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**French Foreign Policy In The Middle East, And North
Africa, Through Neoclassical Realism**

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ABSTRACT

The Mediterranean Sea binds the future of two worlds: Europe and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). France has long been involved in the region as a foreign power promoting security and stability. French foreign policy follows two guidelines: national independence and multilateralism. The objective is to remain an autonomous actor and secure French interests. To study its foreign policy, the cases of Libya, Lebanon, and Iran since 2011 were selected. In a world where power has fragmented, greater competition between multiple nations has accentuated insecurity. Adding to that socio-economic grievances that sparked the Arab Spring, the MENA region became a geopolitical battleground. The French responded to the growing restrictive and dangerous environment by further emphasising the need for security. Structural factors, such as its position within the system, create opportunities for formulating foreign policy; however, domestic issues, such as its weakened economy, also impedes the freedom with which it can pursue its objectives. Multilateralism has varying purposes; its variable nature can benefit immediate national interests but also hinder French efforts for greater influence, cooperation, and integration.

KEYWORDS

Neoclassical Realism, foreign policy, security, Libya, Lebanon, Iran

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Francouzská zahraniční politika na Blízkém východě a v severní Africe prostřednictvím
neoklasického realismu

DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

1. I hereby declare that I have compiled this thesis using the listed literature and resources only.
2. I hereby declare that my thesis has not been used to gain any other academic title.
3. I fully agree to my work being used for study and scientific purposes.

In Prague on May 2nd, 2023

Aymeric Pochat

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Foolish, indeed, are those who have no purpose -

Marcus Aurelius

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*Marianne Abroad: Competing For Power, Seeking
Stability.*

An introduction to the relations

The Romans did call the Mediterranean Sea *Mare Nostrum* for a reason, they conquered all of its shores and tied the land and the people together. They proved that the Mediterranean does not divide Europe from the Middle east and North Africa (MENA), but acts as a bridge for cultural, political, economic, and social exchanges. During the 9th century, there was, on one side, Charlemagne, emperor of the Holy Roman Empire and King of the Franks, and on the other, Harun al-Rashid, caliph of the Abbasid Caliphate. The two rulers entered diplomatic relations and marked the beginning of a bond between the French and the Muslim world that would persist for centuries. The Mediterranean Basin was home to two major religions that, regardless their differences, were united by the sea: Christianity in Europe and Islam in the Levant, the Arabic Peninsula, Persia, and North Africa. The Muslim part, also known as the Middle East, was an important commercial transit hub from the Far East: China. The Europeans longed for the Silk Road's luxurious commodities until the 15th century discovery of the Americas, which diminished the economic predominance of the Far East. Yet, the Middle East remained important as the Ottoman Empire had a say in European politics. By the 1920s, the fall of the Ottomans open the door for European colonial expansion: Britain and France were granted mandates. The end of World War 2 (WW2) ended the age of empires. The new international order was an opportunity for former colonial powers, to their role in the world. Britain decided to closely align itself to the US, in what is often described as a special friendship. France, on the other hand, led by General De Gaulle, wanted to assert itself as a great power promoting multilateralism and, with pragmatism and realism, pursue a policy of its own, and not one promoting American ideals. De Gaulle completely redefined what France was in the international system. Today, French foreign policy is

perceived as French-centric and, to a certain degree, anti-American. French support of the Arab cause against Israel or its refusal to join the Second Iraq War act as proof.

The 2011 Arab Spring was a cataclysmic shift in the MENA regional dynamics. France, an advocate of freedom, democracy, and human rights, backed many authoritarian regimes led by decades-long dictators such as in Egypt, Tunisia, or Libya. The French approach was a realist's: Paris wanted to guarantee stability so that French political and economic interests would be secured. But the Arab Spring posed a dilemma: support the social uprising and truly defend democratic values or continue to support undemocratic regimes and protect French interests. Unsurprisingly the initial response was somewhat disorganised. Once it was clear that the protests would not die out, President Nicolas Sarkozy shifted the policy; it was more reactive than active. When Sarkozy realised the impossibility to protect French interests alone, he opted to promote a European and NATO response. Many of its European partners were, unsurprisingly, reluctant to Sarkozy's new found eagerness. In 2012, Francois Hollande became president. His term would see France respond to the dangers that ensued from the Arab Spring. He did not innovate French policy and instead sought security by reiterated his support to multilateralism. Hollande probably faced one of the toughest periods in foreign policy since the end of the Cold War. The region was riddled by crises: the Libyan Civil War and its spill-over to Mali; the Syrian Civil War; the rise of the Islamic State (ISIS); the Migration Crisis; terror attacks on the French soil. The Russian Annexation of Crimea in 2014 was another additional international challenge. It is not surprising, in a list that is by far non exhaustive, that in such a threatening environment President Hollande sought security. Unlike Sarkozy, Hollande seemed to be more cooperative and appeasing with its allies. His predecessor was more conflictual; Hollande managed to fix and improve

relations. He seemed more reliable and honest in cooperation and foreign policy. The 2017 election of Emmanuel Macron was believed to bring change. An advocate of a strategically independent Europe his foreign policy has offered mixed results. Macron has followed the typical policy formula and added his dynamism and hard work, causing him to rush or pursue various contradicting policies. His ambiguous foreign policy makes his allies doubtful of France's intentions.

Since 2011, the nature of the international environment has constantly become more restrictive. The world has shifted away from a unipolar system to one of great competition where crises and wars nourish instability and fractionalisation. The pursuit of security has become standard practice. In such a rapidly changing and unpredictable system, it is much more difficult to formulate adequate policies. While multilateralism has always been a pillar of its foreign policy, the executive is hesitant as to what path to pursue: should France focus on greater integration with the EU agenda, or should it pursue more French focussed policies? So far, the executive hasn't really changed the country's guidelines, and remains rather conservative. Nonetheless, its waning power also compels France to change its policies. Analysing these changes by looking at Middle Eastern dynamics can shed some light as to the systemic imperatives that impose a change. In addition to that, looking into domestic factors can help explain France's political decision in the past decade. Indeed, the unit level can outline what pressures weigh on the executive when formulating foreign policy. For example, the share of French industry in the economy has been shrinking for decades, impacting the economic strength of the country. A weak economy means a weaker ability to formulate foreign policy.

This thesis will use neoclassical realism as its theory and model of analysis; the latter is a valuable tool that includes the different variables affecting foreign policy making. The

theory acknowledges that systemic pressures are primordial in influencing a state's behaviour but rejects that only the international system is the sole determining factor. States are not abstract structures; they are composed of individuals who must interpret signs to create foreign policy. Because of this, an analysis at both the systemic and the domestic level is necessary. Firstly, I will define the structural modifiers for France. These factors, such as geographic location, determine the level of threat a state faces and, in turn, affects its behaviour. Secondly, I will discuss France's relative potential, which is defined by geography, demography, transportation, resources, technology, political system, economy, and the military. Thirdly, I will examine the international system from 2011 to 2023. This analysis is crucial as systemic imperatives, or signs, emanate from there; they influence the nature of the international environment. These signs are to be interpreted as permissive or restrictive. Finally, the model's four domestic factors that influence decision-making are leaders' perceptions, strategic culture, state-society relations, and domestic institutions. Thus, the research question goes as follows:

Since 2011, what has been the variable, at the international and domestic level, that has most influenced French foreign policy in the Middle East and North Africa?

Additional questions that help frame the research are as follows:

What and how do structural modifiers restrain France's foreign policy?

What opportunities or restrictions emerge from France's relative potential?

Since 2011, what events have affected the nature of the international system?

What and how do domestic factors contribute to foreign policy making?

How did France react to the shifting environment?

At the international level, the growing competition between multiple great and regional powers have fragilised the system's stability and France's position. At the domestic level, the multiple actors within the state have varying degrees of influence. State institutions and the leaders' perceptions are the most influential in defining policy. However, society and the relative potential of France show signs of internal structural weaknesses. A qualitative case study analysis of Libya, Lebanon and Iran will be conducted. Libya has been the theatre of a civil war, ever since the fall of Muammar Gaddafi. Long marginalised, Libya was gradually rehabilitated in the 2000s, also with President Nicolas Sarkozy's help. France began a new relationship with another Middle Eastern dictator, one that caused outrage due to Gaddafi's notorious human rights violations. Only once Gaddafi's hold on power was evidently over, France's foreign policy towards Libya changed: Sarkozy went from Gaddafi's friend and to a fierce opponent. Years later it would be discovered the dictator's generous financial contribution to Sarkozy's presidential campaign. The French president's political scheming was a driving factor shaping French foreign policy towards Libya. This case is interesting as it shows the influence of individuals on foreign policy making. In addition to that, it is an instance of French hard power used to for policy objectives. The usage of lethal force can shed a light on the importance of Libya to French and European security: it is a land rich in natural resources but also a transit for illegal migration and smuggling to Europe. Today, the country has settled into a conflictual status quo where foreign powers compete.

For decades years, Lebanon has been riddled with instability. The country's political apparatus is defective, the economy is plummeting, and social tensions are rife. Nonetheless, the French use soft power to remain deeply involved in Lebanese society: many French businesses operate there, there is an extensive network of schools and

cultural institutions, and a large Lebanese diaspora lives in France. Geographically, the country is located on the shores of the Eastern Mediterranean, acting as a gateway into the Levant region, the other strategically important region for European stability. Geopolitically, Lebanon is a competition ground where the Iranian backed Hezbollah acts as a proxy for an anti-western regime. The deep ties that bind France and Lebanon can highlight how foreign policy is used to promote French culture and identity. An analysis of MENA dynamics is incomplete without studying the case of Iran. Over the years, it has become a regional power with considerable influence in several of its neighbours such as Syria or Iraq. Currently French Iranian relations are inexistant since the 2015 Nuclear Deal collapsed. After a few years under the ruler of a more moderate government, hardliners were elected and the fierce antagonism towards the West resumed. The French have used diplomacy as the primary tool to work on the issues with Iran. Given the latter's pariah status in the system, we can see how France positions itself. Any policy shift towards Iran may provide additional information regarding the systemic and domestic factors that can influence foreign policy.

I. On theory development

Of philosophical origins on man's nature

“As soon as men live in society, they lose the feeling of weakness; equality that was among them, ceases, and the state of war begins.” Montesquieu in The Spirit of Laws

Political theories do not solely attempt to explain international politics, but the origin: human nature. Are humans selfish, rational, and moral beings, or social, irrational, and wicked?¹ Liberalism perceives human beings as rational beings in search for freedom. In this selfish pursuit, individualism becomes a cornerstone; liberalists further claim that all beings share certain fundamental characteristics, giving the theory a globalist worldview where universalist values exist. Realists on the other hand, believe that humans are driven by, as Hobbes described, non-rational appetites such as fears, desires, and power.² As a remedy, beings merge into groups or communities to increase probability of survival. Weaknesses are shared and divided between all members and thus, reduced. But, for example, sharing fear may spread fear as well, as what is shared can easily be disseminated.

Aristotle defined man as a political animal, meaning that humans are not solitary beings in the world, but social beings that need to be with other people. In the Spirit of Laws, Montesquieu asserts that “Man, in the state of nature [...] thinks of his preservation [...] would feel only his weakness; his timidity would be extreme [...]”.³ Fear is the greatest weakness, and eliminating this feeling is through socialisation: strength in unity. As fearful beings form a community in search of security, their personal interests become the

¹ Andrew Heywood, “Human Nature, the Individual and Society,” in *Political Theory: An Introduction*, 3rd ed. (Palgrave, 2004), pp. 15-50.

² Heywood, “Human Nature, the Individual and Society,” 15-50.

³ Charles de Secondat Montesquieu, *De L'esprit Des Lois* (Paris: Gallimard, 1995).

social structure's foundation. Therefore, society reflects human nature. But as various communities form with the same pursuit for security, competition emerges, and a state of war begins. The sovereign state was created to ensure the survival and security of the community, in a world of international anarchy.⁴ Sovereignty is defined by Hobbes as “a monopoly of coercive power”⁵ that is intended to protect the group. Security can also be guaranteed with cooperation by means of treaties and alliances.

Politics “is made by individuals, individuals who are clearly part of the historical process”.⁶ For realists, the individual only has a limited role in shaping politics, as there is no place for individuality in a community; liberalists on the other hand, perceive the state as a structure that suppresses the individual. Yet, both theories neglect the importance that both the individual and the state have. The state is a protection provider that can secure rights and liberties of its citizens by the creation and enforcement of a codified law. But these are made by individuals that, even as part of a community, shape policy. It is a restrained group in position of power that make a state's policies: the élite. For conservatism, which emphasises tradition, history, and established practices, the state exists to maintain social stability against both internal and external threats.⁷ Conservatism and realism share certain common features, mainly the element of fear, and the need for security. While a conservatist may be realist, it does not necessarily apply the other way around. The state is a security guarantor, not a protector of tradition and established customs. In fact, in an environment of constant competition, the state must act according

⁴ Shapcott, Richard. “Anti-Cosmopolitanism,” Essay. In *International Ethics: A Critical Introduction*, 50–86. Oxford: Wiley, 2013.

⁵ Andrew Heywood, “Sovereignty, the Nation and Supranationalism,” in *Political Theory: An Introduction*, 3rd ed. (Palgrave, 2004), pp. 89-119.

⁶ Heywood, “Human Nature, the Individual and Society,” 15-50.

⁷ John Christman, “Conservatism, Communitarianism, and the Social Conception of the Self,” in *Social and Political Philosophy: A Contemporary Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 125-151.

to its needs for survival. To remain a relevant competitor, a state must pursue innovation and adaptation, values that clash with conservatism.

Realism's emphasis on the group makes it anti-cosmopolitan and communitarian.⁸ Cosmopolitanism is opposed to communitarianism, as the former advocates for the existence of global values. The latter, however, defends the unique identity of the group; universal values are impossible, each community developed differently because it lived through different experiences in diverse environments. Pragmatism then becomes a key realist feature because it accepts the world as it is. Nonetheless, we must not neglect that perception varies on every individual's position in the community and in the world. This implies that every realist's perception of the world will differ from another. Consequently, a policy is formulated based on one's perception of reality.

In a world ruled by competition, prudence is essential as it calculates the consequences of a political action.⁹ Careless behaviour can not only terribly harm the state but cause its demise. For this reason, prudence and pragmatism go hand in hand. A policy relying on ethics and global morality does not have its place in a system dominated by competition. Such a policy would be, in Morgenthau's terms, "national suicide".¹⁰ Liberalism and realism may differ in many aspects, and yet they share a similar objective: the former strives for global peace, while the latter aspires for the creation a stable international order.¹¹ Robert Gilpin makes a compelling argument: "peace is more the result of a power equilibrium than a cessation of conflicting ambitions".¹² A stable system is a peaceful one because conflictual interests are contained. As power defines politics, peace becomes the

⁸ Shapcott, "Anti-Cosmopolitanism." 66.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Robert G. Gilpin, "No One Loves a Political Realist," *Security Studies* 5, no. 3 (1996): pp. 3-26, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09636419608429275>.

product of power distribution, which in turn creates a balanced and harmonious environment.

Hedley Bull claims that “there is order in international politics provided by a society of states which adheres to rules based on common interests and common values”.¹³

Declaring that all states share common values contradicts the claim that the international system is made of a society of states. This society is composed of states, which are at their core communities and therefore rooted in communitarianism, a concept opposed to the existence of universally shared values. Accordingly, a society of states cannot uphold common values. Rather, states in this society share common interests: the pursuit of security for survival. It is inevitable for states to seek their national interests when their existence emanates from these. Their nature will reflect onto a society of states and therefore, that society will have in common the pursuit of interests.

Of foreign policy and politics

“It is the country’s interests, not your own, that you defend.”

Sun Tzu in The Art of War

Foreign policy (FP) is how a state behaves in the international system; having no foreign policy is impossible as relations with other states will inevitably occur. According to Kenneth Waltz, a theory of foreign policy explains why states with internal differences and similar positions in the system act differently; a theory of international politics explains why states with internal differences and similar positions in the system act similarly.¹⁴ The distinction highlights the contrasted approach the two theories have in

¹³ Tucker, Michael J. *Canadian Journal of Political Science / Revue Canadienne de Science Politique* 11, no. 3 (1978): 691–93. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3231161>.

¹⁴ Kenneth N. Waltz, “International politics is not foreign policy,” *Security Studies*, 6:1 (1996): 54–57, DOI: 10.1080/09636419608429298

explaining a state's behaviour: one being systemic pressures, the other domestic ones. Foreign policy analysis (FPA) forms a subcategory of International Relations (IR). As Valerie Hudson said, "humans perceive and react to the world around them, [...] humans shape and are shaped by the world around them".¹⁵ The environment molds an individual's behaviour: it forms a person's way of interpreting and then provides signs that must be analysed and reacted to. Individuals become pivotal as they are the "point of intersection"¹⁶ between the world around them, in other words the system, and the state, in other words the domestic. Thus, FP allows for domestic factors that influence political decision-making to be included in the study of IR.

Individuals that formulate foreign policy form a small group that can be referred to as "the élite, the ruling class, or the state",¹⁷ in other words, foreign policy executives. Since men make the state, mistakes and risk become integral part of foreign policy making. Certain statesmen, through personal traits such as charisma or strength of will, can alter a country's foreign policy. These are defined by Daniel Byman and Kenneth Pollack as Great Men: these leaders can for example, set a state's intentions, its strategy, and have a preponderant role in diplomacy and the military.¹⁸ Studying foreign policy executives is essential as they control their state's monopoly on power and therefore, can determine the country's behaviour in the system. Great Men can reshape and redefine their nation's image.

Sam Barkin makes an interesting analysis of Waltz's balance of power, the latter's theory is "in fact, a foreign policy, one in which a state works consciously to balance the power

¹⁵ Valerie M. Hudson, "Foreign Policy Analysis: Actor-Specific Theory and the Ground of International Relations." *Foreign Policy Analysis* 1, no. 1 (2005): 1–30. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24907278>.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Nuno Morgado, "Does the Agent Matter? the Geopolitical Agent in Neoclassical Geopolitics," *SWS Journal of SOCIAL SCIENCES AND ART* 1, no. 2 (November 2019): pp. 96-108, <https://doi.org/10.35603/ssa2019/issue2.08>.

¹⁸ Daniel L. Byman, and Kenneth M. Pollack. "Let Us Now Praise Great Men: Bringing the Statesman Back In," *International Security* 25, no. 4 (2001): 107–46. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3092135>.

of other states”.¹⁹ Power distribution in the international system is no longer seen as a system-regulated mechanism but rather a man-made one. Seminal classical realist theory already acknowledged that foreign policy was about what “decision makers needed to do to achieve their goals in international politics”.²⁰ The role of decision makers in determining a state’s policy proves that the study of systemic incentives is not sufficient. Foreign Policy Analysis does not take systemic imperatives as granted and focusses specifically on domestic factors, which differentiates it from Neoclassical Realism (NCR).²¹ The latter still acknowledges the primordial role of the system but agrees as to the value that FPA has to offer. Neoclassical Realism “attempts to explain variations of foreign policy over time and space”.²² It accepts the existence of structural imperatives, material power and the intervention of domestic factors. Leaders construct foreign policy by interpreting systemic imperatives while considering domestic elements that may restrain their ability to pursue their policies. The international system and the domestic unit level factors justify NCR’s claim that “state behaviour is a product of environmental compulsion”.²³

Of Neoclassical Realism

“Prudence consists in knowing how to recognize the nature of disadvantages, and how to choose the least sorry one as good.” Machiavelli in The Prince

The international system is anarchic because no higher authority than states exists that can guarantee peace. Every state is forced to take its own measures that will guarantee its

¹⁹ Barkin, “Realism, Prediction, and Foreign Policy,” 233–46.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Juliet, Kaarbo, “A Foreign Policy Analysis Perspective on the Domestic Politics Turn in IR Theory,” *International Studies Review* 17, no. 2 (2015): 189–216. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24758357>.

²² Gustav Meibauer, “Interests, Ideas, and the Study of State Behaviour in Neoclassical Realism,” *Review of International Studies* 46, no. 1 (2020): 20–36. doi:10.1017/S0260210519000214.

²³ Ibid.

security. All means of increasing power, whether military or economic, become legitimate. Mearsheimer defines realist assumptions as follows:²⁴ the international system is anarchic, great powers have military capabilities that can destroy each other, states can never be certain about other states' intentions, survival is the primary goal; great powers are rational actors. All but the last can hold true for NCR theory. Rationality is not an unquestionable characteristic of a great power, or any power for that matter. State executives are people driven by irrational thoughts, such as fear, that carry the delicate task of interpreting systemic imperatives. Mearsheimer also describes factors that influence power calculations and weigh on a state's power: nuclear weapons, stopping power of water, and the distribution of power in the system.²⁵ Contrary to the author's claim, water acts more as a unifier rather than a divider of regions. The Mediterranean Sea is a perfect example, water connects Europe with North Africa and facilitates interaction. Furthermore, water enhances power projection capabilities over great distances; once European nations mastered navigation, it allowed for the gradual rise of European colonial empires across the globe.

In the pursuit of national interests, a state will formulate a grand strategy which incorporates systemic pressures and unit level factors.²⁶ Concern over competitive advantage will influence the grand strategy because "if a state does not adapt to others, it puts itself at a disadvantage".²⁷ Nicholas Kitchen claims a nation is "driven from its place in the international system and by its relative material power",²⁸ while Peter Feaver and

²⁴ John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton, 2011).

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Nicholas Kitchen, "Systemic Pressures and Domestic Ideas: a Neoclassical Realist Model of Grand Strategy Formation," *Review of International Studies* 36, no. 1 (2010): 117–43, doi:10.1017/S0260210509990532.

²⁷ Gustav Meibauer et al., "Forum: Rethinking Neoclassical Realism at Theory's End," *International Studies Review* 23, no. 1 (May 2020): pp. 268-295, <https://doi.org/10.1093/isr/viaa018>.

²⁸ Nicholas Kitchen, "Systemic Pressures and Domestic Ideas," 117–43.

his colleagues argue that “international politics is characterised by persistent distributional conflicts”.²⁹ A state’s position in the system and the resources it has at its disposal certainly defines its capabilities. Greater resources means greater relative potential; the position in the system, such as geographical location, determines the nature and degree of threats that a state faces. Indeed, power distribution influences degrees of fear. Overall, an “increase in material power will lead to an expansion in the ambition and scope of a country's foreign policy”.³⁰ Relative potential and the distribution of power in the system will dictate a nation’s behaviour; for example, cooperation may be a preferable policy in the pursuit of national interest.

NCR has a top-down approach to policy making. Systemic imperatives remain the core factor defining external behaviour, even though its primacy can vary in function of the imperatives’ clarity.³¹ Although FP executives are autonomous from society, they are compelled to bargain with domestic actors in order to extract national resources.³² Statesmen will include the unit level in decision-making as mobilising and maintaining support for the national strategy³³ is essential for the state to remain competitive. Therefore, the unit level carries certain weight as it can act as a restrictor or facilitator; that is why intervening variables are the “causal chain between external incentives and state action”.³⁴ The unit level is a natural and undetachable component of foreign policy making; the state is not an abstract concept, but rather an organic and conscious structure that varies across time and space.

²⁹ Peter D. Feaver et al., “Brother Can You Spare a Paradigm? (Or Was Anybody Ever a Realist?),” *International Security* 25, no. 1 (2000): 165–93. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2626777>.

³⁰ Gideon Rose, Review of *Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy*, by Michael E. Brown et al., *World Politics* 51, no. 1 (1998): 144–72, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25054068>.

³¹ Steven E. Lobell, Norrin M. Ripsman, and Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, *Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

³² Steven E. Lobell et al., *Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy*.

³³ Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, “State Building for Future Wars: Neoclassical Realism and the Resource-Extractive State,” *Security Studies*, 15:3 (2006): 464-495, DOI: 10.1080/09636410601028370

³⁴ Gustav Meibauer et al., “Forum: Rethinking Neoclassical Realism at Theory's End,” 268-295.

II. On structural modifiers

The various territories France has across most oceans contributes to its global presence and places France as an important factor in different regional dynamics, such as in the Indian Ocean or in Asia-Pacific. Metropolitan France is located in Western Europe and is made of the mainland and the island of Corsica. It is one of the only European countries with access to both the Mediterranean and the Atlantic, two essential water bodies in Europe. France also has access to the North Sea and the English Channel. Territories located outside of the European continent have different statuses: some are outer-seas departments and are part of the EU, such as Guyana; others are overseas collectivities outside of the EU and with a certain degree of autonomy.

Saint-Pierre and Miquelon is located in the North Atlantic. In the Caribbean Sea there are the islands of Guadeloupe, Martinique, Saint-Barthelemy, and Saint Martin. The territory of Guyana is in South America and thus, France and the EU share a border with Suriname and Brazil. In the Indian Ocean and Antarctica, the territories of French Southern and Antarctic Lands are composed of the Adélie Land, Crozet Islands, Kerguelen Islands, Saint Paul and Amsterdam Islands and the Scattered Islands. Finally, in the Pacific Ocean there is French Polynesia, New Caledonia, and Wallis and Futuna closer to Australia while Clipperton Island is closer to Mexico. All these outer-seas territories resulted from France's historic desire to pursue a culture of maritime expansionism. However, due to its geographic location in Europe, it has always been compelled to pursue a strong land power tradition. The French have been torn between the need for a tellurocratic lifestyle and the desire for a thalassocratic culture. Thanks to many outer seas territories, France has one of the largest Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) in the world. Yet it is only the 45th

largest country on earth,³⁵ approximately the same size as South Sudan or Somalia. The French state has considerable influence compared to its relative size.

Metropolitan France's neighbours are Belgium, Luxembourg, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, Spain, and Andorra. Most are members of the European Union (EU) and of NATO. Metropolitan France acts as a cross point between central and northern Europe with the south, notably the Iberian Peninsula. Thus, it has become a land of transit for migrants heading to other parts of Europe. Of course, due to its colonial past, it is also a migration destination, mostly from Africa, the Middle East, and South-East Asia, due to France's former colonial rule. In the 1960s, President Charles de Gaulle made of France a nuclear power; it now has naval and air striking capabilities. Today, the country is one of the leading military powers in the world: it ranked 9th in 2023 with a power index of 0.1848.³⁶ As such, France is the most powerful military in the European Union, the 4th in the G7 and the 5th in the UNSC. Besides military force, France is very active in diplomacy and is part of multiple international organisations. Since 1945, it is a permanent member, with vetoing power, of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). It is a founding member of the European Union, it is part of the Council of Europe, the WTO, the OECD, the IMF, the OESC and the Francophonie. Paris is the seat of international organisations such as the Council of Europe, UNESCO and OCDE.

³⁵ CIA, "Area - the World Factbook," [cia.gov](https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/field/area/country-comparison), 2023, <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/field/area/country-comparison>.

³⁶ Global Fire Power, "2023 Military Strength Ranking," Global Fire Power, 2023, <https://www.globalfirepower.com/countries-listing.php>.

III. On French relative potential

Of geography

Theoretically, a state of circular shape with its capital in the middle has the best power projection capabilities. The hexagonal shape of metropolitan France, from now on referred to as France, is relatively close to that of a circle, but its capital city is situated more towards northern France, hindering the state's power projection.

France resembles a fortress: it is bordered by water to the south and to the west; the Pyrenees, the Alps, the Jura, and the Vosges Mountains are natural barriers in the south and in the east. The Armorican plateau in Brittany, the Midi plateau in the south and the Corsican Mountains act as natural internal barriers dividing French internally. The major geographic vulnerability is the northern border with Belgium, Luxembourg, and Germany; besides the Ardennes, no natural boundary exists. In fact, northern, central, and south-western France are a continuation of the Northern European Plain, a stretch of land spanning from Russia into Europe. This plain is ideal for invading and reaching the country's core. However, this flatland is also well-suited for agriculture as it is well irrigated by a dense network of rivers: the Loire, the Rhone, the Seine, and the Garonne are the main waterways but many additional tributary rivers such as the Marne, the Moselle, the Charente, the Dordogne, and the Saone contribute to having a fertile land. Rivers also acted as a territorial binder; the capital's northern location and the natural internal boundaries challenged the state's power projection; waterways counter-balanced these factors and allowed Paris to assert its control over remote regions.

Of demography

In 2023, France's population amounted to 68 million (M), one of the largest in Europe. In 2021, the population increased by 0,3%: there were 35M women for 32,9M men.³⁷ Over 65 million live in metropolitan France while approximately 2 million are sparsely distributed in outer-seas territories. There were 283,147 citizens living in French Polynesia in 2022³⁸ and 326,541 in New Caledonia in 2019;³⁹ in contrast only 32,489 lived in Saint Martin in 2019.⁴⁰ Overall, France's population is aging: 21,3% are over 65 years old and only 17,3% are below the age of 15.⁴¹ Yet, France had the highest birth-rate in Europe, with 1.86 births per woman in 2019.⁴²

The French mostly live in urban areas, as people move to cities for employment. The five biggest population centres are located by the Seine, the Garonne, the Rhone, and the Mediterranean Sea. In 2017, the most densely populated cities were Paris with 2,187,526 inhabitants, Marseille with 863,310, Lyon with 516,092, Toulouse with 479,553 and Nice with 340,017.⁴³

France is a sought-after destination for immigrants. In 2021, there was a total of 7 million immigrants. Of these, 2,5M were naturalised French, 4,5M were foreign nationals, and 0,8M were foreigners born on French soil.⁴⁴ Demographics show that France is deeply tied to the African continent as immigrants' origins are very unevenly balanced; in 2019,

³⁷ Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques (Insee), "Évolution et Structure de la Population," Insee, 2023, https://www.insee.fr/fr/outil_interactif/5367857/tableau/20_DEM/21_POP#.

³⁸ Insee, "Populations Légales des Subdivisions Administratives de Polynésie Française en 2022," Insee, 2022, <https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/6689636?sommaire=2122700>.

³⁹ Insee, "Populations Légales des Provinces de Nouvelle-Calédonie en 2019," Insee, 2019, <https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/4464927?sommaire=2122859>.

⁴⁰ Insee, "Populations Légales des Collectivités d'Outre-Mer en 2019," Insee, 2019, <https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/6013871?sommaire=6011075>.

⁴¹ Insee, "Évolution et Structure de la population."

⁴² Eurostat, "EU Births: Decline Continues, but Not from Foreign-Born Women," Eurostat, 2021, <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/ddn-20210323-2>.

⁴³ Insee, "Villes et Communes de France," Insee, 2020, <https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/4277602?sommaire=4318291>.

⁴⁴ Insee, "Étrangers - immigrés - Tableau de Bord de l'Économie Française," Insee, 2023, https://www.insee.fr/fr/outilinteractif/5367857/tableau/20_DEM/25_ETR.

2,164,800 originated from Africa, 1,898,700 from Europe, 650,300 from Asia, and 286,200 from the Americas and Oceania. Of these, 3,800 were Libyan nationals, 9,900 were Iranians and 12,900 were Lebanese.⁴⁵ The Lebanese diaspora is particularly large, both in terms of sheer numbers and in relative size to the country's 5,261,372 inhabitants in 2021. Such a diaspora can have considerable influence: it can be an electoral body in domestic politics, or a lobbying force.

Of transportation

The road, railway, harbour, and airport infrastructures are all tied together and connect with important economic centres. For airports, demographic pressures explain the greater number of hubs surrounding urban centres. The infrastructure in most of French territories are well developed as the state attempted to increase the economic potential of all its regions. Metropolitan France is strategically located for international maritime trade. The country's main harbours are Dunkerque, Le Havre, Rouen, Paris (HAROPA Port) in the north-west; Nantes-Saint-Nazaire, La Rochelle, Bordeaux to the west, and Marseille to the south.⁴⁶ All but Marseille are facing the Atlantic. The main harbours in the outer-seas territories are in Guyana, Martinique, Guadeloupe and Réunion.

There are 66 commercial harbours in France, of which 12 are state controlled. Of these, Saint-Pierre and Miquelon's harbour is classified as a "harbour of national interest", while the other eleven are "*Grand Ports Maritimes*" (GPM), that account for over 80% of all commercial merchandise.⁴⁷ The harbours on the Atlantic trade with the Americas and Africa. Marseille is of major importance as it is on the maritime trading route connecting

⁴⁵ Insee, "Étrangers et Immigrés en 2019," Insee, 2022, <https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/6478065?sommaire=6478362>.

⁴⁶ Ministères Écologie Énergie Territoires, "Acteurs, Réseau, et Activités Portuaires en France," Ministères Écologie Énergie Territoires, 2023, <https://www.ecologie.gouv.fr/acteurs-reseau-et-activites-portuaires-en-france>.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

Europe with Asia. It is the 3rd biggest European harbour for energy trade while Le Havre, with the largest container storage capacity in France, is the main exporter of French cereals.⁴⁸

Of resources

The flatland that stretches over France is a well irrigated and rich soil ideal for agriculture. France is the largest European agricultural producer, and 5th biggest wheat grower.⁴⁹ making it a leader in the European Union. The rich soil has long guaranteed France with food security however, climate change is destabilising and endangering this balance as massive droughts and fires are threatening agricultural production. The 2022 summer heat waves depleted natural water reserves; in winter 2023, another heat wave prevented these same reserves to replenish, causing fears for the future.

In 2018, France needed up to 800 million tons (Mt) of resources originating from biomass, water, nuclear, wind and fossil fuels to meet its needs. 381Mt, representing 60% of interior extraction, of non-metallic minerals such as gravel, sand, slate, sandstone, granite, were extracted. The extraction of metallic minerals such as iron, gold, aluminium, uranium, amounted to only 0,2Mt. Approximately 40%, mainly gas and oil, of French energy needs were imported.⁵⁰ Most imports originate from neighbouring producing countries such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and Algeria. Prior to Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, Moscow was also an energy trading partner. Sahelian states are also vital to French energy security, as uranium is required to produce nuclear energy. As part of the green transition and the energy diversification plan, France is

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ministère de l'Agriculture et de la Souveraineté Alimentaire, "Infographics - Farming France," Ministère de l'Agriculture et de la Souveraineté Alimentaire, June 10, 2021, <https://agriculture.gouv.fr/infographics-farming-france>.

⁵⁰ Commissariat général au développement durable, "L'Utilisation des Ressources Naturelles," Notre-Environnement, 2020, <https://www.notre-environnement.gouv.fr/themes/economie/article/l-utilisation-des-ressources-naturelles#en-bref>.

relying on its 56 nuclear reactors to meet its energy needs. Once again, the waterways system favoured the construction of nuclear powerplants as water is essential for the functioning of reactors.

Of technology

In 2021, France was the most attractive country in Europe, for foreign investment.⁵¹ According to the Global Innovation Index 2022, France was the 12th most innovative country, an improvement since 2019, but a slight decrease from 2021's 11th position.⁵² In 2020, France ranked 9th globally for scientific publications and was a leader in international scientific collaboration with over 60% of publications being a partnership between French and foreign scientists; the country reached an 18% rate of international cooperation, which was superior to Germany. However, it only ranked 13th in environmental research, placing it behind Spain, the UK and Germany.⁵³ France is more competitive in patents, where demand reached 5,7% in 2020, placing the country 5th, just behind the US, Germany, Japan, and China. The technological domains of these patents focussed on mechanics, transport, chemicals, and other industrial materials. Research and development is also essential in the French military industrial complex. Under the supervision of the *Direction Générale de l'Armement* (DGA), the defence industry is spearheaded by private national firms such as Dassault Aviation, Naval Group, Airbus Groups or Thales. As the backbone of a strategic sector, the state is one of the major

⁵¹ Ministère de l'Économie, des Finances et de la Souveraineté industrielle et numérique, "Investissements Internationaux: la France Reste le Pays le plus Attractif d'Europe," Ministère de l'Économie, des Finances et de la Souveraineté industrielle et numérique, 2021, <https://www.economie.gouv.fr/investissements-internationaux-france-reste-pays-plus-attractif-europe#>.

