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# Guns versus butter : the politics of attention in defence policy

Friederike Richter

► **To cite this version:**

Friederike Richter. Guns versus butter : the politics of attention in defence policy. Political science. Institut d'études politiques de paris - Sciences Po, 2022. English. NNT: 2022IEPP0012 . tel-03853233

**HAL Id: tel-03853233**

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Centre de recherches politiques de Sciences Po (CEVIPOF)  
Doctorat en Science politique

Guns versus butter:  
The politics of attention in defence policy

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&

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# Abstract

- IN ENGLISH -

The aim of this Ph.D. thesis is to examine the agenda-setting dynamics of defence policy. My key argument is that defence policy - which is often said to have an exceptional status on government agendas - has started to normalise, in particular over the past three decades. Defence, just like any other public policy, is increasingly constrained by structural biases and system-level dynamics, i.e. parts of the regal domain do not withdraw from the ‘traditional’ agenda-setting dynamics anymore. Three case studies constitute the core of my empirical analysis: the recruitment of service personnel, the acquisition of aircraft carriers and military operations. Based on an original data set that covers the period 1980-2018, I shed light on how these issues became and remained a government priority in France and the United Kingdom (UK), the two leading military powers in Europe. Using both qualitative and quantitative methods, I reach two conclusions on agenda-building in defence. First, I demonstrate the importance of issue attributes at the subcategory level: the most concrete defence issues, such as military recruitment, are likely to follow dynamics that are very similar to those already identified for domestic policy issues; the most abstract defence issues, in turn, like procurement, will mobilise public opinion much less, but may nonetheless catch the attention of the media. Second, my results show that agenda-setting in defence coincides with the priorities of allied governments. More specifically, I highlight that the convergence of British and French defence programmes is *inter alia* due to mimicking behaviour, with France closely following the developments in the UK. Consequently, I conclude that cross-national dynamics are key to understanding how government priorities in defence evolve over time.

- IN FRENCH -

L’objectif de cette thèse de doctorat est de comprendre les dynamiques à l’œuvre dans la mise à l’agenda de la politique de défense. Mon argument principal est que la politique de défense - qui a la réputation d’avoir un statut exceptionnel sur l’agenda

gouvernemental - a commencé à se normaliser, en particulier au cours des trois dernières décennies. La défense, comme toute autre politique publique, est de plus en plus contrainte par des biais structurels et des dynamiques propres au système, c'est-à-dire que certaines parties du domaine régalien ne se soustraient plus aux dynamiques 'traditionnelles' de mise à l'agenda. Trois études de cas constituent le cœur de mon analyse empirique : le recrutement de personnel militaire, l'acquisition de porte-avions et les opérations militaires. À partir d'une base de données originale qui couvre la période 1980-2018, je montre comment ces trois enjeux sont devenus et restés une priorité gouvernementale en France et au Royaume-Uni, les deux principales puissances militaires d'Europe. En utilisant des méthodes qualitatives et quantitatives, je parviens à deux conclusions sur la construction de l'agenda en matière de défense. Premièrement, je démontre l'importance de distinguer les enjeux en fonction de leurs attributs : les questions de défense les plus concrètes, telles que le recrutement de militaires, sont susceptibles de suivre des dynamiques très similaires à celles des questions domestiques ; les questions de défense les plus abstraites, en revanche, comme l'acquisition de porte-avions, mobiliseront beaucoup moins l'opinion publique mais peuvent néanmoins attirer l'attention des médias. Deuxièmement, mes résultats montrent que la mise à l'agenda de la défense coïncide avec les priorités des gouvernements alliés. Plus précisément, je souligne que la convergence des programmes de défense britannique et français est notamment due à un comportement de mimétisme, la France suivant de près les évolutions au Royaume-Uni. Par conséquent, je conclus que les dynamiques transnationales sont essentielles pour comprendre comment les priorités gouvernementales en matière de défense évoluent dans le temps.

# Declaration

- IN ENGLISH -

This Ph.D. research received financial and academic support from the Directorate General for International Relations and Strategy (DGRIS) of the French Ministry of the Armed Forces and the Institute for Strategic Research (IRSEM).

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this Ph.D. thesis are those of the author and do not reflect the official opinion of the French Ministry of the Armed Forces. Neither the DGRIS nor the IRSEM may be held responsible for the use which may be made of the information contained herein.

- IN FRENCH -

Cette recherche doctorale a bénéficié du soutien financier et académique de la *Direction générale des relations internationales et de la stratégie* (DGRIS) du ministère des Armées et de l'*Institut de recherche stratégique de l'École militaire* (IRSEM).

Avertissement : Les propos énoncés dans cette thèse de doctorat ne sauraient engager la responsabilité de la DGRIS ou de l'IRSEM, pas plus qu'ils ne reflètent une prise de position officielle ou officieuse du ministère des Armées.





# Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I would like to thank my supervisors, Martial Foucault and Emiliano Grossman, for their advice, patience and mentorship over the past few years. Your constructive comments and suggestions, benevolence and exceptional motivational qualities did not only make me a more rigorous researcher but also helped me to overcome the challenges I encountered on the road to submitting this Ph.D. thesis.

For having accepted to serve on my dissertation committee, I would like to thank Delphine Deschaux-Dutard, Will Jennings, Jean Joanna and Frédéric Mérand. I hope that this thesis is a good read and rewards your efforts as external examiners.

Over the past years, I was fortunate to have generous institutional and financial support from Sciences Po, the French Ministry of the Armed Forces, and the Regional Council of Île-de-France. Sciences Po sharpened my intellectual curiosity and taste for research, especially via its large offer of seminars, workshops and research exchange programmes. I would like to thank in particular Marilyn Augé, Alain Besoin, Marcelle Bourbier, Madani Cheurfa, Christine Gire, Annie Marcilloux, Florent Parmentier, Gina Sandanassamy, Imola Strehö and Shan Qin-Petit for making the seemingly impossible possible, be it agenda- or funding-related. The support from the French Ministry of the Armed Forces, in particular the DGRIS and the IRSEM, also played a crucial role during my Ph.D. journey. It did not only allow me to conduct my research in excellent working conditions, but also to present my results in France and abroad, to organise and attend conferences, to write and publish my first articles and book chapters, and to build my professional network. Special thanks here to Aurélie Biard, Claire Bordes, Nicolas Bronard, Jean-Vincent Holeindre, Jean-Baptiste Jeangène Vilmer and Caroline Verstappen for their trust, encouragements and support over the past few years. Last but not least, I want to thank the Regional Council of Île-de-France for supporting my research project with an international mobility grant which enabled me to participate in several conferences and to organise two research visits.

During my Ph.D., I had indeed the privilege to conduct research at the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) where Audrey Fleurant and Nan Tian

welcomed me warmly and provided valuable advice on the collection and analysis of defence data. Although I only spent two weeks in Solna, this research stay has largely shaped the research design of my dissertation. Thanks to the Consortium Mobility scheme for Ph.D. candidates at Sciences Po, I also had the opportunity to spend three months at the Department of Government at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE). I would like to thank Joachim Wehner, who supervised my stay, for pushing me to further challenge the specificity of defence as a public policy. The visit to the LSE also allowed me to conduct a series of semi-directed interviews in and close to London and to consult resources from the National Archives in Kew.

Numerous people deserve my gratitude for helping out with data access and giving advice on the empirical analyses. First, I would like to thank the 30 interviewees who were very generous with their time and insights into the agenda-setting process in defence policy. A special thanks also to the Comparative Agendas Project (CAP) community, in particular Shaun Bevan, Emiliano Grossman and Will Jennings, for introducing me to the world of policy agendas and codebooks. I also want to thank Flora Chanvril-Ligneel and Roger Mortimore for providing French and British public opinion data on defence, as well as Ron Smith for shedding light on some of the most mysterious aspects of British and French defence spending data. I am also grateful for various discussions on research methods and data analysis, in particular with Diégo Antolinos-Basso, Pierre-Henri Bono, Abdelouafi El Otmani and Julien Longhi.

A great number of colleagues have given me comments on this research project. I particularly would like to thank Cyril Benoît and Andrew James for their advice on the research design; Jeroen Joly for an uncountable number of discussions on agenda-setting and foreign policy; Lou Safra and Cyrille Thiébaud for pushing me to think more about attitude formation and public opinion on defence; the Ph.D. cohort at the *Centre de recherches politiques de Sciences Po* (CEVIPOF) as well as the *Relève stratégique* of the IRSEM for numerous comments on my work during internal seminars; and Camille Morel and Lou Safra for proof-reading parts of this dissertation in one form or another. I would also like to mention that the final version of this thesis includes reflections and analyses originally presented in articles and book chapters that have already been published or are currently under review. While I have largely rewritten those parts of my dissertation, I am still indebted to my co-authors Camille Collin, Martial Foucault, Emiliano Grossman, Jeroen Joly, Camille Morel, Lou Safra and Cyrille Thiébaud who all significantly shaped my research and writing over the past years.

Writing-up this Ph.D. thesis has been rewarding and challenging at the same time. I, hence, want to thank once more my supervisors Martial Foucault and Emiliano

Grossman as well as Camille Collin, Christine Gire, Fabian Kaufmann, Camille Morel, Lou Safra and Sebastian Scheler for their support and encouragements on the finish line.

Friederike Richter

Paris, May 2022



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# List of acronyms

AFPRB	Armed Forces Pay Review Body
C2SD	<i>Centre d'études en sciences sociales de la défense</i>
CAP	Comparative Agendas Project
CAR	Central African Republic
CATOBAR	catapult assisted take-off but arrested recovery
CDSN	<i>Conseil de défense et de sécurité nationale</i>
CEMA	<i>Chef d'état-major des armées</i>
CEVIPOF	<i>Centre de recherches politiques de Sciences Po</i>
CQL	Cassandra Query Language
CSDP	Common Security and Defence Policy
DFID	Department for International Development
DGRIS	<i>Direction générale des relations internationales et de la stratégie</i>
DIB	defence industrial base
DICoD	<i>Délégation à l'information et à la communication de la défense</i>
EU	European Union
FCO	Foreign and Commonwealth Office
FOI	freedom of information
FP	foreign policy
FPA	foreign policy analysis
GDP	gross domestic product
GGM	ground-to-ground missile
HCA	hierarchical cluster analysis
HCECM	<i>Haut Comité d'évaluation de la condition militaire</i>
HR	human resource

IFOP	<i>Institut français d'opinion publique</i>
Ifri	<i>Institut français des relations internationales</i>
IO	international organisation
IR	international relations
IRSEM	<i>Institut de recherche stratégique de l'École militaire</i>
IS	Islamic State
JCA	joint combat aircraft
JRRF	joint rapid reaction force
JSF	joint strike fighter
LIEPP	<i>Laboratoire interdisciplinaire d'évaluation des politiques publiques</i>
LPM	<i>Loi de programmation militaire</i>
LSE	London School of Economics and Political Science
MII	most important issue
MIP	most important problem
MOD	Ministry of Defence
MP	member of parliament
NAO	National Audit Office
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NGO	non-governmental organisation
NPRM	<i>Nouvelle politique de rémunération des militaires</i>
NPT	Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons
NSS	National Security Strategy
OED	<i>Observatoire économique de la défense</i>
PA 2	<i>Porte-Avions 2</i>
PAC	Public Accounts Committee
PAP	Policy Agendas Project
PDR	Personal Development Record
PE	punctuated equilibrium
PET	punctuated equilibrium theory

PM	prime minister
PTSD	post-traumatic stress disorder
SDE	Statement on Defence Estimates
SDR	Strategic Defence Review
SDSR	Strategic Defence and Security Review
SIPRI	Stockholm International Peace Research Institute
SIRPA	<i>Service d'informations et de relations publiques des armées</i>
SOP	standard operating procedure
SSM	surface-to-surface missile
STOBAR	short take-off but arrested recovery
STOVL	short take-off and vertical landing
TIV	trend-indicator value
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
US	United States of America
WHO	World Health Organisation

# Introduction

The study of the policy-making process has a long tradition in the public policy literature, and scholars developed several models to shed light on how public policies emerge and change over time. One of the most influential models that has so far been put forward is the ‘policy cycle’, initially proposed by Lasswell (1956). In his seminal work, Lasswell broke down the policy cycle into seven stages: intelligence, promotion, prescription, invocation, application, termination, and appraisal. Other academics, including Brewer (1974), Jenkins (1978), May and Wildavsky (1979) and DeLeon (1989), subsequently adapted his model. At present, there seems to be a consensus in the public policy community that the theoretical model should be divided into five major stages only, namely agenda-setting, policy formulation, decision-making, policy implementation and policy evaluation (Howlett et al., 2009). Although all five stages are important, three of them – agenda-setting, policy formulation and implementation – are particularly crucial for understanding *how* public policies are made.

Regardless of the version of the model, *agenda-setting* is always the very first stage of the policy cycle. Agenda-setting can be defined as the process by which social conditions that belong to the private sphere evolve into public problems that become the focus of a wider policy debate. While some issues emerge almost automatically, many others never materialise, or only appear on government agendas after a lengthy process of trial and error. Given that those dynamics have a decisive impact on the whole policy-making process and the public policies resulting from it, agenda-setting is a critical stage (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993; Cobb and Elder, 1972; Jones and Baumgartner, 2005; Kingdon, 1984). This is particularly true since the individuals and institutions involved in policy-making cannot attend to all problems society is facing: attention is a rare good and competition for the attention of decision-makers on behalf of stakeholders is fierce. Policy-makers – like all human beings – are, indeed, rationally bounded (Simon, 1957) and can, therefore, not pay attention to all societal problems at once. This implies that they are not able to constantly evaluate which issues need to be addressed first, and which existing policies have to be adjusted (and by how much). Simon’s (1985) ‘bottleneck of attention’ does not only illustrate the

cognitive and emotional constraints of individuals, but also characterises the political system as a whole (Simon, 1979). Depending on internal rules, norms and procedures, institutions may, indeed, have more or less leeway for redefining existing issues and raising attention to new ones. Agenda space is, consequently, restricted and changes in the status quo of policies are difficult to obtain because there are limits, in terms of time and resources, to what individuals and institutions can accomplish.

For precisely this reason, agenda-setting scholars assume that an increase in government attention to a certain issue is very likely to turn a social condition into a wider public problem (Gusfield, 1981) and, thus, also a strong signal for a policy change (Baumgartner et al., 2006; Cobb and Elder, 1972; Dery, 1984; Schattschneider, 1960). What societies consider to be an issue that government has to address may, hence, not only differ from one country to another, but also change over time. Agenda-setting scholars have already worked on a variety of public policies and political activities, ranging from news media to laws, speeches, hearings and budgets, for example, and have used both qualitative and quantitative methods to shed light on *how* information is prioritised and attention allocated to some problems rather than others. However, they have so far mainly focused on domestic policies, in particular health care (Green-Pedersen and Wilkerson, 2006; Hardin, 2002; Kingdon, 1984) and the environment (Bretherton, 1998; Downs, 1972; Pralle, 2006a; Repetto, 2006; Wood and Vedlitz, 2007).<sup>1</sup> For both issue areas, scholars have not only analysed the policy dynamics at the aggregate level, but also examined the agenda-setting mechanisms of very specific problems, such as autism (Baker and Stokes, 2007), disease control (Shiffman et al., 2002), smoking and tobacco (Albæk et al., 2007; Baumgartner and Jones, 1993; Wood, 2006), air pollution (Crenson, 1971), forest policy (Kamieniecki, 2000; Pralle, 2003), and the use of pesticides (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993; Pralle, 2006b).

Agenda-setting studies do not only deal with different (domestic) policy issues, but

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<sup>1</sup>In addition to health care and the environment, many other issue areas have also been subject to empirical agenda-setting studies. Some social conditions and corresponding policies have been analysed more often, including agricultural policy (Daugbjerg and Studsgaard, 2005; Sheingate, 2000), child abuse (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993; Johnson, 1995; Nelson, 1984), crime (Jennings et al., 2020; Jones and Baumgartner, 2005; Miller, 2016), the death penalty (Baumgartner et al., 2008a; Dardis et al., 2008), immigration/migration (Green-Pedersen and Krogstrup, 2008; Guiraudon, 2000; Hunt, 2002; Scholten, 2013), morality politics (Engeli et al., 2012; Glick and Hutchinson, 1999), safety-related issues (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993; True and Utter, 2002), sciences and technology (Edler and James, 2015; Feely, 2002), social security and social welfare (Jones and Baumgartner, 2005; True, 1999), and transportation (Baumgartner and Jones, 1994; Kingdon, 1984). Others, in turn, have been examined by only few scholars, such as civilian nuclear power (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993), corporate corruption (Jones and Baumgartner, 2005), drug consumption (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993), gender equality (Annesley et al., 2014), Internet gambling (Rex and Jackson, 2009), same-sex marriage (Dziengel, 2010), sexual harassment (Wood and Doan, 2003), telecommunications (MacLeod, 2002), urban affairs (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993), and water exports (Bakenova, 2008).

also have different research goals. Some follow the evolution of several issues within one country (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993; Chaqués-Bonafont et al., 2015; John et al., 2013; Soroka, 2002a); others compare how a single issue evolved in different institutional contexts (Daugbjerg and Studsgaard, 2005; Sheingate, 2000). This vast body of empirical research - which focuses above all on the United States of America (US), though increasingly also on other, mostly Western European, countries - underlines the usefulness of agenda-setting and its key concepts - like subsystems, policy images and venues - to understand how policy-making evolves in different political systems over time. Yet, as the studies mentioned above illustrate well, the majority of policy scholars still focus on how domestic issues become a government priority. Surprisingly, little research has been done on the agenda-setting dynamics of foreign, security and defence policy and the few, isolated contributions that do exist mainly look at salient, visible issues such as military operations (Andrade and Young, 1996; Edwards and Wood, 1999; Mazarr, 2007; True, 2002; Wood and Peake, 1998). Defence, however, is a diverse public policy that covers various issues beyond troop deployments.

The main reason for this gap in the literature is that defence is often considered to be a deviant case for public policy scholars: not only is decision-making largely concentrated at the executive level, but defence is also said to be unpopular in the public debate, rarely covered by the media and one of the issues with which politicians risk losing, rather than winning, an election (Irondelle, 2007). To put it differently, defence - in spite of being a core function of governments - is most of the time presented as an unobtrusive issue, i.e. an issue that citizens do not experience directly, which is remote from their daily preoccupations and for which they rely mainly on others, especially the media, to get information. Wood and Peake (1998, p. 181), thus, explain that the political science literature on agenda-setting has neglected issues related to foreign affairs because the latter were "fundamentally different from domestic policy" and, therefore, required "a different rationale for explaining the rise and fall of issue attention". Given that foreign, security and defence policy do not seem have the material or solidary benefits required for strong participation, public policy scholars tend to assume that an agenda-setting perspective on defence would be less useful. Defence is, consequently, still mainly studied by scholars from other (sub-)disciplines, in particular from international relations (IR) and defence economics.

As Holeindre and Testot (2014) outline in the introduction of the edited volume "*La guerre, des origines à nos jours*", it is hard to deny that war is a major component of the history of societies. War did not only deeply structure and shape the daily life of traditional societies, but also constituted the main factor of social and political change, in particular in the constitution and rise of empires (Tilly, 1990). While

the army emerged as an organisation contributing to the structuring of modern state institutions, the modern state itself increasingly relied on its armed forces to safeguard its sovereignty and to protect its citizens "from the violence and invasion of other independent societies" (Smith, 1776, p. 689). Given that war used to be omnipresent, defence was long time considered to be a core function of the state and, in many instances, even the very first obligation of governments. States defended their borders, managed relations with foreign powers, provided for the general well-being of their people, and maintained the apparatus of government. For precisely this reason, they had to devote large shares of their resources to the defence sector (Legay, 2010), both in terms of human capital and capital investment, without necessarily discussing the economic relevance or social impacts that such spending levels may have.

Nowadays, however, one may argue that the security threats we are most likely to face, such as climate change, migration and pandemics, are not amenable to military solutions only. This, in turn, would suggest national defence budgets close to zero at the global level. The sample of countries that effectively chose not to have a standing army is, however, limited to some twenty states today. Some of those countries, such as Costa Rica, Grenada and Liechtenstein, underwent a process of demilitarisation and fully gave up their forces. Others, including Palau and Samoa, stayed under the protective umbrella of another nation after their independence (here the US and New Zealand, respectively). This being said, most countries still consider investments in the defence sector to be necessary, not only to safeguard their national borders but also to reach their foreign policy goals. Defence, consequently, continues to be a government priority for most states. As Smith (2009) argues, it may, indeed, be sensible to maintain national armed forces as some kind of 'insurance policy', even in times in which there are no obvious or immediate military threats to national security.

Contrary to the past, countries, hence, vary significantly in the attention and resources they devote to the military, and only few states still spend a sizeable share of their discretionary budget on defence. This is mainly due to the fact that a sovereign defence sector - which includes standing armed forces and a national defence industry - is no longer the only means that provides security: political and economic cooperation - at the bi-, mini-, or multilateral level, within or outside of international organisations (IOs) - as well as agreements and treaties covering issues from trade to arms control and disarmament also contribute to a safer security environment. Defence is, thus, increasingly considered to be an opportunity, i.e. a sector that governments may maintain and develop - or not. This is particularly true since the end of the Cold War and the anticipation of drastic cuts in defence spending in the 1990s, also referred to as the 'peace dividends'. Given that defence is a major user of scarce resources having alter-

native and potentially more productive uses (Hartley, 1991, p. 2), many scholars and policy-makers expected that governments would devote less attention to defence and that defence budgets would be redirected to other public goods and services, thereby leading to long-term economic benefits (Gupta et al., 2002; Knight et al., 1996).

The reasons for this assumption were two-fold. First, defence budgets were believed to be significantly affected by the security environment: the more insecure the international context, the more attention countries would pay to defence and the more they would spend on their armed forces (1). With the end of the Cold War, policy-makers and academics alike, consequently, expected lower levels of defence spending at the global level. Given that the conventional wisdom also suggested that the impact of defence spending on economic growth was non-significant or negative, most scholars and policy-makers additionally assumed that states would eventually devote a greater share of government spending to non-defence-related issues which, in turn, would boost their economies in the medium and long run (2). This expectation was mainly based on one of the best-known *clichés* in public policy, namely the trade-off governments face between ‘guns’ (i.e. defence spending) and ‘butter’ (i.e. social spending). As a result, the overall assumption was that defence was not going to be a priority for the majority of governments in the post-Cold War era. While the link between the security environment and defence spending levels is well proven empirically, the economic impact of large defence sectors is less straightforward than one may initially believe.

In the political science literature, in particular in IR, models of defence spending typically show that a country’s defence budget is significantly affected by the state of the international security environment. Empirical evidence suggests the following causal link: the anticipation of threats to a nation’s core interests and/or the likelihood of fatal conflicts lead(s) to an increase in defence spending. Such an increase may then incite other governments to reinvest in their defence sectors too. Nordhaus et al. (2012), for example, show that a one percentage point increase in the aggregate probability of a fatal militarised dispute leads to a three percentage increase in a country’s military spending; other countries may then interpret this increase as a heightened threat to their core interests and, consequently, decide to also pay more attention to their military. Richardson (1960), who presented the first formal statement of the dynamics of such an ‘arms race’, suggested that the driving force behind those fluctuations was the continuous and ineluctable process of action and reaction between nations.

The economics literature, in turn, has shown that defence expenditures can affect the economy through two channels and, therefore, have a rather ambiguous macroeconomic effect. As suggested by Benoit (1973), military spending may have growth-

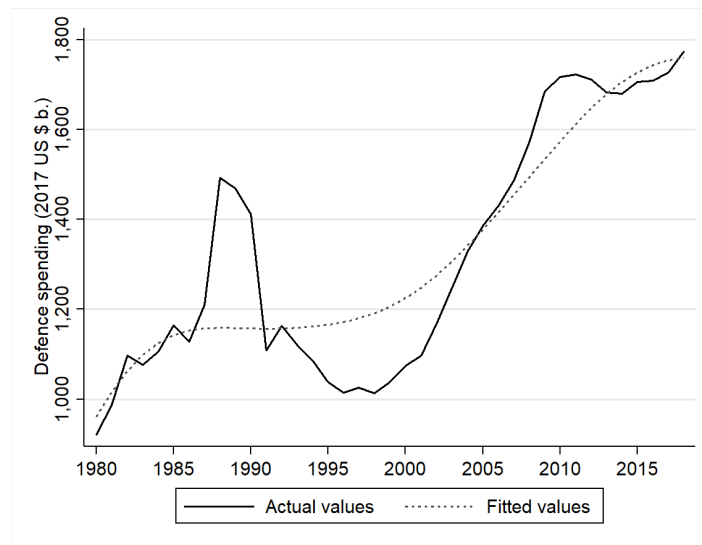


stimulating effects (1). The main reason behind this potentially positive impact is a Keynesian-type aggregate demand stimulation. This means that an increase in defence expenditures may stimulate employment and capital investment and, thus, have a positive impact on economic growth. Empirical studies confirming these growth stimulating effects include *inter alia* the analyses of Atesoglu and Mueller (1990), Mehay and Solnick (1990), Mueller and Atesoglu (1993) and Atesoglu (2002). Defence spending may, however, also have growth-retarding effects (2). The main reasons behind this potentially negative effect are increased inflationary pressures due to exponentially rising costs for manpower and equipment, and investment crowding-out for non-defence-related issues. Empirical studies confirming this channel include *inter alia* the analyses of Mintz and Huang (1990), Ward and Davis (1992), Knight et al. (1996), Antonakis (1997), Heo (1998) and DeRouen and Heo (2001).

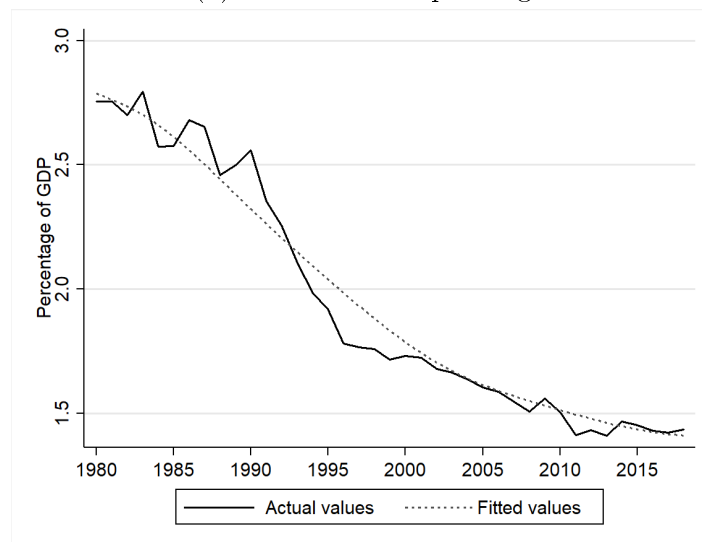
The question that then arises is how much attention governments really paid to defence following the end of the Cold War. Figure 1, which is based on the latest SIPRI data, plots two views of how global defence spending evolved since 1980. It first shows an upward trend of defence spending through 1988 when total expenditures reached 1,493 billion US dollars. The peace dividend that many scholars and policymakers expected to see in the aftermath of the Cold War did exist but was relatively short-lived: in spite of the Gulf War, defence spending declined in real terms between 1989 and 1998. Figure 1a also illustrates that global expenditures are once again on an upward trend since 1999, despite the 2009 recession which has slowed down the rate of increase. This upward trend of the past twenty years is most likely a response to transnational terrorism after 9/11 as well as a consequence of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan; it is, however, also the result of a shift in the global balance of power, with China and Russia heavily investing in their defence sectors in the last decade.

While Figure 1a shows that real defence spending has increased between 1980 and 2018, Figure 1b illustrates that the median share of gross domestic product (GDP) states devote to their defence sectors has steadily declined over that very same period. What does this mean precisely? The median share of GDP is nothing more than an alternative measure for the evolution of global defence spending, and indicates how much of the world's economic capacity is annually devoted to defence. It, hence, measures the global 'defence burden', normalised by GDP. From a global vantage, Figure 1b suggests, contrary to Figure 1a, an ongoing peace dividend, with governments devoting less (budgetary) attention to the defence sector. Do these budgetary trends that have been extensively studied by both IR scholars and defence economists really matter? If so, what do they tell us about government priorities more generally?

Figure 1: The evolution of defence spending worldwide (excluding Iraq), 1980-2018



(a) Total defence spending



(b) Median share of GDP devoted to defence

Source: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (2020c)

Some may argue that budgets are just a political rite or an administrative routine; others, however, have shown that the budget is more than a mere accounting exercise. Schumpeter (1976, p. 7), for example, argued that "public finances are one of the best starting points for an investigation of society, especially though not exclusively of its political life". The budgetary process may, indeed, be seen as a major political act during which strategic choices and trade-offs have to be made, all of which have wider policy implications. From this perspective, the budget is an action plan which highlights the government's policy priorities for the coming year(s) (Lalumière, 1986; Siné, 2006). Even though defence spending increased in absolute terms since 1980,

Figure 1b shows that defence is no longer a top priority for most states, suggesting that government attention has shifted over the past forty years. What used to be a policy making consensus and having a *laissez-passer* is, hence, increasingly subject to efficiency requirements (Siné, 2006) and public scrutiny - just like any other (domestic) public policy -, and has to make sure it maintains a place on the government agenda.

The fact that governments currently pay less (budgetary) attention to defence may surprise given that the international security environment is undergoing profound structural changes. With the emergence of new threats and the diffusion of power at the global level, states have to revisit their strategies, tools and policies to predict, prevent, detect and respond to the tensions characterising the 21st century. Europe, for instance, faces several threats to the security of the continent, including cyber attacks, migration, proliferation, terrorism, pandemics, and more recently the war in Ukraine. Since 2015, security is once again a top concern of citizens and also started to move up on the policy agenda of many states across the European Union (EU) (Brouard, 2016; Brouard and Foucault, 2015). British members of parliament (MPs), thus, urged the UK to rebuild its military capabilities, while François Hollande reviewed France's decreasing defence budget after the attack on Charlie Hebdo in January 2015. Those policy changes were largely supported by the general public, an effect that is often referred to as the 'rally-'round-the-flag effect' in the political science and IR literature (Mueller, 1970, 1973) and which helps governments to quickly enact emergency policies during bad times and international crises (Davis and Silver, 2004).

These policy developments suggest that security and defence issues are once again rising on government agendas, not just from a budgetary perspective. Although it is tempting to argue that governments are simply reacting to policy problems growing more severe, it is not very clear *why* and *how* defence managed to get back on executive agendas in recent years. Different strands of the literature in political science and economics have started to shed light on this research question. As shown above, we already know that the agenda status of defence (partially) depends on the security environment and the state of the economy, a result that has, in the meantime, also been confirmed by policy scholars (Andrade and Young, 1996; Edwards and Wood, 1999; Mazarr, 2007; Peake, 2001; True, 2002; Wood and Peake, 1998). The post-Cold War period, however, also suggests that the agenda-setting dynamics of defence are not only context-dependent, as the current state of the art in both disciplines may suggest. In many European states, for example, increased levels of attention have been paid to the diversification of the military as well as the socio-economic well-being of members of the armed forces and their families. Given that the economic and security context can hardly explain this shift in attention, I argue that it is necessary to study both

the complexity and the evolution of defence policy agendas from a public policy lens, focusing in particular on the interactions at the domestic and the international level.

The current lack of interest in defence policy agendas is, indeed, unfortunate because there are several debates in IR, defence economics and public policy to which a study of the agenda-building dynamics of defence could contribute to - rather than compete with. First, defence continues to be major public policy, not only in budgetary terms. A closer understanding of how it becomes and stays a government priority would, consequently, improve our understanding of policy-making more generally. Second, studying defence from an agenda-setting perspective may help us to shed light on the structural biases in domestic defence policy-making. From past research, we already know that not all policy issues are equally important. This also holds true for defence: some defence issues end up as topics for policy-making while others do not become a government priority. The process of deciding which defence issues are dealt with (agenda-setting) is as much political as the process of deciding how to tackle them (decision-making/policy implementation) and, therefore, merits the attention of researchers. This is particularly true as the actors involved in agenda-setting and policy implementation are not necessarily the same: while decision-making in defence still tends to be highly concentrated at the top of the executive, a variety of individuals and institutions may mobilise during the agenda-setting phase and push for a specific defence issue to be considered by government (e.g. members of the armed forces, the industry, MPs, the media, the general public...). Last but not least, a comparative, cross-national analysis of the agenda-setting dynamics of defence is likely to contribute to our understanding of international relations and defence economics more generally. Given that the agenda-setting phase determines the range of legitimate concerns and policy alternatives within a political system, the defence policy agenda of any country is not only an important signal to its allies and enemies, but may also lead to cross-national policy dynamics that are worth being studied from a public policy perspective.

For precisely this reason, the aim of my Ph.D. thesis is to understand the agenda-setting dynamics of defence policy, and to examine *why* and *how* defence issues become and remain a government priority. To put it differently, my dissertation examines the life course of defence problems and analyses the forces that cause the latter to rise and fall on government agendas over time. This implies determining where defence issues are identified as policy ‘problems’ for which governments have to find a solution (in government statements? in the media?) and who drives - or tries to obstruct - this process. It also means identifying if the same agenda-setting mechanism applies to all defence issues. Indeed, we have to keep in mind that defence policy translates the government’s foreign policy objectives into military terms. As such, it covers very

different aspects, ranging from recruitment, through procurement to the commitment of personnel and equipment to military operations. The nature of these issues is very different: some are abstract, others are concrete; some are obtrusive, others are unobtrusive; some are salient, others are hardly mentioned in the public sphere. Given that public policy scholars have already shown that agenda-building dynamics depend *inter alia* on the issue attributes at hand (Soroka, 2002a; Yagade and Dozier, 1990; Zucker, 1978), it is unlikely that all defence issues reach the government agenda in the same way. I, therefore, analyse how different defence issues emerge in society; how the media and the public deal with them; and how they are eventually transformed (or not) in public policy. Instead of looking at defence as a fully abstract policy that citizens are not interested in, I study the agenda mechanisms of a variety of subcategories that differ in their degree of abstractness, obtrusiveness and salience.

This approach to the study of defence policy-making is particularly innovative as defence has long time been considered to be quite different from other public policies, especially non-regal ones, because it is key to national security. It was, thus, thought of as being too serious to be debated publicly (Almond, 1950). In line with this realist argument, many public policy scholars simply assumed that the general public does not develop preferences for (most) foreign policy issues and is, therefore, not able to hold governments accountable for defence-related decisions. Yet, I find agenda-setting mechanisms that are quite similar to those that scholars have already identified for other public policies, despite citizens extensively relying on second-hand information to form opinions on (most) defence issues (e.g. the media, a family member or close acquaintance in the military etc.). The key argument of my Ph.D. thesis is, consequently, that defence policy has started to normalise, in particular over the past three decades. Defence, just like any other public policy, is increasingly constrained by structural biases and system-dynamic developments, i.e. parts of the regal domain do not withdraw from the ‘traditional’ agenda-setting dynamics anymore. I argue that this holds particularly true for defence issues that are concrete, obtrusive, and/or salient. More abstract defence problems, such as procurement, may continue to escape the more traditional agenda-building dynamics, unless the issue is picked up and heavily promoted by a subsystem, such as the national media, for example.

To demonstrate and illustrate these developments in defence policy-making, I opted for a cross-sectional, cross-national and longitudinal analysis of the agenda-setting dynamics of defence. More specifically, I decided to compare *how* and *why* three different but very complementary defence issues became and remained a government priority in France and the UK over the period 1980-2018: the recruitment of military personnel, the acquisition of aircraft carriers, and military operations. These defence

issues do not only vary in their issue attributes, but two of them also concern most other public policies: human resource (HR) management and procurement. The agenda-setting mechanisms I identify in this dissertation can, hence, easily be transposed and adapted to other policy domains, in particular strategic ones. I chose to work on the two leading military powers in Europe, mainly because most comparative research on France and the UK currently misses a key point that makes the Franco-British couple a particularly interesting case study for analysing the rise and fall of defence issues on policy agendas. Rather than being most similar or most dissimilar cases, I show that the defence policies of the two countries have actually been converging over time. I then argue that it is precisely this convergence that makes a Franco-British comparison of defence policy agendas an interesting contribution to the literature as it allows us to test for cross-national agenda-building dynamics. I demonstrate that monitoring and mimicking matter in defence, i.e. individuals and institutions do not only observe the real world directly, but also closely follow how others around them respond to changes in the environment. Based on the Franco-British comparison, I am consequently able to highlight that the policy priorities of other states, in particular those of close allies, influence issue attention at the national level, thereby leading to cross-national agenda dynamics over time. This pattern is unlikely to be specific to defence, but should also apply to other complex, strategic policy problems.

This Ph.D. thesis is structured as follows.

In the first chapter, I review the literature on agenda-setting, with a particular focus on the theoretical and empirical research that has already been conducted on foreign, security and defence policy. First, I explain how governments set their priorities, reviewing notably the assumptions and conclusions of current models of agenda-setting. Second, I explain that most policy scholars who work on agenda-setting have focused on the dynamics of domestic policies, with little research being done on how defence issues become and remain a government priority. Based on a critical literature review of agenda-setting in foreign, security and defence policy, I notably highlight the limits of current research on defence policy agendas. Last but not least, I propose a novel, theoretical account for stability and change in the defence sector which sheds light on how new understandings of defence issues may or may not be accepted in different political systems. This framework - which focuses on the role of issue attributes and emphasises the interactions between the domestic and the international level - lays the groundwork for the three empirical chapters of my Ph.D. thesis (Chapters 3-5). I conclude Chapter 1 by discussing how agenda-setting affects public policies, examining notably the sources of policy stability and the drivers of change.

In Chapter 2, I explain and justify the research design of this thesis. I notably discuss my key methodological choices, including the decision to opt for a cross-sectional, cross-national and longitudinal analysis. I argue that it is easier to test alternative explanations for stability and change in political attention when focusing on more than one issue (here three defence issues that vary in their nature and issue attributes, namely the recruitment of military personnel which represents the operational dimension of defence; the acquisition of aircraft carriers, as an example for capital investment decisions; and military operations which combine both personnel and equipment choices), in more than one country (here France and the UK, the two leading military powers in Europe) and over a longer period of time (here from 1980 to 2018, a time frame large enough to cover the Cold War, the peace dividends of the 1990s, and more recent policy developments). I pay particular attention to the justification of the Franco-British comparison, given that the UK and France are often considered to be most similar cases. Based on an original and comprehensive data set on the British and French defence sectors, I challenge this assumption and show that defence policy in France and the UK converged over time. I argue that it is precisely this convergence that makes a comparative study particularly fruitful. Last but not least, I explain how political attention can be measured and compared across countries and over time, and give an overview of the quantitative and qualitative data that I use in the empirical chapters to test the theoretical framework proposed in Chapter 1. The latter notably include data from the CAP, defence white papers and strategic reviews, newspaper articles retrieved from Europresse and Factiva, opinion polls and 30 semi-structured interviews. When presenting the data, I also highlight the limits of my research design.

In the following three chapters, I provide empirical evidence for the agenda-setting dynamics of three different but very complementary defence issues: the recruitment of military personnel (Chapter 3), the acquisition of aircraft carriers (Chapter 4), and military operations (Chapter 5). To facilitate the comparison across issues in the conclusion of this Ph.D. thesis, Chapters 3-5 have not only the same structure but are also based on the same empirical analyses. First, I look at *when* each of the three policy issues emerged as a priority on the policy, the media and the public agendas in France and the UK, and examine *how* their framing evolved over time. I then analyse their agenda-building dynamics, underlining in particular how the policy, the media and the public agendas are linked and influenced by the strategic context. This, in turn, does not only allow me to explain why British and French governments pay attention to recruitment, aircraft carriers and military operations, but also to demonstrate that each of the three policy problems has its own policy dynamics. I conclude all empirical chapters with a discussion on the impact that agenda-setting

has on defence policy in France and the UK as well as a reflection on what those dynamics imply for the specificity or non-specificity of defence as a public policy. I reach the following conclusions in Chapters 3-5.

In Chapter 3, I show that military recruitment has been a routine issue for French and British governments, and demonstrate that the framing of the policy problem has changed over time. Instead of focusing on the manning balance only, governments on both sides of the Channel are increasingly concerned about the image of the armed forces as an employer. Based on the theoretical model that I proposed in Chapter 1, which suggests that context matters, I argue that shifts in the security environment, youth unemployment rates, demographic changes as well as the relationship between the armed forces and society are key to understanding how the recruitment of regular armed forces has been understood, framed and addressed as a policy problem in France and the UK. Given that the predominant agenda-building dynamic is between the evolution of the social, political and economic environment and the policy, the media and the public agendas, I assert that recruitment is real-world led and, hence, qualifies as a prominent defence issue. It is, consequently, an excellent example of the normalisation of defence as a public policy since it follows agenda dynamics that have already been identified for non-defence issues, such as unemployment and inflation.

In Chapter 4, I elucidate first of all that procurement is a routine issue for governments on both sides of the Channel, i.e. London and Paris address equipment-related issues on a regular basis. Contrary to the recruitment of service personnel (Chapter 3), however, issue attention to defence procurement strongly depends on the equipment's life-cycle, i.e. it is in the very nature of the policy problem that aircraft carriers gain and lose agenda space over time. I also stress that the framing of the issue has been stable between 1980 and 2018. Given that France and the UK already possessed aircraft carriers in the 1980s, the key issue for both countries is whether they are going to replace them - and if so, when and how. In line with the theoretical framework that I advanced in the first chapter of this thesis, I suggest that government priorities are not only key to understanding *why* procurement and the acquisition of aircraft carriers are regularly addressed by London and Paris, but also account for *how* the issue is framed over time. Given that the policy agenda largely drives media and public priorities, I conclude that the acquisition of aircraft carriers is policy-driven and, hence, qualifies as a governmental defence issue. In addition, I assert that the agenda dynamics of aircraft carriers are similar to those that scholars identified for national unity, for instance, and suggest that this parallel implies that defence procurement, just like the recruitment of service personnel, has started to normalise as a public policy.



In Chapter 5, I illustrate that military operations have been high agenda items in France and the UK, in particular from the 2000s onwards. In contrast to military recruitment (Chapter 3) and the acquisition of aircraft carriers (Chapter 4), troop deployments are not a routine issue. Even though London and Paris regularly address deployment-related issues, they cannot fully anticipate how those interventions will eventually play out. Issue attention to military interventions is, hence, extremely volatile, i.e. in some years, they are a top priority, in others, a non-issue. In addition, I demonstrate that the framing of the policy changes over time and also differs in France and the UK. While British governments increasingly focus on the economic and operational sustainability of their interventions, Paris' attention started to move to the impact that media coverage may have on the public's support of French overseas missions. Based on the theoretical model that I proposed in Chapter 1, I argue that the media lead public opinion on deployment-related policies, with the press focussing in particular on the legitimacy and efficacy of ongoing and potential, future French and British military operations. I, thus, demonstrate that deployments, which used to be a governmental defence issue that was largely policy-driven, have turned into a sensational issue where the media matter more and more. Military operations are, consequently, another example of the normalisation of defence as a public policy, as their agenda-setting dynamics are very similar to those scholars have already identified for non-defence issues, such as AIDS, crime and the environment.

Last but not least, I summarise and discuss the results of Chapters 3-5 in a comparative perspective which, in turn, allows me to test the explanatory power of the framework presented in Chapter 1 and to underline the theoretical, empirical and methodological contributions of my Ph.D. thesis. First, I demonstrate the importance of issue attributes at the subcategory level: the most concrete defence issues, such as military recruitment, are likely to follow dynamics that are very similar to those already identified for domestic policy issues; the most abstract defence issues, in turn, like procurement, will mobilise public opinion much less, but may nonetheless catch the attention of the media. Second, I show that agenda-setting in defence coincides with the priorities of allied governments. I explain that the convergence of British and French defence programmes, for which I provided extensive empirical evidence in Chapter 2, is *inter alia* due to mimicking behaviour, with France closely following the developments in the UK. Consequently, I conclude that cross-national dynamics are key to understanding how government priorities in defence evolve over time, in particular for issues that qualify as governmental ones. The importance of issue attributes and the role of cross-national dynamics, in turn, suggest that defence has been normalising over time. I, therefore, conclude that parts of the regal domain do not withdraw from

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the ‘traditional’ agenda-setting dynamics anymore, i.e. defence is not as specific as we often believe it to be. Since there is no comprehensive theoretical model of agenda-building in defence yet and since the number of empirical analyses of agenda-setting in foreign, security and defence policy is still very limited, I argue that my dissertation fills an important gap in the public policy literature, notably by broadening the empirical domain to include international issues. I also highlight that the comparative agenda-setting perspective allows for sophisticated empirical studies in defence policy-making, thus significantly improving our understanding of international relations more generally. After having pointed out the contribution of this thesis to the literature in public policy, comparative politics and strategic studies, I depict the limits of my dissertation and conclude the manuscript with an agenda for future research.



# Chapter 1

## Agenda-setting dynamics of defence: Towards a new theoretical framework

### 1.1 Introduction

Studying policy agendas is a well-established research tradition. Since the 1960s, several theoretical models have emerged which provide insights into how changes in political attention affect public policies. These models shed light on the nature of the policy process (Cohen et al., 1972; Downs, 1972; Kingdon, 1984), the politics of problem definition (Baumgartner and Jones, 2015; Dery, 1984; Rochefort and Cobb, 1994; Wood and Doan, 2003), and the mechanisms through which social conditions that belong to the private sphere evolve into public problems that become the focus of a wider debate (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993; Cobb and Elder, 1971, 1972; Downs, 1972; Jones and Baumgartner, 2005; Kingdon, 1984; Schattschneider, 1960). To put it differently, they do not describe policy formulation and implementation, but explain why actors, who are involved in the policy-making process, deal with certain issues and neglect others. Most of this research leads to the conclusion that agenda-setting is a socially constructed process in which some individuals and institutions play a fundamental role in determining the problems or issues requiring action on the part of the government. It also tends to show that agenda-setting is not just a stage of the policy cycle. Rather, it is a lens through which policy-making processes can be disentangled and their evolution understood over time, both within and across political systems. As Cobb et al. (1976, p. 138) put it, "[t]he strategies used by various groups competing to place issues on the agenda and the factors which influence their success or failure reveal patterns of participation in policy formulation obscured by a focus on the decision-making process alone".

Although the literature on agenda-setting significantly evolved over the past sixty years, especially with the work of Baumgartner and Jones (1993) and Jones and Baumgartner (2005), the conclusions reached by Schattschneider (1960), Bachrach and Baratz (1962, 1970), Cobb and Elder (1971, 1972), Downs (1972) and Kingdon (1984) on the scope of conflict, non-decision-making, the cyclical nature of policy-making as well as the role of policy entrepreneurs and ‘windows of opportunity’ remain relevant for today’s agenda-setting studies. The agenda-setting approach is, thus, particularly useful to explain *how* and *why* an issue makes it on the government agenda at a specific point of time, including when the underlying causes have already been present for a while. It does not only allow us to identify the mechanisms through which currently dormant issues can be transformed into highly salient political controversies, but also to shed light on how those very same issues may eventually disappear again from the agenda. From a public policy perspective, it is crucial to study those dynamics, to comprehend the different sorts of pressure put on policy-makers on the one hand and to clarify the drivers of policy stability and policy change on the other hand.

The aim of this first chapter is to review the literature on agenda-setting, with a particular focus on the theoretical and empirical research that has already been conducted on foreign, security and defence policy. First, I explain how governments set their priorities, reviewing notably the assumptions and conclusions of current models of agenda-setting. Second, I argue that most public policy scholars who work on agenda-setting have so far focused on the dynamics of domestic policies, with little research being done on how defence issues become and remain a government priority. Based on a critical literature review of agenda-setting in foreign, security and defence policy, I highlight the limits of current research on defence policy agendas. I then propose a novel, theoretical account for stability and change in the defence sector which sheds light on how new understandings of defence issues may or may not be accepted in different political systems. This framework - which focuses on the role of issue attributes and emphasises the interactions between the domestic and the international level - lays the groundwork for the three empirical chapters of my Ph.D. thesis (Chapters 3-5). I conclude Chapter 1 by discussing how agenda-setting affects public policies, examining notably the sources of policy stability and the drivers of change.

## 1.2 How governments set their agendas

While it is beyond the scope of this Ph.D. thesis to individually review the agenda-setting models that have been developed since the 1960s, it is crucial to retain their

key assumptions and conclusions in order to be able to develop a theoretical model for the policy dynamics of defence agendas. From the current state of the art, we can first of all deduce that agenda-setting is a collective process in which certain actors have a tremendous impact on issue selection (Cobb and Elder, 1971, 1972; Schattschneider, 1960). It also becomes clear that all actors involved in the policy-making process - be they individuals, groups or institutions, inside or outside government (Cook, 1981; Jones and Baumgartner, 2005; Kingdon, 1984) - do not only have limited attention spans (Baumgartner and Jones, 1991, 1993; Downs, 1972; Jones and Baumgartner, 2005; Kingdon, 1984), but may process information differently (Baumgartner et al., 2009a; Baumgartner and Jones, 1993; Jones and Baumgartner, 2005). For precisely this reason, the systematic agenda - including public and media priorities - and the institutional agenda - i.e. government priorities - may not always be identical (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993; Cobb and Elder, 1972; Cook, 1981; Jones and Baumgartner, 2005; Kingdon, 1984; Schattschneider, 1960). However, they do converge every now and then (Baumgartner and Gold, 2002; Cook, 1981; Kingdon, 1984; Walgrave and Vliegthart, 2010), thus constituting a window of opportunity for policy change. This can *inter alia* be due to subsystem mobilisations or a change in context that shift the attention of one or several actors towards a specific issue. In this section, I have a closer look at those dynamics, looking in particular at how individuals and institutions process information and identify problems (1); how those problems are, subsequently, framed and received in the policy-making arena (2); and how spillover effects - in particular from the media and public agendas - may eventually influence government priorities (3).

### 1.2.1 Information processing at the individual and institutional levels

Key to most agenda-setting models is the assumption that political systems do not have the capacity to address all problems - and their potential solutions - at any one time. This being said, Jones and Baumgartner (2005) were the first to explicitly model how individuals and institutions involved in policy-making process information and how their (limited) carrying capacities influence the agenda space.

First and foremost, it is important to keep in mind that individuals cannot attend to all social conditions at once since they are rationally bounded (Simon, 1957). Consequently, people tend to focus on a few issues only and are likely to process them one after the other which, in turn, implies that their agenda space is strongly restricted. Agenda-setting scholars, therefore, argue that it is crucial to understand where the in-

formation individuals use to identify problems is coming from and how it is processed (cf. Baumgartner's and Jones' (2015) work on the politics of information).

Although institutions are made up of individuals who are rationally bounded, they have the capacity to make use of parallel rather than serial processing (Simon, 1983). While institutions are, thus, able to process a greater number of issues than any individual could possibly do, they still have limited attention spans, mainly because of time and resource constraints (e.g. in terms of staff, budget, etc.). This implies that institutions can handle many routine items (i.e. items for which standard operating procedures (SOPs) have been developed), but only few non-routine items, at the same time (Kingdon, 1984). Non-routine items are, therefore, usually only looked at if there is a good reason for doing so. Good reasons for addressing a non-routine issue may be a change in the underlying facts of a specific situation (e.g. scientific discoveries or technological advances) or a dramatic event (e.g. a natural disaster, scandal, financial crisis or terror attack), for example, shedding a different light on the issue.

Given that individuals and institutions, hence, both have a 'bottleneck of attention' (Simon, 1985), the size of any policy agenda is limited, i.e. if one issue becomes a priority, less attention will have to be devoted to other policy problems. The fact that there is a structurally determined agenda space implies that issues - and their proponents - do compete for a place on the government's priority list. Such issue competition, in turn, means that some problems are kept off the agenda while others may eventually fade away. This is particularly true for issues that are threatening for some of the actors involved in the policy-making process (Bachrach and Baratz, 1962, 1970). Consequently, the scope of any policy debate is limited, with policy images, alternatives and final outcomes being influenced by so-called 'agenda-setters' who have the ability to structure other actors' choices (Romer and Rosenthal, 1978).

### 1.2.2 The strategic use of policy images and institutional venues

Agenda-setters may, indeed, not only frame the policy problem but also choose the most adequate institutional venue(s) to make their case, thereby further limiting the choices of other actors involved in the policy cycle. This crucial agenda-setting mechanism has already been identified in the 1960s. Schattschneider's (1960) understanding of conflict expansion did, indeed, point to the importance of 'policy images' - i.e. the beliefs and values concerning a public policy -, and the 'venues' of policy action - i.e. the existing set of political institutions dealing with the policy area. More recent work on policy agendas has, however, continued to expand our understanding of the role that images and venues play during the agenda-setting phase.

The agenda-setting literature, thus, notably highlights that policy images are crucial because they indicate how an issue is understood and discussed in the public sphere. The coronavirus, for example, was initially compared to the flu, suggesting that it was not much of a danger to public health. Yet, it quickly turned out that COVID-19 spreads more quickly and has a higher death rate. The World Health Organisation (WHO), hence, officially declared the outbreak of a pandemic which, in turn, immediately changed the image of the virus: it was not only a serious health problem, but also a global political and economic concern. The case of COVID illustrates that policy images may be detrimental or favourable to the actors who want an issue to be tackled (Stone, 1989). It also shows that images may change over time, either because of an external shock or because policy entrepreneurs start lobbying for an alternative understanding of the issue at different policy venues, in the hope that the latter is picked up and catches on to spread. This in, turn, suggests that institutions matter too.

In different societies, different institutions take care of different issues, and each of these venues has, as we have seen above, a limited carrying capacity. Newspapers, for example, only have a certain number of reporters whose time and budget to prepare stories is limited; similarly, parliamentary committees have limits in terms of staff, time - in particular with regard to the number of days that are available for hearings -, and budget (Hilgartner and Bosk, 1988, p. 60). This implies that some policy venues may focus on a problem that others are (still) ignoring which, in turn, means that the reception of an issue may be more or less favourable depending on the venue. The agenda-setting literature, therefore, concludes that strategically-minded actors tend to apply a trial and error process to find the policy venue that is most likely to pay attention to the issue they want to see on the agenda. In the case of COVID-19, for instance, European governments have responded rather slowly to the evolutions in China in late 2019 and early 2020, with border closures in spring 2020 coming as a surprise for many citizens. This, in turn, suggests that the policy problem was not immediately raised at the most adequate policy venues.

‘Venue shopping’ (Pralle, 2003) may eventually lead to a snowball effect where image and venue changes reinforce each other over time (cf. the convergent-choice model by Cook (1981) as well as the ‘cascading’ concept that was introduced by Baumgartner and Gold (2002) and elaborated by Walgrave and Vliegthart (2010)). Once attention to an issue increases in one venue, it is likely that priorities change in other venues too. *How* and *where* issues are discussed is, consequently, not only crucial for problem definition but may change over time and differ across countries. For precisely this reason, many agenda-setting scholars have worked on spillover effects, with a particular focus on how the agendas of the government, the media and the public affect each other.



### 1.2.3 When attention spills over: The link between the media, the public and the government agendas

In fact, most agenda-setting models assume that the priorities of the public, the media and the government are somehow related (Baumgartner and Jones, 1991, 1993; Cobb and Elder, 1971, 1972; Cook, 1981; Downs, 1972; Jones and Baumgartner, 2005; Kingdon, 1984). Given that the aim of this Ph.D. thesis is to examine *why* and *how* defence becomes and remains a government priority, it is useful to review to which extent the media and public opinion may shape the agenda of the executive.

#### 1.2.3.1 The media, key to shaping policy agendas?

Generally speaking, the public policy literature suggests that the media have an impact on government priorities. Numerous studies have, thus, shown that the relations between the media and politics are quite systemic (Curran et al., 2009; Hallin and Mancini, 2004), and that media coverage may affect the policy process from the agenda-setting stage onwards (Birkland, 1997; McCombs and Shaw, 1972).

While there are many case study analyses of how the media played in specific circumstances, only few scholars have attempted to systematise our understanding of how media coverage affects policy-making processes more generally. Classical approaches to policy networks, for example, assume that those in charge of setting the agenda will try to restrict access to policy communities in order to keep control of the policy process (Marsh, 1998; Marsh and Rhodes, 1992). In line with Schattschneider's (1960) argument, actors will, hence, tend to avoid the 'socialisation' of conflict and favour its 'privatisation' for as long as they expect to be able to benefit from it. The media may here be understood as a potential danger, increasing the group of stakeholders beyond the initial policy community. At the same time, salience may be sought for by excluded actors, the losers of the conflict, who look for media attention in an attempt to force their way into an existing policy community.

Boydstun (2013) and Boydstun et al. (2014) have, thus, shown that the media agenda tends to be more volatile than the government agenda, i.e. contrary to the government, the media can suddenly devote large portions of attention to a specific issue or event. This empirical result is fully in line with the 'progressive friction hypothesis'. Friction is the resistance built into the political system: the more friction there is, the more institutions will resist to input (i.e. new information) and the more leptokurtic outputs (i.e. policy) will be. Baumgartner et al. (2009a) further developed this concept into the progressive friction hypothesis, claiming that friction increases when moving

from input to output because of higher decision-making costs. This implies that attention from news media, for example, is less incremental than budgets, where changes in attention involve considerably more costs and, therefore, resistance. In addition, issues can hit the agenda on a wave of positive publicity, or they can be raised in an environment of bad news. By doing so, the media may favour certain actors over others and help popularise specific policy images or solutions. This is particularly true given that the media tend to link policy venues which, in turn, often facilitates cascading processes. Cascading simply implies that the actors involved in policy-making start imitating each other (Walgrave and Vliegenthart, 2010) which may then lead to policy change (Walgrave et al., 2017).

### **1.2.3.2 The general public, an omitted party in agenda-setting?**

Several of the agenda-setting models that have been developed since the 1960s also agree that the general public is not an omitted party in policy-making, but that changes in national mood may have important impacts on policy agendas and policy outcomes (cf., in particular, the frameworks put forward by Cobb and Elder (1972), Kingdon (1984) and Jones and Baumgartner (2005)). The public agenda - which should be thought of as an aggregation of individual agendas - reflects the issues that are salient to the general public, i.e. the concerns people have and the problems they think the government should be addressing (Stimson, 1991, 2004). It is usually less diverse than the media and the government agendas (Jones and Baumgartner, 2005) and also tends to be more volatile (John et al., 2013). This is mainly due to the fact that only few people actively participate in public affairs, i.e. the issues that are most important to the general public are above all affected by media coverage (Jones, 1994).

The media may, indeed, impact the public agenda, by giving issues more or less significance through the type or amount of coverage they receive. Cohen (1963, p. 13) was the first to state what has become a key assumption in agenda-setting studies: the press "may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about". The media are, hence, able to shape public opinion (Behr and Iyengar, 1985; Dearing and Rogers, 1996; Entman, 1989; Iyengar, 1991; Iyengar and Kinder, 1987; Jasperson et al., 1998; McCombs and Shaw, 1972). This is particularly true for concrete policy issues, and for abstract ones if they are reframed in a more accessible way by journalists. Indeed, complex problems can be explained differently: the focus of the debate may be on the technical details of the issue (which are rather abstract) or its wider social and political implications (which tend to be more concrete) (Baumgartner and Jones, 1991). While

abstract discussions are usually led by experts, general frames are easier to grasp for non-experts and, therefore, also more likely to include a larger group of participants, including the general public (Baumgartner, 1989). If the public understanding of the problem is positive (i.e. the public is not only in favour of government action but also believes that the government is able to do something about the issue), specialists have strong arguments to get the issue on the government agenda.

Cobb and Elder (1972, pp. 161-162), thus, argued that any issue that is meant to attain public recognition should be defined "as ambiguously as possible, with implications for as many people as possible, involving issues other than the dispute in question, with no categorical precedence, and as simply as is feasible". This holds true for media coverage, but also for elite discourses which may shape public concerns too.

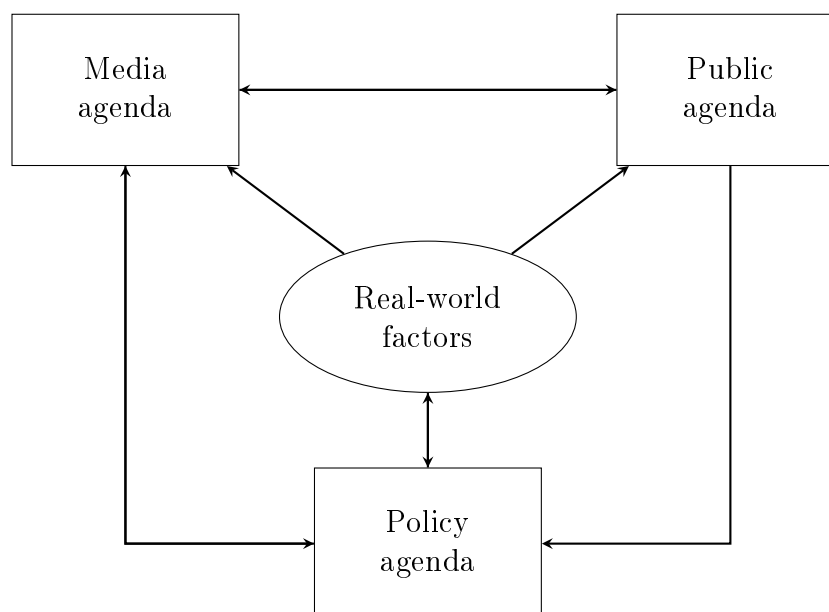
### 1.2.3.3 What determines the government agenda

From the above, we may conclude that an issue that achieves salience in the media and the public debate is much more likely to reach the attention of the executive, legislature or judiciary, thus being up for serious consideration of decision-makers (Cobb and Elder, 1972; Cook, 1981; Jones and Baumgartner, 2004; Soroka, 2002a). There are, however, also other, potentially feasible agenda-setting dynamics. The latter mainly include private decisions made inside government which exclude actors such as the media and the general public; decisions initiated by government officials but for which public and media support is required; decisions made by government after lobbying efforts from outside groups, etc. Although the agenda-setting literature acknowledges that those dynamics exist (Cobb and Elder, 1971, 1972), theoretical contributions currently fall short of specifying under which conditions or for which policy issues they apply.

Agenda-setting scholars, nonetheless, agree that issues should ideally evoke the attention of a variety of individuals and institutions in order to reach - and stay on - the government agenda. Those actors are obviously embedded in a broader social, political and economic environment. As several of the aforementioned agenda-setting models have already pointed out, the context matters for setting government agendas. Soroka (2002a), who studied agenda-setting dynamics in Canada and modelled the link between the government, the media and the public agendas, thus showed that real-world factors have an impact on all three agendas, as illustrated in Figure 1.1. Shifts in the government agenda can, thus, not only occur due to subsystem mobilisations (e.g. before or after a general election) but also be caused by a dramatic event which has the capacity to change the way that political elites and the media talk about the issue. Many public policy scholars have worked on the impact such events have on

government priorities because of the intense media and public attention they tend to receive (cf. in particular Birkland (1997, 1998)). They show that ‘focusing events’ draw attention to oftentimes dormant issues or concerns and result in a sudden rise in issue salience which, in turn, may put pressure on policy-makers to eventually take action (cf. as well the literature on ‘moral panics’ and overreactions (Cohen, 1972; Jennings et al., 2020; Lodge and Hood, 2002)).

Figure 1.1: The dynamics of agenda-setting: A national perspective



Source: Figure based on Soroka (2002a, p. 11)

In addition to studying how real-world factors, the media and the general public affect the policy agenda, scholars have analysed how governments process information and identify priorities. While the bureaucratic apparatus is designed to attend to many issues at the same time, they have shown that the reliance on past solutions as heuristic short cuts to decision-making is necessary - and common practice - for most institutions (cf. Rose and Davies (1994) on ‘policy inheritances’, for instance). Several empirical studies also came to the conclusion that attention is - despite parallel processing - once again much more selective at higher reaches of government where the alternatives for and potential consequences of each decision cannot be fully examined and understood (True, 2002, p. 161). The president or prime minister (PM), for example, is not able to pay close attention to every single budget item, programme update or implementation plan. In the case of the US, Light (1982), thus, found that the agenda of the president is not only determined by the number of staff members, but also by their time, energy and expertise. Consequently, issues have to be taken off the president’s priority list on a quite regular basis, even if they have not been solved yet (cf. Downs’ (1972) issue-

attention cycle). Similarly, Nelson (1984) found that officials did not just slip a new issue between older ones, but paid less attention to older issues or ended up removing them from the existing agenda. It is, consequently, even more important that issues catch the attention of a variety of individuals and institutions, not only to reach but also to stay on the government agenda in the medium and long run.

### 1.3 Defence policy, a deviant case for agenda-setting studies?

Even though agenda-setting studies have grown into one of the major paradigmatic approaches to public policy, many scholars still focus on how domestic issues become a government priority. I argue that there are two reasons for this trend. First, the public policy literature has largely neglected foreign affairs because of research traditions. Public policy usually deals with domestic policy issues while defence is an object that is traditionally studied by IR scholars, foreign policy (FP) analysts and researchers in war studies departments. Thus, little scholarly effort has been made to integrate agenda-setting into mainstream IR or foreign policy analysis (FPA), either from a theoretical or empirical point of view. The second reason, which is closely linked to the first one, is the overall assumption that the mechanisms identified for agenda-setting in domestic policies do not apply for the foreign policy sphere. As Wood and Peake (1998, p. 173) argue, "foreign policy does not readily fit the theoretical mold most scholars associate with domestic issues". Most agenda-setting models focus on problem perception, issue definition, subsystem formation, the mobilisation of interests, venue shopping and institutional friction. The conventional wisdom is, however, that these concepts are not particularly relevant for the study of foreign policy-making.

