

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Intelligence in international society: An English school perspective on the ‘five eyes’

Robert Schuett¹  | John Williams² 

¹Diplomatic Academy Vienna, Wien, Austria

²Durham University, Durham, UK

Correspondence

John Williams, School of Government and International Affairs, Durham University, al Qasimi Building, Elvet Hill Road, Durham DH1 3TU, UK.

Email: j.c.williams@durham.ac.uk

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Abstract

Despite the recent prominence of intelligence in post-Ukraine global policy, it is a Cinderella in international relations studies. Using English School (ES) theorisation, we locate intelligence within the constellation of primary and secondary institutions in international society. Through looking at the Five Eyes, we explore where intelligence sits within widespread claims of a crisis of the post-1945 liberal international order (LIO) and what role intelligence plays in diplomacy, war and great power management in the context of shifting global power dynamics. Following major twenty-first century Western intelligence controversies, we argue against *raison d'état* approaches and for *raison de système* thinking. In the face of claims of a new Cold War between Russia, China and the West, we see an urgency for policymakers in open societies to re-think intelligence from an international society perspective that is realistic and normative, and that pays attention to Global South dynamics. Insulating intelligence from politicisation is more important than ever but does not mean that intelligence is a value-neutral government function.

1 | INTELLIGENCE IN INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY: IT IS GOOD TO TALK

Our goal is to establish a research agenda that closes two specific gaps. Firstly, we aim to close the gap between International Relations (IR) theory and intelligence studies in a distinctive way by arguing that English School (ES) IR theory offers a far more appropriate and effective means of locating intelligence within IR theory than the more common, if still relatively rare, connection between Realism and intelligence. Secondly, we aim to show how this ES perspective closes a gap between intelligence and the values, principles and practices of an open society. Whilst we see important aspects of how intelligence relates to the domestic politics and regulation of open societies from this ES perspective, our principal concern is with the kind of international order open societies advocate. The willingness of ES theory to recognise the complex interaction between different normative pressures in an

international society makes it far more able to effectively explore the ethical challenges intelligence faces in the twenty-first century.

Our agenda both more effectively frames some of the classic tensions between intelligence and an open society, and places those debates in a richer international context that acknowledges the importance of politics, history, law and philosophy. This gets beyond stereotypical and simplistic presentations of intelligence agencies as practitioners of dark arts necessary to survive. It is true that it is ‘an intelligence jungle out there’ (Zegart, 2022: 145), even an ‘epic intelligence war’ (Walton, 2023) where trust is low and uncertainty high, but that does not place spycraft beyond any need for legitimising justification. Within the narrow constraints of a *raison d'état* perspective, there seems little room for discussing the nature of intelligence. And yet, the reality of intelligence in international society is that it is much more complicated than most IR realists would have us believe.

A caveat is in order. We do not reinvent what intelligence is. We are not wholesale against realist

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intelligence orthodoxy. Rather, our aim is to make sense of intelligence from a rich yet hitherto neglected ES viewpoint. Our starting point is today's publicity of an otherwise secretive business. In the run-up to Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, Washington disclosed unprecedented amounts of information about Moscow's troop build-up and hybrid warfare tactics. Ever since London has provided daily updates about what is happening on the battlefield and assessments of where the Ukraine war is headed. Even the once ultra-secretive Five Eyes (FVEY) 'band of brothers and sisters' (Kerbaj, 2022: xi) share joint intelligence assessments with the public. These 'open secrets' (Zegart, 2023), and the positive responses to these initiatives, stand in stark contrast to the early 2000s when global war on terror (GWoT) covert programmes of torture and rendition as well as revelations of sweeping illegal domestic and global surveillance operations called into question the role and place of intelligence in open societies. These controversies have contributed to a resurgence of interest in why and how nations are caught up in fierce and costly intelligence battles, and theorists and practitioners in intelligence studies are developing an autonomous body of intelligence theory (Gaspard & Pili, 2022; Gill & Phythian, 2018). This is where ES theorisation comes in. To end IR theory's awkward silence on the intelligence front, we want to add to these debates over nature and value of intelligence by connecting intelligence theory with *raison de système* ES thinking.

We proceed as follows. In Section 1, we briefly explore the state of play on intelligence theorising in IR and why there is not much to see, before bringing in ES theorising showing how its historical and sociological sensitivity allows us to connect intelligence's place in international society to what ES theorists call 'primary institutions', principally diplomacy, war and great power management. This opens space for normative dimensions of intelligence, and here we explore this space via the open society idea(l). In Section 2, we shift towards more empirical and policy-oriented concerns, looking at FVEY cooperation and how it can be seen as an important 'secondary institution' of contemporary international society that is increasingly characterised by contestation over the nature and purpose of international order. In Section 3, we raise some implications for intelligence policy and priorities in an international society that is changing rapidly. Theorising intelligence in an ES way adds to public and professional debates by enabling more systematic thinking about the impacts of intelligence and its roots in the deep structures of international society. And in Section 4, we conclude that what is particularly important in today's diverse global landscape is to think of intelligence as deeply normative and political without, however, politicising it.

