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# Adam Watson, Raison de Système, and the Practice Turn: Revisiting the Work of Diplomat in the English School

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## Abstract

*This contribution focuses on the concept of raison de système developed by Adam Watson, a career diplomat and a member of the English School of International Relations. I trace the concept of raison de système across Watson's work, which he deploys against raison d'état, and lay out how its scope has expanded to include economic issues and the collective security agenda since the 19th century. I also consider how raison de système relates to change, culture, ethics, and the role of diplomatic agency in international society. I conclude with an overall assessment of Watson's contribution to our thinking about international society and point to the ways in which his scholarship can be fruitfully synthesized with the recent practice turn in diplomatic studies.*

## Keywords

Adam Watson, English School, international relations, practice turn, diplomatic hierarchies

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## Introduction

This contribution offers an overview of the concept of *raison de système* as proposed by Adam Watson, one of the historian members of the English School of International Relations (henceforth ES) and a career diplomat. Watson coined this term to highlight the social structure of international society and used it repeatedly throughout his writings. Watson's fondness for the term, however, has not been picked up by too many others in the broader literature or even within the ES literature. As Buzan notes, together with the other ES term "standard of civilization", Watson's *raison de système* needs to be properly examined as an ES term.[1] In recent years, Gülmez briefly mentioned it in his discussion of an emerging "cosmopolitan diplomacy" in the world. Gülmez did not argue that Watson's concept amounts to cosmopolitan diplomacy, but that it can potentially begin to take us beyond limited definitions of state-centric diplomacy.[2]

*Raison de système* may appear to be an elusive concept confined to Watson yet it essentially epitomizes the very argument that classical ES theorists put forward. Indeed, it is a vital concept for better understanding the ES argument that emphasizes the tension between different imperatives like the maintenance of an inter-state order and the need to provide justice for all humans around the world. *Raison de système*, with a focus on the interplay between the structural and the individual levels, straddles this particular tension and invites us to reconsider how it plays out repeatedly. A related point is that the English School is a macro-historical theory and it is often difficult to examine micro-level processes using the school's approach. From my perspective, *raison de système* builds a bridge between these different levels and helps us make sense of the "everyday" in international society. Watson has therefore contributed a very valuable concept to the ES theory.

While critical, the concept of *raison de système* raises a number of questions at the same time. In this contribution, I review the concept of *raison de système* throughout Watson's research in order to specify exactly how he employs it and to discuss some of the broader theoretical issues that follow. My objective in this analysis is twofold: to institute clarity to the concept and to consider its wider theoretical implications for diplomacy and IR theory.

Watson relates *raison de système* first and foremost to individuals' beliefs in and loyalties towards international society which then lead to the assumption of moral obligations towards the latter. The utmost moral obligation is to ensure the continuity of international society. On this basis, Watson privileges certain periods in history such as the 19th-century Concert of Europe as a period with the strongest sense of *raison de système*, and certain figures like Metternich as having the strongest sense of *raison de système*. Section I specifies the scope and definitions of the term, and elaborates why Watson thinks the Concert system or Metternich were so special in terms of *raison de système*.

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Meanwhile, Watson's concept resembles a more recent concept, Booth and Wheeler's "security dilemma sensibility". As the authors emphasize, their approach draws from the ES theory and the works of Butterfield in particular who kept emphasizing the need to empathize with the standpoint of the adversary.[3] In Section I, I also examine the similarities between *raison de système* and the security dilemma sensibility. Is this particular ES concept also related to the proposed security dilemma sensibility?

Section II deals with the question of change in international society. *Raison de système* seems to reproduce the status quo and works to make sure that international society continues in its *existing form*. Neumann already refers to Watson's (and Kissinger's) understanding of diplomacy as a "systems-maintaining" one.[4] Sharp, who has utilized the concept extensively in his attempt to develop a diplomatic theory of international relations, describes *raison de système* as "keeping the whole show going."[5] Watson demands that especially great powers labor meticulously to maintain the continuity of international society and underlines that our first moral responsibility is to preserve international society. Is it therefore the case that *raison de système* and change are mutually exclusive terms? Section II discusses this question.