When analysing the parliamentary dynamics of defence policy in France and the UK, Foucault and Irondelle (2009, p. 469), thus, argue that defence responds to social and political logics which *could* make it a deviant case for agenda-setting studies. The latter include the concentration of foreign policy-making at the top of the executive, the central role of national interests and secrecy, a certain consensus on both countries' defence policy orientations, scarce parliamentary scrutiny, rare media coverage and little public debate on defence. For precisely this reason, defence is often considered to be more insulated and to lack transparency, with governments trying to sideline parliaments, as it has been shown to be the case for many other foreign policy issues (Vanhoonacker and Pomorska, 2013). In line with this argument, the main assumption of most public policy scholars seems to be that subsystems - which play a key role

in agenda-setting models - do not develop preferences for (most) foreign policy issues since these issues do not typically involve the material or solidary benefits required for strong participation. Consequently, the defence sector appears to have less potential policy venues where policy entrepreneurs can advocate alternative policy images.

In addition, defence - contrary to most other public policies - tends to work like an insurance policy. This means that an effective defence policy, i.e. a policy that successfully deters threats to national security and preserves the country's freedom of action, may look like an unnecessary investment since none of the priorly identified risks ends up materialising (Smith, 2009, p. 38). It also implies that parts of the defence agenda are non-visible for security-related reasons. Defence issues are, therefore, often thought to be unobtrusive, abstract and somehow 'hidden' from the general public and the media. This understanding of the defence sector is not fully mistaken. Many aspects of defence policy are, indeed, beyond the realm of personal experience, i.e. if we learn about these issues, we often do so via the media whose coverage make defence more visible. The corresponding (media) images are oftentimes very loaded, both in 'times of peace' and in 'times of crisis'. In times of peace - i.e. in non-crisis situations -, symbolism and patriotism tend to prevail (e.g. during the ceremonies for national holidays or training exercises); in times of crisis - i.e. when a threat materialised -, governments often securitise very specific defence issues to show that the matter is urgent and has to be taken care of immediately (Buzan, 1991).

There are, consequently, many reasons why defence policy *can*, as Foucault and Irondelle (2009) argue, be thought of as a deviant case for agenda-setting studies. Their empirical analysis, however, shows that agenda-setting is useful for better understanding defence policy-making at the national level and for comparing the evolution of national defence priorities across countries and over time. Other studies too suggest that agenda-setting is a crucial lens for examining the process of foreign policy-making: Durant and Diehl (1989) and Archuleta (2016), for example, explicitly call on public policy scholars to have a closer look at foreign policy-related issues. In this section, I review the literature on agenda-setting in foreign, security and defence policy. More specifically, I underline that there are two research strands that deal with foreign policy from a public policy perspective: the first indirectly sheds light on the agenda-setting dynamics of foreign, security and defence policy because it focuses on the evolution of core agenda topics, including foreign affairs; the second directly looks at foreign policy-related issues and examines how they became a government priority. I pay particular attention to the agenda-setting mechanisms that have already been identified in those strands of the literature as well as the cases that scholars have studied, and then outline the limits of the current state of the art. This critical literature review,

thus, lays the groundwork for my theoretical proposition of how new understandings of defence issues may or may not be accepted in different political systems.

### **1.3.1 The status of defence policy on the government agenda**

Several of the more recently published agenda-setting studies examine agenda diversity, i.e. they analyse the composition of policy agendas over time. This research looks at defence as one of the core issues governments deal with (1), studies potential crowding-out effects between different issues on the government agenda (2), and, thus, also examines the volatility of defence (3). By doing so, these studies - which oftentimes use quantitative methods to understand how issues rise and fall on policy agendas - indirectly shed light on the agenda-building dynamics of foreign policy issues.

#### **1.3.1.1 Defence policy, a core issue for governments?**

As mentioned in the introduction of this Ph.D. thesis, defence was long time considered to be a core function of the state and, in many instances, even the very first obligation of governments. Although defence may seem to be less important nowadays, in particular in terms of budget allocations, it still remains a crucial issue on most government agendas and periodically also has a prominent place among public and media priorities.

One of the most sophisticated studies on the evolution of core issues on government agendas is the comparative, longitudinal analysis of executive speeches in Denmark, France, the Netherlands, Spain, the UK and the US by Jennings et al. (2011b). Using an entropy measure to study agenda diversity, they find that three core functions of government, namely defence, the economy and government operations, condition the space for all other issues on the executive agenda. This means that in times in which those three issues are a government priority, the agenda of the executive is less diverse. To put it differently, Jennings et al. find a crowding-out effect between core and non-core issues, but not between core issues. This conclusion confirms prior research results that already suggested that governments tend to focus heavily on the economy, defence and international affairs (Cohen, 1997; Edwards and Barrett, 2000).

The presence of crowding-out effects between core and non-core issues has also been confirmed by studies on agenda-setting in the US. The latter have concluded that security and defence policy is able to push other, less central or newer issues from the government agenda. In the foreword to Repetto's (2006) edited volume on punctuated equilibrium (PE) and the dynamics of US environmental policy, Speth (2006, p.viii) argues:

"Since 9/11, advocates of preventing action on climate change have had to struggle even harder than usual to get attention from the public and politicians. Inattention to other issues has been part of the collateral damage from the war on terror and the war in Iraq."

A similar point is made by Lane (2006, p. 163) in his chapter on the political economy of US greenhouse gas controls. He stresses that "national security and fiscal policy challenges may well out-compete the same climate issue for both public attention and economic resources". Although neither Speth (2006) nor Lane (2006) properly demonstrate their point, their argument fully fits the empirical analyses on core and non-core issues later conducted by Jennings et al. (2011b).

Yet, it is crucial to note that the absence of crowding-out effects between core issues that public policy scholars tend to find has partially been challenged, in particular by those working on the diversionary use of force. This branch of IR scholarship looks at the ability of (US) presidents to use highly visible and salient foreign policy actions to deflect public and media attention away from domestic issues, including the economy. There is, however, mixed empirical evidence for such a rally 'round the flag effect, a concept already mentioned in the introductory chapter of this manuscript. While some studies confirm that the president addresses foreign issues when public concerns about the economy increase (DeRouen, 2000; Fordham, 1998; Meernik and Ault, 2013; Morgan and Bickers, 1992; Ostrom and Job, 1986), others do not find sufficient evidence for such a claim (Meernik and Waterman, 1996; Mitchell and Moore, 2002; Moore and Lanoue, 2003). Crowding-out effects on government agendas, hence, merit further attention by scholars in public policy, but also in IR.

### **1.3.1.2 Defence policy, a 'victim' or a 'killer' issue?**

The results of Lane (2006), Speth (2006) and Jennings et al. (2011b) seem to suggest that defence is a 'killer issue'. Killer issues are problems that remove other issues from the media or the public agenda. Brosius and Kepplinger (1995), who studied issue competition in the agenda-setting process of German television, argue that events, media coverage and issue awareness matter for creating a killer issue. More specifically, they claim that the attributes of events (e.g. their unexpectedness and damage), the characteristics of media coverage (i.e. its intensity and volatility) and the type of issue awareness (i.e. the concerns the issue creates) are crucial for agenda-setting. Brosius and Kepplinger conclude that defence is a 'victim issue', i.e. in the case of Germany, defence belongs to those issues that are thrown off the media and public agendas in times of agenda restructuring. While this result may seem to contradict the conclusions



reached by Lane (2006), Speth (2006) and Jennings et al. (2011b), it is likely to be due to the research design of the study: Brosius and Kepplinger (1995) focus on Germany - a country that is known for having a difficult relationship with its defence policy - and study television coverage in 1986 only, i.e. their results risk capturing only parts of the story and are, hence, not necessarily generalisable.

In addition, it may also be that defence remains a core issue for the executive (Jennings et al., 2011b), while it declines on other agendas. The results of several empirical studies go in that direction. Baumgartner and Gold (2002), who study issue attention of the US Congress and the Supreme Court, find a drop of 'old' issues, such as federalism, defence and public lands, and a rise of 'new' issues, like environmental regulation and health. Similarly, Jones and Baumgartner (2005, p. 259) conclude that domestic issues have the chance to rise on the congressional agenda as defence and international security become less of a public concern. They argue that the public agenda started to expand (Jones and Baumgartner, 2005, p. 93), with a greater number of domestic policy priorities moving up. The seemingly contradictory empirical results may, hence, simply suggest that current trends differ depending on the agenda one is looking at, with defence remaining a core issue for the executive while increasingly losing traction for the media and the general public. This, in turn, would suggest that the 'agenda status' of defence becomes more volatile.

### 1.3.1.3 Defence, an increasingly volatile issue?

From the empirical studies discussed above, it is difficult to conclude to which extent the status of defence has really changed on government agendas. This is mainly due to the fact that the scope of most analyses is very specific, i.e. their results cannot be generalised. However, the current state of the art clearly indicates that issues related to foreign affairs move up and down the agenda, just like domestic policy issues. John et al. (2013), hence, conclude that attention paid to defence is highly volatile for the executive, the legislative and the media. The public policy literature already identified a few reasons for this volatility, including the 'colour' of government (1), the changing nature of the sector (2), and the role that events play in the foreign policy sphere (3).

First, the agenda status of defence may depend on the government currently being in power. It is, indeed, often assumed that the left favours pro-peace policies while the right favours pro-military policies (Budge et al., 2001; Hicks and Swank, 1992; Klingemann et al., 1994; Koch and Cranmer, 2008; Schultz, 2001). The left (right) may, however, also be inclined to pay more (less) attention to the military, given the priority it places on employment (low inflation) (Eichenberg and Stoll, 2003; Hibbs,

1979). This indirect approach assumes that defence does not compete with but rather supplements the private sector. It, hence, contests the initial hypothesis of a purely pro-peace left and a purely pro-military right (Nincic and Cusack, 1979). Empirical evidence for the impact that the colour of government has on the agenda status of defence is, consequently, less straightforward than one may initially believe. While the issue-ownership model holds in the UK, for example, with the Conservative Party emphasising foreign affairs whereas Labour focuses on social issues (John et al., 2013), empirical analyses conducted in France found hardly any difference in policy attention between the left and right (Baumgartner et al., 2009b,c; Brouard et al., 2012).

Second, defence may be more volatile due to new perceptions of the sector. Jones and Baumgartner (2005, p. 106-107), who studied the evolution of government priorities in the US, thus, argue that the bases and justifications of defence policy have changed over the years. They claim that our understanding of the military - including its very purpose - have started to shift which, in turn, implies a revision of our strategies, tools and policies to predict, prevent, detect and respond to the tensions characterising the 21st century. This obviously holds true for the executive, but is also valid for the general public and the media who may be inclined to challenge the legitimacy and effectiveness of troop deployments or question the necessity to invest in professional armed forces or oftentimes very expensive equipment programmes.

Third, the public policy literature suggests that the volatility of defence on policy agendas is largely due to events and the variety of actors involved in foreign policy-making. Although all public policies may be affected by exogenous shocks, Wood and Peake (1998) argue that their effects tend to be larger for defence. They point to the fact that national security can rise and fall in importance relatively quickly, depending on the severity of external threats as well as the media and public concerns they generate. Foreign policy, therefore, tends to be more random. This 'randomness', however, is not only due to the unpredictability of the international security environment; it is also closely linked to the variety of actors - including governments of other countries and IOs, for instance - that may impact foreign policy-making at the national level (Durant and Diehl, 1989; Eriksson, 2002), in particular following a focusing event.

### 1.3.2 The agenda-setting mechanisms of defence

Although the first strand of the literature sheds light on the agenda-setting dynamics of defence by showing that government attention to defence is conditional on its attention to all other policy problems, it does not account for the mechanisms through which defence issues may out-compete - or be out-competed by - other issues. Here, the

second strand of the literature is helpful since it looks at foreign policy-related issues and examines how they became and remained a government priority.

### **1.3.2.1 The executive, key to understanding agenda dynamics in the realm of foreign, security and defence policy?**

Several of the agenda-setting models discussed in this chapter - which have initially been developed for the domestic sphere - already pointed towards the dominance of the president in the agenda-setting process. Kingdon (1984, p. 25), thus, argued that "no other single actor in the political system has quite the capability of the president to set agendas". Similarly, Baumgartner and Jones (1993, p. 241) underlined that "no other single actor can focus attention as clearly, or change the motivations of such a great number of other actors, as the president". As aforementioned, this key role is often said to be particularly true for the defence sector, given that decision-making is highly concentrated at the top of the executive. Empirical evidence on the agenda-setting power of the executive in the realm of foreign policy is, however, mixed.

In his case study on the British support to the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, O'Malley (2007) shows how Tony Blair, then PM, and his office selectively released information to influence and structure the choices of other actors involved in the decision-making process. Blair was able to convince a large number of Labour MPs, initially opposed to intervening in Iraq, and the Conservatives that a military operation was necessary to avoid a higher risk of attacks on British troops and interests. While O'Malley refers very little to the agenda-setting literature, his contribution is fully in line with earlier theoretical work on policy dynamics (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993; Jones and Baumgartner, 2005; Kingdon, 1984; Schattschneider, 1960): Downing Street had the agenda-setting power to define the alternatives from which everyone else had to choose, thus determining the final policy decision. Though, as O'Malley (2007, p. 8) recognises himself, the invasion of Iraq is not a typical case study, given that the decision was largely criticised, even at the highest levels of government. Since O'Malley focuses on a critical case that is not representative of British foreign policy, his study fails to show the limits of the executive's agenda-setting power.

A few agenda-setting studies do, indeed, challenge the traditional model of presidential predominance in building foreign policy agendas, suggesting that presidents are relatively weak agenda-setters. Several reasons have been advanced for a limited agenda-setting power of the executive. First, policy-makers in foreign policy, similar to decision-makers in other public sectors, face an 'executive bottleneck' (Lindsey and Hobbs, 2015), i.e. presidents, PMs and other top bureaucrats are likely to process

issues one by one (Jones, 1994). The problems they look at have, thus, oftentimes already been pre-screened. This implies that some foreign policy issues are on hold, while others are downplayed for the time being or directly taken off the agenda without ever reaching the top executive. Second, the executive usually has to cope with an agenda that has largely been elaborated by its predecessors, i.e. it does not only have to deal with prior commitments, including treaty obligations, spending entitlements etc., but may even 'inherit' problems that have been not been tackled by the outgoing government (Wood and Peake, 1998). Last but not least, research has shown that presidential influence declines over time, i.e. the executive tends to have less congressional and public support towards the end of its mandate (Light, 1981, 1982).

What does this imply for the agenda-building dynamics of foreign policy-related issues? While the executive is most definitely an important agenda-setter, its overall influence may be limited. Consequently, other factors matter too. To the best of my knowledge, there are seven empirical studies which have had a closer look at how - relatively specific - foreign policy items became a government priority, thereby shedding light on additional determinants of the foreign policy agenda.

### **1.3.2.2 Looking beyond the executive**

In one of the first studies examining the determinants of the foreign policy agenda, Andrade and Young (1996) show that approval levels, presidential influence in Congress and international events matter in the US. They argue that these factors are largely uncontrollable by the president, thus strongly weakening his or her agenda-setting power: approval levels are closely linked to the economic conditions and tend to decline during the president's mandate; presidential influence in Congress depends on the composition of the two houses; and international events - which may have direct or indirect consequences for US politics - can hardly be avoided. Andrade and Young, therefore, conclude that the context largely determine the composition of the president's agenda.

The fact that the president does not fully control the foreign policy agenda has been confirmed by Wood and Peake (1998). Even though foreign policy is institutionally speaking centred around the president, their study reveals that it is characterised by strong inertia, implying that the president has less capacity to change US foreign policy than initially believed. According to Wood and Peake, this inertia may only be disrupted by international events. Measuring presidential and media attention to the Arab-Israeli conflict, the Bosnian war and the Soviet Union, they find that events do not only change the president's perception of the relative severity of the foreign policy problem, but also shape public opinion on the issue, in particular via media coverage.

Looking at five domestic and foreign policy issues, Edwards and Wood (1999) then studied the relationship between the US president, the media and Congress. They found that the president is able to focus the attention of other actors involved in the policy-making process on major domestic policy issues (here crime, education and health care). However, when dealing with foreign policy issues (here the Arab-Israeli conflict and US-Soviet relations), Edwards and Wood concluded that the executive largely responds to events and fluctuations in media coverage, thus confirming the results already reached by Andrade and Young (1996) and Wood and Peake (1998). Based on their comparative analysis of domestic and foreign policy issues, Edwards and Wood (1999), therefore, argue that different issues have different paths of influence.

Peake (2001), subsequently, tested if the results reached by Wood and Peake (1998) and Edwards and Wood (1999) also held beyond the rather specific cases they studied. Based on the assumption that foreign policy comes in many forms and that prior studies do not reflect this diversity, Peake (2001) looked at four other issues - namely the Caribbean, Central America, foreign aid and foreign trade -, arguing that they are less tied to international events. Similar to Edwards and Wood (1999), Peake (2001) found that the president's ability to shape institutional attention depends on issue-related variables, i.e. agenda-building dynamics do not only differ between domestic and foreign policy issues but also change across foreign policy items. He argues that the agenda-setting power of presidents depends on the salience of the foreign policy issue, its potential impact on national security and the extent to which the international system drives the executive agenda. Peake, thus, concludes that the executive has more leverage when dealing with less salient, non-crisis issues while events often oblige the president to deal with issues that he or she would have preferred to further ignore.

Comparing traditional approaches to the study of security and defence issues with the PE model, True (2002) looked at US spending levels since 1946. He found periods of stability and rapid change and, thus, also concluded that policy-makers cannot fully control security policy as the context - and, hence, the objectives of foreign policy - may change rapidly. True (p. 156), therefore, argued that "it would be advantageous to deal explicitly with temporally changing relationships" rather than aspiring to "timeless generalization in an inappropriate way". Although he does not propose a proper agenda-setting model based on his empirical conclusions, True's study suggests that any framework developed for the agenda-building dynamics of security and defence issues should account for institutional inertia and macropolitical shifts of attention.

While the aforementioned studies identify some of the key factors that determine the allocation of government attention to foreign policy issues - including the national

and the international context (Andrade and Young, 1996; Edwards and Wood, 1999; True, 2002; Wood and Peake, 1998), media coverage (Edwards and Wood, 1999; Wood and Peake, 1998) and public opinion (Wood and Peake, 1998) -, they fall short of explaining the mechanisms behind those agenda-building dynamics. Two more recent studies started to close that gap in the literature though: Mazarr's (2007) analysis of the US decision to launch Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003 and Dijkstra's (2012) study of agenda-setting in the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP).

Even though 9/11 is an exceptional case in US foreign policy-making (Jones and Baumgartner, 2005, p. 51), Mazarr (2007) convincingly shows how some individuals, who had already been advocating a more aggressive policy course towards Iraq during the Clinton administration, found themselves in senior policy positions in 2001, and were able to 'use' the events of 9/11 to impose their own, alternative understanding on President Bush, the US Congress, the media and the public. In line with Kingdon's (1984) approach, Mazarr (2007), thus, illustrates how the 'terrorism frame' was manipulated to qualify Iraq as a threat to US national security due to its (potential) possession of weapons of mass destruction and support of international terrorism.

Dijkstra (2012), in turn, who traced attention to CSDP operations in Aceh, Bosnia, Chad and Kosovo, found that the former High Representative Javier Solana and his officials played a key role in putting those missions on the EU agenda. Based on data from official documents and semi-structured interviews with officials from EU member states, EU institutions and IOs, he shows how Solana's team benefited from its institutional position, having up-to-date information on the state of play and, hence, an early-mover advantage to convince member states to launch those four operations. In addition, it used several of the already mentioned agenda-setting strategies - including venue shopping, conflict expansion and issue framing - to make EU operations more acceptable for member states. Dijkstra, thus, also demonstrates that there is a variety of actors involved in foreign policy, both at the national and the international level.

Mazarr's (2007) and Dijkstra's (2007) analyses neatly show how the dynamics of agenda-setting translate to a foreign policy context, with few to no significant policy changes until policy entrepreneurs are able to seize the right opportunity to impose an alternative understanding of the issue – a solution waiting for a problem – to an appropriate venue, thereby causing a major policy change. Mazarr (2007) additionally shows that focusing events *can* play an important role in this process, but also suggests that the latter may only be a trigger and should, therefore, not be overemphasised when studying foreign policy agendas (on this point, cf. as well Joly and Richter (2019)).

### 1.3.3 Agenda-setting in foreign, security and policy: What we currently know

From the literature discussed above, we may derive some more general conclusions on the agenda-setting dynamics of foreign, security and defence policy.

First and foremost, defence does not exist in a vacuum on policy agendas. To the contrary, the attention that any government is able to pay to defence-related issues is conditional on the attention it pays to all other public problems. This implies that the composition of government agendas is likely to change over time, and that defence issues are susceptible to move up and down the priority list of states. Empirical evidence suggests that defence remains a core issue for the executive, able to push non-core issues from the agenda, but starts losing traction for the media and the general public.

Second, the agenda-setting power of the top of the executive is real but limited (Andrade and Young, 1996; Edwards and Wood, 1999; Peake, 2001; True, 2002; Wood and Peake, 1998). Scholars have not only shown that the media, public opinion and context matter (cf. below), but also concluded that there is a variety of actors in the foreign policy arena, both at the national and the international level (Dijkstra, 2012; Durant and Diehl, 1989; O'Malley, 2007). The latter include parliaments (Foucault and Irondelle, 2009; Rozenberg et al., 2011), the defence industry (Adams, 1982), the military (Cohen, 1994), advocacy groups as well as third states, IOs and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) (Durant and Diehl, 1989; Eriksson, 2002), for example. These actors are able to shape government agendas, in particular since they may have different understandings of the military and, hence, different bases and justifications of defence policy, depending on the context they find themselves in.

Third, context matters (Andrade and Young, 1996; Edwards and Wood, 1999; Mazarr, 2007; Peake, 2001; True, 2002; Wood and Peake, 1998). At the domestic level, defence agendas may depend upon a number of different factors, not least of which are power and politics. In some states, defence still plays a central role: it is a political priority that is based on public consensus and receives a significant share of government attention. In other states, however, defence is much less important and problem recognition mainly structured through the course of domestic or international events. John et al. (2013), thus, argue that foreign policy issues often burst onto the scene as the result of a dramatic event or crisis. Such focusing events tend to impose themselves on the agenda and force attention to a very specific issue (Birkland, 1997, 1998, 2004). Depending on the media and public concerns they generate, events and crises may have far-reaching effects for the entire political agenda.

Fourth, political attention to foreign policy issues is very likely to be affected by when and how the media report on the problem (Edwards and Wood, 1999; Wood and Peake, 1998). News coverage is a business and, therefore, tends to be based on what the media expect public interests to be. The media, consequently, frame the news, promoting some perspectives and excluding others (Iyengar and Kinder, 1987; McCombs and Shaw, 1972). Public policy scholars have also shown that media effects vary across agendas and policy domains, i.e. there tend to be larger cascading effects for some issues. Walgrave et al. (2008), for instance, found evidence for the media having an impact on Belgian government agendas in defence and foreign affairs, but also showed that the effects for issues such as law and order were greatest. In addition, scholars have shown that dramatic events have an increased potential for media effects on public opinion (MacKuen and Coombs, 1981; Wanta and Hu, 1993). This being said, we also know that even salient issues will eventually offer less opportunity for a media impact because of limited attention spans (Downs, 1972).

Fifth, the general public seems to play some kind of role in setting foreign policy agendas. Even though the aforementioned studies on agenda-setting in foreign, security and defence policy do not detail the agenda-setting power of public opinion, past research has shown that decision-makers are aware of the general mood in their countries and usually do not take decisions that are at odds with this public mood (Shirayev, 2000). This is a relatively new conclusion. Prior to the 1980s, the consensus in the public policy literature was, indeed, that the public was largely uninformed and disinterested and, consequently, not able to form a 'rational' opinion on foreign policy-related issues (c.f. Almond (1950); Converse (1964); Miller (1967); for a review of this literature, cf. Holsti (2004, pp. 25-98)). The landmark work by Shapiro and Page (1988) changed this assumption, however: based on an extensive data analysis of public opinion surveys in the US between 1935 and 1986, Shapiro and Page showed for the first time that responses to surveys were rather stable. This implies that public opinion tends to be relatively coherent and responds in a rather sensible way to new information (Eichenberg, 1989; Page and Shapiro, 1992; Wittkopf, 1990).

What does this mean for the agenda-building dynamics of foreign policy-related issues? Changes in public opinion are unlikely to automatically translate into a foreign policy decision. However, if the government moves beyond the 'comfort zone' of the general public, public opinion is likely to react and ask for more acceptable policies to be implemented (Stimson, 1991, p. 122-123). Wlezien (1995, 1996), who analysed the evolution of defence expenditures over time, thus compared the responsiveness of public opinion to public spending with a thermostat: if the public considers defence expenditures to be too high (low), it will request lower (higher) spending levels in the



future. Public opinion, hence, turned out to be a 'permissive democratic constraint' (La Balme, 2000), able to shape international politics (Hill, 1998; Sobel, 2001). The key question then is where the public gets the necessary information from.

Soroka (2003), who studied the relationship between media coverage, public opinion and foreign policy in the UK and the US, argued that the public largely relies on the media to keep up with policy-making. The media are, indeed, the main means by which the vast majority of individuals receive information about foreign affairs, an issue for which personal experience is unlikely to provide much useful information (Soroka, 2003, p. 28). Soroka's empirical evidence does not only suggest that it largely depends on media content whether a foreign policy issue becomes a public concern, but also that issue salience may affect the foreign policy agenda. His results, thus, largely confirm the findings of prior research on the effect that media coverage has had on public opinion during the Gulf crisis. Iyengar and Simon (1993), for example, found that the level of coverage matched the proportion of respondents identifying the war as the nation's most important problem (MIP). Similar conclusions have been reached by Sigelman et al. (1993), Mueller (1994) and Pan and Kosicki (1994). Although the Gulf war was a "mediated issue par excellence" (Iyengar and Simon, 1993, p. 381), it shows that news coverage of foreign policy is able to shape public concerns. This has also been confirmed by other scholars who worked on different foreign policy issues (Birkland, 2004; Brouard, 2016; Brouard and Foucault, 2015; Kent, 2006; Mazarr, 2007).

Last but not least, the literature on agenda-setting in foreign, security and defence policy suggests that issue characteristics matter (Edwards and Wood, 1999; Peake, 2001). However, both empirical and theoretical contributions currently fall short of explaining *how* and *why* different attributes lead to different paths of influence. This is striking since public policy scholars have developed several typologies to explain how attributes, public opinion, media coverage and government priorities are related. One of the best-known issue attribute theories is Zucker's (1978) obtrusiveness hypothesis. He suggests that the more obtrusive an issue is - i.e. the more likely it is that individuals experience the issue directly - the more 'immune' they are to media agenda-setting. For unobtrusive issues, in turn, i.e. those not directly experienced by individuals, the media are more likely to have an impact on public opinion. Zucker found that public salience and media coverage were related for pollution and drug abuse (unobtrusive), and unrelated for living costs and unemployment (obtrusive). Based on his framework, Hugel et al. (1989) - who developed structural equation models for the analysis of agenda-setting dynamics - classified foreign affairs as an unobtrusive issue.

Yagade and Dozier (1990), subsequently, argued that the abstractness of an issue

also reduced the agenda-setting power of the media. They suggested that concrete issues, like drug abuse or energy, are more open to media effects than abstract ones, such as the nuclear arms race or the federal budget deficit. Based on the conclusions reached by Zucker (1978) and Yagade and Dozier (1990), Soroka (2002a, p. 15-31) proposed a slightly more sophisticated typology of issue attributes. He differentiates between prominent issues (which are real-world driven), sensational issues (which are media-driven) and governmental issues (which are policy-driven). For prominent issues, which are obtrusive and concrete, media effects are expected to be modest. If individuals can rely on their own experience, the media are less likely to set their issue priorities. For sensational issues, which are unobtrusive and concrete, i.e. individuals do not directly experience them but the issue has tangible consequences for society, the media lead politics, in particular in times of crisis. For governmental issues, which are unobtrusive and abstract, policy leads the media. We can, hence, conclude that different attributes lead to different agenda-building dynamics (Soroka, 2002a,b).

Even though Soroka does not use his typology to analyse foreign policy, it helps us to explain some of the already mentioned empirical findings. Wood and Peake (1998) and Edwards and Wood (1999), for example, found significant media effects, i.e. in the case of the US, foreign affairs tend to be a sensational issue. This has been confirmed by Walgrave et al. (2008, p. 820) who also claim that US foreign policy is unobtrusive, with very concrete and tangible consequences, including the loss of soldiers on battlefields abroad. In the case of Belgium, however, Walgrave et al. found that foreign policy was unobtrusive, with no concrete consequences for the population due to little troop deployments, thereby suggesting that foreign policy was a governmental issue. This, in turn, indirectly confirms Peake's (2001) result: the salience of an issue matters. Thus, agenda-setting dynamics may not only differ across foreign policy issues (Edwards and Wood, 1999; Peake, 2016), but also change over time (Peake, 2001). In addition, they may vary between countries (Walgrave et al., 2008), depending on strategic cultures and the agenda-setting power of the individuals and institutions involved in the foreign policy-making process at the national level.

### 1.3.4 The limits of current research on defence policy agendas

Although the agenda-setting approach is not yet very common among scholars working on foreign affairs, the aforementioned studies have analysed different foreign policy issues through a public policy lens, indicating how useful the framework is for FPA and IR. The research of Andrade and Young (1996), Wood and Peake (1998), Edwards and Wood (1999), Peake (2001), True (2002), Mazarr (2007) and Dijkstra (2012) is

not only complementary but also shows that agenda-setting is transferable to different policy contexts and types of external relations. Just like any other public policy, defence is increasingly constrained by structural biases and system-level dynamics, i.e. parts of the regal domain do not withdraw from the 'traditional' agenda-setting dynamics anymore. This, in turn, suggests a certain normalisation of the sector, as it is not only the executive that influences how the defence agenda eventually plays out. Other actors, including the media and the general public, matter too.

There are, nonetheless, several limits to the current state of the art, both from a theoretical and an empirical point of view. First and foremost, the focus of most studies is currently on very broad and salient foreign policy issues, i.e. scholars have so far failed to have a closer look at defence-related issues. This, in turn, leads to a second limit: except for Foucault and Irondelle (2009) who specifically worked on defence, researchers have not yet disaggregated issues beyond broad policy categories. They, thus, largely ignore the diversity of defence and do not account for the different issue attributes that different aspects of defence policy have. Public policy scholars, though, have shown that an issue's characteristics are key to understanding its agenda-setting dynamics. Last but not least, the empirical validation of how agenda-building plays out in foreign, security and defence policy has several limits, including a focus on the US, the use of either qualitative *or* quantitative methods, and an overall lack of interest in the role that international actors may play when setting the policy agenda.

#### **1.3.4.1 The focus on broad, salient foreign policy categories**

First, most of the aforementioned studies do not only focus on broad foreign policy categories (Andrade and Young, 1996; True, 2002), but also look at highly salient and visible ones (Edwards and Wood, 1999; Mazarr, 2007; Wood and Peake, 1998). Only Peake (2001) studied foreign policy issues that are less tied to events and, hence, also less visible for the media and the general public, for example. While highly salient cases are critical, they are not representative of day-to-day decision-making and may lead to rather bold statements. John et al. (2013, p. 157), for example, argue that "[...] topics, such as wars and other defence-related issues, will likely always be high on the agenda as most news related to defence is salient". There are, however, many defence issues that are much less visible and do not make the news. It is precisely for this reason that Wood and Peake (1998, p. 175) argued that future research should look at a wider range of foreign policy issues, "with differing visibility and interest to the president". Given the impact that the general public and the media may have on government priorities (cf. Figure 1.1), public policy scholars should start examining

issues that are more or less visible to the different actors involved in the different stages of the defence policy-making process.

#### 1.3.4.2 The lack of insights into subcategories

Given that most studies focus on broad and highly salient foreign policy issues, such as conflicts and military operations (Edwards and Wood, 1999; Mazarr, 2007; Wood and Peake, 1998), defence spending (True, 2002), and development aid and trade (Peake, 2001), scholars have not yet looked at subcategories. This is striking since all public policies - including foreign affairs - are inherently multidimensional, even if the official consideration of any issue as well as its media coverage and public understanding may only be partial. Defence policy, for example, has important political and economic impacts at the domestic level, via military bases or industrial sites. As Rozenberg et al. (2011) already argued, it is, thus, also connected to societal aspects that go far beyond geopolitical considerations and matters of national sovereignty.

So far, there are only two agenda-setting studies that fully take those subcategories into account. Foucault and Irondelle (2009), who examined the policy dynamics of the French and the British parliament, concluded that parliamentarians dealt with different defence issues in the 1990s and 2000s: while military service was a prominent topic in France, industrial questions were a priority in the UK. Subcategories are, hence, of importance for agenda-setting studies as they allow for more precision and enable us to compare the composition of defence agendas across countries and over time. However, they also matter because different subcategories have different issue characteristics and, consequently, follow different agenda-setting logics. Military service, for example, is less abstract and more obtrusive than capital investments for military equipment, such as aircraft carriers or fighter jets. This difference can then be further reinforced or moderated via framing. Mörth (2000), who studied the role of framing in EU policy-making, had a closer look at industrial issues. While we would probably consider the industry to be a governmental issue (Soroka, 2002a,b), given that it is largely abstract and unobtrusive, her empirical analysis shows that two frames were competing in the EU: market - which makes the issue more concrete -, and defence - which, in turn, makes the issue more abstract. Policy frames, which are likely to change over time depending on the goals of policy entrepreneurs, are, hence, crucial as they have the power to influence how the agenda-setting dynamics of specific defence issues play out.

We can, therefore, conclude that issue characteristics and framing matter in agenda-setting, including at the subcategory level. As Cobb and Elder (1972, pp. 112-124) argued, "the more ambiguously defined, the greater the social significance, the more

extended the temporal relevance, the less technical, and the less available any clear precedent, the greater the chance that an issue will be expanded to a larger population". Public policy research should, consequently, have a closer look at those dynamics.

### 1.3.4.3 Limited empirical validations

Last but not least, there are several limits to the empirical validation of the agenda-building dynamics that have so far been identified for foreign policy-related issues. First, research has largely focused on the US, with only few studies analysing the mechanisms of agenda-setting in other military or non-military powers. We may, consequently, wonder whether current results are US-specific or also apply to other, national contexts. Second, most studies use qualitative *or* quantitative methods, i.e. they either look at mechanisms *or* trends. Combining the two methods would not only allow for more sophisticated empirical analyses but also more detailed conclusions on how agenda-building plays out in defence. Third, there is quite some silence on the role of international factors in the current state of the art. Indeed, most empirical studies only look at the impact that events may have on agenda-setting. In foreign, security and defence policy, it is, however, very likely that stability and change at the domestic level also coincide with international developments, including the state of the economy, actions of third parties - such as close allies or even enemies - or external expectations raised by IOs. It would, therefore, be fruitful to include those factors in future empirical work on the agenda-setting dynamics of defence.

## 1.4 The politics of attention: How defence becomes a government priority

Based on the extensive literature review of agenda-setting models as well as their application to different foreign policy-related issues, I now propose a novel, theoretical account for stability and change in the defence sector which sheds light on how new understandings of defence issues may or may not be accepted in different political systems. While the model is consistent with already established agenda-setting theories (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993; Cobb and Elder, 1972; Downs, 1972; Jones and Baumgartner, 2005; Kingdon, 1984; Schattschneider, 1960) and earlier accounts of the agenda-building dynamics of foreign policy-related issues (Andrade and Young, 1996; Dijkstra, 2012; Edwards and Wood, 1999; Mazarr, 2007; Peake, 2001; True, 2002; Wood and Peake, 1998), it specifically formalises the process for defence and starts tackling

the limits of the current state of the art. I suggest a multi-causal explanation in which I consider actor-related and structural factors, at the national and the international level. This Ph.D. thesis is, thus, a first theoretical effort to identify the most common ways to translate defence demands into recognised problems decision-makers have to deal with. Before turning to the main dynamics of the politics of attention in the realm of defence as well as the impact agenda-setting has on defence policy, I shortly summarise my key assumptions and explain their implications.

### 1.4.1 Key assumptions

The model I propose is based on two assumptions: first, attention is scarce and consequential; second, different issues have different issue attributes.

**Attention is scarce and consequential** In line with the agenda-setting literature, my first assumption is that an increase in government attention to defence is a necessary pre-condition for policy change, but that political attention is scarce since there are limits, in terms of time and resources, to what individuals and institutions involved in the policy-making process can accomplish. What does this mean for the agenda-building dynamics of defence?

Defence policy agendas - just like all other policy agendas - are inherently dynamic and, consequently, subject to change as items may

- appear on the agenda (*agenda-setting*),
- be given more or less attention (*agenda-structuring*),
- be removed from the agenda (*agenda-removal*) or
- be prevented from appearing on the agenda (*agenda-obstruction*).

Given the competitive nature of political attention, attention to defence is conditioned, in spite of being a core function of government. This, in turn, implies that the agenda status of defence does not only depend on the nature and severity of security and defence problems, but also on the overall structure of political concerns. Issue competition is the norm and trade-offs have to be made. I argue in this dissertation that those trade-offs have to be made at two different levels: between defence and all other public policies (1), and between different defence issues (2).

**Different issues have different issue attributes** My second assumption is that different issues have different issue attributes, and that this holds both at the aggregate

and the subcategory level. Defence, at the aggregate level, is often said to be abstract and unobtrusive, and to lack salience. Though, defence is a very diverse public policy that covers various aspects, including the recruitment, training and retention of civilian and military personnel; research and development; the production and maintenance of military material, equipment and facilities; troop deployments; international cooperation etc. The different dimensions of defence do not only affect the administrative, economic, industrial and social organisation of states; they also have very different characteristics that are likely to change how their agenda-building works.

Some of the aforementioned issues are structural and, thus, tend to be less visible (e.g. research and development), others are highly salient and dramatic (e.g. military operations); similarly, some defence issues are unobtrusive (e.g. procurement), others are obtrusive (e.g. military service); the same holds true for the abstractness of the defence sector: while defence policy may seem to be abstract (e.g. defence strategies), parts of it are actually very concrete (e.g. recruitment policies). In addition, these issues have to be dealt with at different points in time (on a daily basis, every other month, every other decade etc.), are more or less predictable, and have repercussions in the short, medium *or* long run. I argue in this Ph.D. thesis that these differences matter for agenda-setting, with different defence issues passing through different channels to gain a place on the government agenda.

### 1.4.2 The dynamics of agenda-setting in the defence sector

Based on these assumptions, I suggest a multi-causal explanation in which I consider actor-related and structural factors at the national and the international level. This two-level analysis - which is an extension of Soroka's agenda-setting model illustrated in Figure 1.1 - is crucial. As Irondelle (2007) already emphasised, the specificity of defence is its Janus character. Defence has an inward-oriented face (i.e. the composition of government, budgetary choices, public opinion, etc. matter), and an outward-oriented face (i.e. the economic and strategic environment, agreements with other states etc. also play a role). To better comprehend the agenda-setting dynamics of defence issues, it is, therefore, necessary to account for the internal and external dimensions of defence policy, and to examine how they are linked. Given that these multilevel dynamics of problem definition are still relatively understudied in the public policy literature, this Ph.D. thesis makes an important theoretical contribution to agenda-setting studies. In the following subsections, I give an overview of the key determinants of defence agendas, and explain the role that issue attributes play in the agenda-building process.

### 1.4.2.1 Key determinants

Similar to Soroka (2002a), I argue that policy-makers, the media and the general public interact to set the defence priorities of governments. The model I propose suggests that defence policy agendas depend on real-world factors, but are also influenced by media coverage and public opinion. As Figure 1.2 illustrates, I go a step further and extend the model that Soroka developed for the study of agenda-setting in Canada (here Country A) to include the impact that government priorities of other states (here represented by Country B) may have on domestic policy-making (here defence policy-making in Country A). It goes without saying that there are obviously more than two countries on the international scene. Figure 1.2 is, thus, only a simplification of the policy-making process. It highlights defence policy dynamics at the domestic level (i.e. in Country A and Country B, respectively), and shows that the defence policy agenda in Country A may be affected by policy-making in Country B (and *vice versa*). The international level, hence, matters too. This is fully in line with my first hypothesis: while individuals and institutions observe the real world, they also monitor and follow how others respond to changes in the strategic environment.

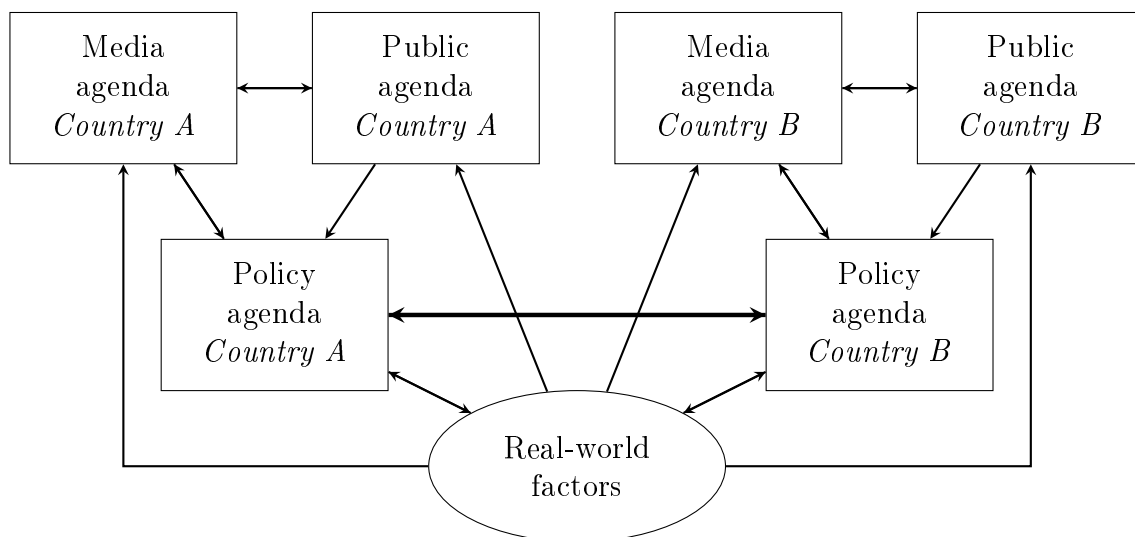
**Hypothesis 1** *Monitoring and mimicking matter. In the realm of defence, individuals and institutions do not only observe the real world directly, but also closely follow how others around them respond to changes in the environment, both at the domestic and the international level. It is, therefore, likely that the priorities of allies influence issue attention at the national level, leading to cross-national agenda-setting dynamics.*

I, thus, assert that international politics are a mixture of behaviours from one or multiple senders to one or multiple receivers (Joly and Richter, forthcoming). For this very reason, any model of agenda-building in defence should include developments at the national and the international level, and shed light on how these two levels interact. I will now explain those dynamics in more detail.

**Real-world factors, key to setting defence agendas?** Even when policy agendas are carefully planned, they may be affected by and adapted to evolutions in the international environment. Government priorities may, thus, shift following an exogenous shock, like a terror attack. Such shocks tend to create or catalyse the need for action, thereby bringing defence issues to the forefront of the political agenda. This is particularly true if it turns out that the government's current approach to the issue has failed and, therefore, needs to be revised (Brockner and James, 2008). Indeed, once the government's policy is called into question, the legitimacy of the status quo



Figure 1.2: The dynamics of agenda-setting: An international perspective



Source: Author's own illustration

is weakened and new policy options have to be assessed (Goertz, 2003; Rosati, 1994). If the policy failure leads to a proper crisis (which, in turn, is more likely to be of lasting interest to the general public and the media), defence policy will capture the attention of the top executive and key decision-makers, thus enabling to overturn "even staunchly defended executive branch policies" (Schraeder, 1994, p. 113).

Studies on the agenda dynamics of foreign policy have mainly focused on the impact that security-related events have had on government priorities. There is surprisingly little research on the role of the economy in the policy-making process. Though, the state of the national economy largely determines which resources are available for the defence sector. As Smith (2009, p. 7) puts it, "[...] most ministries of defence see their main enemy not as the country they might fight, but the finance ministry that controls their budgets and the audit office that evaluates their expenditures and publicises their mistakes". The economy is, consequently, very likely to play a significant role in how agenda-building plays out for defence issues. In addition, it does not seem to have the same effect for all defence issues. An economic downturn, for example, tends to put investments in the defence industry on hold but can be a 'blessing' for recruiters of professional armed forces, in particular if youth unemployment rates rise as young people aged under 25 constitute the main recruitment target of the military.

While the economic and the security environment are both likely to affect defence policy agendas, as I have already shown in the introduction of this manuscript, they do not fully determine government priorities. Context matters and events may cast new light on a given issue. However, they do not lead to change *per se* and should, therefore,

not be overemphasised. Indeed, without policy entrepreneurs, who are able and willing to seize the opportunity, any issue will lose its salience over time and end up fading away (Joly and Richter, 2019). Policy entrepreneurs are, hence, crucial to capitalise on real-world factors and to garner public and media support, thereby advancing policy-making. This includes shaping the scope and timing of other actors' reactions, both at the national and the international level. As Eriksson (2002, p. 90) already argued, "[e]ven when studying agenda-setting within a given polity, there is reason to consider influences and interactions across boundaries".

**The defence community: Different actors, different concerns** Generally speaking, the number of actors able to draw government attention to defence issues has started to increase over time. Giegerich (2018, p. 291), thus, highlighted that

"[...] matters of war and peace, of defence policy and of the role of the armed forces are no longer the preserve of a narrowly defined strategic community of experts and decision-makers. There is a general sense that defence has become more political, at least for the governments of Western liberal democracies, as domestic determinants of foreign and security policy have gained prominence."

While the (extended) defence community may not be able to influence the final policy outcome, it can guide the attention of decision-makers, thereby affecting *what* gets decided on, *when* and *how*. Depending on the issue in question, different actors may, indeed, mobilise during the agenda-setting phase to make sure that the government addresses their concerns: the latter include members of the armed forces, MPs - in particular within the foreign affairs and the defence committees -, representatives of the military-industrial complex, think tankers - especially when they are part of the committee in charge of drafting the new defence white paper or strategic review -, veterans associations, etc. If they are strategically-minded, those actors may be able to shift government attention from one issue (dimension) to another (Riker, 1986).

In addition to policy entrepreneurs at the domestic level (Kingdon, 1984; Mintrom, 1997; Roberts, 1992; Sheingate, 2003), governments face policy entrepreneurs at the international level (Durant and Diehl, 1989; Eriksson, 2002) who also want to influence the agenda. The governments of allies, for instance, may have a different understanding of a given defence issue and try to lobby for their own, alternative policy image and solution. Similarly, IOs may raise policy expectations that affect the members' agendas who eventually opt for similar policy alternatives. Given that governments are increasingly interdependent, this 'internationalisation' of agenda-setting implies that policy

images at the national level (here Country A) may change if policy entrepreneurs at the international level (here Country B, for example) manage to shape the perceptions and actions of policy-makers at the top of the executive (in Country A).

**Media coverage** Figure 1.2 additionally suggests that political attention to defence issues also depends on national news coverage. As we have seen above, the media play, indeed, an integral role in the policy process (Nacos et al., 2000): they decide which issues are covered, how they are framed and whose point of view dominates the (defence) debate (Altheide, 1997; Bennett and Paletz, 1994). The media have, hence, a very strategic position in modern societies, influencing the policy and public agendas.

The media agenda may, however, also be influenced by the general public and policy-makers. Journalists may, thus, cover evolutions in policy-making, such as the launch of military operations or the decision to engage in a new equipment programme, thereby informing the general public about ongoing overseas deployments and military-related investments. They may also respond to demands from the general public, wanting to know more about the state of the country's armed forces, for instance. Given that not all defence issues are concrete and obtrusive, the media may, help to shed light on the implications of defence - be they economic, ethical, social or political -, rather than adapting a purely technical approach to the policy which only experts would be able to follow. By doing so, they have the capacity to broaden the scope of the debate and to enlarge the range of participants that are able to contribute to the agenda-setting phase of the defence policy-making process.

**Public opinion** Moreover, Figure 1.2 emphasises that the general public may influence which defence issues receive government attention. While public opinion does not dictate the defence agenda, people have strong ideas about the issues that the executive should be addressing, thereby constraining policy-making (Key, 1961; La Balme, 2000). Indeed, the government usually does not take decisions that are at odds with the public mood (Shiraev, 2000), and may even look for public approval of its agenda (Verzola, 2013). In the case of defence, this is particularly true for troop deployments.

This being said, public opinion on defence is closely linked to media coverage. Levels of concern notably depend on the amount and the framing of news. As Cobb et al. (1976) already argued "[...] when issues can be defined broadly enough, the involvement of the general public is often crucial in forcing decision makers to place an item on the formal agenda". However, similar to news coverage that may fade over time, the general public has short attention spans, in particular for problems that

are abstract, unobtrusive and have few inherently exciting qualities. Public attention, therefore, rarely remains sharply focused upon defence issues for very long, even if the problem itself has not been solved yet (cf. Downs' (1972) issue-attention cycle).

**Interactions across national agendas** From the above, we may conclude that defence policy agendas depend on real-world factors, but are also influenced by national media coverage and public opinion. In addition, I highlighted the crucial role of domestic and international policy entrepreneurs in the policy-making process. As Jones and Baumgartner (2005, p. 140) put it:

"In social science, a major source of cascades is the process of monitoring and mimicking. In many situations, people may observe carefully not the real world directly, but how others around them are responding to real world. They take action based not on real-world indicators but on their observations of the responses of others."

Surprisingly, research on agenda-setting dynamics has so far mainly focused on cascading effects at the national level.<sup>1</sup> It is, however, reasonable to assume that issues also spill over borders, thereby leading to policy convergence at the international level.

While the diffusion of policy ideas and positive feedback loops may explain the convergence of policy agendas over time, political traditions, the structure of national institutions and negative cross-border feedback may account for any remaining differences in how agenda-setting plays out at the national level. In agenda-setting terms, this means that some countries are first-movers on newly emerging policy problems. They may not only incite other governments to shift their attention to the very same issue, but also influence the content and pace of their policy response, thereby becoming agenda-setters at the international level. The feedback loop can, however, be positive or negative: in some cases, governments may 'mimic' the response of the first-mover, in particular if they deem the latter to be fruitful; in others, they may respond to the same problem with a different policy solution, especially when they consider that their partner's response was not adequate or successful.

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<sup>1</sup>Exceptions confirm the rule. Engeli et al. (2012), for instance, came to the conclusion that certain 'moral issues', such as concerns around genetically modified food and cloning, have emerged on national policy agendas more or less at the same time. They argue that scientific discoveries and technological developments can only partly explain this agenda-setting pattern. Similarly, Breeman and Timmermans (2019) - who studied multilevel governance of environmental issues at the EU level - found attention-following patterns, i.e. when attention rises within the EU Council, it also increases on national executive agendas in Spain and the UK.

### 1.4.2.2 Model specifications

In addition, I propose to adapt and extend Soroka's (2002a) typology of issue characteristics to be able to fully account for the agenda-setting dynamics of defence. First, I argue that his typology can be transferred to the subcategory level. This implies that any public policy - including defence - can be divided into prominent issues (which are real-world driven), sensational issues (which are media-driven) and governmental issues (which are policy-driven). Second, I assert that his typology can easily be modified to include dynamics at the domestic and the international level, i.e. dynamics in Country A and Country B. This is fully in line with my second hypothesis, namely that the different components of defence policy have different issue attributes which facilitate or hinder their presence on the government agenda.

**Hypothesis 2** *Issue attributes are key to understanding the agenda-setting dynamics of defence problems. Some defence issues are treated as high agenda items, with great media coverage, while others remain part of a specialised subsystem, with little public attention. The more abstract and unobtrusive a defence issue is, the more likely it is that only few actors will be involved in the policy-making process at the national level.*

Table 1.1 - which is based on Soroka's work - summarises my theoretical proposition. It gives an overview of the different types of defence issues that do exist, identifies their main characteristics, and specifies the triggers that impact their agenda status.

Table 1.1: Issue characteristics and their impact on agenda-setting

Issue type	Issue characteristics		Key trigger	
	Obtrusiveness	Abstractness	Dom. level	Int. level
Prominent issue	Obtrusive	Concrete	Real-world driven	+
Governmental issue	Unobtrusive	Concrete or abstract	Policy-driven	+++
Sensational issue	Unobtrusive	Concrete	Media-driven	++

Source: Table based on Soroka (2002a)

To put it differently, I differentiate between prominent defence issues, sensational defence issues and governmental defence issues. Prominent defence issues, which are

obtrusive and concrete, are real-world driven at the domestic level and may be influenced via feedback loops at the international level. For governmental defence issues, which are unobtrusive and abstract *or* concrete, policy leads the media domestically, but may be affected by the priorities of other governments, for example, i.e. the defence policy agenda of Country A may be shaped by government priorities in Country B. Last but not least, sensational defence issues, which are unobtrusive and concrete, are media-driven at the domestic level, but may, similar to prominent defence issues, be affected by international feedback loops.

I, hence, argue that different defence issues pass through different channels to reach the government agenda. Those differences may then be reinforced or moderated, depending on how the issue is framed. As Baumgartner and Jones (2002, p. 19) put it, "[...] most decision makers pay attention only to a few of the underlying dimensions". To frame an issue as a matter of national security, for example, would imply a certain sense of urgency, thus justifying a rapid change in government priorities. This is fully in line with Walker's (1977) typology of problems: some problems are pressing (1), some problems occur sporadically (2), some problems periodically require attention, no matter what other business is at hand (3), and some problems are 'chosen' (4). The characteristics and framing of any issue, hence, also matter because different problems tend to require different levels of government attention at different points in time.

### 1.4.3 The impact of agenda-setting on defence policy

Why is it important to better comprehend the agenda-setting dynamics of public policies, including defence? As Michael Oxley, a former Republican US Representative, summarised "Congress does two things well: nothing and overreacting". Issues move up and down the policy agenda. Baumgartner and Jones (1993) demonstrated that issue attention is not gradual or incremental, but disjoint and episodic. Based on this conclusion, they set up the PE model according to which policies are, most of the time, stable (i.e. 'negative feedback') and only sometimes characterised by bursts of frenetic change (i.e. 'positive feedback', also referred to as 'bandwagons', 'escalations', 'slippery slopes', 'waves' etc.). Punctuated equilibrium theory (PET) implies an s-shaped curve whose saturation points indicate a shift from periods of negative to periods of positive feedback (and *vice versa*). The reasons for stability and change in public policy are closely linked to the agenda-setting dynamics outlined earlier on. It is, hence, crucial to understand how issues become a government priority in the first place. This holds true for all public policies, including defence.

### 1.4.3.1 The sources of policy stability

Policy stability is mainly due to three, interlinked factors: bounded rationality (1), the politics of subsystems (2) and institutional friction (3).

First, individuals and institutions are rationally bounded, i.e. there are limits to what actors who are involved in the policy-making process can accomplish. For precisely this reason, decision-makers tend to take some time to realise change in the environment, to analyse the potential consequences of those shifts and to make the necessary policy adjustments. It is, therefore, common practice to stick to past policy choices, and to develop organisational routines or SOPs to avoid high decision-making costs. This ‘path dependency’ (Bebchuk and Roe, 1999; Pierson, 2000) creates some kind of order in an otherwise rather messy policy-making process.

Second, the politics of subsystems generally prevents large policy changes, leading to mostly small and incremental changes instead of policies that are proportionate to solving the problems at hand (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993). This is particularly true when subsystems grow into policy monopolies that are dominated by a single interest, whereby all those involved share the same goals and benefit from the existing policies (Kingdon, 1984). Policy monopolies are usually associated with a powerful and popular image that relates closely to core political values. These images are not easily questioned and used by the subsystem to justify its competence and action, thereby contributing to policy stability. This process of negative feedback is strongly related to the seminal work of Bachrach and Baratz (1962) and Cobb and Elder (1972), already mentioned above, who analysed the mechanisms through which new ideas and their proponents are prevented from gaining traction. Negative feedback is, therefore, one of the sources of equilibrium and policy stability, causing the system to be largely self-correcting (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993).

Third, institutional friction contributes to policy stability (Jones and Baumgartner, 2005). As explained above, friction is the resistance built into the political system: the more friction there is, the more political institutions will resist to input (i.e. new information), and the more leptokurtic outputs (i.e. policy) will be. This is precisely what Baumgartner et al. (2009a) implied with the progressive friction hypothesis: they argue that friction increases when moving from input (e.g. news media) to output (e.g. the budget) because of higher decision-making costs (Jones et al., 2003; Walgrave and Nuytemans, 2009; Walgrave and Vliegthart, 2010).

Overall, due to bounded rationality, the politics of subsystems and institutional friction, new ideas and understandings of problems may not be accepted in a political

system. Political change is, hence, slow and not necessarily proportional to societal demands. A variety of approaches have demonstrated this, ranging from Cobb and Elder's (1972) agenda-building to Kingdon's (1984) policy streams as well as the various uses of path-dependency in public policy analysis (Bebchuk and Roe, 1999; Pierson, 2000). This, however, does not mean that policy is totally gridlocked. Sometimes conditions are ripe for dealing with a new issue: the issue then receives so much political attention that it cannot be ignored, leading to a disproportionately large policy change that is meant to make up for insufficient prior policy adjustments.

#### 1.4.3.2 The drivers of policy change

Although changing the status quo is more difficult than maintaining it, a process of 'positive feedback', whereby overwhelming attention creates the conditions conducive to policy change, can be set in motion. Usually, such a change is due to a shift in the policy image (i.e. the way the issue is generally understood and approached). There are various - and oftentimes interlinked - reasons for such a shift. A policy image may change due to the mobilisation of new - or previously uninterested or unsuccessful - actors (1) who may frame the issue differently (2) and advocate for their (alternative) policy image or solution at different relevant policy venues (3); it can also be due to cascading (4) or focusing events (5).

First, new - or previously uninterested or unsuccessful - actors may mobilise and start advancing solutions for problems they deem worth being added to the agenda. They will try to persuade politicians, whose time frames are usually short because of electoral cycles, to respond to those problems during their time in office. The scope and salience of any issue consequently depends on the ability of actors to make a good case for the problem they want to tackle. With increased levels of competition among issues, subsystems created in the past may, thus, be diluted or destructed after a while which, in turn, implies that new ones may also start emerging.

Second, issues can be framed differently, i.e. any given problem can be formulated in more than one way. Actors will, hence, try to depict and represent an issue, or a phenomenon, in such a way that relevant decision-makers do not only listen but actually pay attention to the issue and do something about it. Policy change may, therefore, also happen when policy entrepreneurs advocate an alternative policy image.

Third, venue shopping may lead to policy change too (Pralle, 2003). Policy venues are institutions or groups, such as committees and commissions, with the authority to make decisions regarding an issue (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993). Each venue is likely to be home to different policy images as the problem will be framed in (slightly) different



ways from one venue to another. The selection of the policy venue is, consequently, very strategic and strongly depends on the different chances of success a new idea may have in different venues. In line with Schattschneider's (1960) expansion of the scope of conflict, policy entrepreneurs on the losing side will move from one venue to another and try to catch the "attention of potential allies not currently involved in the issue" (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993, p. 36) until they successfully make their case.

Fourth, the impact of issue framing and venue shopping may be reinforced through cascading. Cascading is best understood as a self-reinforcing process of positive feedback whereby attention from one actor generates attention from another actor, which, again, draws even more attention from the initial actor, thus overthrowing the existing friction mechanisms (Jones and Baumgartner, 2005; Walgrave and Vliegthart, 2010).

Last but not least, while most issues gain prominence through steady advocacy over a longer period of time, struggling their way up the agenda, others are propelled and impose themselves onto the priority list of governments. This is particularly true following a focusing event, such as an earthquake, a major hurricane, or an oil spill (Birkland, 1997, 1998), characterised by its very dramatic and urgent nature.

Table 1.2 summarises the main sources of policy stability and the key drivers of policy change identified in this subsection. All of these mechanisms are closely linked to agenda-setting which, in turn, makes this strand of the public policy literature a crucial lens for studying (the evolution of) policy-making.

Table 1.2: Stability and change in public policy: An overview

	Policy stability	Policy change
Manifestation	Incrementalism (small adjustments)	Punctuations (large changes)
Sources	'Negative feedback'	'Positive feedback'
Mechanisms	Bounded rationality The politics of subsystems Institutional friction	Focusing events Framing The mobilisation of new actors Venue shopping Cascading

Source: Table adapted from Joly and Richter (2019, p. 47)

## 1.5 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to review the literature on agenda-setting, with a particular focus on studies in the realm of foreign, security and defence policy.

First, I explained how governments set their priorities, reviewing the assumptions and conclusions of current models of agenda-setting. I notably looked at how individuals and institutions process information and identify problems; how those problems are then framed and received in the policy-making arena; and how spillover effects - in particular from the media and public agendas - may influence government priorities.

Second, I argued that agenda-setting scholars have mainly focused on domestic policies, with little research being done on how defence issues become and remain a government priority. I stressed that the public policy literature has neglected foreign affairs because of research traditions: while public policy usually deals with domestic policy issues, defence is an object that is traditionally studied by IR scholars, FP analysts and researchers in war studies departments. I also highlighted that the lack of interest in agenda-setting in defence is due to the assumption that the agenda-setting dynamics of domestic and foreign policies largely differ.

Based on a critical literature review of agenda-setting in foreign, security and defence policy, I challenged this assumption and demonstrated that most agenda-setting mechanisms can easily be transposed to the study of non-domestic issues. Defence, just like any other public policy, is, indeed, increasingly constrained by structural biases and system-level dynamics. i.e. parts of the regal domain do not withdraw from the 'traditional' agenda-setting dynamics anymore. I also showed that there several limits to the current state of the art, both from a theoretical and an empirical point of view. Indeed, scholars have mostly focused on foreign policy in general, with hardly any research being done on defence; moreover, they have not yet disaggregated issues beyond broad categories, thereby ignoring the diversity of defence as a public policy; last but not least, scholars have mainly worked on the US, used either qualitative *or* quantitative methods, and remained rather silent on the role that international factors may play in agenda-setting, i.e. the empirical validation is still rather limited.

I then proposed a theoretical model which sheds light on how new understandings of defence may or may not be accepted in different political systems. I underlined that my theoretical contribution is fully consistent with already established agenda-setting theories (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993; Cobb and Elder, 1972; Downs, 1972; Jones and Baumgartner, 2005; Kingdon, 1984; Schattschneider, 1960) and earlier accounts of the agenda-building dynamics of foreign policy-related issues (Andrade and Young,

1996; Dijkstra, 2012; Edwards and Wood, 1999; Mazarr, 2007; Peake, 2001; True, 2002; Wood and Peake, 1998), and argued that it is a first effort to identify the most common ways to translate defence demands into problems decision-makers have to deal with. My model is based on two assumptions: first, attention is scarce and consequential; second, different defence issues have different issue attributes. Based on those assumptions, I then suggested a multi-causal explanation in which I consider actor-related and structural factors at the national and the international level. I notably highlighted that this two-level analysis was necessary to account for the specificity of defence which has an inward-oriented and an outward-oriented face.

In line with prior research on agenda-setting, in particular the work of Soroka (2002a), I subsequently argued that policy-makers, the media and the general public interact to set the defence priorities of governments. However, I went one step further and extended the model that Soroka developed for the study of agenda-setting in Canada (here Country A) to include the impact that government priorities of other states (here Country B) may have on domestic policy-making (i.e. policy-making in Country A). The model I proposed in this chapter, therefore, suggests that defence policy agendas depend on a series of factors, including the economic and the security environment, the defence community - which includes domestic and international policy entrepreneurs -, media coverage and public opinion. I, thereby, asserted that international politics are a mixture of behaviours from one or multiple senders to one or multiple receivers. In addition, I argued that it was necessary to account for the diversity of defence policy, and suggested to differentiate the agenda-setting dynamics of prominent defence issues, sensational defence issues and governmental defence issues. These issues differ in their abstractness and obtrusiveness which, in turn, has an impact on how their agenda-building works: prominent issues are real-world driven; governmental issues are policy-driven; and sensational issues are media-driven.

In line with this theoretical contribution, I advanced two hypotheses for the agenda-setting dynamics of defence. Individuals and institutions do not only observe the real world directly, but also closely follow how others around them respond to changes in the strategic environment, both at the domestic and the international level (Hypothesis 1). The main channel of influence, however, largely depends on the issue's characteristics which are key to understanding agenda-setting dynamics (Hypothesis 2).

I finished the chapter summarising once more why agenda-setting studies were key to understanding stability and change in public policy. It, thus, lays the groundwork for the empirical chapters of this Ph.D. thesis. Before turning to the empirical analysis in Chapters 3-5, I will outline my research design in the next chapter.

# Chapter 2

## Research design

### 2.1 Introduction

In the last chapter of this Ph.D. thesis, I have shown that agenda-setting scholars analyse the political system through the lens of issues, i.e. they examine *how*, *when* and *where* issues come to be viewed as important and appropriate subjects of political attention. The agenda-setting approach is, thus, not only crucial for understanding politics and policy at the domestic level, but also particularly suited for comparative, empirical studies on government priorities (Baumgartner et al., 2019, 2006, 2008b, 2011; Cobb et al., 1976; Green-Pedersen and Walgrave, 2014).

