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FRENCH SECURITY AND DEFENSE UNDER SARKOZY AND CHIRAC.
The Discursive Reconstruction of Autonomy, Integration, and Identity


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Synopsis

This study attempts to understand and explain the specific configurations of autonomist and integrative policies of France under the presidents Jacques Chirac and Nicolas Sarkozy. It tries to provide answers to the question of whether there is continuity or change in this configuration and its underlying foreign policy identity. For this purpose, it focuses on European security and defense and NATO as the central realms of French security and defense policies. The study analyzes Chirac’s failed and Sarkozy’s successful policies of NATO reintegration (1995-1997 and 2007-2009). It further investigates the Libyan war to enable a richer analysis of the ramifications of NATO reintegration. Written mostly after the end of Sarkozy’s term, this dissertation looks at his presidency as a whole.

The study gives testament to important changes in the French conceptualization of the European security and defense architecture. It argues for a normalization of French CSDP policies, and it unveils an ex-post re-signification of NATO reintegration. The study argues that the scope of integrative policies has increased, whereas the relevance of autonomy has decreased. It contends that a new French foreign policy identity and a new approach to security and defense cooperation have come into being. The study also concludes that these developments have survived the change in the presidency from Sarkozy to François Hollande.

By applying the discourse-theoretical framework of the Essex School in combination with methods from the tradition of Interpretive Policy Analysis, the study makes a novel contribution to the existing body of literature on French security and defense policies. In a constructivist spirit, it adopts an unbiased position towards material and ideational factors, while integrating language into the explanatory process. In doing so, the study combines the
state of the art on French (foreign policy) exceptionalism with a thorough investigation of political struggle on policies and identity.

**Outline of the Dissertation**

This study attempts to understand and explain the specific configurations of autonomist and integrative security and defense policies of France under the presidents Jacques Chirac and Nicolas Sarkozy. It tries to provide answers to the question of whether there is continuity or change in this configuration and its underlying foreign policy identity. For this purpose, the study focuses on European security and defense and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) as the central realms of French security and defense policies. With the French return in the integrated command structures of NATO since 2009, these policies and their repercussions on the French foreign policy identity have been widely discussed in the political elite and scholarship alike. However, huge disagreements on the interpretation of these policies and their consequences remain. For addressing shortcomings in the literature with regard to the conceptualization and understanding of ideational and political change (or continuity), this study analyzes executive and parliamentary discourses on foreign, security and defense policies. The use of the theoretical framework of the Essex School with its *logics* approach allows for analyzing social rules and discursive structures in conjunction with political agency that tries to construct hegemonic political projects. Combined with interpretive methods, this approach can weigh different discursive elements against each other in their relevance for policymaking and explain why a certain project has been chosen at the expense of another. I argue that NATO reintegration mattered more than observers originally thought because it was embedded into a change of French security and defense policies in Europe and its identity narratives. The study demonstrates that due to significant disappointments with the EU’s effectiveness and ability to exert agency, the French approach to these policies was largely emptied of its defining identity dimension and was considerably normalized and pragmatized. On these grounds, NATO reintegration has been re-signified post factum to represent another normal option for French security and defense policies that no longer necessarily has to be used to strengthen European defense. The scope of integrative policies has thus increased, whereas the relevance of autonomy has decreased. For these reasons, French foreign policy identity and its realm of appropriate policy choices has changed in a way that was overlooked by prior explanations. Its normative rationalities (Hopf 2002, 16ff.) have shifted. Ultimately, the results are analyzed in the light of signs for continuity or change under president François Hollande in an epilogue to this study.

Part I, chapter 1 presents research on French foreign policy identity and its deriving security and defense policies extensively. The chapter discusses the multilayered Gaullist concept of autonomy with regard to European policy choices and those for the Atlantic Alliance. Most notably, it uses this legacy to explain the preferences for European cooperation in opposition to integration in NATO and showing too much closeness with the U.S.; this restraint has had as its most prominent symbol de Gaulle’s decision to leave the alliance’s command structures. Existing scholarship unveils how this configuration of policies functioned as *raison d’état* or identity construction of French foreign policy until after the end of the Cold War. Approaching the 1989/91 watershed, the existing research shows how France opened up its autonomy approach towards European cooperation and integration while maintaining its distance towards NATO and the Americans throughout the 1990s and the early 2000s. In this context, the scholarly debate between identity/ ideational explanatory factors for this configuration and rational choice approaches will gain
importance. With regard to Sarkozy’s NATO reintegration policy in 2007, it will be argued that an overemphasis of continuity, based on rational choice assumptions and a hierarchy between interest-related and ideational explanations, covers changes in French foreign policy identity and policymaking that emerges in these years. The chapter finally exposes why a discourse analysis that blends the investigation of “self-interpretations” (Glynos and Howarth 2007) with the construction of hegemonic political projects and linguistic methods through the logics approach of the Essex School enriches the study of French security and defense policy and identity by explaining the relevance and weight of particular discursive elements for policymaking. In doing so, we can improve our understanding of continuities and changes in French identity and policies and of the relevance of particular identity elements at specific points in time and with regard to specific issues.

