



A 2020 Vision for Five Eyes: New Structures for New Challenges

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Key points

- Five Eyes has been a primarily operational grouping, but it is starting to broaden collaboration – particularly to address COVID-19 recovery.
- Five Eyes needs new planning structures if it is to undertake more concerted, strategic initiatives.
- To address the greatest security challenges to the liberal international order, like-minded nations must collaborate on new frontiers – including geoeconomics, cyber and critical technologies, and strategic diplomacy.
- There is momentum for a broader coalition of democracies (like a 'D-10') to address these global challenges, but there are major barriers to the formation and success of such a group.

Policy recommendations

- The Australian Government should leverage its Five Eyes partnerships and credibility as a constructive middle power to advocate for an expanded, more formally coordinated Five Eyes.
- A Five Eyes Leaders Summit should be established, informed by a Secretariat which would develop options for new joint activities and strategic planning.
- An expanded, more strategic Five Eyes should be used as the nucleus for a global coalition of democracies.

The Five Eyes grouping is the oldest and most integrated international security partnership in modern history. In practice, it is an amalgamation of many smaller, often informal, joint meetings, operations and exchanges arranged around specific national security, law enforcement and strategic issues. Practical, issues-based cooperation based on working-level engagement and trust has allowed Five Eyes to grow in an organic way.

However, the challenges facing Five Eyes nations, and the liberal international order they support, demand that the grouping moves to a new era of cooperation that is more expansive, coordinated and strategic. If it can achieve this, Five Eyes could form the nucleus for a wider concert of democratic nations; a type of coalition that many have argued is essential to fortifying the liberal order against the security challenges of the 21st century.

Untapped potential

The basis for Five Eyes arose when a number of Second World War agreements between the United States and Britain were expanded to include Australia, Canada and New Zealand. These formal agreements largely related to signals intelligence sharing. However, collaboration rapidly grew to include all varieties of intelligence—military and civilian. Curiously, this growth in the relationship was not accompanied by additional formal structures like multilateral treaties. Instead, the nature and processes of intelligence exchange were largely left to respective Five Eyes agencies to resolve among themselves.

The ad hoc advantage

A nimble and highly adaptive mode of collaboration allowed Five Eyes agencies to jointly mount complex and largely successful espionage and counter-espionage activities. During the Cold War, Five Eyes activities primarily targeted the Soviet Union, and regimes or insurgencies deemed to align with it. From the 1990s, agencies targeted more non-state actors, and post 9/11 the global campaign against jihadist terrorism became a priority.

Through this cooperation, member agencies' day-to-day activities have become interwoven – they share intelligence, military technology and operational insights. But while the targets for its activities have broadened, the momentum of Five Eyes has continued to come from its operational agencies.

Five Eyes has remained first and foremost an *operational* grouping with no established structure for members to plan and undertake concerted strategic initiatives, particularly those outside of conventional state conflict. This is a problem because nations' collective efforts to address modern threats can no longer be confined to discrete intelligence partnerships between niche agencies.

New challenges, new momentum

The Five Eyes grouping has focused on terrorism, interstate warfare, rogue and failed nations, organised crime and weapons of mass destruction. Yet these threats have been joined, and in many instances eclipsed, by more

opaque, pervasive challenges that require a remodelled Five Eyes.

Today's challenges to the liberal order include:

- a pandemic-induced global economic crisis – the latest in an increasingly frequent cycle of economic and strategic volatility,
- the stagnation of multilateral bodies, particularly those within the United Nations, and
- coercion and political interference by authoritarian powers China and Russia.

By using disinformation campaigns, economic warfare and coercive diplomacy, today's existential challengers target the very fabric of liberal societies as well as the norms and institutions of the liberal international order. To address these challenges, the Five Eyes must expand to be a security partnership that can strategically mobilise economics, information, and diplomacy as well as intelligence and military force.

Within the last decade, Five Eyes nations have shown an interest in pivoting the grouping to address new strategic challenges. Members have recently undertaken ministerial-level engagements on technology regulation, democratic advocacy, COVID-19 economic responses and cyber security. There has even been talk of coordinated retaliatory sanctions from Five Eyes in response to China's arbitrary tariffs on Australian goods.¹

Australian politicians, academics and officials have been active in efforts to test new areas for Five Eyes collaboration. These engagements reflect a growing realisation that the styling of Five Eyes as an exclusively intelligence-sharing club limits the grouping's wider strategic potential. However, implementing coordinated economic sanctions, multi-jurisdictional regulations, or synchronised diplomacy involves highly complex, time-sensitive activities for which Five Eyes is not adequately equipped.

Structures for unlocking strategic potential

To continue to meet its original intent – of securing the liberal order – Five Eyes requires a new, more structured form, plus clearer political commitments from national leaders. This should involve a regular schedule of leaders' summits and a standing secre-

tariat. Comprising embedded expert staff from each Five Eyes nation, a secretariat would provide the institutional backbone to design and implement highly synchronised actions outside of the established intelligence and military relationship.

Such actions could include:

- strengthening economic collaboration, including via joint investments in critical technologies and infrastructure,
- diversifying global supply chains,
- coordinated counter-disinformation and counter-interference campaigns,
- operations to project liberal counter-narratives, and
- support to draw vulnerable states away from coercion.

