



## **Koch showers millions on think tanks to push a restrained foreign policy**

Nahal Toosi

February 13, 2020

Libertarian business tycoon Charles Koch is handing out \$10 million in new grants to promote voices of military restraint at American think tanks, part of a growing effort by Koch to change the U.S. foreign policy conversation.

The grants, details of which were shared exclusively with POLITICO, are being split among four institutions: the Atlantic Council; the Center for the National Interest; the Chicago Council on Global Affairs; and the RAND Corporation.

Each institution is using the funds in different ways. But, broadly speaking, the money will pay for scholarly positions and activities that explore various aspects of U.S. foreign policy, with a focus on testing widely held assumptions about the use of U.S. military force.

The funds are being dispensed amid growing public exhaustion in the United States with American military action overseas. Congress is moving to restrain the executive branch's power to wage war. Some Democratic presidential candidates are running on promises to end the "endless wars" in places like Afghanistan and Iraq. And even President Donald Trump, who has yet to deliver on his campaign pledge to reduce the U.S. military footprint abroad, claims to be bringing U.S. troops home.

Will Ruger, vice president for research and policy at the Charles Koch Institute, the vehicle for the grants, said it's high time that the concepts of "realism and restraint" got a second look. "We think that the marketplace of ideas has been too narrow and has not been healthy," Ruger said. "There are a lot of important ideas that either need to be leveraged in our policy analysis or discovered or re-discovered."

Around \$4.5 million will go to the Atlantic Council, which will use it to establish what it is calling the New American Engagement Initiative. The grant will support five scholars and activities related in part to how the U.S. balances its use of diplomacy, international alliances and the military.

"This is our biggest engagement to date with the Koch Institute, and it's because we both recognize that the world we're facing can't be addressed with the tools we've used in the past," said Fred Kempe, president and CEO of the Atlantic Council. "We just need to be more creative to address a dramatically changed international landscape, including new major power competition."

RAND is receiving \$2.9 million over five years to support a new center focused on the concept of grand strategy. The initiative, called the Center for Analysis of U.S. Grand Strategy, will be led by scholar Miranda Priebe. It will look at how various grand strategies are affected by technological change and other global trends.

The Chicago Council has been granted \$1.9 million over five years. The funds will cover two think tank positions; the council also will hold events and other outreach in the Midwest to foster discussions about the role of the U.S. internationally and how the notion of restraint fits in.

The Center for the National Interest, which already leans to the right and has long advocated a realist foreign policy, is receiving \$900,000 over two years to support three new roles and one existing position. One of the new positions will focus on Asia – specifically China.

By signing up you agree to receive email newsletters or alerts from POLITICO. You can unsubscribe at any time. This site is protected by reCAPTCHA and the Google [Privacy Policy](#) and [Terms of Service](#) apply.

Last year, Koch turned heads when he gave nearly \$500,000 to help establish the [Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft](#), a new think tank devoted to reining in the use of U.S. military action. The institute also received roughly the same amount from liberal billionaire financier George Soros.

Charles Koch also helped co-found the libertarian Cato Institute in the 1970s and has provided it with financial support for many years. But his relationship with Cato has at times been [acrimonious](#).

Koch, who leads the diversified, multinational Koch Industries, is now looking to expand his influence in the foreign policy space through other means. For instance, he's [offering grants](#) for academics and others seeking to research topics such as relations with China and the future of U.S. alliances.

Ruger stressed that the Koch Institute respects the freedom of the think tanks it is funding and realizes that the research they do may not always produce results that align with the pro-restraint model.

What matters more, he said, is simply to get people to think beyond the conventional wisdom that places a priority on military force.

“There is an inflection point in American politics right now,” Ruger said. “There’s a real opportunity for good scholarship to impact the debate.”