Over the past fifteen years, comparative policy scholars have increasingly focussed on cross-national agenda-setting studies (e.g. Baumgartner et al. (2009a); Grossman and Richter (2021); Jennings et al. (2011b); Jones et al. (2009); Mortensen et al. (2011); Vliegthart et al. (2016)). The aim of these analyses is mainly to identify similarities and differences in the mobilisation of interests, conflict expansion and the ultimate success - or failure - of individuals and institutions in setting the agenda. Comparative agenda-setting studies, thus, shed light on why issue priorities vary across countries. They do not only confirm that problems are a social construction, but also stress that political systems are, depending on the institutional venues they offer, more or less open for actors to generate attention to issues. Different institutions have, indeed, different internal rules, norms and procedures and, therefore, also provide different leeways for redefining existing issues and raising attention to new ones. Comparing agenda-setting dynamics across countries, hence, allows us to learn about individuals and institutions in different political systems via how they deal with issues, and to reveal why the processes that characterise policy-making in those countries vary.

In line with this research trend, I opted for a comparative, longitudinal analysis of the agenda-setting dynamics of defence policy in France and the UK, the two leading military powers in Europe. This chapter lays out the research design of my Ph.D. thesis. First, I explain and justify my comparative approach, and show how it tackles the empirical shortfalls of current agenda-setting perspectives on foreign policy issues. More specifically, I elucidate why I decided to work on two countries (i.e. France and the UK); I give reasons for analysing the dynamics of three different but complementary defence issues (i.e. the recruitment of service personnel; the acquisition of aircraft carriers and military operations); and I justify the time frame of my analysis (i.e. 1980-2018). I pay particular attention to defending the Franco-British comparison, given that the UK and France are often considered to be most similar cases. Based on an original and comprehensive data set on the French and the British defence sectors, I challenge this assumption and show that the defence policies of the two countries actually converged over time. I argue that it is precisely this convergence that makes a Franco-British comparison of defence policy agendas interesting. Second, I explain how political attention can be measured and compared across countries and over time, and give an overview of the quantitative and qualitative data being used in Chapters 3-5. When discussing the empirical material, I also outline the methodological challenges I faced during this research project and highlight the limits of my research design.

## 2.2 Comparing defence policy agendas

In Chapter 1, I advanced two hypotheses for the agenda-setting dynamics of defence. I hypothesised that individuals and institutions do not only observe the real world directly, but also closely follow how others around them respond to changes in the strategic environment, both at the domestic and the international level (Hypothesis 1). I also hypothesised that the main channel of influence depends on the issue's characteristics, i.e. issue attributes determine if a problem is real-world driven, media-driven or policy-driven and if cross-national dynamics are at hand (Hypothesis 2).

To test these hypotheses, I opted for a longitudinal, cross-sectional and cross-national analysis. Given that agenda-setting scholars have not yet agreed on how often punctuations should be expected (which is mainly due to the fact that some policy areas seem to be more prone to change than others), it is easier and also more robust to test alternative explanations for stability and critical junctures when focussing on more than one issue (here the recruitment of military personnel, the acquisition of aircraft carriers and military operations) in more than one country (here France and the

UK) and over an extended period of time (here from 1980 to 2018). In the following three subsections, I explain those methodological choices in more detail, emphasising in particular the reasons behind the Franco-British comparison. As Hassenteufel (2005, p. 113) and Boussaguet and Dupuy (2014, p. 99) rightly outline, recent work in public policy is increasingly comparative, but tends to take the legitimacy of the comparative approach for granted. I, therefore, do not only justify my methodological choices but also explain how my research design tackles the shortfalls of current empirical studies on agenda-setting in defence which I outlined in Chapter 1.

### 2.2.1 A cross-national analysis

Both political scientists and defence economists often choose France and the UK to compare defence policy choices (Belot, 2013; Foley, 2013; Foucault and Irondelle, 2009; Joana, 2004; Smith, 2013) or to examine Franco-British military cooperation, in particular since the signing of the Lancaster House Treaty in 2010 (Faure, 2019; Ostermann, 2015; Pannier, 2013, 2016a,b, 2020; Pannier and Schmitt, 2014). Most of these studies focus on the similarities of British and French defence policy, underlining that the two states are (nowadays) comparable in terms of military power and economic weight (Pannier, 2013). Belot (2013, p. 601) even suggests that any Franco-British comparison of defence policies was based on a most similar systems design. Only few scholars insist on the differences that exist between the defence policies of the two leading military powers in Europe (Foley, 2013; Smith, 2013): these studies usually highlight the distinct norms, institutions and organisational routines that both countries developed over time. In this subsection, I argue that most comparative research on France and the UK misses a key point that makes the Franco-British couple a particularly interesting case study for (public policy) scholars who are interested in the rise and fall of defence issues on policy agendas. Rather than being most similar or most dissimilar cases (subsection 2.2.1.1), I claim and show that the defence policies of the two countries have actually been converging over time (subsection 2.2.1.2).

#### 2.2.1.1 France and the United Kingdom: A most similar systems design?

During an event on the French and the British navy, held under the Chatham House Rule at the *Institut français des relations internationales* (Ifri) in May 2019, one of the speakers started off explaining why the UK and France were close partners in defence and advanced three key arguments. First, both countries faced more or less the same strategic environment (1); second, they had similar decision-making procedures at the

national level and shared a series of values which, in turn, also explained why France and the UK were (founding) members of similar international institutions, such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) (2); third, they made a comparable military effort and were the two most active European states on the international scene (3). The speaker in question then argued that this similarity was particularly striking in the naval sector, suggesting that "the Royal and the French navy were twins". In the following paragraphs, I have a closer look at the aforementioned similarities - which are often highlighted in the academic literature too -, and start challenging them. Indeed, as the speaker rightly pointed out, "even when having identical twins, one of the two comes out first" (Institut français des relations internationales, 2019).

**A similar strategic environment** First, it is often highlighted that France and the UK are geographically close and, therefore, face a comparable strategic environment. The Lancaster House Treaty (2010, p. 3) even underlined that the UK and France

"[...] do not see situations in which the vital interests of either Party could be threatened without the vital interests of the other also being threatened."

Policy-makers and academics alike, hence, often argue that France and the UK have similar needs in terms of personnel and equipment which, in turn, requires comparable defence budgeting (Sammeth, 2011). There is, however, one key difference to be taken into account which has, as I will show later, an important impact on how the British and the French armed forces have been composed - and equipped - in the past (cf. Figure 2.2). Contrary to France - which has, relatively speaking, a large army and a small navy and air force -, the UK is an island and, therefore, has a much higher percentage of its armed forces within the air force and the navy. This, in turn, has an impact on defence procurement and, consequently, also on budgetary requirements.

In addition, it is important to keep in mind that similar threat perceptions do not necessarily lead to similar defence policies. In fact, British and French defence policy preferences have diverged on various issues since 1980, including the professionalisation of the armed forces, the privatisation of the armaments industry, procurement decisions such as the type of aircraft carriers to be built, strategic partnerships and defence cooperation (e.g. within the EU and NATO), and the participation or non-participation in multilateral operations like the US-led invasion of Iraq.

**Comparable decision-making procedures and similar values** Second, it is oftentimes underlined that the decision-making procedures in France and the UK are

comparable. In both countries, defence policy is, indeed, characterised by a primacy of the executive and a marginalisation of the parliament (Cohen, 1994; Dover, 2007; Hopkinson, 2000). Defence, thus, belongs to the *domaine réservé* in France and is a royal prerogative in the UK. In addition, there tends to be a remarkable consensus on the orientation of British and French defence. This being said, there are also significant differences, especially with regard to the institutions that shape policy agendas in France and the UK, that should not be neglected.

First, while the scope of action of the executive is considerable in both countries, it is not unlimited, neither in France nor in the UK (Cornish, 2013; Irondelle and Schmitt, 2013). Different actors contribute to defence policy-making on both sides of the Channel. Whereas decision-making continues to be highly centralised in France, the machinery of the British government has become more and more complex, putting the royal prerogative for defence-related issues increasingly under pressure (Cornish, 2010, 2013). British defence policy includes a growing number of actors, such as the Cabinet Office, the Department for International Development (DFID), the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), leaders of the armed forces, the intelligence agencies, the Ministry of Defence (MOD), the National Audit Office (NAO), the Parliament, the PM, the Secretaries of State in charge of foreign policy-related issues, the Treasury... In France, the President remains the key actor in defence, but closely cooperates with the *Conseil de défense et de sécurité nationale* (CDSN) and the *Chef d'état-major des armées* (CEMA) as well as the PM and the ministers of defence and foreign affairs. The role of the latter tends to be particularly strong in times of divided government (*cohabitation*), as the periods 1986-1988, 1993-1995 and 1997-2002 have shown. Other actors started to have a say too, including the Parliament and the *Cour des Comptes*.

Second, both France and the UK experience a - what I call - 'normalisation' of defence policy-making. This implies a more formal and transparent policy-making process which is *inter alia* characterised by the publication of defence white papers and strategic reviews, the (multiannual) programming of defence expenditures, an oversight of spending patterns through the *Cour des comptes* and the NAO, and increasing parliamentary scrutiny and control over government decisions, in particular since the 2000s. There are, however, some differences with regard to how this normalisation plays out. First, the UK updates its white papers and strategic reviews more regularly: eight British strategic documents have been published since 1980, while France only made five documents public. Second, multiannual programming tends to be more respected in the UK than in France (Richter, 2018). This is among others due to the auditing process which seems to be more severe in the UK. Third, parliamentary scrutiny and control over government decisions vary in the two countries. The French parliament



has more influence on defence policy-making than its British counterpart, in particular since the constitutional reform in 2008. The parliament in the UK is, thus, one of the few legislative bodies in Europe that can discuss but not amend the defence budget.

Last but not least, although both the UK and France share common values (i.e. they are part of similar international organisations and have a comparable posture on defence matters), the UK has opted for an approach to defence policy that can, as Cornish (2010, pp. 25-27) argues, best be described as "muddling through". France, in turn, tends to be less pragmatic which explains why its strategic posture on the international scene is often conceived as arrogant (Irondele and Schmitt, 2013).

**Similar defence policies** Third, it is often underlined that France and the UK put similar defence policies in place. The two countries have, indeed, several common strategic characteristics, including professional armed forces and a large military-industrial base. They value power projection which translates into rather frequent (high-intensity) operations abroad, some of which they conduct jointly (cf. Figure 2.3). Both can, therefore, be classified as expeditionary warfare states (Forster, 2011), able to contribute to a wide range of missions and operations. In addition, the UK and France have large national defence industries, and arms exports have become a powerful tool to buffer inflationary trends in domestic defence research and development as well as the production of major defence platforms (cf. Figure 2.5 below).

As former Great Powers, status and prestige still matter on both sides of the Channel. While the French are sensitive about their *grandeur*, the Brits worry about their seat at the top table (Smith, 2009). The UK and France, thus, belong to the five nuclear-weapon states under the terms of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) (since 1952 and 1960, respectively), are key actors in many IOs and have a number of special relationships, including with some of their former colonies (for France, cf. Richter and Foucault (2021); for the UK, cf. Dorman (2021)). In addition, they are willing to pay for an independent defence policy. Since the end of World War II, France and the UK have had similar populations, a comparable GDP, and not too dissimilar military expenditures. They face the highest defence burden in Europe, accounting for 41.7 % of total military spending and 48.4 % of defence investments within the EU in 2018 (European Defence Agency, 2020). This being said, both countries face a significant gap between their ambition and the budget that can be devoted to the defence sector (Dunne, 1995; Irondele, 2011b; Smith, 2013).

In spite of those similarities, there are also significant differences between French and British defence policies. First, France only recently moved from a mixed (1991-1996) to

a professional army (from 1996 onwards). The UK, in turn, has had professional armed forces for over a century, experiencing conscription only during and after World War I and World War II. Even though both countries still work towards versatility and sufficiency of numbers in all three armies, the professionalisation has substantially reduced troop sizes and required adjustments in terms of equipment. Those changes are still ongoing in France. Second, France and the UK have had major military commitments since the 1980s. Contrary to France, however, the British armed forces have been involved in large operations more or less every decade and suffered significant death tolls which, in turn, have negatively affected public support for out-of-area missions. Third, in spite of being nuclear powers, the nuclear issue is much more controversial in the UK than it is in France. Last but not least, France and the UK have different relations with the US which, in turn, shapes their defence policies. For the UK, the US is a 'Gold Standard' in military terms: after Suez, the Brits, thus, concluded that they could not go to war without the Americans, whereas France decided that it had to be able to intervene without the US. Consequently, France left NATO's integrated command in 1966 - at least until 2009 -, and started to have a more independent streak about capabilities than the UK which returns to US capabilities whenever necessary.

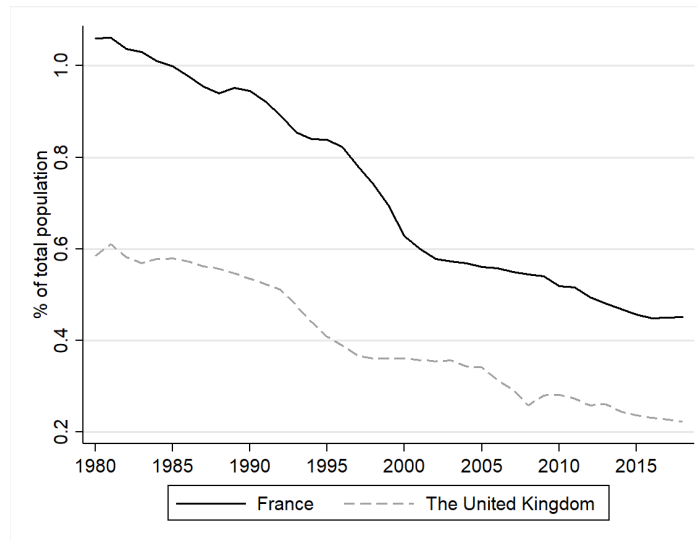
### 2.2.1.2 Towards a new perspective on Franco-British comparisons

Based on an original and comprehensive data set on the French and the British defence sectors, I argue that the defence policies of the UK and France are neither similar nor dissimilar but have been converging over time. To test this claim, I compare the evolution of different defence outputs since 1980, including the size, composition and location of the armed forces; the market shares of arms-producing companies and arms exports; as well as the level and volatility of defence spending.

**The French and British armed forces: Composition, troop deployments and operational deaths** France and the UK have nowadays both professional armed forces. However, this has not always been the case. While the UK only had conscripts between 1916-1920 and 1939-1960, France - just like many other European states - moved from all-volunteer to professional forces after the end of the Cold War (Iron-delle, 2011a; Mérand et al., 2011). The main reason for this shift was the increasing number of missions and operations outside of the French territory, requiring more rapidly deployable forces. In both countries, the professionalisation has had an important impact on numbers, with the proportion of people who serve in the armed forces declining over time. Figure 2.1 illustrates this trend for France and the UK. It shows

that a larger share of the French population joined the armed forces between 1980 and 2018, suggesting, however, that this gap has started to close. This is particularly true since France moved to professional troops in 1996.

Figure 2.1: French and British armed forces personnel (% of population), 1980-2018



Sources: International Institute for Security Studies (2019) and the United Nations (2020)

The professionalisation did not only have an impact on total numbers, but also affected the composition of the armed forces. Figure 2.2a shows that France downsized its three armies, with a particular focus on the army (-64 % between 1980 and 2018). Indeed, in 1980, 56 % of France's armed forces served in the army, compared to only 39 % in 2018. The share of forces within the navy and the air force, in turn, remained rather stable over time. The air force, thus, made up 18 % of total forces in 1980 and 14 % in 2018 whereas the navy attracted on average around 13 % of the French armed forces between 1980 and 2018. The *Gendarmerie nationale* is, hence, the only component of France's forces which saw its share of service personnel increase from 14 % in 1980 to 35 % in 2018. This, in turn, led to rather stable total numbers over time: on average, around 95,000 women and men were in the *Gendarmerie* between 1980 and 2018. In the case of the British armed forces, the evolution is slightly different. Even though the UK also downsized its three armies, the focus of force reductions has been on the air force (-64 % between 1980 and 2018). This being said, Figure 2.2b also highlights that the composition of the British armed forces has been rather stable between 1980 and 2018, in spite of larger cuts in the air force: on average, 21 % of the British armed forces served in the navy, 26 % in the air force and 53 % in the army.

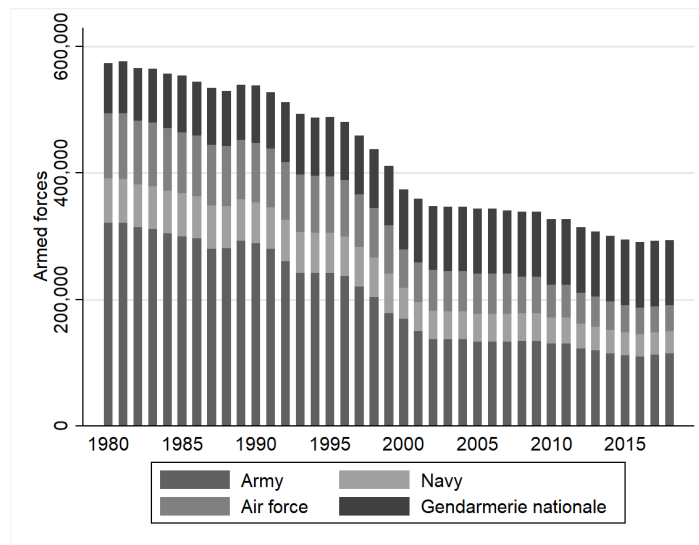
It is interesting to note here that France and the UK have had similarly sized navies since 1980, at least in total numbers. Indeed, the percentage share of forces within the

navy is significantly higher in the UK than it is in France. Between 1980 and 2018, 21 % of the British armed forces were in the Royal Navy, while only 13 % of the French armed forces were part of the *Marine nationale*. This difference has geographical reasons, but is also due to the Falkland Islands war in 1982. Although the war was very brief (2.5 months), it has had a lasting impact on how defence plays out in the UK. In fact, the 1981 John Nott Defence Review concluded that out-of-area missions were no longer a priority for the UK and, therefore, intended to significantly downsize the fleet of the British navy (British Ministry of Defence, 1981). If Argentina had delayed its invasion by only nine months, the UK would have been unable to send a task force to the Falkland Islands. Indeed, in line with the defence review, most of the equipment that was eventually used in the operation would have already been scrapped or withdrawn from service by then (Smith, 2009, p. 39). The Falkland war, thus, had several long-lasting implications for defence policy-making in the UK: it made the navy a crucial component of British defence and affected the role that defence reviews play in the UK. Rather than being an exercise of strategic foresight, most reviews published after 1981 were mere cost-cutting actions. However, instead of cutting entire components like in the 1980s, the Brits started to adopt a ‘salami-slicing’ approach to defence which still characterises defence policy-making in the UK nowadays.

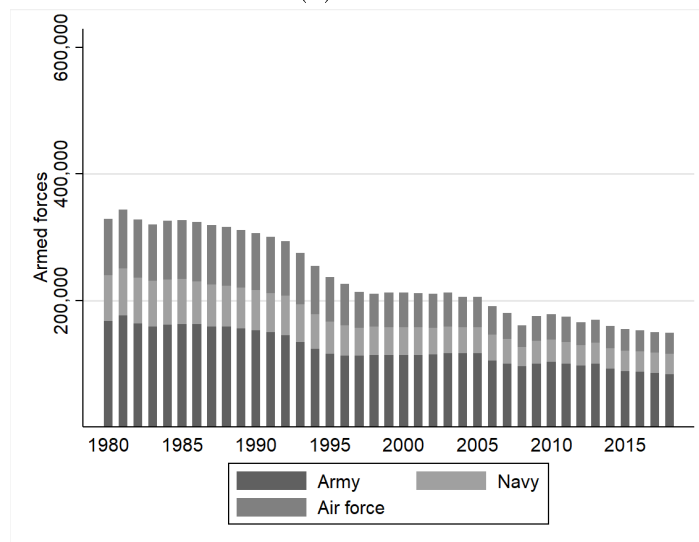
France and the UK have had major military commitments since the 1980s, as Figure 2.3 shows. The British armed forces, however, have been involved more often and with a higher level of commitment - both in terms of forces and equipment - in armed conflicts over the period 1980-2018. Indeed, the UK has deployed troops to large-scale operations more or less every decade: the Falkland Islands in the 1980s; the Gulf war, Bosnia and Kosovo in the 1990s; Iraq and Afghanistan in the 2000s and 2010s; Libya in the 2010s. In addition to those key missions and operations, the British armed forces were deployed to a series of smaller theatres. The tempo of British deployments was, thus, particularly high over the past 40 years, leading to an overstretch of the armed forces. Figure 2.3 illustrates this pattern very well: although troop deployments decreased between 1980 and 2018 (cf. Figure 2.3a), the number of theatres to which the UK deployed troops to increased quite significantly during that period (cf. Figure 2.3b). France experienced a similar pattern, but to a much lesser degree. While the number of British and French troops being deployed to the international scene seems to converge over time, the number of theatres has been characterised by both periods of convergence (e.g. 1980-1992) and periods of divergence (e.g. 2007-2015).

The high tempo of British operations has had several effects: it generated an overstretch of the UK’s armed forces which were deployed to more and more theatres in spite of having their manpower downsized; it increased replacement costs for equipment

Figure 2.2: The composition of the French and British armed forces, 1980-2018



(a) France

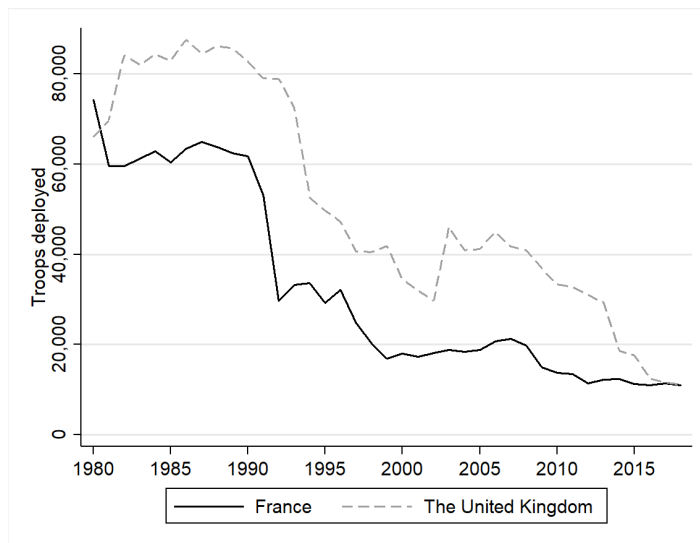


(b) The United Kingdom

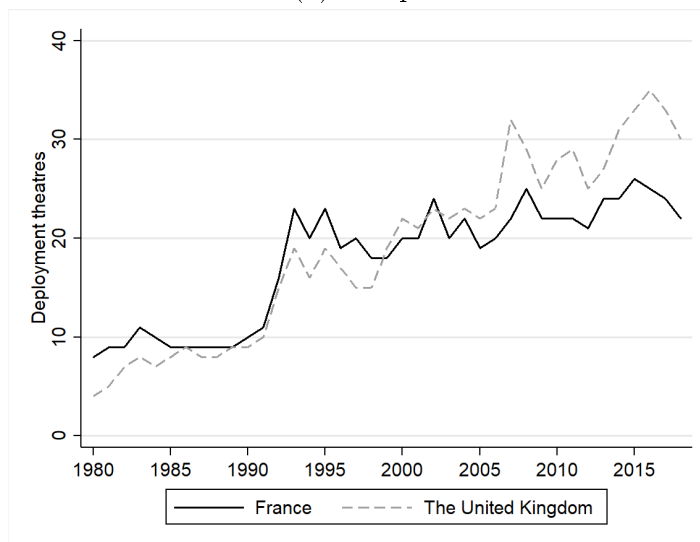
Source: International Institute for Security Studies (2019)

and was, therefore, particularly cost-intensive; and led to a large number of operational deaths which, in turn, negatively affected the public's support of British military interventions. Compared to French operations, the UK's deployments were, indeed, particularly casualty-heavy, as Figure 2.4 shows, and generated heated debates about the government's legal obligation to ensure that the British armed forces received adequate training and equipment before being deployed overseas (Norton-Taylor, 2012). This, in turn, explains why the general public was not supportive of the Iraq war (Stuchlík, 2004) and the second phase of the war in Afghanistan (Clements, 2013).

Figure 2.3: The international presence of French and British troops, 1980-2018



(a) Troops

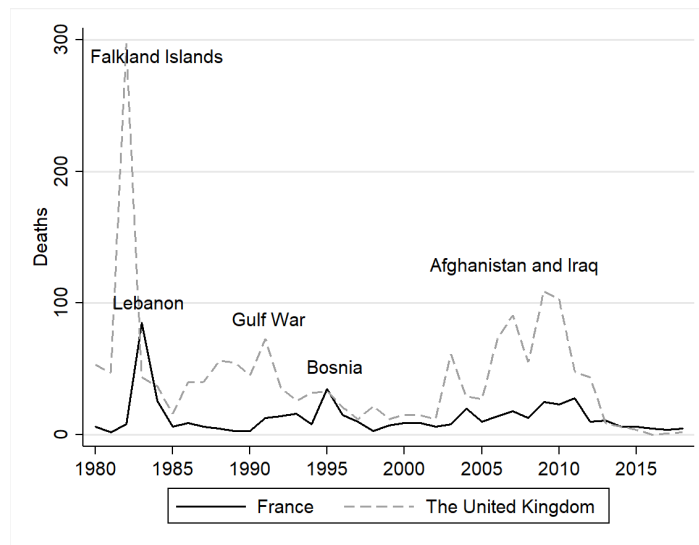


(b) Theatres

Source: International Institute for Security Studies (2019)

**The arms industry: Market shares, exports and national sovereignty** Procurement is a crucial aspect of defence policy, as the armed forces have to be equipped. France and the UK both have a large defence industrial base (DIB), but procurement decisions diverged in the past. This is mainly due to the fact that the relationship between the state and the military sector is rather different in the two countries. Whereas France kept a considerable degree of state ownership and tried to develop a sovereign national defence industry, Britain privatised almost the whole of its arms industry, especially after Margaret Thatcher introduced competition in defence procurement during the 1980s (Smith, 2009, pp. 106-107). The UK, thus, tends to be less sovereign

Figure 2.4: French and British operational deaths, 1980-2018



Sources: French Ministry of the Armed Forces (2020) and British Ministry of Defence (2019)

equipment-wise, and regularly relies on US capabilities.

Key to both defence industrial strategies are arms exports. In 2019, the UK and France ranked second and third among the main arms exporters in the world, just behind the US (Richter and Foucault, 2021). These export orders are crucial for both countries since they increase domestic manufacturing runs and, thereby, reduce unit costs, with fixed costs being spread over a larger production output. Table 2.1, which is based on the SIPRI Arms Industry Database, contains financial data for the top 100 arms-producing and military services companies in the world, and more specifically for the French and British ones. It also highlights how many British and French firms figured among the top 100 and shows their market shares between 2002 and 2018.<sup>1</sup> The table states that the UK is ahead of France, with a larger number of defence companies being in the top 100 and a higher market share, but that the two countries follow a similar downward trend in terms of arms sales and market position.

This evolution is confirmed by Figure 2.5 which illustrates British and French arms exports, using the trend-indicator value (TIV). The TIV is a pricing system developed by SIPRI to measure the volume of deliveries of major conventional weapons. Instead of assessing the financial value of arms transfers (as Table 2.1 does), it puts a figure on the transfer of military capability. Figure 2.5 notably shows that the transfer of military capabilities has been volatile, both in France and the UK, and suggests that the pattern of the decrease in export volumes differs in the two countries.

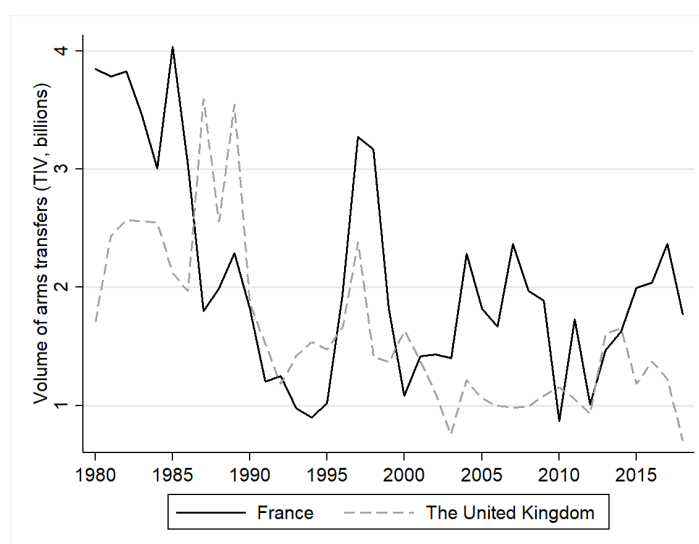
<sup>1</sup>Data are only available as of 2002.

Table 2.1: The arms industry: French and British market shares, 2002-2018

Year	Arms sales worldwide 2018 US\$ m.	Top 100 firms		Arms sales		Market share	
		FR	UK	FR 2018 US\$ m.	UK 2018 US\$ m.	FR %	UK %
2002	286,176.19	7	11	20,238	29,430	7.07	10.28
2003	318,728.36	7	10	21,899	29,462	6.87	9.24
2004	349,130.51	5	10	18,511	31,967	5.30	9.16
2005	358,420.69	6	10	20,826	32,405	5.81	9.04
2006	374,635.88	6	10	20,046	33,910	5.35	9.05
2007	391,192.07	6	11	20,301	38,915	5.19	9.95
2008	418,903.65	6	11	19,778	44,365	4.72	10.59
2009	447,723.08	6	10	19,756	50,085	4.41	11.19
2010	455,374.78	6	10	20,400	50,742	4.48	11.14
2011	431,153.67	6	10	18,862	44,323	4.37	10.28
2012	412,636.69	6	9	19,334	40,568	4.69	9.83
2013	404,416.67	6	8	21,075	39,796	5.21	9.84
2014	391,810.31	6	8	18,910	35,947	4.83	9.17
2015	394,099.41	6	8	20,562	37,109	5.22	9.42
2016	402,148.76	6	7	20,369	37,234	5.07	9.26
2017	401,723.72	6	8	22,705	36,877	5.65	9.18
2018	420,310.00	6	8	23,240	35,120	5.53	8.36

Source: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (2020a)

Figure 2.5: Trend indicator values for French and British arms exports, 1980-2018



Source: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (2020b)

While it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to explain the reasons for this difference, it is important to retain here that the defence policies of France and the



UK are not as similar as they may appear at first glance. To the contrary, British and French defence policy agendas experienced both periods of convergence and periods of divergence which, in turn, makes an agenda-setting approach to study the evolution of those agenda dynamics particularly interesting.

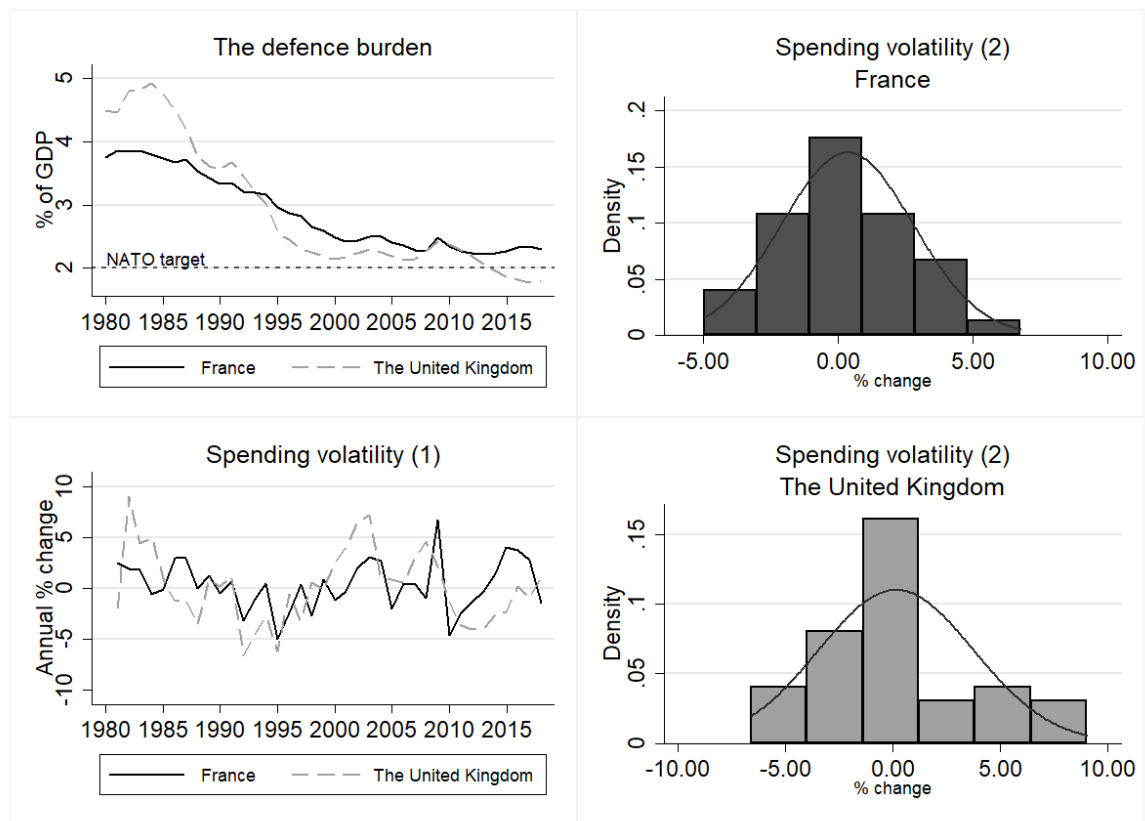
**Balancing strategic aspirations and financial resources** Last but not least, it is important to keep in mind that money is key to war (Irondelle, 2011b) and, hence, to compare how France and the UK balance their strategic aspirations and financial resources. Figure 2.6 provides an overview of the evolution of defence spending. Instead of looking at total expenditures, it compares the defence burden and spending volatility. It highlights that British and French governments give less priority to defence today than they did in 1980, and suggests that the two countries have experienced both stability and change in their budgets. More specifically, the data in Figure 2.6 illustrate that France devotes more budgetary attention to defence than the UK since 1993, spending over 2 % of its GDP on the sector. It is, however, important to note that the SIPRI database continues to include the expenses for the *Gendarmerie nationale* in the French defence budget. While the *Gendarmerie* remains part of the French armed forces, it has been attached to the French Ministry of the Interior since 2009, also from a budgetary perspective. If one takes this shift into account (which also makes the British and the French armed forces more comparable), France does not meet the NATO target either.<sup>2</sup> Defence, thus, currently has more or less the same budgetary priority on both sides of the Channel which, in turn, implies convergence over time. Figure 2.6 additionally suggests that spending levels have been rather volatile since 1980, in particular in the UK. It shows that positive changes in budget orientations are largely due to periods of international conflict (e.g. the Falkland Islands war in 1982, the Gulf War in 1990-1991 and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan). In the case of the UK, it also suggests that large decreases in British spending levels tend to correspond to years during which Britain conducted a strategic review (cf. the years 1990, 1994, 1998, 2004 and 2015). This confirms a point I already made above, namely that most reviews published after the Falkland Islands war were mere cost-cutting exercises.

In addition to comparing the national defence burden and spending volatility, it is useful to look at per capita spending. Figure 2.7a illustrates military expenditure per capita in France and the UK, taking into account the total population. This means that it compares the cost of defence per person in the two countries. It shows that British and French governments spend less per person on defence today than they

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<sup>2</sup>For more information, cf. NATO's annual compendium of financial, personnel and economic data for all member countries (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, 2019).

Figure 2.6: Defence spending in France and the United Kingdom, 1980-2018



Sources: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (2020c)

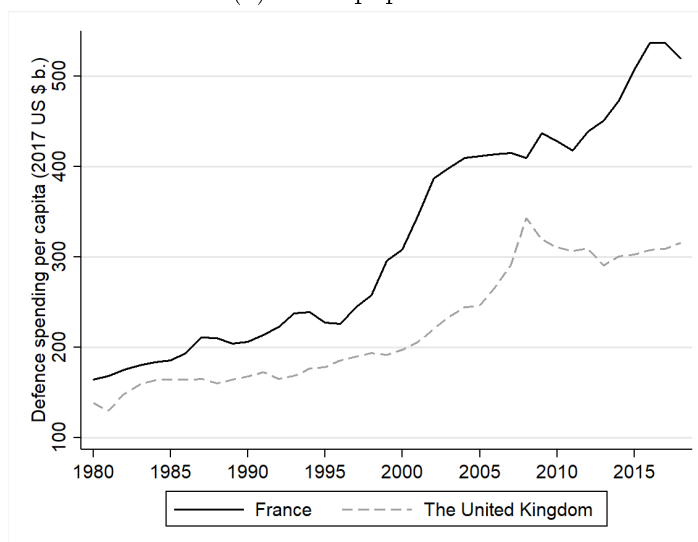
did in the 1980s. While the decrease in defence spending per capita has been rather incremental in France, it has been more abrupt in the UK which experienced phases of stark increase in spite of a general downward trend (e.g. the periods 1981-1985 and 1997-2009). Figure 2.7b also looks at per capita spending but considers service personnel only, i.e. it compares how much the UK and France spent on defence per member of the armed forces between 1980 and 2018. The data show that the military has become more labour intensive in both countries, with France experiencing a strong increase in per capita spending as of 1996, due to the shift to professional armed forces. From a public policy perspective, these dynamics are crucial to be kept in mind when comparing the defence policy agendas of the two military powers in Europe.

**Most similar, most dissimilar or none of the two?** Rather than being similar or dissimilar, the figures and tables presented in this subsection suggest that the defence policies of France and the UK have started to converge. Table 2.2 summarises those findings, indicating the correlation coefficients for the defence outputs I graphically

Figure 2.7: Defence spending per capita in France and the United Kingdom, 1980-2018



(a) Total population



(b) Service personnel only

Sources: International Institute for Security Studies (2019), Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (2020c), the United Nations (2020)

compared before. It confirms converging trends for some defence outputs (e.g. the size of the armed forces, deployments, the defence burden, defence spending per capita (service personnel)), while others are not necessarily related (e.g. operational deaths, exports, spending volatility). This, in turn, suggests that any comparison of French and British defence policy agendas should account for potential cross-national dynamics.

Prior research in IR and defence economics has, indeed, concluded that the UK and France keep observing each other, in particular since the end of the Cold War. This mutual observation is mainly due to the fact that the two countries have been rather

Table 2.2: The convergence of French and British defence policy, 1980-2018

Variable	Correlation coefficient	Observations
<b>The size of the armed forces</b>		
Armed forces (total)	0.9659	39
Army	0.9442	39
Air force	0.9585	39
Navy	0.9114	39
<b>Deployments</b>		
Troop deployments	0.9125	39
Deployment theatres	0.9242	39
Operational deaths	0.0934	39
<b>Exports</b>		
Arms sales	-0.2435	39
TIV	0.4652	39
<b>Defence spending</b>		
Defence spending (total)	0.4474	39
Defence burden	0.9657	39
Spending volatility	0.3444	39
Defence spending/population	0.6250	39
Defence spending/service personnel	0.9435	39

Source: Author's own calculation

close in the past, with similar threat perceptions. As Smith (2009, p. 104) put it

"Their closeness meant that historically they have alternated between being allies and enemies and they tend to have difficulty remembering, at any particular time, what their current relationship is supposed to be."

From the agenda-setting literature, we know that actors make choices, while paying attention to the decisions being taken around them. In the realm of defence, those decisions may be made by individuals and institutions, at the domestic or the international level. The partial convergence of French and British defence policy is likely to be due to mimicking behaviour or cross-national contagion, with political attention shifting because of changes in the defence agenda on the other side of the Channel (cf. Hypothesis 2 presented in Chapter 1). It is precisely this convergence that makes a Franco-British comparison of defence policy agendas interesting and justifies the comparative approach taken in this Ph.D. thesis.

## 2.2.2 A cross-sectional analysis

At the aggregate level, defence is often said to be abstract, unobtrusive and to lack salience. Yet, as we have seen in the last subsection, defence is a diverse public policy. The aim of this Ph.D. thesis is not to cover the full range of defence policy topics addressed by British and French governments since 1980, but to focus on how attention has been allocated to some of its key dimensions. Specifically, I look at the recruitment of military personnel (Chapter 3), the acquisition of aircraft carriers (Chapter 4) and military operations (Chapter 5). These cases cover the social dimension of the defence sector (i.e. the ‘butter’ of the ‘guns’), but also procurement and, consequently, capital investment decisions (i.e. the ‘guns’ of the ‘guns’). They additionally shed light on the operational aspects of defence, with troop deployments requiring both personnel and equipment. In addition to being complementary from a defence policy perspective, the issues I selected for the empirical chapters of my dissertation vary in their level of abstractness, obtrusiveness and salience; the degree to which they depend on the security and economic environment; and their time frame. From a public policy perspective, this variation seems promising as the issues are likely to have different agenda-building dynamics. By examining policy dynamics at the subcategory level, this dissertation, hence, contributes to the current state of the art of the agenda-setting literature. In this subsection, I present and justify each of the three case studies in more detail.

### 2.2.2.1 Prominent defence issues: The case of recruitment

Chapter 3 traces attention to the recruitment of military personnel. Why focus on HR-related issues in this thesis?

From a defence policy perspective, recruitment has become a strategic policy issue since the end of the Cold War. Indeed, it is more and more important that the military offers attractive jobs to recruit and retain qualified service personnel. This is mainly due to the professionalisation of the armed forces, and increased competition for certain skills and competencies on the (civilian) employment market. In addition, recruitment tends to become a policy problem in times of economic well-being when young people are ‘spoilt for choice’ in terms of training and job opportunities. The social dimension of defence, i.e. the ‘butter’ of the ‘guns’, thus started to gain in importance.

From a public policy perspective, recruitment is a routine issue, i.e. governments have to deal with the policy problem on a very regular basis. In addition, recruitment tends to be concrete and obtrusive. Most individuals regularly experience HR-related issues, i.e. the general public does not necessarily need the media to understand the

importance of recruitment. This also holds true for the defence sector. There are nonetheless two specificities that have to be taken into account. First, governments recruit both civilian and military personnel. This distinction is crucial since the terms and conditions of their contracts do not only differ but are also more or less easy to understand for outsiders. Whereas most civilians receive long-term contracts, the armed forces usually provide short-term contracts which, in turn, negatively affects the attractiveness of jobs in the military. Second, civilian jobs in the defence sector are often more concrete and obtrusive for people than military ones. How the recruitment of military personnel is understood at the domestic level is, thus, likely to depend on the format of the armed forces (which, in turn, is largely influenced by the security environment): HR-related issues are, indeed, usually less concrete and obtrusive in countries having a professional military which is mainly due to the fact that conscription helps making defence more accessible for the general public.

In spite of these specificities, the recruitment of military personnel qualifies as a prominent defence issue. As explained in Chapter 1, this implies that the issue is real-world led, leaving little room for media or policy impact on public opinion. Recruitment-related policy issues are, therefore, mainly driven at the national level.

### **2.2.2.2 Governmental defence issues: The case of aircraft carriers**

Chapter 4 traces attention to aircraft carriers. Why focus on procurement-related issues in this dissertation?

From a defence policy perspective, procurement - i.e. the ‘guns’ of the ‘guns’ - is key for any country having armed forces as the latter do not only need people but also have to be equipped. Governments usually have several policy alternatives at hand. They can decide to develop, produce and maintain their defence systems at the domestic level. Alternatively, they may opt for imports, in particular if they do not have a DIB or if their DIB does not cover the full spectrum of equipments and services that their armed forces need. The case of aircraft carriers is particularly interesting here as it reflects the willingness of countries to invest in high-profile capabilities and to be able to conduct overseas operations on their own. Since only very few states possess carriers, the platforms are, however, not just a defence equipment: aircraft carriers are also a symbol of power in IR and, consequently, a crucial tool of diplomacy.

From a public policy perspective, the acquisition of military equipment is quintessentially abstract and unobtrusive: most individuals do not know if the armed forces have the ‘right’ equipment or not. The media too are likely to remain oblivious to or uninterested in such problems until policy-makers, for whom procurement remains a routine

issue, highlight them. Indeed, similar to the recruitment of military personnel, the acquisition of equipment is a thoroughly planned aspect of defence policy. Just like for any other public policy, there are regular and urgent procurement processes. In the case of defence, regular procurement processes - such as the acquisition of aircraft carriers - tend to be slow and formalised. Many aspects have to be taken into account, including the compatibility with other defence equipment (here with aircraft and frigates, for instance) and the minimisation of maintenance costs. Urgent procurement processes, in turn, tend to be faster, more informal and may also end up being partially incompatible with the rest of the defence system (e.g. because of the import of equipment needed for a specific military operation abroad). In spite of being routine issues, the time frame and costs of military recruitment and defence procurement do, however, differ quite significantly. Indeed, most procurement programmes run over a period of forty years and face exponentially rising costs which, in turn, makes their acquisition in times of economic distress much more complicated.

The acquisition of military equipment can, hence, be classified as a governmental defence issue. This suggests, as explained in Chapter 1, that the issue is policy-driven. Before the general public and the media pay attention to the procurement of carriers, policy-makers - at the national and/or the international level - have to identify the policy problem (e.g. the lack of power projection capabilities) and its consequences (e.g. the inability to quickly intervene abroad). The media may affect the public's opinion on aircraft carriers, but this effect is only secondary. It can, however, be reinforced if the issue, which remains technically complex, is discussed with regard to its ethical, social or political implications, thus including a wider range of participants.

### **2.2.2.3 Sensational defence issues: The case of military operations**

Chapter 5 traces attention to military operations. Why focus on the operational dimension of defence in this thesis?

From a defence policy perspective, military operations have been high agenda items since 1991 when they started to become the armed forces' key mission. Be it EU, NATO or United Nations (UN) missions, coalitions of the willing or purely national efforts abroad, the number of military operations has significantly increased after the end of the Cold War. These missions have had various purposes: disaster relief, peacekeeping, counter-insurgency, counter-piracy, counter-terrorism, humanitarian aid, policing, search and rescue, training etc. What they have in common, though, is that they all required personnel and equipment. This, in turn, explains why operations are regularly used to justify recruitment and procurement decisions in the defence sector.

From a public policy perspective, military operations are mostly unobtrusive and concrete, i.e. the vast majority of individuals do not observe or experience them directly, but have some idea about what the armed forces are doing. Troop deployments, hence, create great potential for the media to drive the public and to constrain the policy agenda. Although military operations have become the ‘core business’ of professional armed forces, they still qualify as non-routine policy issues. While the government can prepare for different crisis scenarios and types of intervention, including the ones listed above, it cannot fully anticipate them. Compared to the recruitment of military personnel and the acquisition of carriers, deployments are, hence, much more random. In addition, it is important to note that military operations have started to receive more media coverage over the past thirty years and, therefore, also tend to be rather salient. This is particularly true when the number of civilian and combatant deaths climbs or when the armed forces face equipment deficiencies, for instance, as both incidences increase the potential for media effects and public concern.

Given that operations are unobtrusive, the media are likely to lead the public and to shape the policy agendas. As explained in Chapter 1, military operations may, therefore, be considered as a sensational defence issue. They are mainly driven at the national level, although there is potential for cross-national agenda-dynamics.

Table 2.3: Case study selection: An overview

Case study	Issue type	Issue characteristics		Key trigger	
		Obtrusiveness	Abstractness	Domestic level	Internat. level
Recruitment of service personnel	Prominent defence issue	Obtrusive	Concrete	Real-world driven	+
Aircraft carriers	Governmental defence issue	Unobtrusive	Abstract	Policy-driven	+++
Military operations	Sensational defence issue	Unobtrusive	Concrete	Media-driven	++

Source: Author’s own compilation, based on Soroka (2002a)

To sum up, I look at three policy issues that are complementary from a defence policy perspective and that vary in their level of abstractness and obtrusiveness. As Table 2.3 outlines, those issues have different paths of influence: prominent defence issues are real-world driven; governmental defence issues are policy-driven; and sensational defence issues are media-driven. This is in line with the agenda-setting model Soroka



(2002a) advanced for policy-making in Canada, a model I presented in more detail in Chapter 1 and further developed for the purpose of this research. In addition, the three issues differ in their exposure to cross-national agenda-setting dynamics, with aircraft carriers being most likely to be affected by policy developments abroad. The cross-sectional design of this thesis, thus, enables me to test my hypotheses on the role of mimicking (Hypothesis 1) and issue attributes (Hypothesis 2) for the agenda-building dynamics of defence which, in turn, allows me to contribute to the agenda-setting literature presented in Chapter 1.

### 2.2.3 A longitudinal analysis, 1980-2018

In addition to a cross-national and cross-sectional analysis, I opted for a longitudinal study of the agenda-setting dynamics of defence. Indeed, agenda-setting is not a one-shot activity. It is an ongoing process during which issues ebb and flow through the political system. What France and the UK consider to be a defence problem that has to be addressed may, consequently, change over time. To understand those dynamics, it is crucial to observe policy problems over a longer period of time. A longitudinal approach enables us to comprehend how different issues have been understood in the past and how actors responded to them; it also allows us to examine if there has been any variation in the visibility of the policy or the mobilisation around those defence issues. Indeed, defence policy issues - just like all other policy problems - can be ignored for years and then rapidly reacted to. Similarly, defence issues once considered to be consensual can suddenly be associated with much more conflict. A relatively long time frame is, therefore, vital to shed light on the agenda-building dynamics of defence.

A longitudinal approach is also suited since some issues - in particular procurement-related ones (e.g. aircraft carriers) - have relatively long life cycles. This is not specific to defence, but holds true for all public policies. In this thesis, I decided to trace attention to a prominent defence issue (here the recruitment of military personnel), a governmental defence issue (here the acquisition of aircraft carriers) and a sensational defence issue (here military operations) in the UK and France from 1980 to 2018. I have chosen to work on this time period because it encompasses ten years of the Cold War era, the so-called peace dividends of the 1990s and a wide range of international crises during which France and the UK have taken both very similar and very different decisions. The research design, thus, enables me to examine how the British and the French political systems process information, while controlling for a diverse strategic environment. By taking a shorter time period, I would have risked missing the evolution of different factors – including real-world developments – that are potentially

responsible for producing policy stability and policy change over time.

Overall, the data analysis in this dissertation is conducted over an important period of recent French and British history which, in turn, is key to shedding light on the agenda-building dynamics of defence in those two countries.

## 2.3 Measuring political attention

From the above, it becomes clear that the aim of this dissertation is neither to examine the history of defence policy in the UK and France nor to analyse Franco-British defence cooperation over the past forty years. Others have provided research on the evolution of French and British defence policy (for France, cf. Gregory (2000), Utley (2000) and Pannier and Schmitt (2020); for the UK, cf. Bartlett (1972), Hopkinson (2000), Croft et al. (2001), Dorman (2002) and Brown (2010)) as well as Franco-British defence cooperation, in particular following the signing of the Lancaster House Treaty (cf. Pannier (2013, 2016a,b, 2020), Pannier and Schmitt (2014) and Ostermann (2015)).

Instead of analysing how defence policy is formulated in France and the UK or evaluating their defence outputs - which are, as I explained in the introduction of this manuscript, two very distinct stages of the policy cycle -, I trace attention to three complementary defence policy issues in the two leading military powers in Europe over a period of 39 years. The aim of this comparative research is to understand how defence remained a government priority in the UK and France, and to examine why and under which conditions defence problems - here the recruitment of service personnel, the acquisition of aircraft carriers and military operations - moved up and down on French and British policy agendas between 1980 and 2018. The agenda-setting approach helps us answering this research question because it allows us to study how issues (*what*) rise and fall (*when*) in political systems and to identify the mechanisms (*why*) through which they gain or lose traction on a variety of agendas, notably by distinguishing influential from non-influential actors (*who*) in the policy process.

The question then is: How do we measure attention to defence? Empirical studies on agenda-setting dynamics have relied on both qualitative and quantitative methods. While quantitative studies are best for measuring, ranking and identifying more general patterns and trends in policy agendas, a qualitative approach is useful to contextualise, describe and gain in-depth insights into how issues ebb and flow through the political system. The two methodological approaches are, hence, complementary, even if agenda-setting scholars still tend to focus on either one or the other. To tackle this empirical shortfall, which I explained in more detail in Chapter 1, I combine both qualitative

and quantitative analyses. More specifically, I derive evidence for the agenda-setting dynamics of defence from an original, longitudinal data set which includes speeches, government statements, strategic documents, opinion polls, media coverage, and a series of semi-directed interviews with British and French agenda-setters. The data I collected - which constitute a significant empirical contribution to the agenda-setting literature on foreign, security and defence policy - is used for content, graphical and statistical analyses. In the following subsections, I shortly present the data on which the empirical chapters 3-5 are based and discuss the limits of my research design. More details on this data - including coding schemes and key information on the interviewees - can be found in Appendix A.<sup>3</sup>

### 2.3.1 Quantitative analyses: Data and method

Many public policy scholars have approached policy-making quantitatively. These studies examine policy advocacy coalitions (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1993) and party manifestos (Soroaka and Wlezien, 2005), but also how attention leads to policy stability and policy change (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993; Jones and Baumgartner, 2005). Even though quantitative analyses simplify the policy-making process, they make the incomparable comparable and enable students of public administration and public policy to identify patterns and trends across countries and over time. The key advantage for agenda-setting scholars is that attention can be assessed quantitatively, i.e. there is either more, less or the same amount of attention being paid to a specific issue. The focus on issues, though, means that the latter have to be identified, labelled and coded. Therefore, many quantitative studies draw on a taxonomy of issues to examine the main functions of government. The most sophisticated, comparative data set that has so far been developed for the study of policy agendas is the CAP.

The aim of the CAP, which is based on the US Policy Agendas Project (PAP), is to systematically analyse and compare policy agendas. In the 1990s, researchers in the PAP started to code the content of US policy processes at the quasi-sentence level.<sup>4</sup> The scope of this project was to generate time series which were long enough to study agenda-setting in the US across issues and time. The PAP codes issue attention to 20 public policies with 224 subtopics (cf. Table A.3 for the different topic codes). Even though one may argue that each individual topic has different analytical demands, Baumgartner and Jones (1993) and Jones and Baumgartner (2005) were able

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<sup>3</sup>Appendix A.C also contains an overview of the data I used to show the convergence of French and British defence outputs in section 2.2 of this chapter.

<sup>4</sup>The quasi-sentence level constitutes an expression of a single policy idea or issue while not necessarily being a complete sentence.

to demonstrate - based on their data set - that policy processes in the US are characterised by both stability and change. The US coding scheme has been adapted to a series of local governments (e.g. the Pennsylvania Policy Agendas Project), European countries (including France and the UK) and international organisations (e.g. the EU Policy Agendas Project). Since the content of political activities is coded according to common categories across those different projects, the frequency of issues cannot only be analysed across venues and over time, but also between various political systems (cf. Baumgartner et al. (1998) for an account of methodological issues around the CAP).

Surprisingly, the CAP data have so far barely been used to examine the agenda-setting dynamics of foreign, security and defence policy. Most studies that use the major topic code for defence issues look at agenda diversity, i.e. they compare key government activities and suggest crowding-out effects between core and non-core issues.<sup>5</sup> As I argued in Chapter 1, this may be due to research traditions and the assumption that agenda-setting works differently in domestic and foreign policies. In his book chapter on the creation of the master codebook of the CAP project, Bevan (2019, p. 28) suggests another reason for this gap in the literature:

"In some ways the major topic defense was made for the United States. Not only has the US military been involved in a large number of military actions since World War II, but spending on defense far outstrips every other CAP country. That spending creates many points for policymaking as well, from procurement procedures to bases and much, much more."

The fact that the major topic 'defence' was mainly made for the US does, however, not mean that it is not useful for the study of agenda-building outside of the US-context. Defence, as I have shown in the introduction of this manuscript, remains a key public policy in many states. While most countries cannot keep up with the US in military terms, we have to keep in mind that only some twenty states do not have a standing army at the moment. This implies that the large majority of states do currently pay attention to defence, in some way or another.

In this Ph.D. thesis, I use the CAP-data to measure attention to three defence issues (as compared to all other defence policy issues) in France and the UK between 1980 and 2018. In line with the theoretical model I proposed for the agenda-setting dynamics of defence (cf. section 1.4), I focus on the evolution of the policy, the media and the public agendas, and examine if - and how - the three agendas influence each other. Tables A.1 and A.2 in the appendix give an overview of the data I used and the time frames they

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<sup>5</sup>For a more detailed explanation, cf. the literature review in Chapter 1.

cover. Table A.4, in turn, highlights the CAP-subcodes for defence, including the ones that are particularly relevant for this manuscript: 1608 for personnel issues (Chapter 3), 1610 for procurement (Chapter 4) and 1619 for operations (Chapter 5). Given that those topic codes remain rather broad, I collected and analysed additional policy, media and public opinion data on the recruitment of service personnel, the acquisition of aircraft carriers and military operations. The data in this dissertation have been analysed with a variety of tools, including Iramuteq, R, Stata and TXM. I will now shortly summarise and discuss each of the aforementioned data sets.

### 2.3.1.1 The policy agenda

There are various ways to study government priorities. In this Ph.D. thesis, I opted for looking at cabinet meetings in France and the Queen's Speech in the UK, using pre-coded data from the CAP. In addition, I examined how British and French government priorities evolved by identifying the key topics governments covered in the defence white papers and strategic reviews they published between 1980 and 2018.

**Cabinet meetings and speeches** Research has shown that speeches are a crucial indicator of government priorities (Bertelli and John, 2013; Cohen, 1995, 1997; Hill, 1998; Hobolt and Klemmensen, 2005; Jennings et al., 2011a; John and Jennings, 2010; Mortensen et al., 2011). This is particularly true for domains such as foreign affairs where legislation does not always signal a change in output. For the UK, I, therefore, analysed the Speech from the Throne which opens each session of parliament. As Bertelli and John (2013, p. 753) highlight, "[t]he emphasis on foreign policy in the speech is high, but this reflects the traditions of the speech in drawing attention to such matters by the head of state". Since the format of the speech is consistent over time, regardless of the political parties in power, it constitutes a robust measure of government priorities in the UK (Jennings et al., 2011a).

While data for cross-national analyses have to be comparable, they should also be representative at the domestic level. For studies like this Franco-British comparison, it is, consequently, crucial to determine the indicators of government activity that are the most relevant ones in each country. Although I could have examined Presidential speeches in France to have similar empirical data as for the UK (e.g. the speech of the French President on 14 July or 31 December), prior research suggests that the *Communiqués de Conseil des ministres*, i.e. the weekly statements of the French government, are a better indicator of government priorities in France because they have more policy content (Grossman et al., 2010). The government statements do,

indeed, result in short policy agendas, similar to the Queen's Speech in the UK. They include both issues of current concern and long-term programmes (Grossman, 2019). In addition, the *Communiqués de Conseil des ministres* have been published for over 50 years and have already been coded by the French CAP-team which, in turn, allows me to determine the topics governments have concentrated on and analyse whether they changed over time (and at what speed) - just like for the UK.

In Chapters 3-5 of this dissertation, the base measure for the policy agenda is the percentage, at the quasi-sentence level, of the Queen's Speech and French government statements assigned to a particular topic in any given year. This treats the agenda space as a constant over time, and enables me to calculate change in attention by issue relative to its value in the previous year.

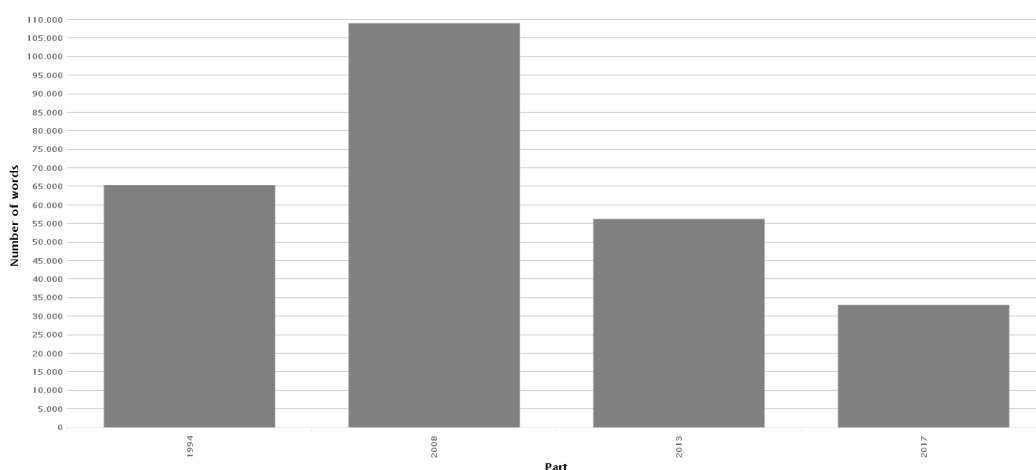
This approach to the study of the defence policy agenda has its limits. Both the Queen's Speech and the *Communiqués de Conseil des ministres* are only part of the executive agenda. The latter also includes the priorities of local government, agencies and departments, for example, which may play a non-negligible role for the agenda-building dynamics of some defence issues, but are excluded from this study. This, in turn, implies that I may find stability by looking at speeches and government statements, while there is significant change in government priorities elsewhere (and *vice versa*). In spite of these shortfalls in the research design, both the *Communiqués de Conseil des ministres* and the Speech from the Throne are consistent over time and, hence, a robust measure of government attention in France and the UK, thereby making them a good starting point for a study on the agenda-building dynamics of defence.

**Defence white papers and strategic reviews** In addition to speeches and government statements, I analysed issue attention within British and French defence white papers and strategic reviews. Those government documents are not covered by the CAP, but constitute one of the most accessible guides to a country's level of ambition in international security and are, therefore, relevant for this project. In fact, defence white papers and strategic reviews identify risks and threats; define - and, if necessary, redefine - policy ambitions; and justify the means that are required for reaching those goals, both in terms of human capital and capital investment. At the same time, they are not binding, i.e. they indicate policy priorities and signal them to a variety of actors at the domestic and the international level. This, in turn, makes them crucial for any analysis of agenda-setting dynamics at the cross-national level.

Figure 2.8 provides some information on the French strategic documents I included in the text corpus that I analysed for this dissertation. France published three defence

white papers (1994, 2008 and 2013) and one strategic review (2017) between 1980 and 2018. The four documents vary quite significantly in their size and the impact they had on French defence policy. The 1994 *Livre blanc sur la défense* was the first strategic document France published after the end of the Cold War, and mainly aimed at adapting the military to the new strategic context (French Ministry of Defence, 1994). With around 65,000 words, it was quite consistent in size. The 2008 *Livre blanc sur la défense et sécurité nationale*, which officially updated French defence policy after 9/11, marked an important doctrinal change. It put the focus on the security-defence continuum and strove for a closer link between strategic reviews and the *Lois de programmation militaire* (LPMs) (French Ministry of Defence, 2008).<sup>6</sup> With around 110,000 words, it is, by far, the most comprehensive strategic document published since 1980. The 2008 white paper strongly influenced the 2013 *Livre blanc sur la défense et sécurité nationale* which includes hardly any major changes in France's defence agenda, except for some updates on cybersecurity, intelligence and strategic autonomy (French Ministry of Defence, 2013). The 2017 *Revue stratégique de défense et de sécurité*, in turn, which is the last document I included in the text corpus, aimed at setting the strategic framework for the elaboration of the 2019-2025 LPM which is meant to raise France's defence effort to 2 % of GDP by 2025 (French Ministry of the Armed Forces, 2017b). Overall, and as illustrated by Figure 2.8, French governments have started to update their defence strategies on a more regular basis which *inter alia* explains why the documents became shorter over time.

Figure 2.8: French defence white papers and strategic reviews, 1980-2018

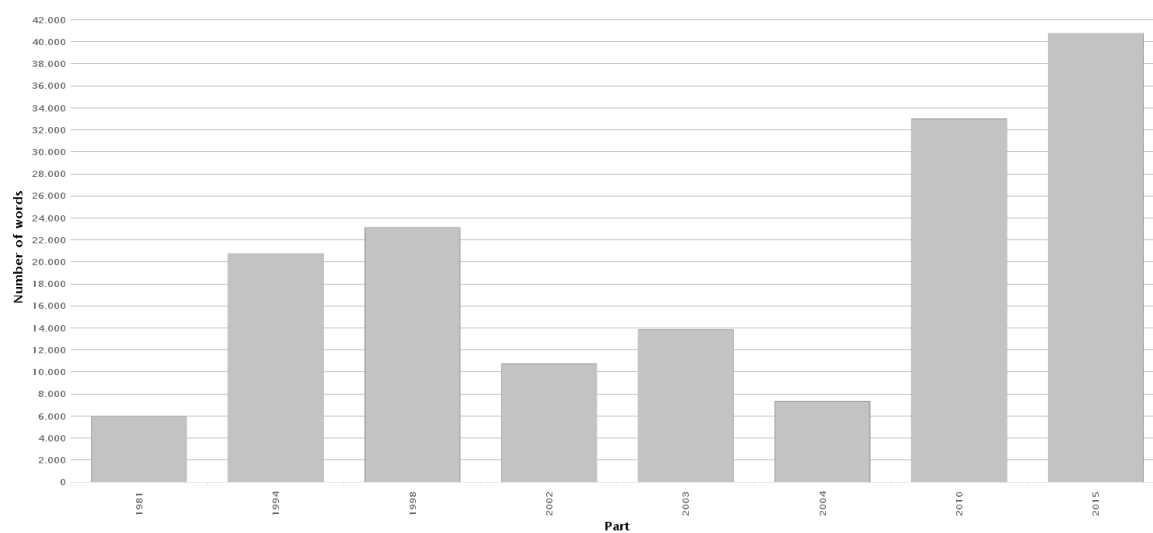


Sources: French strategic documents

<sup>6</sup>The purpose of the LPMs is to establish a multi-annual programme of state expenditure on military matters.