Policy Implications

- Five Eyes intelligence cooperation should be reoriented to take greater account of challenges to the Liberal International Order coming from major Global South democracies' disenchantment and disengagement with LIO principles, institutions and visions for future international order.
- Both better informing Five Eye states' governments on Global South democracies' politics and pursuing opportunities for enhanced intelligence cooperation with Global South democracies can help build democracies' support for the Liberal International Order so more states see it pays to make the system work for themselves and others.
- Recent steps towards greater intelligence openness by Five Eyes states in the context of Russia's invasion of Ukraine should be extended where possible to help rebut disinformation, create opportunities for engagement with intelligence agencies and better connect Five Eyes to the normative vision of an open and rules-based international society that offers benefits for a wide range of open societies.
- Whilst 'peer competitor' challenges from China and Russia's invasion of Ukraine represent clear security challenges for Five Eyes states, necessitating ongoing cooperation, national security strategies and policies that narrow intelligence functions within *raison d'état* risk driving a self-fulfilling logic of mutual hostility. Intelligence and cooperation through Five Eyes must also support diplomatic functions at least as much as military ones to do the hard work of building consensus, creating shared interests and visions and embedding open society principles as widely as possible.

2 | MAPPING INTELLIGENCE IN IR THEORY

There has never been much cross-fertilisation between intelligence studies and IR, even with Realism, which offers the most conducive home to an account of intelligence emphasising *raison d'état*. We suggest that the main reason for this is the idea of IR as an explanatory social science, created by two parallel trends mitigating against intelligence being a major strand of IR theorising. The first of these, behaviourism of the sort associated with Morton Kaplan's (e.g.

Kaplan, 1957) pioneering work, values aggregative data sets subject to systematic statistical analysis using increasingly advanced quantitative research methods. The goal of identifying causal relationships between independent and dependent variables favours theorising that sets aside exploring in depth the nature of human beings, the political and the state in ways seen as the preserve of normative political philosophy. Creating valid, reliable and sufficiently large intelligence data sets for these forms of analysis presents arguably insuperable difficulties because of the necessity of secrecy.

The second methodological change is the shift to the structural level of analysis most strongly associated with the Neorealism of Kenneth Waltz (1979). This marginalises intelligence by seeing it as a tool of foreign policy, and thus consigned to the 'second image' of state-level phenomena that, whilst crucial to explaining specific policy actions and preferences, is marginal to the 'real' task of IR theory – explaining deep-rooted, long-run, structural forces that drive overall patterns of state behaviour under conditions of anarchy. Here, the 'security dilemma' provides the major reference point, and whilst creating space for intelligence agencies to make a major contribution to national security, it excludes specifically theorising intelligence as a central requirement. That is both because of the structural nature and consequent irresolvability of the security dilemma, and how the consequent policy implications mean intelligence can be lumped in with other national security maximising activities where the military is most significant. As Waltz (1979: 187) puts it, states 'have to live with their security dilemma, which is produced not by their wills but by their situations. A dilemma cannot be solved'. The logic then, in Mearsheimer's world (Mearsheimer, 2001: 36), is clear enough: the 'best way for a state to survive in anarchy is to take advantage of other states and gain power at their expense. The best defense is a good offense. Since this message is widely understood, ceaseless security competition ensues.' Given these structural realities, the path to relevance for IR theory (so the argument goes) is through policy advice rooted in the positivist methods of causal analysis that can guide decision-makers in the least-worst options that face them based on statistical probability of achieving particular outcomes (Rosenberg, 2017; Sterling-Folker, 2017).

This impacts theorisation from the other side of the IR intelligence studies gap. Despite methodological difficulties in data collection and assessments, intelligence is becoming the subject of more comprehensive theoretical study. Recently, we have seen intelligence theory comparable to that in politics, sociology and law (see Gaspard & Pili, 2022; Gill & Phythian, 2018). In terms of methodology, we acknowledge the reluctance within intelligence studies to attempt a general theory of intelligence (Rogg, 2018); even defining it is hard

(Miller, 2022; Zegart, 2022: chap 4). Definitional challenges show the impact of methodological changes linked to structuralism and causal explanation to inform effective policy making in the face of uncertainty. The tripartite definition offered by Lowenthal (2022: 10) – which sees intelligence as process, product and operation – is contextualised within the national security discourse indebted to the security dilemma and *raison d'état* approach. Sub-dividing intelligence to sharpen the definition opens a path to comparative analysis of different components' significance, and, potentially, to causality in the intelligence cycle. Yet, this is to set the methodological test in a very particular way, one which sees positivist political science (itself largely seeking to ape neoliberal economics, aiming to be comparable with natural science) as the benchmark, and causal explanation as the most, if not only, meaningful measure of 'good' theory.

