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## INTELLIGENCE THEORY FROM AN EPISTEMOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Merve ÖNENLİ GÜVEN\*

### ABSTRACT

Thinking ability of human beings is the main component that makes it possible for the socialization process of the individuals. Even though this process is created by individuals, it also shapes the individuals as social beings. Intelligence as one of the significant components of nations and the international system is also the product of socialization processes. Intelligence is a crucial and critical tool for the maintenance of social organizations and political relations in an order. To address this construction process in scientific manners, intelligence studies should be disciplined. Therefore, intelligence studies should embrace theory with methodology. This study is an attempt to maintain a theoretical basis for intelligence studies through discussing the place of intelligence conceptualization in social and political theory. For this purpose, structure-agency relationship in social theory and politics-power relationship in political theory are analyzed for structuring the position and function of intelligence in social and political spheres. With an epistemological perspective, how do we perceive our external world and how do we maintain the nature of our knowledge in social and political processes are tried to be addressed with emphasizing the place of intelligence in these processes.

**Keywords:** *Intelligence, Intelligence Theory, Social Theory, Political Theory, Epistemology.*

### EPİSTEMOLOJİK BİR PERSPEKTİFTEN İSTİHBARAT TEORİSİ ÖZET

İnsanın düşünme yeteneği, bireyin sosyalleşme sürecini mümkün kılan temel bileşendir. Bu süreç bireyler tarafından yaratılsa da aynı zamanda bireyleri sosyal varlıklar olarak da şekillendirmektedir. Ulusların ve uluslararası sistemin önemli bileşenlerinden birisi olan istihbarat, aynı zamanda sosyalleşme süreçlerinin de bir ürünüdür. İstihbarat, bir düzende sosyal organizasyonun ve siyasi ilişkilerin sürdürülmesi için çok önemli ve kritik bir araçtır. Bu inşa sürecinin bilimsel bir şekilde ele alınabilmesi için istihbarat çalışmalarının disipline edilmesi gerekmektedir. Bu nedenle istihbarat çalışmalarında teori ve metodoloji tamamlayıcı bir nitelikte olmalıdır. Bu çalışma, istihbarat kavramsallaştırmasının sosyal teorideki ve siyaset teorisindeki yerini tartışarak istihbarat çalışmaları için teorik bir temel oluşturmayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu çerçevede, sosyal teorideki yapı-özne ilişkisi ve siyaset teorisindeki siyaset-iktidar ilişkisi, istihbaratın sosyal ve siyasal alandaki konumunu ve işlevini yapılandırmak amacıyla analiz edilmektedir. İstihbarat kuramını oluşturma girişiminde epistemolojik bir perspektifle, dış dünyanın nasıl algılandığı ile bilginin doğasının/özünün sosyal ve politik süreçlerde nasıl çerçvelendiği, istihbaratın bu süreçlerdeki yeri değerlendirilerek ele alınmaya çalışılmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** *İstihbarat, İstihbarat Teorisi, Sosyal Teori, Siyaset Teorisi, Epistemoloji.*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Thinking ability of human beings is the main component that makes it possible for the socialization process of the individuals. Even though this process is created by individuals, it also shapes the individuals as social beings. Thus, the establishment of the socialization process and being a part of this process interact with each other that shape the individual as well. In the socialization process, ideas and morality gain political meanings and ideological representations. Hence, it can be stated that individuals are the products of the processes, and the product of socialization process affects human will. In social organizations individuals also become political beings. In the socialization process, the consciousness about being a political subject maintains power, interest, and freedom and responsibility relations.

Intelligence as one of the significant social and political components of the nations and international system is also the product of socialization processes. Intelligence is a crucial and critical tool for the maintenance of social organization and political relations in an order. In the international system, intelligence provides leverage and deterrence capability for countries. By the formation of intelligence, individual, social, and national existence and relations are constructed, re-constructed and arranged. Thus, intelligence as a concept that is critical and significant in social and political spheres should be disciplined by all its components theoretically and methodically because social and political spheres are the spaces for appearance in which speech and action take place.

Intelligence as a concept derives from the systematization of thinking. Under the action of thinking, synthesis and analysis are found together. Therefore, in the formation of intelligence studies, intelligence should be approached in a scientific manner and intelligence studies should embrace theory with methodology. Austin Harrington paraphrases Kant's premise about theory-methodology relation as "concepts without perceptions are empty; perceptions without concepts are blind" as "theories without data are empty, data without theories are blind" (2005, p.5).

This study is an attempt to maintain a theoretical basis for intelligence studies through discussing the place of intelligence conceptualization in political and social theory. With an epistemological perspective in the attempt to establish an intelligence theory, how do we perceive our external world and how do we maintain the nature of our knowledge in social and political processes are tried to be addressed with emphasizing the place of intelligence in these processes.

Intelligence as a process to reach a complementary meaning about raw data makes it possible to understand an issue from various perspectives. In the process of reaching a complementary meaning has social and political dimensions in which the perceptions of the subjects also influence the process to reach an understanding about an issue. In social and political theories, the relation between the structure and agency relationship is studied through power conceptualization in the social and political systems in national and international levels. The place, role and effect of intelligence in these processes and relations is neglected. The reason for the attempt to search for intelligence theory depends on the relation between theory and empirical knowledge. A theoretical base in intelligence studies will also guide empirical knowledge. Therefore, the scope of this study depends on the discussion and establishment of a theoretical base for intelligence studies. Because a theoretical base will provide for definitions, classifications, correlations and methodological assumptions.

Hence, the research questions of this study depend on:

- Can an interactive relation be established between social and political theory with intelligence theory?
- If this supposed interactive relation between these theories can be established, how can intelligence theory be constructed and with which conceptualizations?

Depending on the research questions, in the first part of the study, social theory and political theory are evaluated through searching and analyzing the place of intelligence conceptualization in these theories. In the second part, intelligence conceptualization is studied on a theoretical basis by introducing the existing literature on intelligence theory. In conclusion, a general evaluation on intelligence theory is made with suggestions for future studies.

## **1. SOCIAL THEORY AND POLITICAL THEORY ON THE WAY TO INTELLIGENCE THEORY**

The construction of theories is a means of approaching reality that is a crucial component of everyday life (Joas and Knöbl, 2009, p.5). Theory in a discipline is a necessary component for being the source of hypotheses and maintenance of the discipline's historical identity (Joas and Knöbl, 2009, p.x). Karl Popper defines theories as nets that make it possible to rationalize, explain and master the world (Popper, 1992, p.59).

With theory it is possible to make general presuppositions, models, concepts, definitions, classifications, laws, propositions, correlations,

methodological assumptions, observations to reach empirical knowledge. Harrington states that “Theoretical thought is always presupposed in research, there are no observations that are not theory-laden” (2005, p.5). So, social and political theories are two essential components in understanding the structure and function of societies.

Social theory deals with social life through scientific ways of thinking focusing on social behavior and social structure with their components such as power relations (Harrington, 2005, p.1). Social theory covers ideas about how societies change and develop through methods of explaining social behavior, about power and social structure. The individual is born into an already formed society and he/she emerges from and defined in terms of his/her society with stocks of knowledge and procedures (Layder, 2006, pp.72, 93). Social theory therefore focuses on how individuals reorganize their social circumstances. (Layder, 2006, p.161). Because individuals belong to societies with the social customs and habits of their society (Layder, 2006, p.72). With the mutuality of knowledge, it makes interactivity in a society possible and constructs a shared world (Layder, 2006, p.93) in this structure.

Therefore, social theory is about everyday life, and it includes social and political issues (Harrington, 2005, p.6). Social and political issues are inseparable, and they feed each other. Dick Pels identifies the conceptualization of society as a self-regulating nexus of events (1998, p.126) in which these self-regulating nexuses of events include social and political issues. Social relations are arranged by political means. Pels indicates Comte’s understanding about society-state relation with the tool of government through underlining that society cannot exist without government and government cannot exist without society (1998, pp.131-132). This implies the interactive relation between social and political matters.

Politics as a social activity, political theory deals with the activity of politics through dealing with opinions, wants, needs and interests. (Heywood, 2015, p.48). So, the field of political theory focuses on normative issues relating to communal life (Joas and Knöbl, 2009, p.x). Political theory is about organized social life, its political structure and institutions. At some level all social activity is political, and the human agency contains the political. While social theory is about understanding the interactive relation and existence between individual and society, political theory deals with the organizational and institutional order of society. In this realm, political theory focuses on the ethical and normative questions about the reasons for

obeying the state, how the sources should be distributed, and the ways for collective decision making (Heywood, 2015, pp.2-3).