Figure 2.9 provides an overview of the British strategic documents I included in the text corpus that I analysed for this dissertation. The UK has had a series of major defence white papers and strategic reviews since 1980: the Nott Review in 1981 (British Ministry of Defence, 1981), Options for Change in 1990 (British Ministry of Defence, 1990)<sup>7</sup>, the 1994 Defence Costs Study (British Ministry of Defence, 1994), the Strategic Defence Review (SDR) of 1998 (British Ministry of Defence, 1998) - which was updated in 2002 (British Ministry of Defence, 2002) -, the 2003 Defence White Paper (British Ministry of Defence, 2003) - which was supplemented by a chapter on capabilities in 2004 (British Ministry of Defence, 2004) -, the 2010 Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR) (British Ministry of Defence, 2010) and the 2015 National Security Strategy (NSS) and SDSR (British Ministry of Defence, 2015). Compared to France, the UK has updated its defence white papers and strategic reviews on a much more regular basis which, in turn, also explains why the documents tend to be rather short (6,000-40,000 words).

Figure 2.9: British defence white papers and strategic reviews, 1980-2018



Sources: British strategic documents

The Nott review, which I already mentioned above, was strategic in its outlook: it concluded that out-of-area missions were no longer a priority and, therefore, intended to significantly downsize the fleet of the British navy. However, the Falkland war in 1982 showed that the government had set the wrong agenda. The UK, thus, shifted to a more pragmatic approach to defence and increasingly opted for incremental policy changes. The strategic documents that were published immediately after the end of

<sup>7</sup>Since the original text is not accessible, I excluded this defence review from the content analysis in this Ph.D. thesis.



the Cold War, thus, mainly described the world as it occurred, and aimed at reducing the costs of defence. The Labour government under Blair tried to reverse this trend and attempted to link strategy and capability once again, but the 1998 SDR did not receive the financial backing that would have been necessary to live up to its potential. After 9/11, the Brits added a chapter to the 1998 SDR and updated their defence white paper in 2003-2004, mainly to cover non-state transnational threats. The 2010 SDSR, subsequently, incorporated a list of targets for policy issues that are indirectly linked to defence, such as development aid. However, it assumed high efficiency and ended up creating a black hole in the defence budget. The 2015 NSS and SDSR - which is the last policy document I included in this dissertation - suffered a similar problem as its predecessor: it lacked realism and turned out to be not affordable.<sup>8</sup>

Based on those two text corpora, I identified *when* the recruitment of service personnel, the acquisition of aircraft carriers and military operations emerged as policy problems within the defence community. I mainly used specificity analyses to do so. In addition, I looked at both concordances and co-occurrences to examine *how* those topics were addressed, and if there had been any changes in the framing of the three issues over time. Generally speaking, such analyses are not uncommon in political science and communication studies (Labbé, 1990; Labbé and Monière, 2003; Leblanc, 2016; Mayaffre, 2012a,b; Moulène, 2017), but - with one exception (Meszaros, 2018) - have not been conducted on defence-related documents yet.

While the analysis of defence white papers and strategic reviews gives us additional information on the evolution of the defence policy agenda, it has one key disadvantage: the limited amount of data points. Strategic documents are not published on a very regular basis which, in turn, can be a problem for longitudinal and cross-national studies like this dissertation. The UK, for instance, has published twice as many defence reviews as France between 1980 and 2018. This, however, does not mean that a comparative study of those agendas is not recommendable. To the contrary, it might be one of the few feasible options for studying the agenda-setting dynamics of defence, despite the aforementioned shortfall. In fact, it is important to keep in mind that it is rather difficult to measure attention to national security. First, because internal documents are often classified. Second, because defence is an insurance policy which is not unambiguously related to indicators that reflect the severity of the policy problem,

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<sup>8</sup>In the UK, governments presented a more or less annual statement on defence policy to Parliament between 1946 and 1996. Initially referred to as the Statement on Defence, it became known as the Statement on Defence Estimates (SDE). These documents gave an overview of British defence policy, focusing on the activities of the forces that year and the budget required to fund them. The SDEs were not included in the database of this thesis as they were largely an evaluation of the activities of the armed forces, i.e. they reflect a different stage of the policy cycle.

as it is the case for many other issues, such as poverty, unemployment or road safety. Defence white papers and strategic reviews are not only available in the public sphere, but also reflect top priorities at the national level and send a strong signal to a variety of actors at home (e.g. the armed forces, the industry, the media and the general public) and abroad (e.g. close allies). They, consequently, constitute a crucial source for agenda-setting studies that focus on foreign, security and defence policy.

### 2.3.1.2 The media agenda

To measure media attention to defence, I first of all examined the data collected by the French Agendas Project and the UK Policy Agendas Project. The British data measure the policy content of the front page of The Times of London between 1960 and 2008 while the French data focus on the issues that appeared on the front pages of *Le Monde* between 1981 and 2013. Given the size of the data sets, both national projects concentrate on major topic codes only. I, hence, had two options for this research project: recode the available CAP-data at the subcategory level to be able to measure attention to the recruitment of service personnel, the acquisition of aircraft carriers and military operations *or* run additional and more specific media searches.

I eventually decided to take the CAP-data as a starting point only, i.e. I used the available time series to examine how media attention to defence evolved in general between the 1980s and the 2010s. To better grasp how the three defence issues that I selected for the empirical part of this study were treated by national media, I opted for searching print news media in France and the UK *via* two commonly used online databases: Europresse and Factiva. This approach had two main advantages. First, it allowed me run very targeted analyses on the media coverage of the recruitment of service personnel, the acquisition of aircraft carriers and military operations. Second, it enabled me to include more than one national newspaper and, hence, to tackle one of the key problems of the French and British CAP-data, namely the different political colours of the newspapers that the two national projects cover.

For the media analysis in Chapters 3-5, I sampled five of the most read newspapers from the UK and France. In France, I examined four national newspapers (*Le Figaro*, *Le Monde*, *Le Parisien-Aujourd'hui en France* and *Les Échos*), and one regional newspaper (*Ouest-France*). In the UK, I analysed five national newspapers (Daily Mail, The Daily Telegraph, The Guardian, The Independent, The Times). Those newspapers vary in their political alignment (left-right) as well as their link to the defence industry (*Le Figaro*, for example, is owned by Dassault). Given that news are socially constructed and tend to adopt a particular tone, e.g. of a certain political party or interest group,

this selection allowed me to balance variations in reporting. I retrieved and counted articles on the recruitment of service personnel, the acquisition of aircraft carriers and military operations that were published in those ten newspapers between 1 January 1980 and 31 December 2018. I excluded duplicate stories, but included republished ones as they increase the visibility of the three policy issues. Table 2.4 summarises this media database and specifies the time periods covered for each newspaper, as Europresse and Factiva do not grant access to all ten newspapers as of 1980.

Table 2.4: Media data, 1980-2018

	Newspaper	Editorial line	Data	
			Access via	Available as of
France	<i>Le Figaro</i>	Centre-right	Europresse	31-10-1996
	<i>Le Monde</i>	Centre-left	Europresse	19-12-1944
	<i>Le Parisien-Aujourd'hui en France</i>	Popular	Europresse	04-05-2005
	<i>Les Échos</i>	Liberal	Europresse	02-01-1991
	<i>Ouest-France</i>	Popular	Europresse	01-12-2003
UK	Daily Mail	Conservative	Factiva	06-01-1981
	The Daily Telegraph	Conservative	Factiva	03-06-2000
	The Guardian	Social-liberal	Factiva	02-01-1981
	The Independent	Liberal	Factiva	01-06-1988
	The Times	Conservative	Factiva	05-01-1980

Source: Author's own illustration

With Europresse and Factiva, I conducted searches using comparable parameters for both French and British news coverage. In line with media analysis design protocols that advocate for using a variety of search terms to better tailor the inclusion and exclusion criteria, I tested how different terms performed for each of my three case studies. I also checked various combinations of search terms. Table B.1 in the appendix provides an overview of the search terms for which I received the most relevant results and that, consequently, constitute the basis of the empirical analyses in Chapters 3-5. To better grasp the content and tone of the media coverage, I also read around 20 % of the most relevant newspaper articles on each of the three policy issues.

The key problem of this approach is that I am not able to cover the same period for all ten journals, i.e. there may still be potential biases, given that the newspapers vary in their political alignment and closeness to the defence industry. This is particularly true for the French data, with articles from *Ouest-France* and *Le Parisien-Aujourd'hui en France* being only available as of 2004 and 2005, respectively. To tackle this shortfall,

I cross-checked the empirical results by having a closer look at the coverage of *Le Monde* and The Times of London, the two newspapers for which data are available for the period 1980-2018. In spite of their different political orientations, this second analysis allowed me to control for increases in the number of articles on the recruitment of service personnel, the acquisition of aircraft carriers and military operations that are only due to data availability (in particular in the case of France as data for *Ouest-France*, which covers a variety of military issues, can only be accessed for half of the period I am interested in in this study). It also allowed me to close the loop of the media analysis since the CAP-data, which were the starting point of this part of the empirical work, covers precisely those two national newspapers. By triangulating data from more than one source, I intended to increase the validity and reliability of my research results.

### 2.3.1.3 The public agenda

Last but not least, I examined how public opinion on defence evolved since the 1980s. While the study of public opinion on foreign policy, including defence, is quite common in the US, it is less systematic in other countries.

In Europe, defence is hardly ever the main focus of interest of national and international surveys. The Standard Eurobarometer, for instance, only asks a couple of questions on defence, most of which are closely related to the CSDP and the creation of a European army. Whenever defence is the main focus of a survey, it is very likely that the latter was commissioned by the MOD (e.g. the *Délégation à l'information et à la communication de la défense* (DICOd) in France or the Directorate of Defence Communications in the UK). There are, however, several problems with those institutional surveys. First, MODs usually do not make the disaggregated data available. Second, survey results are mainly used to improve the communication around the country's defence policy which, in turn, tends to lead to design-biased questions that do not only avoid self-harm but may also influence participants' responses. Third, surveys on defence - including international ones - are often *ad hoc* polls on salient, newsworthy issues, like military operations. This is neither representative of a country's defence policy nor does it reflect public opinion on defence issues in the medium or long run. The focus on salient policy issues also implies that questions change over time which, in turn, makes it difficult to track the evolution of citizens' preferences.

It is, consequently, not straightforward to measure the public's priorities in terms of government attention to defence. Like most scholars who study issue salience, I started off with aggregate responses to survey questions that either ask about the MIP or the

most important issue (MII) facing the country (Jones, 1994; MacKuen and Coombs, 1981; McCombs and Shaw, 1972; Soroka, 2002a). While the MIP and the MII are very similar indicators, it is important to keep in mind that they are not identical. As Jennings and Wlezien (2011, p. 547) put it:

"In theory, an important issue refers to something that people care about [...] An important problem differs conceptually in that it captures the importance of an issue *and* the degree to which it is a problem. Something can be a problem but of little importance, and something can be important but not a problem."

This being said, Jennings and Wlezien (2011) also underline that people may not make this difference when responding to a survey. Their research shows that this holds true for several issues in the UK (e.g. unemployment, health and education), but not for defence and foreign affairs where the pairwise correlation is comparatively low (0.534). This, in turn, implies that one should either look at the MIP or the MII - but not combine the two - when working on (British) public opinion and defence. For the purpose of this thesis, two problems still had to be tackled though. First, while data on the MIP or the MII are easily accessible for the UK *via* the CAP, it is much more difficult to compile a longitudinal series for France. Second, and more importantly, data on the MIP and the MII are again very broad, i.e. they enable us to have a general idea about when defence was on people's mind but do not allow us to determine which (defence) issues they were precisely thinking of.

For precisely this reason, I also collected all available data on British and French public opinion on service personnel, aircraft carriers and military operations. More specifically, I contacted the British MOD and Ipsos Mori<sup>9</sup> in order to get access to surveys that have been conducted in the UK on defence since the 1980s. It is important to note here that the British MOD has its own survey since 1999, with data being accessible for the general public as of 2011 (British Ministry of Defence, 2017). Although the ultimate purpose of the survey is clearly to analyse the impact of the MOD's communication efforts, it contains a series of questions that are relevant for this dissertation. Indeed, it focuses not only on operations, but also HR- and procurement-related policy issues. In France, I have mainly been in touch with the DICOd which, together with its predecessor, the *Service d'informations et de relations publiques des armées* (SIRPA), has been doing opinion surveys on defence for over forty years. The DICOd is largely in charge of the image of the French armed forces which includes com-

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<sup>9</sup>I would like to thank Roger Mortimore for his help in accessing the public opinion data on defence-related issues.

municating around their missions and operations. This, in turn, explains why most surveys aim to analyse how the French perceive the military and whether they adhere to their missions, both at home and abroad. Contrary to the UK, the French MOD asks hardly any procurement-related issues, except with regard to nuclear policy.

In spite of being more specific, the key problem of looking at institutional surveys to study the public agenda is that the data on the recruitment of service personnel, the acquisition of aircraft carriers and military operations do not fully cover the period 1980-2018. To the contrary, sometimes, they are only available for certain years. For a longitudinal analysis, missing data are obviously inconvenient. From an agenda-setting perspective, however, this is less of a problem. The years for which we have data are actually particularly interesting to analyse as they show that the issue had reached a level of importance where it was deemed necessary to sound out public opinion on the matter. For this thesis, institutional surveys are, consequently, crucial empirical data, in spite of their aforementioned shortfalls (i.e. their potential bias, their focus on newsworthy issues etc.). Still, the lack of data on public opinion on defence shows the limits of a quantitative approach to the study of agenda-setting in defence, and fully justified adding a qualitative component to this research project.

### 2.3.2 Qualitative analyses: Data and method

Although policy scholars increasingly use quantitative methods, it is important to keep in mind that early agenda-setting studies mainly relied on qualitative research to trace the agenda-setting process. Kingdon (1984), for example, drew his research from interviews with people directly and indirectly involved in the policy-making process as well as from government documents, party platforms, media coverage and public opinion surveys. The key advantage of a qualitative approach to policy agendas is that it allows us to identify the mechanism(s) behind stability and change, and to better comprehend how the different agendas are linked. In the following subsections, I give a short overview of the grey literature I used and the interviews I conducted with members of the defence community.

#### 2.3.2.1 Grey literature

First, I used government documents, research reports and policy briefs, all of which are listed in the bibliography at the end of this manuscript.<sup>10</sup> I also made several freedom

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<sup>10</sup>The bibliography is in alphabetical order and includes all primary and secondary sources, the grey literature as well as the databases used in this dissertation.

of information (FOI) requests in the UK to access data on the British defence sector that were held by public authorities but were not (yet) available in the public sphere. More specifically, this grey literature includes:

- official government documents that focus on the recruitment of service personnel, aircraft carriers and military operations;
- FOI requests in the UK, e.g. on the composition of the British armed forces and operational deaths between 1980 and 2018;
- reports and policy documents from various institutions in France and the UK, including think tanks and research institutes (e.g. the *Centre d'études en sciences sociales de la défense* (C2SD), Chatham House, the IRSEM and Rand Corporation), and public bodies (e.g. the *Cour des comptes*, the *Observatoire économique de la défense* (OED), the *Haut Comité d'évaluation de la condition militaire* (HCECM) and the NAO).

This grey literature was not only key to fully understanding the three policy issues I examine in this dissertation, but also to start mapping the actors who are involved in the defence policy cycle in France and the UK, in particular in the agenda-setting stage. The downside of government documents, research reports and policy briefs is that they do not necessarily allow us to study *how* those actors interact. For precisely this reason, I also conducted interviews which helped me to reveal what actors think about the policy process and how they justify certain decisions and actions.

### 2.3.2.2 Interviews

To gain a better insight into the agenda-setting dynamics of defence issues, I conducted 30 semi-structured interviews with actors who are or were involved in French and British defence policy-making. Although this sample may seem relatively small, its composition was particularly useful for this research. Indeed, I covered actors in key positions, with an average of 20 years of professional experience in the defence sector. This implies that most interviewees have had several defence-related jobs in the past, especially in the UK where turnover rates tend to be high (above all but not only in the civil service). Given that both France and the UK have professional armed forces, it is also not uncommon to find (former) service personnel within public bodies, for example. In addition, some interviewees have worked on policy issues that are not directly related to defence and were, therefore, able to reflect on the (non)specificity of the sector, especially with regard to decision-making. Consequently, I received a rather complete picture of defence actors and the impact they have on agenda-setting, despite

interviewing only 30 people. I was also able to grasp whether the agenda-building dynamics of defence were specific or similar to those of other public policies.

When selecting interviewees, I targeted civil servants and (former) service personnel (including members of the so-called ‘inner circle’), defence policy advisers, MPs and parliamentary staff, staff from the NAO and the *Cour des Comptes* as well as defence journalists. As mentioned before, both turnover and reconversion rates have increased over time, i.e. the majority of interviewees check several of those boxes. While the financial support of the French Ministry of the Armed Forces for this dissertation and my affiliation with the IRSEM were key to getting in touch with potential interviewees in France<sup>11</sup>, especially within the MOD, I had to heavily rely on my affiliation with the LSE between December 2017 and March 2018 to get appointments in the UK. Except for one phone interview, all interviews were carried out in person. I conducted them in London during my research stay at the Department of Government at the LSE in early 2018 and in Paris in early 2019. On average, the interviews lasted around 60 minutes. Tables A.5 and A.6 in the appendix provide an overview of this data.

Generally speaking, actors showed a genuine interest in talking about their profession and their role in the policy process, a conclusion already reached by Deschaux-Beaume (2012, p. 102). Rather than recording the meetings, I took notes during the interviews. The discussions were, consequently, particularly open and allowed, in most cases, for very good insights into the agenda-setting powers of the different individuals and institutions. Since most interviewees assumed that I did not have expert knowledge of British and French defence policy, they provided detailed explanations which, in turn, was particularly useful to grasp the agenda-setting dynamics of defence.

Given that the majority of interviewees wanted to remain anonymous, the status of the interview data and their use in this manuscript may seem problematic for some readers. In France and the UK, actors have an obligation of confidentiality, requiring them to use moderate language when discussing professional issues with ‘outsiders’. Most interviewees, hence, only accepted to be identified via their institutions and their service/unit (if the latter was big enough to guarantee full anonymity) as well as a very general description of their position. This being said, the main advantage of anonymity is that interviewees ended up expressing themselves very freely. In combination with the grey literature and the quantitative data, the interviews, thus, allowed me to strengthen my overall understanding of the policy agenda, and to better comprehend how the latter is influenced by the media and the general public. They were also key in capturing how defence issues evolved over time, an aspect I would have largely missed with a

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<sup>11</sup>Please take note of the disclaimer in the beginning of this manuscript (p. v).



‘quantitative only approach’ to the study of agenda-building in defence.

## 2.4 Conclusion

After having proposed a theoretical model for the agenda-setting dynamics of defence in Chapter 1, the aim of this second chapter was to outline, explain and discuss the research design of my Ph.D. thesis in more detail.

First, I explained why I opted for a cross-national, cross-sectional and longitudinal analysis to examine *how*, *when* and *where* defence issues came to be viewed as important and appropriate subjects of government attention. I argued that it is easier to test alternative explanations for stability and change in political attention when focusing on different defence issues (here the recruitment of service personnel, the acquisition of aircraft carriers, and military operations which combine both personnel and equipment choices) in more than one country (here France and the UK, the two leading military powers in Europe) and over a longer period of time (here 1980 to 2018, a time frame that covers the Cold War, the peace dividends, and more recent developments).

Since recent work in public policy is increasingly comparative but often takes the legitimacy of the comparative approach for granted, I explained in detail why I opted for a cross-national comparison of agenda-building dynamics, and why I decided to work on France and the UK. I underlined that cross-border agenda-setting analyses allow us to identify similarities and differences in the mobilisation of interests, conflict expansion and the ultimate success or failure of individuals and institutions in getting a defence policy issue on the government agenda. To put it differently, comparing agenda-setting dynamics across countries enables us to learn about actors in different political systems by examining how they deal with defence issues, and to reveal why defence policy-making processes vary in those countries. I then highlighted that the Franco-British couple was a particularly interesting case for examining and comparing agenda-setting in defence, as it is often presented as an example of a most similar systems design. Based on an original and comprehensive data set on the French and the British defence sector, I challenged this assumption and showed that the defence policies of the two countries experienced periods of convergence and divergence since the 1980s. I then pointed out that it is precisely this (partial) convergence that should incite us to study British and French defence policy agendas from an agenda-setting perspective, and to examine potential cross-border dynamics at hand.

In addition to justifying the Franco-British comparison, I explained why I decided to look at the recruitment of service personnel (Chapter 3), the acquisition of aircraft

carriers (Chapter 4), and military operations (Chapter 5). I highlighted that the three issues are not only complementary, but also vary in their level of abstractness and obtrusiveness. In line with the theoretical framework I presented in Chapter 1, I elucidated that the recruitment of service personnel qualifies as a prominent defence issue, i.e. it is obtrusive and concrete and, hence, real-world driven, leaving little room for media or policy impact on public opinion. The acquisition of aircraft carriers, in turn, can be classified as a governmental defence issue, i.e. it is unobtrusive and abstract and, thus, largely policy-driven. Last but not least, I advanced that military operations qualify as a sensational defence issue, i.e. they are unobtrusive and concrete, with the media leading the public and shaping the policy agenda. I then suggested that the three defence issues do not only differ in their issue attributes, but also in their exposure to cross-national agenda-setting dynamics, with aircraft carriers being most likely to be affected by policy developments abroad. I argued that the cross-national and cross-sectional design of this thesis was crucial to test my hypotheses on the role of mimicking (Hypothesis 1) and issue attributes (Hypothesis 2) for the agenda-building dynamics of defence which, in turn, allows me to contribute to the agenda-setting literature presented in Chapter 1. This is particularly true as I opted for a longitudinal research design, covering the period 1980-2018.

Second, I explained how political attention can be measured and compared across countries and over time. I underlined that empirical agenda-setting studies tend to use either qualitative or quantitative methods, and then argued that the two approaches are complementary and should, therefore, be combined. A quantitative study of agenda-setting is, indeed, best for measuring, ranking and identifying more general patterns and trends in policy agendas, while a qualitative study of agenda-setting is useful to contextualise, describe and gain in-depth insight into how issues ebb and flow through the political system. I then presented and critically discussed the original, longitudinal data set that I constituted to derive evidence for the agenda-setting dynamics of defence policy in France and the UK. The latter includes already coded speeches and government statements from the CAP; strategic documents, such as defence white papers; national media coverage of defence issues; a large variety of opinion polls; and 30 semi-directed interviews with British and French agenda-setters. I highlighted and acknowledged the shortfalls of the qualitative and quantitative data used in Chapters 3-5 and showed how it could be further completed in the future, but also underlined that the data set used in this thesis constitutes nonetheless a significant empirical contribution to the agenda-setting literature on foreign, security and defence policy.

The research design of this dissertation is, indeed, based on two key innovations as compared to prior work on the agenda-setting dynamics of foreign, security and

defence policy. First, it takes into account that defence is a multidimensional public policy and, therefore, covers different but complementary aspects of the latter. It, hence, does not only focus on the use of force which used to over-determine research on foreign policy agendas in the past, but also looks at less salient and less emotional issues such as procurement. Second, the empirical analysis is based on a large, original data set and relies on both quantitative and qualitative methods to study agenda-building in defence. Consequently, the design of this Ph.D. research tackles several of the empirical shortfalls that I identified in the literature review in Chapter 1: it focuses on two military powers (but not the US); it examines both salient and non-salient policy issues, with a specific focus on defence rather than foreign policy in general; it sheds light on the role of domestic *and* international factors in agenda-setting; and additionally combines qualitative and quantitative data analyses.

Examining agenda-setting in two national contexts obviously only constitutes a limited test for the theoretical framework I proposed in Chapter 1. This said, the data presented in the following three chapters is the most extensive that has so far been collected on the agenda-setting dynamics of different defence items. The analysis of critical junctures in the British and French defence agendas will not only enable us to better understand how policy makers (re-)prioritise defence issues in France and the UK, but also to examine to which extent the public and the media may influence this process. It will also help us to determine if the two leading military powers in Europe devote the same level of attention to different defence issues, and if those issues - which significantly differ in their level of abstractness and obtrusiveness - enter the agenda through the same venues, knowing that there are significant differences between the institutions that shape defence policy on both sides of the Channel. In addition, the research design presented in this chapter allows for testing the importance of issue attributes at the subcategory level as well as international agenda-setting mechanisms in the production of public policies, two points that are relevant for understanding agenda-building in defence but actually also matter for comprehending the dynamics of any other public policy. Thus, this dissertation is relevant for scholars who are interested in defence as well as for those who are keen to grasp the evolution of policy agendas more generally.

## Chapter 3

# Agenda-setting of prominent defence issues: The recruitment of military personnel

Il n'est de richesses que d'hommes.

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*Jean Bodin, 1576*  
*Les six livres de la République*

### 3.1 Introduction

Jean Bodin is often quoted in the HR and management literature to show the importance of human capital. The qualifications, skills and competencies of people do, indeed, matter because they constitute a non-negligible stock of knowledge and know-how at the national level. HR management is, consequently, key for *all* public policies, including defence. People are one of the greatest assets to the armed forces and necessary for operationalising any defence policy. To put it differently, the armed forces simply cannot function without the women and men that compose them. This, in turn, also explains why they tend to be rather large employers, especially in military powers. In France, for example, the armed forces currently offer over 400 jobs and aim for recruiting over 20,000 people per year. As one of the interviewees rightly argued, this target is quite ambitious, even compared to big companies such as Carrefour and McDonald's.<sup>1</sup> In the UK, the situation is very similar, even though the British armed

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<sup>1</sup>Interview with military staff at the *ministère des Armées* (ID 28)

forces tend to have more difficulty to fill their ranks. As I have already shown in Chapter 2, troop sizes have been decreasing in both countries since the early 1980s. There are multiple reasons for this downward trend, including economic, strategic and societal ones, all of which caused the policy image of recruiting service personnel, i.e. the way the issue is understood and addressed, to change over time. The question then is *how* and *why* this change happened.

Vennesson (2000) already identified three different ways to characterise HR management in the armed forces: the technocratic, the strategic and the ideological perspective. The technocratic perspective implies that recruitment is only one of many issues to be addressed in defence policy and, thus, subject to the same (economic) reasoning as any other defence problem. The strategic framing of the policy issue suggests that the management of service personnel primarily aims at adapting the forces to the missions they have to fulfil. The ideological perspective, in turn, concentrates on the social and political dimensions of HR management, and takes into account the place of the armed forces in society. Even though Vennesson underlines that the three frames may coexist, Joana (2004) rightly points out that the strategic and the ideological perspective of military personnel are key to understanding recruitment and recruitment-related problems within the British and French armed forces, in particular since the 1990s. France and the UK did not only have to adapt their forces to a new strategic environment after the Cold War, but also needed to make sure that the military remained an attractive employer, in particular for young people. The agenda-setting perspective allows us to analyse those dynamics in much more detail, and to shed light on how governments set their policy agenda in terms of military recruitment.

The aim of this chapter is to understand how military recruitment became and remained a government priority in the UK and France between 1980 and 2018. For ease of comparison, I decided to focus on regular forces only. This implies that I did not include the French *Gendarmerie nationale* as it does not have an equivalent in the UK. I also excluded all potential ‘alternatives’ to conscripts and volunteers, such as the British Gurkha troops from Nepal and the French Foreign Legion, as well as military reserve forces. These troops have rather different roles which means that the mechanisms through which their recruitment catches the attention of government would merit being studied separately. First, I look at *when* the recruitment of regular forces emerged as a priority on the policy, the media and the public agendas in the UK and France, and examine *how* its framing evolved over time. I then analyse the agenda-building dynamics of recruiting service personnel, underlining in particular how the policy, the media and the public agendas are linked and influenced by the strategic context. This, in turn, does not only allow me to explain why French and British

governments pay an increased amount of attention to military recruitment, but also to demonstrate that recruitment policies are real-world led, i.e. they are nowadays largely driven by the strategic context (in the broad sense of the word). Based on this conclusion, I argue that attention to military recruitment and the impact it has on HR policies is a clear sign of defence normalising as a public policy.

## 3.2 The policy agenda

How did attention to recruitment evolve on French and British policy agendas? In this section, I look at government attention to the recruitment of service personnel between 1980 and 2018, providing evidence from speeches and cabinet meetings as well as defence white papers and strategic reviews.

### 3.2.1 Government attention to recruitment: Evidence from cabinet meetings and speeches

In order to better understand when French and British governments focused on military recruitment, I first of all examined government attention to military personnel issues in cabinet meetings and speeches. As I explained in more detail in Chapter 2, I focused on the *Communiqués de Conseil des ministres* in France and the Speech from the Throne in the UK as prior research suggests that those two policy agendas are robust indicators for government priorities on both sides of the Channel.

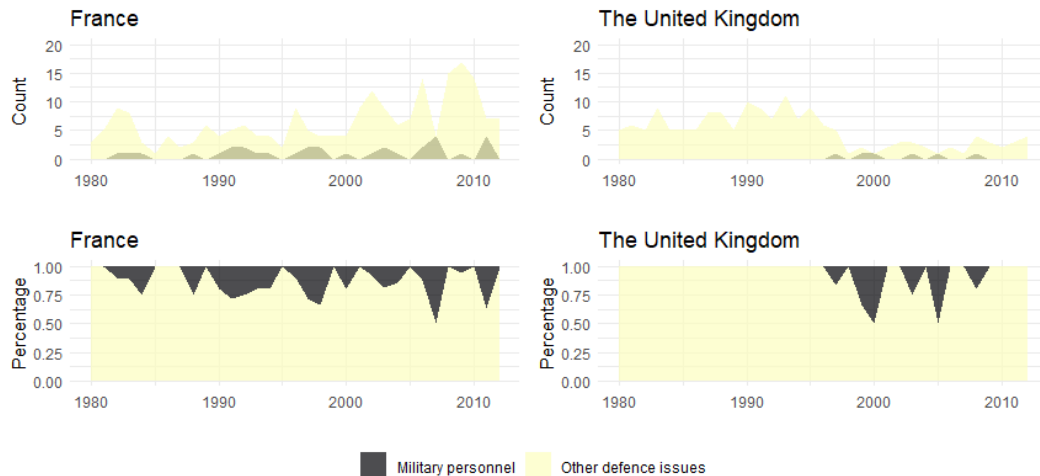
Figure 3.1 - which is based on CAP-data - shows government attention to military personnel issues in France and the UK between 1980 and 2012 (cf. subcode 1608), and compares it to government attention to all other defence issues (i.e. all subcodes of the major topic code 16, except for the subcode 1608). The topic code 1608 includes various issues related to military manpower. It covers staffing requirements, recruitment and retention initiatives, and welfare programmes, for instance. However, it also accounts for policy issues that are only indirectly linked to military recruitment, such as budget estimates (e.g. for the pay of the armed forces), retired military personnel, prisoners of war, etc., i.e. the CAP-data go slightly beyond the key focus of this chapter. This being said, they provide great insights into how military personnel issues ebbed and flowed on French and British government agendas between 1980 and 2012. Figure 3.1 provides two complementary measures of government attention to those HR-related issues: it shows the frequency of topic mentions<sup>2</sup> in cabinet meetings and speeches, and the

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<sup>2</sup>The frequency of topic mentions corresponds to the total count of topic mentions per year.

percentage of government statements and the Queen's Speech assigned to the topic in any given year. While the first measure indicates the relative difference in government attention to military personnel issues in France and the UK, the second treats the (defence) agenda space as a constant over time and, thus, shows when government attention was concentrated on personnel issues.

Figure 3.1: Government attention to military personnel issues, 1980-2012



Sources: Comparative Agendas Project (2021)

Generally speaking, the four subfigures of Figure 3.1 suggest that there are both elements of stability and change in government attention to military personnel issues.

In France, recruitment has been addressed on a regular basis in the *Communiqués de Conseil des ministres*, i.e. there are only very few years since 1980 in which the topic was not on the government agenda. In addition, the issue is much more popular since the 1990s, with several peaks in attention in the 2000s. In 2007, for instance, military personnel issues made up 50 % of the defence agenda. Moreover, Figure 3.1 suggests a more general trend in government attention to defence: indeed, the volume of defence policy content in cabinet meetings increased over time. This, in turn, may also explain why military personnel issues have been covered rather regularly.

In the UK, the trend is very different. First of all, Figure 3.1 shows that the volume of defence policy content in the Queen's Speech significantly dropped after 1995. As Jennings et al. (2011a, p. 88) already put it, "[t]hese trajectories of attention reflect, respectively, the decline in Britain's status as a world power, its loss of empire and the rise of domestic issues as topics of public concern". Paradoxically, it is precisely during that period that military personnel issues started to make it on the British government agenda. In fact, the policy issue was not at all addressed in the State Opening of Parliament before 1997. In 2000 and 2005, however, it was one of the two defence

issues covered during the Queen's Speech.

To sum up, the CAP data suggest that there have been substantive changes in the defence priorities of French and British governments. Given that defence is only one of many policy issues addressed in the *Communiqués de Conseil des ministres* and the Queen's Speech, it makes sense to also have a closer look at how the agenda status of military recruitment evolved in the strategic documents published by the executive.

### 3.2.2 Government attention to recruitment: Evidence from defence white papers and strategic reviews

As I already argued in Chapter 2, defence white papers and strategic reviews constitute one of the most accessible guides to a country's level of ambition in international security. They, thus, supplement the empirical evidence from speeches and cabinet meetings, providing a different and sometimes more nuanced perspective on government attention to military recruitment between 1980 and 2018.

Generally speaking, the recruitment of service personnel is addressed more often in French than in British strategic documents (84 versus 64 occurrences, respectively), at least in absolute terms. In relative terms, it is the other way round. Given that defence white papers and strategic reviews tend to be rather short in the UK, as I have shown in the last chapter, British governments have actually given more agenda space to recruitment-related policy problems than their French counterparts.

To better understand how government attention to the recruitment of service personnel evolved over time, I conducted specificity analyses to check if recruitment, as a policy problem, was specific to any of the strategic documents published in France and the UK since 1980.<sup>3</sup> A specificity analysis indicates whether the occurrence of a word or Cassandra Query Language (CQL) query appears in abundance or in decline in one of the parts of a partition, here a defence white paper or strategic review.<sup>4</sup>

Figure 3.2 shows the results of such an analysis for HR-related issues within French and British strategic documents. The reference lines at -2 and +2 display the standardisation band on either side of the 0 score axis. Bars that remain within this limit represent standard scores, i.e. in those cases, recruitment was, compared to all texts included in the corpus, neither under- nor overaddressed in the document. To put it differently, bars that go under -2 suggest that the issue was, comparatively speaking,

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<sup>3</sup>The specificity analyses in this thesis were all run with TXM. While TXM is a great open access tool for text analysis, it does not (yet) allow for a lot of flexibility when visualising the results.

<sup>4</sup>Cf. Chapter 2 for an overview of the strategic documents included in the empirical analysis.



less of a priority that year while bars over +2 indicate a certain overemployment of recruitment-related terms, compared to how the issue was addressed in other documents of the corpus. Figure 3.2a, thus, indicates that recruitment is not an issue that was specific to any of the strategic documents published by France since 1980, i.e. it was addressed in all four defence white papers and strategic reviews but none of the latter over- or underaddressed the matter. It shows, however, that the topic was more prominent in 1994 and 2008 which is in line with the evolution of issue attention to military personnel issues in the *Communiqués de Conseil des ministres*. Figure 3.2b, in turn, highlights that the 1994 defence costs study addressed recruitment more than any other British strategic document published between 1980 and 2018. It also indicates a shift in government priorities, with recruitment being less of a concern since the 2003 defence white paper. This being said, the fact that the UK's first strategic document after the end of the Cold War focused quite extensively on military recruitment may also explain why the issue emerged on the Queen's Speech from the mid-1990s onwards.

The question then is *how* governments addressed recruitment in those documents. There are three complementary ways to do this. First, by conducting hierarchical cluster analyses (HCAs) where recruitment-related issues may form an individual cluster for some of the defence white papers and strategic reviews, but not for others.<sup>5</sup> Second, by calculating a table of co-occurents for the occurrences of a CQL query, here the recruitment of service personnel. By default, the co-occurents are sorted by their 'co-occurrence score'. This score is an indicator of the probability of association, i.e. it gives us a better idea of the issues that were addressed together with recruitment (e.g. the professionalisation of the armed forces).<sup>6</sup> Third, by examining concordances which, in turn, allow us to look more closely at the strategic document and analyse the context in which recruitment was mentioned.<sup>7</sup> All of these analyses have to be conducted at the national level, with results then being compared across countries.

In France, the data suggest that government attention to military recruitment did not only start to fade away between 1980 and 2018, but that the policy problem was also framed quite differently over time. It shifted from the armed forces not being the most attractive employer to the military having difficulty to fill its ranks in order to remain operational, the two frames being obviously linked. In the UK, in turn, recruitment constituted a significant pillar of the 1994 defence costs study. From the early 2000s onwards, however, it started to receive less government attention. Similar to France, the framing of the policy issue changed between 1980 and 2018. While

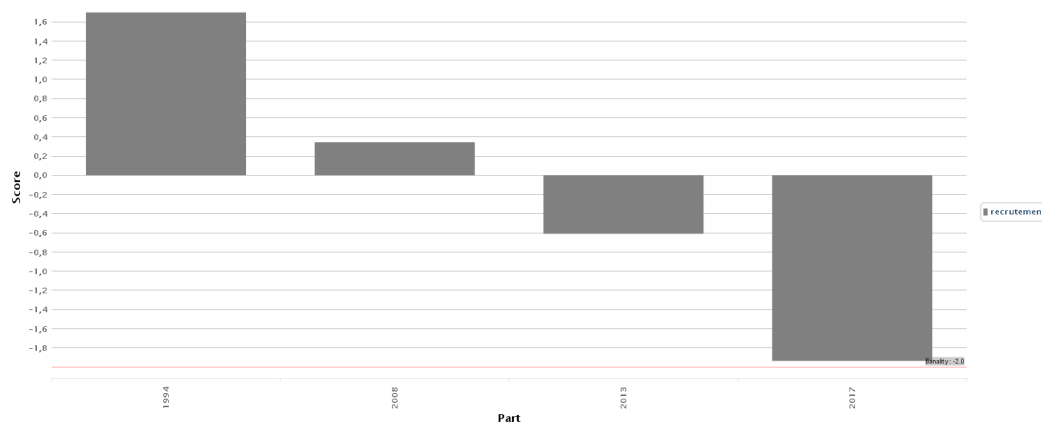
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<sup>5</sup>The HCAs in this thesis were all run with Iramuteq. Results can be found in the appendix B.A.

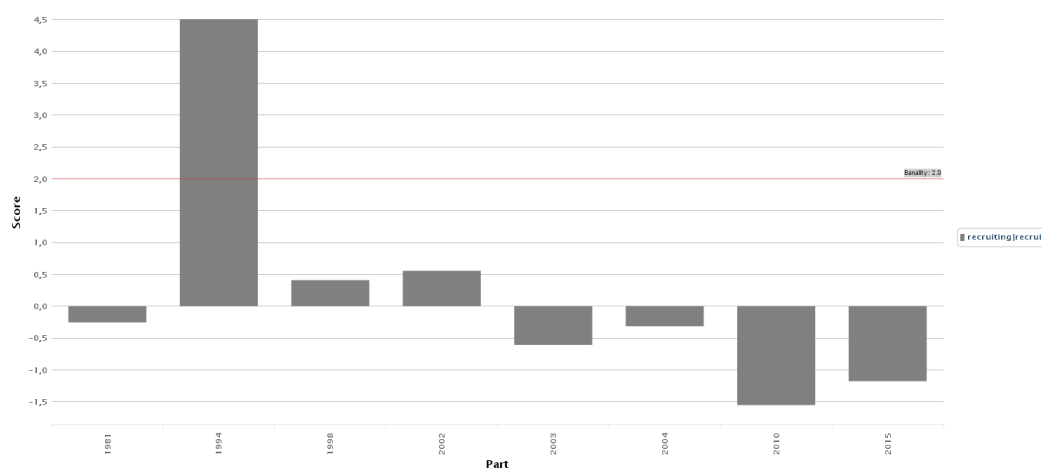
<sup>6</sup>The co-occurrence analyses were run with TXM. Results are directly referred to in the text.

<sup>7</sup>The concordance analyses were run with TXM. Results are directly referred to in the text.

Figure 3.2: Recruitment within French and British strategic documents, 1980-2018



(a) France



(b) The United Kingdom

Sources: French and British strategic documents

British governments focused on manning and training in the 1980s and 1990s, they concentrated on the forces' overstretch and retention problems as of 1998. I will now explain those changes in government attention in more detail.

In 1994, the French government focused above all on the format of the military and underlined that conscription continued to be its preferred method of recruitment, in spite of a progressive increase in professional armed forces. It suggested that a professionalisation of France's military would lead to a recruitment problem and a rise in personnel costs, the latter being likely to come at the detriment of equipment and investment expenses. In addition, the government highlighted that military service played an important role for France's national identity and that a full professionalisation of the armed forces would put a strain on the country's civil-military relations.

The 1994 defence white paper, hence, started to raise the importance of human capital for the French armed forces. As the HCA and the co-occurrence analysis suggest, several HR-related issues caught the attention of government in the early 1990s, including the competencies of recruits, the quality of military training, the living and working conditions of the armed forces as well as their career development.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, the French Ministry of Defence (1994, p. 104) was already well aware that certain societal evolutions were likely to cause recruitment problems in the aftermath of the Cold War, in particular for professional armed forces. It, thus, underlined that

"[t]he defence sector cannot, in any event, ignore the trends in French society: the affirmation of individualism, the stronger than ever attachment to the preciousness of life and, therefore, the hesitation to enlist, the increased levels of training, the almost permanent pressure of the media, but also the need for security, the genuine desire to know, the sense of self-sacrifice and sharing."<sup>9</sup>

In 2008, government attention continued to focus on recruitment, as the HCA demonstrates. Compared to the 1994 defence white paper, however, the co-occurrence analysis suggests that attention shifted to HR-related issues that are very specific to professional armed forces, as France had abandoned conscription in 1996.<sup>10</sup> The latter include the recruitment and retention of young, motivated people that are apt for the missions and operations of the military as well as the introduction of reconversion schemes that allow service personnel to have a second, civilian career. The French government, hence, increasingly concentrated on the attractiveness of the armed forces as an employer, both for men and for women. It paid attention to career opportunities within and outside of the military, but also stressed the importance of providing all forces with adequate equipment to not discourage young people from joining the army, the navy or the air force (French Ministry of Defence, 2008, p. 242).

<sup>8</sup>The most frequent co-occurrences of 'recruitment' in the 1994 defence white paper are *armée* (5), *métier* (3), *qualité* (3), *personnel* (3), *possibilités* (3), *niveau* (2), *améliorer* (2), *engagés* (2), *formation* (2), *terre* (2) and *conditions* (2). The numbers in parentheses represent the corresponding co-occurrence scores.

<sup>9</sup>Original text: "Le monde de la défense ne peut, de surcroît, ignorer les tendances de la société française : l'affirmation de l'individualisme, l'attachement plus fort que jamais au prix de la vie et donc l'hésitation à l'engager, l'augmentation du niveau de formation, la pression quasi permanente des médias mais aussi le besoin de sécurité, la volonté réelle de savoir, le sens du don de soi et du partage."

<sup>10</sup>The most frequent co-occurrences of 'recruitment' in the 2008 defence and national security white paper are *carrières* (9), *formation* (5), *fidélisation* (5), *renseignement* (4), *personnels* (3), *recherchées* (3), *effort* (3), *déroulement* (3), *définies* (3), *initiale* (2), *filières* (2), *réserves* (2), *militaires* (2), *rang* (2), *politiques* (2) and *important* (2). The numbers in parentheses represent the corresponding co-occurrence scores.

The 2010s then marked a shift in government attention to defence, i.e. attention to recruitment-related issues slowly started to fade away, as both the specificity analysis and the HCA suggest. The 2013 defence and national security white paper covered very similar issues as its predecessor, but to a much lesser degree. To remain an attractive employer, the French Ministry of Defence (2013, p. 112) pointed to the importance of service personnel having a work-life balance as well as adequate direct and indirect remuneration. It also underlined that the nation's support and recognition of the profession was crucial to maintain the link between the armed forces and society, in particular since the end of conscription. In 2017, HR-related issues were largely absent from the strategic review. This, however, does not mean that the French government did not address recruitment at all. Rather, the issue received less agenda space, as the specificity analysis already suggested, and was framed differently. Instead of insisting on the attractiveness of the military, the French Ministry of the Armed Forces (2017b, p. 87) highlighted that recruitment and training were important policy issues because they contributed to the forces' ability to conduct their missions at home and abroad, i.e. attention shifted to the operationality of the French armies.

Compared to France who shifted to professional armed forces 25 years ago, the UK experienced conscription only during and after World War I and World War II. It is, consequently, rather unsurprising that military recruitment is an 'old' item on British policy agendas. Recruitment was, indeed, a major motivation for the Healey defence reviews in the 1960s, and continues to be an issue that is regularly addressed in the UK's strategic documents, as the specificity analysis above suggested. Given that the British government has started to face recruitment and retention problems much earlier than its French counterpart, it also had to deal with certain HR issues in the 1980s that rose in France only from the 2000s onwards. The 1981 Nott review, thus, already highlighted that men and women were "a defence resource of central importance" (British Ministry of Defence, 1981, p. 12). This, in turn, does not only show the importance of human capital for the military but also suggests that the feminisation of the forces has been a policy concern in the UK for at least four decades.

The recruitment of service personnel was also central to the 1994 defence costs study, as both the specificity analysis and the HCA show. The review devoted, indeed, an entire chapter to recruiting, manning and training, focusing - as its title already suggests - on the costs of "keeping defence in the public eye" (British Ministry of Defence, 1994, p. 22).<sup>11</sup> In addition, the British Ministry of Defence (1994, p. 5)

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<sup>11</sup>The most frequent co-occurrences of 'recruitment' in the 1994 defence costs study are 'careers' (2), 'men' (2), 'women' (2) and 'demand' (2). The numbers in parentheses represent the corresponding co-occurrence scores.

highlighted that spending on the forces was necessary for their operationality, an issue that was, as I have shown above, raised much later on the other side of the Channel:

"[...] unless the armed forces are recruited, trained, clothed, fed and supplied in a professional and successful manner, their operational capability will suffer. It is as true as ever that the teeth need the tail."<sup>12</sup>

The 1998 SDR and the 2002 SDR new chapter also addressed recruitment, but started to frame the policy problem differently. Indeed, both strategic documents looked at the impact of troop deployments on service personnel and aimed for counterbalancing their potential negative effects. In 1998, the government focused on the undermanning and the resulting overstretch of the British armed forces.<sup>13</sup> It also highlighted that the armed forces had to be an attractive employer, in the eyes of young people but also those of their families who may otherwise discourage them from joining the military. Government attention, hence, shifted to inclusive training possibilities as well as retention strategies to guarantee the long-term motivation of members of the armed forces. Several new HR-related issues, thus, appeared on the British defence agenda, e.g. career development opportunities for all ethnic groups, an improved pay and pension system and support schemes for military families. The government argued, for instance, that deployments should disrupt the life of service personnel as little as possible (British Ministry of Defence, 1998, p. 38). It, therefore, decided to establish a task force to address problems linked to the lifestyle of service personnel, such as access to housing, healthcare and school places for the children of military staff. The SDR new chapter subsequently addressed very similar policy issues,<sup>14</sup> but shed light on the recruitment problem in a very different way. More specifically, the British Ministry of Defence (2002, p. 20) pointed out that

"[...] too many young people simply do not contemplate a Service career. The emphasis we place on recruiting people who wish to make a career of the Services is also at odds with a workforce which moves increasingly quickly from employer to employer. We face strong competition for the best, in the face of high levels of employment, and increasing numbers of young people in higher and further education."

<sup>12</sup>The lack of equipment was not new on the government agenda. The issue was already raised by the Healey and the Mason reviews in the 1960s and 1970s.

<sup>13</sup>The most frequent co-occurrences of 'recruitment' in the 1998 SDR are 'retention' (4), 'rapidly' (2), 'training' (2), 'overstretch' (2) and 'need' (2). The numbers in parentheses represent the corresponding co-occurrence scores.

<sup>14</sup>The most frequent co-occurrences of 'recruitment' in the 2002 SDR new chapter are 'career' (4), 'retention' (4), 'improving' (3) and 'area' (2). The numbers in parentheses represent the corresponding co-occurrence scores.

The British government, hence, acknowledged for the first time that the recruitment and retention problem within the British armed forces was also due to wider social changes and increased levels of competition in the labour market, i.e. a combination of factors being largely beyond the influence of the defence sector.

From 2003 onwards, government attention to defence started to shift, with HR-related issues becoming less of a priority, as both the specificity analysis and the HCA suggest. As in France, this does not mean that the British government did not cover recruitment at all: it just gave less agenda space to those issues. The defence reviews of 2003, 2004, 2010 and 2015 dealt with a variety of HR issues, most of which were, however, not new on the government agenda. Thus, the reviews focused once again on the need to recruit and retain the right people, notably by making service appealing and offering various possibilities for personal development, assistance for military families and financial incentives to stay within the armed forces. They also underlined once more that it was a priority for the UK government to build a more inclusive working environment within the armed forces, and that the final goal was to have a military whose composition fully reflected the diversity of British society.

In addition, the 2010 SDSR and the 2015 NSS and SDSR raised one issue that has been a concern for France since it moved to professional armed forces in 1996, but was rather absent from the British defence policy agenda until the early 2000s, namely civil-military relations and the impact they may have on recruitment. The 2010 SDSR, thus, highlighted that it was a priority for the government to support military personnel, both currently serving and already retired forces, as well as their families, and to fully recognise and value their service. More specifically, the British Ministry of Defence (2010, p. 29) underlined that this recognition was not just a moral imperative but "fundamental to [its] ability to recruit and retain sufficient numbers of highly motivated and capable individuals to deliver the Defence requirement". In 2015, the British government underlined once more that it was committed to the military and that a special treatment of current and former forces was appropriate in some cases, especially for those who were sick or injured. It also highlighted that both the Armed Forces Covenant from 2000 and the 2011 Armed Forces Act enshrined this commitment in law, and that it intended to give even more priority to military families, with attention shifting more specifically to spousal employment, housing opportunities, children's education and healthcare, i.e. various policy issues that are likely to facilitate the everyday life of service personnel.

To sum up, the recruitment of military personnel has been an issue that governments on both sides of the Channel addressed on a regular basis. The empirical evidence pre-

sented in this section suggests, however, that attention to recruitment increased in the *Communiqués de Conseil des ministres* and the Queen's Speech while it slowly started to fade away in defence white papers and strategic reviews. This diverging trend is most likely due to the fact that government statements and speeches - contrary to strategic documents - do not only focus on defence. However, when they address defence, HR-related issues seem to be rather popular. The empirical evidence also points to a change in the framing of the policy problem. In France, the policy frame of recruitment shifted from the armed forces not being the most attractive employer to the military having difficulty to fill its ranks. In the UK, in turn, British governments initially focused on the manning balance only before concentrating on the forces' overstretch and retention problems as of 1998. In spite of these differences, the 'social' dimension of defence started to gain traction in both countries, as the analysis of cabinet meetings and speeches has shown. French and British governments do, indeed, give more priority to the well-being of personnel as well as their families, i.e. the military acknowledged over time that it was an employer like any other.

### 3.3 The media agenda

As aforementioned, the French government already pointed to an "almost permanent pressure of the media" in the 1990s (French Ministry of Defence, 1994, p. 104), thereby suggesting that media coverage had some kind of impact on its defence policy agenda. The question then is how media attention to military recruitment evolved and how HR-related issues were framed over time. In this section, I look at the media coverage of military recruitment in France and the UK between 1980 and 2018, providing evidence from an original data set that includes national news coverage of the policy issue.<sup>15</sup>

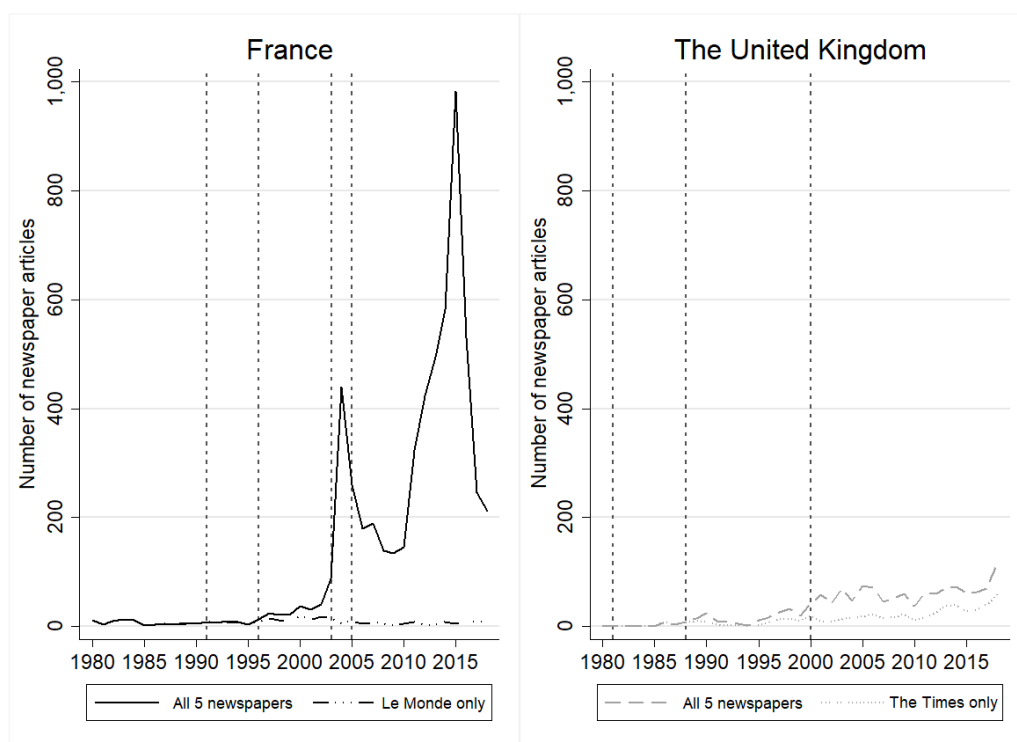
Figure 3.3 compares how national newspapers covered the recruitment of service personnel on both sides of the Channel between 1980 and 2018. More specifically, it provides an overview of the number of articles published on recruitment per year. It is crucial to note here that the figure shows both coverage in five national newspapers *and* coverage in only one of those five newspapers, i.e. *Le Monde* in France and *The Times* of London in the UK. As explained in Chapter 2, due to data (un)availability only those two newspapers fully cover the period of this study and, therefore, serve as controls for the evolution of media attention to recruitment. The vertical reference lines in Figure 3.3 indicate the years in which data for an additional newspaper start

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<sup>15</sup>Appendix B.B explains in more detail how this media analysis was conducted and provides an overview of the search terms I used in Europresse and Factiva.

being available on Europresse and Factiva, respectively.<sup>16</sup> They allow us to be fully aware of the changes in the composition of the database and, hence, to immediately see which ‘spikes in media attention’ are due to the research design and which increases correspond to a real change in the media agenda.

Figure 3.3: Media coverage of recruitment in the French and British forces, 1980-2018



Sources: Europresse and Factiva

What does the figure suggest? Generally speaking, the recruitment of service personnel is covered more often in French than in British media, especially since the 2000s. This trend is rather unsurprising as France moved to professional armed forces in 1996, thereby making the topic particularly relevant for French society. Before 1996, media outlets in France and the UK devoted very similar levels of attention to military recruitment, namely close to none. Recruitment, hence, used to be rather absent from the media agenda between 1980 and the mid-1990s.

In France, media attention to military recruitment started to change in the mid-1990s, ‘rising’ after 9/11 and peaking after the 2015 terror attacks on French soil. While

<sup>16</sup>In France, data for *Les Échos*, *Le Figaro*, *Ouest-France* and *Le Parisien-Aujourd’hui en France* are available as of 1991, 1996, 2003 and 2005, respectively. In the UK, data for Daily Mail and The Guardian can be accessed as of 1981, while data for The Independent and The Daily Telegraph are available as of 1988 and 2000, respectively. Cf. Table 2.4 in Chapter 2 for an overview of the media database and the exact time periods covered by each newspaper included in this study.



the increase in media coverage in the early 2000s is partially due to the composition of the database, with data from *Ouest-France* and *Le Parisien-Aujourd'hui en France* being available as of December 2003 and May 2005, respectively, the bias in the data set does not account for the high levels of media coverage from the 2010s onwards. It is interesting to note here that the number of newspaper articles on recruitment that appeared in *Le Monde* has been relatively stable over time, and that only 6 of the 983 articles published in 2015 appeared in the centre-left newspaper. The large majority of stories on the recruitment of service personnel were, indeed, printed by *Ouest-France* that year, a newspaper that is known to cover defence quite extensively and that prioritised recruitment-related issues between 2010 and 2015.

In the UK, media attention to recruitment increased steadily, in particular since the mid-1990s. Compared to France, the number of articles that the British media devoted to military recruitment remained, however, rather low. Attention peaked in 2018, with a total of 121 articles, out of which 58 appeared in *The Times*. It is important to note here that the evolution of media coverage by *The Times* of London is very similar to the one of the other four national newspapers included in the database, i.e. *Daily Mail*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Guardian* and *The Independent*. In fact, *The Times*, a conservative paper, is known for devoting more agenda space to defence.

The question then is *how* the British and the French media addressed recruitment. Before answering this question, it is crucial to highlight that media coverage of the recruitment of service personnel is largely linked to the army, both in France and the UK, as Table 3.1 shows. This is not very surprising. Although people matter for all three armies, they matter 'a little more' for the *Armée de terre* and the British Army. The reason for this is twofold. First, the army makes up a significant part of the British and the French forces (in terms of numbers), as Figure 2.2 in Chapter 2 already illustrated. Second, equipment - as I will demonstrate in more detail in Chapter 4 when discussing the agenda dynamics of procurement and more specifically of aircraft carriers - is of greater importance to the air force and the navy than it is to the army.

The French media published a total of 5,674 articles on military recruitment between 1980 and 2018. The majority of these stories were framed positively (81 %) and focused on recruitment within the army, followed by articles on the air force and the navy. News coverage peaked on 17 October 2015, with 14 articles being published that day. This was about a month before the Bataclan attacks that led to a large increase in the media coverage of the French armed forces, with 983 and 530 newspapers articles being published on the recruitment of service personnel in 2015 and 2016, respectively.

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<sup>17</sup>Some articles deal with recruitment in all three armies. They are, hence, counted two or three times in this 'total'.

Table 3.1: Newspaper articles on recruitment within each of the three armies in France and the United Kingdom, 1980-2018

	France	The UK
Air force	2,299	208
Army	2,661	710
Navy	1,440	657
Total (with duplicates) <sup>17</sup>	6,400	1,575
Total (without duplicates)	5,674	1,374

Sources: Data from Europresse and Factiva

The topics on the French media agenda vary widely. Some articles deal with the recruitment process more generally. They cover recruitment targets, list recruitment centres, describe the profiles the armed forces are looking for and present the different job opportunities within the military.<sup>18</sup> They also provide information on the contracts the military offers, with details on their length as well as average salaries and benefits. Others, in turn, focus on the challenges that the French armed forces face, in particular since the end of the Cold War. These articles address the evolution of France's defence budget, but also discuss the difficulties that the French forces have to recruit young people in sufficient numbers and the impact that this recruitment problem has on the size of the military. They also regularly cover the reconversion schemes the armed forces introduced to allow service personnel to have a second, civilian career. Still others, especially those published more recently, analyse the impact that changes in the security environment have on the motivation of young people to join the armed forces. The French media, thus, reported on the increased number of applications that the armed forces received following the 2015 terror attacks in France, with a larger percentage of people under 25 being willing to serve their country.

If we only look at the agenda of *Le Monde* - i.e. the only French newspaper for which we have data that cover the entire period 1980-2018 -, we find similar priorities and trends in news coverage. Overall, the newspaper published 308 articles on the recruitment of service personnel, with most news stories being framed positively (63 %). In spite of being a bit more critical than other national newspapers, *Le Monde* covered various recruitment-related topics, including the ones already mentioned above: recruitment procedures and the profiles the armed forces are looking for; budgetary evolutions; the restructuring of the French military since 1996 and its impact on troop sizes etc. Additionally, it addressed diversity within the French armed forces, focusing

<sup>18</sup>This holds particularly true for news coverage in *Le Figaro*.

in particular on the role of women within the French military.

The British media, in turn, published a total of 1,474 articles on military recruitment between 1980 and 2018. The tone of the articles was more negative than in France,<sup>19</sup> and the majority of news stories focused once again on recruitment within the army, followed by articles on the navy and the air force. Generally speaking, British media attention to recruitment increased since the end of the Cold War, with a first peak in the early 2000s and a second peak in the late 2010s.

Just like in France, the topics on the British media agenda vary widely, with one key difference though: the take on recruitment-related issues is much more critical. Some articles deal with the recruitment process more generally. They cover, as in France, recruitment targets and ongoing recruitment campaigns. More specifically, the British media printed details on the contracts, thus informing the public about salaries, pension schemes and other benefits, such as free medical treatment and subsidised accommodation. However, the articles also underlined the shortfalls of the recruitment process and pointed to the recruitment crisis within the British armed forces. The media, thus, questioned recruitment campaigns in schools, accusing the armed forces of specifically targeting schools in deprived areas. It also criticised age limits, underlining that the lower age limit was too low (i.e. under 18) and the upper age limit too high. The news outlets also challenged the privatisation of the recruitment process in the 2010s which cost over 1 billion pounds but did not deliver the expected results.<sup>20</sup> Other articles, in turn, focus on the specific challenges of professional armed forces and question the British military as an employer. A frequent item on the media agenda was, for example, the lack of equal opportunities within the British military, with discrimination and verbal harassment being the 'norm'. Mistreatment during training sessions - and its consequences - was also an issue.<sup>21</sup> In addition, the tempo of deployments, the overstretch of the armed forces and the difficulty of service personnel to have a family life were regularly addressed on the media agenda - not to mention the impact of defence cuts on soldiers' equipment and the rising death toll during military operations. The media also reported about drug problems and symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) within the forces as well as the difficulty the military had to reconvert its soldiers. To put it in a nutshell, the British media agenda largely suggested that one should avoid the armed forces when looking for an employer. It is, thus, unsurprising

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<sup>19</sup>Contrary to Europresse, Factiva does not provide a percentage for negative, neutral or positive media coverage.

<sup>20</sup>Cf. the Capita scandal, a private company that was awarded a 10-year long recruiting contract for the British Army in 2012, but failed to meet its target every single year up until 2020.

<sup>21</sup>Cf. the Deepcut scandal, a series of incidents that led to the death of four British trainee soldiers in the Princess Royal Barracks, Deepcut, between 1995 and 2002.

too that news outlets highlighted positive evolutions, such as the job security within the British military, only in times of economic crisis.

If we only look at the agenda of *The Times of London* - i.e. the only British newspaper for which we have data that cover the entire period 1980-2018 -, we find similar priorities and trends in news coverage. Overall, the newspaper published 534 articles on the recruitment of service personnel, with the number of articles increasing over time. While the recruitment of service personnel was almost a non-issue in the 1980s, it received more media attention in the past decade. *The Times of London* covered various topics, including the ones already mentioned above: the shortfalls of the recruitment process; the impact of military operations and defence cuts on service personnel etc. More specifically, *The Times* also reported that parents with children in recruiting age were not willing to let them join the forces, i.e. the credibility of the British military as an employer was also questioned by the conservative journal.

To sum up, the French media gave more agenda space to recruitment-related issues than their British counterparts, especially since the 2000s. National newspapers in both countries covered similar issues over time, with only a few exceptions. In France, for example, the diversity of the armed forces is rather new on the media agenda. The key difference between the news coverage in the UK and France is the tone. Issues can hit the agenda on a wave of positive publicity, or they can be raised in an environment of bad news - with different policy consequences. The tone of British press coverage of military recruitment tends to be negative, sometimes even sarcastic, which, in turn, is more likely to reinforce the policy problem, rather than solving it. In France, news outlets are much more likely to (objectively) inform the public about the armed forces, and to highlight the progress that has been made on various issues.

### 3.4 The public agenda

From the above, it becomes clear that the status of military recruitment has changed on both the policy and the media agendas. The question then is how the public has perceived the policy problem over time. As I explained in Chapter 2, it is not straightforward to measure the public's priorities in terms of government attention to defence. Defence is, indeed, rarely the focus of national and international surveys. And whenever surveys address defence, they tend to cover highly salient issues, such as military operations. By combining various data sources, it is, however, still possible to grasp what the public thought about military recruitment, especially in recent years.

Although the Standard Eurobarometer only asks a couple of questions on defence,

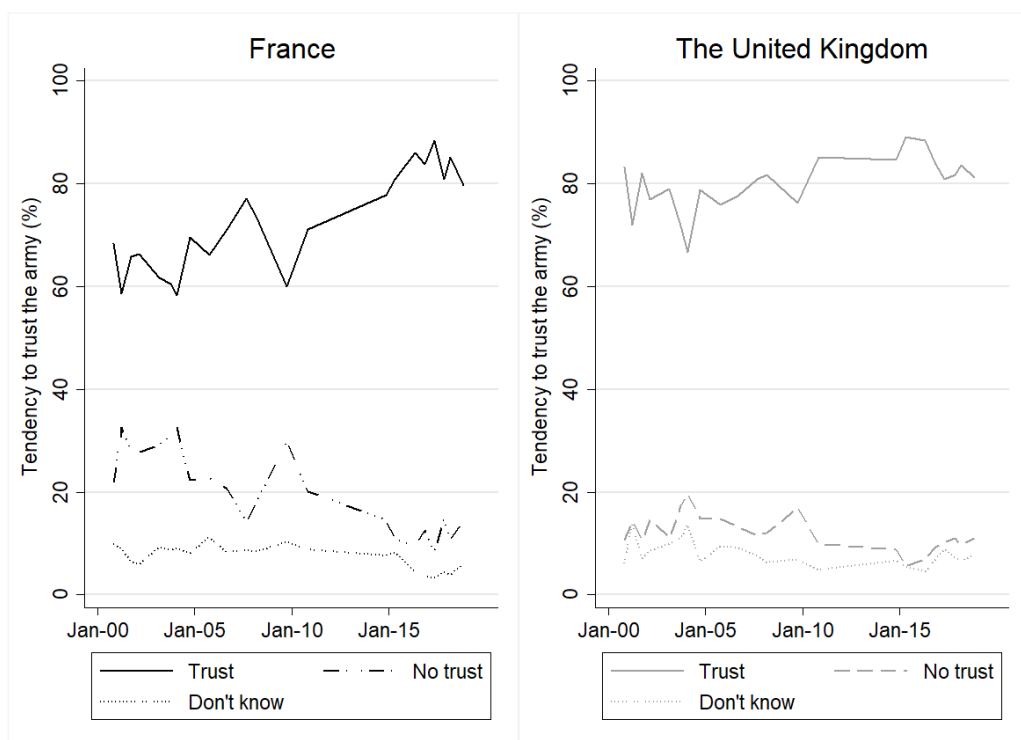
most of which are closely linked to European defence, it contains one question on trust in government institutions that is of interest for this chapter, namely the trust people have in the armed forces. The question is formulated as follows:

*I would like to ask you a question about how much trust you have in certain media and institutions. For each of the following media and institutions, please tell me if you tend to trust it or tend not to trust it.*

#### THE ARMY

Figure 3.4, which is based on data from the Eurobarometer, shows that the majority of French and British citizens tend to trust the military. Trust has actually even been trending upward, in particular since the 2010s, with over 80 % of citizens indicating that they tend to trust the army. As Dolignon and Calzada (2016) already concluded, in Europe, it is in France and the UK that citizens trust their armed forces the most.

Figure 3.4: Trust in the French and British armed forces, 2000-2018



Source: European Union (2021)

In both countries, this trust comes along with a good reputation of the military, i.e. citizens in France and the UK tend to have a very positive image of service personnel. This support of the armed forces is *inter alia* due to a certain public pride, a strong sense of national identity and the values being associated with the military.

In France, the in-house survey of the DICO of the French Ministry of the Armed Forces (2017a, p. 14) concluded that the image of the three armies has been on the rise since 1980. More specifically, around 70 % of the French had a positive image of the armed forces in the 1980s. In spite of the Gulf War, the reputation of the military continued to improve in the early 1990s. The survey shows, however, that support dropped in the mid-1990s, mainly due to France's resumption of nuclear testing. From the 2000s onwards, the data suggest that around 80 % of the French had once again a positive image of the military. After the 2015 Paris attacks, support increased even further, thereby reaching its highest level ever recorded. This evolution is in line with the values that young people aged under 30 tend to associate with the armed forces, namely professionalism, efficiency, reactivity and reassurance (French Ministry of the Armed Forces, 2017a, p. 15). All these values were particularly appreciated in the aftermath of the terror attacks and led, together with the positive image citizens have of the forces, to an unprecedented number of young people willing to join the French military between 2016 and 2018 - a trend that was also largely covered by the media.

In the UK, in turn, both the British social attitudes report (Gribble et al., 2012) and the in-house survey of the Directorate of Defence Communications of the British Ministry of Defence (2017) came to very similar conclusions. Most people, especially older ones, have a high opinion of the British armed forces and do respect them. Gribble et al. (2012, p. 143), thus, concluded that the armed forces were popular with the public, both in relative and in absolute terms, i.e. also when compared to other professions, such as doctors and lawyers. However, they also found a cohort effect, with younger generations being on average less supportive of the military than older ones. This being said, the values that the British public associates with the armed forces are equally positive as in France. They notably include honesty, loyalty, moral courage and respect for others (British Ministry of Defence, 2017). Interestingly, the Directorate of Defence Communications included this question on values and moral standards for the first time in its 2015/2016 survey, i.e. the government only recently became curious about the values the military embodies for the general public.

This change in the design of the MOD's survey actually illustrates a more general shift in government attention to the recruitment of service personnel. In fact, governments on both sides of the Channel have started to get much more interested in how the public perceives the armed forces *as a potential employer*.

In France, this shift is very recent and only few surveys include questions on the military profession. Some of these questions are knowledge-based, i.e. the *ministère des Armées* primarily wants to know if the public is aware that the armed forces are re-

cruiting. Since 2014, the *Institut français d'opinion publique* (IFOP), together with the DICO, thus asks citizens whether they believe that troop sizes are currently increasing. While only 26 % of respondents indicated that the armed forces were expanding staffing levels in 2014, 40 % thought so in 2017 (Ifop, 2017, p. 69). Other questions, in turn, aim more specifically at understanding how the military is perceived as an employer, by potential recruits but also by their parents. Surveys and reports commanded by the *ministère des Armées*, thus, had to conclude that only 40 % to 50 % of the public thought that the armed forces provided service personnel, including women, with equal opportunities (Ifop, 2017; Levionnois et al., 2013). More recently, the IFOP also targeted parents to know whether they would encourage their children to join the military. This question is particularly interesting as France currently recruits the first generation of service personnel whose parents did not have to perform mandatory military service. Results have been mixed, but parents do not tend to be particularly in favour of having their children join the forces (Ifop, 2018, p. 68).

In the UK, the shift is rather recent too. In 2011, the British Ministry of Defence (2017) started to systematically include several questions on the military profession in its in-house survey. As in France, some of these questions are knowledge-based, i.e. the MOD wants to know if the British public is familiar with the government departments and public bodies, including the forces and the MOD, and if it has heard about initiatives such as the Armed Forces Day and the Armed Forces Covenant, i.e. the safeguards, rewards and compensation schemes the government offers for military personnel. Generally speaking, the survey shows that UK citizens tend to know the armed forces better than the MOD. It also suggests that the majority of the public have heard about the Armed Forces Day (80 %) but not about the Armed Forces Covenant (50 %). In the 2015/2016 edition, the MOD additionally asked all respondents who indicated that they had heard about the Covenant to explain what the latter referred to: however, only 15 % gave a correct answer. In addition, the survey includes a series of questions on the MOD and the armed forces as employers. Do they look after their people? Do they offer appropriate levels of pay, allowances and other benefits? Do they promote their best people, regardless of race, gender, religion or sexual orientation? It turns out that the British public has a much more favourable view of the armed forces than the MOD. Indeed, the majority of people believe that the armed forces look after their people and are an equal opportunities employer. Though, they tend to think that the British military is not paying particularly well. This, in turn, may explain why only one third of respondents indicated to consider or to have previously considered a career in the armed forces, and why only one in two would encourage a friend or family member to join the military (British Ministry of Defence, 2017).

To sum up, both the French and the British public trust the military and have a good image of the armed forces. In France, there are only few surveys on the military profession and results have so far been rather mixed, i.e. the armed forces are not necessarily seen as the ideal employer. In the UK, in turn, surveys have shown that there is big difference between how the public perceives the MOD and the armed forces, with respondents having a much more favourable opinion on the latter. Indeed, the military is believed to look after its people and to treat them equally, in spite of a certain consensus that British service personnel is underpaid.

The data that I presented in this section do not fully cover the period 1980-2018. To the contrary, it turns out that national surveys started to include HR-related items only in recent years. While missing data are inconvenient for any longitudinal analysis, they are less of a problem for studies having an agenda-setting perspective. Indeed, the years for which we actually have data on public opinion and military recruitment are particularly interesting to analyse as they show that the issue had reached a level of importance where policy-makers deemed it necessary to sound out public opinion on the matter. The fact that both the British and the French MOD started to commission surveys in the 2010s to evaluate how the public perceives the armed forces as an employer is a clear sign that public opinion actually matters for defence policy agendas. If it had no policy impact at all, neither the French nor the British MOD would continue to investigate the matter. This is particularly true as survey responses in recent years are not necessarily to the advantage of the governments on either side of the Channel.

### 3.5 The agenda-dynamics of recruiting service personnel

After having analysed *when* the recruitment of regular armed forces emerged as a policy problem and *how* it was framed over time, I will now focus on its agenda-building dynamics, i.e. I will examine *how* the policy, the media and the public agendas interact and *how* the strategic context affects them. More specifically, the aim of this section is to explain why military recruitment is a government priority in France and the UK, and to demonstrate that recruitment policies are real-world led. Recruitment, therefore, does not only qualify as a prominent defence issue; its agenda-setting dynamics are also a clear sign of defence normalising as a public policy.



### 3.5.1 The strategic context, key to understanding issue attention to military personnel

The theoretical model that I proposed for the agenda-setting dynamics of defence in Chapter 1 suggests that context matters, in particular for prominent defence issues. In this subsection, I show that the strategic environment evolved quite significantly since the 1980s and argue that this evolution affected how the recruitment of regular armed forces has been understood, framed and addressed as a policy issue, both in France and in the UK. To fully comprehend the agenda status of recruitment-related policy problems, I assert that several contextual aspects have to be taken into account. The latter include shifts in the security environment (1), economic downturns and unemployment rates, in particular among young people aged under 25 (2), demographic changes and the impact that peoples' employment expectations have on potential recruitment pools (3), and the relationship between the armed forces and society (4). Some of these changes have been explicitly addressed in the defence white papers and strategic reviews that I discussed above which, in turn, suggests that governments on both sides of the Channel were well aware of how the social, political and economic environment shapes their agendas and affects HR-management within the armed forces.

#### 3.5.1.1 Shifts in the security environment

First and foremost, France and the UK faced significant shifts in the security environment, most of which required them to have rapidly deployable forces, in particular since 1990. This, in turn, explains why France - like most other European countries - abandoned conscription shortly after the end of the Cold War.<sup>22</sup> The UK has been an 'outlier' in that regard: indeed, it has had professional armed forces for over a century and experienced conscription only during and after World War I and World War II, i.e. British forces were already easily deployable in the 1990s. This structural dissimilarity does not only imply important differences in the training of British and French service personnel up to 1996, but also in the regeneration of armed forces on both sides of the Channel, some of which still persist nowadays. Recruiting women and men in all-volunteer forces is, in fact, a matter of supply and demand (Orvis and Asch, 2001, p. 8), with demand largely depending on the security environment, but also on the country's aspirations in foreign, security and defence policy.

In France, the end of conscription was a significant change in the state's defence

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<sup>22</sup>Spain moved from conscription to all-volunteer forces in 2001, Italy in 2006, Poland in 2009, Germany in 2011, etc.

doctrine. Even though the decision was taken during a period of divided government (*cohabitation*), there was a political consensus on the need to move towards professional armed forces in the post-Cold War era. As one interviewee argued, the driving force behind this change - which pushed recruitment to the top of the defence agenda - was France's involvement in the Gulf War, followed by its contribution to the military operation in Bosnia.<sup>23</sup> Given that French conscripts had to sign a specific contract in order to be able to volunteer for those operations, a professional army became necessary to avoid any constraints in terms of (rapid) force projection. The need to find volunteers for France's professional armed forces, not only in sufficient numbers but also with the necessary skills and motivation, made the recruitment of service personnel a government priority in the second half of the 1990s (Foucault and Irondelle, 2009; Genieys et al., 2001). This change is fully reflected in the *Communiqués de Conseil des ministres* and the French defence white papers and strategic reviews analysed above.

Contrary to France, the UK already had a rather long experience of handling professional armed forces by the end of the Cold War. The 1990s and 2000s were, nonetheless, marked by a renewed interest in recruitment-related issues - but for different reasons than in France. As shown in Chapter 2, the UK's all-volunteer force is much smaller than its French counterpart and experienced a significant downward trend in terms of numbers, in particular since 1990. In spite of having rapidly deployable forces (which was not the case for most of the UK's European allies), the British forces risked being severely overstretched. This was mainly due to an acceleration of the tempo of military operations which was incompatible with the UK's troop sizes and net recruitment levels. In addition, rising death tolls in Iraq and Afghanistan as well as fading public support for British military operations did not facilitate recruitment; to the contrary, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq are often mentioned as one of the driving factors of the recruitment crisis that London has been facing more recently.<sup>24</sup> Given the shift in the security environment, HR management, thus, became a key aspect of British defence policy, receiving quite some government attention, as I have shown above.

In the UK and France, the 1990s, thus, corresponded to a re-prioritisation of the management of the armed forces. In France, conscription turned out to be inadequate to address the new security environment. In the UK, the regeneration of professional armed forces, which was necessary to deal with an increasing number of out-of-area missions, started to become more complicated. While the end of the Cold War was a clear turning point for those in charge of recruiting service personnel, there are instances in which a change in the security environment may actually also contribute to solving

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<sup>23</sup>Interview with a Deputy at the *Commission de la défense nationale et des forces armées* (ID 16)

<sup>24</sup>Interview with a civil servant at the FCO (ID 4)

potential recruitment problems. Three of the French interviewees, thus, highlighted that young people in France were much more interested in joining the armed forces following the terror attacks on European soil in 2015.<sup>25</sup> As I will show later, this shift, which risks being temporary due to an "erosion" of the "patriotic impulse"<sup>26</sup>, is not only due to the deterioration of the security environment and the terrorist threat but also closely linked to the job expectations of those who are aged under 25.

### 3.5.1.2 The state of the economy and (youth) unemployment

In addition to the security environment, the state of the economy also matters for explaining changes in the agenda status of recruitment, as the empirical analysis of French and British policy and media agendas above already suggested. In Chapter 2, I underlined that the economy has, indeed, an important impact on how easy or difficult it is to recruit service personnel. To put it differently, "[a]ny analysis of military labor supply must begin with the two basic economic forces that determine military enlistments: (i) military pay relative to civilian wages and (ii) the civilian unemployment rate" (Warner, 1990, p. 48). Why is this the case?

First, there is competition between the civilian and the military sector. Due to technological progress, the armed forces increasingly look for highly qualified personnel. This is particularly true for navies and air forces.<sup>27</sup> When trying to recruit air traffic controllers, aeronautical maintainers, atomicists or electronics engineers, for example, recruiters in the military are in direct competition with recruiters in civilian sectors who offer a series of alternative jobs that tend to be much better paid (Pesqueur, 2020). The armed forces, however, need those technicians to make their equipment - which has become more and more complex over time - work. Competition also increasingly exists for non-technical positions within the military, i.e. nowadays, job offers within the forces have to be competitive when set against comparable civilian careers. The evolution of military pay and civilian wages has had a non-negligible impact on net recruitment levels and, hence, defence priorities. As I have shown above, salaries, bonus payments and pensions, for example, are all recruitment-related policy issues that have started to emerge on the British and the French policy agenda in the 1980s and 1990s, respectively. They were also addressed by the national media.

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<sup>25</sup>Interviews with civil servants and military staff at the *ministère des Armées* (ID 19, ID 20, ID 28)

<sup>26</sup>Interview with military staff at the *ministère des Armées* (ID 28)

<sup>27</sup>Historically, air forces and navies both required very skilled recruits, in particular when compared to the infantry. Today, this difference has largely disappeared because of technological progress, i.e. armies, navies and air forces aim for recruiting very similar and highly qualified profiles.

Second, the unemployment rate matters to fully comprehend the agenda-setting mechanisms of military recruitment. Indeed, the military traditionally recruits young people from the working class, often in areas of high unemployment. This ‘strategy’ already suggests that recruitment and retention problems are cyclical, i.e. their severity strongly depends on the job market. When (youth) unemployment rates are high, the armed forces usually have no major difficulty in meeting their recruitment targets (DeRouen, 2000). In times of economic well-being, however, it is less easy to convince young people to join the armed forces (Bellany, 2003; Foucault and Irondelle, 2013; Morse, 2018). As one interviewee put it, when the economy is doing well, everyone is hiring: "We look for the same young people who would also join the police, the SNCF or even McDonald's. There is a real competition on the job market."<sup>28</sup>

Figure 3.5 provides additional empirical evidence for this pattern: it compares annual percentage changes in intake levels with annual percentage changes in youth unemployment in France and the UK.<sup>29</sup> While youth unemployment rates have been rather comparable in France and the UK between 1980 and 2018, recruitment has been much more volatile in the British armed forces. Figure 3.5 also suggests that increasing rates of youth unemployment do not immediately lead to higher recruitment levels. To the contrary, there seems to be a time lap of two to three years. The analysis of policy agendas above suggests that governments on both sides of the Channel were fully aware of how (youth) unemployment affects military recruitment when setting their agenda.

With the shift to professional armed forces, it is increasingly important that the military offers attractive jobs. This is particularly true in a context of increased competition for certain skills and competencies on the (civilian) employment market as well as in times of economic well-being. Being a competitive employer is, however, also crucial because of recent societal changes to which I turn next.

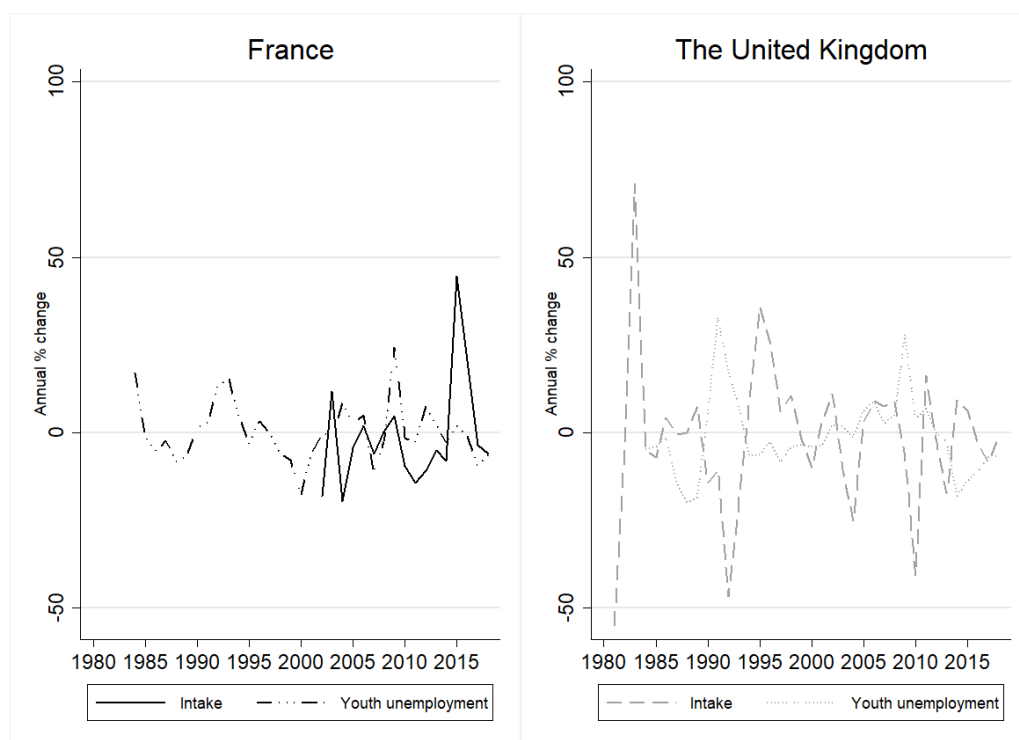
### 3.5.1.3 Societal changes: Demographic evolution, recruitment pools and job expectations

Although young people increasingly look for a purpose in their professional lives, which also explains why the French armed forces received an unprecedented number of applications following the terror attacks in 2015, the recruitment environment for military personnel has become more challenging due to shifts in society that have had a direct, negative impact on the labour supply side. As one interviewee highlighted, being a

<sup>28</sup>Interview with military staff at the *ministère des Armées* (ID 28)

<sup>29</sup>Data on youth unemployment in France and the UK are only available as of 1983. Data on the manning balance in the British and French armed forces are available from 1980 and 2001, respectively.

Figure 3.5: Recruitment of service personnel and youth unemployment in France and the United Kingdom, 1980-2018



Sources: French Ministry of the Armed Forces (2019a,b), British Ministry of Defence (2018c) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2020)

member of the armed forces is quite a specific job.<sup>30</sup> Similar to Foucault and Irondelle (2013), this journalist argued that the very nature of military operations implied that the armed forces had to recruit very young people, ideally aged under 25, in order to guarantee their fitness, flexibility and resilience. For multiple reasons, though, this pool of candidates has changed over time, both in terms of size and 'fit', an evolution that Paris and London fully acknowledged in their strategic documents.

First, the structure of the French and the British society is shifting, leading to a decrease in the working class which is the traditional recruitment pool for professional armed forces (Strachan, 2003), i.e. there are less potential recruits. Second, societies are ageing. As Bellany (2003) already underlined in the early 2000s, the target population, i.e. people aged between 16 and 24, has been shrinking over time which, in turn, makes it even more difficult to find service personnel. Third, young adults in the UK and France tend to join the workforce later than they used to, due to longer education programmes (Strachan, 2003). Thus, they may not be apt for the military

<sup>30</sup>Interview with a French defence journalist (ID 26)

anymore. Fourth, new generations seem to have different life goals (Pesqueur, 2020) and, consequently, a different attitude towards their professional careers (Bourn, 2006). Given that it is much more common to change jobs nowadays, young people are less likely to commit to a long-term career in the armed forces (Morse, 2018) which, in turn, is challenging for a bottom-fed organisation. In addition, as one interviewee argued, they do not only compare jobs but are also quite demanding: "Young people want a lot of things - but going to bed very late, getting up very early and running in the rain are not among them."<sup>31</sup> Last but not least, several studies suggest that increasingly large proportions of young adults are over the weight limits for military enlistment and, hence, would not qualify for the armed forces, even if they were interested in joining the military (Mission: Readiness, 2010; Yamane, 2007). From the analysis of the policy agendas above, we can conclude that governments on both sides of the Channel were not only aware of but also concerned about those evolutions as they have a major impact on how military recruitment plays out at the national level.

Military recruitment may, hence, also become a policy problem that governments have to address because of societal changes, including demographic changes and job expectations, that have a direct, negative impact on the manning balance. As two interviewees put it when asked about the difficulty to recruit young, motivated people for professional armed forces: "You recruit the best when you have the choice but when you do not have the choice, you take what you can get."<sup>32</sup>

#### 3.5.1.4 The relationship between society and the armed forces

Last but not least, the level of attention governments devote or have to devote to the recruitment of military personnel also depends on the relationship that exists between the armed forces and society, as Paris and London both acknowledged in their defence white papers and strategic reviews. This relationship, in turn, is heavily influenced by the format of the military (which, in turn, is closely linked to the security environment, as I have shown in Chapter 2), and the social contract that may or may not exist between the armed forces, government and society.

First, it is important to keep in mind that HR-related issues tend to be less concrete and obtrusive in countries having professional forces. This is mainly due to the fact that conscription helps making defence more accessible to the general public. Unlike the UK, the French armed forces are currently recruiting the first generation of service personnel

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<sup>31</sup>Interview with military staff at the *ministère des Armées* (ID 28)

<sup>32</sup>Interviews with a Deputy at the *Commission de la défense nationale et des forces armées* (ID 16) and military staff at the *ministère des Armées* (ID 28)

whose parents have not done mandatory military service, i.e. the link between society and the armed forces is still somewhat existent in France. This, however, is likely to change over time. One interviewee, thus, argued that the French forces expect recruitment to become more difficult in the future as today's parents tend to have little knowledge about the defence sector and are, hence, unable to give advice to their children.<sup>33</sup> Recent research confirms that the French public already knows rather little about its forces (Chéron, 2018), i.e. governments may have to make their professional armed forces more visible to recruit service personnel in sufficient numbers. As one of the British interviewees argued, less visibility usually leads to a lack of knowledge, i.e. over time, public opinion will only be favourable towards professional armed forces when there is a physical connection to the sector, such as a military base.<sup>34</sup>

Second, the recruitment of service personnel is increasingly viewed as a social contract between the armed forces, government and society. This implies that the public's perception of the defence sector matters, at least to some extent. While the French public has a particularly positive view of the armed forces since the terror attacks in 2015 and 2016, with young people being more interested in joining the military to make a contribution to society,<sup>35</sup> the British public considers its forces to be non-operational and, hence, not very attractive to join (Morse, 2018) - in spite of an overall support of the military. As two British interviewees pointed out, Brits tend to believe that soldiers are badly treated in the UK,<sup>36</sup> i.e. they have a negative image of the British MOD which then spills over on their willingness to join the institution. In addition, there are also "uncertainties concerning the long-term effect of political devolution on the willingness of the Scots and the Welsh to enlist in the British Army" (Bellany, 2003, p. 282). In the UK, the social contract, hence, currently hardly exist which, in turn, reinforces the recruitment and retention problem within the British armed forces.

To sum up, France and the UK faced several contextual changes - including shifts in the security environment, economic downturns and various societal evolutions - that shaped how recruitment has been understood, framed and addressed over time.

### 3.5.1.5 How the strategic context affects the policy, the media and the public agendas

From the above, it becomes clear that the strategic context is key to understanding government attention to military recruitment, i.e. it largely explains *why* recruitment

<sup>33</sup>Interview with military staff at the *ministère des Armées* (ID 28)

<sup>34</sup>Interview with a civil servant at the MOD (ID 12)

<sup>35</sup>Interview with a civil servant at the *ministère des Armées* (ID 20)

<sup>36</sup>Interviews with civil servants at the MOD (ID 5, ID 12)

was addressed in the *Communiqués de Conseil des ministres*, the Queen's Speech as well as defence white papers and strategic reviews and also accounts for *how* the issue was framed over time. The predominant agenda dynamic is, hence, between the evolution of the social, political and economic environment and the three agendas, i.e. recruitment qualifies as a prominent defence issues. This, however, does not mean that there are no interactions between government, media and public priorities. To the contrary, media coverage of and public opinion on military recruitment may actually constrain the government's policy choices even further, thereby reinforcing the policy problem.

This is particularly true in the UK where the tone of media reports on HR management within the armed forces has been very negative. To better understand the impact that the media may have on government priorities, it is important to keep in mind that there are no unions for soldiers<sup>37</sup> and that the armed forces only provide evidence if they have the explicit permission to do so or if they really want to push an issue on the policy agenda.<sup>38</sup> Thus, journalists tend to be the *porte-parole* of service personnel. However, their coverage cannot always be positive, i.e. problems have to be reported too.<sup>39</sup> As one of the interviewees highlighted, the French media usually acknowledge that progress has been made, even if they may also highlight that the latter was not fast enough.<sup>40</sup> In the UK, in turn, media coverage is much more negative and does not miss a single policy scandal, as we have seen above. This trend may also explain why defence ministries on both sides of the Channel nowadays conduct in-house media monitoring, i.e. they do want to know which issues the national and the international press cover and how they are framed in order to be able to react accordingly.

The fact that the British and the French MODs also began to commission opinion surveys to evaluate how the armed forces were perceived as an employer is a clear sign that public opinion matters to some degree for the government's defence agenda. If it had no policy impact at all, neither the French nor the British MOD would continue to investigate the matter. This is particularly true as survey responses in recent years are not necessarily to the advantage of the governments on either side of the Channel. Several interviewees, both in France and the UK, thus highlighted that the ministries were looking for citizens' support and notably used the results of their in-house surveys to adapt how they communicate about the armed forces,<sup>41</sup> i.e. the opinion polls became a marketing tool that allowed governments to improve their recruitment strategies.

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<sup>37</sup>Interviews with a Deputy at the *Commission de la défense nationale et des forces armées* (ID 16) and a civil servant at the *ministère des Finances* (ID 29)

<sup>38</sup>Interview with staff of the Defence Committee (ID 7)

<sup>39</sup>Interview with a defence journalist (ID 26)

<sup>40</sup>Interview with a civil servant at the *ministère des Armées* (ID 19)

<sup>41</sup>Interviews with civil servants at the MOD (ID 5, ID 12) and the *ministère des Armées* (ID 19, ID 20)



The agenda dynamics of military recruitment - which are similar to those that Soroka (2002a) identified for inflation and unemployment - suggest that defence has been normalising as a public policy. This, in turn, implies that government agendas in London and Paris are increasingly constrained by structural biases and system-dynamic developments, i.e. parts of the regal domain do not withdraw from the 'traditional' agenda-setting dynamics anymore. Given that agenda-setting is the first stage of the policy cycle (cf. the introduction of this manuscript), it affects both policy formulation and policy implementation. In the last subsection, I will, hence, shortly discuss how government attention to recruitment shaped HR policies in the armed forces and explain why those policies provide additional empirical evidence for a normalisation of the sector.

### **3.5.2 The impact of agenda-setting on recruitment policies: Towards a normalisation of defence?**

The analysis of the policy, the media and the public agendas suggests that military recruitment is no longer limited to the management of intakes and outflows of service personnel. Recruitment has become more complex over time. Indeed, the military nowadays has to offer attractive jobs to recruit and retain qualified service personnel because it is increasingly competing for certain skills and competencies with the civilian employment market. Given that military recruitment tends to become a policy problem in times of economic well-being when young people are 'spoilt for choice' in terms of training and job opportunities, HR policies in the defence sector started to normalise, i.e. they were slowly but surely aligned with the recruitment techniques and employment standards of (most) civilian employers. The latter include policies that aim for diversity and non-discrimination as well as attractive salary packages and sustainable working conditions. In addition, governments introduced HR policies that are more specifically targeted at service personnel, i.e. they deal with the state's duty of care for military staff and their families and lay out various options for reconversion to allow members of the armed forces to have second, civilian career, if they want to.

#### **3.5.2.1 A change in recruitment techniques**

First, recruitment techniques started to change, both in France and the UK. As one interviewee argued, military recruitment has become a true industry, an industry that did not exist before.<sup>42</sup> To make sure that young people were not only interested in the

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<sup>42</sup>Interview with a defence journalist (ID 26)

armed forces but also had the physical condition to join them, governments on both sides of the Channel invested in recruitment campaigns and launched tools to support those who are willing to serve their country in reaching the necessary fitness levels.

To increase the visibility of the armed forces (including as an employer), governments launched several events, such as the Armed Forces Day in the UK or the *Journée défense et citoyenneté* in France. They also started to offer periods of initiation into military life, e.g. the Army Cadet Force for young (British) people aged 12 to 18 and the *Service militaire volontaire* for young (French) people aged 18 to 25.

In addition, governments realised that it was not enough to inform the public about jobs within the armed forces. To the contrary, all three armies had to develop proper marketing strategies to reach young people and use communication tools that were popular among those aged under 25.<sup>43</sup> It is, thus, unsurprising that both the French and the British military have a rather large online presence nowadays. They place advertisements on TV and in the cinema, but also in the public space, such as bus and tube stations, and use various communication channels, e.g. Instagram and Snapchat.

In France, for example, the PM allows all three armies to advertise their jobs four times a year, for a period of three weeks. The main goal of this deferred campaign schedule is to avoid competition between the *armée de l'Air*, the *armée de Terre* and the *Marine nationale*. Usually, those campaigns are launched in September (to recruit school-leavers who did not find a job yet), November, January and March and tend to lead to a peak in inscriptions, i.e. they fulfil their purpose.<sup>44</sup>

One key problem, though, remains: advertisements have to be fair. One interviewee, thus, highlighted that the key difficulty of marketing jobs within the armed forces was to be authentic and, hence, to show what it meant to be a soldier - without discouraging young people from joining the military.<sup>45</sup> To do so, most professional armed forces rely nowadays on external consultants who are in charge of designing their recruitment campaigns.<sup>46</sup> In addition, they also tend to use the responses to their in-house surveys to improve their communication strategy and adapt the framing of their campaigns.<sup>47</sup>

While it is important to catch the interest of young people, the armed forces also have to make sure that potential recruits pass the medical, physical and cognitive tests that are required for joining the forces. France and the UK, like other military powers, thus, created applications to help potential recruits improve their fitness levels and

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<sup>43</sup>Interview with military staff at the *ministère des Armées* (ID 28)

<sup>44</sup>Interview with military staff at the *ministère des Armées* (ID 28)

<sup>45</sup>Interview with military staff at the *ministère des Armées* (ID 28)

<sup>46</sup>Interview with military staff at the *ministère des Armées* (ID 28)

<sup>47</sup>Interview with a civil servant at the *ministère des Armées* (ID 20)

prepare for entry tests - which, in turn, is another sign that the recruitment techniques of the military have been aligned with those of the civilian employment market. HR management, hence, started to normalise, a trend that is confirmed by the armed forces' strive for diversity and non-discrimination.

### 3.5.2.2 The strive for diversity and non-discrimination within the armed forces

From the empirical analysis of the policy, the media and the public agendas, it becomes clear that the composition of the armed forces started to matter, in particular in terms of their diversity. Indeed, the under-representation of minorities became a political problem (Bellany, 2003), both in France (Bertossi and Wihtol de Wenden, 2006) and the UK (Dandeker and Mason, 2001). As a recruiter, the military, therefore, began to care much more about equality, parity, diversity and non-discrimination, thereby following a trend that was already very present on the civilian employment market.

In the UK, the Commission for Racial Equality, which was established in 1976 and replaced with the Equality and Human Rights Commission in 2007, aims for equality in all British public services, including the armed forces. The British armed forces - in particular the navy - thus made substantial efforts to diversify their personnel and have recently been ranked as one of the UK's top employers for committing to women as well as lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgender staff.

In France, the diversification of the armed forces is a more recent policy goal.<sup>48</sup> One interviewee, thus, highlighted that the recruitment of women, for example, was still rather symbolic in the 1980s and only started to become much more systematic when France prepared its shift to professional armed forces in the 1990s.<sup>49</sup> Another interviewee confirmed that equal opportunities for women and men was a new item on the defence agenda: "20 years ago, any soldier would have thought it was a joke if you had mentioned parity within the armed forces as a policy goal."<sup>50</sup> Today, this is different. Indeed, studies have shown that the abolition of female quotas for the recruitment of service personnel in 1998<sup>51</sup> has had a positive impact on the overall number of women in the French military, even if the health service continues to be the most feminised service (Conseil économique et social, 2004). Florence Parly, defence minister between 2017 and 2022, pushed the issue even further, e.g. by introducing the *Plan Famille* which is meant to facilitate the everyday life of all service personnel,

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<sup>48</sup>Interview with a civil servant at the *ministère des Armées* (ID 19)

<sup>49</sup>Interview with a defence policy advisor to the government (ID 27)

<sup>50</sup>Interview with a civil servant at the *ministère des Armées* (ID 19)

<sup>51</sup>Cf. the Decret no 98-86 from 16 February 1998

including minorities.<sup>52</sup> Like the UK, France aims, indeed, for diversifying the background of its forces. Even though the navy is particularly successful in doing so, the French forces continue to be less multicultural than their British counterparts.<sup>53</sup>

To sum up, French and British governments strove for more diversity and non-discrimination within their armed forces by putting service personnel at the core of their public policies. The recent change in the name of France's Ministry of Defence - from *ministère de la Défense* to *ministère des Armées* - illustrates this trend very well.<sup>54</sup> Despite the efforts on both sides of the Channel, some actors still consider that governments should give more priority to HR-related issues. One of the speakers at an Ifri event, thus, highlighted that the armed forces continued to be "too white, too male and too straight" and, hence, failed to reach their targets in terms of diversity (Institut français des relations internationales, 2019). While the evaluation of military recruitment policies is beyond the scope of this Ph.D. thesis, this assessment shows nonetheless that HR management within the armed forces is normalising.

### 3.5.2.3 More attractive salary packages and working conditions

In addition to aiming for more diversity and non-discrimination, the armed forces also started to offer more attractive salary packages and working conditions. Rather than relying on an institutional logic that would concentrate on the link between the state, the military and society, the UK - and increasingly also France - focusses on individual incentives to join the military (e.g. via pay checks, bonus payments etc.).

The UK, thus, introduced the so-called 'X-factors' in the pay of soldiers in 1970 in order to account for the inconveniences that come with being a military. These X-factors are regularly adjusted by the Armed Forces Pay Review Body (AFPRB). In France too, salaries have been adapted over time, and a new remuneration policy is expected to enter into force in 2022-2023.<sup>55</sup> Non-financial aspects have also become more important in the two countries. The latter include free access to sports, health care packages (in the case of the UK), subsidised housing and relocation services, for instance. Additionally, the armed forces aim for increasing their attractiveness by providing job security and offering positions that allow for career progress.<sup>56</sup> Both the adjustment of pay and the improvement of working conditions are not only an incentive

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<sup>52</sup>Interview with a civil servant at the *ministère des Armées* (ID 19)

<sup>53</sup>Interview with a defence policy advisor to the government (ID 27)

<sup>54</sup>Interview with a civil servant at the *ministère des Armées* (ID 21)

<sup>55</sup>Cf. the *Nouvelle politique de rémunération des militaires* (NPRM)

<sup>56</sup>Interviews with civil servants at the *ministère des Armées* (ID 18, ID 21) and a defence policy advisor at the *Sénat* (ID 30)

to join but also to stay in the military, i.e. they fully belong to the retention policies that governments on both sides of the Channel introduced to reduce the number of service personnel leaving the French and British military before retirement.

Retention is crucial for all-volunteer forces (Asch et al., 2007; Szvircev and Leuprecht, 2010) because high (voluntary) turnovers are costly for bottom-fed organisations (De Roquemaurel, 2002). Reports suggest various reasons for early departures, most of which are linked to the personnel's work-life balance (Bourn, 2006; Haut Comité d'évaluation de la condition militaire, 2007). Because of frequent and rather lengthy military operations, service personnel in France and the UK regularly underlines that being a military has a negative impact on their personal life, with most families being unable to plan their free time. Other reasons for leaving the armed forces are frequent relocations and the difficulty for partners to find a new job each time the family is moving (Foucault and Irondelle, 2013). In the UK, a survey of the NAO also highlighted that service personnel felt that the military's work was no longer valued and that jobs were increasingly uncertain and unsafe, given the reduction in the size of the armed forces and concerns about the quality of military equipment (Bourn, 2006).

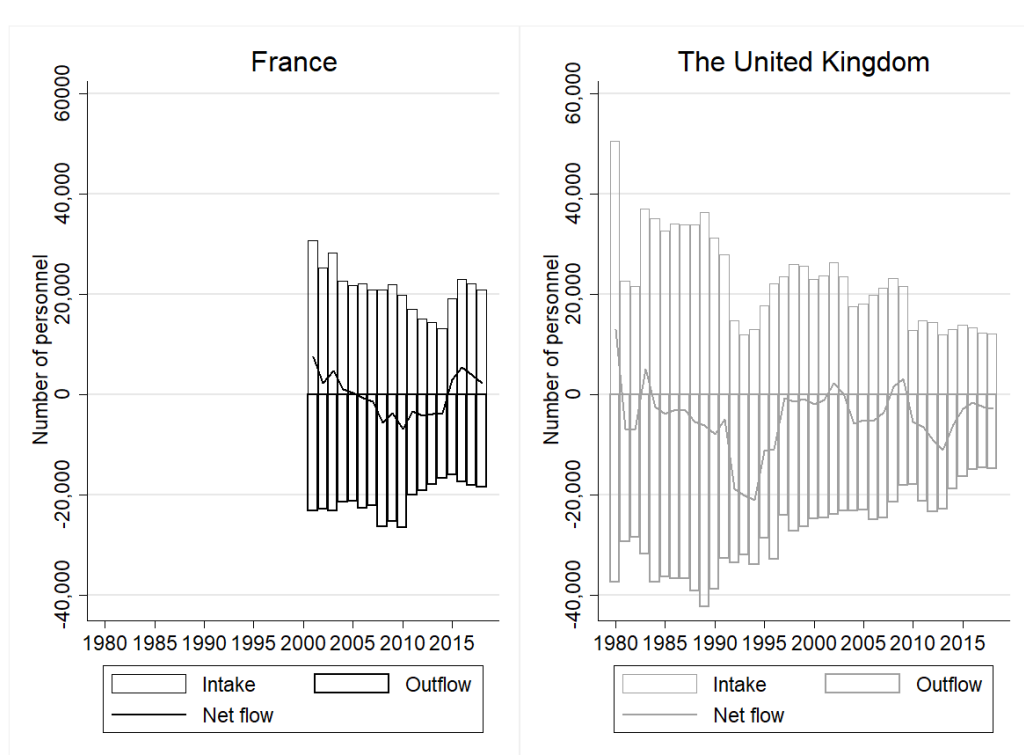
Figure 3.6 looks at the intake to and the outflow from the British and French armed forces.<sup>57</sup> Why should we look at those personnel flows? As with military equipment, it makes sense to distinguish between 'stocks', i.e. the number of trained personnel currently available, and 'flows', i.e. the number of personnel joining *or* leaving the armed forces every year. Given that professional armed forces need young people, they have to make sure that the inflow is kept up, while the outflow is fully under control. Figure 3.6 shows that the net flow has been largely negative between 1980 and 2018. France experienced an increase in the size of its armed forces after 9/11 and the terror attacks in 2015 and 2016. The UK, in turn, has had a positive net flow only during the years that followed the Falkland war, 9/11 and the war in Afghanistan. This negative balance explains why retention policies gained traction: since promotion within the military is largely internal, it is crucial to control the flow of personnel as professional armed forces cannot rely on conscription anymore.

The UK and France, therefore, both try to retain their recruits via (more or less) competitive welfare policies and financial incentives. The UK introduced 'harmony' guidelines on the amount of time that members of the armed forces may spend away to ensure that they have a sustainable work-life balance. It also opted for financial incentives in the short run - such as funding for postgraduate studies - and commitment bonuses in the medium and long run (Bourn, 2006). The latter include, according to

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<sup>57</sup>Data on the manning balance in the British and French armed forces are available from 1980 and 2001, respectively.

Figure 3.6: Intake to and outflow from the French and British armed forces, 1980-2018



Sources: French Ministry of the Armed Forces (2019a,b), and British Ministry of Defence (2018c)

Bourn's NAO report, incentives like golden hellos, rejoining bounties, and transfer bonuses to boost the number of personnel staying in the armed forces.

Inspired by the AFPRB, France created the HCECM in 2005 to better evaluate the work environment of service personnel. The HCECM ensures that members of the armed forces have a decent work-life balance and that their families receive government support, in particular during military operations, i.e. whenever the soldier is not at home (e.g. the *Plan Famille* which facilitates access to housing, kindergarten places etc.).<sup>58</sup> In addition, the French armed forces introduced a consultative body which made sure that everyday issues in the lives of service personnel were put on the agenda and addressed by government. The latter include, for instance, housing-related issues, such as the furnishing of barracks (including adequate rooms for service personnel, a decent Wifi connection, etc.). According to one interviewee, policy change is slow but ongoing since competition is fierce: "The SNCF, for example, offers housing for its staff that is not too expensive; it provides train tickets at reduced prices. Why should young people join the armed forces if other employers have much better offers?"<sup>59</sup>

<sup>58</sup>Interviews with military staff at the *ministère des Armées* (ID 28) and a defence policy advisor at the *Sénat* (ID 30)

<sup>59</sup>Interview with military staff at the *ministère des Armées* (ID 28)

To sum up, government attention to recruitment led to several changes in HR management. The UK started to offer attractive salary and welfare packages as early as in the 1970s, a trend that France closely followed from the 1990s onwards.

#### **3.5.2.4 New government obligations towards the armed forces and their families**

More recently, governments on both sides of the Channel also began to focus on their duty of care. Given that the French and the British armed forces were involved in a series of conflicts and operations of varying intensity, attention shifted to the introduction of safeguards, rewards and compensation schemes for current and former military personnel as well as their families. This is particularly true for the UK which faced, contrary to France, particularly high death tolls during its deployments.

Cornish (2013), who argues that the relationship between the British society and its armed forces has become more and more complex, thus highlights that the post-Cold War period necessitated a doctrinal change which, in the case of the British armed forces, was characterised by the Military Covenant. The latter describes the relationship between members of the armed forces and society, underlining that service personnel was regarded and valued as people, and that government owed them a duty of care. This includes a series of welfare policies as well as the guarantee that all staff are adequately equipped for the missions they have to fulfil, but also taking charge of soldiers who were physically or psychologically injured during an operation. A similar evolution can be observed in France where policies have changed to take care of currently serving military personnel, veterans as well as the families of military personnel that died on duty (Collin and Richter, forthcoming). It is crucial to note here that both the French and the British MODs have already been sued in the past: in the UK, the law suit was about equipment deficiencies in Iraq<sup>60</sup>; in France, in turn, several families of the ten soldiers who died in the Uzbin Valley ambush in 2008 filed a complaint for an organisational mishandling of the operation in Afghanistan. These lawsuits did not only catch the attention of the media and the general public, but also led to rapid policy changes on both sides of the Channel.

#### **3.5.2.5 An update of reconversion schemes**

Last but not least, government attention to military recruitment also led to changes in reconversion policies. While military-civilian conversion used to absorb personnel

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<sup>60</sup>Interview with a defence journalist (ID 15)

of overstuffed units, for example (Genieys et al., 2001), it is nowadays a necessary condition to recruit young people in the first place. As one of the interviewees argued, "[if] you want to recruit service personnel today, you need to tell potential candidates straight away how they can leave the forces, if they end up wanting to leave them".<sup>61</sup> Reconversion, hence, started to be a way to make military service more attractive, and to make sure that people would also stay in the medium and the long term. It is reassuring young people who may still hesitate to join the armed forces, and provides an incentive to try a military career that may then be more or less long.

The British armed forces, thus, introduced a Personal Development Record (PDR) for members of the armed forces that is meant to keep track of the skills and competencies they acquire during their military career - and that are transferable to the civilian sector. In France, reconversion is a statutory right since the shift towards professional armed forces in 1996, with all military staff being able to leave the armed forces after four years of active service. Similar to the UK, the French military insists on the acquisition of skills and competencies that allow military personnel to prepare for a second, civilian career. Research shows that reconversion schemes tend to be rather successful (Pesqueur, 2020), with companies such as FM Logistic, SNCF and Sodhexo informing the *ministère des Armées* whenever they have specific recruitment needs that may be met by former service personnel (De Roquemaurel, 2002, p. 642). Reconversion schemes are also crucial to keep future personnel inflows up: as Pesqueur (2020) put it, the best ambassador of the armed forces is well reconverted staff.

To sum up, government attention to military recruitment led to concrete policy changes, all of which suggest that the nature of the policy problem and its image changed over time. Military recruitment is, indeed, not limited to the management of intakes and outflows of service personnel anymore. Instead, governments realised over time that the armed forces had to be an attractive employer, especially to be able to compete with offers on the civilian employment market. They, thus, adapted their recruitment techniques and employment standards, and introduced various HR policies that are more specifically targeted at service personnel, such as a duty of care and reconversion schemes. This, in turn, shows that the 'social' aspects of defence gained traction: the everyday life of military staff started to matter, just as the situation of veterans as well as towns and communities in which the military is a major employer.<sup>62</sup> All of these changes suggest that government attention to military recruitment has significantly shaped HR policies in the British and French armed forces, and that the latter are more and more comparable to those implemented outside of the defence

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<sup>61</sup>Interview with a defence policy advisor to the government (ID 27)

<sup>62</sup>Interview with staff of the Public Accounts Committee (ID 11)



sector. This, in turn, implies that both agenda-setting and policy-making in defence have normalised since the 1980s.

## 3.6 Conclusion

The supply of suitable labour has been a constant concern to the military. People are, indeed, one of the greatest assets of the armed forces. The reason for this is straightforward: no country can operationalise its defence objectives without service personnel. The aim of this chapter was, therefore, to understand how military recruitment remained a policy priority in the UK and France between 1980 and 2018.

First, I looked at *when* the recruitment of regular forces emerged as a priority on the policy, the media and the public agendas, and examined *how* its framing evolved over time. Based on CAP-data and a detailed analysis of strategic documents, I showed that military recruitment has been a routine issue for governments on both sides of the Channel, i.e. London and Paris addressed the problem on a regular basis, in particular since the mid-1990s. The empirical evidence suggests, however, that recruitment gained traction in the *Communiqués de Conseil des ministres* and the Queen's Speech while it started to lose agenda space in defence white papers and strategic reviews. As it will become clear in the next chapters of this manuscript, this diverging trend is due to the fact that government statements and speeches do not only deal with defence problems, but when they do, they focus on issues that are more concrete for the general public. The empirical evidence also points to a change in the framing of the policy problem: in France, attention shifted from the military not being the most attractive employer to the armed forces having difficulty to fill their ranks; in the UK, governments initially focused on the manning balance when they discussed recruitment, but then shifted their attention to the forces' overstretch and retention problems.

After having analysed how military recruitment was addressed by governments, I examined how the issue was covered by French and British media and perceived by the general public in the two countries. To do so, I used data from Europresse, Factiva as well as national and international opinion polls. I concluded that the press in France gave more agenda space to recruitment-related issues than its British counterpart, especially since the 2000s. I then showed that newspapers in both countries covered similar issues between 1980 and 2018, but framed them very differently. I also highlighted that the tone of British media tends to be much more negative, and argued that this framing did not only reinforce the policy problem, but also partially explains why the UK public considers that the armed forces are a better employer than the MOD.

In France, governments only recently started to commission opinion polls on how the armed forces are perceived on the job market. I outlined that this sudden interest for the public's perception of the French military suggests that public opinion matters for the policy agenda. This is particularly true as survey results have so far been rather mixed, i.e. the French armed forces are not necessarily seen as the ideal employer.

Second, I analysed the agenda-building dynamics of recruiting service personnel, and explained why French and British governments pay an increased amount of attention to military recruitment. Based on the theoretical model that I proposed for the agenda-building mechanisms of defence, which suggests that context matters, I argued that the social, political and economic environment was key to understanding the agenda status of military recruitment. I then showed that the strategic environment evolved quite significantly since the 1980s, and pointed out that several contextual aspects had to be taken into account to fully comprehend why governments paid - or had to pay - attention to military recruitment. The latter include shifts in the security environment, economic downturns and (youth) unemployment rates, demographic changes and the impact that peoples' employment expectations have on potential recruitment pools, and the relationship that exists (or does not exist) between the armed forces and society. Last but not least, I explained that all of these evolutions have had an impact on how the recruitment of regular armed forces has been understood, framed and addressed as a policy problem, both in France and in the UK.

Based on this analysis, I suggested that the strategic context is not only key to explaining *why* recruitment was addressed in the *Communiqués de Conseil des ministres*, the Queen's Speech as well as defence white papers and strategic reviews, but also to accounting for *how* the issue was framed over time. I argued that the predominant agenda-building dynamic is between the evolution of the social, political and economic environment and the three agendas. For this very reason, I concluded that recruitment is real-world led and, hence, qualifies as a prominent defence issue. I specified, though, that this does not mean that there are no interactions between government, media and public priorities. To the contrary, I underlined that media coverage of and public opinion on military recruitment may constrain the government's policy choices and, thus, reinforce the policy problem. In addition, I asserted that the agenda dynamics of military recruitment are similar to those that scholars identified for inflation and unemployment, for instance, and suggested that this parallel did not only imply that the policy problem had a cyclical nature (i.e. it becomes more severe when employment levels at the national level are high, for example), but also that defence has been normalising over time. Indeed, French and British defence agendas are increasingly constrained by structural biases and system-dynamic developments, i.e. parts of the

regal domain do not withdraw from the ‘traditional’ agenda-setting dynamics anymore.

Given that agenda-setting is the first stage of the policy cycle, I then underlined that its dynamics affect policy formulation and policy implementation. To illustrate this point, I concluded the chapter by discussing how government attention to recruitment shaped HR policies in the French and British armed forces and explained why those policies provide additional evidence for a normalisation of defence as a public policy. I showed that recruitment policies have become more and more complex over time, and that the military nowadays has to offer attractive jobs to recruit and retain qualified personnel. I outlined that this was particularly true as the sector is increasingly competing with the civilian employment market. Since military recruitment tends to become a policy problem in times of economic well-being when young people have various training and job opportunities, I demonstrated that the military’s HR policies started to normalise, i.e. they were aligned with the recruitment techniques and employment standards of (most) civilian employers. Governments in France and the UK started to create specific authorities and agencies in charge of recruitment-related policy issues, mainly to guarantee that diversity, equality and non-discrimination, attractive salary packages, decent living and working conditions and appealing reconversion schemes were the norm. This does not only mean that HR management within the armed forces is more and more difficult to question and, hence, to remove from the government agenda, but also that the normalisation of the agenda-building dynamics of military recruitment translated into a normalisation of HR policy formulation and implementation.

# Chapter 4

## Agenda-setting of governmental defence issues: The acquisition of aircraft carriers

### 4.1 Introduction

Defence procurement is the process by which states acquire goods and services that the armed forces need to fulfil their missions, both at home and abroad. As Kapstein (1991, p. 117) highlighted, governments procure two types of items when they equip their military: civilian products, such as food and clothing, which are regularly purchased in large quantities and, hence, at low unit costs, and major weapons systems, such as armoured vehicles, fighter jets and aircraft carriers, which, if they are purchased, are acquired in small quantities only and, hence, at high unit costs. All of these acquisitions have three goals. First, to ensure that the armed forces are properly equipped, especially when compared to current and potential, future adversaries. Second, to obtain or maintain an appropriate degree of national sovereignty over the use, maintenance, upgrading and replacement of weapons systems. Third, to realise indirect benefits from those expenditures at the national level, be they economic, industrial, technological or employment-related. Procurement is, consequently, a key activity for any state that has a military. Similar to government purchasing in civilian sectors, such as health care and transportation, the procurement process in defence does not only require governments to decide which goods and services to acquire, but also from whom and how (e.g. via its DIB, co-development, imports, etc.) - all while taking into account the wider social and economic effects that may come along with that decision.

France and the UK regularly acquire ‘high profile’ capabilities which reflects their willingness to conduct military operations on a purely national basis, and to contribute to multinational ones if they want to. Both countries belong to the ‘restricted club’ of states that possess aircraft carriers, the flagship of the world’s most powerful navies and a particularly capable tool of force projection. Carriers are nuclear- or non-nuclear-powered platforms from which aircraft can be launched and landed, i.e. they allow for dealing with a variety of crisis scenarios. Aircraft carriers are especially useful when airfields do not exist or cannot be accessed due to lacking overflight permits, and when ashore facilities are not (yet) available. Only eight states currently have such carriers. While the US leads the way with 11 aircraft carriers, the UK (2) and France (1) are on an equal footing with China (2), Italy (2), India (1), Russia (1) and Spain (1), respectively.<sup>1</sup> To fully benefit from the political and military flexibility that carriers allow for, states should have at least two of them to bridge periods of maintenance, and make sure that their warships are part of a well-balanced navy, i.e. that they are accompanied by a complete task force. The latter may include destroyers, frigates, mine hunters, submarines and amphibious ships, for instance. Although carriers are a symbol of national identity and resolve<sup>2</sup> and tend to make their navies particularly proud, the status and freedom of manoeuvre they grant come at a significant cost. The agenda-setting perspective allows us to examine how aircraft carriers came to be seen as a powerful tool in international relations, and how some governments eventually decide to make the possession of such platforms a priority.

The aim of this chapter is to understand how the procurement of aircraft carriers became and remained a government priority in France and the UK. To study those agenda dynamics, I decided to work on carriers that have been operational between 1980 and 2018, i.e. some of the carriers that I included in the empirical analysis have been decommissioned and scrapped or sold before 2018. Figure 4.1 gives an overview of the British and French aircraft carriers that are part of my data set, and indicates when they have been laid down, commissioned and decommissioned. It also specifies the ‘fate’ of the carriers that are not in service anymore. In this chapter, I look first of all at *when* the acquisition of aircraft carriers emerged as a priority on the policy, the media and the public agendas in France and the UK, and examine *how* its framing evolved over time. I then analyse the agenda-building dynamics of procuring carriers, underlining in particular how the policy, the media and the public agendas are linked and influenced by the strategic context. This, in turn, does not only allow me to explain why British and French governments pay attention to procurement in a very

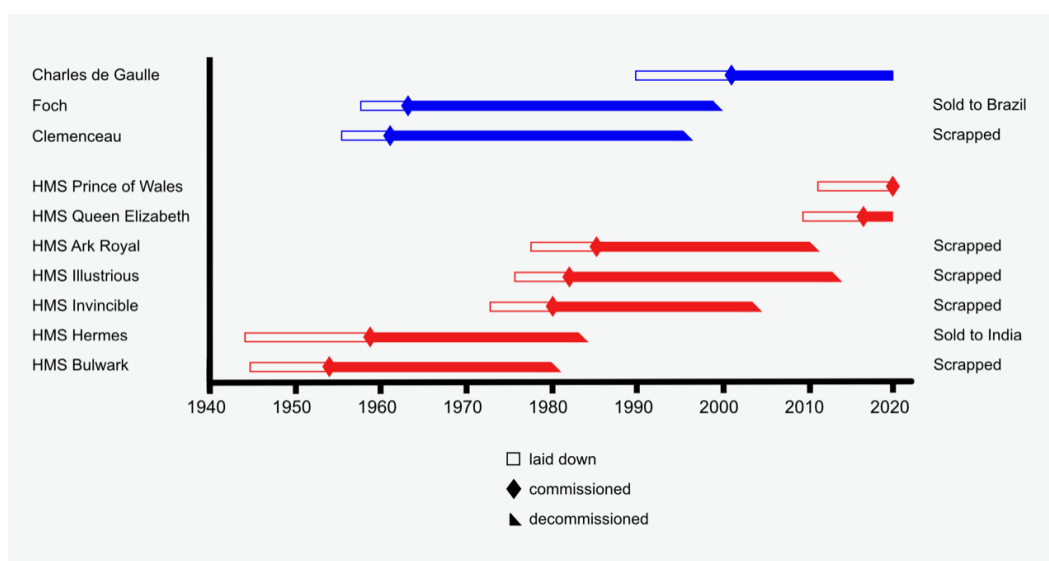
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<sup>1</sup>This list, which is based on data from December 2021, does not include helicopter carriers.

<sup>2</sup>Interview with a defence journalist (ID 15)

cyclical manner, but also to demonstrate that the acquisition of aircraft carriers is policy-driven, i.e. before the media and the general public pay attention to the navy's (future) flagship, French and British policy-makers have to identify that it is a policy problem to drop out of the 'privileged club of carrier owners' or to have only one carrier at disposal. Based on this conclusion, I argue that government attention to carriers and the impact it has on procurement policies suggests that defence procurement, in spite of having become more transparent over time, continues to be somewhat specific.

Figure 4.1: French and British aircraft carriers (in service), 1980-2018



Source: Author's own illustration

## 4.2 The policy agenda

How did attention to aircraft carriers evolve on French and British policy agendas? In this section, I look at government attention to the acquisition of carriers between 1980 and 2018, providing evidence from speeches and cabinet meetings as well as defence white papers and strategic reviews.

### 4.2.1 Government attention to aircraft carriers: Evidence from cabinet meetings and speeches

To better comprehend when British and French governments focused on the acquisition of aircraft carriers, I first of all examined government attention to procurement-related issues in speeches and cabinet meetings. As I explained in more detail in Chapter 2, I

selected the Speech from the Throne in the UK and the *Communiqués de Conseil des ministres* in France as prior research suggests that those two policy agendas are robust indicators for government priorities on both sides of the Channel.

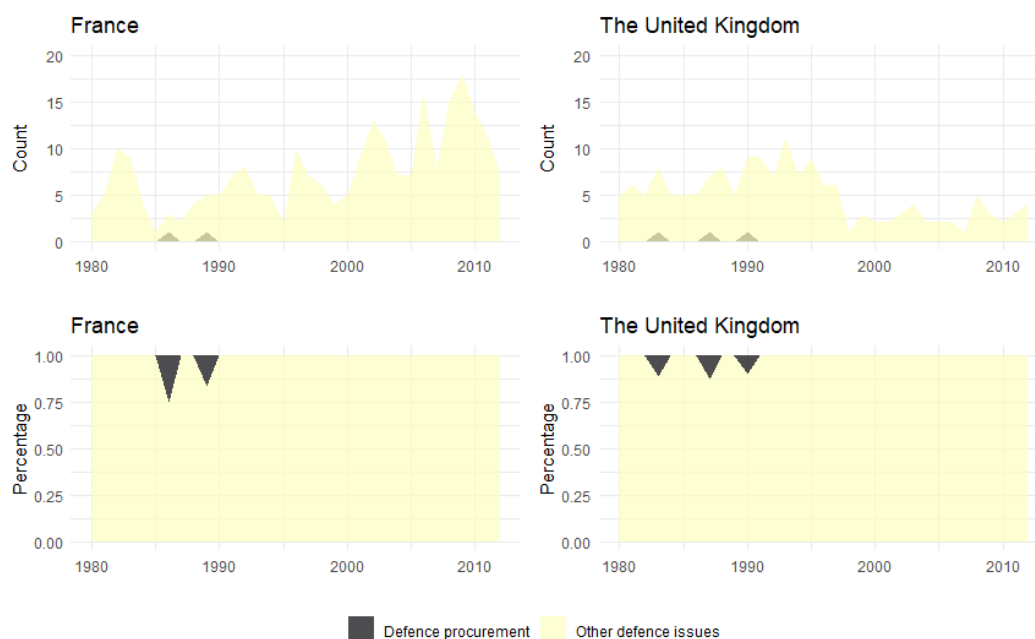
Figure 4.2 - which is based on CAP-data - shows government attention to defence procurement and the acquisition of weapons systems in the UK and France between 1980 and 2012 (cf. subcode 1610), and compares it to government attention to all other defence issues (i.e. all subcodes of the major topic code 16, except for the subcode 1610). The topic code 1610 includes various issues related to procurement. It covers the defence procurement process, the testing and evaluation of weapons systems and budget estimates for military acquisitions. It also accounts for the regulation of the arms industry and its overall health, i.e. the CAP-data do not code attention to aircraft carriers *per se* but to broader, related policy issues. This being said, they give great insights into how military procurement ebbed and flowed on French and British government agendas between 1980 and 2012. Figure 4.2 provides two complementary measures of government attention to the acquisition of weapons systems: it shows the frequency of topic mentions<sup>3</sup> in cabinet meetings and speeches, and the percentage of government statements and the Queen's Speech assigned to the topic in any given year. While the first measure indicates the relative difference in government attention to defence procurement in France and the UK, the second treats the (defence) agenda space as a constant over time and, thus, shows when government attention was concentrated on procurement and the acquisition of weapons systems.<sup>4</sup>

Generally speaking, the four subfigures of Figure 4.2 suggest that defence procurement is largely absent from French and British government agendas, at least when we look at government statements and speeches. In both countries, the acquisition of weapons systems was only addressed a few times in the 1980s and early 1990s. In France, defence procurement was mentioned twice, in 1986 and 1989. In the UK, the trend is very similar. Procurement was discussed in the Queen's Speech in 1983, 1987 and 1990, and then disappeared from the agenda. There are two reasons for this pattern. First, we have to keep in mind that defence is, as I already argued in Chapter 3, only one of many policy issues that are addressed in the *Communiqués de Conseil des ministres* and the Speech from the Throne. Second, the empirical evidence presented above and in Chapter 3 suggests that not all defence issues are equally 'popular', i.e. whenever defence is covered in a speech or statement, it is much more likely that governments discuss military recruitment, an issue that is more concrete for most people,

<sup>3</sup>The frequency of topic mentions corresponds to the total count of topic mentions per year.

<sup>4</sup>In the case of aircraft carriers, the second measure may seem to be redundant. However, since the goal of this Ph.D. thesis is to compare the agenda-setting dynamics of three different defence issues, I decided to run the same empirical analyses for all case studies.

Figure 4.2: Government attention to defence procurement, 1980-2012



Sources: Comparative Agendas Project (2021)

than that they address military procurement, an issue that is more abstract for most non-experts on defence policy. It, hence, makes sense to also have a closer look at how the agenda status of defence procurement - and more specifically the acquisition of weapons systems - evolved in French and British strategic documents, especially since those documents do not address the general public but target the defence community at the national and the international level. They are, consequently, much more likely to discuss more technical, strategic and abstract defence issues, such as aircraft carriers.

#### 4.2.2 Government attention to aircraft carriers: Evidence from defence white papers and strategic reviews

As I have already highlighted in the second and the third chapter of this thesis, defence white papers and strategic reviews constitute one of the most accessible guides to a country's level of ambition in foreign, security and defence policy. They address all defence issues that are relevant for the government at the time of publication, i.e. they discuss industrial issues, like procurement, in the same way as they deal with HR management, for instance. Strategic documents, consequently, provide a different and more nuanced perspective on government attention to aircraft carriers between 1980 and 2018 and, therefore, complement the empirical evidence from government statements France and speeches that I just presented.



Generally speaking, the acquisition of aircraft carriers is addressed more often in British than in French strategic documents (79 versus 20 occurrences, respectively). This is not only true in absolute but also in relative terms given that defence white papers and strategic reviews are shorter in the UK than in France, as I have shown in Chapter 2. This, in turn, implies that British governments tend to give much more agenda space to carrier-related policy problems than their French counterparts do.

To better understand how government attention to aircraft carriers evolved over time, I conducted a specificity analysis to check if the acquisition of aircraft carriers, as a policy problem, was specific to any of the strategic documents published in France and the UK since 1980.<sup>5</sup> As I already explained in Chapter 3, a specificity analysis indicates whether the occurrence of a word or CQL query appears in abundance or in decline in one of the parts of a partition, here a white paper or strategic review.