⁵² Global Innovation Index | Creating Healthy Lives-The Future of Medical Innovation, "Global Innovation Index | Creating Healthy Lives-the Future of Medical Innovation," Global Innovation Index, 2019, <https://www.globalinnovationindex.org/Home>.

⁵³ Ministère de l'Enseignement Supérieur et de la Recherche, "L'État de l'Enseignement Supérieur, de la Recherche et de L'Innovation - Résumé," Ministère de l'Enseignement Supérieur et de la Recherche, 2022, <https://publication.enseignementsup-recherche.gouv.fr/eesr/FR/Resume/>.

stakeholders in these companies. Another sector of strategic value is space. French Guyana operates as the launching pad for national and European space operations. France aspires to be a leader in space research and technology. In addition to that, the *plan France 2030*, aimed at making French industry more competitive, makes artificial intelligence a priority. The government has already invested 1.5€ billion since 2018; by 2021 there were 81 AI labs, the highest number in Europe, and 502 specialised start-ups, an 11% increase from 2020.⁵⁴

Of the political system

The French Revolution and the Enlightenment established the basis for what French democracy is today: the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, the rule of law and the separation of power between three different bodies: legislative, executive and judiciary. Today, the French 5th Republic is a semi-presidential regime, with strong executive powers; its constitution, also referred to as “fundamental law”, defines the institutions’ role and their relation with one another.⁵⁵

The executive branch has the power to enforce laws. It is composed of the president, who’s the chief of state and of the armies, and of its government, made up of ministers under the leadership of a prime minister. The president nominates a prime minister which in turn appoints minister. The legislative branch has the power to vote laws. It is composed of the parliament and several advisory councils such as the *Conseil Constitutionnel*. The lower chambre of parliament is the *Assemblée Nationale*; it is composed of 577 deputies elected every five years. The higher chambre is the *Senate*; it

⁵⁴ Ministère de l’Économie, des Finances et de la Souveraineté industrielle et numérique, “La Stratégie Nationale Pour l’Intelligence Artificielle,” Ministère de l’Économie, des Finances et de la Souveraineté industrielle et numérique, March 30, 2023, <https://www.economie.gouv.fr/strategie-nationale-intelligence-artificielle>.

⁵⁵ DILA, “Les Révisions de La Constitution Sous La Ve République,” Vie Publique, August 30, 2019, <https://www.vie-publique.fr/dossier/267859-les-revisions-de-la-constitution-sous-la-ve-republique>.

is made up of 348 senators elected by grand electors, such as mayors or local officials. Half of the Senate is elected for six years, the other half for three years. The judiciary branch has the power to bring justice. It is divided into 2 entities, the judiciary justice, and the administrative justice. The distinction exists because two laws, dating back to 1790, prohibit judges of being aware of any litigation involving public administration and state officials.⁵⁶ Judiciary justice oversees issues concerning private citizens and law violations, while administrative justice rules over issues involving a public individual, such as a municipality or the state.⁵⁷

Of the economy

France is a member of the euro zone with a GDP of 2.96 trillion dollars in 2021.⁵⁸ It became, in 2023, the 6th largest economy in the world, behind the United States (US), China, Japan, Germany and India. It is also now the second largest European economy, as the United Kingdom (UK) is facing severe economic challenges.

The French economy is mostly based on services: in 2021, the commercial service industry represented 56,5% of the national output; non-commercial services represented 22,8%; the industry amounted to 13,1%; 5,7% in the construction sector and agriculture reached 1,9%.⁵⁹ The COVID pandemic and the War in Ukraine have caused global spikes in inflation; by the end of 2022, French inflation reached 5,2% while purchasing power has been steadily dropping for years to reach 1,9%; in 2011, it reached -0,6%.⁶⁰ The

⁵⁶ Direction de l'information légale et administrative (DILA), "Quelle Est l'Organisation de la Justice en France?," Vie publique, 2023, <https://www.vie-publique.fr/fiches/268519-quelle-est-lorganisation-de-la-justice-en-france>.

⁵⁷ Ministère de la Justice, "L'Organisation de la Justice en France," Ministère de la Justice, September 15, 2021, <http://www.justice.gouv.fr/organisation-de-la-justice-10031/>.

⁵⁸ The World Bank, "France | Data," The World Bank, 2023, https://data.worldbank.org/country/france?name_desc=false.

⁵⁹ Insee, "Économie générale - Tableau de bord de l'Économie Française," Insee, 2023, https://www.insee.fr/fr/outil-interactif/5367857/tableau/10_ECC/11_ECO.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

French state's spendings are higher than its revenues: public deficit was of 163.3 billion euros in 2021, the equivalent of 6,5% of its GDP.⁶¹ Public administration is extremely costly: 44,5% of expenditures were for social insurance, 15,7% for health, 11,7% for economic affairs, 9,7% for general public services, 8,9% for education, and 3,1% for defence.⁶²

In 2021, the value of foreign investments in France was of 22.8€ billion, far exceeding French foreign investments of 13.1€ billion.⁶³ Great attention is given to the defence sector; in 2021, France represented 11% of global arms exports, ranking 3rd globally.⁶⁴ The Ministry of the Armies occupies a central role in the economy by purchasing goods for a value of 5€ billion to 26,000 different SMEs every year.⁶⁵ A negative trade balance exists since 2004 because of energy imports; in 2021, imports reached 31,4% compared to 29,4% of exports.⁶⁶ Nonetheless, there was an excess in exports in certain sectors such as agriculture, transport equipment, service and tourism. The main partners are the EU, the US and China. In the pursuit of soft power, the service industry is essential in spreading France's fashion, design, art, architecture, food, and language.

Of the military

The Ministry of the Armies, the French ministry of defence, supervises the country's armed forces, which are divided into four branches: the army, the navy, the air & space

⁶¹ Insee, "Finances publiques - Tableau de bord de l'Économie Française," Insee, 2023, https://www.insee.fr/fr/outil-interactif/5367857/tableau/10_ECC/15_FIN.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Insee, "Commerce extérieur - Tableau de bord de l'Économie Française," Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques, 2023, https://www.insee.fr/fr/outil-interactif/5367857/tableau/10_ECC/16_CEX.

⁶⁴ Cour des Comptes, "Le Soutien Aux Exportations de Matériel Militaire," Vie Publique, January 15, 2023, <https://www.vie-publique.fr/rapport/288018-soutien-aux-exportations-de-materiel-militaire-rapport-cour-des-comptes>.

⁶⁵ Secrétariat général pour l'administration, "Achats et Relations avec les Entreprises," Ministère des Armées, 2023, <https://www.defense.gouv.fr/sga/au-service-armees/achats-relations-entreprises>.

⁶⁶ Insee, "Tableau de bord de l'Économie Française."

force, and the gendarmerie. Attached to this ministry are other governmental agencies such as the *Direction Générale de l'Armement* (DGA), the *Direction Générale de la Sécurité Extérieure* (DGSE), the *Direction Générale des Relations Internationales* (DGRIS), the *Direction du Renseignement et de la Sécurité de la Défense* (DRSD), the *Direction du Renseignement Militaire* (DRM). The objectives of the military are to ensure the stability of the international system, provide security and consolidate French presence and influence in strategic regions, equip allies with the means to defend themselves and fight terrorism.⁶⁷

In 2022, the army had 121,000 soldiers and 24,000 reservists; the navy had 42,000 soldiers and 6,000 reservists; the air & space force had 42,000 soldiers and an additional 5,000 others. in operations such as *Operation Daman* in Lebanon, *Operation Chammal*, *Operation Sentinelle*, *Operation Resilience*, *Operation Corymbe*, *Atalante*. The *Loi de programmation militaire* is the military modernisation program that plans to invest 295€ billion from 2019 to 2025, to improve military equipment⁶⁸ and have the capacity to respond to high intensity threats; a 23% increase compared to the 2014 to 2018 period.⁶⁹ Furthermore, Macron announced, in January 2023, an additional 413 billion euros for defence until 2030.⁷⁰ The modernisation program is allocating 25 billion euros to nuclear deterrence, 59 billion to armament operationalisation, 35 billion to material maintenance,

⁶⁷ DILA, "Rapport au Parlement 2022 Sur les Exportations d'Armement de la France," Vie publique, September 27, 2022, <https://www.vie-publique.fr/rapport/286474-exportations-d-armement-de-la-france-2022>.

⁶⁸ Ministère des Armées, "Loi de Programmation Militaire 2019-2025," Ministère des Armées, 2023, <https://www.defense.gouv.fr/ministere/politique-defense/loi-programmation-militaire-2019-2025>.

⁶⁹ DILA, "Budget de la Défense: les Étapes pour le porter à 2% du PIB," Vie publique, December 28, 2022, <https://www.vie-publique.fr/eclairage/284741-budget-de-la-defense-les-etapes-pour-le-porter-2-du-pib>.

⁷⁰ Le Monde, "Emmanuel Macron Annonce une Enveloppe de 413 Milliards d'Euros de Financement des Armées pour les Sept Années à Venir," Le Monde, January 20, 2023, https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2023/01/20/emmanuel-macron-annonce-une-enveloppe-de-413-milliards-d-euros-pour-le-financement-des-armees-dans-les-sept-annees-a-venir_6158657_3210.html.

and 11 billion to investments in defence infrastructures for the year 2023.⁷¹ It is also aiming to strengthen its capacities in cyber, intelligence, security, and protection. The *Scorpion* program was created to adapt combat capacities with the delivery of 54 MEPAC vehicles and 200 renovated Leclerc tanks by 2027, 1872 *Griffon* armoured vehicles by 2033, and 2038 *Serval* vehicles by 2034.⁷² Soldiers' equipment is also completely modernised.

The military has two types of prepositioned forces: on sovereign territory, where 7150 soldiers are spread-out between Guyana, Antilles, Mayotte and Réunion, New Caledonia and French Polynesia; on foreign territory, where 3750 soldiers are deployed in the UAE, Djibouti, Gabon, Ivory Coast, and Senegal.⁷³ France has also multiple ongoing foreign operations such as *Operation Chammal* in Iraq and Syria or with NATO, the EU, or the UN.⁷⁴ French presence is most consequent in Africa.

⁷¹ DILA, "Budget de la Défense: les Étapes pour le Porter à 2% du PIB."

⁷² Armée de Terre, "Le Programme Scorpion," Ministère des Armées, 2023, <https://www.defense.gouv.fr/terre/nos-materiels-nos-innovations/nos-innovations/dossier-programme-scorpion/programme-scorpion>.

⁷³ Ministère des Armées, "Forces Prépositionnées," Ministère des Armées, 2023, <https://www.defense.gouv.fr/operations/forces-prepositionnees>.

⁷⁴ Ministère des Armées, "Opérations," Ministère des Armées, 2023, <https://www.defense.gouv.fr/operations/operations>.

IV. On the International System

Of those holding power

Saul Bernard Cohen argued in his book *Geopolitics* that a dynamic hierarchical power structure exists with states of the first, second, third, fourth and fifth order;⁷⁵ the higher a state moves in the structure, the more power, capability and influence it has. Power is dynamic and variation can occur: a state's power can change overtime.

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) is composed of five permanent members with both veto power and nuclear striking capabilities: the US, the UK, France, China, and Russia. Other nations, such as North Korea, possess nuclear weapons but do not have such influence in all military, cultural, economic, and political domains as the permanent UNSC members do. The system's great powers will be defined as the ones permanently sitting on the security council. However, a power disparity exists among them. The United States is the system's sole superpower; China is a rising one; Russia has shown, with the difficulties it is having in Ukraine, to be a waning great power attempting to maintain its status; The UK and France are both attempting to maintain their status but are waning as well.

According to Andreas Krieg, the US will pursue a doctrine of burden sharing by mobilising its partners, if its national interests are not immediately threatened.⁷⁶ Since the early 2010s, US policy for the Middle East has become one of gradual withdrawal; their attention has pivoted towards Asia because of China's growing influence.⁷⁷ The Obama

⁷⁵ Saul Bernard Cohen, *Geopolitics* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2009).

⁷⁶ Andreas Krieg, "Externalizing the Burden of War: The Obama Doctrine and US Foreign Policy in the Middle East," *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)* 92, no. 1 (2016): 97–113, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24757837>.

⁷⁷ Council on Foreign Relations, "Timeline: U.S.-China Relations," Council on Foreign Relations, 2022, <https://www.cfr.org/timeline/us-china-relations>.

administration settled for the approach of ‘leading from behind’,⁷⁸ meaning that the US would relegate the role of security guarantor to its regional allies. Nonetheless, lately America has been seeking new investments and development agreements to challenge Chinese influence.⁷⁹

Chinese foreign policy is spearheaded by economic cooperation and partnership; securing access to resources needed for the 2013’s *Belt and Road Initiative* (BRI) is essential.⁸⁰ However, Chinese global development projects have caused many states, notably in Africa and the Balkans, to become vulnerable to their investor’s political influence. Debt trap diplomacy⁸¹ is a widely acknowledged strategy allowing Beijing to mould the international system’s balance in its favour. Since Xi Jinping came to power in 2012, the country’s foreign policy has shifted from risk averse to re-establishing China’s rightful place.⁸²

Russia’s foreign policy has long been reactive to US patterns of interference.⁸³ Russia has often backed regimes, such as in Syria, that faced American criticism. The Kremlin’s cooperation model cannot be primarily based on economic cooperation, as its economy cannot compete with that of western countries and China. Russia uses security and cooperation in the defence sector as the basis for bilateral cooperation agreements. Paramilitary groups, such as the Wagner Group, provide weak governments with security in exchange for natural resources, such as gold and diamonds.

⁷⁸ Andreas Krieg, “Externalizing the Burden of War”

⁷⁹ David Wemer, “The US Government Makes Its Big Push for Investment in Africa,” Atlantic Council, October 16, 2020, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/the-us-government-makes-its-big-push-for-investment-in-africa/>

⁸⁰ Lee Dong Gyu, “Will China’s Middle East Policy Change?” Asan Institute for Policy Studies, 2021, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep34031>.

⁸¹ Kai Wang, “China: Is It Burdening Poor Countries with Unsustainable Debt?” *BBC News*, January 6, 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/59585507>.

⁸² Peter Ferdinand, “Westward Ho—the China Dream and ‘One Belt, One Road’: Chinese Foreign Policy under Xi Jinping,” *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)* 92, no. 4 (2016): 941–57, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24757683>.

⁸³ Wolfgang Muhlberger and Toni Alaranta, “*Political Narratives in the Middle East and North Africa Conceptions of Order and Perceptions of Instability*,” Cham: Springer, 2020.

Since the end of the Second World War, the UK has followed an “atlanticist” foreign policy, which is the pursuit of a close, and somehow special, relationship with the US, and to a larger extent, the entire English-speaking world.⁸⁴ The 2021 AUKUS military alliance between Australia, the UK and the US embodied the pursuit of such policy. English exceptionalism ideology and the amnesia regarding its past,⁸⁵ misleads the UK regarding its role in global politics. In essence, the UK’s loss of status and its fear of becoming just another European country is driving its foreign policy. Brexit further expressed this fear as the British believed that distancing themselves from the European Union (EU) would benefit their status.

Finally, there is France’s combination of French focussed policies and European integration. During the Arab Spring, Paris reacted to the events and even showed momentary disengagement.⁸⁶ President Sarkozy, in a dire situation, promoted a European approach, but as a means of securing French interests. Sarkozy’s unilateral decisions generally undermined the nation’s standing among its allies.⁸⁷ France tries to keep their sphere of influence, in the Sahel and the Middle East, amidst growing resentment. French foreign policy ambitions have often translated into a desire to lead the EU, only to be met with scepticism from partners that perceive French policy as too French, and not European.⁸⁸ President Hollande tried to improve ties with its allies; he reassured them of France’s position. Further Europeanisation of French foreign policy can be seen especially since 2017’s election of Emmanuel Macron, who’s a strong advocate for

⁸⁴ Srdjan Vucetic and Isabel Muttreja, “What Drives British Foreign Policy?” Chatham House – International Affairs Think Tank, February 10, 2022, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2022/02/what-drives-british-foreign-policy>.

⁸⁵ Srdjan Vucetic and Isabel Muttreja, “What Drives British Foreign Policy?”

⁸⁶ Miron Lakomy, “The ‘Arab Spring’ in French Foreign Policy”, 2012.

⁸⁷ Patrick Müller, “The Europeanization of France’s foreign policy towards the Middle East conflict – from leadership to EU-accommodation,” *European Security*, 22:1 (2013): 113-128, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09662839.2012.698266>.

⁸⁸ Manuel Lafont Rapnouil, “ALONE IN THE DESERT?: HOW FRANCE CAN LEAD EUROPE IN THE MIDDLE EAST,” European Council on Foreign Relations, 2018, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep21499>.

greater European integration and cooperation in defence. He has often voiced his desire for a strategically autonomous European Union. This could confirm the belief that French foreign policy is, to a degree, anti-American.⁸⁹

At the regional level, several powers have significant influence: Turkey, Egypt, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Saudi Arabia, and Iran. The Arab Spring was the opportunity for President Erdogan to promote a regional order with Turkey at its core; its assertive foreign policy can be defined as neo-Ottomanism.⁹⁰ It is a Turkish desire to reconnect with the empire's former regional status. Its influence has expanded into all realms: political, economic, military, and cultural. Turkey provides military assistance to the Tripoli government in Libya and has also signed energy extraction contracts; Turkey has a military base in Somalia and trains Somali armed forces; while many investments and cultural centres have materialised across the entire African continent.⁹¹ Since 2013, Turkey is Egypt's main regional rival because President al-Sissi deposed the Turkish-backed Muslim Brotherhood government. Egypt is seeking greater strategic influence by backing Marshall Haftar in Libya for example. Al-Sissi's foreign policy frequently aligns with EU interests in the Eastern Mediterranean, where Egypt can be considered a naval power.⁹² Egypt is a reliable European partner against a growingly assertive Turkey that has often clashed with its NATO partners.