Section III considers the degree to which *raison de système* corresponds to a "first image" view of IR that concentrates on the role of individuals over states and the international system.[6] As explained in more detail below, Watson relates diplomacy to the performing of the "social position" of a state in international society by its diplomats which implies a strong sense of diplomatic agency.[7] In this section, I relate Watson's understanding of diplomacy to the recent "practice turn" in diplomatic studies and consider the "diplomatic self"[8] in relation to *raison de système*. In the concluding section, I offer my overall assessment of Watson's scholarship and contribution to our thinking on international affairs.

## Raison de Système: Scope and Definition

*Raison de système* points to the "belief that it pays to make the system work" in Watson's definition.[9] In broader terms, *raison de système* provides a synopsis of the ES approach to IR as it highlights the social structure of international affairs. *Raison de système* is in this sense the response of the ES to *raison d'état* in particular and focuses on those "non-vital interests of states and dynasties and communities that militate against *raison d'état*."[10] In a simple distinction, Watson likened *raison d'état* to the "invisible hand" of the market, but he warned that you cannot rely solely on it in international society. You need *raison de système* and "in practice statesmen were usually aware that they cannot count on the unseen hand."[11] As Buzan and Little underline, others like Wendt[12] have also attempted to develop similar frameworks that concentrate on this deeper social element in IR although Wendt's attempt is less informed by history than Watson's.[13] Watson indeed traces his concept throughout history and identifies periods during which *raison de système* existed in stronger terms, among which the Concert of Europe. But *raison de système* is also about the question of ethics in international society and Watson's thinking on this subject has been influenced by his University of Cambridge history tutor Herbert Butterfield. As Sharp explores in detail, Butterfield was discussing a "virtuous" and "civilizing" diplomacy which could help build a better international society.[14] It was Butterfield who brought into the study of IR

> a breadth of concern and generosity of spirit that had its place in a tough-world dominated by the cruder reaches of realism. Adam Watson, a skilled diplomat himself and close friend of Butterfield, noticed the urgency that Butterfield's ethics in world affairs attached to studying those individuals and states who had engaged in conflict, who believed themselves to be right, who believed their opponents to be evil or mad, and yet who *still stopped fighting* in order to achieve a larger aim.[15]

From Watson's standpoint that larger aim which states and individuals seek to achieve is to maintain international society.

> I have referred to the interest which member states in a system have in the effective functioning of the system itself, and of their responsibilities towards it. The conscious sense that all the states in an international society have an interest in preserving it and in making it work I have called *raison de système*.[16]

"Conscious" is a key term here that finds repeated expression throughout Watson's work. Watson frequently draws an analogy between the solar system and the international system in the sense that they both operate mechanistically. International society, in distinction, is put in place purposefully and requires "tremendous conscious effort" to continue functioning as Butterfield has underlined as well.[17] *Raison de système* is a concept that first and foremost postulates the presence of international society and its purposeful creation by states and individuals who feel responsible for its protection. Watson refers to *raison de système* in more exacting terms as a "sense of the value of international society in all its members,"[18] and adds that it incurs responsibilities on all to "ensure that the fabric of the system itself is preserved and its continuity maintained."[19] *Raison de système* is the cornerstone of Watson's understanding of diplomacy and great powers have a special responsibility for maintaining it. It is above all great powers which have to observe *raison de système*, accept a "negative

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requirement" for NOT damaging the functioning of international society, and agree amongst themselves on certain principles of crisis management.[20] Indeed, Watson notes,

> the potential of diplomacy can be realized when the great powers not merely observe prudent codes of conduct towards each other but also recognize, explicitly or tacitly, that the preservation and effective functioning of their system and of international society must be given priority whenever the point is reached where it appears to be seriously threatened. This attitude is something more than prudence and restraint. It is conscious *raison de système*, the use of diplomacy to achieve the ultimate purpose of an international society of independent states.[21]

As emphasized above, this places *raison de système* in a fundamental tension with demands for (just) change in international society. Watson has not ignored the question of change as I discuss below. However, the question of what the ultimate purpose of international society is appears to be international society itself from his position. Hence, his overall argument is marked by a tendency to stick with the status quo.