Chapter 2 goes back to the theoretical basics and delves deeper into constructivism and discourse analysis as the methodological fundamentals of this dissertation. Departing from the development of a constructivist research program in International Relations and Foreign Policy Analysis since the 1980s, it will be argued why the poststructuralist, discursive tradition of constructivist scholarship is preferred as conceptual framework against cultural approaches; the main reason for this is the conceptualization of (in)stability and contingency in the discursive tradition, which allows for a better capture of political struggles for hegemony, and a deeper understanding of continuities and changes on various levels. The chapter then proceeds to discussing Foucault, Critical Discourse Analysis, and the discourse theory of the Essex School. I will opt for the latter school as the primary, poststructuralist methodological framework for my analysis because it enables an unbiased analysis of both structure and agency in an intersubjective setting. I will borrow though from Critical Discourse Analysis’ textual approach and Interpretive Policy Analysis (see below) for operationalizing some aspects of the Essex School’s logics, especially the fantasmatic logic (efforts at persuasion).

Having established this methodological framework, chapter 3 deepens the debate of the discursive explanatory approach. It describes this approach as interpretive process-tracing. For this reason, the chapter will start with a discussion of some mechanism literature in more detail, and opt for understanding mechanisms as analytical constructs that help the researcher in structuring experience. I will maintain that the Essex School’s theoretical approach can analyze agency and structure through its logics approach (the social, the political, and the fantasmatic persuasiveness) as suggested in the book from Glynos and Howarth (2007). I will argue though that Glynos’ and Howarth’s presentation of fantasmatic logics needs to be operationalized with techniques from the tradition of Interpretive Policy Analysis. Framing, narratives, and metaphors will be introduced as investigative techniques subsequently. Next to their literary meaning and status as analytical units, narratives are also conceptualized as explanatory strategies consistent with the linguistic epistemology.

The chapter closes with three more sections: first, I have included a brief note on my personal approach to critical analysis, in which I take the rather restraint, Foucauldian position of showing the contingency of things. Next, the three cases of this study – NATO reintegration and the launch of CSDP under Chirac (1995-1998), NATO reintegration under Sarkozy (2007-2009), and the Libyan war (2011-12) – will be presented to argue for their relevance in analyzing French security and defense. The 1990s case study is necessary for making a claim for discursive change in the latter cases. The two Sarkozy cases will give testament to further changes between the two periods, but the Libyan war was also chosen to see how the institutional policies of the two former cases work out in a crisis situation. Finally, the chapter concludes with a section on the research process. This section
describes the empirical apparatus of presidential and parliamentary documents that has been chosen for the discourse analysis, and how it has been edited. It presents the practical conduct of the research process, which draws on qualitative content analysis and open coding to increase the reliability of the discourse analysis and make it more workable.

Part II of the dissertation begins with an introduction that puts the empirical analysis into various contexts. First, the institutional and agentive features of French foreign policy discourse (its *structure*) will be laid out, so that this does not have to be done extensively at the beginning of each empirical chapter. While the centrality of presidential and executive leadership in foreign, security, and defense policies is confirmed, more recent constitutional changes have increased the powers of parliament. Second, an overview on the French party system will be given in order to make the positions that are taken in the discourse more comprehensible. The chapters will, however, still introduce major contextual aspects and developments that are pertaining to them.

Chapter 4 contributes the first of three discourse analyses of French NATO and European/EU policies in security and defense. It starts with president Chirac’s failed attempt at NATO reintegration between 1995 and 1997 and the launch of CSDP. The analysis discusses how the NATO reintegration policy relates to lessons from the end of the Cold, the role of the U.S. in the new world order, and how France can relate to this. Whereas the right majority maintains that these changes in world order allow for reintegration without giving up Gaullism, representations of U.S. dominance and processes of othering the Americans hinder reintegration principally on the left. Only in the EU can *grandeur*, autonomy, and the maintenance of a global role for France be reconciled, whereas the right majority connects these aspects conditionally to NATO reintegration, too. The political logics of equivalence and difference, which I use as analytical mechanisms in this study, will be of particular use to explain the differences between the various discursive projects. Discussing European security and defense policies, it will become clear that Europe puissance is built on a political identity project of the political center that consists of both tremendous steps of institutionalization and capability improvements to enable EU actoriness in security and defense. With regard to NATO though, questions of its Europeanization as precondition of reintegration and deliberations about autonomy and influence are still central and a major discursive battleground between the two respective political projects, with the left rejecting the possibility of ceding autonomy for realizing influence in the alliance. Measured further against representations of the U.S., discursive performances of continuity or change are incompatible. While the right argues for achieving influence by integration, the left only conceives this as an option in Europe, if at all. These differences help us in estimating the role autonomy plays as social logic of the discourse, and this analysis provides the grounds for understanding the change of this social logic in the future. The failure of reintegration will be explained in the context of the arrival of cohabitation, which will be rejected as sole explanation of the end of the policy, and the reactivation of a latent representation of U.S. dominance in the right majority that combines with the search for European autonomy against NATO reintegration.

