

Getting Somewhere ? The Utility of ‘Multiplexic Thinking’ in Connecting International Relations to the Study and Doing of Intelligence

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Abstract

This article advances the proposition that contemporary intelligence is essentially concerned with ‘multi-everything’. Particularly, this is when intelligence is conceptualized at its most broad, including: (i) when functionally it both considers and involves multiple entities; and when (ii) intelligence work is simultaneously spanning several familiar collection/gathering and analysis/assessment (estimation) activities; as well as (iii) examining how and where they all go (both temporally and spatially) for management, accountability and oversight purposes; and when overall (iv) intelligence work involves ‘all-source’ and/or ‘multiple intelligence disciplines’ (‘multi-INT(s)’) approaches.

In these circumstances and involving contexts in international relations (IR) where the developing and observable concept of ‘multiplexity’ is present, to both scholars and practitioners, and equally when pursued in terms of both theory and practice, the value of ‘multiplexic thinking’ soon becomes apparent. As this article demonstrates, while several differing definitions of the ‘multiplex’ phenomenon appear to thrive

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with at least fluctuating elements of relevance in their many variations, the noteworthiness of ‘multiplexic thinking’ with regard to intelligence is especially central where ‘multiplex’ and its closely associated extended derivatives are defined, beyond their more common cinema invoking, as: ‘involving or consisting of many elements in a complex relationship . . . [also] involving simultaneous transmission of several messages along a single channel of communication’. Both in theory and practice many ‘pluralities’ are clearly involved, such as relating to often rapidly unfolding situations, events, and developments. These trends once more underscore the importance of the previously advanced ‘complex co-existence plurality’ concept both in and cutting-across varying IR and intelligence ‘worlds’ during both their study and more practical doing.

Reaching overall conclusions, this article contends that thinking in terms of ‘multiplexity’ has extended utility. Notably, this is in terms of forming a relevant space or location, involving much overlap, for further helping to better ‘connect’ IR to both the study and doing of intelligence. This is especially strongly so in international security related areas. These form areas where, at the same time and in the same places, from case study examples we can empirically observe the existence of several pluralities and witness much complexity; and where, relating to theory, there are also many shared more ‘realist’-leaning interests and concerns to more ‘constructivist’ and ‘idealist/liberal internationalist’-heading norms and values that simultaneously figure largely. Scholar-Practitioners in both IR and intelligence adopting the position of ‘critical constructivists’ in their work and outlook, professionally and otherwise - for example, extending beyond into more informal, social, spheres - similarly has much continuing resonance. Greater robust linkages between the different, yet overlapping, ‘worlds’ are found, as well as deserving of being further harnessed and exploited into the future via the hub and mechanism of ‘multiplexic thinking’, extending to its enhanced mobilization.

Keywords: intelligence, multiplexic thinking, International Relations, plurality, multiplexity

Introduction

This article examines what is termed “multiplexic thinking”. That mode or variant of thinking derives from the developing concept of “multiplexity”, essentially defined as: “The quality or condition of being multiplex; multiplicity;

complexity.” (OED, 2018); or, at least, fusions of “multiple complexities” are involved. This article then goes on to evaluate the *utility* of “multiplexic thinking”. Currently, that thinking arguably has simultaneous increasing relevance to: (i) the study of International Relations (IR); and to (ii) Intelligence Studies (IS); as well as to (iii) the actual practical doing of intelligence and IR. A suitably agile conceptual hub and mechanism is provided, offering many possibilities for joining-up several different approaches, entities and phenomena.

Further insight is apparent. As this article argues, while the term “multiplexity” (as well as its associated derivatives) has been established in other, not too unrelated, fields of study for some time - such as the social sciences more widely (see, e.g., Mollenhorst, 2008, p.55-78) -, it appears to be at least a relative “newcomer” to the more specific study and doing of IR to Intelligence Studies. A general status that is similarly apparent to their further ranging associated and bespoke theoretical and practical endeavors. As a helpful point of departure for the discussions undergone during the course of this article, IR scholar, US Professor Amitav Acharya, frames his IR usage of “multiplexic thinking” along the lines of deploying a “Multiplex World” lens towards the study of IR (e-IR, 2016; Acharya, 2016). Other analysts have also taken note, seeing the world as “multi-ordered” (see below).

Much linkage potential is especially offered. Extending beyond mere labels alone, the “multiplexic” concept, together with its associates, is highly deserving of further exploration efforts with regard to both IR and intelligence. This includes as: (i) contemporary intelligence work, when undertaken at its widest, spans from collection and gathering to analysis and assessment/estimation tasks, and intimately involves “all-source” to “multiple intelligence disciplines” or “multi-INT(s)” approaches (Svendsen, 2017a,b; 2018; Ainsworth, 2018); and (ii) when - at different times and in differing places, and/or in varying combinations - several IR to more tailored, developing intelligence theories are simultaneously included, as variously helpful explainers for the activities undergone or equally not (e.g. Svendsen, 2009; 2012a,b; Aldrich, 2010; Crawford, 2010).

As this article argues, however or wherever it is precisely conceived, there is value in the greater harnessing of “multiplexic thinking,” particularly for the purposes of greater connection. Accordingly, this article next advances by, firstly, further generally defining the concept of “multiplexity”. Secondly, the article goes on to evaluate the relevance of “multiplexic thinking” (or thinking in terms of “multiplexity”), especially as it is used or even can be regarded as helpful in the IR-context, such as relating to the analysis of international affairs and world politics. Thirdly, the value of harnessing “multiplexic thinking” in the intelligence context and *vis-à-vis* intelligence is further examined. This is before, fourthly, coming to some overall conclusions.

Ultimately, the overall conclusions offer insight and further highlight the utility of “multiplexic thinking” to both IR and IS, and particularly in “connecting” IR