Another tendency that marks Watson's work is his preference for supranational systems. Watson devised his own classification of international systems with reference to a metaphorical pendulum made up of four increasing degrees of supranationalism: multiple independences, hegemony, dominion, and empire. Throughout his work, Watson kept emphasizing the pitfalls of the independences part of the pendulum (multiple independences and hegemony) and the benefits of the supranational part (dominion and empire). The supranational part is associated with peace and prosperity even if it may be at the expense of independence.[22] If Bull's chief work was an "implicit defense" of the system of states in his own words,[23] then Watson's was an implicit defense of supranationalism. He once described two sets of ideas associated with each particular part of the pendulum. Accordingly, ideas such as sovereignty, anti-hegemonial coalitions, balance of power, and non-intervention are associated with the multiple independences part, while those such as intervention, standards of civilization, human rights, and the responsibilities of great powers are associated with the

supranational part. The Concert of Europe system is also related to this same supranational part in Watson's analysis.[24] What was so special, then, about this particular system, and how is it related to our central theme of *raison de système*?

Many already pointed to the distinctiveness of the Concert of Europe system. For Kann, the Concert was a "system of international politics according to supra-national and supra-party principles" designed to offer peace and stability for the European continent.[25] For Elrod, the Concert was the first instance of states foregoing their own interests in order not to be placed outside the moral community of Europe, and was a system that was capable of convincing states to observe limits in their actions for the collective maintenance of a peaceful European order.[26] Watson starts discussing the lead-up to this peaceful European order from the 18th century onwards. Accordingly, the 18th century was the "Age of Reason and Balance" with an ongoing multilateral diplomatic dialogue. What was absent was a passionate pursuit of religious and nationalistic ambitions, and there was a very well-functioning balance of power where no state was able to assume a hegemonic position.[27] Watson's dislike of these forces becomes more apparent where he singles out the pursuit of overly nationalistic policies especially as the irresponsible pursuit of what he calls "*passion d'état*."[28] Democracy too could potentially harm diplomacy when "fused with sovereignty that admits no restraint outside itself and with national passion, it can produce a dangerous and intoxicating brew" for Watson.[29] "The level of creative statecraft" in 18th-century Europe, absent in such strong forces as democracy and nationalism, was simply "outstanding" from his perspective.[30]

The Concert marked the "climax of European constructive achievement in the managing of a state's system" in Watson's analysis.[31] One of its most important characteristics was inclusiveness – its diplomatic dialogue included small and medium-sized powers and the system represented three-quarters of the population of Europe at the time.[32] The Concert did not mean the absence of conflicts of interest among its members, but it was a rules-based system for resolving them. Its weakness was its status quo orientations and anti-revolutionary zeal.[33] Metternich and the other figures involved in the Concert developed a solidarity of purpose and their thinking extended system-wide. In connection

with this point, Watson quotes Metternich as saying, "My country is the whole of Europe."[34] *Raison de système* was particularly high during the Concert of Europe era and its members "felt responsible for the functioning of the European society of states as a whole: not always, or absolutely, but strongly enough to make it a rule of the game."[35]

Watson also points to Bismarck as another major figure with a strong sense of *raison de système*. He displayed, in Watson's analysis, a particularly strong sense of *raison de système* when he resisted the urge to create an even larger Germany and excluded Austrian lands. But Bismarck also had a strong sense of *raison d'état* which manifested itself when he re-acquired Alsace and Lorraine from a defeated France.[36]

Since the times of Bismarck, and excluding its complete collapse during World War I, *raison de système* expanded twice in Watson's analysis. The first expansion was with the creation of the League of Nations and the principle of collective security which incurred new responsibilities in international society and a guarantee of the minimum need to survive in international society for each member.[37] The second expansion is more recent and is marked by a move towards the inclusion of international economic affairs. Watson calls this "economic *raison de système*,"[38] and he places the aid-donor relationship that has come to characterize increasingly the relationship between the developed and the developing parts of the world at its center. At its core, *raison de système* is about moral responsibility in international society and refers to the idea that we need to make international society work. Economic *raison de système* is not merely the provision of aid – it is a broader contribution by great powers to collective aid programs together with bilateral aid, "not just on reason of state or charitable grounds but for motives of *raison de système,* in order to make international society function more effectively to the benefit of all its members," argued Watson.[39]

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To reiterate, *raison de système* is a concept that points to the moral underpinnings of international society which Watson and Butterfield kept emphasizing. As Vigezzi writes, all 30 papers submitted to the