Methodological dogmatism stands in contrast to the interdisciplinary approach of earlier intelligence studies comprised of historians, political scientists, journalists and practitioner–scholars. This can still be found in definitional debates today. Gill and Phythian (2016: 7) link intelligence to both the general pursuit of useful knowledge, and contextualise it in the specific realm of national security, allowing diverse inputs into the first element of definitional debate. That interdisciplinary intelligence studies constituency mirrors the combination of historians, political philosophers, international lawyers and practitioner–scholars in the British Committee for the Theory of International Politics, active from the 1950s to the mid-1980s, which originated the ES (Vigazzi, 2005). ES theory remains interdisciplinary-oriented, even if academia's professionalisation leaves less space for practitioner–scholars than once existed. Substantial progress in ES theorising this century, whilst still emphasising the systemic level of analysis, conceptualises the international system as a social structure and thus the product of human choices and historical contingency bearing normative importance. Through its concepts of 'institutions' the ES recognises how policy actors shape and are shaped by social structure (Buzan, 2014). There is, therefore, reason for optimism about ES theory offering space for intelligence studies because it lacks methodological rigidity and displays openness to sub-systemic influences. The work of spooks and spymasters is 'practiced within a larger understanding of human nature and the nature of a good society' (Warner, 2022: 889). Material and ideational facets of human agency and social structure are co-constitutive of international society shaping, in turn, notions of what intelligence *is* or *can be*.

Central to an ES perspective is deep social understanding of the interacting structural and agential dynamics that create constellations of institutions characteristic of the international order at a particular point in time. That can be long-term and high level in its

claims (the boldest current example is Buzan, 2023), or shorter term and more oriented towards foresight (Buzan & Schouenborg, 2018). This relative openness means contemporary intelligence theorising can find a space where its contribution is important, but its distinctiveness is not lost in the general welter of 'national security policy'. This means seeing intelligence in the context of institutions, arguably the ES' most distinctive feature.

ES shares with Realism a state-centric worldview and a prudent one too. It parts company with *raison d'état* thinking via its analytical and normative focus on *raison de système* and the social construction of international anarchy. ES is concerned with international cooperation, but whereas neoliberals treat state preferences as given and cooperation turns into a function of rational choice logic, ES theorisation takes seriously history, ethics and culture in the contingent creation of international society which both constitute legitimate actors and regulate their behaviour via powerful socialising logics. ES argues the international system is overwhelmingly ideational, arising from contingent historical-sociological processes manifesting in 'primary institutions' that collectively define the particular character of international society at any historical moment.

The ES concept of 'primary institutions' captures deep-rooted social structures that simultaneously constitute membership of an international society of states, and which establish regulatory standards and expectations for those states (e.g. Buzan, 2004, 2014; Buzan & Schouenborg, 2018; Falkner & Buzan, 2019; Schouenborg, 2011). Buzan's (2014: 16–17) definition is the benchmark:

[Primary institutions] are deep and relatively durable social practices in the sense of being more evolved than designed. These practices must not only be shared amongst the members of international society, but also be seen amongst them as legitimate behaviour. Primary institutions are thus about the shared identity of the members of international society. They are constitutive of both states and international society in that they define not only the basic character of states but also their patterns of legitimate behaviour in relation to each other, and the criteria for membership of international society.

A nexus of primary institutions, therefore, defines membership of international society via an ideal-typical conceptualisation of sovereignty as final authority over defined territory leading to the non-intervention principle. Furthermore, this nexus sets the parameters for some of the most basic and familiar elements of conducting international relations, including. For example, creating a

specific inter-state discourse through diplomacy, establishing the market as the basic framework for international economics, giving meaning and scope to international law, defining legitimate grounds for initiating and conducting war and privileging certain states as great powers with responsibilities for managing and preserving international society (Bull, 1977: chs 5–9; Buzan, 2004: 161–204). Importantly, these primary institutions do not just describe international society at any historical point. All have normative impact: we judge actors and behaviours against compliance with the aspirations primary institutions create. Primary institutions make possible naming 'bad' actors and 'misbehaviour'.

These social practices manifest in and, in turn, are shaped by what ES theorists call 'secondary institutions' (Knudsen & Navari, 2019). These include international forums ranging from the global (e.g. the UN, the IMF) through the regional (e.g. the African Union, ASEAN) to the local (e.g. the Visegrad Four, ECOWAS), engaging in functions from technical matters (e.g. allocating orbital slots for satellites) through to the 'high' politics of war and peace, power and security (e.g. NATO, the nuclear non-proliferation system rooted in the NPT). Some are firmly rooted in treaties (e.g. the International Criminal Court), others are relatively ad hoc, with much smaller memberships (e.g. the Missile Technology Control Regime). A body like FVEY is, thus, a secondary institution of international society, one with a relatively specific remit of intelligence cooperation, a limited membership, but a global scope.

How states make secondary institutions work (or don't), and how activities within and by secondary institutions go on to change the primary institutional dynamics is a major research topic. New primary institutions can emerge and give rise to new secondary institutions. Falkner and Buzan (2019) show how a primary institution of environmental stewardship emerged in the 1970s, and this has been crucial for developing important secondary institutions, such as the nexus around the Paris Treaty on climate change. Contributions to Knudsen and Navari (2019) cover multiple instances of how negotiations within secondary institutions have changed understanding of the content and normative aspiration of primary institutions. Intelligence is entangled with key primary institutions of diplomacy, war and great power management. Intelligence reflects the normative tensions of wider international society. How intelligence agencies and intelligence cooperation manage those tensions – to be clear, they are sometimes managed badly – in turn shapes the meaning and role of key primary institutions in international society.

