The Canadian national intelligence culture: A minimalist and defensive national intelligence apparatus

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Abstract
This paper seeks to understand the nature and characteristics of Canadian national intelligence culture post–Cold War using the analytical insights of the strategic culture and intelligence culture literature. Previous studies have focused on an organizational description or historical studies of Canadian intelligence during the Cold War or after 9/11. Yet, no studies have examined the characterization of a national intelligence culture in Canada and proposed to contextualize the Canadian intelligence system in light of its national intelligence culture. Building on a culturalist approach of national intelligence systems, this paper proposes an operationalization of the national intelligence culture concept drawn on the strategic and intelligence culture literature. The paper concludes that Canada’s national intelligence culture is mostly defensive and minimalist. However, we note that recent changes in the Canadian intelligence apparatus have led to a gradual evolution of Canadian intelligence from defensive to offensive.

Keywords
Canada, intelligence studies, intelligence culture, strategic culture, culturalist approach

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Canada is unique among its Western allies in that it does not have a dedicated foreign human intelligence agency and does not carry out or participate in violent intelligence operations like France, the United Kingdom, the United States, or Australia. Nevertheless, Canada has a long tradition in domestic intelligence, from military intelligence at the border in the 19th century to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Security Service and the creation of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS). But, like the US and the UK, Canada has a dedicated agency for signals intelligence. 9/11 pushed Canadian intelligence to the forefront and made it one of the most important actors in national security, forcing a transformation of the Canadian intelligence community. In 2004, the Ottawa policy statement “Securing an Open Society: Canada’s National Security Policy,” put intelligence at the center of government policy for the first time to reinforce and better coordinate security intelligence collection activities. This new intelligence position in the Canadian government security policies was also reflected in the 2015 anti-terrorism legislation, Bill C-51, which strengthened the intelligence gathering and sharing powers of Canadian intelligence agencies and the new Bill C-59.

This paper offers to move beyond the universalism of existing theories stating that intelligence provides a decision-making advantage over adversaries or that intelligence can reduce risk and embrace a culturalist approach in which there is a variety of national intelligence systems depending on each country’s political and cultural systems. In intelligence studies, the culturalist approach leads in particular to determining specific intelligence cultures by identifying the specific norms, ideas, rules, and practices of certain intelligence systems. The core of the culturalist approach is the idea that actors are oriented by general dispositions to act in certain ways in sets of situations. While there are several studies on the history of Canadian intelligence and the organizational structure and evolution of the intelligence community, there are no

1. Martin Rudner, “Challenge and response: Canada’s intelligence community and the war on terrorism,” Canadian Foreign Policy Journal 11, no. 2 (2004): 17.
2. See Jennifer Sims, “Defending adaptive realism: Intelligence theory comes of age,” in Peter Gill, Stephen Marrin, and Mark Phythian, eds., Intelligence Theory: Key Questions and Debates (London: Routledge, 2009), 151–165; Michael Warner, “Intelligence as risk shifting,” in Gill, Marrin, and Phythian, Intelligence Theory, 16–32.
3. See Adda Bozeman, “Political intelligence in non-Western societies: Suggestion for comparative research,” in Roy Godson, ed., Comparing Foreign Intelligence: The US, the USSR, the UK & the Third World (Washington: Pergamon-Brasseys, 1988), 149–150. For more considerations on a culturalist turn in Intelligence Studies, see Simon Willmetts, “The cultural turn in intelligence studies,” Intelligence and National Security 34, no. 6 (2019): 800–817.
4. Harry Eckstein, “A culturalist theory of political change,” American Political Science Review 82, no. 3 (1988): 790.
5. See, inter alia, Wesley K. Wark, “Cryptographic innocence: The origins of signals intelligence in Canada in the Second World War,” Journal of Contemporary History 22, no. 4 (1987): 639–665; Martin Rudner, “The historical evolution of Canada’s foreign intelligence capability: Cold War SIGINT strategy and its legacy,” Journal of Intelligence History 6, no. 1 (2006): 67–83; Reg Whitaker, Gregory S. Kealey, and Andrew Parnaby, Secret Service: Political Policing in Canada from the Fenians to Fortress America (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012); Stephanie Carvin, Thomas Juneau, and Craig Forcese, eds., Top Secret Canada: Understanding the Canadian Intelligence and National Security Community (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2020).
studies that propose to contextualize Canadian intelligence in relation to its national culture. The added value of a culturalist approach to intelligence is that it identifies the cultural context in which intelligence operates and provides a characteristic of culturally constituted intelligence elements.

With this paper, we suggest that we should extend the analytical insights of the strategic culture literature to national intelligence, and more specifically to Canadian intelligence, for a new perspective on the Canadian intelligence system and its evolution. This paper also builds on the foundations of the literature on intelligence culture. The main argument is that Canada’s national intelligence culture is primarily defensive and minimalist. But we also suggest that there has been a recent and gradual evolution of Canadian intelligence from defensive to offensive. The main objective of this study is to characterize Canada’s national intelligence culture using a culturalist framework. However, this paper is limited in that it does not explore the origins of this national intelligence culture. Thus, this paper excludes the study of the formation of the national intelligence culture and provides only its main characteristics. Furthermore, this paper is not intended to be a study of the organizational cultures that compose the Canadian intelligence community. Indeed, the objective is to study the national culture of intelligence, not the cultures of national intelligence. By the concept of national intelligence culture, we mean the national culture of intelligence, that transcends the idiosyncratic interests of individual agencies.

**What is national intelligence culture? From strategic culture to intelligence studies**

Before discussing the concept of national intelligence culture, it is necessary to define the concept of intelligence. For this study, intelligence will be defined as a secret epistemic social process performed by a government bureaucracy to understand and act against an enemy’s intentions, to avoid surprise, and to formulate rational decisions on national security issues. For the purpose of this article, and due to length considerations, we will only discuss those agencies that only do intelligence, that is, CSIS and the Communications Security Establishment (CSE). Other agencies or departments that have intelligence functions among other primary mandates will be mentioned for contextualization purposes or historical discussions.