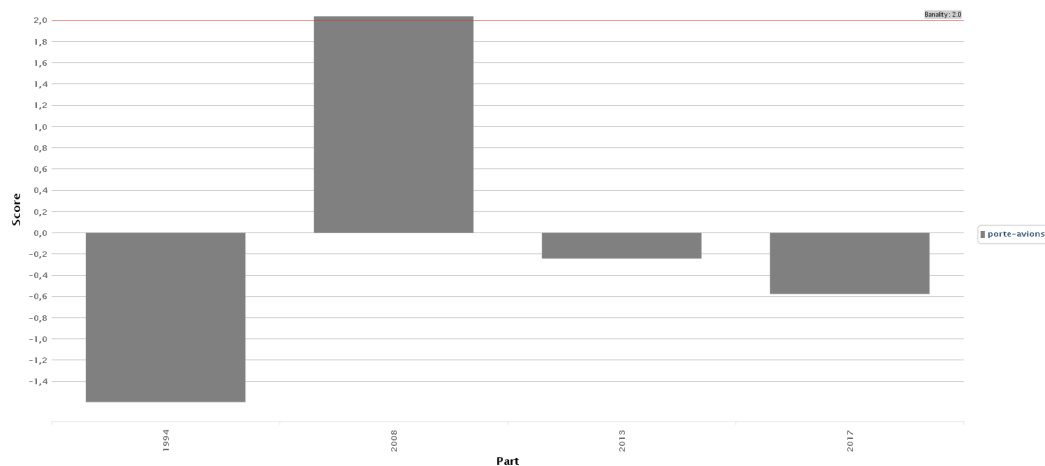
Figure 4.3 shows the results of such an analysis for procurement-related issues within French and British strategic documents. The reference lines at -2 and +2 display the standardisation band on either side of the 0 score axis. Bars that remain within this limit represent standard scores, i.e. in those cases, aircraft carriers were, compared to all other texts included in the corpus, neither over- nor underaddressed in the document. To put it differently, bars that go under -2 suggest that the issue was, comparatively speaking, less of a priority that year while bars over +2 indicate a certain overemployment of the term 'aircraft carrier', compared to how the issue was addressed in other documents of the corpus. Figure 4.3a, thus, indicates that aircraft carriers were addressed in all four strategic documents that France published between 1980 and 2018. However, the issue was specific to the 2008 defence and national security white paper which overemphasised the topic as compared to the other documents included in the corpus. In the UK, the agenda status of carriers has been slightly more volatile. Figure 4.3b does not only suggest that the navy's flagship was a non-issue in 1994 and 2002, but also that aircraft carriers were particularly prominent in the 2010 SDSR. This, in turn, implies that the policy issue had a similar agenda status in France and the UK around 2008-2010 which is mainly due to the fact that the two countries wanted - but eventually failed - to co-develop a new generation of carriers during that period of time.

The question then is *how* governments addressed aircraft carriers in those documents. As I already explained in Chapter 3, there are three complementary ways to do this. First, by conducting HCAs where procurement-related issues may form an individual cluster for some of the defence white papers and strategic reviews, but not

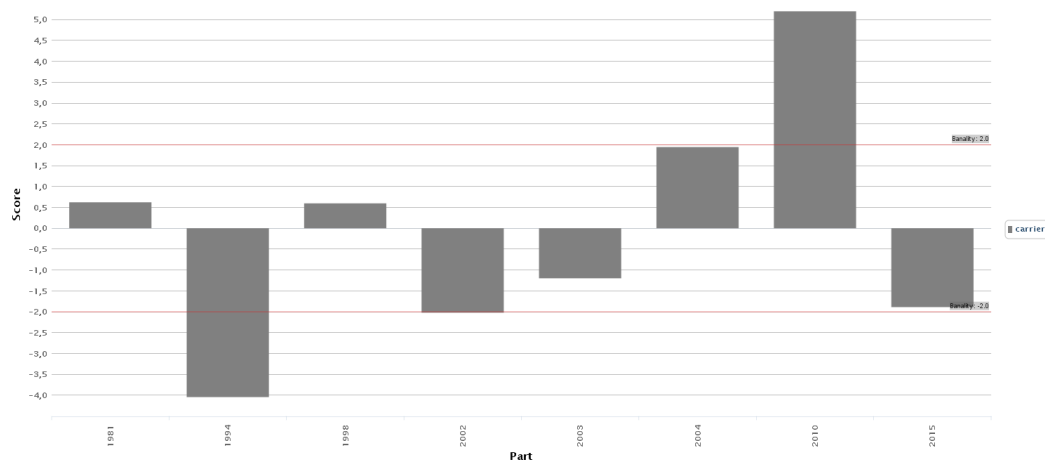
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<sup>5</sup>The specificity analyses in this thesis were all run with TXM. While TXM is a great open access tool for text analysis, it does not (yet) allow for a lot of flexibility when visualising the results.

Figure 4.3: Aircraft carriers within French and British strategic documents, 1980-2018



(a) France



(b) The United Kingdom

Source: French and British strategic documents

for others.<sup>6</sup> Second, by calculating a table of co-occurrences for the occurrences of a CQL query, here aircraft carriers. By default, the co-occurrences are sorted by their ‘co-occurrence score’. This score is an indicator of the probability of association, i.e. it gives us a better idea of the issues that were addressed together with carriers (e.g. the carriers’ task force or aircraft to be used together with the carriers).<sup>7</sup> Third, by examining concordances which, in turn, allow us to look more closely at the strategic document and analyse the context in which aircraft carriers were mentioned.<sup>8</sup> All of these analyses have to be conducted at the national level, with results then being

<sup>6</sup>The HCAs in this thesis were all run with Iramuteq. Results can be found in the appendix B.A.

<sup>7</sup>The co-occurrence analyses were run with TXM. Results are directly referred to in the text.

<sup>8</sup>The concordance analyses were run with TXM. Results are directly referred to in the text.

compared across countries (here France and the UK).

In France, the results of the HCAs suggest that the arms industry and procurement were a significant pillar of all defence white papers and strategic reviews published since 1980. Aircraft carriers, however, do not appear in any of the clusters, in spite of the issue being mentioned in all four strategic documents. This is mainly due to the fact that governments addressed carrier-related problems, but not very extensively. The 1994 defence white paper, for example, mentioned the French aircraft carrier 'Charles de Gaulle' only once. It identified the navy's flagship as a necessary equipment for various crisis scenarios, highlighting that "the control of the sky and the sea [were] prerequisites for successful operations" (French Ministry of Defence, 1994, p. 89).<sup>9</sup>

In 2008, aircraft carriers received more agenda space, as the specificity analysis already suggested. Indeed, the French government explained in detail why it decided to postpone the decision on whether the *Marine nationale* was to have a second carrier. First, because of budget constraints and spending priorities.<sup>10</sup> Second, because of a general fear that the acquisition of a second aircraft carrier would delay other, major defence programmes. Third, because it was unlikely for the *Porte-Avions 2* (PA 2) to be ready before the next maintenance period of the 'Charles de Gaulle' which, in turn, made the decision less urgent. Fourth, because there was still no consensus on whether the next carrier was to be a conventional or a nuclear one. And fifth, because the French government aimed, at that time, for co-developing the next generation of aircraft carriers together with the UK, with a final decision on the cooperation agreement to be taken in 2011-2012 (French Ministry of Defence, 2008, p. 214). The 2008 defence and national security white paper, consequently, discussed the advantages and disadvantages of a second carrier, highlighting the flexibility it would grant but also the costs it would induce.<sup>11</sup> Paradoxically, it gave a lot of agenda space to the matter, but mainly to justify why the problem would not be addressed immediately.

The 2013 defence and national security white paper and the 2017 strategic review subsequently only mentioned aircraft carriers a few times (4 times and 1 time, respectively) - and not necessarily with regard to the *Marine nationale*. In 2013, the French government focused on its naval forces, highlighting that the carrier and its task force

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<sup>9</sup>Original text: "La maîtrise du ciel et de la mer sont les conditions préalables au bon déroulement des opérations."

<sup>10</sup>The government aimed for giving priority to intelligence and the protection of its forces in combat (French Ministry of Defence, 2008, p. 214).

<sup>11</sup>The most frequent co-occurrences of 'aircraft carrier' in the 2008 defence and national security white paper are *deuxième* (5), *indépendamment* (5), *disponibilité* (4), *Charles* (4), *Gaulle* (4), *utilisés* (3), *accompagnement* (3), *aériens* (3) *nécessaires* (3), *construction* (2), *nucléaires* (2) and *aériens* (2). The numbers in parentheses represent the corresponding co-occurrence scores.

were vital for France's military operations.<sup>12</sup> In 2017, it addressed the acquisition of aircraft carriers only when discussing the toughening of the operational environment. More specifically, it noted a weaponisation of the high seas, with an increase in submarine fleets, the development of surface-to-surface missiles (SSMs) or ground-to-ground missiles (GGMs), and a larger number of states acquiring aircraft carriers. Surprisingly, the review did not mention whether France was still considering to equip its navy with a second carrier; it also did not discuss if, when or how the 'Charles de Gaulle' was to be replaced. The French carrier was, hence, a non-issue.

In the UK, in turn, the results of the HCAs do not only suggest that the arms industry and procurement were a significant pillar of the defence white papers and strategic reviews that British governments published between 1980 and 2018, but also that aircraft carriers had a special agenda status during that period. More specifically, the cluster analyses show that carrier-related topics were addressed quite extensively in the strategic documents of 1981, 1998, 2004 and 2010, usually together with other equipment-related policy issues. This is in line with the specificity analysis above which also suggested that carriers were discussed more often in those four documents.

In 1981, the British government underlined that it wanted to complete the new carrier 'Ark Royal' as planned, but that it aimed for keeping only two of the three ships of this class (British Ministry of Defence, 1981, p. 10). The 'HMS Hermes' was, hence, to be phased out. This decision was in line with the overall goal of the Nott review, namely the downsizing of the Royal Navy. The British government did not only want to have fewer aircraft carriers, but also intended to purchase less destroyers, frigates and amphibious ships. As I explained in Chapter 2, this change in the policy agenda was mainly due to the assumption that out-of-area missions were no longer going to be a priority for the British armed forces. In addition, the government believed that the cancellation of major equipment orders would allow for substantial savings to be made, a concern that had already been voiced in the Healey review in the 1960s.

After having been largely absent from the 1994 defence costs study, the 1998 SDR re-addressed the British 'carrier problem'. More specifically, the government underlined its intention "to buy two new larger aircraft carriers to project power more flexibly around the world" (British Ministry of Defence, 1998, p. 5).<sup>13</sup> To put it differently, the

<sup>12</sup>The most frequent co-occurrences of 'aircraft carrier' in the 2013 defence and national security white paper are *sous-marins* (7), *attaque* (5), *bâtiments* (4), *frégates* (4), *rang* (4), *nucléaires* (3), *premier* (3) and *commandement* (2). The numbers in parentheses represent the corresponding co-occurrence scores.

<sup>13</sup>The most frequent co-occurrences of 'aircraft carrier' in the 1998 SDR are 'hms' (6), 'two' (5), 'replace' (4), 'around' (4), 'aircraft' (4), 'larger' (4), '2012' (4), 'plan' (3), 'Harrier' (3), 'utility' (2), 'power' (2) and 'RAF' (2). The numbers in parentheses represent the corresponding co-occurrence scores.

UK aimed for replacing the 'HMS Invincible', the 'HMS Illustrious' and the 'HMS Ark Royal' as of 2012, opting for two more versatile ships that were able to rapidly move people and equipment to trouble spots. According to the British Ministry of Defence (1998, p. 39), those carriers would allow for power projection, deterrence and coercion.

In 2004, the British government devoted even more attention to aircraft carriers. The defence white paper notably highlighted the advantages of the new carrier class and discussed other, closely related procurement issues in more detail. The British Ministry of Defence (2004, p. 7), thus, stated that the carriers - which were meant to deploy joint combat aircraft (JCA) - "will have greater reach, sustainability and survivability than the existing carriers and will be able to deploy a much more powerful mix of fast jets and helicopters". Government attention, hence, did not only focus on the aircraft carriers, but started to expand to the carrier group as well as the aircraft that was meant to be launched from and landed on the platforms.<sup>14</sup>

The policy problem was taken up again in the 2010 SDSR. The British government confirmed its intention to decommission both the Invincible class of aircraft carriers and the Harrier aircraft, thereby accepting a gap of almost ten years in the carrier strike group as the procurement of the new aircraft carriers and the joint strike fighter (JSF) was scheduled for the late 2010s/early 2020s only. In the foreword, the British Ministry of Defence (2010, p. 5) underlined that this capability gap was mainly due to errors made by Gordon Brown's government which had committed to carriers that would have made it difficult for the UK to cooperate with its closest allies, in particular the US and France. David Cameron, hence, decided to address the issue differently and to accept significant delays in the delivery of the platforms. Rather than committing to two aircraft carriers, which would have negatively affected other, important investments for the British armed forces, he opted for a "carrier-strike based around a single new operational carrier with the second planned to be kept at extended readiness" (British Ministry of Defence, 2010, p. 21).<sup>15</sup> In addition, the government led by Cameron decided to make last-minute changes to the design of the Queen Elizabeth class to make sure that the new carrier generation was going to be compatible with the equipment of the UK's key allies. The planned changes in the design notably included the installation of a catapult and arrestor gear to be able to fly a version of the JSF.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup>The most frequent co-occurrences of 'aircraft carrier' in the 2004 defence white paper are 'amphibious' (5), 'task' (5), 'joint' (3), 'strike' (3), 'groups' (3), 'aircraft' (2), 'combat' (2), 'Harrier' (2) and 'existing' (2). The numbers in parentheses represent the corresponding co-occurrence scores.

<sup>15</sup>More specifically, the British government wanted to decide in 2015 whether it would sell or keep the second carrier.

<sup>16</sup>The most frequent co-occurrences of 'aircraft carrier' in the 2010 SDSR are 'jets' (5), 'capability' (5), 'French' (4), 'aircraft' (4), 'catapult' (4), 'fly' (4), 'carrier' (4), 'fighter' (3), 'joint' (3), 'strike' (3), 'two' (3), 'continuous' (3), 'allow' (3), 'new' (2), 'carrier-strike' (2), 'single' (2), 'fast' (2), 'landing' (2),

Compared to 2010, the policy problem was hardly addressed in the 2015 NSS and SDSR. The document specified that the two new Queen Elizabeth class aircraft carriers, now meant to enter into service from 2018 onwards, were the largest warships to ever be built for the Royal Navy. It then outlined future procurement choices, notably with regard to aircraft, logistic ships and tankers (British Ministry of Defence, 2015, p. 30), i.e. it put a variety of capabilities on the policy agenda that were necessary to be able to make the best use of the new British carriers.

To sum up, the agenda status of aircraft carriers strongly depends on the policy agenda one is looking at. While procurement-related policy issues literally disappeared from the *Communiqués de Conseil des ministres* and the Queen's Speech from the 1990s onwards, they have been addressed more or less extensively in all defence white papers and strategic reviews that France and the UK published between 1980 and 2018. Even though the UK has paid much more attention to the policy problem than France, issue attention has been volatile on both sides of the Channel, i.e. in some years, the acquisition of new carriers was discussed in great detail, in others, it was hardly mentioned. As I will explain later, this is *inter alia* due to the cyclical nature of the policy problem: indeed, carriers only have to be replaced every 30 to 40 years. In addition, it is also important to note that the framing of the policy problem did not change much over time, neither in the UK nor in France. It tends to be a matter of *when* and *how* governments will acquire a carrier (group).

### 4.3 The media agenda

In Chapter 3, I already highlighted that the French government underlined that media pressure had an impact on its agenda, in particular with regard to the recruitment of service personnel. The question then is if this also holds true for procurement-related policy issues. How did media attention to the acquisition of aircraft carriers evolve and how was the issue framed over time? In this section, I look at media coverage of carriers in France and the UK between 1980 and 2018, and provide evidence from an original data set that includes national news on the policy problem.<sup>17</sup>

Figure 4.4 compares how national newspapers covered aircraft carriers on both sides of the Channel between 1980 and 2018. More specifically, it provides an overview of the number of articles published on carriers per year. As in Chapter 3, it is crucial to note

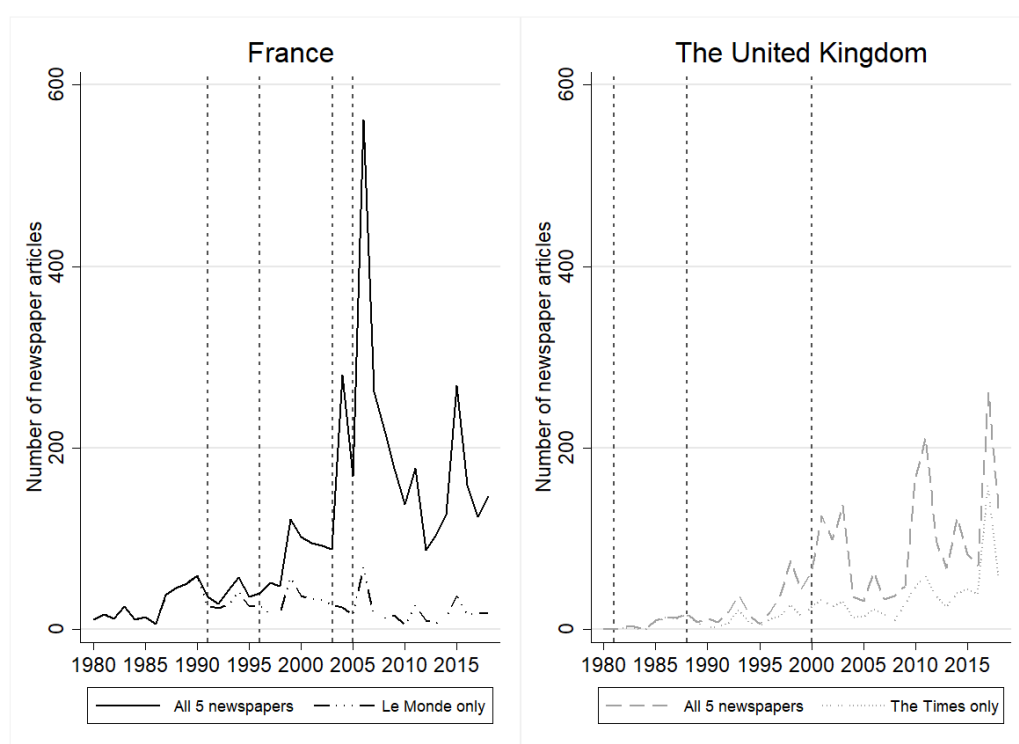
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'extended' (2), 'large' (2), 'operate' (2), 'mission' (2) and 'options' (2). The numbers in parentheses represent the corresponding co-occurrence scores.

<sup>17</sup>Appendix B.B explains in more detail how this media analysis was conducted and provides an overview of the search terms I used in Europresse and Factiva.

that the figure shows both coverage in five national newspapers *and* coverage in only one of those five newspapers, i.e. *Le Monde* in France and *The Times* of London in the UK. Due to data unavailability, only those two newspapers fully cover the period of this study and, therefore, serve as controls for the evolution of media attention to the navy's flagship. The vertical reference lines in Figure 4.4 indicate the years in which data for an additional newspaper start being available on Europresse and Factiva.<sup>18</sup> They allow us to be fully aware of the changes in the composition of the data set and, hence, to immediately see which 'spikes in media attention' are due to the research design and which increases correspond to a real change in the media agenda.

Figure 4.4: Media coverage of French and British aircraft carriers, 1980-2018



Sources: Author based on Europresse and Factiva data

What does the figure suggest? In both countries, media coverage has been rather volatile between 1980 and 2018. In addition, we note that newspapers in France and the UK have followed very similar trends, regardless of their political orientation. In France, attention peaked in 2006, with a total of 561 articles on French aircraft carriers,

<sup>18</sup>In France, data for *Les Échos*, *Le Figaro*, *Ouest-France* and *Le Parisien-Aujourd'hui en France* are available as of 1991, 1996, 2003 and 2005, respectively. In the UK, data for *Daily Mail* and *The Guardian* can be accessed as of 1981, while data for *The Independent* and *The Daily Telegraph* are available as of 1988 and 2000, respectively. Cf. Table 2.4 in Chapter 2 for an overview of the media database and the exact time periods covered by each newspaper included in this study.

out of which 68 were published in *Le Monde*. This spike in attention is, however, at least partially due to the composition of the data set: data from *Ouest-France* and *Le Parisien-Aujourd'hui en France* are, indeed, only available as of December 2003 and May 2005, respectively. This being said, the bias in the media database does not account for the high levels of media attention to aircraft carriers from the 2010s onwards. In the UK, in turn, attention peaked twice, in 2011 and 2017, with a significant share of articles being published by The Times of London. The question then is *how* the British and the French media addressed and framed the policy problem.

In France, the media published a total of 4,130 articles on French aircraft carriers between 1980 and 2018. News coverage peaked on 16 February 2006, with 29 articles being published that day. While the majority of news stories were framed positively (62 %), the topics that the French media address with regard to aircraft carriers vary widely. Some articles describe the missions and operations for which the French carriers are or have been used in the past. This is particularly true whenever an aircraft carrier is about to be decommissioned. Others discuss the advantages and disadvantages of acquiring a second aircraft carrier. These articles usually underline that a second platform is useful to cover periods of maintenance and, hence, to remain operational, but also implies that a significant share of the defence budget has to be allocated to defence procurement. Sometimes, they also cover more technical and industrial problems that are linked to the acquisition of aircraft carriers, but whenever they do, they do so in rather concrete terms. Still others deal with the evolution of the strategic environment and provide information on the state of American, British and Chinese aircraft carriers, for example. The media also covered the Franco-British project of co-developing the next generation of aircraft carriers, a project which eventually did not materialise. If we only look at the agenda of *Le Monde* - i.e. the only French newspaper for which we have data that cover the entire period 1980-2018 -, we find very similar priorities in news coverage. Overall, the newspaper published 987 articles on French aircraft carriers, with most news stories being framed positively (58 %).

In the UK, in turn, the media published a total of 2,225 articles on carriers between 1980 and 2018. Just like in France, the topics on the British media agenda vary widely, with one key difference though: the take on carriers is slightly more critical.<sup>19</sup> Similar to the news coverage in France, some articles describe the missions and operations for which the British carriers are or have been used in the past. This is particularly true whenever a carrier is about to be withdrawn from service. In those cases, the British media print a 'farewell article', providing an overview of the aircraft carrier's missions

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<sup>19</sup>Contrary to *Europresse*, *Factiva* does not provide a percentage for negative, neutral or positive media coverage.



over the past 25 years. In addition, it is quite common for the press to publish obituaries of soldiers who served on one of the Royal Navy's flagships during their military career. Others discuss the implications of having two or more aircraft carriers, both positive and negative ones. They underline, for example, that the construction of carriers in the UK creates jobs, but also point out the inefficiencies in the procurement process. More specifically, the British media criticised that the latest generation of British aircraft carriers was designed and built in six different yards across the UK. Several articles stressed that this was not only costly, but also led to delays in the procurement process. They also pointed to 'pork-barrel politics', questioning why Brown insisted on having aircraft carrier work being done at Rosyth, near his constituency. In addition, the British media regularly emphasise that the government does not only have to commit to the acquisition of carriers, but also to the recruitment of sailors to man those ships and to the procurement of aircraft to be used on the platforms. Still others deal with the evolution of the strategic environment and provide information on how British carriers perform compared to American, Chinese, Japanese and Russian designs, for instance. It is interesting to note here that French carriers are hardly ever mentioned. If we only look at the agenda of The Times of London - i.e. the only British newspaper for which we have data that cover the entire period 1980-2018 -, we find similar priorities and trends in news coverage. Overall, the newspaper published 891 articles on carriers, with the number of articles increasing over time.

To sum up, the French media gave more agenda space to aircraft carriers than their British counterparts over the past 40 years. This being said, the news coverage of French and British carriers has been rather volatile between 1980 and 2018 which, in turn, suggests once more that the nature of the policy problem is cyclical. National newspapers in both countries covered similar issues over time, most of which also figured on the policy agenda. In France, for example, the media focused quite extensively on the advantages and disadvantages of having a second carrier; in the UK, media outlets concentrated on the (economic) implications of having two or more aircraft carriers. The key difference between the news coverage in the UK and France is, however, the tone. As I already underlined in Chapter 3, issues can hit the agenda on a wave of positive publicity, or they can be raised in an environment of bad news - with different policy consequences. The tone of British press coverage of carriers is, every now and then, rather negative, in particular when journalists cover the economic burden that comes along with the acquisition of aircraft carriers or when they report on inefficiencies in the UK's defence procurement process. In France, news outlets are much more likely to inform the public about the flagship of the *Marine nationale*, and to highlight the role it plays in international relations in a more neutral way. As I will explain later,

this positive - or rather non-negative - stance is partially due to the fact that aircraft carriers are a symbol of power on the international scene.

## 4.4 The public agenda

From the above, it becomes clear that the status of aircraft carriers has changed on the policy and the media agendas. In both cases, the issue is rather volatile, i.e. in some years, attention to carriers is high, in others, it is a non-issue. The question then is how the public has perceived the policy problem over time - if it perceived the issue at all. As I already mentioned several times in this manuscript, it is not straightforward to measure the public's priorities in terms of government attention to defence. This is mainly due to the fact that defence is hardly ever the focus of national and international surveys. And whenever defence is addressed, surveys tend to cover highly salient issues, such as military operations (cf. Chapter 5). Procurement - be it of civilian or military nature - is, indeed, often a non-issue in public opinion surveys.

Contrary to the recruitment of service personnel, where it was possible to combine various data sources to grasp what the public thought about the policy issue, it is very difficult to find useful public opinion data on the acquisition of aircraft carriers. National and international surveys very rarely include procurement-related items. While missing data are an issue for any longitudinal analysis, they are less of a problem for studies that have an agenda-setting perspective. Indeed, the years for which we have data on public opinion and the acquisition of aircraft carriers are particularly interesting to analyse as they show that the issue had reached a level of importance where policy-makers deemed it necessary to sound out the public's perspective on the matter. The years for which we do not have any data, in turn, are also insightful as they do suggest that the issue was either policy- or media-driven, i.e. in those years the general public did not have a significant impact on government priorities.

Generally speaking, surveys in France and the UK indirectly address procurement since the 2010s, i.e. the polls of the *ministère des Armées* and the British MOD aim at identifying whether the general public considers the national armed forces to be well-equipped (or not). Results show that respondents either believe that the armed forces are not particularly well-equipped or that they do not know enough about the policy issue to answer that question (British Ministry of Defence, 2017; Ifop, 2017). In the UK, the MOD includes two additional, equipment-related questions: the first asks whether respondents think that the ministry works well with industry to provide the best equipment for the armed forces (since 2011, one third of respondents tend

to disagree); the second asks whether respondents believe that the ministry needs to invest in military equipment and capability to protect national security (since 2014, over 80 % of respondents tend to agree) (British Ministry of Defence, 2017).

In its 2016/2017 edition, the in-house survey of the British MOD additionally figured two questions on the latest generation of aircraft carriers as well as the aircraft to be used on those platforms. These questions targeted both the public's awareness of the policy issue and its opinion on the matter. As Figure 4.1 illustrates, the MOD included the two questions just before the 'HMS Queen Elizabeth' and the 'HMS Prince of Wales' were commissioned in 2017 and 2019, respectively. Rather than following the evolution of British public opinion on the acquisition of aircraft carriers over time, the MOD aimed for grasping public mood on the issue at a very specific moment in time, namely right before the commissioning of the carriers into the Royal Navy fleet.

Table 4.1: Awareness of the delivery of the Queen Elizabeth class aircraft carriers and the F-35 aircraft in the United Kingdom, 2016-2017

The British armed forces will soon take delivery of the UK's two new aircraft carriers and a fleet of F-35 aircraft. Which of these best sums up your awareness of this?

	%
You are aware of both.	36
You are aware of the aircraft carriers, but not of the F-35 aircraft.	20
You are aware of the F-35 aircraft, but not of the aircraft carriers.	1
You are aware of neither.	43

Source: Based on British Ministry of Defence (2017), edition 2016/2017

Table 4.1 shows that only 36 % of the British public was aware that the British armed forces were about to receive two new aircraft carriers, the 'HMS Queen Elizabeth' and the 'HMS Prince of Wales', as well as a fleet of F-35 aircraft. 43 %, in turn, declared not to be informed about this acquisition. In addition, the table highlights that 20 % of the British public knew about the carriers, but not about the aircraft (for only 1 % of the public, it was the other way round). Hence, 57 % of respondents were aware about the equipment choices of and upcoming deliveries for the Royal Navy.

Table 4.2 completes this picture on British public opinion by providing insights on how respondents perceived the Queen Elizabeth class of aircraft carriers and the fleet of F-35 aircraft. Generally speaking, over 70 % of the public considers the acquisitions to be important, notably because they provide security, are good for the UK econ-

Table 4.2: British public opinion on the Queen Elizabeth class aircraft carriers and the F-35 aircraft, 2016-2017

Thinking about the new aircraft carriers and the F-35 aircraft, can you tell me to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements?

		Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Do not know
The new aircraft carriers and F-35 aircraft will keep Britain safe by providing security at home and abroad.	%	43	30	15	4	4	5
The new aircraft carriers and F-35 are good for the UK economy and for jobs.	%	40	30	15	4	4	7
The new aircraft carriers and F-35 aircraft demonstrate the UK's international influence and commitment to working together with allies and partners.	%	43	34	13	3	3	5

Source: Based on British Ministry of Defence (2017), edition 2016/2017

omy and demonstrate the country's influence on the international scene as well as its commitment to work together with allies and partners.

To sum up, governments on both sides of the Channel deemed it necessary to sound out public opinion on defence procurement from the 2010s onwards. The results of those national opinion polls show that the French and the British public consider their armed forces to be not ideally equipped. In the UK, the MOD additionally included questions on the latest generation of British aircraft carriers as well as the aircraft to be used on those platforms. Here results suggest that there is a strong support

for those investments, even if the public acknowledges that it is not fully aware of the policy problem and the solutions that the British government already proposed. Two conclusions - that may initially seem to be contradictory - can be drawn from those results. First, the overall lack of public opinion data on procurement - and more specifically on the acquisition of aircraft carriers - suggests that the public does not have a significant impact on government investment priorities. Second, the fact that the defence ministries on both sides of the Channel started to commission surveys on defence procurement implies that public opinion may nonetheless affect the defence policy agenda - but not with regard to procurement choices. Instead, it matters for making sure that young people perceive the armed forces as being well-equipped and are, hence, willing to join them (cf. Chapter 3 in which I examine the agenda dynamics of recruitment). I will discuss those conclusions in more detail in the next section.

## 4.5 The agenda-dynamics of acquiring aircraft carriers

After having analysed *when* the acquisition of aircraft carriers emerged as a policy problem and *how* it was framed over time, I will now focus on its agenda-building dynamics, i.e. I will examine *how* the policy, the media and the public agendas interact and *how* the strategic context affects them. More specifically, the aim of this section is to explain why the acquisition of aircraft carriers is a government priority in France and the UK, and to demonstrate that procurement-related policies are policy-driven, i.e. before the media and the general public pay attention to the procurement of carriers, policy-makers - at the national and/or the international level - have to identify the policy problem (e.g. the lack of power projection capabilities) and its consequences (e.g. the inability to quickly intervene abroad). The acquisition of aircraft carriers, therefore, does not only qualify as a governmental defence issue; its agenda-setting dynamics also suggest a certain normalisation of defence as a public policy.

### 4.5.1 Aircraft carriers as a domestic and a foreign policy tool

From the above, it becomes clear that neither the media nor public opinion are key to understanding government attention to the acquisition of aircraft carriers. To put it differently, the procurement of the navy's flagship becomes important to policy-makers before it sparks the interest of journalists and the general public. It is, consequently, crucial to understand why policy-makers in France and the UK care about having and

maintaining this capability, and to examine which conditions may hinder them from fully committing to it. In this section, I argue that British and French governments pay attention to aircraft carriers because they are high-profile capabilities that allow for rapid force projection and reflect their willingness to figure among the world's most powerful navies. This being said, the status, signalling power and freedom of manoeuvre that carriers grant also come at a significant cost and oblige policy-makers to make trade-offs at the domestic level.

#### 4.5.1.1 The importance of signalling in international relations

Defence procurement has, as I already mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, several goals. It aims at properly equipping the armed forces, and obtaining and maintaining a certain degree of national sovereignty, all while realising indirect benefits from those capital investments. For precisely this reason, procurement is often considered to be a key activity of the state. The decision to acquire aircraft carriers is, however, somewhat specific in that regard. Given that only eight states currently possess such warships, carriers are not 'just' a military equipment that contributes to a country's national sovereignty: they are also a crucial signalling tool in international relations. Several interviewees, thus, underlined that aircraft carriers allowed the UK and France to show their military excellence on the international scene and were, therefore, an important symbol of power.<sup>20</sup> As the French would say, Paris and London explicitly chose to possess 42,000 and 65,000 tonnes of diplomacy.

The empirical analysis of British and French defence white papers and strategic reviews showed that governments on both sides of the Channel commit to aircraft carriers because they allow for rapid and flexible force projection in a variety of crisis scenarios, i.e. they grant Paris and London with a certain freedom of manoeuvre on the international scene, politically and militarily. This holds true for unilateral but also for multinational operations during which the UK and France are able to contribute to the naval presence of their alliances. It is, consequently, also unsurprising that strategic documents in both countries tend to tout the next generation of aircraft carriers as the largest and most powerful warships of the *Marine nationale* and the Royal Navy, and to emphasise, as we have seen above, that it is the government's priority to cross-check and to ensure that its military equipment is compatible with that of its allies.

Although governments on both sides of the Channel devote significant levels of attention to their navy's flagship, London and Paris have distinct approaches to defence procurement which are also fully reflected in their defence policy agendas. The analysis

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<sup>20</sup>Interviews with a civil servant at the MOD (ID 12) and two defence journalists (ID 15, ID 23)

of issue attention in section 4.2 suggests that policy priorities notably differed with regard to the type and the number of aircraft carriers to acquire. Generally speaking, there are three types of aircraft carrier configurations which mainly differ in the system being used for launching and recovering aircraft on the deck: the catapult assisted take-off but arrested recovery (CATOBAR) system, the short take-off and vertical landing (STOVL) system and the short take-off but arrested recovery (STOBAR) system. With the (conventional) CATOBAR system, aircraft launch by using a catapult assisted take-off and land on the ship thanks to arrestor wires.<sup>21</sup> The (alternative) STOVL system requires, as its name already suggests, aircraft that is able to take-off from a short runway and to land vertically.<sup>22</sup> The STOBAR system, in turn, combines elements of STOVL- and CATOBAR-type carriers, i.e. aircraft use a ski-jump - rather than a catapult - to assist take-off, but require arrestor wings to land on the platform.<sup>23</sup> The CATOBAR system is more expensive than the two alternative operating systems, but also provides for greater flexibility in carrier operations as all conventional aircraft can be launched from and landed on the platform.

In addition, it is important to keep in mind that aircraft carriers can be nuclear or non-nuclear powered. Nuclear-powered carriers ensure exceptional autonomy and can be deployed for long periods and at great distances from their home ports. At the time of writing, the French 'Charles de Gaulle' is the only non-American carrier-vessel that is nuclear powered and has a catapult launch system. As one interviewee emphasised, this political choice dates back to the presidential term of François Mitterand who wanted to make sure that the French armed forces had a powerful platform that was compatible with all types of aircraft.<sup>24</sup> The flagship of the *Marine nationale*, hence, does not only fully embody French nuclear policy, it also grants France a very specific status within the already 'privileged club of carrier owners'. This is important to remember as it largely explains why French governments have a preference for nuclear carriers, as the defence white papers and strategic reviews above already suggested, even if this more expensive policy choice implies having only one platform.<sup>25</sup>

British governments, in turn, systematically opt for non-nuclear-powered STOVL-type carriers - even when they voice interest in installing a catapult and arrestor gear as in 2010. There are several reasons for this priority. First, we should keep in mind that nuclear issues are more controversial in the UK than they are in France.<sup>26</sup> Second,

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<sup>21</sup>France and the US currently have CATOBAR-type carriers.

<sup>22</sup>Spain, Italy, the UK and the US currently have STOVL-type carriers.

<sup>23</sup>China, India and Russia currently have STOBAR-type carriers.

<sup>24</sup>Interview with a civil servant at the *ministère des Armées* (ID 24)

<sup>25</sup>Cf. the 2008 defence and national security white paper in which the French government justified its decision to have only one operational carrier for now.

<sup>26</sup>Interviews with a defence policy advisor to a political party (ID 1) and a defence policy advisor

non-nuclear-powered aircraft carriers, while they are less powerful, are also cheaper in their acquisition, maintenance *and* dismantling.<sup>27</sup> Those savings, which can be further increased when governments opt for the STOVL or the STOBAR system, help the UK to afford at least two aircraft carriers. This policy priority, which is highlighted in almost all British strategic documents that address the carrier problem, is mainly due to the UK's 'Falkland-Islands-trauma', and allows the British government to signal its operational independence.<sup>28</sup> As one interviewee argued, it makes sense to have two or more carriers as it enables governments to always have a platform at disposal, even when one warship is not serviceable because it has to be maintained.<sup>29</sup> This is particularly true for states that opt for nuclear-powered ships because their maintenance takes longer. Indeed, the most important period of maintenance of an aircraft carrier, which has to be scheduled every seven years, lasts 18 instead of 12 months when the warship is nuclear powered. This, in turn, explains why the 'Charles de Gaulle' is, on average, only available 65 % of the time (French Ministry of Defence, 2008, p. 214). Contrary to the UK which tends to have two or three carriers that can cover each others periods of maintenance, the French government currently has to rely on its allies' capabilities while the 'Charles de Gaulle' is maintained, not only for conducting missions and operations but also for training exercises.<sup>30</sup> Given that the credibility of any military equipment depends on its availability,<sup>31</sup> the question of whether France should acquire a second carrier has come up regularly in national defence debates, in particular since the 'Clemenceau-Foch duo' was decommissioned in the late 1990s.<sup>32</sup>

To sum up, France and the UK both use their aircraft carriers for signalling purposes, but they send very different messages to the national and international defence community. While Paris signals that it can keep up with US equipment choices, the UK makes it clear that its key priority is to be able to afford at least two platforms, even if this implies opting for 'less powerful' warships. To put it differently, London's message is that operationality matters more than status.

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to the government (ID 27)

<sup>27</sup>Interview with a civil servant at the *ministère des Armées* (ID 24)

<sup>28</sup>Cf. Chapter 2 for a discussion on how the Falkland Islands war affected British defence policy.

<sup>29</sup>Interview with a defence journalist (ID 15)

<sup>30</sup>Pilots, for example, need to get regular carrier landing training even when the state's aircraft carriers are undergoing maintenance.

<sup>31</sup>Interview with a defence journalist (ID 15)

<sup>32</sup>Interview with a defence policy advisor at the *Sénat* (ID 30)



#### 4.5.1.2 To invest or not to invest in aircraft carriers? Policy trade-offs at the domestic level

From the above we can conclude that government attention to procurement is not only driven by foreign policy ambitions. Aircraft carriers are a national symbol of resolve and allow governments to signal their military excellence, but they have a significant cost, obliging the executive to make various trade-offs at the domestic level. According to several interviewees, the latter include a series of important budgetary decisions, e.g. how to allocate defence spending between manpower and equipment, between conventional and nuclear forces and between the army, the air force and the navy.<sup>33</sup>

Whenever a government decides to acquire aircraft carriers, it has to make several decisions - all of which have wider policy implications. First and foremost, as we have seen above, governments have to agree on the number and the type of warship to procure. This choice, in turn, directly impacts the size of the task force<sup>34</sup> and the aircraft fleet, both of which are necessary to support and effectively use the carrier, as well as the number of personnel that is required to operate and maintain the platform(s).<sup>35</sup> To put it differently, if a government wants its aircraft carrier to live up to its full potential, it needs, as one interviewee argued, a well-balanced navy that is supported by a sound army and air force.<sup>36</sup> Operating an aircraft carrier is, hence, particularly costly, both in the short and the long run, which may explain why governments in France and the UK only put the issue on the agenda whenever they really have to.

Second, governments have to decide *when* and *how* to acquire aircraft carriers. In countries like France and the UK that already possess aircraft carriers and face budget constraints the issue usually gains traction whenever a platform needs to be replaced. This, in turn, tends to be the case every 30 to 40 years and explicates why the issue ebbs and flows on government agendas over time. Once the time is ripe, policy-makers have to check if they are able to build the aircraft carriers at home or together with a partner *or* if they have to import the warships from abroad. All of these options have advantages and disadvantages, notably economic, technological, industrial, employment-related and strategic ones. Given that the UK and France have a large DIB,<sup>37</sup> they usually opt for building the carriers themselves. This decision is

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<sup>33</sup>It is important to keep in mind that the navy is particularly capital-intensive, especially compared to the army (Interviews with civil servants at the *ministère des Armées* (ID 17, ID 18)).

<sup>34</sup>As a reminder, the task force may include amphibious ships, destroyers, frigates, mine hunters and submarines, for instance.

<sup>35</sup>The smaller the platform, the less manpower is required to operate it (Interviews with defence journalists (ID 15, ID 23) and a defence policy advisor to the government (ID 27)).

<sup>36</sup>Interviews with a defence journalist (ID 15) and a defence policy advisor to the government (ID 27)

<sup>37</sup>Cf. Chapter 2 for an overview of the French and the British arms industry.

also due to domestic considerations, as defence has a strong local dimension on both sides of the Channel, with the (naval) defence industry being particularly present in some areas,<sup>38</sup> such as Brest, Portsmouth, Toulon and Rosyth. It, thus, contributes to employment, the creation or maintenance of high-technology skills, spin-offs, etc.

All in all, defence procurement is a routine issue for French and British governments. Contrary to the recruitment of service personnel, which I discussed in Chapter 3, it is, however, not a daily or yearly concern for policy-makers as attention to procurement depends on the operating cycle of the equipment in question. In the case of carriers, the latter is maximised and, therefore, requires strategic foresight from the actors involved in the acquisition of the platform. As I will explain later, it is precisely the need for long-term planning that tends to make defence procurement - and in particular the acquisition of aircraft carriers - an adjustment variable at the domestic level. This is all the more true since government plays a triple role in the defence industry: it is not only the client, but also an industrial actor and the regulator. Consequently, it has to balance political, strategic, operational and economic considerations when it decides to procure military equipment for its armed forces.

#### 4.5.1.3 How government priorities affect the media and the public agendas

It follows from the above that the acquisition of aircraft carriers is largely policy-driven, i.e. governments draw the issue to the forefront for domestic and foreign policy reasons. The priorities of British and French governments, hence, explain *why* procurement was addressed in national defence white papers and strategic reviews, and *how* the issue was framed over time. The predominant agenda dynamic is, consequently, between the policy agenda and the other two agendas, i.e. carriers fully qualify as a governmental defence issue. In line with the theoretical framework that I proposed in Chapter 1, any relationship between the three agendas and real-world indicators is, thus, secondary to the effects that the policy agenda has on media and public priorities. This, however, does not mean that there are no interactions with the strategic environment or that media coverage and public opinion do not matter. To the contrary, as the empirical analysis above already suggested, both the security and the economic situation may constrain the policy options of decision-makers, and the media may raise issues that governments would have preferred to let go in silence.

First and foremost, the theoretical model that I proposed to explain the dynamics of defence policy agendas suggests that the strategic environment may be more or less crucial to account for the evolution of government attention to defence-related

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<sup>38</sup>Interview with a civil servant at the *ministère des Armées* (ID 24)

policy problems, depending on the issue's attributes. In Chapter 3, I already showed that the policy context evolved quite significantly since the 1980s, and underlined that shifts in the security environment, economic downturns, demographic changes and the relationship between the armed forces and society were key to understanding why the recruitment of service personnel became and remained a government priority in France and the UK. Not all of those changes, however, have had an impact on the agenda-building dynamics of defence procurement. To the contrary, to fully comprehend how the acquisition of aircraft carriers has been understood, framed and addressed as a policy problem since 1980, only two contextual aspects have to be taken into account: the security environment and the economic situation. These two constraints have been explicitly addressed in the defence white papers and strategic reviews that I discussed above which, in turn, suggests that governments on both sides of the Channel were well aware of how the strategic context affected their procurement choices.

In France, governments did not only underline that the 'Charles de Gaulle' was key to the success of French military operations (French Ministry of Defence, 1994, 2013), but also stressed the toughening of the operational environment and that more and more states started to equip their forces with seagoing airbases (French Ministry of the Armed Forces, 2017b). There was, hence, an underlying assumption that France had to keep up with other states in terms of military equipment. In the UK, the executive focused on the role that carriers played for British troop deployments, underlining in particular their power projection, deterrence and coercion capacities (British Ministry of Defence, 1998, 2004), i.e. British governments emphasised that carriers were a useful policy tool on the international scene. While the evolution of the security environment, which is increasingly characterised by out-of-area missions, hence, encouraged London and Paris to maintain their platforms, the economic situation - combined with the impact the peace dividends have had on defence spending in the 1990s<sup>39</sup> - constrained the policy options the two countries had at hand. The state of the French economy is, for instance, important to fully understand why Nicolas Sarkozy decided to postpone the acquisition of a second aircraft carrier in 2008 (French Ministry of Defence, 2008). In the UK, in turn, budgetary considerations are more or less omnipresent when the defence agenda is set, as I explained in more detail in Chapter 2. They largely explain why London opts for smaller and more affordable warships. Consequently, the strategic context matters for defence procurement: it may shape the agenda, but more importantly, it directly affects the government's policy options.

Second, there may be interactions between the policy, the media and the public

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<sup>39</sup>As one interviewee argued, by the end of the 1990s, it was more and more difficult to make the case for more military spending (Interview with a civil servant at the FCO and the MOD (ID 14)).

agendas. Even though governmental defence issues are not usually chosen by the media because they tend to be abstract, the acquisition of aircraft carriers has been covered quite extensively by the French and the British press between 1980 and 2018. There are several reasons for this trend. First, the platform itself is a media emblem, in particular in France. One of the interviewees, thus, underlined that "you sell journals with an article on the [French] carrier: it encourages the armed forces, it displeases certain allies - it is one of those rare moments where we can still have the illusion of being a real power".<sup>40</sup> Second, aircraft carriers are linked to a variety of other defence issues, such as HR- or industrial-related ones, i.e. the media can opt for a non-technical perspective on the policy problem. This is fully in line with the empirical analysis above which had already shown that the newspapers in France and the UK tend to cover the advantages and disadvantages of having aircraft carriers, the missions and operations of the platforms, the need for a carrier group and service personnel to operate the warships etc. As one interviewee rightly argued, the media do not affect but closely follow the policy agenda, i.e. they mainly report already known information.<sup>41</sup> To put it differently, the media act primarily as a conduit for government-led issue cues. It is, thus, also unsurprising that media attention ebbs and flows over time: like the policy agenda, the media agenda reflects the cyclical nature of the problem. The case of aircraft carriers, thus, also illustrates the difficulty to create a steady, long-term media interest for defence issues that only peak every other decade.<sup>42</sup>

In line with the theoretical framework that I proposed in Chapter 1, the media may affect public opinion on aircraft carriers, but this effect - if it exists - is only secondary as the acquisition of warships does not have a directly observable impact on most individuals. It can, however, be reinforced if the policy problem is discussed with regard to its political, economic, ethical or social implications. This seems to be the case in the UK where newspapers covered the procurement of the Queen Elizabeth class in a rather critical way. As the media analysis above already suggested, the latest generation of British aircraft carriers brought together all potential dilemmas that governments may face when acquiring weapons systems: programme delays, cost overruns, accusations of pork-barrel politics... The government, hence, decided to sound out public opinion on the matter. From the 2016-2017 poll, which I discussed in section 4.4, the British MOD understood that the public had little knowledge about the Royal Navy's flagship. According to one interviewee, the MOD, hence, changed its communication strategy and started to tell the public more explicitly what the carriers were meant to do.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup>Interview with a defence journalist (ID 26)

<sup>41</sup>Interview with a civil servant at the *ministère des Armées* (ID 19)

<sup>42</sup>Interview with a civil servant at the *ministère des Armées* (ID 19)

<sup>43</sup>Interview with a civil servant at the MOD (ID 12)

Rather than shaping the government's procurement agenda, the public's support for British policy priorities mattered because it was an indirect measure of how the armed forces were perceived - as an employer, as a contributor to the UK's economy, as an actor on the international scene, etc. It was also a way to counterbalance negative news coverage, an issue that is less of a concern in France where media reports on the flagship of the *Marine nationale* tend to be neutral or positive.<sup>44</sup>

The agenda dynamics of the acquisition of aircraft carriers - which are similar to those that Soroka (2002a) identified for national unity - suggest that defence procurement has been normalising as a public policy, at least to some extent. It is, like many other, domestic issues, policy-driven. This, in turn, implies that parts of the legal domain do not withdraw from the 'traditional' agenda-setting dynamics anymore. In the case of defence procurement, some specificities do, however, remain. The latter are mainly due to the triple role of government, being the client, the regulator and an industrial actor at the same time. Given that agenda-setting is the first stage of the policy cycle (cf. Chapter 1), it affects policy formulation, policy implementation and policy evaluation. In the last subsection, I will, hence, shortly discuss how government attention to aircraft carriers shaped procurement-related policies in France and the UK and explain why those policies - and how they have been evaluated over time - provide additional empirical evidence for the normalisation of the sector.

#### **4.5.2 The impact of agenda-setting on procurement policies: Towards a normalisation of defence?**

The analysis of the policy, the media and the public agendas does not only suggest that the acquisition of aircraft carriers is policy-driven, but also shows that procurement does not always play out as initially planned. Major equipment programmes tend to be delayed, adjusted or even cancelled over time. This is mainly due to the fact that France and the UK aim for efficient and effective public policies, but face budget constraints that oblige them to make trade-offs. Agenda-setting and policy-making also differ because the interests of the actors involved in the procurement process do not necessarily converge. While the military is keen to have the latest generation of aircraft carriers and the national defence industry eager to produce them - and, therefore, also likely to underestimate the programme costs - governments are more and more obliged to look for 'value for money'. London and Paris, thus, face 'conspiracy of optimism' in their defence sectors which is particularly troublesome as they both strive for more transparency and accountability in defence, including in procurement. The willingness

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<sup>44</sup>Interview with a civil servant at the *ministère des Armées* (ID 19)

to make defence less of a black box suggests a certain normalisation of the policy which is, as I will show in this last subsection, also increasingly subject to parliamentary scrutiny and audit by the NAO and the *Cour des Comptes*.

#### 4.5.2.1 ‘Conspiracy of optimism’ - or how aircraft carriers may become an adjustment variable

Contrary to the recruitment of service personnel where the priorities that governments identified for HR management translated rather neatly into public policies (cf. Chapter 3), it is very common that procurement plans fail, in one way or another. Most acquisition projects are, indeed, either modified, delayed or cancelled. This is because they are policy-driven and not real-world led, i.e. governments have more room for manoeuvre when deciding whether, when and how to procure aircraft carriers.

**Do they walk like they talk?** From the empirical analysis above, it becomes clear that governments on both sides of the Channel regularly change the agenda that they initially set for the procurement of aircraft carriers, i.e. the policy priorities they highlight in government statements, speeches, defence white papers and strategic reviews do not necessarily translate into procurement policies. This is particularly true in the UK. In 1981, for example, the British government aimed for keeping only two of the three ships of the Ark Royal class (British Ministry of Defence, 1981). Due to the Falkland Islands war, however, it eventually did not decommission its third carrier. Similarly, in 2010, David Cameron decided to focus on a carrier-strike group around one carrier only, with a second planned to be kept at extended readiness (or to be sold later on). He also announced to purchase the Lockheed F-35C carrier variant and to build the new generation of British aircraft carriers in a CATOBAR configuration (British Ministry of Defence, 2010). None of these priorities materialised in the end. To the contrary, due to rising cost estimates, the government reverted to the original design proposed by Gordon Brown, i.e. it decided to deploy F-35Bs from (two) STOVL carriers and, hence, accepted that the equipment of the British military would be less compatible with the capabilities of its closest allies.

Every now and then, however, governments on both sides of the Channel ‘walk like they talk’ - even if they may walk rather slowly and do not always choose the most efficient route to reach their destination. In the case of carriers, this implies both programme delays and cost overruns. As one interviewee put it, “[t]he success of British spending programmes depends on their failure”.<sup>45</sup> This means that they

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<sup>45</sup>Interview with a civil servant at the FCO and the MOD (ID 9)

will only materialise if they are late and more expensive than initially planned. The latest generation of British aircraft carriers illustrates this pattern - which also holds for France - rather well. In the 1998 SDR, the UK government stressed its intention to buy two larger carriers to project power around the world. Both ships were meant to be ready by 2012 (British Ministry of Defence, 1998). This plan did not work out though. First, the 'HMS Queen Elizabeth' and the 'HMS Prince of Wales' were commissioned in 2017 and 2019, i.e. they were 5 and 7 years late. Second, the carrier programme, which was initially budgeted at £3.65bn, ended up costing £6.2bn, with cost overruns being shared between the MOD and contractors. How did that happen?

Both Tony Blair and Gordon Brown had committed to two carriers. While the Navy was in favour of this agenda, HM Treasury opposed it from the beginning.<sup>46</sup> In spite of being sensible to defence issues, "Treasury remembers all the cases in which the MOD wanted more money and then failed its projects so 'successfully' that Parliament decided to launch an inquiry".<sup>47</sup> To put it differently, the UK's economic and finance ministry would have preferred to cut the programme to avoid any additional cost overruns. Defence programmes are, indeed, particularly prone to go over budget. According to several interviewees, this is mainly due to the fact that procurement requires medium- and long-term commitment to the armament project in question, i.e. there is little leeway if programme changes have to be made over time.<sup>48</sup> It is, thus, also rather unsurprising that a review, initiated by Cameron, came to the conclusion that it was cheaper for the taxpayer if government went ahead with the carrier programme, which had already been 12 years in the making, than if it cancelled the contract.<sup>49</sup>

The Queen Elizabeth class is, therefore, mainly the result of conspiracy of optimism, with various actors being in favour of the carriers, all while having doubts about the feasibility of the project. As one British interviewee<sup>50</sup> highlighted:

"The day after they were announced, I was in the minister's office and I said to him 'I very much doubt those carriers will ever be built' and he looked at me and said 'you may be right, but let's hope not'."

Indeed, there was an overall agreement in the national *and* the international defence community that the amount of carriers the UK was about to purchase was too high, but it remained a non-issue as the contract for the warships had already been prepared.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>46</sup>Interview with a civil servant at the FCO and the MOD (ID 14)

<sup>47</sup>Interview with a civil servant at the FCO and the MOD (ID 14)

<sup>48</sup>Interviews with a defence policy advisor to a political party (ID 1) and a civil servant at the *ministère des Armées* (ID 17)

<sup>49</sup>Interview with a defence policy advisor to the MOD (ID 8)

<sup>50</sup>Interview with a defence journalist (ID 15)

<sup>51</sup>One interviewee highlighted that the UK consulted the US prior to publishing its 2010 SDSR,

Conspiracy of optimism, within the MOD, the military and the industry, thus, created a 'bow wave', which the ministry internally also referred to as a 'tsunami', that eventually ran the programme into a wall.<sup>52</sup> It was, thus, a strategic choice and smart move to call the new generation of carriers the 'Queen Elizabeth class': "even if you really wanted to, you just can't cancel a ship named after the Queen".<sup>53</sup>

Not all aircraft carrier programmes that were mentioned in the strategic documents analysed above were that lucky though. The defence white papers and strategic reviews on both sides of the Channel refer, for instance, to the government's intention to co-construct a carrier generation with its French/British counterpart. Given that the UK needed to replace its warships in the 2010s and that France aimed for procuring a second platform at that period of time, the project would have allowed for reduced unit costs. However, the Franco-British aircraft carrier failed more or less on the starting line already. As one interviewee argued, the cooperation agreement looked very promising on paper, but there were several differences that the UK and France did not manage to overcome.<sup>54</sup> France had a preference for a nuclear-powered carrier, for instance, while the UK wanted a non-nuclear configuration. Moreover, it is important to keep in mind that any cooperation on warships does not really depend on London but Washington's approval, and that the Brits, in spite of their special relationship with the US, continue to aim for strategic independence. Since no one could assure them that the French would be willing to cooperate in every single carrier mission that the UK might want to launch in the future, the co-development of an aircraft carrier was rather unlikely from the start.<sup>55</sup> The project, which was mentioned in London's and Paris' strategic documents, thus, eventually failed, with the UK building its own carriers and France abandoning the idea of acquiring a second platform for the time being.

**Aircraft carriers, the 'ideal' adjustment variable?** In order to fully understand why the policy priorities that governments state in their defence white papers and strategic reviews do not necessarily correspond to the procurement policies they eventually implement, it is crucial to stress once more that major weapons systems, like aircraft carriers, tend to face cost escalation, i.e. they are usually more expensive than initially planned. As I already suggested above, this is mainly due to the fact that a variety of actors, with diverging interests, is involved in the defence procurement pro-

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mainly to discuss budget cuts. The US stressed that the UK should maintain the nuclear arm and invest in intelligence, i.e. the US would have been fine with the British armed forces having only one warship at disposal (Interview with a defence policy advisor to a political party (ID 1)).

<sup>52</sup>Interview with a civil servant at the FCO and the MOD (ID 9)

<sup>53</sup>Interview with a civil servant at the FCO and the MOD (ID 14)

<sup>54</sup>Interview with a defence policy advisor to the government (ID 27)

<sup>55</sup>Interview with a defence policy advisor to the government (ID 27)



cess which, in turn, affects how the acquisition of major weapons systems plays out. Like Smith (2009, p. 125) argues:

"There is not just one principal and one agent in defence procurement; there are agency problems all through the system. Politicians employ civil servants and the military; the civil servants and military employ industry; the top-level decision makers employ specialists to implement the decisions, and so on. The incentives of the various groups differ substantially: military and civil servants want promotion; politicians want good publicity; bureaucrats want a quiet life; industry wants to make profits. There is nothing wrong with these objectives in themselves but they constrain the way the system operates."

Those agency problems are particularly troublesome in times in which technology-driven inflation has led to a significant increase in intergenerational equipment costs.<sup>56</sup> This is all the more true for aircraft carriers whose procurement does not benefit from economies of scale as states only acquire a few units. The unit production costs for each platform, hence, increase quite significantly over time which makes it more and more complicated to maintain the capacity as the defence budget in France and the UK has been on a downward trend for over four decades (cf. Chapter 2).

In the case of aircraft carriers, this trend led to conspiracy of optimism, notably between the defence ministry, the military and the industry which are keen to see the platforms being produced and, hence, have strong incentives to underestimate programme costs in order to make sure that the replacement of the warships is accepted by government and included in the defence budget.<sup>57</sup> Contractors play a crucial role here. Indeed, domestic firms face an existence-or-bust-imperative to make a low-price winning bid to secure future business, i.e. the DIB is likely to underestimate programme costs, assuming that politicians will be reluctant to cancel the acquisition of the warship later on. To make sure that the carriers are eventually commissioned, the government will have to accept that they are likely to be late and over-budget and fail to meet performance targets. To put it differently, it has to make procurement an adjustment variable. The reason for this is quite simple. Armaments are easier to slow down than other defence budget items, such as the payroll of the military.<sup>58</sup> They are not only less visible for the general public, but also de-block large funds.

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<sup>56</sup>An increase in intergenerational equipment costs implies that each new carrier costs a lot more than the unit it is replacing.

<sup>57</sup>Interview with a civil servant at the FCO and the MOD (ID 14)

<sup>58</sup>Interview with staff of the *Cour des Comptes* (ID 22)

This being said, failure in procurement is not specific to defence. It exists in the civil sector too, both the public and the private one. Procurement, regardless of its nature, tends to be characterised by asymmetric information between the buyer and the seller, risk and uncertainty, including with regard to the quality of the product, and contract (re)negotiations. Those constraints prevail in the civil and the military world, even if the bilateral dependence between government and its DIB is quite strong. Defence is, hence, not ‘the odd one out’ in the policy-making process.

#### 4.5.2.2 The strive for more transparency and accountability in defence procurement

From the media analysis above, we know that changes in programmes, delays, cost overruns and programme cancellations are covered by the national press, in particular in the UK. This media interest in the inefficiencies of the defence sector is not surprising as the military nowadays not only has to justify its acquisition choices, but also needs to explain whenever its policy priorities do not play out as initially planned. In fact, it is more and more common in France and the UK to have audits of defence expenditures, in particular procurement-related ones, as well as parliamentary oversight of the armed forces’ equipment choices. This, in turn, suggests that procurement policies - just like recruitment (cf. Chapter 3) - started to normalise, i.e. they were slowly but surely aligned with the standards of civilian sectors, in particular in terms of policy evaluation.

**Towards more value for money** In the past, the rationale for military action used to come from a notion of general interest that was "almost irreducible to any efficiency"<sup>59</sup> (Sinnassamy, 2004, p. 479), i.e. defence funding was focused "solely on meeting the needs expressed by the armed forces"<sup>60</sup> (Foucault, 2003, p. 84). Since the 1990s, we face a trend reversal, i.e. there is a more general search for efficacy that concerns not just the armed forces but all public bodies (Morel and Richter, 2019). Due to budget constraints, governments try to make the best use of available resources and to meet performance requirements, in defence but also in other policy areas. In the defence sector, the overall goal is to procure armament at the lowest possible initial and through-life costs, and to make sure that the capabilities are available and operational within the requested time. There is also a more general strive for transparency and accountability in defence, including in procurement, which translates into a rising number of reports published by the NAO and the *Cour des Comptes* as well

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<sup>59</sup>Original text: "quasi irréductible à une quelconque efficacité"

<sup>60</sup>Original text: "mais seulement à la satisfaction des besoins exprimés par les armées"

as parliamentary inquiries on both sides of the Channel.

**The audit of defence procurement** Since government investment in defence continues to be important, the *Cour des comptes* and the NAO keep an eye on spending levels.<sup>61</sup> In both countries, reports focus on a variety of topics, including the progress made on the development of major weapons systems for the armed forces.

In the UK, the NAO tends to publish reports on various defence-related topics. One interviewee highlighted that there were a few ‘no-brainers’ where it was evident that the NAO would make an inquiry. The latter include welfare-related issues, infrastructure, the overseas development agency convention, and major defence procurement projects.<sup>62</sup> With regard to procurement, the NAO checks, for example, the validity of the MOD’s equipment plan which sets out its intended investment in equipment and support projects for the next decade.<sup>63</sup> Within the equipment plan, whose introduction in 2012 is in itself already a sign of the normalisation of defence procurement, some issues are easier to report on than others because the narrative is straightforward.<sup>64</sup> As one interviewee<sup>65</sup> put it:

"The narrative for the current generation of aircraft carriers was rather easy. You have a carrier which is late, over budget and does not work because there are no aircraft. Now this is easy to understand and to communicate to the general public which also explains why this part of the report was widely covered by the media."

The NAO and the MOD also meet on a regular basis to discuss preliminary findings of the audit. With those meetings, the NAO wants "to soften people up, instead of just publishing the final report".<sup>66</sup> The only audit that is different in that regard is the report on the equipment plan which is made public on the same day as the MOD publishes the original document. This is mainly due to time constraints.<sup>67</sup>

In France, the *Cour des Comptes* studies defence from three different angles: personnel and infrastructure expenditures; spending linked to the armed forces and their deployments; research, investment and armament. Similar to the UK, there are obvious topics to be covered, such as the Rafale, and less obvious ones, in particular those

<sup>61</sup>Interviews with staff of the NAO (ID 3) and the *Cour des Comptes* (ID 22)

<sup>62</sup>Interview with staff of the NAO (ID 13)

<sup>63</sup>Interview with staff of the NAO (ID 13)

<sup>64</sup>This holds true for all public policies (Interview with staff of the NAO (ID 13)).

<sup>65</sup>Interview with staff of the NAO (ID 13)

<sup>66</sup>Interview with staff of the NAO (ID 3)

<sup>67</sup>Interview with staff of the NAO (ID 3)

that are more technical and require a specific type of expertise. After five years, the *Cour des Comptes* has usually covered the key topics in defence and starts the audit all over again. It also checks at regular intervals if its recommendations have been implemented or not.<sup>68</sup> This being said, the *Cour des Comptes* always tries to "choose its critic in a fair way"<sup>69</sup>, even when its audits do not have the desired effect.

The NAO and the *Cour des Comptes* both look at the effectiveness of defence spending, and have an information and awareness-raising role. As one interviewee highlighted, this task is rather difficult as there is no real measurable output in the defence sector.<sup>70</sup> We can measure arrests, employment levels, housing, road accidents, but it is less straightforward to find valid parameters for regal domains such as defence. Although one can estimate the availability rates of military equipment or make cost-benefit analyses of defence procurement, it continues to be an ambitious task to audit the defence sector.<sup>71</sup> This is also due to the fact that the time frames of procurement projects are particularly long and need to be correctly accounted for during policy evaluations.<sup>72</sup> In both countries, the NAO and the *Cour des Comptes* nonetheless focus on defence and treat it like any other public policy - with one precaution, though. As a staff member of the NAO<sup>73</sup> put it during an interview:

"The [UK] MOD is good to work with, probably better than the ministries in charge of social policies [...] The only risk is that you get drawn into, that you become sympathetic. They are quite good story tellers and you may start feeling sorry for the shortage of equipment they seem to be facing."