In this social-political state of being, intelligence has a significant place. Since intelligence is a crucial and critical tool for the maintenance of social organizations and political order. As the products of social-political processes, states concentrate and organize the life of society (Pels, 1998, p.150) and intelligence is one of the necessary and complementary tools of states. When the place of intelligence is evaluated in social and political spheres, intelligence is an intellectual and cultural product of social and political processes. Intelligence provides the unification of knowledge and experience. In social and political spheres, while stocks of knowledge shape the experiences of the people, on the other side experiences also influence the stocks of knowledge by updating them with new data.

Intelligence is about how to know, what to know, and understanding knowledge. Sherman Kent states the importance of intelligence in the reach for knowledge about the unknowns as; “We knew almost nothing about the tens of thousands of things we were going to have to learn about in a hurry” (1993, p.1). Intelligence is about giving meaning to knowledge. Intelligence makes it possible to deal with the social and political world in terms of our knowledge through decreasing the uncertainty about the existing situations. Layder defines the interactive relation between individual and society as; “People are intrinsically involved with society and actively enter into its constitution; they construct, support and change it because it is the nature of human beings to be affected by and to affect their social environment” (2006, p.159). By the perceptions, consciousness and practices of individuals about their environment maintain the stocks of knowledge and cultural guidelines.

Intelligence is about understanding the stocks of knowledge and cultural recipes that shape perceptions, understandings and consciousness. For instance, how a terrorist organization understands the existing system, how does it desire to change it with which tools can be understood and evaluated from the stocks of knowledge and cultural recipes that these kinds of organizations’ constructions and reconstructions. Hence, intelligence theory depends on the nature of the knowledge. So, from an epistemological perspective, intelligence provides an understanding about how we know what we claim to know. By intelligence studies, to extend knowledge and answer particular questions, a theoretical base and methodological ways, which complete each other is a necessity.

## **2. INTELLIGENCE CONCEPTUALIZATION ON A THEORETICAL BASE**

Intelligence theory is an attempt to explain intelligence. Why a theoretical base is needed for intelligence studies depends on the relation between theory and knowledge. “Human activity has become externalized and objectified in the form of knowledge” (Layder, 2006, p.106) and theory is a path to reach empirical knowledge (Joas and Knöbl, p.3). From this perspective, intelligence provides knowledge about social existence and social order through making it possible to understand the networks of interdependence. Intelligence is an institutional structure of political life that organizes social life. Intelligence is also about power relations. For individuals, groups, societies and nations, intelligence provides the means to serve their interests using knowledge and organizing the power relations between them.

The first attempt in theorizing intelligence was studied by Sherman Kent from a positivist and realist approach (De Graff, 2019, p.7). In this approach intelligence is evaluated as a concept to see the development of threats earlier (De Graff, 2019, p.11). Peter Gill, Stephen Marrin and Mark Phythian discuss key questions about whether intelligence should be defined as a knowledge process of whether it is a power process involving policy and action (2012, p.9). They indicate intelligence as the unification of “targeting, collection, analysis, dissemination and action intended to enhance security, maintain power relative to competitors by forewarning of threats and opportunities” (2012, pp.9-10). Gill and Pythian define that “intelligence is politics” (2019, p.27). Gill also describes intelligence as a social activity in which gathering information in the face of uncertainty to assess threats (2012, p.5). Marrin defines intelligence as documenting what is known, evaluating it for gaps, working to fill those gaps in knowledge (2014, p.267).

Marrin also defines intelligence as a function of government and emphasizes that theorizing intelligence is an effort to understand and explain intelligence as a part of state governance mechanism (2019, pp.270). Marrin categorizes intelligence theories as descriptive, explanatory, predictive and normative. From this perspective, Marrin indicates that theorizing intelligence as a function of government is descriptive, while explanatory theories explain the reasons and processes (Marrin, 2019, pp.44-45). Predictive theories provide forecasts about what intelligence as a function of government will be involved in the future and normative theories present assessments of what intelligence should and should not do as a function of government (Marrin, 2019, pp.44-45).

The conceptual frameworks are represented by descriptive theories in intelligence studies through focusing on the aspects of intelligence as a process and organization. In this descriptive theoretical approach, collection, analysis, and intelligence cycle are also included. Explanatory theory deals with explaining intelligence failure and concepts such as war (Marrin, 2019, p.48). Hamilton Bean introduces critical-cultural theories of intelligence. In this theoretical approach power is a defining feature of intelligence on the basis of its effects on institutional and social change by means of discourse and interaction (2019, p.144). Intelligence theorizing from a critical perspective focuses on discourse, power, structure and identity in the construction and re-construction of social order (Bean, 2019, p.152). This perspective implies that knowledge is produced by a structured social context which is conceptualized as an institution, which includes structured and formal set of rules and practices with informal set of practices that affect the actions of individuals (Eriksson, 2019, p.186).