The Gulf states, namely Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia, are stiffly competing. Qatar pursues soft power approach, with the Al Jazeera media outlet for

⁸⁹ Manuel Lafont Rapnouil, "ALONE IN THE DESERT?"

⁹⁰ M. Sheharyar Khan, "The Transformation of Turkish Foreign Policy Towards the Middle East," *Policy Perspectives* 12, no. 1 (2015): 31–50. <https://doi.org/10.13169/polipers.12.1.0031>.

⁹¹ Le Dessous des Cartes, "Turquie: Les Cartes d'Erdogan - Le Dessous Des Cartes | ARTE," [www.youtube.com, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qZD3Zhf2kZM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qZD3Zhf2kZM).

⁹² European Parliament, "Egypt's Foreign Policy within a Challenging Regional Context | Think Tank | European Parliament," European Parliament, October 11, 2021, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_BRI\(2021\)698062](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_BRI(2021)698062).

example, that is efficiently spreading the country's message. Qatar tries to place itself as an interlocutor between the west and the Muslim world and thus become a bridge between different cultures.⁹³ The UAE, nicknamed the Little Sparta, does not hesitate to use military force to pursue foreign policy. However, it now attempts to address security issues collectively and to prioritise economic cooperation,⁹⁴ as it often clashes with its powerful neighbour Saudi Arabia over military, economic and political issues. Saudi Arabia sees itself as the defender and unifier of all Sunnis. The Saudis wish to end their involvement in Yemen, diversify their economy away from fossil fuels, and increase their security in a competitive environment in which Iran poses an existential threat.⁹⁵ The Ayatollah's regime is unique. It is a destabilising player in the region as it aspires to spread its Islamist ideology, to unite Shia Muslims, to erase western influence, and, as Khamenei repeated, to remove and eradicate Israel.⁹⁶ Iran has been building ever since the 1980s a transnational network⁹⁷ that contributes to its political goals. Its aggressive foreign policy has made it an extremely assertive state with significant influence in countries such as Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq.

Of systemic signals in the Middle East and North Africa

Systemic signals that will be discussed are piracy in the Horn of Africa, that had already begun prior to the Arab Spring; the Arab Spring and the subsequent spill over; the war on

⁹³ Timur Akhmetov, "Explaining Qatar's Foreign Policy," openDemocracy, 2012, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/explaining-qatars-foreign-policy-0/>.

⁹⁴ Mohammad Barhouma, "The Reshaping of UAE Foreign Policy and Geopolitical Strategy," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, January 4, 2022, <https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/86130>.

⁹⁵ Zara Ali, "Dr. Yasmine Farouk on Saudi Arabia's Foreign Policy," Georgetown Journal of International Affairs, May 24, 2021, <https://gjia.georgetown.edu/2021/05/24/dr-yasmine-farouk-on-saudi-arabias-foreign-policy/>.

⁹⁶ France 24, "Iran's Khamenei Says Israel 'Not a Country, but a Terrorist Base,'" France 24, May 7, 2021, <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20210507-iran-s-khamenei-says-israel-not-a-country-but-a-terrorist-base>.

⁹⁷ Maria-Louise Clausen, "Iran's Successful Transnational Network: Iranian Foreign Policy Utilizes Partners," Danish Institute for International Studies, 2020, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep27546>.

terror and the death of Oussama Ben Laden; the rise of the Islamic State, ISIS terror attacks, and the international coalition to defeat it; and current issues that persist.

Prior to 2011, the Horn of Africa was already subject to international security operations, such as *Operation Atalanta*, due to piracy off the coast of Somalia. In November 2008, the Sirius Star petrol tanker became the largest ship ever captured by pirates. Off the Horn's through the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, that connects the Red Sea with the Gulf of Aden, is the fourth most important chokepoint in international trade⁹⁸ because most oil and gas from the Persian Gulf transits there to the rest of the world.

Change began in December 2010 in Tunisia: the population poured into the streets of the capital city to protest against the decades-long dictator Ben Ali. Social unrest quickly spread to all Arab nations of the MENA however, each experienced the upheaval differently: some states, such as Saudi Arabia, did not see any significant change, certain states introduced social reforms, such was the case in Morocco, others saw their governments collapse, such as in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya, while some like Syria and Iraq plunged into civil war. The West labelled the Arab Spring as a call for democracy, but the issue was taxation in an economic model lacking socioeconomic mobility,⁹⁹ and the core desire was to have prospect for the future. Mobility was vital to many economies: their youth would seek employment abroad, essentially in oil-producing countries, and bring back their revenue. Once the job market shrank, and income sources diminished, the youth was no longer a source of finance and thus the taxation model was no longer viable. It was years of economic stagnation slowly but surely undermined the socio-economic structure of many Arab states.

⁹⁸ Luca Baccarini, "Crise Au Yémen: Les Enjeux Du Déroit de Bab-El-Mandeb," IRIS, March 31, 2015, <https://www.iris-france.org/57023-crise-au-yemen-les-enjeux-du-detroit-de-bab-el-mandeb/>.

⁹⁹ Onn Winckler, "The 'Arab Spring': Socioeconomic Aspects," in *Middle East Policy*, 4th ed., vol. 20 (Middle East Policy Council, 2013), 68–87.

Then, the Arab Spring spilled over into neighbouring regions, notably in the Sahel and more specifically in Mali. In 2012, the Tuareg minority in the northern Mali launched another insurgency against the central government in Bamako. Faced with an armed insurrection it could not contain on its own, Mali requested France to intervene. The same year, *Operation Serval* began and successfully defeated the Tuareg insurrection. But, at the same time, terrorist groups infiltrated the country, which marked the start of years of counter-terrorism operations.

2011 was a milestone in the War on Terror: Al-Qaida's chief Oussama Ben Laden was killed in Abbottabad, Pakistan. America's worst enemy was neutralised after eluding capture for years. As President Bush stated, the successful mission was a "momentous achievement" that "marks a victory for America";¹⁰⁰ it was one step closer in serving justice to 9/11 victims and in healing a deep trauma in American society. In the meantime, a radical Islamist terrorist group was slowly rising in the Levant: the Islamic State, also known as Daesh or ISIS. Created in 2006 by Abu Omar al-Baghdadi, the chaos caused by the Arab Spring was ideal for the group to pursue its strategy of territorial expansion. In 2014, the caliphate was declared and reached around 125,000 members, of which 15,000 were foreigners,¹⁰¹ at the peak of its power in 2015. ISIS also enjoyed many affiliated terrorist groups worldwide, such as the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (IS-GS). 2015 was the height in terror attacks on foreign soils, many occurring in France. Europe was also a promising land for recruitment; many joined ISIS as foreign terrorist fighters over a desire to affirm their Muslim identity, to help the wider Muslim

¹⁰⁰ Dean Schabner and Karen Travers, "Osama Bin Laden Killed: 'Justice Is Done,' President Says," ABC News, May 2, 2011, <https://abcnews.go.com/Blotter/osama-bin-laden-killed/story?id=13505703>.

¹⁰¹ H el ene Sallon, "Sur la Piste du Fief de l' Etat Islamique," *Le Monde*, September 15, 2015, https://www.lemonde.fr/proche-orient/article/2015/09/15/sur-la-piste-de-l-emir-autoproclame-de-l-etat-islamique_4758179_3218.html#link_time=1442326844.

community or due to marginalisation and discrimination.¹⁰² In 2017, ISIS was militarily defeated by an international coalition but was far from eradicated. The coalition, composed of dozens of states, was itself fractured: the West had been helping Syrian rebels against Bashar al-Assad while Russia was backing Assad's regime. Syria became a battleground where Russia intended to compete with other powers.

In 2023, the Arab Spring's consequences are still visible. Certain countries have stabilised and returned to their previous authoritarian regime; such is the case with Egypt. Others, like Libya and Yemen, are still in a state of civil war. Insurgencies in Iraq and Syria have been crushed but are now considered, along with Lebanon, Iranian proxies because of their dependency on the Islamic Republic.¹⁰³

The highly fractionalised and conflict riddled geopolitical landscape of the MENA shows great restrictiveness. French policy makers have decided that working with stable, yet authoritarian, regimes such as Saudi Arabia or Egypt is more valuable than not to. The need for reliable partners in a geographically close region that can easily destabilise Europe is crucial for French security. The fractionalised landscape and the stiff regional competition contribute to instability and restrict possibilities of alliances and partnerships, the ability to shift or promote policies without endangering French regional position.

Of systemic signals on the Old Continent

Systemic signals in Europe were the 2008 Financial Crisis that led to the European Debt Crisis; the rise of populism; the Russian Annexation of Crimea; the Migration Crisis; the Brexit.

¹⁰² Anne Speckhard and Molly Ellenberg, "ISIS in Their Own Words: Recruitment History, Motivations for Joining, Travel, Experiences in ISIS, and Disillusionment over Time – Analysis of 220 In-Depth Interviews of ISIS Returnees, Defectors and Prisoners," *Journal of Strategic Security* 13, no. 1 (April 2020): 82–127, <https://doi.org/10.5038/1944-0472.13.1.1791>.

¹⁰³ Maria-Louise Clausen, "Iran's Successful Transnational Network."

The 2008 Financial Crisis, followed by the European Debt Crisis, crushed European economies. A growing resentment and dissatisfaction changed the European political landscape by allowing political parties once perceived as extremist and marginalised to gain momentum and solid support. The rise of populism in Europe has redefined political priorities and has divided European parties along pro and anti-EU. Strongly drawn to the concept of illiberal democracy, the far-right shares interests and even facilitates Putin's agenda of disseminating disinformation and anti-establishment narratives.¹⁰⁴ A weaker union allows the Russians more freedom of manoeuvring in their neighbourhood. In 2014, Russia violated the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine by annexing the Crimean Peninsula. The West imposed sanctions however, stronger measures were not taken, allowing Russia to assert its control over the region and emboldening it for future endeavours. In 2015, thousands of refugees, mostly from Syria, set out for Europe, starting the Migration Crisis. A per country refugee quota was decided by the EU; some states such as Sweden welcomed migrants, only to face later the consequences of inadequate infrastructures and social inclusion programs, others such as Hungary, Austria and Slovenia erected barriers and shut their borders. Furthermore, multiple Islamist terrorist attacks in Europe only exacerbated anti-migrant feelings and further strengthened populist parties' nativism and authoritarianism.¹⁰⁵ Populists are strongly opposed to migration and the EU inclusive political agenda. Finally, in 2016, the UK voted to leave the European Union. Brexit was an attempt by the British to establish a 'Global Britain',¹⁰⁶ a concept that would affirm their independence, uniqueness, and position as a global leader.

¹⁰⁴ Fredrik Wesslau, "Putin's Friends in Europe," European Council on Foreign Relations, October 19, 2016, https://ecfr.eu/article/commentary_putins_friends_in_europe7153/.

¹⁰⁵ Andrea Pirro, "Far Right: The Significance of an Umbrella Concept," *Nations and Nationalism* 29, no. 1 (June 27, 2022): 101–12, <https://doi.org/10.1111/nana.12860>.

¹⁰⁶ Srdjan Vucetic and Isabel Muttreja, "What Drives British Foreign Policy?"

Overall, the geopolitical landscape in Europe is also very restrictive. The severe financial crisis crippled European economies and allowed for a radicalisation in political rhetoric that was further bolstered by the Migration Crisis. It is not far-right parties that have become less extreme, but mainstream parties that have radicalised¹⁰⁷ as they have adapted to systemic imperatives. Issues on the old continent have created a restrictive environment in which France must pursue a political agenda emphasising security.

Of systemic signals in the wider world

Systemic imperatives in the wider world were the election of Xi Jinping, of Narendra Modi, of Donald Trump, of Joe Biden; the AUKUS deal; the COVID-19 pandemic; the US withdrawal from Afghanistan; the Russian growing influence in Africa; the Russian Invasion of Ukraine; the energy and food crises.

Xi Jinping falls into Byman and Pollack's "Great Men". Now re-elected for an unprecedented third term in 2023, he has redefined Chinese policy and attitude in the system: from one of peaceful rise to an assertiveness and challenger. His rule is marked by greater authoritarianism and centralisation of power, as was seen in the 2019 Hong Kong protests. It is noteworthy to mention the 2014 election of populist leader Narendra Modi as India's president. Though not as China is, India is on the rise and is a relevant player in the competition opposing China to the US. Modi is playing an equilibrist's game, both diplomatically engaging with Russia, a pariah state since 2022, but also adhering to defence agreements with the West, notably the QUAD alliance.

The 2016 election of Donald Trump to the presidency shifted the US towards an isolationist and America first policy. Trump initiated a trade war by announcing tariffs worth \$50 billion on Chinese imports in response to alleged Chinese theft of technology

¹⁰⁷ Cas Mudde, *The Far Right Today* (Cambridge, UK; Medford, Ma: Polity Press, 2019).

and intellectual property;¹⁰⁸ and alienated its European allies because of his doubtful engagement to international treaties and institutions. Joe Biden labelled his 2020 presidential victory as “America is back”, meaning the return of diplomacy in US foreign policy.¹⁰⁹ Faced with China’s constant rise, the US has been pursuing pragmatic and realist policies; such was the case with the AUKUS security alliance with the UK and Australia in 2021, depriving France of an important security agreement and undermining both French interests and that of the European Union since Asia-Pacific was labelled as a priority in the 2022 strategic compass.¹¹⁰

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic forced states to enforce restrictive measures on social interaction so to slow the spread of the virus; in turn it drastically slowed down economic activity. Millions died and the global economy struggled to revive itself; recovery plans and measures were drafted, such as the EU stimulus package aimed at building a greener, more digital, and resilient Europe.¹¹¹ In 2022, when economies were still slowly absorbing COVID’s effects, Russia launched its military invasion of Ukraine, sparking energy and global food crises. In the euro-zone alone, inflation reached 10.6% in October 2022.¹¹² For years now, Russia has been actively undermining European influence. It has gained in Africa a strong foothold at the expense of Europe and more specifically France. Russia interpreted the 2021 chaotic US and NATO retreat from Afghanistan as an American unwillingness to be involved abroad. Emboldened, the Russian leadership

¹⁰⁸ Council on Foreign Relations, “Timeline: U.S.-China Relations.”

¹⁰⁹ U.S. Department of State, “‘America Is Back’: President Biden Outlines His Vision for U.S. Foreign Policy,” United States Department of State, February 5, 2021, <https://www.state.gov/dipnote-u-s-department-of-state-official-blog/america-is-back-president-biden-outlines-his-vision-for-u-s-foreign-policy/>.

¹¹⁰ Council of the EU, “A Strategic Compass for a Stronger EU Security and Defence in the next Decade,” Council of the European Union, March 21, 2022, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2022/03/21/a-strategic-compass-for-a-stronger-eu-security-and-defence-in-the-next-decade/>.

¹¹¹ European Commission, “Recovery Plan for Europe,” European Commission, December 17, 2020, https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/recovery-plan-europe_en.

¹¹² Eurostat, “Inflation in the Euro Area,” Eurostat, 2023, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Inflation_in_the_euro_area#Euro_area_annual_inflation_rate_and_its_main_components.

decided to openly challenge the international order. This proved to be a serious miscalculation of the West's disunity; the invasion of Ukraine only brought Europe and the US closer.

Overall, the geopolitical developments in the wider world are also restrictive. The rise of populist leaders, the evermore confrontational competition between the US and China and the war in Ukraine build an insecure environment. France is facing threats on three different levels: European, regional, and global. All levels are providing signals indicating that the nature of the international system is restrictive. The greater the system's restrictiveness, the greater a state will need to pursue a policy of survival. French leadership has already announced its new plan for a modernised defence force for the coming decade, and it is aiming for NATO's 2% of GDP.

Of Libya's situation

After years of being a pariah in the 20th century, Libya would gradually be rehabilitated in the 2000s. During that decade, Colonel Gaddafi, then in power for 30 years, would be president of the African Union and of the UNSC; would host several state visits from western leaders; would oversee the return of western companies, mostly energy companies, to Libya; and would sign an anti-migration deal with the EU as well as a defence contract with Russia. In 2011, Gaddafi's position was shaken as protesters organised into a rebel force with the sole goal of ousting him from power. In support of the rebels, the UNSC declared a no-fly zone over Libya and later NATO launched a military intervention. In September 2011, dozens of nations recognised the National Transitional Council (NTC) as Libya's legitimate government and by October, Gaddafi

was killed.¹¹³ At the same time, the Islamic State rose to prominence in the country and in 2012, it attacked the American consulate in Benghazi, killing the US ambassador. In 2014, the situation deteriorated when the General National Congress did not disband after the end of its mandate. By 2016, the UN backed Government of National Accord (GNA) arrived in Tripoli while Marshall Khalifa Haftar, leading the Libyan National Army, challenged the new government and took control of the east. To further complicate the issue, several foreign powers such as Turkey, Italy, Russia, or France are involved on either side of the conflict. Libya has settled into a multipolar status quo, only undermining the peace building process.

The French government has been backing the UN backed GNA while also showing support to Marshall Haftar.¹¹⁴ On March 9, 2020, Haftar was in Paris on an official visit to meet French President Macron and then Minister of Foreign Affairs Jean-Yves Le Drian. The French had already been in contact with the General's government several times prior to that. Nonetheless, the French government claims to be seeking an inclusive political solution between the presidential council and the opposition.¹¹⁵ Since 2016, France has invested 15€M to secure French interests in Libya, which are mainly related to security and economy: Libya is an important illegal migration hub towards Europe, while energy represents 99% of French imports from Libya.¹¹⁶ To secure these interests, France has invested 15€ million since 2016 in order to stabilise the country.

¹¹³ BBC News, "Libya Profile - Timeline," *BBC News*, September 3, 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-13755445>.