In spite of its specificities, defence is, hence, increasingly subject to audits which, in turn, suggests that its policy-making process has started to normalise over time.

**Parliamentary oversight of defence procurement** In addition to the NAO and the *Cour des Comptes*, parliament holds government accountable for its defence policy choices, in particular but not exclusively with regard to spending patterns.

In France, the presidents of the defence committees at the *Assemblée nationale* and the *Sénat* tend to agree on the broad outline of their agendas in advance.<sup>74</sup> The parlia-

<sup>68</sup>Interview with staff of the *Cour des Comptes* (ID 22)

<sup>69</sup>Interview with staff of the *Cour des Comptes* (ID 22)

<sup>70</sup>Interview with staff of the *Cour des Comptes* (ID 22)

<sup>71</sup>Interview with staff of the *Cour des Comptes* (ID 22)

<sup>72</sup>There also long-term projects in other public policies, such as transport, but they tend to be less complex and are usually not meant to last as long as defence equipment (Interview with staff at the NAO (ID 3)).

<sup>73</sup>Interview with staff of the NAO (ID 3)

<sup>74</sup>Interview with a defence policy advisor at the *Sénat* (ID 30)

ment oversees a variety of topics, such as the recruitment of service personnel, defence cooperation in Europe, procurement and arms exports as well as defence spending more generally.<sup>75</sup> Since 2005, it meets on a regular basis with the Ministry of the Armed Forces, the CEMA and Bercy, who has "the key to the safe", to monitor the evolution of the defence budget.<sup>76</sup> More specifically, it checks if the LPM is respected, i.e. it verifies that military programming laws translate into initial finance acts. In the case of France, this oversight mission is particularly important as LPMs are hardly ever respected, thus influencing policy choices (Richter, 2018).

In the UK, procurement is one of the key topics of the Defence Committee and the Public Accounts Committee (PAC).<sup>77</sup> The Defence Committee focuses on capability reviews, modernisation programmes etc., and, hence, indirectly addresses defence spending and its effectiveness, which, however, continues to be the main concern of the NAO.<sup>78</sup> For precisely this reason, it is common practice nowadays that the committee has a NAO secondee who works and consults on expenditure projects. According to several interviewees, those secondees stay for a year and work on procurement because it is a particularly complex topic.<sup>79</sup> The PAC also plays a non-negligible role in overseeing defence procurement. As one interviewee pointed out, the committee is the "paramilitary wing of the NAO" and has the first go on NAO reports.<sup>80</sup> To put it differently, it checks and controls the government's defence spending patterns. Procurement is an area where the PAC feels more able to criticise the MOD, as it is, according to an interviewee, much easier to point to inefficient defence investments than criticising how money is spent on the armed forces, for example.<sup>81</sup>

To sum up, government attention to aircraft carriers led to procurement policies that have not always been very efficient, thereby catching the attention of the parliaments and the bodies in charge of auditing public spending on both sides of the Channel. Indeed, major equipment programmes, such as aircraft carriers, tend to be delayed, adjusted or even cancelled over time. This is mainly due the fact that Paris and London face conspiracy of optimism in their defence sectors, with various actors being in favour of the defence programme although they have doubts about its feasibility. Since the late 1990s, however, there is not only a willingness to make defence less of a black box, but also to have 'more value for money'. This, in turn, led to a strive for more transparency and accountability which suggests that both agenda-setting and

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<sup>75</sup>Interview with a defence policy advisor at the *Sénat* (ID 30)

<sup>76</sup>Interview with a Deputy at the *Commission de la défense nationale et des forces armées* (ID 16)

<sup>77</sup>Interviews with staff of the Defence and the Public Accounts Committees (ID 7, ID 11)

<sup>78</sup>Interview with staff of the Defence Committee (ID 7)

<sup>79</sup>Interviews with a NAO secondee at the Defence Committee (ID 6) and staff of the NAO (ID 13)

<sup>80</sup>Interview with with a NAO secondee at the Defence Committee (ID 6)

<sup>81</sup>Interview with staff of the Public Accounts Committee (ID 11)

policy-making have started to normalise in the defence sector.

## 4.6 Conclusion

Defence procurement is a constant concern for the military. Indeed, countries cannot operationalise their defence objectives if their service personnel is not well equipped. The aim of this chapter was, therefore, to understand how defence procurement, and in particular the acquisition of aircraft carriers, became and remained a policy priority in France and the UK between 1980 and 2018.

First, I looked at *when* the acquisition of aircraft carriers emerged as a priority on the policy, the media and the public agendas, and examined *how* the framing evolved over time. Based on CAP-data and a detailed text analysis of strategic documents, I showed that procurement is, in general, a routine issue for governments on both sides of the Channel, i.e. London and Paris address equipment-related issues on a regular basis. Contrary to the recruitment of service personnel (cf. Chapter 3), however, issue attention to procurement strongly depends on the equipment's life-cycle, i.e. it is in the nature of the policy problem to gain and lose agenda space. The empirical evidence suggests that the acquisition of weapons systems lost traction in the *Communiqués de Conseil des ministres* and the Queen's Speech, while it ebbed and flowed on the defence white papers and strategic reviews. This diverging trend is due to the fact that government statements and speeches do not only deal with defence problems, but when they do, they focus on issues that are more concrete than military procurement. The empirical evidence also points to a stable framing of the policy problem. Since France and the UK already possess aircraft carriers, the key issue for both countries is whether they are going to replace them - and if so, when and how.

After having analysed how procurement and the acquisition of aircraft carriers was addressed by governments, I examined how the navy's flagship was covered by the French and the British media and perceived by the general public in the two countries. To do so, I used data from Europresse, Factiva as well as national opinion polls. I concluded that the press in France gave more agenda space to the country's warship than its British counterparts, especially since the early 2000s. I then showed that the newspapers in both countries covered very similar issues between 1980 and 2018, but framed them slightly differently. I notably highlighted that the tone of British media tends to be more negative, as it was already the case for the recruitment of service personnel, and argued that this framing contributed to reinforce the policy problem. This, in turn, also explains why governments started to commission opinion polls on

procurement. I outlined that this sudden interest for the public's perception of military equipment suggests that public opinion matters for the policy agenda, but not with regard to procurement choices. Rather, it matters because the armed forces want to make sure that the public believes that service personnel is well equipped, i.e. they want to make sure that young people are willing to join the military.

Second, I analysed the agenda-building dynamics of acquiring aircraft carriers and explained why government attention to procurement ebbs and flows over time. Based on the empirical analysis, I argued that neither the media nor public opinion were key to understanding government attention to the acquisition of aircraft carriers. I demonstrated that French and British governments draw the platforms to the forefront because they are high-profile capabilities that allow for rapid force projection, grant status, and provide signalling power and freedom of manoeuvre, both politically and militarily. I also explained that figuring among the world's most powerful navies comes at a significant cost, obliging policy-makers on both sides of the Channel to make trade-offs at the domestic level. Last but not least, I highlighted that Paris and London, although they both devote significant levels of attention to their navy's flagship, send very different messages to the defence community. While London signals that its key priority is to afford at least two platforms, Paris makes it clear that it wants to keep up with US equipment choices, even if this implies having only one warship.

Based on this analysis and in line with the theoretical framework that I proposed for the agenda-building mechanisms of defence in Chapter 1, I suggested that government priorities were key to understanding *why* procurement was addressed in the *Communiqués de Conseil des ministres*, the Queen's Speech as well as defence white papers and strategic reviews, but also to accounting for *how* the issue was framed over time. I argued that any relationship between the three agendas and real-world indicators is secondary to the effects that the policy agenda has on media and public priorities. For this very reason, I concluded that the acquisition of aircraft carriers is policy-driven and, hence, qualifies as a governmental defence issue. I specified, though, that this does not mean that there are no interactions between government, media and public priorities or that the strategic context does not matter. To the contrary, I underlined that the security and the economic environment both have an impact on equipment choices, and that media coverage of and public opinion on procurement may constrain the government's policy choices, not necessarily with regard to procurement but connected issues such as recruitment. In addition, I asserted that the agenda dynamics of aircraft carriers are similar to those that scholars identified for national unity, for instance, and suggested that this parallel implied that defence has been normalising over time.

Given that agenda-setting is the first stage of the policy cycle, I then underlined that its dynamics do not only affect policy formulation and policy implementation but also policy evaluation. To illustrate this point, I concluded the chapter by discussing how government attention to aircraft carriers shaped procurement policies in London and Paris and explained why those policy outcomes provide additional evidence for a normalisation of defence as a public policy. I showed that major equipment projects, such as warships, tend to be late, over budget and risk being cancelled over time. I then explained that this tendency was not specific to defence, but concerned any type of procurement, regardless of the policy area. On both sides of the Channel, those inefficiencies caught the attention of parliament and the public bodies in charge of auditing government spending, and led to a strive for more transparency and accountability in the policy-making process, in particular since the late 1990s. I concluded the last section by stressing that the rising number of inquiries on defence procurement made defence policy less of a black box and that the evaluation of defence spending constituted an important step towards the normalisation of the regal domain.





# Chapter 5

## Agenda-setting of sensational defence issues: The case of military operations

### 5.1 Introduction

Since the end of the Cold War, military operations have become the key mission of most European armed forces (Joly and Haesebrouck, 2021). These operations have had various purposes, including counter-insurgency, counter-piracy, counter-terrorism, disaster relief, humanitarian aid, peacekeeping, policing, search and rescue, and the training of local forces. To be carried out, they all required personnel and equipment which, in turn, explains why troop deployments are regularly used by governments to justify the need for higher levels of military recruitment (cf. Chapter 3) and the acquisition of weapons systems (cf. Chapter 4) at the domestic level. Military interventions are, indeed, rather random, i.e. governments can prepare for different, potential future crisis scenarios, but are not able to fully anticipate how these crises will eventually play out and which capacities they will need to tackle them efficiently. It is, consequently, unsurprising that MODs try their best to avoid any additional cuts in the defence budget. This being said, overseas operations did not only turn out to be cost-intensive, but also led to a non-negligible number of civilian and combatant deaths, two issues that receive more and more attention from the media in recent years. Media coverage of military operations, in turn, increasingly shapes public opinion on the matter, i.e. the public's support for troop deployments has started to vanish, thus becoming an additional constraint for (defence) policy-makers in Europe.

As I have shown in Chapter 2, this also holds true for France and the UK, two countries that have had major military commitments since the 1980s already. Al-

though Paris experienced an increase in the tempo of its military interventions and the number of theatres it deploys troops to, London has committed more capacities to overseas missions in comparison. The particularly high tempo and intensity of British operations has had several effects: it contributed to an overstretch of the British armed forces, increased the replacement costs for military capacities and led to a large number of operational deaths, all of which have negatively affected the public's support for troop deployments over time. Compared to French operations, London's deployments were, indeed, particularly casualty-heavy and resulted in heated debates about the government's legal obligation to ensure that the British armed forces received adequate training and equipment before being deployed overseas. Military interventions, consequently, have had a special agenda status in the UK between 1980 and 2018. In spite of deploying fewer troops to combat operations than its British counterpart, the issue also ranked high on French policy agendas during that period of time. This is mainly due to the fact that France and the UK have similar threat perceptions, the ambition to have a seat at the (international) table and, hence, the willingness to cooperate on defence matters, including deployments, be it at the bilateral or the multilateral level. To put it differently, overseas operations - as well as related policy issues such as administrative and financial support for deployed soldiers and their families - have been a major concern for Paris, especially in the past 20 years. The agenda-setting perspective allows us to analyse those dynamics in more detail, and to shed light on how governments set their priorities in terms of military operations.

The aim of this last chapter is to understand how military operations became and remained a government priority in France and the UK. Instead of examining the agenda-setting dynamics of a specific intervention, I offer a more general analysis of how issue attention to overseas operations ebbed and flowed over time.<sup>1</sup> First of all, I look at *when* troop deployments emerged as a priority on the policy, the media and the public agendas in France and the UK, and examine *how* the framing of the policy problem evolved between 1980 and 2018. I then analyse the agenda-building dynamics of military interventions, underlining in particular how the policy, the media and the public agendas are linked and influenced by the strategic context. This, in turn, does not only allow me to explain why British and French governments pay attention to overseas missions, but also to demonstrate that the latter are media-driven nowadays, i.e. the media on both sides of the Channel increasingly drive public opinion on troop deployments and thereby constrain the policy agenda. In other terms, the media are able to shape government priorities with regard to troop deployments by having a direct impact on how the public perceives the issue. Based on this conclusion, I argue that government

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<sup>1</sup>As in Chapters 3 and 4, I will nonetheless give concrete examples to illustrate my argument.

attention to military operations and the impact it has on troop deployments over time suggests that defence, as a public policy, has started to normalise.

## 5.2 The policy agenda

How did attention to military operations evolve on French and British policy agendas? In this section, I look at government attention to troop deployments between 1980 and 2018, providing evidence from speeches and cabinet meetings as well as defence white papers and strategic reviews.

### 5.2.1 Government attention to military operations: Evidence from cabinet meetings and speeches

In order to better understand when French and British governments focused on military operations, I first of all examined government attention to troop deployments in cabinet meetings and speeches. As in Chapters 3 and 4, I focused on the *Communiqués de Conseil des ministres* in France and the Speech from the Throne in the UK because prior research suggests that those two policy agendas are robust indicators for government priorities on both sides of the Channel (cf. Chapter 2).

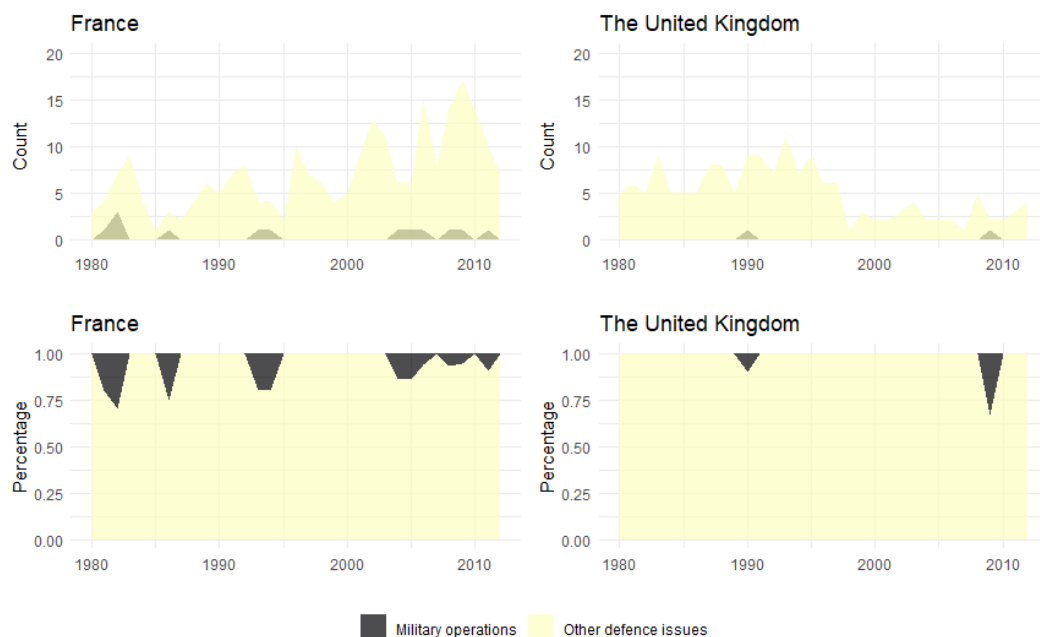
Figure 5.1 - which is based on CAP-data - shows government attention to military operations in France and the UK between 1980 and 2012 (cf. subcode 1619), and compares it to government attention to all other defence issues (i.e. all subcodes of the major topic code 16, except for the subcode 1619). The topic code 1619 includes various issues that are linked to direct war-related foreign military operations, prisoners of war and collateral damage to civilian populations. It, hence, provides great insights into how military operations and closely related policy issues ebbed and flowed on French and British government agendas. Figure 5.1 provides two complementary measures of government attention to those operations: it shows the frequency of topic mentions<sup>2</sup> in cabinet meetings and speeches, and the percentage of government statements and the Queen's Speech assigned to the topic in any given year. While the first measure indicates the relative difference in government attention to military operations in France and the UK, the second treats the (defence) agenda space as a constant over time and, thus, shows when government attention was concentrated on deployments.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>The frequency of topic mentions corresponds to the total count of topic mentions per year.

<sup>3</sup>In the case of the UK, the second measure may seem to be redundant. However, since the goal of this Ph.D. thesis is to compare the agenda-setting dynamics of three different defence issues in France and the UK, I decided to run the same empirical analyses for both countries.

Figure 5.1: Government attention to foreign operations, 1980-2012



Sources: Comparative Agendas Project (2021)

Generally speaking, the four subfigures of Figure 5.1 suggest that foreign operations tend to be addressed in the *Communiqués de Conseil des ministres* while they have been largely absent from the Queen's Speech. In France, the policy issue was, indeed, mentioned a few times between 1980 and the early 2000s, and is addressed on a more regular basis since 2004, taking up about 10 % of the French defence agenda. This trend is rather unsurprising as the international context evolved quite significantly since the end of the Cold War, in particular since 9/11. In the UK, in turn, which has committed more troops and equipment to overseas missions than France, the issue was addressed only twice in the Queen's Speech, in 1990 and 2009. This quasi absence of military operations on the government agenda mainly suggests that the speech is not the policy venue that the British government uses the most to communicate its priorities for the deployment of its armed forces. It, hence, makes sense, like in Chapters 3 and 4, to also look at how the agenda status of military interventions evolved in the strategic documents that London and Paris published since 1980. Since defence white papers and strategic reviews address the defence community at large, they are much more likely to address the missions and operations of the armed forces in detail.

## 5.2.2 Government attention to military operations: Evidence from defence white papers and strategic reviews

As I explained in Chapter 2, defence white papers and strategic reviews constitute one of the most accessible guides to a country's level of ambition in international security. They, thus, supplement the empirical evidence for government attention to military operations from speeches and cabinet meetings, providing a different and more nuanced perspective on the agenda status of troop deployments between 1980 and 2018.

Generally speaking, military operations are addressed more often in France than in the UK, at least in absolute terms. In relative terms, it is the other way round. Given that defence white papers and strategic reviews are rather short in the UK (cf. Chapter 2), British governments have actually given more agenda space to policy problems that are related to overseas deployments than their French counterparts. This also holds true if we take into account that various words can be employed to refer to military operations (military operation, deployment, military intervention, etc.). Table 5.1 shows the terminology that is used in France and the UK to speak about 'military operations'. It suggests that governments on both sides of the Channel usually refer to their missions as 'operations', but that they also opt quite regularly for the term 'deployment'. Paris additionally uses the word 'intervention' to highlight its priorities with regard to overseas missions, a term that is hardly ever chosen in London.

Table 5.1: Terminology used in French and British strategic documents to refer to 'military operations', 1980-2018

	Occurrences	
	France	United Kingdom
"operation(s)"	496	470
"deployment(s)"	144	173
"intervention(s)"	266	31

Source: Author's own calculation

To better understand how government attention to military operations evolved over time, I once again conducted specificity analyses to check if the deployment of troops, as a policy problem, was specific to any of the strategic documents published in France and the UK since 1980.<sup>4</sup> As a quick reminder: a specificity analysis indicates whether the occurrence of a word or CQL query appears in abundance or in decline in one of

<sup>4</sup>The specificity analyses in this thesis were all run with TXM. While TXM is a great open access tool for text analysis, it does not (yet) allow for a lot of flexibility when visualising the results.

the parts of a partition, here a defence white paper or strategic review.<sup>5</sup>

Figure 5.2 shows the results of such an analysis for military operations within French and British strategic documents. Given that the terminology for overseas missions is broader than for the recruitment of service personnel (Chapter 3) or the acquisition of aircraft carriers (Chapter 4), I ran the analyses for the terms that are most frequently used in French and British strategic documents to refer to troop deployments: operations, deployments and interventions. As in the last two empirical chapters, the reference lines at -2 and +2 display the standardisation band on either side of the 0 score axis. Bars that remain within this limit represent standard scores, i.e. in those cases, troop deployments were, compared to all texts included in the corpus, neither under- nor overaddressed in the document. To put it differently, bars that go under -2 suggest that the issue was, comparatively speaking, less of a priority that year while bars over +2 indicate a certain overemployment of deployment-related terms, compared to how the issue was addressed in other documents of the corpus.

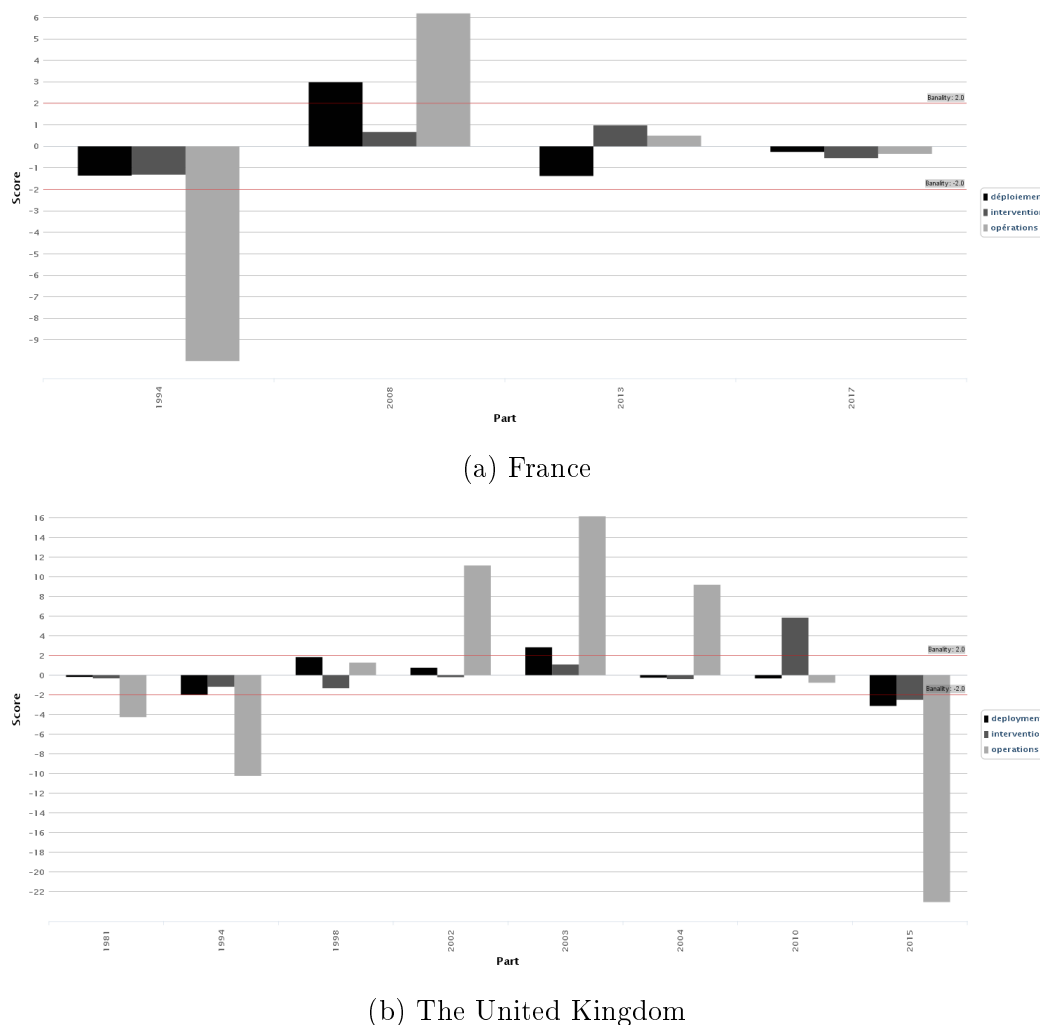
Several conclusions can be drawn from Figure 5.2. First, while it is very common for Paris and London to use different terms in the same strategic document to refer to overseas missions, their word choice preferences have changed over time. In the 2000s, for instance, troop deployments have mainly been referred to as ‘operations’, both in France and the UK. Since the 2010s, though, it is much more common to speak of ‘interventions’, in particular in France. Second, the agenda status of troop deployments changed on both sides of the Channel between 1980 and 2018, with significant differences between France and the UK. Figure 5.2a, thus, suggests that military interventions were, comparatively speaking, a non-issue in France in 1994 and have, subsequently, been overaddressed in the 2008 defence and national security white paper. In 2013 and 2017, the policy problem had no specific status, i.e. it was neither under- nor overreported. In the UK, in turn, military operations were either a non-issue or a top priority, as Figure 5.2b highlights. Similar to France, troop deployments have been underaddressed in the 1980s and early 1990s, with the issue gaining traction from the 2000s onwards. More specifically, the topic was particularly prominent in the strategic documents of 2002, 2003, 2004 and 2010. Contrary to France, however, military interventions started to lose agenda space in the 2015 NSS and SDSR which is, as I will explain later, mainly due to the fact that the UK decided to reduce its overseas missions because of budget constraints and an overall lack of public support.

The question then is *how* governments addressed military operations in those documents. As I explained in Chapters 3 and 4, there are three complementary ways

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<sup>5</sup>Cf. Chapter 2 for an overview of the strategic documents included in the empirical analysis.

Figure 5.2: Military operations within French and British strategic documents, 1980-2018



Source: French and British strategic documents

to do this. First, by conducting HCAs where deployment-related issues may form an individual cluster for some of the defence white papers and strategic reviews, but not for others.<sup>6</sup> Second, by calculating a table of co-occurents for the occurrences of a CQL query, here military operations. By default, the co-occurents are sorted by their ‘co-occurrence score’. This score is an indicator of the probability of association, i.e. it gives us a better idea of the issues that were addressed together with troop deployments (e.g. the need for service personnel and equipment, operational deaths, etc.).<sup>7</sup> Third, by examining concordances which, in turn, allow us to look more closely at the strategic

<sup>6</sup>The HCAs in this thesis were all run with Iramuteq. Results can be found in the appendix B.A.

<sup>7</sup>The co-occurrence analyses were run with TXM. Results are directly referred to in the text.



document and analyse the context in which troop deployments were mentioned.<sup>8</sup> All of these analyses have to be conducted for one term and one country at a time. Since France and the UK usually use the word ‘operation’ to refer to their missions abroad (cf. Table 5.1), I ran all three analyses for this term only.

In France, the results of the HCAs show that military operations do not form a cluster on their own, as it was the case for HR management (cf. Chapter 3) and defence procurement (cf. Chapter 4). Surprisingly, the issue is also not mentioned in any of the other pillars, at least not directly. This, however, does not mean that deployments have not been a concern for Paris. To the contrary, the policy problem actually appears in an indirect manner in a cluster that is common to all French defence white papers and strategic reviews. This cluster systematically covers the evolution of the international context and how France intends to respond to those changes. More specifically, it deals with current risks and threats and stresses the institutional frameworks based on which France wants to tackle them (e.g. the EU, NATO, the UN etc.). While one can deduce that deployments play a role here, it is necessary to rely on the co-occurrence and concordance analyses to fully understand how the French government perceived military operations and framed them as a policy problem over time.

From the specificity analysis above, we already concluded that deployments were, comparatively speaking, underaddressed in the 1994 defence white paper. If we have a closer look at the document though, we realise that the policy problem was already identified as such. The government notably highlighted that France had to be able to defend its interests in various parts of the world, either on its own or together with allies (French Ministry of Defence, 1994, p. 50). It acknowledged that the country had to be prepared to undertake several actions simultaneously. The latter included the participation in a regional conflict of high intensity, ideally within a coalition framework; one or more interventions for the benefit of an overseas department or territory; the application of a defence agreement; and the contribution to humanitarian actions or UN operations (French Ministry of Defence, 1994, p. 71).<sup>9</sup> The government also stressed that a mixed HR-model, based on conscripts and professional service personnel, was ideal for those missions (French Ministry of Defence, 1994, p. 94). It additionally underlined that all deployments required efficient defence equipment, including weapons systems able to strike with precision at great distances and means to constantly monitor the combat zone (French Ministry of Defence, 1994, pp. 89-90).

<sup>8</sup>The concordance analyses were run with TXM. Results are directly referred to in the text.

<sup>9</sup>The most frequent co-occurrences of ‘operation’ in the 1994 defence white paper are *paix* (10), *maintien* (7), *politiques* (4), *placées* (4), *humanitaire* (3), *spéciales* (3), *égide* (3), *rétablissement* (3), *caractère* (2), *extérieures* (2), *françaises* (2), *unités* (2), *peut* (2), *contrôle* (2), *présence* (2) and *Nations* (2). The numbers in parentheses represent the corresponding co-occurrence scores.

More importantly, however, the government reckoned that it had to pay close attention to the conduct of its operations because media outlets were no longer just "spectators but actors in crises and conflicts, influencing their conduct and outcome" (French Ministry of Defence, 1994, p. 20).<sup>10</sup> Indeed, from the 1990s onwards, it became more and more common for journalists to report on troop deployments from the theatre of operation, and the French clearly identified this change in media coverage as a risk for the conduct of their overseas missions (French Ministry of Defence, 1994, p. 158):

"The authorities and the media may have differing views of the seriousness of a situation, with the latter dramatising what is otherwise considered trivial, or, on the contrary, considering as secondary what the government believes to be important. Moreover, there is always the possibility of one-upmanship between different media outlets as they are subject to the economic imperatives of competition. The reality of a situation can, thus, be totally distorted: recent examples of this pattern are frequent. Finally, the media, for technical reasons, can be led to summarise, to present the spectacular, like a shocking image that is published out of its context, emphasising the sensational while describing the situation only very imperfectly."<sup>11</sup>

The government, thus, stressed that news on troop deployments may distort its operational activities abroad, thereby manipulating public opinion and modifying the image of the French armed forces (French Ministry of Defence, 1994, p. 102, p. 158).

The policy problem then gained traction in the 2008 defence and national security white paper. The French government analysed once again the evolution of the strategic environment and laid out which capabilities it needed to tackle the various risks and threats to its national security. More specifically, it highlighted that military interventions had become the armed forces' key action, and stressed that the aim of France's military presence was to protect the country's strategic interests and to keep

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<sup>10</sup>Original text: "Les médias ne sont plus seulement des spectateurs mais des acteurs des crises et des conflits, qui pèsent sur leur conduite et leur issue."

<sup>11</sup>Original text: "Les pouvoirs publics et les médias peuvent avoir des opinions divergentes de la gravité d'une situation, les seconds dramatisant des faits jugés par ailleurs banals, ou au contraire considérant comme secondaire ce que le gouvernement juge important. Par ailleurs une surenchère est toujours possible entre des médias soumis à des impératifs économiques de concurrence. La réalité d'une situation peut s'en trouver totalement faussée : les exemples récents en sont fréquents. Enfin les médias, pour des raisons techniques, peuvent être conduits à résumer, à présenter le spectaculaire, telle une image-choc extraite de son contexte, soulignant le sensationnel tout en ne décrivant que très imparfaitement la situation."

up with its international responsibilities. The document also specified that those overseas operations would mostly take place in a multilateral framework, but could also be conducted with a close partner or, in exceptional cases only, in a purely national framework (French Ministry of Defence, 2008, pp. 71-72).<sup>12</sup> The French government, thus, recognised the need for efficient and legitimate interventions, anticipating the influence of the media and means of instant communication on the perception of these military operations at home (French Ministry of Defence, 2008, p. 24). More precisely, it highlighted that the legitimacy of troop deployments was no longer limited to their legality under international law. To the contrary, the government perceived democratic legitimacy as being equally important. It, therefore, aimed for making the objectives of French overseas operations more transparent and having the support of the public, in particular by getting green light from the parliament for the launch of its missions (French Ministry of Defence, 2008, p. 74). In line, it decided to strengthen the oversight role of the French parliament in defence matters, with the intervention of the armed forces being henceforth subject to an information and authorisation procedure (French Ministry of Defence, 2008, p. 254).

In 2013, the policy problem lost some agenda space, but still caught the attention of policy-makers. Above all, the government noted that there was a great deal of reluctance in Europe and the US to engage in any other large-scale, long-term external intervention after the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq (French Ministry of Defence, 2013, p. 31). It, hence, stressed once more that French military operations were mainly going to take place within a multilateral framework. The government also explained that future troop deployments could only be successful if they had the support of the general public, i.e. they had to meet the expectations of those directly concerned by the intervention and be carried out by organisations considered to be legitimate to do so (French Ministry of Defence, 2013, p. 25).

Four years later, military operations still figured on the government agenda, but the issue was understood and addressed quite differently. The 2017 strategic review marked a major change in French troop deployments, with a massive presence of the military on national soil following the terror attacks in 2015. Government attention to overseas missions, hence, shifted, focussing mainly on having service personnel and defence equipment available in sufficient numbers for ongoing interventions abroad (French Ministry of the Armed Forces, 2017b, p. 95). The document stressed that it

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<sup>12</sup>The most frequent co-occurrences of 'operation' in the 2008 defence and national security white paper are *civiles* (18), *stabilisation* (11), *extérieures* (11), *spéciales* (11), *militaires* (8), *maintien* (8), *paix* (8), *dirigées* (5), *Union* (5), *complexes*, (5) *humanitaires* (4), *évacuation* (4), *ressortissants* (4), *théâtres* (3), *ponctuelles* (3), *rétablissement* (3), *consécutives* (3), *contre-terrorisme* (3) and *exclues* (3). The numbers in parentheses represent the corresponding co-occurrence scores.

was a priority for the government to guarantee the sustainability of France's military commitments, as endurance was decisive for having an effective defence policy (French Ministry of the Armed Forces, 2017b, p. 15).<sup>13</sup> More specifically, the strategic review highlighted that military operations were carried out over a period of 10 to 15 years, requiring endurance as well as the ability to regenerate human capital and defence equipment in adequate levels and at adequate speed. At the same time, the government acknowledged that a close relationship between the armed forces and society was crucial to preserve the existing consensus on the major orientations of French defence policy, and to strengthen the acceptance and support of France's overseas engagements at the domestic level (French Ministry of the Armed Forces, 2017b, p. 85).

In the UK, in turn, the results of the HCAs suggest that military operations have had a special agenda status within government, in particular from the 2000s onwards. Indeed, the cluster analyses show that deployment-related topics were addressed quite extensively in the strategic documents of 2002, 2003 and 2004, usually together with a closer analysis of the current strategic context and its potential evolution, the alliances based on which the UK intended to tackle (new) risks and threats to its national security and Britain's responsibilities on the international scene. This is fully in line with the specificity analysis above which also suggested that military interventions were mainly discussed in those three strategic reviews and defence white papers.<sup>14</sup>

In line with the HCAs, the concordance analyses indicate that military operations were not yet a government priority in the 1980s. Indeed, the British Ministry of Defence (1981, p. 11) mainly underlined how it would use its aircraft carriers in out-of-area deployments, highlighting that it intended to coordinate its exercises and operations with the US and other close allies. In the early 1990s, however, this focus on defence cooperation disappeared and government attention started to shift to the operational effectiveness of the British armed forces in the post-Cold War era, characterised not only by changes in the security environment but also severe budget constraints. The British MOD, thus, underlined the necessity to ensure the rapid deployment of troops and equipment to crisis areas, and stressed that it had to invest in the infrastructure required to fully meet this ambition. More specifically, the MOD pointed out that it aimed for a joint service basis for all future operations of the British armed forces. The latter was meant to contribute to the rationalisation of command, training and

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<sup>13</sup>The most frequent co-occurrences of 'operation' in the 2017 strategic review are *militaires* (6), *conduites* (3), *sous-region* (3), *omp* (2), *extérieures* (2), *spécifiques* (2), *engager* (2), *déploiements* (2), *intensité* (2), *haute* (2), *stabilisation* (2) and *niveau* (2). The numbers in parentheses represent the corresponding co-occurrence scores.

<sup>14</sup>Additionally, the specificity analysis showed that troop deployments were one of the top priorities of the 2010 SDSR, even if the topic slowly started to lose traction on the government agenda.

support structures, hence allowing for both an increase in operational effectiveness and a decrease in overall defence costs (British Ministry of Defence, 1994, p. 7).

Having modern and effective armed forces that are equipped for expeditionary operations, usually as part of a coalition, continued to be a policy priority in the 1998 SDR. The British MOD underlined once more that it aimed for a tri-service joint approach to avoid the duplication of (defence) resources, thereby increasing the operational effectiveness of the armed forces. Indeed, it assumed that military operations would "merge into a single battle space" by 2015, requiring close cooperation of the air force, the army and the navy (British Ministry of Defence, 1998, p. 100). In addition, the MOD underlined its intention to coordinate the various missions and operations of the British armed forces more closely (British Ministry of Defence, 1998, p. 22). In line, and similar to the evolution in France, the government stressed that it had to train its service personnel for all types of overseas interventions and ensure that the British defence industry was able to support those deployments, notably by generating and regenerating the equipment required to conduct them (British Ministry of Defence, 1998, p. 239).<sup>15</sup> Moreover, it acknowledged for the first time that "[c]oncerns [had] been expressed about current arrangements to compensate Service personnel for injury, illness and death" and that these arrangements had to "reflect modern standards and be consistent with the legitimate expectations of Service men and women" (British Ministry of Defence, 1998, p. 217). Government attention, hence, started to shift, with a specific focus on the impact that military operations have on the life and well-being of service personnel being deployed overseas. Given that media reporting from the front line started to put great pressure on operational decisions (British Ministry of Defence, 1998, p. 14), this shift in government priorities is rather unsurprising and also largely in line with the policy evolutions in France.

In the early 2000s, troop deployments became a top priority for the British government (British Ministry of Defence, 2002, 2003, 2004). Several closely-related policy topics caught the attention of the MOD during those years. The latter notably included the sustainability of British military operations, the need for precision in the use of force, the acquisition of adequate strategic enablers, setting up the logistics that were necessary to conduct those missions, and the impact that the increase in the tempo of British troop deployments started to have on the well-being of service personnel (and their families) as well as the life-cycle of defence equipment.

First and foremost, the MOD updated its priorities in terms of military interven-

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<sup>15</sup>The most frequent co-occurrences of 'operation' in the 1998 SDR are 'preparing' (4), 'Gulf' (3), 'Bosnia' (3), 'joint' (2), 'envisage' (2), 'involved' (2), 'kind' (2) and 'tactical' (2). The numbers in parentheses represent the corresponding co-occurrence scores.

tions.<sup>16</sup> More specifically, it clarified that the British military would not be involved in all crises. To the contrary, the government aimed for reducing the number of military operations to be run in parallel (British Ministry of Defence, 2002, p. 14):

"[...] we should plan to be able to undertake either a single major operation (of a similar scale and duration to our contribution to the Gulf War in 1990-91), or undertake a more extended overseas deployment on a lesser scale (as in the mid-1990s in Bosnia), while retaining the ability to mount a second substantial deployment – which might involve a combat brigade and appropriate naval and air forces – if this were made necessary by a second crisis. We would not, however, expect both deployments to involve warfighting or to maintain them simultaneously for longer than 6 months."

In 2003, the government additionally assessed the preparation of the British armed forces, in particular those assigned to the joint rapid reaction force (JRRF). Based on the lessons learned from the operations in Iraq, it notably intended to adjust how the military was going to be trained for an increasing number of small- and medium-scale operations (British Ministry of Defence, 2003, p. 15).<sup>17</sup>

Second, the government insisted on the need for precision in the use of force to minimise collateral damages (British Ministry of Defence, 2002, p. 17). Attention, hence, shifted to the importance of investing in defence equipment, in particular advanced capabilities such as strategic enablers, to undertake expeditionary operations as safely as possible (British Ministry of Defence, 2004, p. 10).

Third, the government focused more closely on the impact that the increased tempo of British military operations had on service personnel. More precisely, it stressed that repeated deployments had "a cumulative effect on morale" and that the government had to ensure that its armed forces found a balance between time at home and time away, especially those with young families (British Ministry of Defence, 2002, p. 20). This was particularly true for key enablers, i.e. units that were required for all expeditionary deployments, as they risked being overburdened in the early 2000s. The MOD also underlined that the training and development needs of each active member of the British military had to be met, to make the service attractive and to avoid increasing

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<sup>16</sup>The most frequent co-occurrences of 'operation' in the 2002 SDR new chapter are 'overseas' (4), 'coerce' (2) 'find-and-strike' (2), 'recent' (2), 'counter' (2), 'recently' (2), 'years' (2), 'may' (2), 'potential' (2), 'Balkans' (2) and 'disrupt' (2). The numbers in parentheses represent the corresponding co-occurrence scores.

<sup>17</sup>The most frequent co-occurrences of 'operation' in the 2003 defence white paper are 'diplomacy' (3), 'Iraq' (2), 'carefully' (2) and 'challenger' (2). The numbers in parentheses represent the corresponding co-occurrence scores.

drop-out levels. In line, attention also shifted to the maintenance of support structures and defence equipment, all of which were passing a stress test due to the high-level of British overseas commitments (British Ministry of Defence, 2003, p. 13).

From the 2010s onwards, the policy problem slowly started to lose traction. Similar to France, the UK notably highlighted the importance of intervening in an alliance, either with the US or under the umbrella of NATO, the UN or the EU. It also stressed once more that it had to focus on certain missions, with Afghanistan remaining the key priority until 2015. More specifically, the government's priorities in terms of deployments were (British Ministry of Defence, 2010, p. 18):

- standing commitments, i.e. permanent operations that were essential to safeguard British interests at the international level;
- short-term and high-impact military operations; and
- long-term stabilisation operations to resolve conflict situations abroad.

To put it differently, the government underlined that the British armed forces would continue to operate across the full spectrum of missions and operations, in spite of having faced severe cuts in their overall size.<sup>18</sup> However, it specified as well that the military would only be deployed abroad if its presence was necessary, thereby suggesting that overseas operations were not the government's key priority anymore.

In 2015, military operations were rather absent from the government agenda, in line with the specificity analysis. The government mainly highlighted that the armed forces were prepared to contribute to various crisis scenarios, such as humanitarian assistance, disaster responses, rescue missions and operations to restore peace and stability. Major combat operations, though, were only to be conducted if really required, e.g. under NATO's Article 5 (British Ministry of Defence, 2015, p. 29). The government, hence, stipulated under which conditions military assets were going to be used for crisis management, underlining its intention to establish a fast track mechanism together with the DFID to speed up the contribution of military capacities whenever civilian alternatives were not available (British Ministry of Defence, 2015, p. 65).<sup>19</sup>

<sup>18</sup>The most frequent co-occurrences of 'operation' in the 2010 SDSR are 'Afghanistan' (5), 'enduring' (5), 'divided' (3), 'domain' (3), 'undertake' (3), 'stabilisation' (3), 'commitments' (2), 'prioritised' (2), 'conduct' (2), 'months' (2), 'capable' (2) and 'standing' (2). The numbers in parentheses represent the corresponding co-occurrence scores.

<sup>19</sup>The most frequent co-occurrences of 'operation' in the 2015 NSS and SDSR are 'counter-piracy' (3), 'Sierre' (3), 'EU' (3), 'joint' (2), 'air' (2), 'missions' (2) and 'counter-terrorism' (2). The numbers in parentheses represent the corresponding co-occurrence scores.

To sum up, the agenda status of military operations strongly depends on the policy agenda one is looking at. While deployment-related policy issues have been addressed on a regular basis in the *Communiqués de Conseil des ministres*, they were largely absent from the Queen's Speech. This being said, the policy problem has been addressed more or less extensively in all French and British defence white papers and strategic reviews published between 1980 and 2018. Even though the UK has paid much more attention to military interventions than France, issue attention has been volatile on both sides of the Channel, i.e. in some years, deployments were discussed in great detail, in particular from the 2000s onwards, in others, however, they were hardly mentioned. This volatility is mainly due to the nature of the policy problem, as states may plan for different crisis scenarios but not fully anticipate them. In addition, it is important to note that the framing of the policy problem did not only change over time, but was also quite different in France and the UK. While British governments increasingly focused on the economic and operational sustainability of their interventions, attention in Paris shifted to the impact that media coverage of troop deployments may have on the public's support of French overseas missions, an issue that has hardly been addressed in the UK. To put it differently, France increasingly focused on the democratic legitimacy of troop deployments while the UK concentrated more and more on the efficacy of its military operations.

### 5.3 The media agenda

From the analysis of the policy agenda above, it becomes clear that the media have started to affect how governments address troop deployments, in particular in France. The question then is how media attention to military operations evolved and how troop deployments were framed over time. In this section, I look at the media coverage of military interventions in France and the UK between 1980 and 2018, providing evidence from an original data set that includes national news coverage of the policy issue.<sup>20</sup>

Figure 5.3 compares how national newspapers covered troop deployments on both sides of the Channel between 1980 and 2018. More specifically, it provides an overview of the number of articles published on military operations per year. It is crucial to note here that the figure shows both coverage in five national newspapers *and* coverage in only one of those five newspapers, i.e. *Le Monde* in France and *The Times* of London in the UK. As explained in Chapter 2, due to data (un)availability only those two newspapers fully cover the period of this study and, therefore, serve as controls for

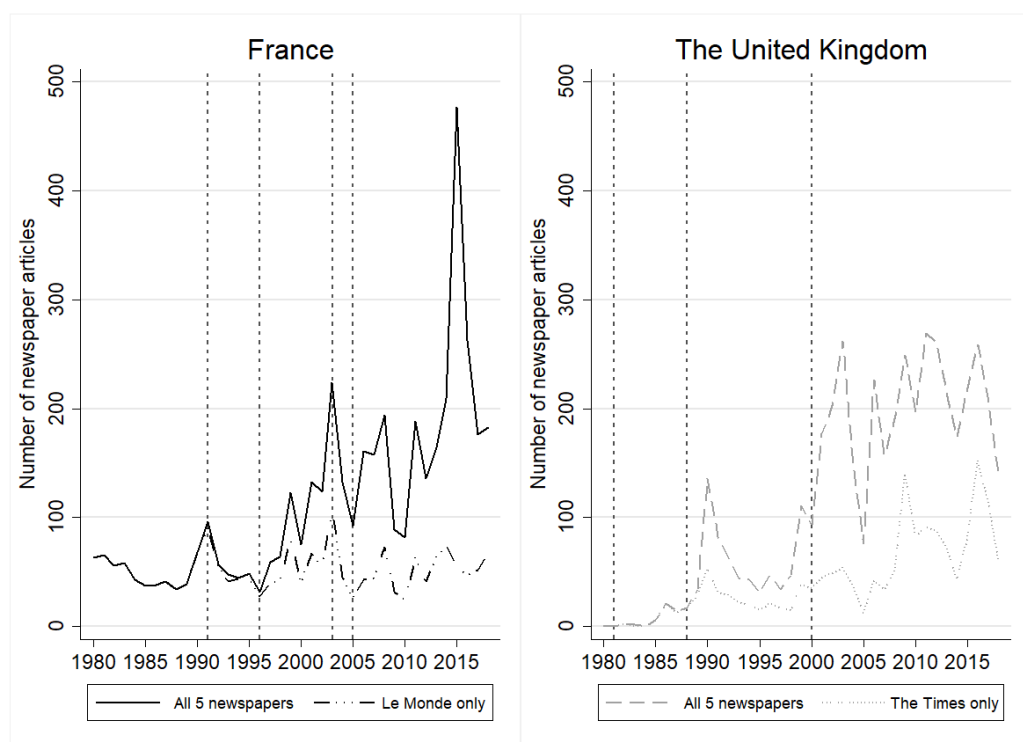
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<sup>20</sup>Appendix B.B explains in more detail how this media analysis was conducted and provides an overview of the search terms I used in Europresse and Factiva.



the evolution of media attention to military operations. The vertical reference lines in Figure 5.3 indicate the years in which data for an additional newspaper start being available on Europresse and Factiva, respectively.<sup>21</sup> They notably allow us to be fully aware of the changes in the composition of the database and, hence, to immediately see which ‘spikes in media attention’ are due to the research design and which increases correspond to a real change in the media agenda in France and the UK.

Figure 5.3: Media coverage of military operations involving France and the United Kingdom, 1980-2018



Sources: Author based on Europresse and Factiva data

What does the figure suggest? Although media coverage has been very volatile in both countries between 1980 and 2018, we note that newspapers in France and the UK have followed comparable trends, regardless of their political orientation. In France, attention peaked several times since 1990, in line with French troop deployments.<sup>22</sup> The key peak, however, was in 2015, with a total of 477 articles on French military

<sup>21</sup>In France, data for *Les Échos*, *Le Figaro*, *Ouest-France* and *Le Parisien-Aujourd'hui en France* are available as of 1991, 1996, 2003 and 2005, respectively. In the UK, data for *Daily Mail* and *The Guardian* can be accessed as of 1981, while data for *The Independent* and *The Daily Telegraph* are available as of 1988 and 2000, respectively. Cf. Table 2.4 in Chapter 2 for an overview of the media database and the exact time periods covered by each newspaper included in this study.

<sup>22</sup>More specifically, the national media covered France's participation in the Gulf war (1990-1991), the war in Kosovo (1998-1999) and the Afghanistan war (2001-2014) quite extensively.

operations, out of which 55 were published in *Le Monde*. This spike in media attention is closely linked to the terror attacks in France which put the armed forces in the centre of attention of media outlets. Similar to France, media attention in the UK peaked several times, in particular since the early 2000s, with over 200 articles being published per year.<sup>23</sup> The volatile status of military operations on the media agenda is not that surprising. First, troop deployments depend on the strategic environment which, in turn, is subject to change. Second, they have wider policy implications, e.g. for the armed forces and the defence industry, and, therefore, also tend to be rather salient, i.e. if military operations catch the attention of media outlets, they usually take up a significant share of the media agenda. Since the policy problem may be framed and addressed quite differently, it is particularly interesting to examine in more detail *how* the British and the French media perceived and presented the issue over time.

In France, the media published a total of 4,377 articles on French military operations between 1980 and 2018. The tone of these news stories was quite diverse, i.e. some were framed in a positive way, while others were formulated much more negatively. News coverage peaked on 11 June 2003, with 10 articles being published that day. The topics that the French media address with regard to troop deployments vary widely. Some articles describe the missions and operations of the French armed forces, both at home and abroad. This is particularly true whenever troops have just been deployed to a new theatre of operation, such as Mali or Syria, or whenever they are about to return back home. Others discuss the implications that those interventions have for the armed forces. These articles underline more and more often the overstretch and *fatigue* of the military, and tend to stress that the tempo of operations risks negatively affecting the recruitment levels within the armed forces. They also address operational deaths. Still others deal with the funding of overseas missions, and how budget cuts impact the equipment of the French armed forces. This is mostly the case when it becomes evident that the LPM will not be respected or, alternatively, when a new LPM is about to be announced. The media also covered various scandals that were more or less directly related to troop deployments, such as the faulty software Louvois which has prevented soldiers and officers, in particular those being stationed overseas, from being correctly paid for several years.<sup>24</sup> Last but not least, the French media

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<sup>23</sup>The key peaks were in 2003 (with 262 articles, out of which 54 appeared in The Times of London), 2011 (with 269 articles, out of which 91 were published in The Times of London), 2012 (with 261 articles, out of which 88 appeared in The Times of London) and 2016 (with 259 articles, out of which 152 were published in The Times of London). They largely correspond to the involvement of the British armed forces in the war in Afghanistan (2001-2021) and the Iraq war (2003-2011), both of which led to particularly high death tolls, as Figure 2.4 in Chapter 2 already showed.

<sup>24</sup>It is important to note here that this policy problem did not emerge when examining media attention to military recruitment in Chapter 3.

regularly address the role of the parliament in approving troop deployments, thereby indirectly looking at how the public perceives those missions. If we only examine the agenda of *Le Monde* - i.e. the only French newspaper for which we have data that cover the entire period 1980-2018 -, we find very similar priorities in news coverage. Articles cover the role of the armed forces, at home and abroad, provide information on ongoing missions, and discuss whether budget allocations live up to France's ambitions on the international scene. Overall, the newspaper published 2,023 articles on French military operations, with most news stories being framed negatively though (70 %).

In the UK, the media published a total of 4,454 articles on British military operations between 1980 and 2018. As in France, the topics on the British media agenda vary widely and news coverage is also rather negative.<sup>25</sup> Similar to the media coverage in France, some articles describe the missions and operations of the British armed forces, i.e. they provide regular updates on both the troops and the equipment being deployed abroad. Others discuss, as in France, the implications that those interventions have for the military. More precisely, those articles highlight that the forces tend to be below their predicted strength but are still deployed above planned levels which, in turn, negatively affects the overall well-being of military personnel. The media, thus, regularly address the under-manning and overstretch of the British armed forces, arguing that the latter was mainly responsible for service personnel suffering stress, alcoholism and PTSD. Similar to France, they also report on operational deaths. This was particularly the case when death tolls in Afghanistan started to rise, with the British MOD being accused by journalists of having failed to comply with its duty of care to soldiers on the frontline. Still others deal with the underfunding of the British armed forces and show that the military is often inadequately equipped for its missions and operations, leading to low morale within the troops. These articles also discuss budget cuts, especially during defence reviews. Last but not least, the British media regularly cover the results of public opinion surveys, above all those commissioned or conducted by the MOD, and discuss reports on military operations published by the parliament and the NAO. If we only look at the agenda of *The Times* of London - i.e. the only British newspaper for which we have data that cover the entire period 1980-2018 -, we find very similar priorities in news coverage. Overall, the newspaper published 1,629 articles on British military operations and mainly provides updates on troop deployments, including information on defence budget cuts and the impact they have on service personnel and equipment being stationed overseas.

To sum up, the French and the British media dedicated a large share of their

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<sup>25</sup>Contrary to *Europresse*, *Factiva* does not provide a percentage for negative, neutral or positive media coverage.

agendas to overseas operations over the past 40 years, in particular since the early 2000s. News coverage of those missions has been rather volatile between 1980 and 2018 which, in turn, is due to the nature of the policy problem. Indeed, the UK and France can plan and prepare for military operations, but are unable to fully anticipate them. On both sides of the Channel, national newspapers covered similar issues over time, some of which also figured on the policy agenda (e.g. the wider social and economic implications of troop deployments). In addition, the tone of media reporting changed over time, i.e. sometimes it was positive, sometimes it was negative, although it tends to be slightly more critical in the UK. As I already underlined in Chapters 3 and 4, issues can hit the agenda on a wave of positive publicity, or they can be raised in an environment of bad news - with different policy consequences. The tendency to have rather critical news on troop deployments, in turn, is not without consequences for the public's support of those missions, as the analysis of the policy agenda already suggested and as the next sections will show in more detail.

## 5.4 The public agenda

From the above, it becomes clear that the status of military operations has changed on both the policy and the media agendas. Although defence is rarely the focus of national and international public opinion surveys, highly salient issues, such as military operations, tend to be covered on a more or less regular basis. Compared to the recruitment of service personnel and the acquisition of aircraft carriers, we consequently have a variety of national and international data sets that help us to better grasp what the public thought about (ongoing) troop deployments, in particular since the early 2000s which have been marked by a strong increase in *ad hoc* surveys on military interventions. This being said, the analysis of public opinion data on troop deployments is still somehow problematic. Polls usually provide a snapshot of how the general public perceived overseas missions, i.e. the data are often only available for a few years and do not systematically cover the operations from start to finish. If data are available for longer time periods (which tends to be the case for the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, for example), it is crucial to check if the data points are really comparable over time. Since this is more likely to be the case whenever we rely on the same data source, I will focus on opinion polls from the MODs and Ipsos in this section.

In France, the MOD regularly concludes that the public tends to support French troop deployments,<sup>26</sup> even if it acknowledges that the government has also faced periods

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<sup>26</sup>This is fully in line with the rally-'round-the-flag effect that IR scholars tend to find.

during which the population was much more sceptical of ongoing interventions. Public support for the war in Afghanistan, for instance, which was relatively high in the early 2000s, with 66 % of the French approving of the military intervention in the fall of 2001 (Ipsos, 2001a), dropped from 52 % in 2008 to 25 % in 2009 after the Uzbink Valley ambush which killed ten French soldiers on 18-19 August 2008 (French Ministry of the Armed Forces, 2017a, p. 11). After the ambush, support for the mission only slowly increased again, reaching around 50 % by the time France decided to withdraw its troops in 2014 (French Ministry of the Armed Forces, 2017a, p. 11). More recent operations, such as Sangaris in the Central African Republic (CAR) and Serval in Mali, seem to be perceived in a more positive way, although overall levels of support also tend to decrease over time. In 2012-2013, 60 % and 67 % of the French were in favour of Sangaris and Serval; in 2015-2016, support dropped to 50 % and 59 %, respectively. This being said, some operations have also seen public support increase over time. This is notably the case for Chammal, whose aim is to fight against the terrorist group Islamic State (IS) in Syria and Iraq, with public support climbing from 70 % in 2014 to 85 % in 2016 (French Ministry of the Armed Forces, 2017a, p. 11). This increase in public support for Chammal is, however, likely to be due to the 2015 terror attacks in France and may, hence, not necessarily persist over time.

In the UK, the MOD rarely sounds out attitudes towards specific military operations. Instead, the in-house survey of the ministry started to focus on what the public believes the armed forces do and where it thinks that the British military is currently deployed to. According to the 2016/2017 edition of the survey, only 8 % of the British public considers that the forces play a role in military operations and fighting conflicts. The majority of respondents thought that the task of the military was to protect and defend the UK and its economy (66 %), followed by peacekeeping missions (26 %) and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (20 %) (British Ministry of Defence, 2017). This misperception of the key mission of the British armed forces is fully in line with another result of the MOD's opinion poll, namely that Brits are ill-informed about ongoing troop deployments. Thus, a large majority of the public had difficulty to name missions and operations - or even just countries - to which the UK contributes forces and/or equipment (British Ministry of Defence, 2017). While the MOD's survey provides insights into how the British public perceives the work of the armed forces, it does not allow us to analyse the support of or opposition to troop deployments. It is, consequently, all the more important to rely on international databases to comprehend the attitudes of the public towards overseas missions and operations.

In the case of the UK, Ipsos has various archives on the wars in which the UK has been involved since the 1980s. The latter notably include the Falklands war, the war in

Afghanistan and the Iraq war, three conflicts that significantly shaped British defence policy over the past 40 years. The panel data on the Falklands war, thus, suggest that the dispute quickly turned into the MII facing Britain, with 61 % of respondents mentioning the war as the nation's most important issue on 3-5 May 1982 while only 39 % thought so on 14 April 1982. In addition, they show that the satisfaction with how the government handled the situation steadily increased from 60 % in April 1982 to 84 % in June 1982. From the panel data, we can also conclude that two thirds of the population were in favour of using military force to regain British sovereignty in the Falklands, in spite of American pressure, and that the issue was important enough to justify the loss of British service personnel (Ipsos, 1982). Support for the Falklands war was, consequently, not only strong but even increased over time.

The war in Afghanistan was also the subject of several Ipsos polls between 2001 and 2021. In the fall of 2001, over 80 % approved how the then PM Tony Blair handled the British response to the terror attack on 9/11, and almost 70 % of respondents supported taking action against Afghanistan (Ipsos, 2001b). This support, however, quickly started to drop. Ipsos polls, thus, show that Brits increasingly opposed the campaign and became more and more sceptical that the aims of the operation would eventually be met. By 2009, around half of the British public was against continuing the mission in Afghanistan, with only 41 % being in favour of keeping the troops abroad (Ipsos, 2009). In line, more recent surveys concluded that Brits were split about troop withdrawal from Afghanistan, with 39 % of the general public saying it was the right thing to do and 40 % believing that the UK should stay in Afghanistan (Ipsos, 2021). Similarly, public opposition to the UK's intervention in Iraq also increased over time, with the 2003 Iraq war being even more unpopular than the war in Afghanistan. An Ipsos trend analysis of attitudes towards the invasion of Iraq, thus, showed that 49 % of respondents disapproved how Blair handled the situation in September 2002, with dissatisfaction rates increasing to 77 % by May 2007 (Ipsos, 2007).

Although both France and the UK have faced more and more opposition to their military operations over time, in particular since the late 2000s, negative attitudes towards troop deployments did not automatically lead to a disapproval of the armed forces. To the contrary, support for and trust in service personnel continues to remain high on both sides of the Channel (cf. Chapter 3), even if the general public increasingly questions the legitimacy and efficacy of their overseas missions and operations.

To sum up, governments as well as international polling institutes increasingly deem it necessary to sound out public opinion on ongoing troop deployments. Recent years have, thus, seen a spike in *ad hoc* surveys on the missions and operations of the armed

forces, suggesting that the policy issue has reached a level of importance where society at large considers that the public's perspective on the matter is of importance. While the support for military operations tends to decrease over time on both sides of the Channel, opposition to troop deployments does not imply that the public has a negative image of the armed forces. To the contrary, as I have shown in Chapter 3, trust in the military remains high and even increased over time, although the general public is more and more sceptical towards the overseas missions of service personnel.

## 5.5 The agenda-dynamics of military operations

After having analysed *when* military operations emerged as a policy problem and *how* they were framed over time, I will now focus on the issue's agenda-building dynamics, i.e. I will examine *how* the policy, the media and the public agendas interact and *how* the strategic context affects them. More specifically, the aim of this section is to explain why interventions have become a government priority in France and the UK after the end of the Cold War, and to demonstrate that deployment-related policies are increasingly media-driven. This means that the media have started to lead public opinion on the matter, focussing in particular on the legitimacy and efficacy of ongoing and potential, future French and British military operations. They, thus, increasingly limit the policy options that the executive has at hand. Overseas missions and operations, therefore, do not only qualify as a sensational defence issue; their agenda-setting dynamics also suggest a certain normalisation of defence as a public policy.

### 5.5.1 Military operations as a media emblem

From the empirical analysis of the policy, the media and the public agendas, it becomes clear that news coverage and public attitudes have started to become key to understanding how government attention to troop deployments eventually plays out, both in France and the UK - even if London does not address the impact that media coverage has on the conduct and success of British military interventions as extensively as Paris. To put it differently, although policy-makers on both sides of the Channel finally decide on the launch of an overseas operation or the contribution of troops and equipment to an international mission, their policy options are increasingly constrained and shaped by media coverage and public opinion. It is, consequently, crucial to fully comprehend why the media in France and the UK have started to care about ongoing and potential, future troop deployments, and why their news coverage has such a direct impact on policy agendas. In this section, I argue that media outlets pay attention to

military interventions because they have wider policy implications, notably in terms of HR management and defence procurement, the two building blocks of any defence policy. In other terms, deployments have become a media emblem because they can be framed and addressed in very different ways, including positive and negative ones, and because they tend to be particularly sensational at the domestic level.

### **5.5.1.1 Troop deployments and operational deaths - or how defence increasingly makes the news?**

Since the end of the Cold War, military operations have become a media emblem, i.e. they belong to the defence issues that the national and the international press cover quite extensively. This shift in media attention is largely confirmed by the empirical results of Chapters 3-5 which suggest that military operations caught the attention of media outlets to a greater extent than the recruitment of service personnel and the acquisition of aircraft carriers, for instance. According to several interviewees, the key reason for this change in the media agenda is that defence policy nowadays mainly becomes important at the domestic level when the government decides to deploy troops and equipment abroad, i.e. whenever society fears the consequences of its military engagements and, hence, has concerns about the life and well-being of soldiers.<sup>27</sup>

From the analysis of the media agenda above, we already know that journalists only provide little information on the missions and operations of the armed forces. Information on ongoing troop deployments is, indeed, very controlled at the national level which, in turn, also explains why news coverage of overseas interventions tends to be vague and slightly delayed. According to one interviewee, the reason for journalists not being allowed to cover troop deployments in great detail is twofold: governments do not only want to protect their service personnel but also avoid the undermining of their operations.<sup>28</sup> On both sides of the Channel, the conduct of overseas operations, including their advances and problems, thus stays a bit of a 'taboo', with newspapers hardly addressing the operational activities of the military in real-time. This holds true in spite of journalists being increasingly present during overseas deployments.

In France, media coverage of defence-related issues started to increase with the war in Afghanistan, as Figure 5.3 already suggested. It then spiked, as two of the interviewees confirmed as well, with the 2015 terror attacks in France which made the armed forces the prime focus of the national press for several months.<sup>29</sup> The French

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<sup>27</sup>Interviews with a defence policy advisor to a political party (ID 1) and a civil servant at the MOD (ID 12)

<sup>28</sup>Interview with a defence journalist (ID 26)

<sup>29</sup>Interviews with a civil servant at the *ministère des Armées* (ID 20) and a defence journalist (ID



media, thus, currently mainly focus on the internal and external operations of the armed forces which, in turn, also explains why journalists increasingly try to report from the deployment theatres.<sup>30</sup> This being said, some operations receive much more media coverage than others, such as the interventions in the CAR and Mali, thereby giving more visibility to the French armed forces and their work overseas.<sup>31</sup> In addition, news coverage is not always positive, as the analysis of the media agenda above has shown and as media monitoring within the French MOD confirms as well.<sup>32</sup> The MOD, hence, regularly ‘risks getting into trouble’ when the press covers France’s operational activities abroad, in particular when the armed forces record casualties. Operational deaths do, indeed, systematically make the news and may lead to unforeseen (political) crises at the national level, as one interviewee stressed.<sup>33</sup> Just think about the media reactions to the bombing of Bouaké on 6 November 2004 which resulted in 9 deaths and several dozen injured; the Uzbin Valley ambush on 18-19 August 2008 during which France suffered 10 deaths and 21 wounded; or the helicopter crash in Mali on 25 November 2019 which killed 13 French soldiers. Those operational deaths also explain why the coverage of troop deployments is rather contrasted in France, i.e. some missions are reported on positively, like Chammal during which France has recorded 2 operational deaths, while others receive much more critical news, like Barkhane during which 48 French soldiers lost their lives since the operation was launched in 2014.<sup>34</sup>

Given this change in media priorities, the DICOd started to offer internships for journalists from the early 2000s onwards, mainly to better prepare and train reporters for their work overseas. It also co-edited a guide with Reporters without Borders to support French journalists covering conflict zones. This guide does not only recall the principle of press freedom and charters and declarations relating to professional ethics, but also specifies the rules to be respected in dangerous environments as well as the first steps to take whenever those preventive measures fail. Although the French MOD obviously intends to increase the safety of reporters, both the guide and the internships also aim at making sure that the press does not (immediately) cover issues that would put the life of service personnel and/or the mission itself at risk.<sup>35</sup> In spite of this ‘double target’, the measures that the DICOd has taken to better prepare journalists for their missions and to monitor their news coverage of troop deployments over time have had a positive impact on the relationship of the armed forces and French defence

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<sup>30</sup>Interview with a civil servant at the *ministère des Armées* (ID 20)

<sup>31</sup>Interview with a defence journalist (ID 26)

<sup>32</sup>Interview with a civil servant at the *ministère des Armées* (ID 20)

<sup>33</sup>Interview with a civil servant at the *ministère des Armées* (ID 20)

<sup>34</sup>Interview with a civil servant at the *ministère des Armées* (ID 20)

<sup>35</sup>Interview with a civil servant at the *ministère des Armées* (ID 20)

journalists<sup>36</sup> which, in turn, may also (partly) explain the rather positive coverage of recruitment and procurement-related issues that I found in Chapters 3 and 4.