At this point, intelligence-ontological security relation has a crucial effect on understanding intelligence by a structured social context. Intelligence as a concept includes power relations and politics is about power. Security is one of the significant issues in politics focused on how to prevent threats (Heywood, 2015, p.110). Layder points out that Giddens's theory about human existence depends on ontological security, which is about maintaining a sense of psychological well-being (2006, p.167). Ontology is about how we experience the nature of reality in a society with which constituent elements. In this ontological perspective, culture has a significant place. Because according to lived experiences of each society, their security perceptions are shaped. For example, the U.S. described its security perception from the lens of national intelligence as, "...courses of action within the power of a foreign nation or organization which would affect the interests of the U.S." (Smith, 1955, p.3). Intelligence is one of the constituent elements of ontological security. International politics is acted in an anarchical environment even though there is the existence of international law and international organizations. Because international politics lacks enforceable rules and pre-eminent power (Heywood, 2015, p.235).

Additionally, there are various influenceable actors including state and non-state actors. Security in international politics derives from national security in which intelligence is a significant tool to maintain national and international security. By one of the studies of the U.S. intelligence community titled "*Introduction to Intelligence Studies*", this issue is stated as; "Intelligence has played a critical role for humankind since the earliest

humans began to think and process information. Information, and the intelligence drawn from that information, directly influences the daily decisions of individuals, businesses, industry, the military, and the government. Nations have risen and fallen on the power of intelligence and the decisions that have resulted from it. Thus, the ability to know, anticipate, and plan is very powerful” (Jensen, McElreath and Graves, 2023, p.2).

Social reality is a constructed phenomenon and as a result of intentions, motivations and behaviors of people social structures, institutions and systems exist and shaped in a continuum (Layder, 2006, pp.164-173). Intelligence is one of the tools of social and political life of societies that provides meaning and understanding for the reasons, motivations, behaviors and actions of individuals. Intelligence represents the causal relations with possibilities between the object and the subject. Intelligence is a concept that maintains knowledge in a complementary way to decrease uncertainty in the social and political life of societies.

Politics is a way of order in social life. Hence, intelligence as a concept can be theorized based on social and political theories in a constructivist way. Because, from the perspective of understanding and analyzing language and the means of communication as constructions indicates that the interaction of human minds creates and re-creates reality (De Graff, 2019, pp.14, 17). By constructivism, intelligence is treated based on intentions and discourse. Taking intelligence from an epistemological perspective represents intelligence as a concept that provides an understanding for the past, present and future. In theorizing intelligence, epistemology provides a reason-driven understanding and analysis for intelligence searching for how social and political life are patterned and routinised, in which conditions conflicts can erupt through filling the gaps and analyzing the social and political activities in the national and international systems.

## **CONCLUSION**

To understand the concept of intelligence in a coherent way, theorizing intelligence is a pre-requisite for intelligence studies. The need for a theory to maintain intelligence as a discipline and provide its development first in the sense of thought which will then shape the methodological and empirical approaches is crucial for establishing a theoretical base for intelligence studies. From an epistemological perspective, to understand and analyze intelligence conceptualization, perceptions, cognitions, consciousness and

self-awareness are significant données in social and political spheres. Because intelligence is acted in social and political spheres and intelligence as a construction tries to understand and analyze the source of knowledge and the effects of knowledge in social and political life, which are shaped according to cultural characteristics and can change based on time and space.

Societies are culturally constructed structures which are historically produced and transformed into repertoire for actions. In these constructed structures as Giddens introduces, cultural schemas and cultural knowledge are produced and re-produced with the interactions of people. Structure is what the agent knows. The cognition, perception and understanding of the subject is the structure. Structure is already what the subject knows and experiences as the knowledge that is shaped by culture. Cognitive schemas are available to the members of the groups with a certain frame of cognition that includes a collection of experiences. So, structure is the process of making, which is continuing and productive that results in new perspectives, intentions, aims and capabilities. Therefore, social and political reality are constructed by knowledge and experiences of individuals.

