



FIVE EYES, OR MORE?

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The increasingly assertive position of China is impacting the international community—and especially in Asia, where there is growing mobilization of resources and the activation of new, and attempts at reactivating old, alliances. The most obvious examples of this realignment are [Quad](#), [AUKUS](#), [ANZUS](#), [FPDA](#), [ASEAN](#), [ASEAN-ARF](#), [ShanGriLa Dialogue](#) (just the ideas of reactivating [SEATO](#) and [ANZUK](#) are missing).

Alongside these evident blocks and agreements, intensive work is being done to strengthen agreements relating to intelligence, cyberwarfare, and electronic and satellite surveillance. This sector, always a very delicate element in the relations between states and the dynamics of security pacts, suffers particularly from the heavy offensive by Beijing. China wants to maintain its technological advantage, while also expanding it as much as possible, with respect to countries potentially hostile to its hegemonic projects.

In an unusual way, as it deals with issues that should remain confidential, a vast, but complex, debate was launched on the possibility of expanding the so-called Five Eyes, which brings together the intelligence communities of USA, UK, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. Some potential new members could be India, South Korea and Germany and Japan. There has been much speculation on the accession of these states. This is because of paragraphs included in a bill, by the Subcommittee on Intelligence and Special Operations of the United States House of Representatives.

These paragraphs, which announced the option of new members for Five Eyes and is part of the National Defense Authorization Bill for 2022, asked the Director of National Intelligence, in coordination with the Secretary of Defense, to report by May 20, 2022 on the effectiveness of the Five Eyes mechanism and to consider the benefits of expanding the agreement to include South Korea, Japan, India and Germany. This decision would require extraordinary levels of trust to share a state's most delicate secrets with another nation. For this reason, most intelligence relations are bilateral, with the exchange of each report assessed on a risk/reward basis. The Five Eyes is a unique example where the intelligence-flow is shared between five allies, while other multilateral agreements, such as those within NATO, are much more cautious in exchanging information.

The Five Eyes originated with Winston Churchill's decision, in 1941, to include the US in one of the most sensitive secrets of those times: Britain (with the help of Polish and French experts) had broken the German encryption system, "Enigma." The secret (known as "Ultra") was tightly controlled by Britain,

and the idea of sharing it with the Americans was not without risk.

But it turned out to be a very good political calculation. After the war, this Anglo-American cooperation was formalized in the UKUSA agreement of 1946. Australia, Canada, and New Zealand joined the agreement through their Dominion status within the British Commonwealth and which was referred to as “Echelon” and was formalized in successive stages between 1960 and 1971. Other Dominions—most notably South Africa, India, Pakistan, and Ceylon—were not included, which gave the idea that the Five Eyes was a WASP (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant) club. This may have been true in the 1940s and 1950s, but it has little or no validity today, when all five countries are now fully multiethnic.

What is true, however, is that these five countries see the world in similar terms and have worked closely on most crises since 1946, including the Korean War, the Cold War, and the so-called Global War to Terror. Today, all five assess the potential dangers of China's rise in similar terms. This agreement, first of all, with its political, and later military and security nature, however has suffered various problems over the years, including serious ones, such as the refusal of the US to support Great Britain during the Suez crisis; the weak assistance of Washington to Britain in the Malaysian and Borneo insurgences; London's reluctance to participate in the Vietnam War; New Zealand's long standing ban on nuclear-armed warships accessing its waters—and all this without speaking of the several (and not all made public) infiltrations of double agents within the same intelligence structures of the five.

Despite the political appeal of Five Eyes enlargement in the face of China's growing assertiveness, it is likely that several of the five countries and (especially) their intelligence agencies will oppose it. The key topics will focus on the quality of intelligence services on the one hand and on the alignment, continuity, and, especially, the priorities of foreign and security policies of potential adherents.

In fact, none of the four potential adherents fully shares the opinions of the Five Eyes allies on global threats (and not only vis-à-vis China), and on how to deal with them. This without considering that beyond a substantial unanimity, the Five Eyes also have their profound differences over issues of no small importance.

Technically, the four potential candidates have good quality intelligence services; but as mentioned, their strategic priorities are different. For South Korea, the main target remains North Korea, and the National Intelligence Service has also been closely associated with extremist political groups.

Both Germany and Japan, since 1945, have been uneasy that intelligence plays too influential a role in national policy-making systems and bodies. For many years the German intelligence service was based near Munich, while the federal government was in Bonn, inevitably pulling intelligence away from politics.

In Japan, intelligence services are fragmented, although they are probably more effective than they appear. But situations like those in South Korea have also been recorded in relations to the domestic political system.

Of the four potential candidates, only India has structures similar to those of the Five Eyes (thanks to the British matrix). But a significant part of its activity is oriented to opposing Pakistan; and only recently has New Delhi begun to give Beijing the same attention that it has been giving to Rawalpindi—as a perceived level of systemic threat.

But the real differences are found in the general policies of these potential countries. Germany maintained close trade ties with Russia, despite the Ukrainian events and resisted all attempts (some very heavy) to cancel the Nord Stream 2 project. India also has wanted to maintain its close relations with Moscow, especially in the area of procurement of weapons' systems, and has been careful not to allow the Quad to turn into a full strategic alliance against China and keep it as a security tool for the panregion.

South Korea does not want an overly conflicting relationship with Beijing, both for commercial reasons and for the moderating role that China may play in the face of North Korea's recurring excesses; again in terms of regional policies, there is little prospect of a strengthening of relations with Tokyo, which Seoul also sees as a dangerous commercial rival, not to mention the open questions about fisheries, territorial waters and a controversial past (when Japan, between 1910 and 1945 dominated the peninsula).

Germany, too, could be lukewarm towards an agreement that could turn into a tool to exert pressure for a tougher approach towards Moscow and Beijing (and to damage its enormous trade and energy relations with China and Russia).

In absolute terms, both of quality and of means, a real (more than potential) adherent could be France,

whose services, even if strongly oriented towards Africa, represent a highly respected element. However, even for Paris the need to maintain fluid commercial relations (especially with China) could be an element of fragility in its membership of the Five Eyes. However, it must be remembered that the USA itself, which has identified Beijing as a global competitor, has important trade relations with China and still wants to keep the door open to dialogue, re-proposing the same dynamics that they fear to see applied by their partners (potential or present) in that context.

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