¹¹⁴ Le Dessous des Cartes, "Turquie : Les Cartes d'Erdogan - Le Dessous Des Cartes | ARTE."

¹¹⁵ Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères (MEAE), "Libye Relations Bilatérales," France Diplomatie, 2023, <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/dossiers-pays/libye/relations-bilaterales/>.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

Of Lebanon's situation

Lebanon's politics are characterised by instability, division, and sectarianism. After 15 years of civil war, the Lebanese National Assembly ordered all armed militias but one to dissolve in 1990. The Hezbollah had become a powerful Shia organisation with both a political and military branch. In 2004 and 2005, Israeli and Syrian forces completely withdrew from Lebanese territory, but internal tensions remained. Among kidnappings by the Hezbollah, assassination of political figures, governmental resignations, political deadlock, and foreign meddling, the UNSC made several attempts at solving Lebanon's crises. In 2007, a resolution was passed to form a tribunal to try the suspects in 2005 President Hariri's assassination.¹¹⁷ The 2009 unity government of Saad Hariri collapsed in 2011 after the Hezbollah ministers and its allies resigned. In 2012, the Syrian civil war spilled over into Lebanon. The subsequent years would be marked by inner tensions, sporadic violence, a migration crisis, and changes in governance due to further political turmoil. By January 2020, Saad Hariri government resigned after facing protests due to economic stagnation and corruption. In August 2020, Hassan Diab's government resigned when a drop in the currency, the impact of COVID and the explosion in Beirut's harbour caused new mass protests. The country remains in a state of crisis ever since.

The French government outlines five cooperation objectives: consolidating the rule of law, economic and social development, protection of the environment and of the cultural heritage, academic research cooperation and cultural exchanges.¹¹⁸ The density of French and Lebanese bilateral relations, 27 visits since 2016 alone, prove the importance they have for one another. There are approximately 23,000 French citizens currently living in

¹¹⁷ BBC News, "Lebanon Profile - Timeline," *BBC News*, April 25, 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-14649284>.

¹¹⁸ MEAE, "Liban Relations Bilatérales," *France Diplomatie*, 2023, <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/dossiers-pays/liban/relations-bilaterales/>.

Lebanon. Since the 2020 Beirut explosion, France has further invested in Lebanon to stabilise the country's governance and economy. Paris is currently Beirut's 7th biggest partner: several thousand French companies operate there, investments reached 3€ billion in 2017 while exports reached 748€M in 2018.¹¹⁹ In the cultural sector, France has 8 cultural institutes, 6 schools and an additional 50 partnered establishments.¹²⁰ The French language remains very influential even though the use of English is increasing. Finally, they often cooperate in the security sector: France has a military base in the country and is assisting the Lebanese armed forces in a variety of domains.

Of Iran's situation

Since its foundation in 1979, Iranian leadership has seen many social protests over a variety of issues such as social rights or economic stagnation. Iran has been under decades-long sanctions due to its support of terrorist activities and, most importantly, over its nuclear program. Iranian oil, one of the country's main exports, is under embargo by the West. The Arab Spring, combined with international sanctions, caused the currency to drop to record lows.¹²¹ The 2013 election of reformist Hassan Rouhani as president brought hope that some sanctions would be alleviated. In 2015, the Iran Nuclear Deal was reached: in exchange for abandoning its nuclear enrichment program, international sanctions would be lifted. In 2017, Rouhani was re-elected, but the end of that year was marked by new protests over economic stagnation. 2018 was the turning point as Trump withdrew from the Nuclear Deal, causing a continual deterioration in relations with Iran. In 2019, the US accused Iran of attacking an oil tanker; in 2020, the US killed General Qassem Soleimani, commander of the Guardians of the Revolution. That same year,

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ BBC News, "Iran Profile - Timeline," *BBC News*, September 24, 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-14542438>.

political hardliners won the presidential election. Finally, in September 2022, amidst rampant inflation, country-wide protests, violently repressed, erupted after the death of Mahsa Amini at the hands of Iranian's morality police. In 2013, diplomatic relations were reinstated with the aim of deescalating regional tensions and reaching a deal for the nuclear program; Between 2015 and 2017, 10 official visits took place.¹²² Diplomatic relations are influenced by the political situation in the world and when the US withdrew from the Nuclear Deal, French Iranian relations also plummeted. The nature of Iranian's government will also highly influence whether it will be more engaging with the West or not. Currently, diplomatic relations are frozen.

¹²² MEAE, "Iran Relations Bilatérales," France Diplomatie, 2023, <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/dossiers-pays/iran/relations-bilaterales/>.

V. On Domestic Factors

Of leaders' perceptions

State leaders perceive, interpret, and react to systemic imperatives. Given that the constitution grants the president immense power he will, through his character and perceptions, affect his state's foreign policy and reaction. The president's ministers also support the former's policy agenda.

a. Nicolas Sarkozy - until 2012

The geographical proximity of Libya to Europe incited President Sarkozy to primarily focus on the Libyan Civil War. Strongly in favour of a multilateral solution, France appealed to the Council of Europe to determine an official strategy for Libya: Gaddafi had to renounce its position and the new legitimate entity was the Government of National Transition.¹²³ The French and the British, supported by the Arab League and a UNSC resolution, led the eventual military intervention in Libya.¹²⁴ On February 23, 2011, a week after hostilities began, the French President denounced the repression and suggested that European foreign ministers agree on sanctions against Gaddafi's regime.¹²⁵ However, weeks into the conflict, the French were reluctant to use force, especially with NATO, because they argued it wasn't appropriate.¹²⁶ In March 2011, the UNSC Resolution 1973 allowed the use of lethal force if no ceasefire and diplomatic solution

¹²³ DILA, "Conférence de presse de M. Nicolas Sarkozy, Président de la République, notamment sur la position de l'Union européenne face à la situation politique et humanitaire en Libye, à Bruxelles le 11 mars 2011," Vie publique, March 11, 2011, <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/181484-nicolas-sarkozy-11032011-ue-situation-politique-humanitaire-libye>.

¹²⁴ Institut de Relations Internationales et Stratégiques, "La Politique Arabe de François Hollande," IRIS, November 22, 2016, <https://www.iris-france.org/83753-la-politique-arabe-de-francois-hollande/>.

¹²⁵ DILA, "Déclaration de M. Nicolas Sarkozy, Président de La République, Sur La Situation Politique En Libye, à Paris Le 23 Février 2011," Vie publique, February 23, 2011, <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/181358-declaration-de-m-nicolas-sarkozy-president-de-la-republique-sur-la-si>.

¹²⁶ DILA, "Interview de M. Alain Juppé, ministre des affaires étrangères et européennes, à RTL le 6 mars 2011, sur l'intensification des combats en Libye et les perspectives d'une intervention militaire dans ce pays," Vie publique, March 06, 2011, <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/181532-alain-juppe-06032011-combats-libye-intervention-militaire-envisagee>.

was immediately reached.¹²⁷ The French are strongly predisposed towards multilateralism “the question is not what France can do. It is what the international community can do”¹²⁸ and France “can take initiatives but cannot do it without closely working with its partners and the UNSC”.¹²⁹ In late March 2011, France praised the UNSC Resolution 1973 and the cooperation of other Arab nations, such as Qatar and the UAE, in what was described as a democratic wind blowing in Libya.¹³⁰ Ironically, the two aforementioned states are authoritarian regimes that tried to silence that same democratic wind. This realism and pragmatism shows that the French were trying to contain instability and ensure security, rather than promote democracy. The declarations on the nature of the Arab Spring as a desire for democracy, social progress, and economic growth¹³¹ are discourses used to legitimise foreign policy decisions. Richard Shapcott argues, pursuing an idealism-based foreign policy can be extremely dangerous, as it can lead to policies that neglect or undermine a state’s security.¹³²

There were no particular developments in the Franco-Lebanese relations during Sarkozy’s term. The official position remained as in the previous decades: promote Lebanese sovereignty and territorial integrity and help with its economic development.¹³³

¹²⁷ DILA, “Déclaration de M. Nicolas Sarkozy, Président de la République, sur l’application de la résolution du Conseil de sécurité de l’ONU exigeant un cessez le feu immédiat et l’arrêt des violences contre les populations civiles en Libye, à Paris le 19 mars 2011,” Vie publique, March 19, 2011, <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/181579-declaration-de-m-nicolas-sarkozy-president-de-la-republique-sur-lapp>.

¹²⁸ DILA, “Interview de M. Alain Juppé.”

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ DILA, “Déclarations de M. François Fillon, Premier ministre, M. Alain Juppé, ministre des affaires étrangères, et de M. Gérard Longuet, ministre de la défense et des anciens combattants, sur l’engagement français dans la coalition internationale en Libye, au Sénat le 22 mars 2011,” Vie publique, March 22, 2011, <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/181605-declarations-de-m-francois-fillon-premier-ministre-m-alain-juppe-mi>.

¹³¹ DILA, “Conférence de presse de M. Nicolas Sarkozy.”

¹³² Shapcott, Richard. “Anti-Cosmopolitanism.”

¹³³ DILA, “Entretien de Mme Catherine Colonna, Ministre de l’Europe et Des Affaires Étrangères, Avec Le Journal Quotidien ‘Asharq Al-Awsat’ Le 2 Février 2023, Sur Les Relations Avec Les Pays Du Golfe Persique, l’Iran, Le Liban, La Syrie, Le Maroc et l’Algérie et Le Conflit En Ukraine.,” Vie publique,

Sarkozy did propose to create an international contact group, with other nations that have close relationship with Lebanon, to help the country confront its challenges.¹³⁴ As a former colonial possession strategically located, Lebanon still has an important position in French foreign policy. By helping Beirut, Paris can play great power politics by projecting power and influence. Likewise, Franco-Iranian relations were mostly at a standstill because of Iran's isolation. President Sarkozy followed the usual policy of being "clear and firm" and that "Iran getting the nuclear weapon is totally unacceptable".¹³⁵ The position aligns with that of its Western partners, again emphasising Paris's multilateralism, but perhaps indicating a degree of Atlanticism in its foreign policy.¹³⁶ This comes into conflict with France's desire to be an independent actor, free from American directives.

Overall, French foreign policy under President Sarkozy was dominated by the Libyan Civil War. Multilateralism was at the core of the policy; it gives legitimacy but may indicate the incapacity and therefore, lack of power, to solve the crisis on its own. Lebanon's threat to European security is limited, which might explain the limited attention it received during that period. As for relations with Iran, they are much more influenced by the regime's degree of isolation and antagonism to the West. Because of multilateralism, France possibilities for having relations with Iran are limited; it actually ties the French with its western allies, such as the US. President Sarkozy's politics were

February 2, 2023, <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/288165-entretien-catherine-colonna-02022023-france-pays-arabes>.

¹³⁴ DILA, "Communiqué de la Présidence de la République, en date du 16 janvier 2011, sur la situation politique au Liban," Vie publique, January 16, 2011, <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/180952-communicue-de-la-presidence-de-la-republique-en-date-du-16-janvier-2011>.

¹³⁵ DILA, "Interview de M. Alain Juppé, ministre des affaires étrangères et européennes, à Al-Hayat le 14 mai 2011, sur l'évolution de la situation dans les pays arabes et le rôle de l'Iran dans la région," Vie publique, May 14, 2011, <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/182122-alain-juppe-14052011-printemps-arabes-role-iran>.

¹³⁶ Institut de Relations Internationales et Stratégiques, "Macron: Le Spectre de La Gesticulation Diplomatique," IRIS, June 5, 2018, <https://www.iris-france.org/114204-macron-le-spectre-de-la-gesticulation-diplomatique/>.

dynamic but cleaving and confrontational with its partners.¹³⁷ But, Sarkozy's multilateral politics were seen as a way of boosting the French position,¹³⁸ he would break from its allies' position to pursue an independent path, explaining why he alienated his allies. For multilateralism to work, it requires functioning relations for reaching efficient solutions; It may explain the indecisiveness in France's foreign policy towards Libya, Lebanon, and Iran.

b. Francois Hollande - from 2012 to 2017

Probably the most notable development during Francois Hollande's term was ISIS and terror attacks. In September of 2012, the American ambassador in Libya was killed by the Islamic State and in April 2013, the French embassy in Tripoli was also attacked. Hollande condemned and insisted to have the Libyan government's cooperation to try the offenders.¹³⁹ The US and France shared a common challenge that deepened their cooperation. President Hollande followed in its predecessor's footsteps: find a rapid solution by means of a national reconciliation between the different parties,¹⁴⁰ believing it to be most suited to a conflict that could drag on for years. Even when the GNA was formed, the President acknowledged the urgency for new government to take power,¹⁴¹ signalling a certain anxiousness of any power vacuum. Hollande stated that "we must do

¹³⁷ Institut de Relations Internationales et Stratégiques, "Quel Est Le Bilan de La Politique Étrangère Menée Par François Hollande, Un an Après Son Élection ?," IRIS, May 6, 2013, <https://www.iris-france.org/43736-quel-est-le-bilan-de-la-politique-etrangere-menee-par-francois-hollande-un-an-apres-son-election/>.

¹³⁸ Miron Lakomy, "The 'Arab Spring' in French Foreign Policy", 2012.

¹³⁹ DILA, "Déclaration de M. Laurent Fabius, ministre des affaires étrangères, sur l'attentat contre l'ambassade de France à Tripoli en Libye, à Paris le 23 avril 2013," Vie publique, April 23, 2013, <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/187793-declaration-de-m-laurent-fabius-ministre-des-affaires-etrangeres-sur>.

¹⁴⁰ DILA, "Déclaration de M. Laurent Fabius, ministre des affaires étrangères et du développement international, sur la crise politique en Libye et la lutte contre le terrorisme, à New York le 25 septembre 2014," Vie publique, Septembre 25, 2011, <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/192437-laurent-fabius-25092014-crise-politique-libye-et-lutte-contre-terrorisme>.

¹⁴¹ DILA, "Déclaration de M. Jean-Marc Ayrault, ministre des affaires étrangères et du développement international, sur la position de l'Union européenne concernant le conflit israélo-palestinien et la situation en Libye et sur l'attentat terroriste en Côte d'Ivoire, à Bruxelles le 14 mars 2016," Vie publique, March 14, 2016, <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/198276-declaration-de-m-jean-marc-ayrault-ministre-des-affaires-etrangeres-e>.

all we can so that stability in Libya is now the priority”,¹⁴² but granting the GNA with international recognition did not bring stability or legitimacy as many different factions were de facto in control of certain territory; the GNA threatened their existence. The strict pursuit of stability in the frame of international recognition forced Hollande to neglect the pragmatism necessary in a fragmented landscape. Although Libya retained much attention, Hollande was shifting towards fighting terrorism; in 2014, Paris suggested to list Ansar al-Sharia on the list of terrorist organisations.¹⁴³

In Lebanon, President Hollande reiterate French support for Lebanon’s sovereignty and territorial integrity; the President’s December 2013 declaration feels paternalistic as he wished to “comfort the Lebanese”¹⁴⁴ by aiding them through Sarkozy’s international contact group. The stagnation of crises is caused by the various political factions and, as a sort of mentor, Hollande urged them to take responsibility and find a political solution.¹⁴⁵ It is with Hollande that one of the greatest diplomatic evolutions with Iran materialised: the 2015 Iranian Nuclear Deal. France has long pursued a policy of nuclear antiproliferation and to that end, it adopted a strict position of no or very limited concessions to Iran’s nuclear program, so that the finalised deal would be more binding.¹⁴⁶ A risky move that proved fruitful; France seemed to wield influence in

¹⁴² DILA, “Déclaration de M. François Hollande, Président de la République, sur la lutte contre le groupe terroriste Daech en Irak et en Syrie et sur la situation en Libye,” Vie publique, March 14, 2016, <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/198434-declaration-de-m-francois-hollande-president-de-la-republique-sur-la>.

¹⁴³ DILA, “Déclaration de M. Laurent Fabius.”

¹⁴⁴ DILA, “Conférence de presse de M. François Hollande, Président de la République, sur les relations entre la France et l’Arabie Saoudite, le nucléaire iranien, la situation en Syrie et au Liban et sur la lutte contre le chômage, à Riyad le 29 décembre 2013,” Vie publique, December 29, 2013, <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/190001-conference-de-presse-de-m-francois-hollande-president-de-la-republique>.

¹⁴⁵ DILA, “Déclaration à la presse de M. Jean-Marc Ayrault, ministre des affaires étrangères et du développement international, sur la crise politique au Liban, à Beyrouth le 12 juillet 2016,” Vie publique, July 12, 2016, <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/199867-declaration-la-presse-de-m-jean-marc-ayrault-ministre-des-affaires-e>.

¹⁴⁶ DILA, “Déclaration de M. Laurent Fabius, ministre des affaires étrangères et du développement international, sur la mise en oeuvre de l’accord nucléaire avec l’Iran, à Paris le 16 janvier 2016,” Vie publique, July 15, 2015, <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/197589-declaration-de-m-laurent-fabius-ministre-des-affaires-etrangees-et-du>.

diplomacy. However, the Iranian's moderate government led by Hassan Rohani was certainly a deal-making factor, as they were eager for an alleviation of sanctions. A nuclear deal was the first necessary step before the French government would return diplomatically and economically to Iran.¹⁴⁷

Overall, Hollande's foreign policy much resembled that of Sarkozy; he followed his predecessor's agenda in Libya or Lebanon. He was rather successful in diplomacy, where consensus and cooperation is necessary. President Hollande was a very appeasing, prudent, and considerate partner.¹⁴⁸ Thanks to his character, relations with its partners were improved after the cleaving attitude of Sarkozy. Multilateralism was more effective as he strived to reach pluralistic solutions that were not seen as an attempt to promote solely French interests.

c. Macron - from 2017 to 2023

Macron's official policy in Libya remained "dialogue between all parties to build a unified and peaceful Libya".¹⁴⁹ However, Macron opted for more pragmatism and engaged with both the GNA and Marshal Haftar, the leader of the National Libyan Army controlling eastern Libya. Italy is also involved in Libya and has been, to a certain degree, competing with France. Though their relations greatly fluctuate, they agreed during the 2019 G7 meeting in Biarritz, to jointly bring forth a suggested international conference for Libya.¹⁵⁰ However, this was most likely a suggestion rather than a concrete decision.