Structure refers to social consciousness which is the distribution of knowledge. In this sense, structure is bound to change on the basis of a certain sequence, historical experience, and temporality. Therefore, the event is inherently unpredictable and unforeseen. Unpredictable, unforeseen events are inherent in the structure and intelligence as one of a tool of the structure as an action provides an understanding for the unpredictable and unforeseen. Thus, as part of a structure, intelligence is a social phenomenon that is also culturally constructed. So, social constructions produce bounded knowledge for the individuals to understand their environment. As a socially constructed phenomenon, intelligence provides insights into bounded knowledge and consciousness about possibilities. Eriksson defines this process as; “All knowledge is produced within a specific social and institutional setting that affects the individuals engaged in producing knowledge and the character of the knowledge itself” (Eriksson, 2019, p.186).

Intelligence is a crucial tool in the practice of social and political life because with intelligence practices in these spheres power relations, interests, responsibilities and acts of freedom are organized and re-organized. Intelligence is a strategic concept including the cognitive abilities to learn, form concepts, understand, reason, recognize patterns, comprehend ideas, plan, problem solve, manage conflicts and produce discourse. Intelligence produces knowledge to understand the subject-object relation through identifying the time and space. Intelligence as a critical tool in the

organization of social and political spheres functions as an epistemological bridge between nature of reality and nature of knowledge.

Intelligence also provides the social and political organization of knowledge. Hence, the concept of intelligence should be disciplined in the development of intelligence studies containing theory, doctrine, methodology and literature. Sherman Kent emphasized that intelligence could gain the aspects of a discipline with its vocabulary, methodology and a body of theory and doctrine (1993, p.2). Kent also underlines that without the existence of literature the theoretical base of intelligence studies could not reach full maturity (1993, p.2).

With this study, intelligence is tried to be conceptualized in the context of social and political theories with the purpose of theorizing intelligence from an epistemological perspective. Based on the research questions of

- Can an interactive relation be established between social and political theory with intelligence theory? and
- If this supposed interactive relation between these theories can be established, how can intelligence theory be constructed and with which conceptualizations?

It is concluded that an interactive relation can be established between social and political theory with intelligence theory. Because intelligence is a critical and important concept in the organization and re-organization of social and political spheres for reaching, understanding and analyzing the knowledge which can vary according to time and space. By the reason driven characteristic of intelligence, the gaps in the social and political processes to reach, understand and analyze the knowledge, intelligence establishes a complementary perspective. From this complementary perspective, while existing situations are explained, future possibilities and capabilities can also be described.

Intelligence is at the core of social-political state of being. Hence, structure-agency relationship in social theory and politics-power relationship in political theory are analyzed for structuring the position and function of intelligence in social and political spheres. Intelligence provides knowledge about social existence and social order through establishing the networks of interdependence. Intelligence as an intellectual and cultural product of social and political spheres provides an understanding about how we know what we claim to know. Intelligence is a kind of social behavior and part of social structure as an effective tool in the maintenance of social organizations and political order. Thus, intelligence as part of social structure shapes politics.

From that perspective, intelligence is at the core of security understanding of societies and nations, which shapes the international political system with its usage and with intelligence successes and failures.

Thus, the establishment of an intelligence theory will provide an extensive understanding in the study of intelligence by providing necessary tools in the process of transforming information into intelligence. Additionally, with the intelligence theory, it will be possible to understand the effects of and influence of cognitive processes and cultural variables in the formation of intelligence. Because intelligence provides an extensive understanding about new perspectives, intentions, aims and capabilities through insights into bounded knowledge. Hence, theorizing intelligence from a constructivist perspective based on social and political theories has a solid base.

In this study, by the discussion on intelligence theory from an epistemological perspective, the role of intelligence in the process of understanding social and political life and their conflictual nature derived from various security understandings is presented. For future studies the ontological security conceptualization-intelligence relation from a phenomenological perspective can be studied in the establishment of intelligence theory. The phenomenological perspective will guide us to understand the development of human consciousness and self-awareness from the lived experience of human beings.

So, intelligence as a core concept in the construction and re-construction of social and political life should be studied in an inter-disciplinary way. From the inter-disciplinary perspective, firstly intelligence conceptualization should be theorized. In the second step with the theoretical base, methodologies for the components of the concept of intelligence should be studied and developed. Under this aim, especially disciplines such as psychology and neuroscience should be integrated into intelligence studies theoretically and methodologically.

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