Intelligence, explored through the primary institutions of diplomacy, war and great power management, and operating through secondary institutional mechanisms such as FVEY, plays an important role in how international society functions, develops and, potentially, gives way to a different primary institutional constellation

whereby the distinctive features of the current order change. Intelligence played a significant role in some post-9/11 dynamics that called into doubt the liberalism of the international order. For example, US moves to entrench and partially formalise its privileged status included significant intelligence elements through reinterpreting global prohibitions on torture and rendition, pursuing intelligence-led extra-territorial targeted killing operations (often officially carried out by the CIA to reduce democratic oversight), and substantially extending established understandings of preventive military action through radical interpretation of imminence (e.g. Keating, 2013; Niva, 2013; Trenta, 2018). Moves like this potentially entrenched a formal hierarchy in international society, granting the US (and democratic allies) privileges and permissions denied to others. These initiatives produced some exemplary instances of a central normative tension the ES explores: that between 'order' and 'justice'.

Often discussed in terms of 'order' *versus* 'justice', this is better understood in terms of a spectrum that functions in two dimensions. Firstly, the spectrum recognises that order and justice as values are entangled with one another. There are tensions, clearly, between justice envisaged through the open society lens of protecting and promoting universal human rights, and ordering principles such as sovereignty and its non-intervention and territorial integrity corollaries. The reality of great powers' significance and responsibility for order clashes with sovereign equality. Arguing a more just world will likely be more orderly has power, but the ES accepts that the 'more evolved than designed' nature of primary institutions bakes in ethical tensions and creates a way to analyse those tensions. Within intelligence, arguments over where and how intelligence agencies and operations sit in relation to open society principles of the rule of law and democratic accountability reflect this but are principally considered in the domestic context. How intelligence relates to international order and justice in an open international society through cooperative secondary institutions linked to primary institutions such as war, diplomacy and great power management extends this line of analysis. More on this in Section 3.

Secondly, what holds primary institutions in place is measured along a different spectrum running from coercion, through calculation, to belief, and has significant implications for the durability and effectiveness of secondary institutions (Buzan, 2004: 154–60). Holding social orders in place through coercion is exceptionally resource intensive. As Adam Watson argued (Watson, 1992: 14), *raison de système* is important – voluntarily upholding behavioural expectations is far more likely when members believe it 'pays to make the system work'. Intelligence is part of this system, and there is consensus amongst states that intelligence activities go on, there are unwritten 'rules of the game'

about what is allowed, and what the likely consequences will be for breaches. The need for states to carry out intelligence operations is both accepted and constrained by consensus this is part of making the system work.

The way intelligence is generated, used, analysed, disseminated, presented and critiqued has been important to debates about the changing nature of international order for 20 years. Intelligence operations and agencies have played vital roles in how and why the LIO is perceived as in crisis, because intelligence during the GWOt became linked with allegations of US unilateralism and hypocritical illiberalism, and because that illiberality created an open invitation to authoritarian states to legitimise their own behaviour and to follow suit. Yet, intelligence is also crucial to the defence of states professing open society values, and intelligence agencies have succeeded multiple times in preventing attacks and disrupting actors intent on harming open societies. This tension, dilemma even, becomes clearer and its significance more apparent in ES perspective.

Embedding, extending and defending an open society requires intelligence. The normative tensions within open societies manifest in intelligence functions and intelligence cooperation. Theorising intelligence in an open society context connects it through to ES theory and can capture established strengths in intelligence studies around historicising intelligence agencies and operations to reflect their distinctive and dynamic context. Locating intelligence within contemporary international order shows how intelligence has contributed to that order, and how it remains essential to sustaining order against challenges, even when some intelligence practices have undermined that order.

3 | ES THEORISATION OF FVEY COOPERATION

What follows is neither FVEY history nor sociology (for those see Kerbaj, 2022; Rolfe, 2021; Wells, 2020; Williams, 2023), but why ES theorisation of FVEY is useful for theorists and policymakers.

Despite grand liberal rhetoric (of which more below), FVEY is a security-focused intelligence arrangement, embedded in military relationships and tightly knit on the working level of collection and analysis (Rolfe, 2021). Despite emphasising trust and equality among members (see, e.g., Omand, 2020: 208–32), Washington is FVEY's most powerful actor, often leading the way. Nevertheless, FVEY is more than functional, and displays its historical origins of being a specific type of 'club', whose membership is constrained not just on functional grounds. Looking at FVEY via power-identity analysis (Williams, 2023), cooperation is a product of *both* a geostrategic SIGINT collection necessity *and* of socialising processes to get three old Dominions

– Canada, Australia, New Zealand – into a strategic and political anti-Communist security community with the US and UK after World War Two. That points to the historical contingency and normative inconsistency of international society. The ‘global’ FVEY originates in the continued strategic and political expression of an older Anglo-Saxon world view with a hierarchical understanding of civilisation, culture, race and empire. That legacy echoes to this day, even whilst the universality of the LIO's benefits and values is propounded. The Anglo-Saxon hierarchical FVEY structure, where the United States, notably through the National Security Agency (NSA), occupies the highest echelon, even poses challenges in integrating certain Western European partners. These partners include Denmark, France, the Netherlands and Norway, potentially forming a ‘Nine Eyes’ configuration, along with Germany, Belgium, Italy, Spain and Sweden, which could expand it to a ‘Fourteen Eyes’ framework.