British Committee on the Theory of International Politics during Watson's chairmanship between 1973 and 1978 were on the subject of ethics in international society.[40] The strong emphasis Butterfield had placed on the subject of ethics, together with other human feelings such as fear, already attracted the attention of Booth and Wheeler when they were developing their concept of security dilemma sensibility. In specific terms, this sensibility refers to

> an actor's intention and capacity to perceive the motives behind, and to show responsiveness towards, the potential complexity of the military intentions of others. In particular it refers to the ability to understand the role that fear might play in their attitudes and behavior, including, crucially, the role that one's own actions may play in provoking that fear.[41]

Booth and Wheeler specified three different logics of the security dilemma: fatalist, mitigator, and transcender TRANSCENDER (this should read 'transcender' as in the original source. corresponding respectively to anarchy, society, and community in international affairs. The mitigator/society logic draws attention to the ES theory especially. Overall, the security dilemma sensibility underlines the importance of empathy towards the adversary and its opposite is zero-sum security for us all.[42] In this respect, the security dilemma sensibility and *raison de système* are related: each emphasizes the need for restraint in the conduct of diplomacy. My reading of *raison de système* is that it is at the same time a prior and a first-order concept. It is a response to a curious condition that Bull expressed when discussing the symbolic function of diplomacy in international society, namely why it has been continuing for centuries now. In Bull's words,

> The remarkable willingness of states of all regions, cultures, persuasions and states of development to embrace often strange and archaic diplomatic procedures that arose in another age in Europe is today one of the few visible indications of universal acceptance of the idea of international society.[43]

What follows Bull's observation is another aspect of this curious condition: how new states come into existence having already embraced the rules and norms of international society, or share in *raison de système* the moment they are born into international society. Watson himself

discussed how postcolonial states did not challenge the fundamental pillars of international society but only sought to advance their own position within it. Continuing this discussion, Watson maintained that "[t]o will the state is to will the states system." "So the leaders of the new states," he argued, "whatever their domestic form of government, consider the diplomatic dialogue with other states as now conducted to be a condition or corollary of their own statehood."[44]

Viewed in this respect, *raison de système* refers to a prior intersubjective agreement among all members of international society, old and new, that international society is to exist. As even new states come into the system accepting its fundamentals, international society keeps reproducing itself. To repeat, Watson says that is a way of making sure that international society continues.[45] This self-replicating quality of international society brings me to the question of change in international society and Watson's perspective on this issue. Was Watson a conservative? Was he a defender of the status quo? Or, was he simply pointing to the potential dangers of revolutionary activism in international society?

## Raison de Système and Change in International Society

As Vigezzi stresses, the members of the British Committee, including Watson, were on the whole interested in identifying the forces of continuity in international society.[46] This tendency did not go uncriticized – perhaps in the harshest terms by Callahan who likened the Committee to an "old boys' club" seeking to maintain UK/European ascendancy in the world with academic tools.[47] There is a conservative element in the works of the ES tied to the concept of order. For Vincent, however, conservatism is built into the very nature of the concept of order to begin with. Bull's notion of order, again from Vincent's perspective, is a conservative one, but that is not necessarily for the sake of conservatism. Vincent notes that Bull's "iconoclastic, dismissive, tough-minded, ruthless" conception of order is conservative because Bull believed that "authority must reside somewhere if order is to obtain anywhere."[48]

My interpretation of Watson's concept of order is that it is a more *pragmatic* one compared to Bull's. Indeed, Watson made several suggestions for

re-arranging the fundamental rules of international society. These included recognizing new categories of existence/statehood for resolving issues such as the status of Palestine or acknowledging aid dependency and re-arranging the workings of international institutions around the unequal relationship between the donors and recipients of aid if necessary.[49] These were all pragmatic suggestions to make international society work by forgoing certain ideals if and when necessary: forgoing the ideal of full and independent statehood in the case of Palestine or the ideal of equality in the case of donor-recipient relations.