Chapter 5 investigates the reintegration policy of president Sarkozy between 2007 and 2009 and its articulation with European security and defense policies. It will demonstrate that the discourse on NATO and its connection to French identity and policies has not lost anything of its vividness between the two opposing political camps (still a right majority/president and a left opposition). However, more effectiveness and the achievement of actoriness-capabilities get established as major discursive rules against a narrow understanding of autonomy (they denote a new social logic). This powerful discourse on the right is amended by the central concept of joining the own democratic, western family
via NATO reintegration, which has been newly introduced to the fantasmatic, persuasive logic of the discourse. Against this background, autonomy is not perceived as being lost, influence can be gained, and rather than threatening grandeur, it is actually argued that it must be saved by reintegration. The balance in Gaullism between autonomy and influence-seeking is thus changed in favor of the latter. Hence, reintegration does not stand in contradiction to still powerful demands for Europe puissance, institutionalization and capability improvement policies. However, a so far largely unrecognized development begins that moves away from the emphasis on institutionalization as part of the European identity project in the political center, starting to favor pragmatic progress and effective actorness instead. The renewal of Franco-British cooperation will be analyzed as contributing, inter alia, to this shift. Due to the under-theorizing of this ideational change in existing literature, the symbolic relevance of NATO reintegration has not been properly taken into account in continuity explanations, and strong disagreement prevails between the discursive agents themselves. However, reflecting these developments, the right wing can relax a strong conditionality of NATO reintegration on prior progress in its Europeanization and rather conceives of reintegration as chance to push CSDP further. This is a gamble still too dangerous for the left. Despite the persisting and strong relevance of autonomy in the nuclear realm, integration becomes the default answer to managing security and defense issues properly. With this institutionally more indifferent take on integration and cooperation, the realm of appropriate policy choices is redefined, and the relevance of autonomy in the social logic of the discourse decreases.

Chapter 6 is special in so far as it does not deal with a mainly institutional policy issue and its repercussions on identity, but looks at how the previously analyzed identity construction is put to a test in a crisis situation, the Libyan war. It will be maintained that this was a decisive moment for French security and defense policies because, on the one hand, European action was politically impossible, and, on the other, NATO was chosen as institutional framework of a coalition of the willing. This situation was a problem for the effectiveness and actorness rules that have become so central in the discourse on CSDP before. The center left Socialists and Radicals have downgraded their NATO and U.S. criticism considerably in the wake of these European disappointments, what theoretically signals a shift in the political logic in comparison to former times. It will be argued that although French specificity is still transferred to Europe, the political project of Europe puissance through the EU and CSDP is seriously challenged by the EU’s immobility, while a certain ease with NATO is developed at the same time; CSDP’s identity dimension and narrative are practically evacuated from the discourse at the expense of re-signifying security and defense cooperation and integration along pragmatic lines that pay attention to tackling an issue effectively with or without the involvement of CSDP. This gives testament to a new structure of the political logic of the discourse that reaches out to the Atlantic Alliance in a new way. In this context of the normalization of the European security and defense project, Franco-British cooperation has been intensified to a new extent, including partial nuclear integration, redefining and de-complexing the realm of appropriate policy choices between NATO, Europe, and the EU further. NATO reintegration is thus re-signified after the fact. Altogether, the Gaullist legacy has been considerably reconfigured under Sarkozy.

The conclusions of this dissertation will sum up the results of this study and underline the contribution this specific poststructuralist, discourse-analytical approach makes to the study of French foreign policy identity and the explanation of foreign-policy making. It will be argued that this approach has been able to provide both a more fine-grained analysis of French policies while integrating more explanatory factors that this was done before. At the
same time, these factors and identity elements could be weighed against each other for the sake of explaining policymaking. Next to this being a so far unique way of studying French security and defense policies, the study develops poststructuralist theory of explanation further.

In an epilogue, an outlook will be given at the presidency of the Socialist François Hollande, who took office in May 2012. This is done in order to corroborate the claim for fundamental policy and identity change after now almost three years of action of the new administration. The verdict will be fully affirmative and invalidates the argument that French NATO policies from 2007 to 2012 have been the mere consequence or result of a pro-American president: Hollande did not introduce any changes to the new Sarkozian legacy but mainly continued it with his policies.

References: