHEPA was at the White House and had meetings with President Gerald Ford and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, this is well documented and there are verbatim notes of the meeting.

*“First, I want to express my appreciation to all of you for being here. I fortunately had a very long period of time when in the Congress to have many contacts with AHEPA. Some of my contacts go back even further Alex Demar and Bill Strugis -- between them I earned my first dollar. I have a strong feeling for Americans of Greek heritage. When I was Vice President, I recall receiving a call from the Secretary of State on the problems in Cyprus. The Secretary filled me in on the steps*

*then being taken by the previous Greek government in trying to change. or upset, the arrangements then existing in Cyprus. Since becoming President, I have spent a good deal of time working with the Secretary, with the Congress. trying to find ways to get an answer to the Cyprus problem, to get negotiations going. negotiations bringing about the desired results. The Secretary has had several meetings with the foreign ministers of Greece and Turkey trying to arrange for negotiations. trying to get steps started toward a settlement. My friends on Capitol Hill then tried their initiative. I understand what the Congress wants to do. However, frankly, in my judgment the various actions by the Congress have been counterproductive. I have talked about this with Congressmen Brademas, Sarbanes and Rosenthal. I think that if we are to have a solution, we have to be given flexibility. I know this does not coincide with the attitude of AHEPA and your actions over the last six months. But what progress has the position that has been taken by you produced? There has been no solution on Cyprus. The Turks are more difficult and not more cooperative. I am sure you know that we have some very important and very sensitive bases in Turkey. Bases, important not only for the United States, but also for the NA TO Alliance. Turning to Greece, I could not have been more overjoyed by last year's Greek elections and the support of Caramanlis. But, in four by-elections last week the Greek government lost all four. This does not bode well for Greece. I was also not encouraged to see two recent incidents: What is this gal's name -- Mercouri. leading two thousand demonstrators through the streets of Nicosia; and further to read of demonstrations outside the U. S. Embassy in Athens last week. ”<sup>5</sup>*

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<sup>5</sup> [https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/4/4a/Ford%2C\\_Kissinger%2C\\_AHEPA\\_-\\_April\\_25%2C\\_1975%28Gerald\\_Ford\\_Library%29%281553045%29.pdf](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/4/4a/Ford%2C_Kissinger%2C_AHEPA_-_April_25%2C_1975%28Gerald_Ford_Library%29%281553045%29.pdf)

AHEPA was strong on the issue of eliminating Turkish threat on Cyprus. It was clear to AHEPA that the Kissinger doctrine which is still in effect in Cyprus was more important than the diaspora communities' concerns. Unfortunately, over 46 years has passed with no equitable resolution to this issue. The important take away is that the AHEPA and the diaspora community worked together to pressure the White House to do what was right. AHEPA has done this on many occasions. AHEPA meets with the President of the United States on an annual basis and have done so since 1924 for the Order of AHEPA is the premier and only organization that represents the Greek American community others have different motivations behind their objectives. AHI was born out of the AHEPA and today these organizations work closely to maintain an Israel Cyprus Greece relationship that was started by AHEPA in 2010. Our diaspora presence is impressive.

In an effort to clarify the importance between a diaspora organization and a think tank. It is critical to understand that a think tank is funded by individuals who would like to advocate their position and assert an underlying result. Many times, the intention or the direction of these individuals is to manipulate change and change does not necessarily mean for the better. Think tanks are like consultants anymore with the underlying agenda which can reflect a certain political view, but it is not directly attributed to a working theory that is not supported by somebody or financial means. Basically, think tanks are almost like hiring a consultant which will do your bidding and create the narrative that you want created in an academic environment so that the result will benefit the individual paying for the service. This is not an absolute statement; there are several think tanks that are academic in nature, usually not very well-funded, that actually serve the purpose they were intended to serve which is dialogue. Think tanks work on topics which will inevitably end with options for solutions to a problem. If we were to take all the Greek American issues and boil them

down into tangible concepts, we would be hard-pressed to find two or three issues which means as much to us today than 50 years ago. The Greek American community does not have issues like other hyphenated communities in the United States today. ***We are first in education and second and income as an ethnic group. Our parents and grandparents sacrificed much to make sure that our existence today would be easier than theirs.***

The Chinese political public relation machine can afford to spend hundreds of millions of dollars in think tanks to advocate their position on economy, immigration, civil and human rights, and a plethora of other areas that they are extremely weak in. Countries which command this excess amount of money can effectuate philosophical change on how we view them. These excess funds can manipulate the situation to their advantage this is the major flaw with think tanks they conform to the highest bidder. China is a flagrant violator of every basic principle we hold true as Americans and think tanks enable these positions for China.

The Greek American community is probably the worst funded lobby there is in America for the amount of affluence we command. Greek Americans have spent little money on politics and on lobbying. Our strength as a diaspora community comes from the outreach to our grass roots networking from education and teaching elected leaders our issues. This plays a major role in how the Greek American community can create change in America and in turn on the globe. The diaspora communities working together, especially multi-cultural communities, for example the Greek American the Armenian-American the Israeli American the Spanish American or any community is available to working together, can create an immovable force in the Congress of the United States much like the perceived quilt of ethnicities in this country which makes up America. Communities need to work together jointly to create opportunities and educate individuals on issues on the hill that would benefit everyone.

*“Relations between Turkey and its Western allies in the United States and Europe have been on a steady downward trajectory for some eight years. While Presidents Donald Trump and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan established a measure of rapport, their highly personalized dealings only papered over the structural differences undermining the relationship. With President Joe Biden unlikely to continue Trump’s laissez-faire approach, several of these simmering disagreements could bubble over in 2021 and lead to a deeper rupture in relations. Beyond the change of tone and approach from a new U.S. administration, several key strategic and energy decisions could determine Turkey’s direction for years to come.*

*Indeed, with Turkey militarily engaged in Syria, Iraq, and Libya—and at loggerheads with Greece, Cyprus, Egypt, and France over Eastern Mediterranean maritime boundaries and potential energy resources—there is no shortage of potential flashpoints. The possibility that Turkey will fully activate the S-400 air defense system purchased from Russia or pursue deeper cooperation with Moscow in response to U.S. sanctions continues to threaten the strategic relationship. The separate threat of sanctions against Turkey’s state-owned Halkbank for evading Iran sanctions hangs over the already-weakened Turkish economy. The lira’s weakness and Turkey’s persistent current account deficit, coupled with Ankara’s exhaustion of its foreign currency reserves, could lead to further economic turbulence and, potentially, greater repression from President Erdoğan of his domestic critics. In Libya, a fragile ceasefire has so far held back a new phase of that internationalized conflict, but Turkey stands against an array of regional players in supporting the U.N.-recognized government. The Libyan conflict is now also tied into a broader standoff between Turkey and its Hellenic neighbors over Cyprus, maritime delineation, and energy exploration.”<sup>6</sup>*

The region of the eastern Mediterranean is a powder keg waiting to explode. This is not a new development but the erratic behavior of the Turkish leadership of the entire region has countries baffled as to what is next. There are daily incursions of Greek airspace, violations of territorial waters by Turkish ships, and many more unnecessary violations which do nothing but escalate tensions. Turkish violations in Syria, Egypt, Libya, and other borders by Turkey is alarming. They are the second most dangerous country on the planet, second only to China. The upper echelon Turkey have caused a major upheaval in the region and the problem with that is that they do not

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/security/reports/2021/01/19/494738/flashpoints-u-s-turkey-relations-2021/>

deal honestly and fairly. There is no solution to the Turkish question or the problem and no think tank who Turkey funds will be able to convince the US Congress that their value is important. Just on human rights violations Turkey should be viewed as a second-class country. The United States no longer needs their support or their assistance in the region for anything. The problem with the think tanks is they will never say no to Turkey because they pay top dollar for opinions.

I myself and members of the AHEPA have been threatened by the Turkish government on several occasions almost being ejected out of Turkey for our positions against the government. This is not a time to hide behind think tanks and it is not a time to hide behind false hope. Turkey must be eliminated from the equation so that peaceful relations between all the Mediterranean countries can take root. The EU is a problem here, the United States is a problem here, China is a problem here and Russia is a problem here. These countries look to Turkey as a good customer and a good place to buy cheap goods. Israel is the only world player who sees the truth in Turkey and could resolve the entire problem themselves, but that is not how it works.

The U.S. State Department has for over 45 years followed a flawed policy of appeasement when it comes to Turkey. Diplomacy thru strength has always worked better than diplomacy through kindness. If we are to realize a renewed age of peace it will not come from think tanks, and maybe not even from a diaspora effort. During the Cold War, things were much easier to handle. Today with the advent of China on the world stage and the power-hungry dictators around the world trying to secure money and influence, it remains to be seen who is going to be able to make peace out of this jumbled mess.