All of these suggest that Watson did not shy away from change and in fact, to the contrary, he advocated some radical ideas. Although it is crucial to note that the purpose of change is to make the system work or to maintain *raison de système*. Watson advocated change to the extent that the system would not collapse in on itself. In his own words,

> *Raison de système* means not a commitment to the status quo but the management of orderly change. Maintaining a just balance between independent states requires continual ad*just*ment. Among the maxims that formulate the wisdom born of experience, none is more important than the rule that the enemy of today will be the ally of tomorrow, and that therefore you should not damage the vital (as opposed to the peripheral) interests of another state, especially a powerful state. Western traditions of statecraft are based on the prudence, the restraint, the elasticity, the sense of responsibility of a sophisticated elite, above the passions of the crowd. *Raison de système* is thus enlightened expediency, or farsighted prudence.[50]

What, then, about the traditions of non-Western states? And as importantly, can they be reconciled with Western ones? Can *raison de système* be multicultural or is it a European attribute? Another question that emerges is can it accommodate multiple ethical standpoints? Watson was an essentialist on the first question of multiculturalism. On the second question of ethics, he was once again a pragmatist. Let me elaborate both issues.

In an earlier contribution, I examined Wight and Watson's views on culture and called them "culturalists" who do not simply point to the

role of culture but impose culture onto international society.[51] Their culturalism became most obvious when they discussed encounters between Europe and the Ottomans. For Watson, the Ottomans never really became a member of European international society even after they were formally admitted into the Concert of Europe in 1856.[52] The members of international society could, of course, regulate their mutual involvement in the absence of a common culture, much like the Europeans and the Ottomans did for centuries from Watson's perspective. This, Watson compared to the discovery of a community on the Moon: we would not share a common culture with them but would nonetheless formulate rules of co-existence if we were not to exterminate them or they were not to exterminate us.[53] These common rules, however, could not become a substitute for pre-existing cultural bonds in international society for Watson. As early as 1961, Watson was discussing how international society was comprised of different groupings which were separated, among other things, by "an ability to instinctively understand one another."[54] This ability is tied to the existence of common cultural bonds and Watson remained insistent on this point.

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Several other conditions also marked off different groupings in international society which included "a common conception of international morality and law and of diplomatic method." Watson even made mention of "excentric circles" in international society, as opposed to concentric circles, on the basis of the four criteria of common morality, law, diplomatic method, and the ability to understand one another quickly. Accordingly, the "the Western, the Communist and the Afro-Asian" excentric circles existed in the 1960s which were "possibly overlapping and possibly united in a universal system of politics, but each constituting in itself an international society."[55] I believe that this extreme cynicism is a reflection of Cold War divisions in international society; Watson is not this pessimistic in his subsequent writings.

As to the question of the existence of common ethical principles in international society, Watson came up with his own pragmatic compromises again. Vigezzi writes that Watson readily left aside the question of what was right or wrong, and regarded this as the "unanswerable question."[56] What mattered for international society instead was whether "ethical criteria as valid for the conduct of international relations, and whether a common recognition by member states of a system of certain ethical principles is necessary to the functioning of a state system."[57]

By this time, Watson had already started questioning whether conventional, Westphalian concepts could be utilized to make sense of international affairs equally well around the world. Between 1956 and 1959, Watson was head of the African department of the Foreign Office in London and was appointed as ambassador to the Federation of Mali, Senegal, Mauritania, and Togo between the years 1960 and 1962.[58] Shortly after these postings, he published *Emergent Africa*[59] under the pseudonym Scipio and *The Nature and Problems of the Third World*.[60] These two books laid the groundwork for Watson's preoccupation with the question of dependency and the role of hegemony in international society. He later reflected that his diplomatic assignments in the 1950s and 1960s across Africa and also Cuba eventually led him to see statehood and the role of weak states in a profoundly different way than the rest of other states. As he put it,

> I began to see the new international order that emerged from wholesale decolonization not only in Westphalian terms. It could also be seen as a core of economically and politically developed states, surrounded by an ever more numerous periphery of weak and inexperienced states faced often with the alternatives of firm government or chaos.[61]

Watson's continuing engagement with the themes of hegemony and dependence culminated in two full-blown attempts at destroying the Westphalian myths of independence and anarchy, *The Evolution International Society*[62] and *The Limits of Independence*[63]. Much like Bull, he grew increasingly more interested in the actual implementation of ethical principles in international affairs, departing from his earlier position that ethical criteria need not constitute a basis of conduct in

the international system. As mentioned earlier, he pushed the agenda of the discussions of the British Committee in the direction of ethical questions under his chairmanship. Still, Watson was not advocating the automatic implementation of ethical principles in the relations between states. What he was suggesting was a diplomatic dialogue, and a bold one, around ethics. Accordingly, Watson called for an ongoing adjustment between ethics and international politics, and a "process of diplomatic pressure in favor of the opinions of mankind."[64] Adjusting ethics and politics as these pressures kept piling up would, of course, require statecraft of the finest quality.