FVEY makes an important contribution to central functions of an international society, including through shaping what and how diplomacy, war and great power management are and can be in an era where the liberal consensus about the normative ambitions of international society is breaking down. ES theory helps us grasp the non-binary nature of these analyses, and why they matter. FVEY are the real-world realisation of what is possible (*is*) and desirable (*ought*) against the background of its members' interests and ideas about order and justice in the LIO.

Seeing FVEY as an important secondary institution that draws its normative status and its operational orientation from the primary institutions of diplomacy, war and great power management helps analyse its nature and significance in ways Realism cannot. Order – especially the avoidance of catastrophic great power warfare – is typically seen as international society's core normative ambition in conditions of anarchy and where a common social vision (such as liberalism provides) is weak, contested or absent (Bull, 1977). Primary institutions that cohere around a consistent means of achieving that basic goal, like diplomacy and great power management, but also sovereignty and territoriality, tend to be granted normative primacy, with other ambitions, such as universal rights or environmental stewardship, seen as disruptive of order (Buzan, 2004: 184–85). Despite the impeccable liberalism of these ‘disruptive’ primary institutions, this normative dissonance and privileging can see intelligence agencies turned against organisations advocating such goals. Think of the 1985 sinking of the Greenpeace ship *Rainbow Warrior* by French intelligence, for example, or UK Special Branch penetration of environmental campaign organisations.

Sustaining a specific international order whereby key destabilising challenges are identified and countered informs grand declarations such as the FVEY's ‘crucial

role in safeguarding a free world [...] working assiduously for our greater good’ (e.g. Lord West quoted in Wells, 2020: vii). That may grate given some of its members' darker practices. And yet these five countries recognise a historical and normative necessity of *raison de système* that is both important and meaningful. It makes sense to advocate and claim to instantiate an international order based on open society principles of democracy and human rights, yet that has to be pursued in an international society that is also about war and great power management.

That helps explain, but does not condone, torture, assassination, mass data interception and other illiberal practices. In the early 2000s, international society got to see ‘the shady nature of the intelligence services within the Five Eyes’ (Kerbaj, 2022: 222). Echoing Schmittian thinking, Michael Ignatieff's (2004) ‘lesser evil morality’, or the ‘fight fire with fire’ approach (Steel, 2004) suggests that by doing ‘evil lite’ we win against ‘the true evildoers.’ That is profoundly dangerous, in part because, of course, there is no such thing as a ‘good’ Schmittian, but also because it undermines both open society values at home, and feeds critics' arguments about hypocrisy at the core of the LIO's principal advocates and beneficiaries. Intelligence successes may weigh on the other side of the scales, but this is not reducible to an instrumental or narrowly utilitarian assessment. Upholding values, and bearing costs to do so, matters.

FVEY's secondary institutional arrangements suggest this primary institutionally induced normative tension. There is no centralised coordinating body – the Five Eyes Intelligence Oversight and Review Council (FIORC), created in 2017, is a non-political discussion forum. Yet, the real depth and scope of FVEY cooperation are noteworthy. Sebastian Rowe-Munday (2021) summarises:

The phrase international intelligence co-operation can sound like an oxymoron [but the FVEY relationship] projects something deeper. The relationship constitutes the core of a distinct international, transnational, and civilizational entity within global society, unmatched by any other states. All parties perceive that it is needed, and all continue to forge together in roughly the same direction.

That description fits well with ES analysis locating FVEY as a secondary institutionalisation of the primary institutional arrangements relating to diplomacy, war and great power management within a normatively contested international society facing considerable illiberal challenge from, in particular, China and Russia. Yet, its exclusivity is striking: its matchless nature is linked to civilisational commonality and (roughly) shared vision of the future.

Those are not technical questions about institutional design or means of maximising common utility. They are normative issues about what a more (or less) just international order looks like.

From the ES theorisation standpoint what the FVEY do, or choose not to do, is, therefore, inherently normative, just as other secondary institutions of international society shape and are shaped by debates about the *is* and *ought* in international society. The specific open society idea(l) FVEY members profess as their common heritage and shared vision means these debates demonstrate specific controversies and tensions. At the domestic level, intelligence's ability to protect against threats is an important component of any open society's political discourse in, for example, discussion of appropriate levels of political oversight and accountability, and the applicability of domestic law to intelligence agencies. Intelligence agencies' place in relation to foreign and security policy priorities and goals within the context of open societies' appeals to the current reality of and stated normative ambition for maintaining and enhancing a rules-based LIO is also a live topic for controversy and debate. How far *shall* intelligence, and for that matter FVEY cooperation, go in maintaining the LIO? If from the standpoint of ES theorisation, intelligence is as normative and political as any other function of the modern state with regard to foreign, security and global affairs, what are the implications for policy in the context of protecting and promoting a specific form of international society, both in relation to upholding its current (imperfect) manifestation, and in advocating for future developments to counter proposed illiberal alternatives?

4 | POLICIES, PRIORITIES AND RAISON DE SYSTÈME

These questions push us towards *raison de système* – how to make abiding by the system's rules, norms and principles attractive enough that compliance becomes internalised at best, or seen as being, on the balance of calculations, in nations' interests.