Five Eyes' potential for strategic action could be trans-

formative. Together, these activities could help push back against the global spread of authoritarianism² via reinvigorated advocacy of free markets and democratic governance. There are also opportunities for Five Eyes nations to make the world safer for free markets and democracy by being more coordinated in how they manage and regulate the Internet and social media giants that transcend jurisdictions.

Of course, the creation of formal structures to unlock Five Eyes' wider strategic potential need not, and should not, impact upon organic operational collaboration between intelligence agencies. Rather, new strategic structures would enable additional collaboration, particularly between non-security agencies, that cannot be achieved through existing, informal means.

D-10 starts with 5 eyes

To address the international security challenges of the 21st century, there is a growing consensus that liberal democratic nations need to coordinate their actions like never before. Leading liberal scholar John Ikenberry has called for a grouping of the top democracies akin to the G-7 economic grouping.³ President-elect Joseph R. Biden has pledged to hold a global Summit for Democracy in his first year in office.⁴ The UK government has advocated a 'D-10' of prominent democracies, to collaborate on supply chains and advanced technology-sharing, among other things. A prototype D-10 exists among think tanks and foreign policy planners, and has begun to advocate a coordinated China strategy.⁵

However, building an effective concert of democracies will be long and difficult. While D-10 members will be united by broad political affinities and threat perceptions, their democratic traditions and security capabilities vary greatly. D-10 members will also be influenced by disparate and occasionally competing national interests and regional geopolitics. Such a grouping would also become the target of fierce efforts by China and Russia to discredit and undermine its legitimacy and divide its members.

For this reason, the process of building a D-10 should start by capitalising upon the potential of Five Eyes to act as a more coordinated strategic collective of democratic nations, not just a narrow intelligence clique.

The Five Eyes nations could set an example of the kind of collaborative successes that can be achieved by truly synchronised multilateral initiatives. Five Eyes leadership would also enable a gradualist approach

to strategic collaboration between democracies, with cooperation starting with practical initiatives of immediate shared interest before stepping up to more complex multilateral projects.

Similarly, by leveraging Five Eyes as its nucleus, a D-10 grouping will be led by nations experienced in undertaking joint activities in the face of resistance from states like China and Russia. This leadership could give more vulnerable states essential resolve in the face of external pressure.

There is already external lobbying for Five Eyes to expand membership – from France, Japan and Israel. Including these nations in a D-10 grouping or similar would let Five Eyes expand collaboration on the strategic issues that matter most to the liberal order, without having to manage the risks of opening up its more sensitive intelligence exchanges to new members.

A chance for Australian leadership

The need to unlock the strategic potential of Five Eyes presents the Australian Government with an opportunity to exercise new middle power leadership for the liberal order. As Kori Schake reminds us, “the liberal order is not – has never been – self-sustaining.”⁶ In an increasingly multipolar world, and with the United States' comparatively reduced standing and relative decline in power, more responsibility now rests with middle powers like Australia to bolster liberal institutions and norms.

Australia has already demonstrated quiet diplomatic initiative on key strategic issues – such as regulating 5G and countering foreign interference. Australia, perhaps with Canada, the United Kingdom or New

Zealand, could exercise middle power leadership by seeking to convene a meeting of Five Eyes heads of state ahead of, or on the side-lines of, Biden's 2021 Summit for Democracy. The meeting would focus on establishing a new Five Eyes Secretariat and an ongoing program of leadership summits.

Indeed, for a D-10 or similar to have maximum credibility as a values-driven coalition, it should be driven by non-American leadership. A degree of Australian leadership of the initiative, especially alongside another middle powers, would demonstrate to other smaller states and revisionist powers that the revitalisation of the liberal order is not a cynical project for preserving US hegemony or 'containing' China. Further, while efforts to bolster Five Eyes in isolation could be criticised as an Anglo-centric policy, such criticism could be offset if it was being done as part of a wider push towards a sustainable D-10 grouping.

Potential costs

Undertaking a high-profile initiative to broaden the strategic application of Five Eyes and build a D-10 would doubtless attract the ire of the Chinese Communist Party and regimes that would prefer to see a weaker, less cohesive community of liberal democracies. Yet, with the bilateral relationship presently at its lowest ebb since 1972, it appears China has already determined to make an example of Australia regardless of its responses. Australia should not shirk at restructuring international security institutions like Five Eyes due to arguably inevitable penalties. To do so would be to submit to China's coercion strategy and allow the liberal order to fall into a course of accelerated decline.

Notes

1. "Australia's Five Eyes Allies Reportedly Plot Joint China Sanctions," ABC Radio National (Dec 16, 2020), <https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/breakfast/australias-five-eyes-allies-reportedly-plot-joint-china-sanction/12988320>.
2. John Keane, *The New Despotism*, Harvard University Press (2020).
3. Ikenberry's D-10 vision includes Australia, Canada, Germany, France, India, Japan, New Zealand, South Korea, the United Kingdom, and United States.
4. Agenda items are likely to include: coordinating liberal democracies to address Chinese belligerence, recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, and global economic dysfunction.
5. Atlantic Council Scowcroft Center for Strategy and Security, "Global Strategy 2021: An Allied Strategy for China" (Dec 2020), <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/global-strategy-2021-an-allied-strategy-for-china/>.
6. *America vs the West: Can the Liberal World Order be Preserved?*, Lowy Institute Paper (2018).

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