> Prudence is the most responsible virtue of statesmanship. It is the virtue which enables a statesman to bring practical and moral goals into some form of approximation with the stubborn and less than hospitable realities of international politics. The expediency of prudence shades off into the twin virtue of European statecraft, the sense of moral obligation. This ethical sense, unlike calculated prudence, has become stronger as the influence of public opinion on foreign policy grows.[65]

This excerpt wherein Watson merges European statecraft and a process of ethical adjustment in international society gives me a final chance to consider the question of multiculturalism, multiple ethical perspectives, and *raison de système*. Watson was more prepared to accommodate multiple ethical perspectives than he was prepared to accommodate multiple cultures. He kept privileging European statecraft and European practices, and the volume that he co-edited with Bull, *The Expansion of International Society,* told the story of the emergence of a universal international society from a Eurocentric position.[66] In a recent contribution, Neumann urged us to reconsider this global expansion from a *relational* rather than from a Eurocentric perspective.[67]

As for ethics, Watson remained cautious but nonetheless more open. On the caution side, he warned that "right" cannot be the only criterion of ethics as it applies in international society. He qualified it with "reasonable." Accordingly, ethics in international society would be "what is right and reasonable between states."[68] As Cochran notes, the English School made "state consensus the crucial determinant

of ethical possibility" which he believes closes off the possibility of a more maximal ethics.[69] From the perspective of the ES, however, more maximal positions, can become a threat to *raison de système.* What we can do, from Watson's perspective, is to carry on with the diplomatic dialogue nonetheless.

> It cannot be expected of the diplomatic dialogue between independent states that it will transform international relations to the point of abolishing the very divergences of interest which first give rise to the need for continuous negotiation. The most it can achieve is to find acceptable compromises, where necessary by introducing other inducements.[70]

Through the diplomatic dialogue, Watson hoped, we could reach a consensus even on such difficult issues like distributive justice – that is not distributive justice as such or as a philosophical concept, but in a format that can be implemented in practice in international society. Watson places this emphasis on the implementation dimension for a very simple reason. As he explains it, we "assume a distributor" when we ordinarily speak of the term distributive justice.[71] Yet in the absence of a distributor in the international system, we need to modify our arguments accordingly. He was thus not advancing any principled objection to more expansive ethical ideals, but underlining the peculiar nature of international society.

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The emphasis on the specific qualities of international society brings me to the final question in my analysis of Watson's approach to diplomacy, namely, that of whether his work tilts towards a "third image" structural view or towards a "first image" one in Waltz's well-known formulation where individuals, or diplomats, are at the center.[72] Is *raison de système* related to man or war? Watson's term "social position" is key to approaching this question.[73]

## Watson on Diplomatic Agency and the Social Position of the Diplomat

As Byman and Pollack remind us, international relations research has been dominated by third image or structural approaches rather than the first image that focuses on individuals. This ignorance of the first image is, as they continue to emphasize, problematic since individuals matter in international politics particularly during great transformations in history or when power is concentrated in the hands of a single leader. In order to highlight the overlooked importance of individuals, they concentrate on five crucial personalities including Hitler and Napoleon, and put forward over a dozen hypotheses as to why individuals matter.[74] In the particular study of diplomacy, Faizullaev points out that the diplomat has mostly been treated as an instrument in foreign policy-making and therefore the study of diplomacy has been depersonified.[75] Meanwhile, Holmes and Wheeler, among others, have pointed to a recent trend toward focusing on the individual diplomat in diplomatic studies. This is essential in that personalities and personality traits can shape vital outcomes such as entry into war or impact international negotiations. To understand these outcomes, we need to turn our attention to the first image. Holmes and Wheeler consider additional details such as why some diplomats instantly bond with one another while others do not. Microsociological studies of diplomacy that focus on diplomats are thus essential from the perspective of making sense of these puzzles.[76] In recent years, such studies are increasing. Towns's work on gender and diplomacy[77] and Nair's work on the practice of face-saving among ASEAN diplomats[78] are among these new works. How, then, is the role of the individual in the ES literature and in the works of Adam Watson?

