

Thierry de Montbrial

Founder and Chairman of the WPC

Founder and Executive Chairman of IFRI



Thierry de Montbrial is the Founder and Executive Chairman of IFRI, France's leading think tank. He is also Chairman of the World Policy Conference (WPC), which he founded in 2008.

Every aspect of his intellectual engagement and action are permeated with the idea that progress in human societies is possible when reason and sensitivity are harmoniously combined. Trained in the exact sciences and in particular mathematics, in which his interest has never flagged, he wrote his doctoral thesis at Berkeley on the time dimension in the economic theory of general equilibrium, directed by Gérard Debreu, 1983 Nobel Prize winner. The concepts of time and equilibrium, and thus History, can be found throughout his work. In his view, economics remain the queen of the sciences of action, even though, as 2008 showed, reality sometimes offers a harsh reminder of its limits. He transformed the way the subject is taught at the Paris École Polytechnique, with a team he chaired for eighteen years (1974-1992).

Alongside this, from 1973, his functions as Head Director of the Policy Planning Staff (Centre d'analyse et de prévision, CAP) at the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs gave him the chance to extend the scope of his explorations and action to international policy and strategy. Having formed an expert team with some of the most brilliant minds in the field, he worked in the firm belief that, in these areas too, while knowledge ordered in scientific fashion is of the essence, it must be applied with an in-depth understanding of others, with respect, tolerance and empathy. Over the course of his six years at CAP, he established an "intellectual diplomacy" never before seen in France, which led him to travel the five continents, meeting with others and building ever more ties. This experience was pivotal, enabling him to go to other cultures with an open ear.

In the same spirit, he brought the concept of the think tank to his country in 1979, when he founded the Institut français des relations internationales (Ifri), now considered one of the best in the world. In his view, think tanks have a major part to play in the 21st century, putting flesh on what are still the bones of global civil society. While geopolitics is often associated with war, Thierry de Montbrial has unflinchingly worked for geopolitics of peace. He feels that there is no collective undertaking more important than the creation of legitimate and effective global governance. Toward this end, in 2008, he initiated the World Policy Conference (WPC), which over six years' time established itself across the planet as a forum of prime importance.

The two-fold scientific and human dimension of Thierry de Montbrial's work is expressed in his many books, teaching and conferences, which often overrun the bounds of economics and international relations to touch on philosophy and spirituality.