We conceptualize culture like Mark Howard Ross, for whom culture provides a framework for organizing the ordinary activities of individuals, gives meaning to actions, links identities to political action, and predisposes individuals and groups to consider some actions and reject others. In other words, culture defines social and

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6. This definition is drawn from Michael Warner, “Wanted: A definition of intelligence,” *Studies in Intelligence* 46, no. 3 (2002), https://www.cia.gov/library centerX-cent-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/csi-studies/studies/vol46no3/article02.html (accessed 20 January 2019); and Giangiuseppe Pili, “Intelligence and social epistemology – Toward a social epistemological theory of intelligence,” *Social Epistemology* 33, no. 6 (2019): 574–592.
political identity, structures social actions, and imposes a normative order on political and social life, as well as arranging political priorities.7 We note, however, that many considerations of culture put ideas as the driving force of social action. Even if social practices are included in conceptions of culture, the former are subordinate to the prior ideas and beliefs that influence these social practices. In simple terms, it is ideas and beliefs that shape the world. However, we consider practices to also have a performative power by themselves.8 Finally, we propose that culture provides a context for establishing the conditions of possibility rather than causality.9

While there are many definitions of the concept of culture, there are far fewer definitions of the concept of national intelligence culture. We can draw from the concept of strategic culture as suggested by Michael Turner, Isabelle Duyvesteyn, or Matthew Aid.10 The concept was introduced to explain the different ways in which states approach the same issue in the defense area. It states that instead of approaching defense issues objectively, decision-makers will view them through cultural lenses. Jack Snyder, the first to use this concept, describes strategic culture as a “set of general beliefs, attitudes, and behavioral patterns with regard to nuclear strategy [that] has achieved a state of semipermanence.”11 For Colin Gray, strategic culture refers “to modes of thought and action with respect to force, [and] derives from perception of the national historical experience, aspiration for self-characterization.”12 Alastair Johnston identifies three fundamental elements of strategic culture: the role of war in human affairs, the nature of the threat, and the utility of the use of force.13 But it is Frederik Doeser and Joakim Eidenfalk who provide the most complete conceptualization of strategic culture by identifying five constitutive elements: the dominant threat

7. Mark Howard Ross, “Culture in comparative political analysis,” in Mark Irving Lichbach and Alan S. Zuckerman, eds., Comparative Politics: Rationality, Culture, and Structure (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 134, 139.
8. See Vincent Pouliot, “The logic of practicality: A theory of practice of security communities,” International Organization 62, no. 2 (2008): 257–288.
9. See James Fearon and Alexander Wendt, “Rationalism v. constructivism: A skeptical view,” in Walter Carlsnaes, Thomas Risse, and Beth A. Simmons, eds., Handbook of International Relations (London: Sage Publications, 2002), 52–72; and Colin S. Gray, “Strategic culture as context: The first generation of theory strikes back,” Review of International Studies 25, no. 1 (1999): 49–69.
10. Michael A. Turner, “A distinctive U.S. intelligence identity,” International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence 17, no. 1 (2004): 42–61; Isabelle Duyvesteyn, “Intelligence and strategic culture: Some observations,” Intelligence and National Security 26, no. 4 (2011): 521–530; Matthew Aid, “Sins of omission and commission: Strategic cultural factors and US intelligence failures during the Cold War,” Intelligence and National Security 26, no. 4 (2011): 478–494.
11. Jack L. Snyder, The Soviet Strategic Culture: Implications for Limited Nuclear Operations (RAND Corporations, 1977), v.
12. Colin S. Gray, “National style in strategy: The American example,” International Security 6, no. 2 (1981): 22.
13. Alastair Iain Johnston, “Thinking about strategic culture,” International Security 19, no. 4 (1995): 46.
perception, the core task of the armed forces, the cooperative frameworks, the international legality, and the strategic partners.\textsuperscript{14} In the same way, James Sperling, referring to the concept of security culture, identifies four core elements: the view of the strategic environment, including the definition of security threats; the national identity; the instrumental preferences for coping with threats; and the cooperation preferences.\textsuperscript{15} While there are many other contributions to strategic culture, the above authors offer the fundamental core of what constitutes strategic culture.

In Intelligence Studies, several authors have been interested in defining a culturalist approach to the field, notably centered on the concept of intelligence culture. It was Adda Bozeman who first suggested that intelligence systems are partially influenced by cultural factors.\textsuperscript{16} Later, Philip Davies suggests that in doing intelligence, “the role of culture [provides] influences, orientations and expectations that cannot be reduced to the internal logic of those tasks.”\textsuperscript{17} The author suggests that culture plays a role in the national ideas of what constitutes intelligence, which differs from one country to another. Hence, intelligence culture includes divergences in national conceptions of intelligence functions. For Michael Turner, strategic culture has an impact on intelligence norms, forming a specific intelligence identity.\textsuperscript{18} In a different study, Philip Murphy proposes the interesting idea that the UK attempted to create a commonwealth intelligence culture in the early years of the Cold War by exporting its intelligence model, with more success in Central Africa and Australia than in Canada.\textsuperscript{19} Finally, Mark Phythian, adopting the definition of strategic culture, defines national intelligence culture as “ideas, responses and behaviours acquired by intelligence communities and conditioned by history and geography.”\textsuperscript{20}

In this paper, we combine the contributions of the strategic culture and previous intelligence culture scholars to consider the national intelligence culture as a set of collectively shared and time-sustainable ideas, norms, and practices on how to conceive the role and the use of intelligence. In this study, the collectivity refers to political, national security, and strategic elites and decision-makers. The ideas, norms, and practices are located within government and institutions’ publications on defence, intelligence, and national and international security; discourses of political, defence,

\begin{thebibliography}{99}

\bibitem{14} Frederik Doeser and Joakim Eidenfalk, “Using strategic culture to understand participation in expeditionary operations: Australia, Poland, and the coalition against the Islamic State,” \textit{Contemporary Security Policy} 40, no. 1 (2019): 7–8.