A strong concern with the human condition, Jackson observes, permeates the international system category of the ES and it is what distinguishes its understanding of system from that of Waltz's neorealism. According to Jackson, we need to read the ideas and beliefs held by political leaders when we are reading the "international system" category of the ES.[79] Indeed, these beliefs and ideas mattered a significant deal from Watson's perspective. During the British Committee discussion sessions, Vigezzi notes, together with Michael Howard, Watson insisted on the role of individuals and especially intellectuals who could push for peace-loving

ideals and transform the international system.[80] In this respect, there is already a strong first image view of IR in Watson's and indeed in the English School's work. The particular concept of *raison de système* is in fact a reversal of what Faizullaev calls the "depersonification of diplomacy."[81] *Raison de système* is a strong statement in favor of diplomatic agency and in this respect Watson's understanding of diplomacy aligns with constructivist and practice-oriented approaches in diplomatic studies that are becoming more popular. Yet, *raison de système* is not merely an emphasis on any sort of diplomatic agency: it is diplomatic agency of a certain kind. Faizullaev's concept of the "diplomatic self" can be particularly useful here in elaborating this point. I discuss both issues below starting with the similarities between Watson's understanding of diplomacy and recent constructivist/practice-oriented scholarship.

As Adler-Nissen's underlines in her extensive review, (neo)realists and (neo)liberals do not pay much attention to diplomats. The IR theories that pay attention to the diplomat, apart from the English School, are rationalist game theory, foreign policy analysis, the practice turn, and post-structuralism.[82] Constructivist and practice scholars have in particular studied the ways in which diplomacy is a process of learning, interaction, and socialization among diplomats. Constructivists scholars have focused on how diplomats perform, reproduce, and change states' interests while practice scholars have accorded quite a large role to diplomatic agency. Their focus has been on the everyday practices of diplomats and how practice shapes diplomacy.[83] For Neumann, Watson also sees diplomacy as an ongoing social practice.[84] Indeed, Watson used the phrase "social position" to stress this.

> In the diplomatic life of Moscow, for instance, Soviet diplomats find that the insistence on such observances as black-tie dinners, ritual toasts, meetings at airports, comes especially from the representatives of new states, whereas the embassies of established Western powers are more inclined to informality and to cut down on ceremony in order to concentrate on exploratory dialogue. This is what one might expect. The more secure the *social position* of an individual is, the more casual and informal he is prepared to be.[85]

These respective positions assumed by existing Western and new diplomats are social hierarchies or what Pouliot called "diplomatic pecking orders" in the recent practice scholarship on diplomacy. Pouliot examines how these "pecking orders" function in multilateral organizations such as NATO and the EU.[86] He departs from the same premises that Watson does and stresses that the sovereign equality of states is a myth. In practice, the international system operates hierarchically. The day-to-day functioning of the "diplomatic pecking order" in multilateral organizations is the starkest empirical evidence of hierarchy in the international system. "Exceptional diplomats punching way above their country's weight certainly exist (and matter), but in the grand scheme of things, pecking orders primarily rest on much less heroic practices," Pouliot notes.[87] Otherwise, however, the "diplomatic pecking order" makes and remakes our hierarchical international system every day. "The pecking order can be a brutal reality," Pouliot concludes.[88] This approach is quite similar to Watson's where he notes that "the international order is the setting in which, through interdependence, new states are schooled in the – sometimes disappointing and painful – limits of independence."[89]

The practice turn in diplomatic studies can thus be fruitfully synthesized with ES theorizing on diplomacy and Watson's views on hierarchy in particular. One final point that I wish to discuss is who those "exceptional diplomats" with an ability to punch above their weight or place in the "pecking order" can be. The "diplomatic self" can help us further describe the qualities of such exceptional diplomats who will have an exceptional sense of *raison de système* as well. The diplomatic self, as Faizullaev says, is a merger of two different selves: the individual self and the state self of the diplomat. Both can be strong in some diplomats whereas in the case of diplomats who have allegiance problems to the sending state, state selfhood may be weak and these diplomats can even defect in the end. Others may identify with the state very strongly and thus have a very dominant state selfhood.[90] These selfhoods are also tied to the "social positions," to use Watson's phrase, of the diplomats' states.[91] The greater the reputation of a state, "the higher its diplomat's self-esteem" will be, Faizullaev notes.[92] A diplomat with a great sense of *raison de système* will be one who can transcend his or her strong state selfhood and act for the interests of international society as a whole –

much like when Bismarck was able to transcend his state selfhood and refrain from creating an even larger Germany as in the example Watson provides.