¹⁴⁷ DILA, "Déclaration de M. Laurent Fabius, ministre des affaires étrangères et du développement international, sur l'accord concernant le nucléaire iranien, à Paris le 15 juillet 2015," Vie publique, July 15, 2015, <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/195603-laurent-fabius-15072015-accord-concernant-le-nucleaire-iranie>.

¹⁴⁸ Institut de Relations Internationales et Stratégiques, "Quel Est Le Bilan de La Politique Étrangère Menée Par François Hollande?"

¹⁴⁹ DILA, "Communiqué de la Présidence de la République, en date du 1er juin 2017, sur la situation en Libye," Vie publique, June 1, 2017, <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/202914-communique-de-la-presidence-de-la-republique-en-date-du-1er-juin-2017>.

¹⁵⁰ DILA, "Déclaration de M. Emmanuel Macron, Président de la République, sur les relations franco-italiennes, la question migratoire, la construction européenne et la situation en Libye, à Rome le 18 septembre 2019," Vie publique, Septembre 18, 2019, <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/270617-emmanuel-macron-18092019-france-italie>.

Later, in 2023, President Macron discussed and supported the African Union's (AU) desire to take part in the reconciliation process.¹⁵¹ The president's decisions are French-centred and anti-multilateral, which is surprising for a country promoting multilateralism. Macron supports both sides in Libya, which is in conflict with Italy, the UN and EU recognised government. Such contradiction alienates France's European partners, undermining Macron's desire for a stronger Europe.

Since 2017, bilateral governmental visits with Lebanon amount to 27,¹⁵² by far extending Libya's 9¹⁵³ and Iran's 4.¹⁵⁴ Evidently, Lebanon is important to France. In 2020, the Beirut harbour explosion further destabilised Lebanon. Within two days, Macron was on the ground to help Lebanon to extract itself out of years-long crises. Political figures gathered and agreed to act by quickly forming an inclusive government and yet, years later, little has happened;¹⁵⁵ the country remains in a deadlock. Macron was too eager to solve the issues and hastened the process of government building,¹⁵⁶ ultimately undermining his own attempts. Interestingly, there was no mention of the international support group during Macron's presidency, as if the group had become inactive or had disbanded. France also donated 400€M worth of military equipment to the Lebanese armed forces because of its "fidelity to its history and its engagement to Lebanon".¹⁵⁷

¹⁵¹ DILA, "Déclaration de M. Emmanuel Macron, président de la République, sur la situation en Libye et les relations franco-congolaises, à Brazzaville le 4 mars 2023," Vie publique, March 4, 2023, <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/288579-emmanuel-macron-04032023-france-congo-brazzaville>.

¹⁵² MEAE, "Liban Relations Bilatérales."

¹⁵³ MEAE, "Libye Relations Bilatérales."

¹⁵⁴ MEAE, "Iran Relations Bilatérales."

¹⁵⁵ DILA, "Déclaration de M. Jean-Yves Le Drian, ministre de l'Europe et des affaires étrangères, sur le processus de paix au Proche-Orient et la situation politique au Liban et en Libye, à Paris le 11 mars 2021," Vie publique, March 11, 2021, <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/278993-jean-yves-le-drian-11032021-proche-orient>.

¹⁵⁶ Les Jeunes IHEDN, "Entretien Avec Le Spécialiste Du Moyen-Orient Georges Malbrunot," Jeunes IHEDN, September 23, 2022, <https://www.jeunes-ihedn.org/2022/entretien-avec-le-specialiste-du-moyen-orient-georges-malbrunot/>.

¹⁵⁷ DILA, "Déclaration de M. Jean-Yves Le Drian, ministre de l'Europe et des affaires étrangères, sur la situation politique au Liban et sur la coopération militaire franco-libanaise, à Rome le 15 mars 2018," Vie publique, March 15, 2018, <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/205178-jean-yves-le-drian-15032018-cooperation-militaire-franco-libanaise>.

With such romanticised declaration and Hollande's paternalistic attitude, the French seemed to desire the role of the guiding and protective father. Such goodwill policies are typical of great powers.

In 2019, Iranian reformist Hassan Rouhani was re-elected, prompting Macron to congratulate him, and to further deepen bilateral relations, keep diplomatic channels open¹⁵⁸ and reaffirm their commitment to the 2015 Nuclear Deal, for which Rouhani requested the international community's contribution.¹⁵⁹ Even though Iran showed certain openness, Trump's withdrawal from the Nuclear Deal deteriorated relations; while the French believed it to be detrimental for Iran to possibly withdraw from the deal,¹⁶⁰ there was little to be done. It confirms that systemic imperatives weigh heavily on the French diplomatic abilities. Currently, the official position is back to Sarkozy's antagonism: both condemning and sanctioning of the regime, as was the case during the brutal repressions of the 2022 protests.¹⁶¹

With agility as guiding principle,¹⁶² the self-proclaimed chief mediator is constantly searching for an opportunity to make international headlines;¹⁶³ he made 140 diplomatic

¹⁵⁸ DILA, "Communiqué de la Présidence de la République, en date du 21 mai 2017, sur les élections présidentielles en Iran," Vie publique, May 21, 2017, <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/202861-communiqué-de-la-presidence-de-la-republique-en-date-du-21-mai-2017-su>.

¹⁵⁹ DILA, "Communiqué de la Présidence de la République, en date du 2 janvier 2018, sur la situation en Iran et au Moyen-Orient," Vie publique, January 2, 2018, <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/204654-communiqué-de-la-presidence-de-la-republique-en-date-du-2-janvier-2018>.

¹⁶⁰ DILA, "Déclaration à la presse de M. Jean-Yves le Drian, ministre de l'Europe et des affaires étrangères, sur les relations franco-allemandes et sur les tensions entre l'Iran et les Etats-Unis, à Paris le 19 juin 2019," Vie publique, June 19, 2019, <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/268995-jean-yves-le-drian-19062019-france-allemande-tensions-iran-etats-unis>

¹⁶¹ DILA, "Déclaration de Mme Catherine Colonna, ministre de l'Europe et des affaires étrangères, sur le conflit en Ukraine, la Chine et l'Iran, à Münster le 3 novembre 2022," Vie publique, November 3, 2022, <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/287123-catherine-colonna-03112022-politique-etrangere>.

¹⁶² Institut Français des Relations Internationales, "Europe, Sahel, Guerre En Ukraine... Quel Bilan Tirer de La Politique Étrangère Menée Par Emmanuel Macron ?," Institut Français des Relations Internationales, April 22, 2022, <https://www.ifri.org/fr/espace-media/lifri-medias/europe-sahel-guerre-ukraine-bilan-tirer-de-politique-etrangere-menee>.

¹⁶³ Romain Brunet, "Emmanuel Macron, Le Bilan (1/4): Sur La Scène Internationale, Un Président Médiateur Impuissant," France 24, March 3, 2022, <https://www.france24.com/fr/france/20220303-emmanuel-macron-le-bilan-1-4-sur-la-sc%C3%A8ne-internationale-un-pr%C3%A9sident-m%C3%A9diateur-impuissant>.

visits by the end of 2022,¹⁶⁴ even though COVID restricted traveling. Nonetheless, Sarkozy was more active with 167 visits and Hollande was by far more engaged with a total of 206 trips.¹⁶⁵ Macron seeks more a powerful stunt that makes the news rather than truly being an internationally engaged mediator. His business background and entrepreneur-like attitude has shaped his approach. In the past few years, he was one of the rare pro-European and pro-integration candidates to be elected,¹⁶⁶ yet, once in office, he actively pursued conflicting agendas with the EU or its European partners. Macron's foreign policy is pragmatic, but very confused and lacking a clear objective. He is too eager for results, which undermines his efforts and France's position.

Of strategic culture

Strategic culture is a set of means that contribute a state's pursuit of its foreign policy objectives, which is why it is strategic in nature. It is a materialisation of assets that a state can use for spreading its influence.

d. Defence industry

In European history, state building and war are inseparable. Centuries of competition has pressured the French state to develop a strong defence industry. To this day, the military industrial complex is still very reliant on the state; the latter being a client, a stakeholder and a regulator that enforces arms trade international regulations;¹⁶⁷ state institutions such as the DGA or the SDGSN act as supervisors. Some have argued that Hollande's government used diplomacy as a tool for commerce, more specifically for the defence

¹⁶⁴ Flavie Holzinger et al., "Le Bilan de La Politique Étrangère d'Emmanuel Macron En Carte," *Le Monde*, February 21, 2022, https://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2022/02/21/le-bilan-de-la-politique-etrangere-d-emmanuel-macron-en-carte_6114645_823448.html.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁶ Institut Français des Relations Internationales, "Europe, Sahel, Guerre En Ukraine... Quel Bilan."

¹⁶⁷ Benoit Rademacher, "Les Industries Françaises de Défense," *Vie Publique*, September 27, 2022, <https://www.vie-publique.fr/parole-dexpert/286199-les-industries-francaises-de-defense-par-benoit-rademacher>.

industry.¹⁶⁸ Indeed, compared to Sarkozy's peak 8.1€ billion in 2009, Hollande reached 16.9€ billion during his term, however Macron is here the true champion, with 28€ billions.¹⁶⁹ Considering that arms exports are destined to favour the balance of power, enforce alliances and cooperation, and secure French strategic autonomy, France became the 3rd biggest arms exporter in 2021.¹⁷⁰ Furthermore, the defence sector plays an important role in the economy as it creates 400,000 jobs and employs 5,000 companies all of which accounts for 25% of European capabilities;¹⁷¹ an unneglectable figure for European strategic autonomy.

e. French industry

Aside from certain rather successful economic sectors such as defence or energy, France's industry and economy has been waning. Since the 1980s, the industrial sector lost half its workforce, the equivalent of 2.2 million jobs, while its GDP share fell by 10 points to 13.4% in 2018.¹⁷² The 2008 financial crisis further exhausted the economy: since 2002 France hasn't had a trade surplus and by 2012 trade deficit reached 70€ billion.¹⁷³ Since Sarkozy, attempts were made to revitalise the industrial sector with new industrial policies. In 2020, Macron announced the COVID recovery plan *France Relance* that would particularly focus on taxation, labour law, and vocational training.¹⁷⁴ In addition to that, the *France 2030* investment plan, presented in 2021, will focus on key sectors of the industry:

¹⁶⁸ Institut de Relations Internationales et Stratégiques, "La Politique Arabe de François Hollande."

¹⁶⁹ Flavie Holzinger et al., "Le Bilan de La Politique Étrangère d'Emmanuel Macron En Carte."

¹⁷⁰ Cour des Comptes, "Le Soutien Aux Exportations de Matériel Militaire."

¹⁷¹ MEAE, "Defence Industries and Technologies," France Diplomacy, 2023, <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/french-foreign-policy/economic-diplomacy-foreign-trade/supporting-french-businesses-abroad/strategic-sector-support/defence-industries-and/>.

¹⁷² Aloïs Kirchner, "Zooming in on French Industrial Policy," Institut Montaigne, March 10, 2022, <https://www.institutmontaigne.org/en/analysis/zooming-french-industrial-policy>.

¹⁷³ Charles Bouisset, "A Soft Way to Influence Others. A Study on the Discourse of the French Institute of Poland" (2021).

¹⁷⁴ Aloïs Kirchner, "Zooming in on French Industrial Policy."

1. Energy: create new small-scale nuclear reactors, develop green hydrogen infrastructure, and decarbonise the economy
2. Transport: increase production of electric and hybrid vehicles, and create the first low carbon aircraft
3. Food: invest in a healthy, sustainable, and traceable diet
4. Healthcare: develop biopharmaceuticals against cancer and chronic diseases
5. Culture: invest in the production of cultural and creative content
6. Space & sea beds: research in space exploration and sea beds.¹⁷⁵

Though the state has been making considerable effort in boosting the economy, these revitalisation plans will most likely take years to bear fruit. Military theorist Raimondo Montecuccoli well explained the importance of a strong economy, “for war you need three things: 1. Money 2. Money 3. Money.”¹⁷⁶ Even though the end goal here is not waging war, a weak economy certainly hinders a state’s power and that, Macron seems to have well understood. While French industry is by far not as powerful as Germany’s for example, France is at an advantage in culture, a foreign policy heavyweight domain.

f. Cultural diplomacy

Its rich history and culture is certainly France’s most powerful asset. Cultural diplomacy can be defined as a “policy that involves governmental strategies and activities that promote the production, dissemination, marketing, and consumption of the arts”,¹⁷⁷ that falls under the concept of soft power,¹⁷⁸ as it aims to forge a specific image of France that attracts foreigners. The ministry of foreign affairs defines, strengthening cultural and intellectual outreach and promoting cultural and creative industries as the two

¹⁷⁵ Business France, “Presentation of the ‘France 2030’ Plan,” Business France, October 15, 2021, <https://www.businessfrance.fr/discover-france-news-presentation-of-the-france-2030-plan>.

¹⁷⁶ Alfred de Vigny, *The Warrior’s Life* (Penguin Classics, 2013).

¹⁷⁷ Kevin V. Mulcahy, *Public Culture, Cultural Identity, Cultural Policy: Comparative Perspectives*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2016. Accessed April 8, 2023, ProQuest Ebook Central.

¹⁷⁸ Charles Bouisset, “A Soft Way to Influence Others.”

fundamental pillars of cultural diplomacy.¹⁷⁹ With the 3rd largest diplomatic network in the world, just after the US and China, French culture has at its disposal the necessary tools for being promoted effectively. It is noteworthy to mention, that the leadership considers French culture as the last defender of aesthetics and excellence against American popular consumerism.¹⁸⁰

Paris's nickname the *City of Light*, infers that the city is a beacon enlightening the world. Among many other events, the Enlightenment, the French Revolution, the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen forged a strong national identity and a powerful image of a forward-thinking republican nation. The Louvre, one of the most famous museums in the world, is home to the Mona Lisa, probably the world's most notorious painting. The Louvre Abu Dhabi is a case of long-term policy involving many actors, such as private companies and cultural communities, that are not under the French government's immediate control.¹⁸¹ Paris is also iconic for its architecture: the Hausman boulevards, the Eiffel Tower, Versailles, or the Arc de Triomphe. The capital's beauty lured some of the greatest artists of the past century to experience the French lifestyle: Picasso, Matisse, Hemingway, Strauss or Kupka. Designers further contributed to making Paris one of the world's fashion capitals home to many luxury brands: LVMH, Chanel, Yves Saint Laurent, Dior, or Hermes. Language also serves as a tool for cooperation and soft power. In 2022, French was the fifth most spoken language in the world with over 270 million speakers.¹⁸² The *Organisation de la Francophonie* also acts as a forum for

¹⁷⁹ MEAE, "Diplomatie Culturelle," France Diplomatie, December 2021, <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/politique-etrangere-de-la-france/diplomatie-culturelle/>.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Sheelah Delestre, "Langues Les plus Parlées Au Monde En 2022," Statista, February 2022, <https://fr.statista.com/statistiques/1348875/langues-les-plus-parlees-au-monde/>.

54 member states, 27 observers and 7 associated states to pursue social and economic development opportunities.¹⁸³

Some claim that in the past few years, France has neglected this incredible soft power advantage,¹⁸⁴ the executive must not discard the immense power at its disposal because culture has successfully created an idealised and romanticised image of France that has been attracting tourists from all over the world. In fact, for years, it has been the most visited country in the world, reaching over 140,000 arrivals in 2021.¹⁸⁵ The *made in France* or the *French Touch* became synonymous of this elusive idea.

Of state and society relations

Leaders often have to consider society as a factor in policymaking if they want to secure their political position. In turn, society can force the executive to adjust or completely shift a policy if it hinders their interests. Pressuring the leadership can take various forms: petition, legal action or protesting, something the French are quite adept of. A 2018 research determined that 53% of 2017's protests only lasted a day, 25% lasted two days and only 2% lasted over a week.¹⁸⁶ This may be why the stereotype that France is home to procrastinators exists. Protesting is part of French identity and culture: history taught the French that citizens hold great power and can shift national policies. Unions can often be part of protests as they are organisations participating in the social dialogue and

¹⁸³ Organisation internationale de la Francophonie, "Qui Sommes-Nous ? | Organisation Internationale de La Francophonie," Francophonie, 2023, <https://www.francophonie.org/qui-sommes-nous-5>.

¹⁸⁴ Michel Duclos, "La Diplomatie d'Emmanuel Macron Ou Le Risque de La Solitude Stratégique," Institut Montaigne, October 11, 2021, <https://www.institutmontaigne.org/analyses/la-diplomatie-demmanuel-macron-ou-le-risque-de-la-solitude-strategique>.

¹⁸⁵ World Tourism Organisation, "Basic Tourism Statistics," UNWTO, December 22, 2022, <https://www.unwto.org/tourism-statistics/key-tourism-statistics>.

¹⁸⁶ Statista Research Department, "Manifestation Professionnelle : Durée Moyenne France 2017," Statista, January 2018, <https://fr.statista.com/statistiques/713651/manifestation-organisee-evenement-professionnel-france-duree-moyenne/>.

defending the rights and interests of workers.¹⁸⁷ Yet only 2.5 million in France are unionised, a much smaller number to Germany's 6 million.¹⁸⁸ There is a belief that a constructive social dialogue is impossible, and conflicts must be solved on the street; protesting is not a last resort but a means of bringing the government to the negotiation table.¹⁸⁹ The frequency with which protests occur undermine their attempts to grab the state's attention. In 2022, a research presented the French's beliefs:

- France in decline (75%) in 2022, lower to 2014 (85%).
- Increase France's power even if it hinders that of Europe (58%), in decline since 2013 (65%).
- Trust in the EU institutions is rising since 2014 (31%) to reach (50%) in 2022.
- Living in a discontented country (58%), living in an angry society (36%), only (6%) thought to live in a satisfied one.
- Biggest worries were purchasing power (54%), the environment (34%), the future of the social system, such as healthcare and retirement (26%).
- Nostalgia is strong (69%), though in decline since 2014 (74%).
- Trust in democracy is increasing (70%), but has dropped since 2014 (76%)
- Low trust in politicians (57%) and has been decreasing since 2013 (62%).¹⁹⁰

Since the 2008, every government has tried to change the economic and social systems. Sarkozy's main reforms were: *Loi Tèpa* (work, employment, purchasing power); continuity of public transport (preventing strikes from paralysing transportation systems);

¹⁸⁷ Direction de l'information légale et administrative, "Quels Sont Les Moyens d'Action Des Syndicats?," Vie Publique, January 2, 2023, <https://www.vie-publique.fr/fiches/24071-quels-sont-les-moyens-daction-des-syndicats>.