\bibitem{15} James Sperling, “National security cultures, technologies of public goods supply and security governance,” in Emil J. Kirchner and James Sperling, eds., \textit{National Security Cultures: Patterns of Global Governance} (London: Routledge, 2010), 11–12.

\bibitem{16} Bozeman, “Political intelligence in non-Western societies,” 149–150.

\bibitem{17} Philip H. J. Davies, “Intelligence culture and intelligence failure in Britain and United States,” \textit{Cambridge Review of International Affairs} 17, no. 3 (2004): 496.

\bibitem{18} Turner, “A distinctive U.S. intelligence identity.”

\bibitem{19} Philip Murphy, “Creating a commonwealth intelligence culture: The view from Central Africa 1945–1965,” \textit{Intelligence and National Security} 17, no. 3 (2002): 131–162.

\bibitem{20} Mark Phythian, “Cultures of national intelligence,” in Robert Dover, Michael S. Goodman, and Claudia Hillebrand, eds., \textit{Routledge Companion to Intelligence Studies} (London: Routledge, 2015), 35.
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and national security elites and decision-makers; formal rules of intelligence institutions; intelligence-related laws; and intelligence and national security practices. These sets of ideas, practices, and norms are shaped by history and the strategic environment. Finally, national intelligence culture provides a context that establishes conditions of possibility in the arrangement of intelligence priorities.

The core elements of the national culture of intelligence

From these previous works on strategic culture and intelligence culture, we have identified at least three cultural core elements that we will use to study Canadian intelligence from a culturalist perspective: threat perception, preferred responses to address the threat, and the vision and use of intelligence in Canada. These core dimensions are consistent with our definition of national intelligence culture.

The threat perception questions the nature of the state’s perceived threat and who or what is threatened. Thus, there are existential threats, where the survival of the state is in question, and limited security threats, where the state is not directly endangered. In addition to threatening actors, perception of threat also includes notions of interests that must be protected, including a state’s territory, population, economy, other territories, normative values such as human rights or international stability, or its prestige, defined as peer recognition of its relative power. Finally, this perception can be global, in which the security of the international system is what makes us secure, or selfish, in which only the security of the nation-state matters. In summary, this core element provides three sub-dimensions to threat perception: the nature of the threat (security, economic, or normative), its scope (existential or limited), and its subject (global or egoist). We state that perception of threat is intimately linked to national and international identity.

The preferred responses to address the threat focus on the state’s strategic approach to the international environment. Indeed, the strategic environment has an impact on the use of the intelligence apparatus. Hence, preferred responses to the threat do not depend directly on intelligence, but rather on the defense of the state generally, including intelligence. In this dimension, we distinguish offensive and defensive approaches. Offensive preferences refer to an inevitable vision of war, where the best option is to act before the other acts, while defensive preferences entail a more idealistic vision where war is avoidable and undesirable, and where all non-offensive lines of action will then be considered before resorting to the use of force. Furthermore, will the state prefer to act unilaterally, bilaterally, or multilaterally? In other words, which are the parameters established by a state to respond to a threat? In summary, we envisage two sub-

21. Jason W. Davidson, America’s Allies and War: Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Iraq (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 16–17; Doeser and Eidenfalk, “Using strategic culture,” 7.

22. Alastair Iain Johnston, “Cultural realism and strategy in Maoist China,” in Peter J. Katzenstein, ed., The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 223.
dimensions of possible responses to the threat: the scope of possible options (offensive or defensive) and their nature (unilateral, bilateral, or multilateral).

The *intelligence vision and utility* questions the state’s vision and use of its intelligence apparatus. Besides the national vision of intelligence, it is possible to frame the utility of a state’s intelligence on a defensive/offensive continuum. This dimension contains two categories: (1) defensive use, in which intelligence serves to protect the state’s interests (security, economic, or normative), to preserve its influence in a specific situation or to preserve its international image, excluding a gain in power, a territorial gain, or an advantage that one is trying to obtain,\(^\text{23}\) *without* the use of covert paramilitary actions and (2) aggressive use, relying on covert actions to advance the state’s interests (security, economic, or normative), by gaining influence in a specific situation, by gaining power, by advancing its cause; or relying on paramilitary covert actions to protect its interests (security, economic, or normative), to preserve its influence in a specific situation or to preserve its international image. There are several forms of covert actions such as propaganda, political covert action, economic covert action, and paramilitary covert action. The latest, also called covert war or secret war, refers to the use of force or the training of irregular forces to initiate insurgencies. The nature of cyberattacks is still debated, but they can be categorized as covert actions.\(^\text{24}\) While in almost all countries, covert operations represent the minority of intelligence activities, it is possible to assess whether a country is more or less offensive in its use of intelligence.

The Canadian national intelligence culture: Defensive and overseeing

*Threat perception and Canada’s internationalist identity*

During the Cold War, one of the most significant threats to Canada was communism, and the fight against communism and the Soviet Union was a top security and defense priority. Domestic and international terrorism was also a major national security concern during this period. Among the terrorist threats perceived by the Security Service, in charge of domestic intelligence at the time, were the Front de Libération du Québec, the Sons of Freedom in British Columbia, anti-Castro Cubans, the Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia, Sikh extremists, the Palestinian Liberation

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23. See Rory Cormac, *Disrupt and Deny: Spies, Special Forces, and the Secret Pursuit of British Foreign Policy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 268.