High-level national intelligence policy priorities from FVEY states, however, principally reflect *raison d'état* logics. The 2023 US National Intelligence Strategy (NIS) directs that the intelligence community (IC) must be supporting policymakers, operators and warfighters in line with strategic priorities drawing directly from the 2022 National Security Strategy. That pits the US-led LIO against the 'illiberal model' (p. 8) of China, Russia, North Korea, Iran and like-minded authoritarian countries. Therefore, the IC's priority must be to position the US intelligence agencies and partners for sustained strategic competition against China and Russia as the 'principal challenges to a free, open, secure, and prosperous world' (p. 5). And that positioning requires that the US continues 'to invest in existing partnerships like

those with our Five-Eyes partners' (p. 11). The American IC and the FVEY are elements of US national power to be used to pressurise Russia and China either towards adherence with LIO rules, norms and behaviour or in blocking their subversion of them. This reflects a strategic logic in which hanging on to as much as possible of what the US has built and leads is the strategic goal. Change is dangerous, acknowledgement of past weakness and failure an invitation for enemies to exploit and reliability is the key ally quality.

The NIS misses how *raison de système* is present and important to US priorities. Firstly, recognising both Beijing and Moscow have managerial responsibility for supporting international order, it is key for the American IC's collection and analytical efforts to assess Chinese and Russian willingness and ability to live up to legal and moral obligations in the near and distant future. Willingness is in decline, but countering decline is not just about the defensive militarised responses seeking to reinforce deterrence and enable punishment. Secondly, looking at how to retain and build support for key LIO principles more broadly is an intelligence issue. So, too, should be reforming the LIO. Illustratively, whilst Global South state condemnation of Russia's invasion of Ukraine via UN General Assembly Resolutions has been strong, almost none of these states impose sanctions on Russia. Important regional leaders have repeated Russian tropes about the invasion being part of Russia's anti-imperialist struggle against aggressive NATO expansion, and the most recent BRICS summit extended membership invitations to Saudi Arabia, Iran, Egypt, Ethiopia, Argentina and the UAE, several of which are openly sceptical of or hostile to the LIO. Public opinion polling in several major Global South states suggests strong support for Russian claims about its 'legitimate security interests' in Ukraine, and powerful opposition to Western leadership in international order. How intelligence agencies interact with diplomatic and 'soft power' operations in the Global South is far less prominent in major intelligence policy statements. Yet, as efforts by China, for example, to construct alternative multilateral financial and economic institutions attract US condemnation, and the Belt and Road Initiative is seen in Washington as a security challenge, these *raison de système* priorities are downplayed in favour of great power confrontation. How to detach powerful Global South voices from Russian and Chinese visions of international order is a neglected priority.

The general direction of the UK government is similar. The 2023 Integrated Review Refresh, 'Responding to a more contested and volatile world,' is clear about the big picture. As Prime Minister Sunak writes: 'China poses an epoch-defining challenge to the type of international order we want to see, both in terms of security and values' (p. 3, emphasis added). Alongside new Atlantic-Pacific partnerships, such as AUKUS, Global

Combat Air Programme (UK, Italy, Japan), or the G7+3 (India, Korea, Australia), 'the well-established Five Eyes grouping will continue to play a critical role, both in its core mission of intelligence sharing, and in the broader defence and security cooperation it now supports' (p. 9). The number one goal is 'to create the conditions for an open and stable international order'. That instantiates the tensions ES theorising draws out: open and stable international orders are *not* simply the outcome of defence and security cooperation with long-established allies. Understanding and challenging the reasons why the LIO is in decline, why so much of the Global South is so ambiguous about the invasion of Ukraine, and how China's anti-hegemonial rhetoric around a post-LIO international order functions so effectively is as important in offering positive reasons for sustaining the LIO. Appeals to the perils of the collapse of international order into a Hobbesian-style abyss of a war of all against all cannot of themselves be effective reasons for adhering to and improving the LIO. A positive narrative about the superiority of the potential justice such a normatively legitimised international order offers is vital. Whilst unsurprisingly from the standpoint of London: 'We have a natural foundation for this [stable and open international order] in groupings such as the Five Eyes and the G7' (pp. 19–20), London (and Washington) need to prioritise other multilateral fora. Preaching to the choir is easy, but the congregation is dwindling, and the lure of different gospels is powerful. In international society, questions of order and justice are entangled, and the balancing act in the primary institutional setting of diplomacy, war and great power management is to attempt to solve what may be insoluble through violence or force and to avoid situations where those become the least bad, or only, options. Hence, the need for intelligence, both unilateral and collective through the FVEY, but with an orientation towards reform in the LIO, not retrenchment.