This is distinct from the "revolutionary diplomat" who, as Sharp explains, tries to find a balance between the revolutionary ideal and the requirements of international society.[93] Testing times such as the Suez Crisis can be another significant measure of diplomatic selfhood. In the British Committee, the Suez Crisis gave way to an engaging discussion on diplomatic agency. The specific question, raised by Mackinnon in 1962, was what duties individuals have toward their states and what alternative loyalties they may have. Mackinnon continued to mention the possibility of conflicting loyalties,[94] and maintained that as in the case of some in Britain during the Suez Crisis, we may have "loyalty to an international society or to a certain conception of international society." "Individuals," Mackinnon contended, "may transfer their loyalty from their own state to the international society."[95] *Raison de système* need not mean a "transfer of loyalty" to international society, but it certainly refers to an ability to transcend narrow state selfhoods especially during challenging times like the Suez Crisis. The Suez episode is also useful in demonstrating how diplomatic agency and *raison de système* are linked as the *belief* that they need to make international society work forces diplomats to make adjustments between their individual and state selfhoods. These adjustments also reflect how diplomats make and remake international society "every day" and as they do, they resolve the tensions that emerges between our conflicting imperatives.

## Conclusion

**Watson's studies in hierarchical international systems in particular can help us reimagine some very problematic assumptions that we hold about international society.**

Adam Watson was a seasoned diplomat, a member and the third chairperson of the British Committee on the Theory of International Politics, a published author, and a scholar. In addition to articles and book chapters, he authored seven books, co-edited a volume with Bull, and edited Butterfield's 1981 book *The Origins of History*[96] following his death.[97] I believe that Watson's most valuable

contribution has been to push us to confront uncomfortable questions around dependency, equality, and statehood in international society. As Buzan and Little emphasize, his work sharply exposes the inconsistencies between the actual theory and practice of international society which we need to tackle.[98] As Buzan later emphasized with Schouenborg, Watson's studies in hierarchical international systems in particular can help us reimagine some very problematic assumptions that we hold about international society.[99]

Watson's contribution to diplomatic theory has been praised as well. *Diplomacy: The Dialogue between States* (1982) is regarded as a seminal text in the subject area.[100] Prior to writing *Diplomacy*, Watson had set himself the task of writing a good book on the theoretical aspects of diplomacy since Nicolson's book on the same topic.[101] In Wright's review, Watson has "succeeded admirably" in this self-appointed task.[102] An equally good review of *Diplomacy* has been provided by Miller.[103] Neumann's approach to *Diplomacy* is somewhat cynical. He notes that the book is formally unreferenced. In terms of substance, Neumann writes, "It is still more a number of (often highly fruitful and stimulating) observations rather than a sustained effort to theorize diplomacy as an historically and socially occurring phenomenon."[104]

From my perspective, the greatest opportunity *Diplomacy* offers us is to develop our understanding of hierarchy in international society further by combining Watson's work with the recent practice turn in the study of diplomacy. Critics of the English School have complained that the ES has put forward a series of concepts but offered no clue as to how they can be studied in empirical terms on the ground.[105] How, for instance, do we study Watson's hierarchy in everyday terms? Pouliot's extensive work in multilateral organizations demonstrates that hierarchy exists and can be observed in each and every single interaction among diplomats.[106] Watson's overall approach to international society is shaped by an emphasis on practice which he says "outruns" our theoretical assumptions about it all the time. Practices which work for the benefit of international society, Watson contends, eventually become codified in theory.[107] Looking ahead, a promising research agenda that emerges from Watson's research is the study of which particular practices work in diplomacy and how these may reshape diplomatic theory over time.

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