¹⁸⁸ ARTE, "Le Président Français A-t-Il Trop de Pouvoir? | ARTE Info Plus," Youtube, April 14, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PK4dUdP52-M&t=1s>

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Brice Teinturier, Salomé Quétier-Parent, and Mathieu Gallard, "Fractures Françaises - Opposition : La Bataille France Insoumise / Rassemblement National," Ipsos, October 4, 2022, <https://www.ipsos.com/fr-fr/fractures-francaises-opposition-la-bataille-france-insoumise-rassemblement-national>.

revision of the constitution; pensions in both 2007 and 2010, triggering mass protests against reforms that changed the retirement age to 62 years old and cancelled certain special treatments.¹⁹¹ Hollande's main reforms were: legalising same sex marriage; transparency of public life (mandatory declaration of heritage); prohibition of mandate cumulation; state of emergency and terrorism; euthanasia (assisted suicide for patients with terminal illnesses); green transition and climate change; liberalising the economy, also called *Loi Macron* (suppression of SNCF monopoly on transport); work reform (more flexibility and security for employees) that required the use of article 49.3.¹⁹² This specific article allows a statute to be adopted without a vote, if no vote of confidence is passed.¹⁹³ Macron's reforms followed his predecessor's: work; moralisation of political life (banning family employment); SNCF reform that caused mass protests, but was required by European agreements; suppression of the ISF which was supposed to increase free investments, but a Senate report proved that only the rich benefited; COVID recovery plan; purchasing power, also due to Gilet Jaunes protests; insurance reform; and most importantly, a retirement reform, that was postponed due to COVID-19.¹⁹⁴ In early 2023, Macron pushed for this reform, causing countrywide weeks long mass protests; the government made use of article 49.3 for the eleventh time since it entered office, marking also the hundredth time it was used in the 5th republic.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹¹ Le Point, "BILAN. Ce Que Sarkozy a Fait En Cinq Ans," Le Point, February 15, 2012, https://www.lepoint.fr/presidentielle/sarkozy-ce-qu-il-a-fait-en-cinq-ans-a-l-elysee-14-02-2012-1431302_3121.php#11.

¹⁹² Cathy Lafon, "Les 10 Lois Que l'on Retiendra Du Quinquennat de François Hollande," *Sud Ouest*, December 5, 2017, <https://www.sudouest.fr/politique/francois-hollande/les-10-lois-que-l-on-retiendra-du-quinquennat-de-francois-hollande-3467469.php>.

¹⁹³ DILA, "La Réforme de 2008 Sur La Modernisation Des Institutions," *Vie Publique*, July 26, 2019, <https://www.vie-publique.fr/eclairage/268318-la-reforme-de-2008-sur-la-modernisation-des-institutions>.

¹⁹⁴ François Vignal, "[Série] Bilan Du Quinquennat Macron: Les Principales Réformes à Retenir," *Public Senat*, August 9, 2021, <https://www.publicsenat.fr/article/parlementaire/bilan-du-quinquennat-macron-les-principales-reformes-a-retenir-190037>.

¹⁹⁵ Romain Imbach and Romain Geoffroy, "Comment Fonctionne l'Article 49.3, Utilisé Pour La Onzième Fois Par Elisabeth Borne ?," *Le Monde*, March 17, 2023, https://www.lemonde.fr/les-decodeurs/article/2023/03/17/comment-fonctionne-l-article-49-3-utilise-pour-la-onzieme-fois-par-elisabeth-borne_6146430_4355771.html.

All three presidents' popularity has been very low, coinciding with all three attempting to reform the country's economic and social system. Upon entering office, they enjoyed rather favourable ratings that would quickly plummet. An all-time low was hit by Hollande in 2014, with an unfavourable rating of over 80%. Sarkozy, stabilised around an unfavourable rating of 60% while Macron was over 70% in 2019 and 2022.¹⁹⁶

Since 2016, annual reports on the societal climate are drafted by the RAEF. Each year, the organisation outlined the need to appease, reconcile, and reunite the state and society: "Still believe in France", "Reconcile France", "Better invest for France", "Cohesion and transition: act differently" and "Give ourselves a new direction".¹⁹⁷ The 2017 report showed that inequalities and social fractures were constantly rising while the 2019 report specifically called for immediate reform of public services to answer social grievances.¹⁹⁸ Years of neglect have led to a conflictual relationship with the state.

Of domestic institutions

The way a nation's institutions are designed determines how power is distributed. Domestic institutions will determine the degree of manoeuvrability a government has in formulating and pursuing its policies.

Adopted in 1958 and amended for several times since, the 5th Republic's constitution created a "rationalised parliamentarism" with a powerful executive and a president acting

¹⁹⁶ Pierre Latrille and Federico Vacas, "Baromètre Politique Ipsos-Le Point: Marine Le Pen, Grande Gagnante de La Crise Politique?," Ipsos, April 12, 2023, <https://www.ipsos.com/fr-fr/barometre-politique-ipsos-le-point-marine-le-pen-grande-gagnante-de-la-crise-politique>.

¹⁹⁷ Conseil économique, social et environnemental, "Rapport Annuel Sur l'État de La France 2021 - Face Au Choc, Construire Ensemble La France de Demain," Vie Publique, March 30, 2023, <https://www.vie-publique.fr/rapport/279322-construire-la-france-de-demain-rapport-sur-letat-de-france-raef-2021>.

¹⁹⁸ Conseil économique, social et environnemental, "Rapport Annuel Sur l'État de La France 2020 - Se Donner Un Nouveau Cap," Vie Publique, July 9, 2020, <https://www.vie-publique.fr/rapport/275131-rapport-annuel-sur-letat-de-la-france-2020>.

as the system's keystone.¹⁹⁹ In 2008, the largest reform of the constitution modernised the institutions. For example, the use of article 49.3 was limited to finances and social security statutes.²⁰⁰ The National Assembly was also granted more power, in turn limiting that of the president. For example, if a military intervention exceeds four months, parliament must grant authorisation.²⁰¹ Nonetheless, the president's powers remain considerable, especially when parliament is dominated by the presidential party, which is why the 5th Republic has often been described as a presidential monarchy; the French paradox is the need for a powerful centralised executive but at the same time having strong parliamentary roots.²⁰²

The president names the prime minister, can address parliament in a Congress, initiate referendums, dissolve the National Assembly, request for the Constitutional Council's advice,²⁰³ and abrogate absolute power, by means of Article 16, in situations of emergency.²⁰⁴ The president has considerable influence in foreign policy and diplomacy as he can negotiate, ratify treaties, and name ambassadors.²⁰⁵ It is unsurprising that with such overlapping roles, the president can seem to be eclipsing his government. The government is tasked by Article 20 of determining and conducting the nation's politics but, if the president and the prime minister are from the same political party, they de facto

¹⁹⁹ DILA, "Comment Caractériser Le Régime Politique de La Ve République?," Vie Publique, December 7, 2022, <https://www.vie-publique.fr/fiches/38013-comment-caracteriser-le-regime-politique-de-la-ve-republique>.

²⁰⁰ DILA, "La Réforme de 2008 Sur La Modernisation Des Institutions."

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² ARTE, "Le Président Français A-t-Il Trop de Pouvoir ? | ARTE Info Plus."

²⁰³ Assemblée nationale, "Fiche de Synthèse : Présentation Synthétique Des Institutions Françaises - Rôle et Pouvoirs de l'Assemblée Nationale - Assemblée Nationale," Assemblée nationale, 2019, <https://www2.assemblee-nationale.fr/decouvrir-l-assemblee/role-et-pouvoirs-de-l-assemblee-nationale/les-institutions-francaises-generalites/presentation-synthetique-des-institutions-francaises>.

²⁰⁴ DILA, "Quels Sont Les Pouvoirs Exceptionnels Définis Par l'Article 16 de La Constitution ?," Vie Publique, December 12, 2022, <https://www.vie-publique.fr/fiches/273931-les-pouvoirs-exceptionnels-definis-par-l'article-16-de-la-constitution>.

²⁰⁵ DILA, "Quel Est Le Rôle Du Président de La République Dans Les Institutions ?," Vie Publique, 2023, <https://www.vie-publique.fr/fiches/19414-quel-est-le-role-du-president-de-la-republique-dans-les-institutions>.

share that role.²⁰⁶ The government can declare the state of emergency, but an extension beyond twelve days must be authorised by parliament,²⁰⁷ and Article 49.3 is a tool solely available to the prime minister.²⁰⁸

To have absolute majority in the National assembly, a party must have 289 seats out of 577. In the 2007 parliamentary elections, the two major parties were the right-wing presidential party UMP (313 seats) and the Socialists (186 seats).²⁰⁹ The UMP had over half the seats in the National Assembly absolute majority, granting the government institutional freedom of action. Indeed, 49.3 article, often used when a political deadlock obstructs a law's adoption, was not used once during those five years.²¹⁰ In 2012, President Hollande's Socialist Party had only a relative majority with 280 seats, followed by the UMP with 194 seats.²¹¹ The government of Prime Minister Valls used Article 49.3 6 times and was opposed by 3 no confidence votes.²¹² The government experienced resistance to its policies, namely relating on issues of social security and pension reforms. The 2017 legislative elections gave Macron's party absolute majority (308 seats), the right-wing *Les Républicains* came second (112 seats).²¹³ The government of Edouard Philippe used Article 49.3 only once and was confronted with one no confidence vote.²¹⁴ The institutional political landscape had changed; the socialists' presence eroded in

²⁰⁶ Assemblée nationale, "Fiche de Synthèse: Le Gouvernement - Rôle et Pouvoirs de l'Assemblée Nationale - Assemblée Nationale," Assemblée nationale, 2019, <https://www2.assemblee-nationale.fr/decouvrir-l-assemblee/role-et-pouvoirs-de-l-assemblee-nationale/les-institutions-francaises-generalites/le-gouvernement>.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ ARTE, "Le Président Français A-t-Il Trop de Pouvoir ? | ARTE Info Plus."

²⁰⁹ DILA, "Les Élections Législatives de 2007," Vie Publique, July 21, 2022, <https://www.vie-publique.fr/eclairage/285785-resultats-des-elections-legislatives-2007>.

²¹⁰ Romain Imbach and Romain Geoffroy, "Comment Fonctionne l'Article 49.3, Utilisé Pour La Onzième Fois Par Elisabeth Borne?."

²¹¹ DILA, "Les Élections Législatives de 2012," Vie Publique, June 8, 2022, <https://www.vie-publique.fr/eclairage/285715-resultats-des-elections-legislatives-2012>.

²¹² Romain Imbach and Romain Geoffroy, "Comment Fonctionne l'Article 49.3, Utilisé Pour La Onzième Fois Par Elisabeth Borne?."

²¹³ DILA, "Les Élections Législatives de 2017," Vie Publique, August 8, 2022, <https://www.vie-publique.fr/eclairage/286001-resultats-des-elections-legislatives-2017>.

²¹⁴ Romain Imbach and Romain Geoffroy, "Comment Fonctionne l'Article 49.3, Utilisé Pour La Onzième Fois Par Elisabeth Borne?."

favour of the presidential party. The far right also made an entrance into the National Assembly. Traditional parties' domination of the institutions was slowly fading in favour of new political forces. In the 2022 legislative elections, the presidential party did not secure an absolute majority (244 seats); the left-wing coalition Nupes came second (127 seats) while the far-right RN secured 89 seats.²¹⁵ The latest elections showed further erosion of traditional parties. In the current institutional framework, the government is facing severe pushback and used 11 times Article 49.3 and faced 12 no confidence votes.²¹⁶

There are multiple bodies supporting and advising the government on policymaking. Consequently, these hold immense influence on foreign policy, as the information they provide is the basis the executive uses to act on. Intelligence services are essential in gathering such information; the main agencies are the DGSE (foreign intelligence), the DGSI (internal security), and the DRM (military intelligence). The *Conseil d'État* is the highest administrative jurisdiction that can either be an advisor or rule on legal issues.²¹⁷ The *Conseil économique, social et environnemental* focusses on economic, societal, and the environmental issues; they draft annual reports on the state of the nation. The *Conseil Constitutionnel* assures that statutes, policies, or international agreements are compatible with the constitution.²¹⁸ Over the past decade, the council has had to rule over an ever-growing number of issues. Under Sarkozy 617 decisions were taken, 938 with Hollande,

²¹⁵ DILA, "Législatives 2022 : Résultats Définitifs et Composition de La Nouvelle Assemblée," Vie Publique, June 20, 2022, <https://www.vie-publique.fr/en-bref/285441-legislatives-2022-resultats-definitifs-et-composition-de-l-assemblee>.

²¹⁶ Romain Imbach and Romain Geoffroy, "Comment Fonctionne l'Article 49.3, Utilisé Pour La Onzième Fois Par Elisabeth Borne?."

²¹⁷ Assemblée Nationale, "Fiche de Synthèse : Le Conseil d'État - Rôle et Pouvoirs de l'Assemblée Nationale - Assemblée Nationale," Assemblée Nationale, 2019, <https://www2.assemblee-nationale.fr/decouvrir-l-assemblee/role-et-pouvoirs-de-l-assemblee-nationale/les-institutions-francaises-generalites/le-conseil-d-etat>.

²¹⁸ Assemblée nationale, "Fiche de Synthèse : Le Conseil Constitutionnel - Rôle et Pouvoirs de l'Assemblée Nationale - Assemblée Nationale," Assemblée nationale, 2019, <https://www2.assemblee-nationale.fr/decouvrir-l-assemblee/role-et-pouvoirs-de-l-assemblee-nationale/les-institutions-francaises-generalites/le-conseil-constitutionnel>.

and 1467 with Macron, 1150 in being under his first mandate.²¹⁹ More of the council's ruling was required over electoral issues, especially for the National Assembly, and over compatibility of statutes' with the constitution.

The *Conseil de défense et sécurité nationale*, composed of the president, a few ministers and advisors, defines military programming and foreign military operations, designs responses to major crises and policies for internal security.²²⁰ While this council may be taking the final decision, it is backed by the *Secrétariat général de la Défense et de la Sécurité nationale* (SGDSN); the latter is truly in charge of anticipating, acting and preventing threats to national security.²²¹ The SGDSN indicates the main issues that must be addressed. The 2022 foreign policy objectives delineated by the SGDSN were: having robust nuclear strength; assure territorial autonomy; a modern military adapted to the modern threats; prevent cyber-attacks; increase defence spending; bolster the NATO alliance and promote EU strategic autonomy; protect French economic, industrial, scientific interests; safeguard the international order.²²²

²¹⁹ Conseil Constitutionnel, "Bilan Statistique - Second Semestre 2022 | Conseil Constitutionnel," Conseil Constitutionnel, December 31, 2022, <https://www.conseil-constitutionnel.fr/bilan-statistique>.

²²⁰ Secrétariat général de la défense et de la sécurité nationale, "Rapport d'Activité 2021," Vie Publique, 2021, https://medias.vie-publique.fr/data_storage_s3/rapport/pdf/286044.pdf.

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² Ibid.

VI. On the imperatives' relevance

French territories span across the globe, far from its seat of power in the capital. To keep these territories under control it requires certain power capabilities, which France does have. But this territorial imperative means that the French must pursue policies that consider these territories, in other words, a policy with strong emphasis on national interests. Furthermore, this global presence means that France must have naval capabilities to connect with its territories. The desire for greater maritime ambitions comes into conflict with a long tellurocratic tradition required by centuries of European competition and warfare. However, since European integration has encouraged cooperation instead of war, France has the opportunity to finally focus its attention to the sea. Europe can help its nation states to secure greater influence and guarantee more power globally, especially since its members are relatively small in size. The French are very well positioned in the system and with a UNSC permanent seat with veto power and nuclear weapons means that France has a seat at the great powers table. The current international order cements the country's position, which is why France is part of many international organisations.

Centralisation is a key feature of the French state. Not only does the political life revolves around the capital, but so is the case for society and culture. Centralisation means that for change to happen, it must be in Paris, the seat of power. However, centralisation also means it may be easier for the ruling class to administer use national resources. Geographic imperatives for security are no longer essential given the existence of the EU, it offers the state the opportunity to shift its focus to its other territories that have different needs. Nonetheless the greatest advantage of French territory is the soil's fertility and naturally well-irrigated soil. Not only does it provide sufficient food production, but it also places France as the biggest producer in Europe, a strategic position. However,

climate change has shown how destabilising it can be, and is endangering the fertility of French soil. Climate change is a threat to national security. A great weakness of the country is its heavy reliance on foreign energy imports, meaning it is very vulnerable to systemic imperatives. Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, energy became of strategic importance. Even its green transition plan, partly based on nuclear energy, is reliant on foreign resources, namely uranium.

Metropolitan France is the most populated region, and the disparity gives demographic dominance of the core over the overseas territories. The location of overseas territories can further accentuate that because some territories such as New Caledonia are in a region of strategic importance. The diversity of France's populations can also affect degrees of importance: diasporas can easily weigh on political decisions. Nonetheless, the state has developed infrastructure in all of its territories to ensure development. For example, harbours are ideal for international trade while airports easily provide regular connections with all of France.