The same goes for Canada, Australia and New Zealand. They also identify and present as liberal democracies defending the LIO against its many threats. Canada's first and only national security strategy, 2004's 'Securing an Open Society' may be outdated, but Ottawa's worldview and strategic culture remain 'shaped by a deep attachment to democracy, the rule of law, respect for human rights and pluralism' (p. 1). Australia's 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper is also ageing, but Canberra's position still sees open society ideals as key (pp. 2–3), and foreshadowing AUKUS, Australia's assessment is that 'without sustained US support, the effectiveness and liberal character of the rules-based order will decline' (p. 7). What is required, therefore, is 'Australia's cooperation with our Five-Eyes partners' (p. 19). That decline is ongoing and accelerating. New Zealand's first national security strategy, *Secure Together* (2023) acknowledges liberal democracy and the LIO are under pressure from

China and Russia (pp. 4–7) and notes New Zealand's shared history and values with Australia, Canada, the UK and the US (p. 14). The 'Five Eyes partnership is an invaluable support to our understanding and ability to respond to emerging and complex security issues' (p. 18).

FVEY members' concerns over the nature and future of the LIO are acknowledged, and the FVEY institution is publicly acknowledged as a tool of national and collective statecraft to help maintain the LIO, but in a way that is rather more *raison d'état* than *raison de système*. *Raison de système* exists in all FVEY national security and intelligence environments and statements, but, equally, all seem adrift in how to respond to shifting global power dynamics, other than through clinging to a vision of the post-1945 international society as co-extensive with a LIO that was always partial – in both senses of the word – and never what these accounts suggest it to have been: consensual and universally beneficial.

ES theorisation establishes two policy implications, one locating FVEY intelligence agencies and cooperation within international society, the second looking at how open society values in the context of international society reshape some of the governance and legitimacy debates around intelligence agencies within democratic states.

First, Amy Zegart (2022: 276) concludes, rightly, that in 'this emerging world, intelligence has never been more important, or more challenging.' However, she may be right for the wrong reasons. With great power competition and the intelligence war between Russia, China and the West, pressure is mounting on policymakers to re-think what intelligence is for. Calder Walton (2023: 510) rightly points out that in questions relating to diplomacy, war and great power management 'strategic empathy' matters. Intelligence should be best equipped to look at the political scene of international society and its clashes of interests and ideas from the point of view of other nations. Whilst current major policy statements prioritise Russia and China as those other nations, sustaining and enhancing an international order conducive to open society values and goals means looking beyond 'peer competitors' and into emerging powers' visions of international order. India, South Africa, Mexico, Brazil, Argentina and Nigeria have democratic traditions and constitutional principles that align with open society values. Their growing distance from the LIO and leaning into visions of international order offered by Moscow and Beijing should be far more prominent in intelligence priorities and practice. In terms of intelligence liaison, this implies moving beyond mere instrumental bargaining or what has been termed 'crypto-diplomacy' (Bradford Westerfield, 1996: 536), where intelligence ties serve as either a complement to traditional diplomatic channels or even a replacement for them. Rather, this

involves the cultivation of shared and trusted rationales within the system – *raison de système* – emphasising the intersection of intelligence and diplomacy across primary and secondary institutions of international society. In terms of ES theorisation, the meaning of strategic empathy reaches farther and deeper into what are both primary and secondary institutions of international society, and the practical challenge is to place intelligence within a recognition of ‘deep pluralism’ (Acharya & Buzan, 2019: 261–284).

Taking a longer view of *world* history from nineteenth-century colonialism, through the two World Wars, the Cold War and decolonisation, up to our post-Ukraine time, suggests that making sense of current and future international society requires moving beyond the analytical and normative strictures of realist and liberal modes of IR thinking. Whether we like to call it a post-Western world order or not, international society is a deeply ‘diffuse distribution of power, wealth and cultural authority’ (Acharya & Buzan, 2019: 265). Therefore, strategic empathy is no longer solely about recognising strategic interests of America, Russia and China, nor merely accepting that ‘the rest’ may have interests and ideas that are not in line with a Western conception of a good (international) society. Rather, it is about going beyond notions of material polarity and absolute values, respectively, to at least understand that under the conditions of a deep pluralism, ‘anti-hegemony looks like being a strong norm for the foreseeable future’ (Buzan, 2023; Buzan & Acharya, 2022: 133). The way policymakers in much of Africa, South and Southeast Asia and Latin America see current regional and world events, ranging from Russia’s war in Ukraine, through Chinese hegemonic ambitions, and America’s responses, bears that out.

Second, because of Western intelligence’s new relative post-Ukraine openness, challenges to the legitimacy of intelligence as a tool of statecraft in open societies will persist. That may seem odd on three accounts. Firstly, there seems to be a relative consensus that the future of intelligence is in open-source information or OSINT (Walton, 2023: 509–10; Zegart, 2023); second is growing Western openness about intelligence work, where even FVEY agency leaders figure prominently in press briefings or where social media platforms are being used to recruit spies; the third is coming out of open society debates and echoing Ignatieff’s lesser evil approach, treating intelligence ‘as a necessary evil’ (Grutza, 2023: 176). Taken together, what is left to discuss?