24. Loch K. Johnson, *America’s Secret Power: The CIA in a Democratic Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 21–29; Michael Warner, “A matter of trust: Covert action reconsidered,” *Studies in Intelligence* 63, no. 4 (2019): 33–41.
Organization, the Direct Action, and the Irish Republican Army. In the late 1970s, it seemed that international terrorism was replacing communism as the dominant national security threat.\textsuperscript{25} Between 1960 and 2015, Canada experienced nearly two thousand acts of terrorism and violent extremism, both at home and abroad, including the tragic bombing of Air India Flight 182.\textsuperscript{26} International terrorism is often associated with deeper factors such as the absence of democracy, the absence of a market economy, overpopulation, or the anarchy present in some countries.\textsuperscript{27} In 1995, Canada realized that the international system had entered an unpredictable phase and that “the international community must increasingly navigate in uncharted waters.” This new changing world of “great opportunity” has also given way to non-traditional threats that “transcend political borders and affect whole regions, or even the globe.”\textsuperscript{28} For example, long before the events of 11 September 2001, CSIS identified terrorism as one of the most significant threats, and thus as a top intelligence priority. In the late 1990s, CSIS recognized that many global terrorist groups had established themselves in Canada and the threat posed by Sunni militant groups became CSIS’s primary concern.\textsuperscript{29}

In 2004, the Government of Canada announced a national security policy that closely linked national and international security. This national security policy identified several threats such as terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, failed and failing states, foreign espionage, natural disasters, critical infrastructure vulnerability, organized crime, and pandemics. It was clear in this national security policy that “national security also intersects with international security.”\textsuperscript{30}

In 2005, international terrorism moved to the top of Canada’s foreign policy agenda as a threat to Canada. Canada’s 2005 International Policy Statement describes terrorism as having a significant and devastating impact on the international system.\textsuperscript{31}

International terrorism then poses a double threat. First, it is a threat to the security of individuals, but above all, it is a threat to the balance of the new liberal international

\textsuperscript{25} Nicole Tishler, Marie Ouellet, and Joshua Kilberg, “A survey of terrorism in Canada: 1960–2015,” in Jez Littlewood, Lorne L. Dawson, and Sara K. Thompson, ed., Terrorism and Counterterrorism in Canada (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2020), 25–48; Dominique Clément, “Counterterrorism security planning in Canada: From imperialism to international terrorism,” in Littlewood, Dawson, and Thompson, Terrorism and Counterterrorism in Canada, 130–133.

\textsuperscript{26} Tishler, Ouellet, and Kilberg, “A survey of terrorism in Canada,” 25.

\textsuperscript{27} Canada, La politique de défense du Canada – 1992 (Ottawa: Ministère de la Défense nationale, 1992); Canada, Le Livre blanc sur la défense de 1994 (Ottawa, Ministère de la Défense nationale, 1994); Canada, Canada in the World: Government Statement (Ottawa: Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada, 1995).

\textsuperscript{28} Canada, Canada in the World, 1, 3.

\textsuperscript{29} Rudner, “Challenge and response,” 18–19; Osvaldo Croci, “Canada: Facing up to regional security challenges,” in Kirchner and Sperling, National Security Cultures, 129.

\textsuperscript{30} Canada, Securing an Open Society: Canada’s National Security Policy (Ottawa: Privy Council Office, 2004), 3–8.

\textsuperscript{31} Canada, A Role of Pride and Influence in the World. Canada’s International Policy Statement. Overview. (Ottawa: Privy Council Office, 2005), 13.
In 2008, the Harper government’s Canada First Defence Strategy placed the terrorist threat in third place and associated it with the political instability of states. In 2017, terrorism returned to the government’s top priorities and was more broadly associated with the threat of violent extremism. Specifically, international terrorism is now a direct threat to Canada, as the country “remains the target of direct threats by groups such as Daesh and al-Qaeda, and by a small number of individuals inspired by the violent extremist ideologies of these groups.”

The second priority threat to Canada is the risk posed by failed states. This form of threat arises primarily from explosive situations, which are rooted in ethnic conflict, economic disparity, land claims, and domestic political instability. These fragile, poorly governed states are among the greatest causes of security threats. Terrorism and state failure are intimately linked. Fragile states foster the development of terrorism, but terrorism also weakens states and political authority.

The third major threat that has remained relatively constant since the end of the Cold War is the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. This threat is heightened by the possibility that terrorist groups may acquire such weapons, with serious consequences for Canada. The same association between weapons of mass destruction and terrorism was made by the Conservative government in 2008, who added that “unpredictable states” were equally dangerous to Canadian security. In 2017, this threat was perceived to come more from states than from terrorist groups. Among these potentially threatening states to Canada and security are North Korea, Iran, and Syria. This threat is made more serious with the technological evolution of ballistic missiles able to strike North America.

Finally, Canada’s latest defence policy identifies two new threats. The first is the re-emergence of competition among states, which no longer threatens the security of Canadians, but that of the rules-based international order. Two countries are particularly implicated in this new threat: China, with the conflicts in the China Sea; and Russia, with the annexation of Crimea. Finally, cyberspace represents for the first time a priority threat in Canada’s foreign and defence policy. However, it is not only terrorist groups that pose a threat through cyberspace, but also the intelligence and military services of foreign countries. The threat from intelligence and military services is said to be even more evolved, with states having more capabilities than terrorist groups, and is expected to increase in the coming years.

In the intelligence domain, the main perceived threats over the last decade have been international and domestic violent extremists inspired by terrorist groups, Canadian

32. Canada, *Canada First Defence Strategy* (Ottawa: Department of National Defence, 2008), 6; Canada, *Strong, Secure, Engaged: Canada’s Defence Policy* (Ottawa: Department of National Defence, 2017), 53.
33. Canada, *La politique de défense du Canada – 1992*, 11; Canada, *A Role of Pride and Influence in the World*, 13.
34. Canada, *Canada in the World*, 3; Canada, *A Role of Pride and Influence in the World*, 16; Canada, *Canada First Defence Strategy*, 6; Canada, *Strong, Secure, Engaged*, 54.
35. Canada, *Strong, Secure, Engaged*, 50, 56.
extremist travelers, the growing threat of right-wing extremism, espionage and foreign interferences, and cyber threats such as the use of the internet by terrorists, state-sponsored cyber espionage and military activities, and cybercrime. Since 2017, Canadian intelligence agencies have been warning more about the threat to democratic institutions and processes. More specifically, they have called attention to the objectives of opposing states to interfere in the electoral process to affect the popularity of candidates, reduce trust in democratic processes, push policies in preferred directions, disrupt international alliances, or promote core economic, geopolitical, or ideological interests. According to David Vigneault, director of CSIS in 2018, threats of cyber interference are growing, even though “traditional interference by foreign spies remains the greatest danger.”