To increase the nation's potential, the executive has conceived plans for greater competitiveness. As if it were a planned economy, the state programs the necessary changes in various strategic sectors such as research and development or AI. The latter is a competitive field in which any country that desires to be a power of some importance must pursue. To be competitive, a state must be innovative and seek the latest technological developments. However, to support development, a state needs a resilient economy, which is France's greatest weakness. With an economy with a negative trade balance that is reliant on imports, its relative potential is feeble. The state has been indebting itself because of large expenses on public administration and social security which, in a way, create the French socio-economic model. France must revive its economy if it wishes to remain a relevant power that can exert influence and finance its

military. The latter is a useful source of hard power still extensively used today: France has multiple ongoing operations, many within the framework of international organisations, and has several military bases across the globe. The military is means of protecting the world order and of serving foreign policy objectives, which is why France has recently massively invested in the modernisation of its defensive means. In essence, for France to continue with great power politics, a strong economy will finance the country's desire to solidify its position in the system.

In a way, the Arab Spring is an early symptom of the international system's changing nature in the 2010s. The fragmentation of power and the rising competition between great powers and regional powers has led to high instability and insecurity. The American shift to Asia to contain China has caused them to neglect and withdraw from other regions. The US no longer desired to be the world's policeman, allowing for other nations to pursue greater aspirations. Xi Jinping, on the other hand, placed its attention on the developing world by providing economic development and covering sovereign debt; the Chinese diplomatic model has in fact given Beijing leverage and possibly fatal influence over many poorer nations. Debt trap diplomacy provides China with support to rise to its rightful place as global leader. Xi Jinping's desires have progressively shattered the unipolar world where other nations such as Russia desire to become a pole of power. Russian foreign policy is based on pragmatism with short-term personal interests and defiance to the West. They often offer marginalised regimes with security in exchange for natural resources. While they have successfully challenged western, and especially French influence, in Africa, their foreign policy has no clear long-term objective except to reinstate Russia as a great power; one with imperialistic ambitions and capabilities. Putin has to a degree managed to bring Russia back into great power politics, but

unfortunately for him, his war in Ukraine has so far only succeeded in bringing back war to a continent in which armed conflict was no longer believed to be a possibility and, more ironically, in proving Russia's waning military strength and status as a great power. Yet, he is not the only great power fearing for its status; the UK and France are both waning powers fearing for their status. The UK's shift towards the English-speaking world, instead of Europe, is the sign they fear of becoming just another European country. Only the shadow of the once powerful empire, they are struggling to find their place in this shifting system. As their position is not guaranteed, they are faced with an identity crisis; a similar one faced by France. Though the latter has not pursued a stronger independent policy, it tries to assert its position through Europe. Indeed, integration would provide the French with more means and power to cement their position. However, the contradicting policies, where both European integration and national interest are combined, undermine French efforts but alienating its allies. France and the UK are very much alike: they are old and waning powers, in a world of fierce competition. It could serve them both to have closer ties; in Europe, cooperation and integration does not undermine a country's independence as much as it guarantees a future in a more resilient and powerful political entity.

The effects of fragmentation in the international system has had identical repercussions at the regional level, where multiple actors are trying to gain the upper hand. Turkey, for example, pursues national policies that directly clash with its NATO allies. Egypt is pursuing stronger ties with Europe while competing with Turkey. The Gulf states seek their share of power and both hard and soft approaches are useful to each a dominant position. America's decision to rely on regional allies instead of guaranteeing security itself, has actually opened the door for competition and caused a "may the best state win" situation. Regional actors may acknowledge that fragmentation is very dangerous for

security, but each believe that none, other than them, can guarantee a safe environment. Furthermore, pragmatic attitudes, driven by the lack of a higher authority that would ensure peace, needed to be adopted given the rise of ISIS. The latter easily recruited from socio-economically marginalised sections of society around the world, regional actors needed to adopt. All sides of the Mediterranean were faced with similar socio-economic issues. In Europe, economic stagnation led to polarised societies, where populism would find root. Russia would use the growing resentment to undermine European unity and security. But the rise of nationalist governments with various forms of populist rhetoric did not solely occur in Europe, countries such as Turkey, India, China, or the US would be exposed to similar situations. Such leaders emphasise national identity and uniqueness in foreign policy, meaning that their policies easily polarise the system. In a way, Trump's desire to make America great again is the result of being challenged by another great power. His policies aggravated the global order by undermining international institutions supposed to guarantee stability. Adding to that, the COVID-19 pandemic that further strained economies, divided societies, and increased security imperatives. Nonetheless, the multiple shared crises have successfully been managed by Europe; its members have managed to find strength in unity, which in the current political environment, is essential. The EU can build on its members' existing potential to promote greater strength and resilience. The case studies of Libya, Lebanon, and Iran show quite well how global and regional developments have impacted the region. Libya's key position on the southern coast of the Mediterranean gives it utmost importance because its domestic situation easily affects the stability of its northern neighbours. The military intervention that ousted Gaddafi from power has only succeed in creating a volatile environment where power is shattered between multiple actors, each backed by a variety of foreign powers, who's interests in Libya may be stability, or instability. An instable Libya is an opportunity to

fragilise European unity. The French acknowledge that, and further understanding that hard power cannot solve the crisis, France has opted for investment and diplomacy. The former truly shows France's interests in Libya because it finances activities related to security, namely controlling trafficking and smuggling; only then diplomacy follows. France's is faced with a difficult political landscape in which it has a hard time selecting the proper strategy. Lebanon is less of a security imperative as the country is located in the Levant, a strategic region indeed, but not one as close and with such great destabilising capacity as Libya does. Rather the main interest in Lebanon is maintain influence. French soft power is visible through its economic, political, and especially, cultural activity. In Lebanon we can see the French using cultural diplomacy as a primary tool for influence; it allows France to keep a strong foothold in the region. Unfortunately, French involvement has not succeeded in bringing a solution to a country faced with chronic instability for years. The fragmented political landscape proves extremely difficult to solve the multiple crises. The French may use multilateralism to find a compromise however, but given that other foreign actors are involved, namely Iran, a resolution will first require France to engage with the latter. For any cooperation between Iran and the West, Iranian leadership must be willing to interact, in other words it must be ready to make concessions. Without a compromise on the nuclear program, no other progress can be made. Finding a diplomatic solution with Iran would ease regional tensions because Iran could press its proxies to adopt amenable postures. Yet, since a more radical government has entered office, the fragmented environment has played in Teheran's favour; it can pursue power seeking influence that further polarise the region. French diplomatic efforts are very much limited by Iran's domestic situation, one that can hardly be influenced.

Overall, the lack of an overarching power in the international system has led to a restrictive environment of ever-growing competition. Systemic imperatives and regional instability clearly signal a need for France to shift back to the essence of the state: security for survival. Libya, Lebanon, and Iran also show reaction to the wider polarisation of the system and in all three cases; greater insecurity has only hindered stability. All cases show how multilateralism is an essential component of French foreign policy. This objectives of this approach vary; multilateralism can be a means of securing national interests, but it also can be used to reach greater regional stability. The former is a French-centric policy while the latter is a soft power strategy in great power politics. French multilateralism's varying nature can be confusing or even undermining because its allies will be wary of a policy with a shifty essence.

The analysis of French domestic factors show how the state is an organic structure led by and shaped by its leaders. Because of the presidents' dominant position, their character and perceptions have determined how France behaves in international politics. Sarkozy was energetic but cleaving, making him a difficult partner. His personality easily took on the role of war leader; Libya required quick and decisive action. Diplomacy, the main approach to solve issues with Lebanon and Iran, was relayed to the background. Action suited more Sarkozy's character. Hollande was much more appeasing and friendly; he improved relations his predecessor had damaged, and his multilateral efforts were quite successful, especially with Iran. In regard to Lebanon, Hollande's was almost paternalistic as he wanted to guide the nation out of the crisis. His more amical character has encouraged cooperation; even though we did not shy away from hard action, he strongly advocated for diplomatic resolution, fitting the results attained with Iran. Hollande's attitude proved to its allies that France can be relied upon, and that it will seek

a common goal together. Macron is dynamic and his business-like attitude has caused him to hasten diplomatic efforts; he is too eager to have results. This was evident in the Beirut Harbour Explosion; Macron rushed to help but did not succeed in bringing any tangible result. His approach in Lebanon shows his overwhelming eagerness; in Libya, we see him following differing agendas that undermine multilateralism and trust. Finally, with Iran, we see him abiding to multilateralism and condemning the regime. Macron seems to desire cooperation but then may decide for policies that clash with its allies. Being pragmatic is necessary in the deeply competitive environment but, it should not harm France's position. Macron's ambiguity, his desire for making the news, his aspirations of being a mediator and problem solver have mainly puzzled France's allies as to what it might do. Macron may be embodying a wider issue: what is France's role in the world, what should the country aim for, is France still capable of imposing its worldview?

The strategic culture serves as tools for French capabilities: the defence industry is one of Europe's largest and the country's arms sales have constantly increased since 2011. The sector serves to preserve the balance of power. However, France's overall industrial capacity has been shrinking for decades; without a strong industry, one cannot expect to play great power politics. All three presidents, especially Macron, have tried to revitalise the industry; he has introduced several investment plans in multiple strategic sectors. Unfortunately, these plans will require years to truly take effect, meaning that France's power, in the short term, will be undermined.

Culture is a set of values and norms; shaping these is the most challenging and time-consuming foreign policy approach, as it takes decades to mould beliefs. However, there is no more powerful long-term strategy: once values are shaped, a culture will easily

attract and appeal to an individual, making him or her much more likely to pursue closer ties with that specific culture. A bond will be created that will eventually be passed down to future generations. France's greatest asset is culture; it is a pillar of its own in foreign policy that has the infrastructure to promote the country and the language. Culture can act as a forum for cooperation and development; private institutions, such as the Louvre, are extremely useful because they offer greater liberty in promoting culture. Such institutions serve the state's interests indirectly. Culture diplomacy is, especially in times of waning influence, a flexible strategy that can easily reposition and strengthen France's position. Unfortunately, the main issue is that culture diplomacy is extremely costly and without a strong economy that can finance it, efforts will be crippled.

Years of neglect has led to a conflictual and explosive relationship between the state and society. Macron's government has been forced to impose its reforms on a population no longer willing to listen. No social dialogue between the groups exist; if society wants the isolated leadership to negotiate, it must take it to the streets. France's economic decline created a general feeling among the population that France is waning: the French are declinist, discontent, nostalgic and greatly distrustful of politicians and democracy. Considering that all three presidents since 2008 deemed a remodelling of state expenditure necessary, there is evidently a crisis in France's budget: the declining economy can no longer support the socio-economic model. Every government that tried to change was faced with resistance and great unpopularity; society does not seem aware of the severe challenges the country is facing. The state does not exist to serve its citizens but to protect and ensure a better life for them; this may often mean that the state will have to pursue policies that do not please society.

The French constitution creates a very powerful executive in a very centralised state. The president has considerable power over foreign policy and diplomacy, meaning it can easily shape the state's behaviour. Presidential domination is further accentuated when parliament is dominated by his party; in this case, the executive truly became all powerful, while parliament becomes more of a supporting legal framework for the executive to freely pursue its policies. However, the government is challenged by parliament if it must use article 49.3; the more this article is invoked, the more is power balanced between the government and parliament. With article 49.3, the government imposes its will on the institutions, in turn hindering its legitimacy. The political landscape since 2017 has seen voters turn away from traditional left and right parties in favour of new parties that would address their grievances. But these same parties would quickly face both institutional and societal dislike.

Advisory bodies are hugely influence on policymaking and adoption. For the latter, the *Conseil Constitutionnel* must confirm statutes' constitutionality. Since Sarkozy, the council's has had to rule over a constantly rising number of statutes, reaching well over a thousand rulings during Macron's presidency. The council work proves that checks and balance still correctly function in the French democratic system, but it also reflect the severe political polarisation and societal dissatisfaction in French society. The SGDSN is the body that truly shapes foreign policy because it identifies the threats and determines the guidelines necessary to contain them. Its word may be advisory, but it is in fact a policy to be followed. However, how leaders will understand these policies recommendations will determine how policies will be shaped. Nonetheless, the SGDSN may not have the power to make the final decision, but it decides what the final decision should be. In some way, that is true power.

The French response to systemic imperatives was to firmly commit to their traditional foreign policy: national independence and multilateralism. The former is visible through various strategic commitments taken over the past decade. France pursued military operations, mostly within international institutional frameworks, economic partnerships, with strong security emphases; diplomacy was even perceived as a tool for arms sales. National independence is a key feature partly because the French enjoy designing policies that respond to their needs, but also because it is an expression of national identity, one that desires freedom and independence. Multilateralism is the backbone of French foreign policy; international institutions bind France's actions within a legal framework. Indeed, it may restrict the state's action but more essentially it gives it legitimacy. The current world order is favourable to France, so it is in its interest to keep it alive. Multilateralism can give the French both the role of mediator and more influence because it can be backed by allies. The strong emphasis placed on multilateralism could also be seen as a tacit acknowledgement of a certain weakness. France does not have the capacity of acting alone as it does not have the ability or the power to do it. Its multilateralism is imbedded in pragmatism because France is willing to cooperate with non-democratic governments to further its interests. Promoting democracy becomes of secondary importance; a state can pursue ideal-based policies only if it does not threaten its security. Democracy is instead a political discourse justifying and legitimising foreign policy. Multilateralism has had varying degrees of success; in Lebanon and Libya, no lasting solution was reached so far. However, the failure is also due to the fragmented geopolitical landscape in these nations. Any lasting solutions would require a more inclusive and more pragmatic solution; there needs to be consensus from all actors, including foreign powers. For the French to succeed in multilateralism, it must be a policy of inclusiveness, cooperation, and compromise. This means that the French must also be ready to concede on their strong

desire for national independence, and instead favour an agenda that truly incorporates their allies.

VII. Final remarks

The contribution of this thesis is to explore the factors that have defined French foreign policy since the Arab Spring. By means of the Neoclassical Realist model of analysis, it was possible to describe the strengths and weaknesses that geographic and structural factors offer France, while identifying the systemic and domestic imperatives that may be threats or opportunities in foreign policy decision-making. The selected case studies embody the varying nature the Middle Eastern and North African crises and allow us to see how the French responded to these imperatives. This thesis explores the origin of Neoclassical Realism as a theory before analysing the relative potential of France, in other words, the power it can assemble; the structural modifiers, which influence France's place in the system; the nature of the international system; and the domestic factors that affect policy making. The latter is certainly one of the most interesting contribution that NCR theory has; it is at the domestic level that we can see how domestic politics can influence foreign policy. The Neoclassical Realist model allows us to see where the French decision making originates from.

France has many strengths that can secure its position in the system, it has territories across the globe, making it a relevant actor in multiple regions; a strong culture and a well-developed diplomatic service; many global allies and partners backed by a reliable defence industry; and it is well positioned within the existing international order. However, its economic weakness and ambiguous foreign policy proves to be its greatest weakness. More clearly define guidelines would be an opportunity for France to affirm its political position in the system and its trustworthiness. If France wishes to hold onto its power, it must first cede some. More cooperative and inclusive policies can guarantee greater potential and thus, greater power. With a continent whose motto is *United in*

diversity, many opportunities present themselves to countries that desire greater importance in the world.

French presidents and domestic institutions, more specifically the SGDSN, are the most influential domestic factors in foreign policy making. The advisory council defines what are the threats to national security, and the executive follows that advice. Leaders will transform the recommendations into a concrete policy; here their attitude and character will influence their approach to understanding and applying the policy. Thus, state leaders' dominant position means that they have primacy in conducting foreign policy at the domestic level. Nonetheless, strategic culture and society have considerable influence over domestic issues. The former is a tool to pursue foreign policy, but it is also a domestic concern because French economic power has been waning for years, which in turn affects the country's ability to maintain an influential foreign policy because the economy can no longer sustain the country's socio-economic model. Without a strong economy, a country can hardly dream of playing great power politics.

In the international system, the gradual withdrawal of the US as the world's policeman has given other powers the opportunity to rise, leading to competition and polarisation of global politics. Leaders with strong personalities were able to come to power by promoting nationalistic policies that would challenge established rules or institutions. Other factors have contributed to the rising instability and restrictiveness of the political environment such as the rise of populism, ISIS and terror attacks, the COVID-19 pandemic, or the War in Ukraine. In the Middle East and North Africa, the political order was undermined by its lingering socio-economic problems. As power had fragmented, the geopolitical reality became a world where multiple foreign and regional powers challenge each other. The French approach in Libya, Lebanon, and Iran followed their

longstanding practice of multilateralism. In Libya, its purpose was to guarantee security; the North African country's potential to undermine European stability compelled France to remain involved. The decisions it has taken aim to fulfil French-centred interests. In Lebanon, the French desire to keep their influence, which is why cultural diplomacy is widely used. In this case, multilateralism is a tool, for playing great power politics, that promotes France as a mediator. However, its potential is limited when it comes to Iran. The latter's openness is influenced by domestic forces. Here, France firmly aligns itself with its allies and pursues a multilateralism that is more inclusive; it realises it does not have the potential of dealing with Iran on its own. Overall, the cases show that multilateralism serves national independence. The issue of using multilateralism for multiple different objectives is that it becomes difficult to trust France's intentions which only hinders its own goals.

An additional study of French foreign policy, through NCR, in other regions of strategic importance, such as Asia-Pacific, would help to confirm this thesis' findings. Further study into the correlation between the American withdrawal from the MENA and the rise of multiple powers could shed some light on the impacts it had on the international system. Regarding domestic factors, diving more into the socio-economic issues and the policies implemented in France could strengthen the claim that a weaker economy has caused weaker foreign policy potential. Finally, a study of the perception of French multilateralism by its European allies could give a clearer image of France's foreign policy and its attempts to promote a more unified Europe. who are important players in France's desires for a strategically autonomous Europe.

*Opinions not accompanied by knowledge are all
without beauty - Plato*

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