ES theorisation of intelligence, however, would argue instead that being serious about upholding the LIO necessitates looking at the intelligence legitimacy challenge from a *raison de système* perspective. How do open societies ‘make the system pay’ under conditions of deep pluralism and where their domestic legitimacy is challenged? Anna Eva Grutza (2023: 176) is

right to caution that the secretive realm of intelligence is ‘situated at the very line between *closed* and *open* societies constantly endangering the latter to transform into the former’. The pressure to respond to authoritarianism in a deeply pluralist international society can exacerbate this pressure. The open-source revolution, at first glance, may suggest the age of stealing secrets, subversion and sabotage could be over (spoiler – it isn’t); and few doubt good open-source data are important in intelligence work. But reaching out to new partners, from the private sector to academia, from communities to local and regional governments and to non-governmental organisations, brings the risk that in their battle over the LIO’s future Western democracies are becoming mirror images of their spookocracy foes, where ‘reaching out’ becomes ‘penetrating’. The same goes for increased levels of intelligence publicity. On the one hand, it may be a corrective to what Zegart (2022: chap. 2) refers to as the ‘education crisis’ about intelligence; while on the other, it may reinforce a false sense of security if intelligence work – complicated and filled with uncertainties as it is – gets dragged into domestic and global politics in an unreflective or, worse, politicised way.

This is not to say that intelligence ought to remain in the shadows of an open society. Any legitimisation of intelligence should not be based on a *raison d’état* conception of international order claiming an open society’s right to do (almost) whatever it takes to defend itself. Instead, intelligence policy must explain what intelligence is for, why, and how it gets done via the dynamics of the place of open societies’ *raison de système*. For if we take the concept and reality of international society seriously then the West in particular, with its claims to maintain LIO, must accept the responsibility that what counts as legitimate in terms of intelligence practice is not only a domestic issue of a democracy’s rule of law and democratic accountability but also at one and the same time a question of what are (*is*) or should be (*ought*) shared or acceptable practices within the constellation of primary and secondary institutions in international society.

5 | CONCLUSION

Intelligence’s place in open societies has always been contested, understood as a necessity that creates genuine tensions – even real-life dilemmas – about operations, analysis, accountability, governance and the rule of law. Yet, its role in an international society that Western states like to describe as liberal, open and rules-based, and which they see as essential to their security and prosperity, has not been considered in the same way. This, we argue, stems from the lack of appropriate theorising, whether that be within intelligence studies or IR. An unsophisticated *raison d’état* Realism

has been the default position for thinking about the nature of intelligence in general, and about Western intelligence agencies and their institutionalisation in arrangements like FVEY.

We have also argued that ES theorising offers a more systematic assessment of the social structural impacts of the deep structures of international society on intelligence cooperation, and how, in turn, that cooperation feeds back into deep social structures. In that sense, the normativity of intelligence is about connecting intelligence – through its entanglement with primary institutions like diplomacy, war and great power management – to social structural implications of FVEY intelligence cooperation as an important secondary institution. This is absent from current accounts.

We do not challenge the necessity of insulating the intelligence cycle from politicisation in the usual sense. Yet, ES theorisation shows intelligence is not a purely technical or value-neutral activity. Intelligence agencies, and the many different ways they cooperate with one another, contribute to how primary institutions of international society function and evolve over time – and that is normative. And because it is normative it is political, hence a question for policy. We have set out how a *raison de système* approach, derived from ES theory, offers a policy framing that challenges the *raison d'état* assumptions in major intelligence and national security policy reference documents.

If FVEY agencies and their cooperation are to make the contribution to a rules-based open international order those policy frameworks prioritise, it is not through the means of defensive or offensive Realism currently pursued, aimed at offsetting Russia and China as principal challengers to that international order. *Raison de système* thinking means that commitment to a liberal international society comes through understanding it pays to make such an order work. Here, in relation to major democratic Global South states, FVEY members face many challenges and are under immense pressure in persuading those states the LIO does and will work for them and that they should commit to it.

As FVEY agencies have, under intense domestic democratic pressures, shifted away from the failed policies and practices of GWoT towards more openness and developed new ways of presenting and sharing intelligence in the context of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, *raison de système* logics are coming more to the fore. This is the policy direction ES theory points towards because it demands intelligence cooperation becomes more about countering challenges and challengers to LIO in ways that build connections with Global South democracies and cooperate with them to resist Russian and Chinese challenges to that order. That means FVEY cooperation is not, as in key policy statements, just about turning to one another and reaffirming an old Anglo-Saxon alliance rooted in historical connections and Cold War experiences of leadership

in international affairs. Making the system pay as the way to preserving LIO must be about change, as well as continuity, and it has to pay for the Global South, too.

Here, intelligence has a crucial role to play, both better informing FVEY state leaders about those states and informing better policy making, and in cooperation to reinforce the open society forces within those states. The world is largely a post-Western one. It is an order – a current disorder – marked by a 'deep pluralism' in terms of power and legitimacy. An open international society for the second half of the twenty-first century cannot be built through policy prescriptions rooted in a myopic and self-serving account of the second half of the twentieth century.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

There are no conflicts of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The paper does not use quantitative or qualitative data that can be shared.

ORCID

Robert Schuett  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8250-3389>

John Williams  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5127-4608>

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

Robert Schuett's research and teaching interests are in international security, political theory and intelligence studies. He holds faculty positions at the Diplomatic Academy Vienna and the University of Salzburg. Robert is a Visiting Fellow at Durham University's School of Government and International Affairs.

John William's research and teaching interests are in international relations theory, particularly the English School, and the ethics and security of emergent military technologies. He is a faculty member of Durham University's School of Government and International Affairs.

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