We suggest that Canadian threat perception, which is primarily non-existent, security-oriented, and normative, is driven by a Canadian internationalist identity—in other words, not egoistic and a part of the international community in which security is everyone’s concern. Actually, national identity—that is, how we perceive ourselves compared to others—influences the perception of threats. Canada sees itself as an active contributor to building a rules-based international community. In a disinterested manner, Canada intervenes even when its interests are not at stake, unless one considers

36. See Canada’s and CSIS’s public reports on the threats to Canada, including, but not limited to, Canada, 2013 Public Report on the Terrorist Threat to Canada: Building a Safe and Resilient Canada (Ottawa: Public Safety Canada, 2013); Canada, 2018 Public Report on the Terrorist Threat to Canada: Building a Safe and Resilient Canada (Ottawa: Public Safety Canada, 2019); CSIS, Public Report 2010–2011 (Ottawa, 2012); CSIS, Public Report 2011–2013 (Ottawa, 2014); CSIS, Public Report 2013–2014 (Ottawa, 2015); CSIS, Public Report 2019: A Safe, Secure and Prosperous Canada through Trusted Intelligence and Advice (Ottawa, 2020); Canada, Canada’s Cyber Security Strategy: For a Stronger and More Prosperous Canada (Ottawa, 2010), 5–6; Canada, National Cyber Security Strategy: Canada’s Vision for Security and Prosperity in the Digital Age (Ottawa: Public Safety Canada, 2018), 12–15.
37. CSE, Cyber Threats to Canada’s Democratic Process (Ottawa, 2017), 13; CSE, 2019 Update: Cyber Threats to Canada’s Democratic Process (Ottawa, 2019); CSIS, Public Report 2019, 17.
38. David Vigneault, “Remarks by Director David Vigneault at the Economic Club of Canada,” Canadian Security Intelligence Agency, 4 December 2018, https://www.canada.ca/en/security-intelligence-service/news/2018/12/remarks-by-director-david-vigneault-at-the-economic-club-of-canada.html (accessed 10 November 2020).
39. See, for example, F. Gregory Gause III, “Balancing what? Threat perception and alliance choice in the Gulf,” Security Studies 13, no. 2 (2003): 273–305; Heon Joo Jung and Han Wool Jeong, “South Korean attitude towards China: Threat perception, economic interest, and national identity,” African and Asian Studies 15 (2016): 242–264.
that Canada’s interests are precisely those of a stable and peaceful international community. Canada has a particular vision of national security that it considers more global in nature. This internationalist identity also involves moral elements and universal Canadian values such as pluralism, rights and freedoms, and democracy, which Canada tries to promote abroad to safeguard the quality of life at home. According to Tom Keating, this internationalist commitment has appeared frequently in foreign policy statements since the Cold War.

National interests, which are a reflection of national identity and how we view ourselves and the world, impact the Canadian threat perception. Don Macnamara identifies the four main national interests of Canada, which are almost perfectly reflected in the threat perception. The first, security, refers to the protection of Canadian territory and the security of its people. The second, prosperity, promotes economic growth and supports the prosperity and welfare of Canadians. The third national interest is a stable world order, supported by a contribution to the international order and stability in the interests of security and prosperity of the country. Finally, the projection of values refers to international protection and enhancement of democracy and freedom.

Hence, Canada does not seem to perceive any existential threats to the survival of the state. The nature of the threats is more limited, related to the physical security of Canadians or Canada’s economic security. However, there is a normative element in Canada’s threat perception, which is the importance of safeguarding a rules-based international order. Nor does Canada conceive of its security as egoist, but intimately links national security to international security. It must contribute to international security, as a member of the international community, to ensure its national security. This perception of threat is driven by an internationalist identity and national interests.

40. Croci, “Canada: Facing up to regional security challenges,” 144; Justin Massie, “Une culture stratégique idéaliste, libérale et défensive ? Analyse de l’Énoncé de politique internationale du Canada,” in Stéphane Roussel, ed., Culture stratégique et politique de défense: L’expérience canadienne (Outremon: Athéna Édition, 2007), 206. Stuart Farson and Reg Whitaker, “Canada,” in Stuart Farson, Peter Gill, Mark Phythian, and Shlomo Shpiro, ed., PSI Handbook of Global Security and Intelligence: National Approaches (Westport: Praeger Security International, 2008), 36; Stéphane Roussel and Chantal Robichaud, “L’État postmoderne par excellence ? Internationalisme et promotion de l’identité internationale du Canada,” Études internationales 35, no. 1 (2004): 149–170; Canada, Canada in the World: Government Statement, iii.

41. Tom Keating, “Whither the middle-power identity? Transformations in the Canadian foreign and security milieus,” in Nik Hynek and David Bosold, ed., Canada’s Foreign & Security policy: Soft and Hard Strategies of a Middle Power (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 8.

42. Don Macnamara, “Canada’s national and international security interests,” in David S. McDonough, ed., Canada’s National Security in the Post-9/11 World: Strategy, Interests, and Threats (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 49–50.
A defensive and multilateral reaction against threat

In Canadian defence policy, Canada has traditionally been seen to act on the basis of a liberal internationalist identity. The notion of liberal internationalism refers to the idea that the main objective is to contribute to the peace and stability of the world system by policies based on multilateralism and institutionalism. Canada must play an active and visible role in the establishment of an international order consistent with certain values, such as respect for democracy and human rights, social justice, free trade, and the rule of law.43

This liberal internationalism is also characterized by an aversion to the use of force and a preference for a peaceful resolution of disputes through diplomacy and international institutions.44 Osvaldo Croci argues that Canada views the international environment through liberal internationalist lenses and believes in a peaceful international order based on rules that promote international institutions rather than deterrence and balance of power.45 This internationalism, according to the author, is intimately linked to Canadian political values that place great importance on liberal democracy, respect for the law, the defense of human rights and civil liberties, and a deep belief in pluralism. The 1995 Foreign Policy Statement outlined that policies based on the use of the military to deal with Cold War threats would gradually be abandoned by Canada in favor of new policies focusing on stability and cooperation. Moreover, for conflict prevention, Canada prefers to turn to the tools of preventive diplomacy and regional security organizations. In 2005, this internationalist identity continued to be present in response to threats, particularly through its focus on intelligence, law enforcement, and financial instruments. Military force is the last tool considered.46 Canada’s 2008 Conservative defense policy seemed to be an exception to this internationalism due to its prioritizing of the defense of Canadian territory and the North American continent. Peace and international security were the last objectives. Trudeau’s government has renewed internationalism by promoting peace around the world and insisting on multilateral cooperation. This emphasis on multilateral mechanisms to address threats nevertheless hides the resurgence of traditional deterrence in which Canada participates, notably through NATO and the North American Aerospace defence Command47 In any event, Canada prefers the use of non-military tools, particularly to settle disputes peacefully, and, above all, to act within a

43. Roussel and Robichaud, “L’État postmoderne par excellence ?,” 152.
44. Massie, “Une culture stratégique idéalist, libérale et défensive ?” 207.
45. Croci, “Canada: Facing up to regional security challenges,” 127.
46. Canada, Canada in the World: Government Statement, 29–30; Canada, A Role of Pride and Influence in the World, 14.
47. Canada, Canada First Defence Strategy, 7; Canada, Strong, Secure, Engaged, 50–51.
multilateral framework, predominantly through international organizations, to ensure cooperative security. However, another vision of Canadian strategic identity complements the vision of Canada’s internationalism: Atlanticism. In short, Atlanticism posits that transatlantic unity between the US, UK, and France is a central element in Canada’s strategic culture. Nevertheless, Atlanticism should not be seen as a competing approach to liberal internationalism, but rather as a complementary approach that clarifies one of the elements of liberal internationalism, multilateralism. Indeed, it is on the nature of multilateralism that Atlanticism makes its real contribution, specifying that the multilateralism dear to Canada is multilateralism within NATO or other coalitions in which there is transatlantic unity between the US, UK, and France.

Canada’s defensive and multilateral strategic approach is illustrated in the various military commitments to which it has contributed or refused to contribute, like Kosovo, Iraq, Libya, or the coalition to counter the Islamic State. In each of these cases, Canada has considered the military option as a last resort, and always within a multilateral framework.

In the intelligence domain, Canada also adopts a multilateral framework through the Five Eyes intelligence partnership involving the US, the UK, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia. This partnership, in which the United States plays the largest role, is more important than NATO in intelligence affairs. Canadian Signals Intelligence (SIGINT), in charge of foreign intelligence, originated as a multilateral enterprise, as Wesley Wark notes. The constitution of Canadian SIGINT capabilities was discussed with the US and the UK, with the intention of establishing a cooperative agreement with the US, later known as the CANUSA agreement of 1949. As Maria Robson pointed out, “a major driver in Canadian postwar intelligence planning was the need to make a meaningful contribution to allied intelligence sharing.” This indicates that Canada has considered its foreign intelligence capabilities within a multilateral and cooperative framework from the beginning. According to Wark, “CANUSA was both a guarantor of the survival and independence of a postwar Canadian signals intelligence effort, and the beginning of an expansion of signals intelligence sharing in peacetime that would

48. Kim Richard Nossal, Stéphane Roussel, and Stéphane Paquin, *The Politics of Canadian Foreign Policy* (Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2015), 74; John C. Blaxland, *Strategic Cousins: Australian and Canadian Expeditionary Forces and the British and American Empires* (Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2006), 170.
49. Justin Massie, “United West, divided Canada? Transatlantic (dis)unity and Canada’s Atlanticist strategic culture,” *Journal of Transatlantic Studies* 8, no. 2 (2010): 133.
50. See Paul Heinbecker, “Human security,” *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal* 7, no. 1 (1999): 21; Justin Massie, “Why Canada goes to war: Explaining combat participation in US-led coalitions,” *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 52 (2019): 584.
51. Wesley Wark, “The road to CANUSA: How Canadian signals intelligence won its independence and helped create the Five Eyes,” *Intelligence and National Security* 35, no. 1 (2020): 20–34.
52. Maria A. Robson, “The third eye: Canada’s development of autonomous signals intelligence to contribute to Five Eyes intelligence sharing,” *Intelligence and National Security* 35, no. 7 (2020): 963.
ultimately shape the modern ‘Five Eyes’ alliance.” These multilateral origins of Canadian SIGINT have implications for the Canadian way of doing intelligence, particularly when it comes to foreign intelligence. These implications will be discussed in the next section.

Thereby, to respond to the global threats it perceives, Canada prefers to react with non-military tools in the first instance, using diplomacy and international organizations, without excluding the use of armed force, but always within a multilateral framework. Canada favors a defensive response to international threats. Indeed, even if Canada agrees to go to war, it considers this option only as a last resort, preferring to rely on other tools. In its defensive strategy, Canada never acts alone, and prefers to act multilaterally, whether through formal multilateralism—that is, through international organizations such as NATO or UN—or informal Atlanticist multilateralism. It is interesting to note that in terms of foreign intelligence, Canada acts within a multilateral partnership, the Five Eyes. Thus, the strategic preferences for responding to threats are also reflected in the way foreign intelligence is conducted.

A defensive use of intelligence

The first major, though relatively broad, use of intelligence in Canada can be found in the 2018 Annual Report of the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians (NSICOP), which states that the government’s top national security and intelligence priority is to ensure the safety and security of Canadians at home and abroad. Also, intelligence is used to serve Canadian interests in international relations, defense, and national security, particularly given Canada’s strong presence in multilateral trade and security organizations, military operations, or humanitarian projects. However, intelligence does not play a direct role; it is used to “improve [the government’s] understanding of a situation, develop the most appropriate or advantageous policies, and maximize the effectiveness of [government] operations.” Thus, it would appear at first glance that intelligence is not an offensive tool for government but is used to monitor and advise. But this has not always been the case. Prior to the creation of CSIS, the Security Service was in charge of domestic intelligence. During the Cold War, this service made tracking down spies and fighting subversion its main activities. Moreover, the Security Service engaged in intrusive and aggressive activities during that time that were not well received. In 1969, the MacKenzie Commission recommended that the domestic intelligence mandate of the RCMP be removed and that it be civilianized. After several scandals involving the aggressive methods of the Security Service, the McDonald Commission of 1977 recommended the creation of a civilian service for security intelligence. In 1984, CSIS was established by Parliament, and the

53. Wark, “The road to CANUSA,” 20.
54. “Annual Report 2018,” National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians, Ottawa, 2018, 27, 34.
intentions were pretty clear that the intelligence activities of this new agency would remain minimalist and strictly as necessary.\textsuperscript{55} 

The CSIS mandate is “to investigate activities that could pose a threat to the security of Canada.”\textsuperscript{56} However, CSIS is limited in its ability to collect foreign intelligence in Canada and remains constrained to security intelligence in Canada and abroad. These limitations and domestic focus, we state, are a consequence of Canada’s security intelligence history during the Cold War. The CSE is mandated to collect foreign intelligence abroad, but only from signal sources. CSE may, however, assist other Canadian federal agencies to collect domestic signals intelligence under a judicial warrant.\textsuperscript{57}

Prior to 9/11, intelligence had a relatively modest influence on decision-making. According to Greg Fyffe, this is because Canada “has not been among those nations that assume intelligence vital to an effective foreign policy agenda.”\textsuperscript{58} Intelligence would only serve to inform, not influence, decision-making.\textsuperscript{59} According to Fyffe, the low importance of intelligence may also stem from the predominance of intelligence from allies, particularly the US, which would not be perceived as particularly useful to Canadian interests. Moreover, Canada, not being a major world power, would have less need for intelligence than major powers such as the US or the UK.\textsuperscript{60} However, since 2001, Canadian intelligence has become more important and is increasingly being developed abroad. Although its ability to operate abroad to collect human intelligence on foreign states that directly concerns the security of Canada remains limited, Canadian intelligence has been increasing its presence and efforts. In addition, as part of the fight against terrorism, the C-51 Anti-Terrorism Act added to CSIS’s mandate the ability to conduct disruptive operations, subject to obtaining a warrant from the Federal Court.\textsuperscript{61} While the concept of disruptive operations remains vague, it is clear that CSIS is being given a new, more offensive mandate than in the past. CSE, for its part, has modernized to adapt to the new realities of international terrorism. Its missions continue

\textsuperscript{55} See Whitaker, Kealey, and Parnaby, \textit{Secret Service}, 324–364; and Jez Littlewood, “The Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS),” in Carvin, Juneau, and Forcense, \textit{Top Secret Canada}, 60.
\textsuperscript{56} “Collecting and sharing intelligence,” Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS), https://www.canada.ca/en/security-intelligence-service/corporate/collecting-and-sharing-intelligence.html (accessed 25 December 2019).
\textsuperscript{57} Stuart Farson and Nancy Teeple, “Increasing Canada’s foreign intelligence capability: Is it a dead issue?” \textit{Intelligence and National Security} 30, no. 1 (2015): 62–63.
\textsuperscript{58} Greg Fyffe, “The Canadian intelligence community after 9/11,” \textit{Journal of Military and Strategic Studies} 13, no. 3 (2011): 11.
\textsuperscript{59} James Cox, \textit{Canada and the Five Eyes Intelligence Community}, Strategic Studies Working Group Papers (Ottawa: Canadian Defence & Foreign Affairs Institute and Canadian International Council, 2012), 8.
\textsuperscript{60} Fyffe, “The Canadian intelligence community after 9/11,” 11.
\textsuperscript{61} Michael Tierney, “Past, present, and future: The evolution of Canadian foreign intelligence in a globalized world,” \textit{Canadian Military Journal} 15, no. 2 (2015): 50; Littlewood, “The Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS),” 62–63.
to focus primarily on foreign-directed surveillance, including its presence in many Canadian embassies, allowing it to collect signals intelligence in the host country. In 2013, leaked documents showed that CSE spied on the Brazilian government to obtain economic intelligence. This espionage was also done in a multilateral framework, with CSE working closely with the American National Security Agency.

However, the new National Security Act of 2019 has given the CSE a “covert action role,” as stated by Bill Robinson, with the ability to conduct active cyber operations. They are used not to protect Canada or Canadians, but in international, defense, or security matters, moving away from a strictly defensive intelligence framework. This can be linked to an offensive intelligence framework insofar as it involves covert actions to advance Canada’s interests.

It is then possible to notice the evolution of the vision and role of intelligence in Canada. While Canadian intelligence has been defensive in nature, with limited security intelligence capabilities and SIGINT foreign intelligence activities, it is now acquiring offensive capabilities that are difficult to measure at this time. However, these offensive capabilities seem to be only a small step towards the evolution of the vision of Canadian intelligence and not a revolution in the way of doing intelligence. Indeed, according to Jez Littlewood, CSIS seems to make limited use of disruptive actions for now. Covert CSE actions raise more questions given the vague restrictions on their use. According to Robinson, this “could lead to excessive permissiveness, but it is also possible that [it] will lead to a conservative interpretation of what is legally permissible.” Even so, Canadian intelligence is primarily used for surveillance, which is relatively limited and constrained and does not have a paramilitary force that can carry out violent covert actions.

So, despite its more offensive mandate in recent years, Canadian intelligence remains essentially defensive in nature. This is mainly reflected in the absence of a foreign human intelligence service like the CIA. We believe, like other scholars, that the political costs of such a measure would be too high for a government to choose this option. This option questions the real usefulness of intelligence in Canada, which

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62. Martin Rudner, “Canada’s Communications Security Establishment, Signals Intelligence and counterterrorism,” *Intelligence and National Security* 22, no. 4 (2007): 473.

63. Colin Freeze and Stephanie Nolen, “Charges that Canada spied on Brazil unveil CSEC’s inner workings,” *The Globe and Mail*, 7 October 2013, https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/world/brazil-spying-report-spotlights-canadas-electronic-eavesdroppers/article14720003/ (accessed 20 November 2020); James Fitz-Morris, “Why would Canada spy on Brazil mining and energy officials?,” CBC, 9 October 2013, https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/why-would-canada-spy-on-brazil-mining-and-energy-officials-1.1931465 (accessed 20 November 2020).

64. Bill Robinson, “The Communications Security Establishment (CSE),” in Carvin, Juneau, and Forcese, *Top Secret Canada*, 72; *National Security Act, 2017*, S.C. (2019), c. 13. S.76 (20) https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/N-16.56/FullText.html (accessed 25 December 2019).

65. Littlewood, “The Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS),” 63; Robinson, “The Communications Security Establishment (CSE),” 81.
would not be to engage in significant espionage abroad.\textsuperscript{66} Indeed, it appears that Canada’s security culture is risk-averse and insensitive to intelligence issues, resulting in governments balancing strategic and security needs with this culture of risk aversion, maintaining a minimalist intelligence community.\textsuperscript{67} In short, it is simply not the Canadian way of doing intelligence to conduct human foreign intelligence. We can simplify the Canadian way of doing intelligence as follows: a minimalist security intelligence with a domestic focus, and a limited foreign intelligence in a multilateral framework.

Finally, it is possible that Canada simply does not have the need for it, as suggested by Stuart Farson. Canada needs intelligence in the areas of business and commerce, national security, and politics. In the first two cases, such intelligence in Canada is mostly directed inward, such as espionage or border surveillance. Political intelligence is already well supplied by Canadian embassies. As for Canada’s international obligations, it can rely on its main partners to obtain the necessary information. Finally, one of Canada’s other concerns is that it should not be a threat to its neighbours, particularly the US, and thus should focus its intelligence efforts inward, on threats within Canada. Thus, there has been no willingness since the end of the Second World War to pursue covert offensive actions abroad, and instead Canadian intelligence has developed to deal with internal threats.\textsuperscript{68}

It would appear that intelligence in Canada is not intended to preserve world peace, some status for Canada abroad, or any other form of global interest, but simply to protect Canada primarily from a territorial perspective, or to protect Canadians abroad, such as in foreign military operations. In its 2004 National Security Policy, the government stated that its primary national security interests were to protect the safety and security of Canadians, not to be a source of threat to allies, and to contribute to international security given that some international threats may impact the national security of Canada and Canadians.\textsuperscript{69}

Returning to our classification of intelligence utility, we can classify Canadian intelligence as primarily defensive in nature. Its main concern remains the safety of Canadians, as well as not posing a threat to its neighbor. Moreover, the absence of a foreign human intelligence service demonstrates the defensive intent of Canadian intelligence, which is primarily directed toward protecting the safety and security of Canadians.

However, there are certain tensions that can change the culture of Canadian intelligence. We are currently witnessing a transformation of the use of intelligence, until

\textsuperscript{66} Paul Robinson, “The viability of a Canadian foreign intelligence service,” \textit{International Journal} 64, no. 3 (2009): 716; Farson and Whitaker, “Canada,” 43.

\textsuperscript{67} Andrew Brunatti, “Canada,” in Dover, Goodman, and Hillebrand, \textit{Routledge Companion to Intelligence Studies}, 154.

\textsuperscript{68} Stuart Farson, “Is Canadian intelligence being re-invented?” \textit{Canadian Foreign Policy Journal} 6, no. 2 (1999): 16–19; Stuart Farson, “Schools of thought: National perception of intelligence,” \textit{Conflict Quarterly} 9, no. 2 (1989): 71–72.

\textsuperscript{69} Canada, \textit{Securing an Open Society}, 6.
now primarily defensive in nature, toward more offensive actions. This is the beginning of a gradual evolution of Canadian intelligence. The question that may arise is: will the long-term defensive focus of Canadian intelligence prevail over recent offensive trends because it is too strongly entrenched in Canadian intelligence culture?

**An evolving national intelligence culture?**

A culturalist approach of intelligence systems allows us to study variations between national intelligence systems, but also similarities between certain countries, while providing a context for interpreting the role of intelligence in a particular country, its state, and its evolution. Finally, this cultural context also informs us of the parameters for possible reforms, telling us what is culturally conceivable and what is not. This paper has drawn on the insights of strategic culture and intelligence culture to understand Canadian intelligence through a culturalist lens. The defensive and domestic nature of the security intelligence and the limited and multilateral foreign intelligence of Canadian national intelligence culture helps us to understand the Canadian way of doing intelligence. However, recent transformations in Canada’s intelligence apparatus have led to possible tensions. First, Canada’s strategic posture has not always been strictly defensive, as evidenced by the military intervention in Kandahar, Afghanistan, as well as the air strikes in Kosovo, Libya, and against the Islamic state in Iraq and Syria. Second, recent shifts in the mandates of CSIS and CSE towards more offensive actions are creating tensions within the more defensive nature of Canada’s intelligence vision. These recent shifts towards a more offensive approach may have greater political costs in a Canadian society that is more risk-averse. Yet, attempts to transform the use of intelligence have been accompanied by changes in the system of intelligence review and oversight, towards broader review and more robust oversight. In-depth studies, including studies on the role of the historical origins of Canadian intelligence in contemporary intelligence culture, are required to fully contribute to a culturalist approach of Canadian intelligence. Studies on organizational cultures, as well as the links between political culture and intelligence, would be an interesting avenue for future research. In addition, the analytical framework used in this study is designed to provide a basis for comparative studies of national intelligence cultures. We hope that this attempt to study Canadian intelligence from a culturalist perspective will be followed by other contributions on the relationship between culture and intelligence in Canada.

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