The link between higher levels of troop deployments and an increased interest in defence was largely confirmed by a British interviewee who argued that the national press in the UK only cared about defence policy when troops were deployed in high-intensity conflicts.<sup>37</sup> As in France, this is particularly true since 9/11, with the UK being militarily involved in several large-scale missions, first Afghanistan then Iraq. While the invasion of Iraq was "a brilliant success", the subsequent occupation was casualty-heavy and expensive and, therefore, caught the attention of the British media.<sup>38</sup> The focus of news coverage was, however, not only on operational deaths which are, as I have shown in the second chapter of this thesis, higher than in France. In line with the empirical analysis above, the media also concentrated on a wider range of policy failures, such as lacking schemes for war veterans and equipment deficiencies. As one interviewee suggested, the number and extent of those failures is, indeed, not negligible: in 1999, the infantry forces that moved into Kosovo had to borrow mobile phones because their Clansman radios did not work; in 2000, nearly 10 % of the standard SA-80 rifles jammed during an operation by paratroopers and special forces to rescue hostages in Sierra Leone; and in Iraq, the British armed forces had to deal with several equipment deficiencies, including shortfalls in protected vehicles and support helicopters.<sup>39</sup> Equipment deficiencies, hence, regularly make the news, especially in the UK, giving the British media an opportunity to discuss the impact of defence budget cuts on the work of the armed forces in more detail.

The media in France and the UK, hence, regularly cover troop deployments and operational deaths, in particular since the early 2000s. This shift in media attention is particularly interesting as the post-Cold War period has actually been the least fatal one for London and Paris in over a century.<sup>40</sup> According to one interviewee, the key reason for increased levels of media coverage of casualties during military operations is that death, which used to be anonymous and collective, has started to become more and more personalised and, hence, also very emotional.<sup>41</sup> To put it differently, taking care of soldiers who died for France or the UK has turned into a top priority

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<sup>36</sup>Interview with a civil servant at the *ministère des Armées* (ID 20)

<sup>37</sup>Interview with a civil servant at the MOD (ID 12)

<sup>38</sup>Interview with a defence journalist (ID 15)

<sup>39</sup>Interview with a defence journalist (ID 15)

<sup>40</sup>For an overview of operational deaths in the French armed forces since 1914, see Collin and Richter (2021) who provide aggregate data from the French Ministry of the Armed Forces (2020); for an overview of operational deaths in the British armed forces since 1945, see the database of the British Ministry of Defence (2019).

<sup>41</sup>Interview with a civil servant at the FCO (ID 4)

on both sides of the Channel. The same interviewee also stressed that the media's interest in troop deployments contributed to the general public being more informed about ongoing missions and operations, and politicians being more involved in overseas interventions as their political costs kept increasing given that governments aimed at conducting 'wars with 0 dead'. Both 24-h global news coverage and the increased use of social media, thus, led to a public debate on how British soldiers were treated, at home and during their overseas operations. It also contributed to a non-acceptance of the current situation: while the French and the Brits support their troops, both society and political leaders have more and more difficulty making sense of operational injuries and deaths, especially as the latter tend to concern young people.<sup>42</sup>

### 5.5.1.2 How media coverage affects public opinion and constrains the policy agenda

Given that military operations are concrete but mostly unobtrusive, i.e. the vast majority of Brits and French do not observe or experience them directly,<sup>43</sup> troop deployments create great potential for the media to drive public opinion on defence and to constrain the defence policy agenda of the executive. This is particularly true when the number of civilian and combatant deaths climbs or when the armed forces face equipment deficiencies, for instance. From the empirical analysis above, we also know that public support for military operations tends to decrease over time, both in France and the UK, and that opposition to those interventions does not imply opposition to the armed forces in general. To the contrary, trust in the military has remained high on both sides of the Channel in spite of the public increasingly challenging the legitimacy and efficacy of overseas operations. How can we explain this pattern?

To shed light on what may at first seem like a paradox, it is important to keep in mind that the UK and France have a military legacy, and that public support for the armed forces has historically been very high in both countries. As one interviewee argued, this support is still required nowadays to sustain national defence policies, but has increasingly been challenged with substantial casualties, in particular since the early 2000s.<sup>44</sup> To put it differently, while there continues to be a certain public pride of the French and British armed forces, the latter may become very difficult at times, especially when operational deaths have to be justified or be made sense of.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>Interview with a civil servant at the FCO (ID 4)

<sup>43</sup>Cf. Figure 2.1 in Chapter 2 for an overview of the proportion of people who serve in the armed forces in the UK and France.

<sup>44</sup>Interview with a civil servant at the MOD (ID 12)

<sup>45</sup>Interview with a civil servant at the FCO and the MOD (ID 14)

Just think about public opposition to the invasion of Iraq. In France, 1.5 million people demonstrated against the war in 2003, forcing a debate on whether France should back its allies or not. In the UK, the public initially supported the overseas operation - which was mainly due to the impact that 9/11 has had on British national security and the country's special relationship with the US -, but opposition to the intervention rapidly took over as the number of casualties increased and body bags started to return. As one of the British interviewees reminded, "when the first coffins were being driven back home, whole villages would lie on the streets to protest against the intervention".<sup>46</sup> In other terms, while the public supports the troops, there can be passionate opposition to their overseas deployments. This is particularly true if Brits have the impression that the armed forces were not adequately prepared and equipped for their mission and that the government does not support them in an appropriate manner once they return home. The same interviewee also pointed out that the MOD had become "useless" for many Brits because it handled public funds inefficiently, and then argued that there was, indeed, evidence for the ministry not managing its budget particularly well.<sup>47</sup> This, in turn, largely explains why the UK public has become increasingly suspicious of British overseas interventions.

According to two interviewees, the key turning point for how troop deployments have been perceived and addressed as a policy problem in the UK were the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.<sup>48</sup> Indeed, from the 2000s onwards, there was an increased sense of vulnerability within the MOD, a feeling in government that the UK had taken a disproportionate political risk, in particular in Iraq, as the intervention clearly showed an overall lack of strategy.<sup>49</sup> With rising death tolls, government attitude became more bitter because it seemed like the UK was losing people for no good reason. In addition, the public became increasingly opposed to British overseas missions, including the war in Afghanistan where the death record had also started to worsen. When David Cameron came into office, he, therefore, announced the withdrawal of British troops from Afghanistan. However, he continued to support the Iraq mission, even though he was not particularly enthusiastic about it.<sup>50</sup> The two interviewees, thus, agreed that public opinion started to matter, and that defence was no longer an exclusive issue of the PM and his or her inner circle.<sup>51</sup> To the contrary, it became evident during the

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<sup>46</sup>Interview with a civil servant at the FCO and the MOD (ID 14)

<sup>47</sup>Interview with a civil servant at the FCO and the MOD (ID 14)

<sup>48</sup>Interviews with a defence policy advisor to the MOD (ID 8) and a civil servant at the FCO and the MOD (ID 14)

<sup>49</sup>Interview with a civil servant at the FCO (ID 4)

<sup>50</sup>Interview with a civil servant at the FCO (ID 4)

<sup>51</sup>Interviews with a civil servant at the FCO (ID 4) and a defence policy advisor to the MOD (ID 8)

UK's intervention in Syria in 2013 that overseas operations had to be legitimised by the British parliament. One of the two interviewees, thus, voiced that MPs felt like the PM [Theresa May] could not go to war as easily as Blair did, and that she would need parliamentary approval before sending troops and equipment overseas.<sup>52</sup>

It follows from the above that military operations are increasingly media-driven, in particular since the early 2000s, i.e. the British and the French media started to drive public opinion on troop deployments - and, hence, defence more widely speaking -, thereby limiting the policy options that governments have at hand. By impacting how the public perceives the policy problem, the media indirectly shape government priorities. The predominant agenda dynamic is, consequently, between the media agenda and the other two agendas, i.e. the armed forces' overseas missions and operations *nowadays* qualify as a sensational defence issue. In line with the theoretical framework that I proposed in Chapter 1, any relationship between the three agendas and real-world indicators is, thus, secondary to the effects that the media agenda has on public and government priorities. As in the last two empirical chapters, this does not mean that there are no interactions with the strategic environment or that the priorities of the executive do not matter at all. To the contrary, as the analysis above already suggested, the strategic environment is key to understanding issue attention to troop deployments and governments may, in spite of media constraints, decide to override public opinion and opt for policy solutions for which they do not have support back home. This is particularly true as the data presented in this chapter imply that military operations used to be largely policy-driven until the early 2000s.<sup>53</sup>

First, the theoretical model of Chapter 1 suggests that the strategic environment may be more or less crucial to account for the evolution of government attention to defence-related policy problems, depending on the issue's attributes. In Chapters 3 and 4, I already showed that the policy context evolved quite significantly since the 1980s and underlined that the security and the economic situation were key to comprehending how the recruitment of service personnel and the acquisition of aircraft carriers have been understood, framed and addressed as policy problems over time.<sup>54</sup> This also holds true for military operations. The evolution of the security and the economic environment have not only been addressed in the defence white papers and strategic reviews that I discussed above, but also been covered quite extensively by the French and the British media. In the case of overseas missions and operations, it goes without

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<sup>52</sup>Interview with a defence policy advisor to the MOD (ID 8)

<sup>53</sup>Cf. Chapter 4 for an empirical analysis of how the agenda-setting dynamics of governmental defence issues may play out.

<sup>54</sup>I also highlighted that demographic changes and the relationship between the armed forces and society were important to grasp why HR management became a priority on both sides of the Channel.

saying that the strategic context matters to understand and account for issue attention as governments would not deploy troops and equipment if the security environment did not require them to do so. At the same time, the economic situation may be a significant constraint when doing so, with decreasing defence budgets limiting the tools and, hence, the policy options that governments have at their disposal.

Second, there may be interactions between the policy, the media and the public agendas. Even though sensational defence issues create great potential for the media to drive public opinion and to constrain the policy agenda, mainly because the vast majority of individuals do not observe or experience them directly, this may not necessarily happen. In the case of troop deployments, there are several examples that illustrate that governments may override media and public priorities. In the 1980s, for example, the executive had no real choice with regard to defence, i.e. high levels of defence spending were necessary, even if the armed forces were not actively used during the Cold War.<sup>55</sup> In the 1990s, governments rapidly decided to launch several expeditionary warfare missions, with troops being sent to Iraq and the Balkans, for instance, without prior parliamentary approval. Those "successful wars", i.e. interventions with few losses for the French and the British armed forces, led to an overconfidence in the military tool, in particular in the UK.<sup>56</sup> In other terms, military interventions did not seem to be very risky at that time which, in turn, ended up becoming a problem for governments on both sides of the Channel from the early 2000s onwards, as I have already shown above. As one British interviewee explained in great detail:<sup>57</sup>

"In the 2000s, the core of our work on foreign and defence policy was on Iraq and Afghanistan. Both wars dominated the agenda of the MOD and the DFID, it was also quite a chunk of the PM's agenda, as our national reputation was caught up in those two missions. Contrary to Brexit which currently overruns everyone's agenda, the government continued to keep working on other defence policy issues, such as the Middle East peace process, and also paid attention to domestic policy issues, like tuition fees. But still, there was a lot of short-term thinking going on: while we really needed helicopters and armoured vehicles for both missions, it was already a daily scramble to make sure that the very basics were there."

Although media coverage increasingly shapes public opinion on defence and limits the policy options of the executive, there are still situations in which policy-makers decide

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<sup>55</sup>Interview with a civil servant at the FCO (ID 4)

<sup>56</sup>Interview with a civil servant at the FCO (ID 4)

<sup>57</sup>Interview with a civil servant at the FCO (ID 4)

that it is in the country's best interest not to respond to the demands of the public.<sup>58</sup> To use the words of a British interviewee, there are "slow-burning" and "fast-burning" threats and with the latter, the government has no choice but to react immediately, carrying along the public.<sup>59</sup> To put it differently, there is simply no time for a rally-'round-the-flag effect. The Russian invasion of Ukraine is an excellent example for such a fast-burning threat where the media and public opinion initially hardly mattered as governments had to react very quickly when Russia started to move its armed forces into the separatist controlled regions on 22 February 2022.

The agenda dynamics of military operations - which are similar to those that Soroka (2002a) identified for AIDS, crime and the environment - suggest that deployment-related policies have normalised over time. They are like many other, domestic issues increasingly media-driven. To put it differently, what used to be a governmental defence issue slowly but surely turned into a sensational defence issue. The media, hence, shape the public agenda on troop deployments, thereby limiting the policy options of the executive. This, in turn, implies that parts of the regal domain do not withdraw from the 'traditional' agenda-setting dynamics anymore. Given that agenda-setting is the first stage of the policy cycle, it affects policy formulation, policy implementation and policy evaluation. In the last subsection, I will, hence, shortly discuss how government attention to overseas missions shaped institutional practices and deployment-related policies in France and the UK and explain why those changes provide additional empirical evidence for the normalisation of the defence sector.

### 5.5.2 The impact of agenda-setting on deployment policies: Towards a normalisation of defence

The analysis of the policy, the media and the public agendas does not only suggest that military operations are increasingly media-driven, but also shows that the interventions of the 1990s and 2000s were very influential in terms of defence policy-making, i.e. they dominated the defence agendas on both sides of the Channel, especially in the UK, be it with regard to HR or equipment choices.<sup>60</sup> In addition, the mediatization of troop deployments contributed to several changes at the domestic level. First, Paris and London strove for more democratic legitimacy of military operations, in particular by looking for parliamentary approval and, hence, public scrutiny of their international engagements. Second, they introduced a series of policies that are specifically targeted

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<sup>58</sup>Interview with a civil servant at the FCO (ID 4)

<sup>59</sup>Interview with a civil servant at the FCO (ID 4)

<sup>60</sup>Interview with a defence policy advisor to the MOD (ID 8)

at service personnel and their families, including support schemes for military staff that suffered injuries during an overseas mission and families who lost a loved one on duty. Last but not least, deployment-related policies started to change, notably in an attempt to counterbalance the overstretch of the French and the British armed forces. These changes show a certain normalisation of defence policy which is not only increasingly subject to parliamentary scrutiny, but also subject to policy modifications that account for the constraints that current and former military personnel as well as their relatives face in their everyday lives.

### 5.5.2.1 The strive for more democratic legitimacy of military operations

From the empirical analysis of the policy, the media and the public agendas, it becomes clear that public opinion and parliamentary scrutiny became increasingly important on both sides of the Channel. London and Paris, thus, strove for more democratic legitimacy of their military operations, in particular from the late 2000s onwards.

Generally speaking, it is important to keep in mind that parliamentary rights with regard to deployments have been rather limited in the past, both in France and the UK. The *Assemblée nationale* and the House of Commons, hence, do not take the decision to send troops abroad; they also do not have to approve the launch of or participation in a military operation; and, consequently, do not have a say in the mandate, the rules of the engagement, the duration of the deployment, the number of troops to be sent or the equipment to be used (Mölling and von Voss, 2015). This being said, some institutional practices and rules have started to change since the 2000s, thereby giving parliaments more leeway to affect the government's defence agenda.

In France, the executive does not need parliamentary approval to decide on the launch of a military operation. In the early 1990s, the only constraint that government faced when deploying troops overseas was that conscripts had to sign a specific contract to volunteer for interventions outside of Europe. This restriction also explains why the executive eventually decided to move to an all-volunteer force in 1996 (Irondelle, 2011a). Since the constitutional reform of 23 July 2008, however, the French parliament has to be informed about the government's decision to deploy the armed forces abroad no later than three days after the start of the operation. The government also has to specify the objectives of the troop deployment, even if the information provided is not followed by a parliamentary vote. In addition, parliament has to authorise the extension of any mission that lasts longer than four months, i.e. since 2008, it may effectively monitor the deployment of troops and equipment overseas which, in turn, constitutes a major change for the French armed forces. Those constitutional changes also affected the



agenda of the *Assemblée nationale* and the *Sénat*, with military operations having become a key item on the policy agendas of the two houses.<sup>61</sup>

In the UK, the situation is rather similar, i.e. the executive can deploy the armed forces abroad without having the consent or backing of parliament. Institutional practices, however, started to change with the war in Iraq when the then PM Tony Blair agreed to debate and vote on the intervention in the House of Commons in March 2003. Indeed, British PMs increasingly seek approval of parliament before deploying troops overseas, although legislation does not require them to do so. This incremental change in policy practices, in turn, contributed to a closer parliamentary oversight of British overseas missions and operations, with parliament holding government more and more accountable for its deployment-related decisions. In Syria, for example, the government decided to withdraw the UK's troops as MPs did not support the mission. Those changes in institutional practices are fully reflected in the policy agenda of the defence commission. As one interviewee highlighted, in spite of not being able to directly authorise or oppose the government's decisions in the realm of defence, the commission and MPs are free to set their agenda and to focus on issues they deem important, be it the overstretch of the armed forces, equipment deficiencies or troop deployments,<sup>62</sup> thereby confirming the research results of Irondelle et al. (2012, p. 98).

To sum up, parliaments on both sides of the Channel are increasingly able to hold government accountable for its decision to launch or participate in a military operation, formally in France, informally in the UK. London's shift in institutional practices from the early 2000s onwards and the 2008 changes in the French constitution clearly show that governments strive for making troop deployments more transparent and getting the green light from parliament for their missions, in an attempt to legitimise troop deployments not only via international law but also democratically.

### **5.5.2.2 New government obligations towards deployed service personnel and their families**

As I already explained in Chapter 3, French and British governments also started to focus more closely on their duty of care, formalising their obligations towards service personnel. Given that the armed forces on both sides of the Channel have been involved in a series of conflicts and operations since the end of the Cold War, government attention shifted to the introduction of safeguards, rewards and compensation schemes for current and former military personnel as well as their families. Governments also

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<sup>61</sup>Interview with a defence policy advisor at the *Sénat* (ID 30)

<sup>62</sup>Interview with staff of the Defence Committee (ID 7)

institutionalised the procedures for operational deaths to make sure that the repatriation and celebration of soldiers who died for their country were standardised. As I mentioned in Chapter 3, this is particularly true for the UK which faced high death tolls during its deployments, but also holds for France.

In the UK, the key policy change was the introduction of the Military Covenant in 2000. The covenant describes the relationship between members of the armed forces and society, underlines that service personnel should be treated with fairness and respect and be valued as people, and specifies that government owes them a duty of care (Forster, 2006, 2012; McCartney, 2010). This includes a series of welfare policies (e.g. access to education and healthcare, measures to increase the forces' well-being); the guarantee that all staff is adequately formed and equipped for the missions it has to fulfil; as well as various safeguards, notably to make sure that soldiers who are physically or psychologically injured, be it during an operation or a training exercise, will be taken care of by government services. As one interviewee reminded, several deaths in Iraq were linked to lacking equipment for combat soldiers which, in turn, led to "unhappy times for the MOD" as it realised that it "faced a number of huge problems on the ground, most of which had been a political creation".<sup>63</sup> The equipment failures - and the impact they had for the armed forces - contributed to the public paying more and more attention to the policy problem which, in turn, led to homecoming parades and various pride messages, raising the profile of the armed forces within the UK.<sup>64</sup>

A similar evolution can be observed in France where policies have changed to take care of currently serving military personnel, veterans as well as the families of military personnel that died on duty (Collin and Richter, 2021, forthcoming). It is crucial to note here that both the French and the British MODs have already been sued in the past: in the UK, the law suit was about equipment deficiencies in Iraq<sup>65</sup>; in France, several families of the ten soldiers who died in the Uzbin Valley ambush in 2008 filed a complaint for an organisational mishandling of the operation in Afghanistan. These lawsuits did not only catch the attention of the media and the general public, but also led to rapid policy changes on both sides of the Channel. In France, the media coverage of Uzbin, which left several French soldiers dead and injured, contributed to the launch of a public debate on the young age of most members of the armed forces and the modalities of their deployments (Chéron, 2019). It led to several policy changes, in particular with regard to the political recognition of French soldiers who died during an overseas mission, the support of their families (including their parents,

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<sup>63</sup>Interview with a defence journalist (ID 15)

<sup>64</sup>Interview with a civil servant at the MOD (ID 12)

<sup>65</sup>Interview with a defence journalist (ID 15)

siblings, grand-parents, partners and children), and the treatment of the wounded or those who witnessed the death on the deployment theatre.

### 5.5.2.3 Changes in deployment-related policies

Last but not least, government attention to the legitimacy and efficacy of military operations also led to changes in deployment-related policies.

On both sides of the Channel, governments introduced what one may call a sustainability agenda, i.e. they determined the number of missions and operations that could be run in parallel, given the armed forces' capacities. According to a British interviewee, the purpose of this measure was twofold: first, to make decision-makers think in more realistic terms and second, to send a clear sign to Treasury as there was a sense in the late 1990s that policy-makers had not fully thought through the consequences that cuts in defence spending would have for the armed forces.<sup>66</sup> Limiting the number of operations that the military was involved in was, hence, meant to avoid a further overstretch of the forces and to slow down the replacement costs which came along with an overuse of weapons systems and, hence, a shortened life-cycle of defence equipment, as several interviewees confirmed.<sup>67</sup> It is, indeed, important to keep in mind that the armed forces, in particular the British ones, were "running hot" for 15 years and that defence priorities were distorted by immediate needs<sup>68</sup> which, in turn, also made it hard for anyone to argue against the funding of the armed forces. As one interviewee put it, "we keep thinking that we are fighting the last war".<sup>69</sup>

Both the lack of public support and severe defence budget constraints, thus, resulted in an overall decrease in the number of troops being deployed overseas, in particular in recent years.<sup>70</sup> This drop, which is also reflected in Figure 2.2 in Chapter 2, has had several positive effects, however. First, fewer deployments mean that troops have more time to rest and recuperate and that overseas missions do not interfere too much with their training exercises (which, in turn, also leads to lower drop-out rates within professional armed forces, as shown in Chapter 3).<sup>71</sup> In addition, governments put in place several schemes to help soldiers 'switch' between their military and their civilian life, in particular when they come back home after an overseas deployment. Since the 2010s, for instance, all French soldiers have an end-of-mission lock of 3-4 days, either in

<sup>66</sup>Interview with a defence policy advisor to the MOD (ID 8)

<sup>67</sup>Interviews with a defence policy advisor to the MOD (ID 8) and a civil servant at the *ministère des Armées* (ID 18)

<sup>68</sup>Interview with a civil servant at the FCO and the MOD (ID 14)

<sup>69</sup>Interview with staff of the Public Accounts Committee (ID 11)

<sup>70</sup>Interview with a civil servant at the FCO and the MOD (ID 14)

<sup>71</sup>Interview with a civil servant at the FCO and the MOD (ID 14)

Crete or Cyprus, to start processing the mission with the help of psychologists before returning back to Paris and, hence, to ‘normal’, everyday life. This example shows once again that governments take their duty of care more and more seriously, offering various schemes to prepare the military for its missions, to support the armed forces while on duty, and to accompany them well once they are back home.

## 5.6 Conclusion

Military operations have been high agenda items in France and the UK since 1991. Be it EU missions, operations under NATO command, UN missions, coalitions of the willing or purely national efforts abroad, the number of theatres to which London and Paris deploy troops to has significantly increased after the end of the Cold War. The aim of this chapter was, therefore, to understand how troop deployments became and remained a policy priority in the UK and France between 1980 and 2018.

First, I looked at *when* overseas missions and operations emerged as a priority on the policy, the media and the public agendas, and examined *how* the framing of the policy problem evolved over time. Based on CAP-data and a detailed text analysis of strategic documents, I showed that troop deployments are not a routine issue, i.e. although London and Paris regularly address deployment-related issues, they cannot fully anticipate how those interventions will play out and which capacities they need for them to be successful. Contrary to the recruitment of service personnel (cf. Chapter 3) and the acquisition of weapons systems (cf. Chapter 4), issue attention to military interventions is, hence, extremely volatile, i.e. in some years, it is a non-issue, in other years, it is a top priority. The empirical evidence I presented suggests that troop deployments have been addressed on a regular basis in the *Communiqués de Conseil des ministres*, but were largely absent from the Queen’s Speech. It also shows that the policy problem ebbed and flowed on French and British defence white papers and strategic reviews, although the issue was particularly present from the 2000s onwards. In addition, I highlighted that the framing of military operations did not only change over time, but was also quite different on both sides of the Channel. I notably demonstrated that British governments increasingly focus on the economic and operational sustainability of their interventions, while the attention of Paris shifted to the impact that media coverage of troop deployments may have on the public’s support of French overseas missions, an issue that has hardly been addressed in the UK.

After having analysed how troop deployments were addressed by governments, I examined how the issue was covered by the French and the British media and perceived

by the general public. To do so, I used data from Europresse, Factiva as well as national and international opinion polls. I concluded that the press in France and the UK dedicated a large share of its agenda to overseas operations over the past 40 years, in particular since the early 2000s. Similar to issue attention by government, I highlighted that news coverage of troop deployments has been rather volatile between 1980 and 2018. I also showed that newspapers on both sides of the Channel covered similar policy problems, some of which also figured on the policy agenda (e.g. the wider social and economic implications of troop deployments). In addition, I demonstrated that the tone of media reporting changed over time, i.e. it was sometimes positive and sometimes negative. I then stressed that critical news tend to prevail, in particular in the UK where the media regularly underline how budget cuts negatively affect the well-being of the armed forces. I argued that this framing contributed to reinforce the policy problem and also explains why governments and international polling institutes increasingly deem it necessary to sound out public opinion on ongoing troop deployments. I then stressed that the support of military operations tends to decrease over time on both sides of the Channel, but that opposition to troop deployments does not imply that the public has a negative image of the armed forces.

Second, I analysed the agenda-building dynamics of overseas missions and operations and explained why government attention to troop deployments ebbs and flows over time. Based on the empirical analysis, I argued that the media have started to lead public opinion on deployment-related policies, focussing in particular on the legitimacy and efficacy of ongoing and potential, future French and British military operations. In other terms, I demonstrated that deployments, which used to be a governmental defence issue that was largely policy-driven, have turned into a sensational issue where the media matter more. More specifically, I highlighted that deployments had become a media emblem and, therefore, started to limit the policy options of the executive.

In line with the theoretical framework that I proposed for the agenda-building mechanisms of defence in Chapter 1, I then suggested that media coverage was key to understanding *how* troop deployments were addressed in the *Communiqués de Conseil des ministres*, the Queen's Speech as well as defence white papers and strategic reviews. I argued that any relationship between the three agendas and real-world indicators is secondary to the effects that the media agenda nowadays has on public and government priorities. For this very reason, I concluded that the launch of military operations is increasingly media-driven and, hence, qualifies as a sensational defence issue. I specified, though, that this does not mean that there are no interactions between government, media and public priorities or that the strategic context does not matter. To the contrary, I underlined that the security and the economic environment both

have an impact on troop deployments, in particular in the UK, and may constrain the government's policy choices. I also stressed that the executive may, under certain circumstances, decide to override media and public priorities. In addition, I asserted that the agenda dynamics of troop deployments are similar to those that scholars identified for domestic policy issues, such as AIDS, crime and the environment, and suggested that this parallel implied that defence has been normalising over time.

Given that agenda-setting is only the first stage of the policy cycle, I then argued that its dynamics do not only affect policy formulation and policy implementation but also institutional practices at the domestic level. First, I showed that Paris and London increasingly strive for parliamentary approval of their military operations, thereby seeking to legitimise their interventions domestically. Second, I underlined that governments on both sides of the Channel introduced a series of schemes and policies that were specifically targeted at current and former service personnel and their families, including various measures to support staff that suffered an injury while on duty or families who lost a loved one during a training exercise or overseas mission. Third, I stressed that deployment-related policies started to change in the UK and France, mainly to avoid a further overstretch of the armed forces. I concluded the last section by highlighting that both the change in institutional practices and policy shifts with regard to troop deployments constituted an important step towards the normalisation of the regal domain. These results, thus, confirm the findings of Chapters 3 and 4 which also pointed to the agenda-setting dynamics of defence being less exceptional than often presented in the public policy literature.



# Conclusion: The secret of setting defence agendas

Ageing, child abuse, crime, diseases, global warming, inequalities and inequities, poor education, substance abuse, terrorism, violence... Conditions abound our policy systems. So why do governments continue to devote attention to defence?

The aim of this Ph.D. thesis was to understand the agenda-setting dynamics of defence policy, and to examine *why* and *how* defence issues become and remain a government priority. Even though agenda-setting studies have grown into one of the major paradigmatic approaches to public policy, the majority of scholars still focus on how domestic issues emerge on government agendas. Surprisingly, little research has been done on the agenda-setting dynamics of foreign, security and defence policy, and the few, isolated contributions that do exist mainly look at salient and particularly visible issues such as military operations. Defence, though, is a multidimensional public policy that cannot be restricted to troop deployments only. It covers various aspects ranging from the recruitment and retention of civilian and military personnel, to the procurement of equipment that is meant to last for several decades and international cooperation on operational and industrial matters, for instance. I, therefore, analysed in more detail how three specific defence issues emerged in society; how the media and the public dealt with them; and how they were eventually transformed (or not) in public policy. More specifically, I strived for identifying if the same agenda-setting mechanism applies to all defence issues or if there are differences in how defence-related policy problems are understood, framed and addressed over time.

In order to do so, I opted for a cross-national, cross-sectional and longitudinal analysis of the agenda-setting dynamics of defence policy (Chapter 2). Instead of looking at defence as a fully abstract policy, I studied *how* and *why* three different but very complementary defence issues became and remained a government priority in France and the UK over the period 1980-2018: the recruitment of military personnel (Chapter 3), the acquisition of aircraft carriers (Chapter 4), and military operations



(Chapter 5). I mainly chose this research design to increase the robustness of my empirical results, as testing alternative explanations for stability and change in political attention is more powerful when focusing on more than one issue, in more than one country and over a longer period of time. All empirical analyses in this thesis are based on an original and comprehensive data set. The latter notably includes data from the CAP, defence white papers and strategic reviews, newspaper articles that I retrieved from Europresse and Factiva, various national and international opinion polls and 30 semi-structured interviews with French and British agenda-setters.

In this conclusion, I first discuss the results of Chapters 3-5 in a comparative perspective and summarise my three key findings which, in turn, allows me to demonstrate the explanatory power of the theoretical framework that I advanced in Chapter 1. More specifically, I show that issue attributes determine the predominant agenda dynamic in defence (1), and that mimicking is crucial to understand how agenda-building eventually plays out (2). I also prove that defence has started to normalise as a public policy, i.e. rather than withdrawing from the 'traditional' agenda-setting mechanisms, it is increasingly constrained by structural biases and system-dynamic developments (3). Second, I stress that my Ph.D. thesis fills an important gap in the literature, and underline its theoretical, methodological and empirical contribution to the current state of the art, especially in public policy, comparative politics and strategic studies. I then conclude the manuscript by outlining three avenues for future research.

## Key findings

In this section, I discuss the results of Chapters 3-5 in a comparative perspective and summarise my key three findings. First, I show that issue attributes at the subcategory level determine the predominant agenda dynamic in defence. The most concrete defence issues, such as military recruitment, are likely to follow dynamics that are very similar to those that public policy scholars have already identified for domestic policy issues; the most abstract defence issues, in turn, like procurement, will mobilise public opinion much less, but may nonetheless catch the attention of the media. Second, I demonstrate that agenda-setting in defence coincides with the policy priorities of allied governments, and argue that the convergence of British and French defence programmes, for which I provided extensive empirical evidence in Chapter 2, is *inter alia* due to mimicking behaviour, with France closely following the developments in the UK. My results, thus, point to cross-national dynamics being key to understanding how government priorities in defence evolve over time, in particular for issues that qualify as governmental ones.

Last but not least, I stress that both the agenda-setting dynamics of defence and the impact they have on policy-making are clear signs of defence normalising as a public policy. To put it differently, in spite of being an essential part of national identity in France and the UK, defence is increasingly constrained by structural biases and system-dynamic developments and, therefore, does not withdraw from the 'traditional' agenda-setting mechanisms anymore. It is, consequently, less 'specific' than often assumed, and should not be seen as a deviant case for policy scholars.

### **Issue attributes determine the predominant agenda dynamic in defence**

In Chapters 3-5, I first of all looked at *when* the recruitment of service personnel, the acquisition of aircraft carriers and military operations emerged as a priority on the policy, the media and the public agendas in France and the UK, and examined *how* their framing evolved over time. I then analysed the agenda-building dynamics of each policy issue, and underlined how the policy, the media and the public agendas were linked and influenced by the strategic context. This, in turn, allowed me to explain *why* British and French governments pay attention to military recruitment (Chapter 3), aircraft carriers (Chapter 4) and overseas deployments (Chapter 5), and to demonstrate that the three policy problems do not only differ in their degree of abstractness, obtrusiveness and salience, but that those differences also affect their agenda dynamics and, hence, how they become and remain a government priority.

In Chapter 3, I demonstrated that the strategic context was key to understanding government attention to military recruitment. In other terms, real-world factors largely explain *why* recruitment was addressed in the *Communiqués de Conseil des ministres*, the Queen's Speech as well as the defence white papers and strategic reviews that France and the UK published between 1980 and 2018. They also account for *how* the issue was framed over time. For precisely this reason, I argued that the predominant agenda dynamic of HR-related issues was between the evolution of the social, political and economic environment and the three agendas, i.e. the recruitment of service personnel fully qualifies as a prominent defence issues. This, however, does not mean that there are no interactions between government, media and public priorities. To the contrary, military recruitment is a routine issue for governments having standing armed forces, and tends to be rather concrete and obtrusive for the general public, in particular in countries that still have conscription. I, therefore, stressed that media coverage of and public opinion on the recruitment of service personnel may constrain the government's policy choices even further, thereby reinforcing the policy problem

that is, at heart, largely driven by the strategic context.

In Chapter 4, I then showed that the agenda dynamics of aircraft carriers were quite different from those that I identified for the recruitment of service personnel. Rather than being context-dependent, I demonstrated that the decision to opt for or replace a carrier programme was mainly policy-driven, i.e. governments in France and the UK tend to draw the issue to the forefront for domestic and foreign policy reasons. To put it differently, the policy priorities of British and French governments are key to understanding *why* procurement was addressed in national defence white papers and strategic reviews, and *how* the issue was framed over time. Consequently, I asserted that the predominant agenda dynamic of aircraft carriers was between the policy agenda and the other two agendas, i.e. the flagship of the world's most powerful navies fully qualifies as a governmental defence issue. It is, like most other defence equipment, quintessentially abstract and unobtrusive. This, however, does not mean that there are no interactions with the strategic environment or that media coverage and public opinion do not matter when governments decide to put the warship on their policy agendas. Indeed, both the security and the economic situation may constrain the policy options that decision-makers have at hand, and the media can raise issues that governments would have preferred to keep out of the public sphere.

In the last chapter, I highlighted that the agenda-setting dynamics of the recruitment of service personnel, the acquisition of aircraft carriers and troop deployments differed significantly. More specifically, I illustrated that military operations were neither context-dependent nor policy-driven, but increasingly shaped by media coverage. This means that French and British media drive public opinion on deployments and thereby limit the government's policy options, in particular for ongoing and potential, future overseas operations. Given that the media influence *how* the public perceives interventions and, thus, indirectly shape government priorities, I advanced that the predominant agenda dynamic of military operations was between the media agenda and the other two agendas, i.e. the armed forces' overseas missions *nowadays* qualify as a sensational defence issue. They are mostly unobtrusive and concrete, i.e. the vast majority of individuals do not observe or experience them directly, but understand their implications because of increased levels of media coverage of troop deployments. Once again, this does not mean that there are no interactions with the strategic environment or that the priorities of the executive do not matter when deployments emerge on the policy agenda. To the contrary, the empirical evidence suggested that the strategic environment was key to understanding issue attention to overseas missions and that governments may, in spite of media constraints, decide to override public opinion and opt for policy solutions for which they do not have support back home.

To sum up, different defence issues have different issue attributes, leading to different paths of influence. My Ph.D. thesis notably shows that obtrusive and concrete defence issues tend to be real-world driven; unobtrusive defence issues, in turn, are either policy- or media-driven, depending on whether they are abstract or concrete. Based on those findings, I, hence, validate my second hypothesis which states that issue attributes are crucial to understand the agenda-setting dynamics of defence problems (cf. Hypothesis 2 in Chapter 1).

## **Mimicking is crucial to understand how agenda-setting in defence plays out**

From the empirical analyses in Chapters 3-5, we can, hence, conclude that issue attributes are key to understanding how defence problems turn into a government priority. Additionally, it also became clear that agenda-setting is a dynamic process which does not exclusively happen at the domestic level, but is at least partially influenced by government priorities and policy-making abroad. Indeed, individuals and institutions do not only observe the real world, but also monitor how others respond to changes in the environment. They, consequently, also keep an eye on policy agendas abroad. As I have already argued before, policy agendas have an important signalling function, i.e. they send a multitude of messages, internally and externally. Internally, to a broad audience of (defence) policy-makers and politicians, the arms industry, the general public and the national media, for instance; externally, to allies, IOs and potential adversaries, thereby showcasing the government's priorities, be it with regard to HR management, capability planning, troop deployments or defence cooperation.

The data I collected for this Ph.D. thesis, including the empirical evidence that I already presented in Chapters 3-5, suggest that agenda-setting is characterised by attention-following patterns at the international level. Those mimetic practices did not only emerge in the defence white papers and strategic reviews that France and the UK published between 1980 and 2018, but became particularly visible during the semi-structured interviews, with interviewees having the tendency to compare their country's position on the international scene or certain of their government's current and past policy choices with those of close allies - even though I did not explicitly ask them to do so. The tendency to closely monitor and learn from the solutions that other governments, facing the same or a similar policy problem, obtained applies to some defence issues in particular, such as the acquisition of aircraft carriers.

As I explained in Chapter 4, France and the UK do, indeed, regularly acquire 'high

profile' capabilities, including carriers. Since only eight states currently possess such a platform, it is rather unsurprising that French and British governments are not only keen to maintain their capability but also closely watch when other states acquire a new aircraft carrier or replace their old warship. In France, for example, the government discussed in quite some detail the advantages and disadvantages of having a second carrier in the 2008 defence and national security white paper, mainly to justify why it decided to address the problem later on. Just like London, Paris, hence, gave a lot of agenda space to the matter in the early 2000s and continued to observe how the size of the 'restricted club' of states that possess aircraft carriers evolved over time. In 2017, for instance, it noted that a larger number of governments were procuring their navies with new platforms (French Ministry of the Armed Forces, 2017b) which, in turn, may also explain why the issue has recently been back at the top of the French government agenda. As one interviewee explained, "when a defence issue matters in other countries too, things move ahead quicker [at the domestic level]".<sup>72</sup>

The case of aircraft carriers, however, does not only illustrate that the French monitor policy choices abroad. It also elucidates the 'love-hate relationship' of France and the UK. One British interviewee, thus, noted that French capability "often looks good on paper, but isn't that good when you actually get to work with it", underlining in particular that it was rather useless to only have one platform at disposal.<sup>73</sup> According to this journalist, this was mainly due to France having a preference for prestigious defence projects, such as nuclear-powered aircraft carriers, without having recourse to shared technology, thereby putting an enormous strain on its defence budget. For Brits, the UK has a more pragmatic approach to procurement<sup>74</sup> and would, therefore, always opt for two platforms, even if they were less powerful.<sup>75</sup> The interviews and defence white papers, thus, show that mutual observation is key in the policy-making process and that agenda-setters on both sides of the Channel are fully aware that carriers are an important political and diplomatic tool to be maintained at the domestic level.

A similar attention-following pattern can be observed for the recruitment of service personnel. As I have shown in Chapter 3, the French government was well aware that the professionalisation of its military would lead to a rise in personnel costs and put a strain on the country's civil-military relations, eventually leading to a recruitment problem which most countries having professional armed forces tend to face sooner or later (French Ministry of Defence, 1994). The interviews confirmed this point, suggesting that France did not only closely follow the development of HR policies in other

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<sup>72</sup>Interview with a civil servant at the *ministère des Armées* (ID 19)

<sup>73</sup>Interview with a defence journalist (ID 15)

<sup>74</sup>Interview with a defence policy advisor to the government (ID 2)

<sup>75</sup>Interview with a defence journalist (ID 15)

European countries, including the UK, but also compared its own performance with those of its partners. One interviewee, while acknowledging that military recruitment had turned into a policy problem, thus stressed that France faced less difficulty recruiting service personnel than Germany, Italy, Spain and the UK.<sup>76</sup> This being said, it was also highlighted by another interviewee that the French actually closely looked at what the Brits were doing in terms of recruitment, as they have had major difficulties to find a suitable model of force projection after the end of the Cold War due to a series of societal changes that France was also confronted with.<sup>77</sup> Consequently, France drew lessons from the British experience, and opted for voluntary policy convergence, i.e. the French government reckoned that it had to switch to professional armed forces too, but decided to do it differently than its British counterpart. The British interviewees, in turn, were mainly concerned about domestic policy developments, and did not mention France at all with regard to the recruitment of service personnel. To put it differently, the French policy agenda, which has been influenced by how London manages its professional armed forces, does not affect HR priorities in the British military.

With regard to military operations, the agenda-setting pattern is slightly different. Rather than monitoring and mimicking the policy priorities of other governments, both France and the UK aim for protecting their strategic interests and fulfilling their international commitments. The empirical evidence, thus, suggests that the policy priorities of London and Paris do not necessarily affect each other. Instead, expectation management at the international level is much more important to understand how troop deployments become and remain a government priority in France and the UK. In other terms, neither the Brits nor the French want to lose their seat at the top table.

To sum up, uncertainty creates incentives for policy-makers to adjust their strategies, based on their own experience or after having observed how others around them respond to the policy problem. Mimetic practices, thus, enable individuals and institutions to adopt or adapt elements of policy agendas set up in one or more other countries. The data I presented in this Ph.D. thesis suggest that cross-national dynamics are key to understanding how government priorities in defence evolve over time, in particular for issues that qualify as governmental ones. Based on those findings, I am, hence, also able to validate my first hypothesis which states that the priorities of allies influence issue attention at the national level (cf. Hypothesis 1 in Chapter 1).

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<sup>76</sup>Interview with a Deputy at the *Commission de la défense nationale et des forces armées* (ID 16)

<sup>77</sup>Interview with a defence policy advisor to the government (ID 27)

## Defence has started to normalise as a public policy

Although "we tend to make defence a special thing",<sup>78</sup> we have to keep in mind that all ministries are somehow specific and face uncertainty when setting their agendas.<sup>79</sup> According to several interviewees, MODs only put their 'specificity' forward to avoid being compared, be it at the national or the international level.<sup>80</sup> Yet, the results of this Ph.D. thesis suggest that the agenda-setting and policy-making dynamics of defence are actually quite similar to those of other public policies.

From the above, we can, indeed, conclude that defence policy is not as specific as we often believe it to be. To the contrary, the empirical evidence suggests that issue attributes are key to understanding how defence problems turn into a government priority, a conclusion that public policy scholars have already reached for domestic as well as for certain foreign policy issues (Edwards and Wood, 1999; Peake, 2001; Soroka, 2002a; Yagade and Dozier, 1990; Zucker, 1978). It also shows that agenda-setting does not only happen at the domestic level, but is at least partially influenced by how policy agendas evolve abroad, thereby confirming prior research on cross-national agenda dynamics by Engeli et al. (2012) and Breeman and Timmermans (2019). Just like any other public policy, defence is, thus, increasingly constrained by structural biases and system-dynamic developments, i.e. parts of the regal domain do not withdraw from the 'traditional' agenda-setting dynamics anymore. The latter, in turn, have a direct impact on how defence policy-making plays out at the domestic level, underlining once more that defence is undergoing a process of normalisation.

In Chapter 3, I showed that the recruitment of service personnel was real-world led and, hence, argued that it followed agenda dynamics that were similar to those that scholars identified for unemployment and inflation, for example. As illustrated in Figure 5.4, I also demonstrated that monitoring and mimicking mattered to some extent, with France closely watching the effect of HR policies in the UK - mainly to avoid making the same 'mistakes' as its ally. Moreover, I stressed that military recruitment had become more complex over time. I notably elucidated that the armed forces on both sides of the Channel have to offer attractive jobs to recruit and retain qualified personnel, as they are increasingly competing with the civilian employment market. They do not only propose attractive salary packages and sustainable working conditions, but also aim for diversity and non-discrimination. This, in turn, led me to conclude that HR policies have started to normalise, i.e. the military increasingly aligns

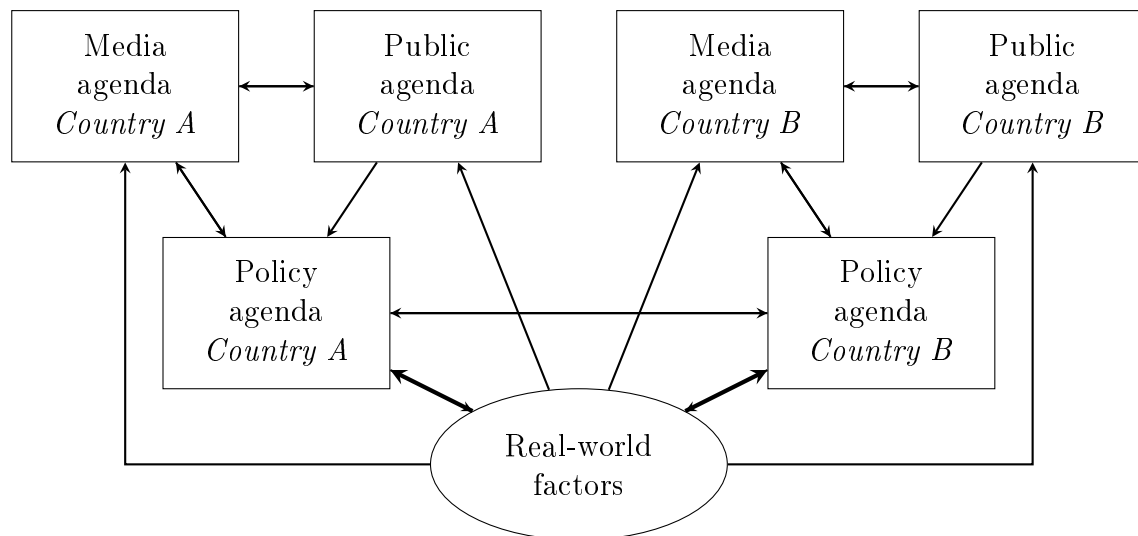
<sup>78</sup>Interview with a civil servant at the *ministère des Finances* (ID 29)

<sup>79</sup>Interview with a civil servant at the *ministère des Armées* (ID 24)

<sup>80</sup>Interviews with a civil servant at the FCO and the MOD (ID 9) and a civil servant at the *ministère des Finances* (ID 29)

its recruitment techniques and employment standards with those of civilian employers.

Figure 5.4: The agenda dynamics of prominent defence issues



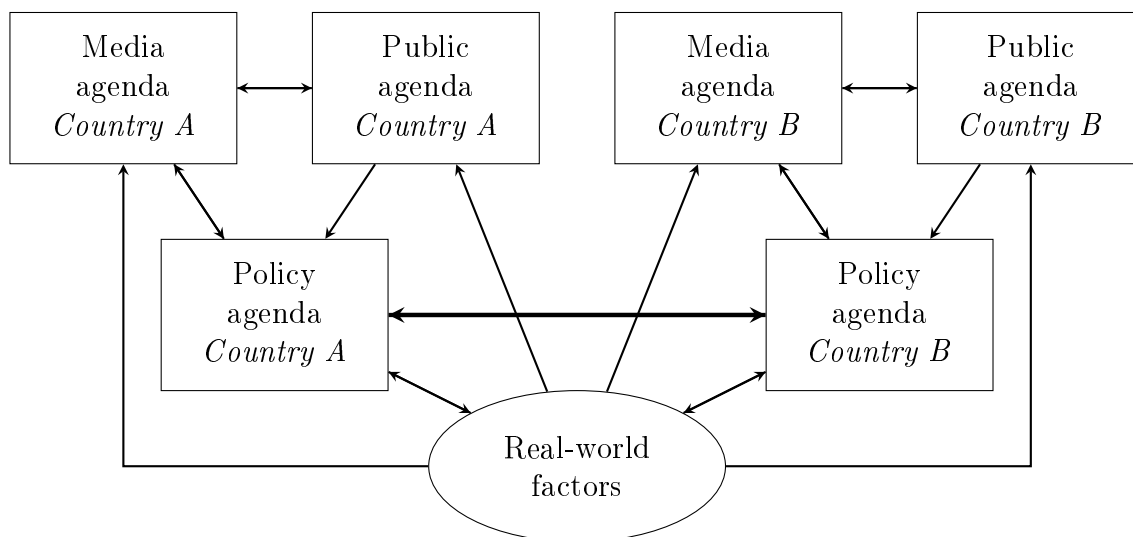
Source: Author's own illustration

In Chapter 4, I demonstrated that the acquisition of aircraft carriers was policy-driven, i.e. it follows agenda dynamics which are very similar to those of domestic issues, such as national unity. I also elucidated that monitoring was crucial to fully understand the warship's agenda mechanisms, with France and the UK closely observing procurement decisions abroad, as shown in Figure 5.5. In addition, I stressed that defence procurement does not always play out as initially planned, i.e. the policy agenda does not systematically translate into public policy. More specifically, I explained that major equipment programmes, such as carriers, tend to be delayed, adjusted or even cancelled over time, as conspiracy of optimism still prevails in the defence community. This optimism, in turn, is particularly troublesome for Paris and London, as they both strive for more transparency and accountability in defence procurement. Given that acquisitions are nowadays subject to parliamentary scrutiny and audit by the NAO and the *Cour des Comptes*, I concluded that governments' willingness to make defence less of a black was an additional sign of defence normalising as a public policy.

In the last chapter, I showed that military operations, which used to be a governmental defence issue and were, hence, largely policy-driven, have turned into a sensational issue from the 1990s onwards. To put it differently, they are - like many domestic policy issues, such as AIDS, crime and the environment - mainly media-driven, as illustrated in Figure 5.6. Monitoring and mimicking, in turn, hardly matter for this specific defence problem. Instead, London and Paris both care about meeting their international commitments and keeping their seat at the table. Last but not least, I



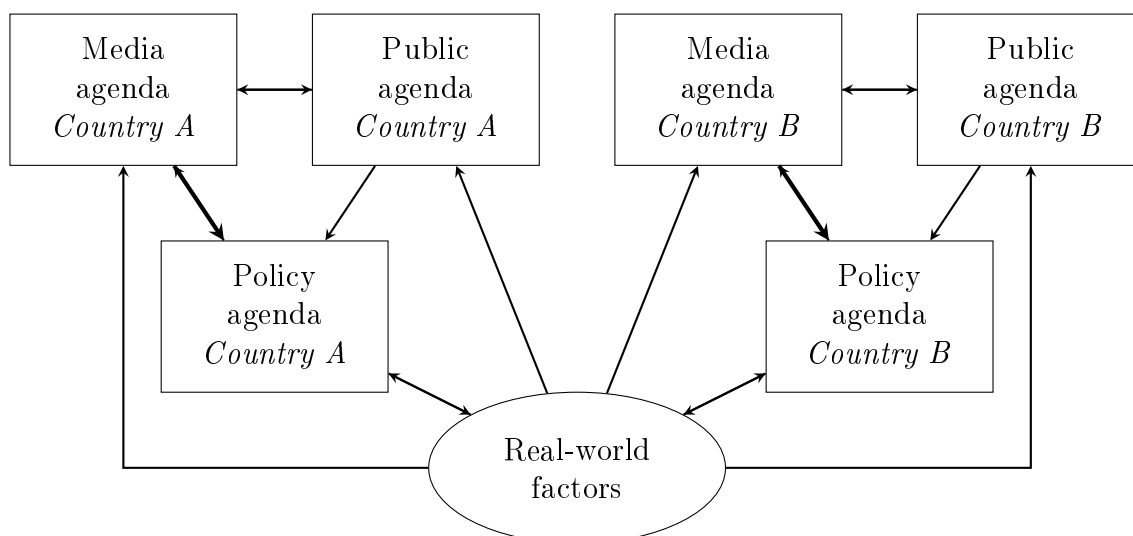
Figure 5.5: The agenda dynamics of governmental defence issues



Source: Author's own illustration

demonstrated that French and British military interventions have been very influential in terms of defence policy-making, in particular in the 1990s and 2000s. I, thus, stressed that governments on both sides of the Channel do not only strive for having parliamentary approval of their deployments, but also introduced a series of policies to better account for the constraints of current and former military personnel. I once again concluded that those institutional and policy changes confirmed that defence was, indeed, undergoing a process of normalisation

Figure 5.6: The agenda dynamics of sensational defence issues



Source: Author's own illustration

To sum up, the empirical results of Chapters 3-5 suggest that defence has started to normalise as a public policy. Both the agenda-setting dynamics of the recruitment of service personnel, the acquisition of aircraft carriers and military operations and the impact they have had on defence policy-making are clear signs of defence not being an outlier. In other terms, in spite of being an essential part of national identity in France and the UK, defence is increasingly constrained by structural biases and system-dynamic developments and, therefore, does not withdraw from the 'traditional' agenda-setting mechanisms anymore.

## Contribution

Given that this Ph.D. thesis lies at the intersection of public policy, comparative politics and strategic studies, I now outline its overall contribution. More precisely, I stress that my research fills an important gap in the literature, and underline its theoretical, methodological and empirical contributions to the current state of the art.

### Theoretical contribution

Generally speaking, research on policy priorities often focuses on policy formulation and implementation, thereby ignoring the preliminary phases of policy-making. As I have shown in the introduction of this manuscript and in Chapter 1, this holds particularly true for foreign, security and defence policy, as the public policy field has largely ceded questions of defence to economists as well as IR and security scholars.

Since agenda-setting is a crucial lens for studying the policy-making process, I proposed a novel, theoretical account for stability and change in the defence sector which sheds light on how new understandings of defence issues may or may not be accepted in different political systems. My framework focuses on the role of issue attributes and emphasises the interactions between the domestic and the international level. This approach to the study of defence policy-making is particularly innovative.

First, defence has long time been considered to be quite different from other public policies, especially non-regal ones. It was said to be unpopular in the public debate, rarely covered by the media and one of the issues with which politicians risked losing, rather than winning, an election (Irondelle, 2007). In addition, defence, which is key to national security, was thought of as being too serious to be debated publicly (Almond, 1950). In line with this realist argument, many public policy scholars assumed that the general public does not develop preferences for (most) foreign policy issues and is,

therefore, not able to hold the government accountable for its defence-related decisions. Yet, the empirical evidence presented in this thesis suggests that the agenda-setting dynamics of defence are quite similar to those that scholars have already identified for other policy problems, in spite of citizens extensively relying on second-hand information to form opinions on (most) defence issues (e.g. the media, a family member or close acquaintance in the military etc.). More specifically, my research shows that certain aspects of defence are more responsive to media coverage and public opinion than others, and that media coverage usually helps influencing the government agenda.

Second, my research does not only improve our understanding of how agenda-setting plays out in defence, but also shows the importance of issue attributes at the subcategory level. By examining three different defence issues, I demonstrate that attributes vary and that this variance is not limited to broad policy domains (e.g. defence, health, transport etc.). Instead, issue attributes also vary within each of these policy domains. Those differences, in turn, significantly affect how individual issues become and remain a government priority. In the case of defence, obtrusive and concrete issues tend to be real-world driven while unobtrusive problems are either policy- or media-driven, depending on whether they are abstract or concrete.

Third, my Ph.D. thesis suggests that agenda-setting is a dynamic process which does not only unfold at the domestic level, but is also partially influenced by policy priorities and policy-making abroad. Although prior research in public policy has already shown that such cross-national policy dynamics exist (Boussagnet and Dupuy, 2014; Hassenteufel, 2005; Holzinger and Hill, 2005; Rose, 1991; Walsh, 2007), with actors watching of how others solve policy problems, the focus has so far been on policy implementation. Smith (2013), for example, demonstrates that defence spending in France can be explained by the evolution of British military expenditures. Only very few agenda-setting scholars looked at cascading effects at the international level, examining how monitoring and mimicking affect policy agendas across borders.

## Methodological contribution

Methodologically, I opted for a cross-sectional and longitudinal analysis of the agenda-setting dynamics of defence in France and the UK that uses mixed methods. As I explained in Chapter 2, empirical studies on agenda-setting tend to be based on qualitative *or* quantitative research designs. While quantitative studies are best for measuring, ranking and identifying more general patterns and trends in policy agendas, a qualitative approach is useful to contextualise, describe and gain in-depth insights into how issues ebb and flow through the political system. Given that the two research de-

signs are complementary, I combined both qualitative and quantitative analyses in this manuscript to shed light on how defence becomes and remains a government priority. More precisely, I derived evidence for the agenda-setting dynamics of defence from an original, longitudinal data set which includes speeches, government statements, strategic documents, national and international opinion polls, media coverage, and a series of semi-directed interviews with British and French agenda-setters.

## **Empirical contribution**

The data I collected for this research project constitute, indeed, a significant empirical contribution to the agenda-setting literature on foreign, security and defence policy. Since the number of empirically-driven policy studies on defence is still very limited, as I have shown in Chapter 1, my Ph.D. thesis fills an important gap in the public policy literature by broadening the empirical domain to include international issues.

In addition, the agenda-setting mechanisms I identified can easily be adapted and transposed to other policy domains. First, two of the issues that I examined also concern most other public policies, namely HR management and procurement. Second, defence is, by nature, a strategic policy, i.e. its agenda-building dynamics, in particular the cross-national ones, should also hold for other complex, strategic policy problems, such as the management of environmental change or pandemics.

To sum up, this Ph.D. thesis constitutes a significant contribution to the current state of the art. Theoretically, I proposed a novel account for stability and change in the defence sector which explains how new understandings of defence issues may or may not be accepted in different political systems. Methodologically, I combined qualitative and quantitative methods to shed light on how three different but complementary defence issues became and remained a government priority in France and the UK. Empirically, I filled a gap in the public policy literature, by broadening the scope of analyses. My dissertation, however, does not only add to the current state of the art in comparative public policy; it is also of interest for scholars in IR and strategic studies as it improves our understanding of how international politics play out domestically.

## **Avenues for future research**

This being said, my Ph.D. thesis probably raised as many questions as it answered. I, therefore, conclude the manuscript by shortly outlining three avenues for future research. The latter focus on the research design, the agenda dynamics of strategic

policy issues, and discrepancies that may exist between the declared government agenda and the government's output in terms of public policies.

## Research design: Data collection and empirical analyses

First and foremost, it is important to keep in mind that I opted for a specific research design to study the agenda-setting dynamics of defence, and that the latter could be adapted to further refine and elaborate the findings.

Indeed, I used government statements, speeches, defence white papers and strategic reviews to analyse the evolution of the defence policy agenda in France and the UK. Even though those documents give great insights into government priorities, Chapters 3-5 clearly show that other agendas may matter too, such as parliamentary debates and reports. Although the British and the French parliament mainly monitor government action in defence (Cohen, 1994; Hopkinson, 2000), they have become more and more active, in particular with regard to the use of force (Born et al., 2007; Dietrich et al., 2008; Maurer and Wesseld, 2001; Peters and Wagner, 2012). In other terms, they nowadays regularly alert the executive of potential policy problems. This is particularly true as more and more MPs are not only interested in defence but also have a personal experience of the military, with the number of former service personnel rising within the defence committees on both sides of the Channel.<sup>81</sup>

In addition, the empirical evidence presented in Chapters 3-5 has shown that our overall understanding of public opinion on defence is still rather limited. Future research could, hence, not only monitor how the public perceives defence policy over time, but also examine more closely where those perceptions of and attitudes towards defence come from. More specifically, it would be interesting to regionalise defence polls, as results may differ depending on the location of respondents and, hence, their closeness to the military (e.g. a military base or defence industrial site).<sup>82</sup>

## Agenda dynamics of strategic policy issues

Second, the theoretical framework in Chapter 1 and the research design in Chapter 2 may serve as a blueprint for future comparative research on policy agendas. This holds particularly true for studies that focus on foreign, security and defence policy

<sup>81</sup>Interview with staff of the Public Accounts Committee (ID 11)

<sup>82</sup>A research project that intends to start filling this gap is currently funded by the *Laboratoire interdisciplinaire d'évaluation des politiques publiques* (LIEPP): <https://www.sciencespo.fr/liepp/fr/content/public-opinion-democratic-accountability-and-evaluation-defence-towards-new-comparative-rese.html>

or strategic policy issues more generally. The theoretical framework and the research design can, indeed, easily be used to examine the agenda-building mechanisms of other defence issues, such as research and development or defence cooperation at the bi-, mini- or multilateral level, both in military and non-military powers. They can also be adapted to analyse the agenda-setting dynamics of other strategic issues, such as energy-related policy problems, which are also likely to be subject to cross-national agenda dynamics. A comparative study of strategic policy agendas would also allow for further assessing the (non-)specificity of those issues.

### **Do they walk like they talk?**

Last but not least, the empirical evidence of Chapters 3-5 suggests that policy agendas do not necessarily translate into public policies. Follow-up projects may, hence, want to study in more detail *why* we have discrepancies between the government's rhetoric (i.e. the declared government agenda) and the reality (i.e. government realisations). Research has so far only focused on budget-related issues, suggesting that planned and actual spending do not coincide as policy-makers tend to use capital investment in defence as an adjustment variable (Richter, 2018). While budget constraints are key to understanding changes in procurement projects, they do not necessarily account for discrepancies with regard to other defence issues. Jacques Chirac, for example, introduced professional armed forces in France in 1996, although the 1994 defence white paper called for maintaining conscription to avoid recruitment problems within the armed forces. By analysing why defence policy agendas do not materialise, we do not only improve our understanding of the defence policy-making process, but are also able to better assess how well defence agendas stand up to subsequent events at the domestic and the international level.



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# Appendices



# Appendix A

## Data sets

This appendix gives an overview of the data sets and coding systems used in the manuscript. Its goal is to facilitate the replication of data analyses in chapters 2-5.

### A.A Comparative Agendas Project (CAP)

#### A.A.1 French and British CAP data

Table A.1: French CAP data

Agenda	Data source	Period covered	Unit of analysis	N
Policy agenda	Government communications	1980-2013	Statement's item	6,447
Media agenda	<i>Le Monde</i>	1981-2013	Front-page	55,768

Source: Author's compilation

Table A.2: British CAP data

Agenda	Data source	Period covered	Unit of analysis	N
Policy agenda	Speech from the Throne	1980-2012	Quasi-sentence level	2,442
Media agenda	The Times of London	1980-2008	Front-page headlines	12,714

Source: Author's compilation



## A.A.2 Master Codebook of the Comparative Agendas Project (CAP)

Table A.3: CAP main codes

Code	Topic
1	Macroeconomics
2	Civil rights
3	Health
4	Agriculture
5	Labour
6	Education
7	Environment
8	Energy
9	Immigration
10	Transportation
12	Law and Crime
13	Social welfare
14	Housing
15	Domestic commerce
<b>16</b>	<b>Defence</b>
17	Technology
18	Foreign trade
19	International affairs
20	Government operations
21	Public lands
23	Culture

Source: Comparative Agendas Project (2021)

Table A.4: CAP subcodes for defence policy

Code	Topic	Description of subtopics
<b>16</b>	<b>Defence</b>	
1600	General	Includes issues related generally to defence policy, and appropriations for agencies that oversee general defence policy
1602	Alliances	Includes issues related to defence alliances and agreements, security assistance, and UN peacekeeping activities
1603	Intelligence	Includes issues related to military intelligence, espionage, and covert operations
1604	Readiness	Includes issues related to military readiness, coordination of armed services air support and sealift capabilities, and national stockpiles of strategic materials
1605	Nuclear arms	Includes issues related to nuclear weapons, nuclear proliferation, modernisation of nuclear equipment
1606	Military aid	Includes issues related to military aid to other countries and the control of arms sales to other countries
<b>1608</b>	<b>Personnel issues</b>	Includes issues related to military manpower, military personnel and their defendants, military courts, and general veterans issues
<b>1610</b>	<b>Procurement</b>	Includes issues related to military procurement, conversion of old equipment, and weapons systems evaluation
1611	Installations and land	Includes issues related to military installations, construction, and land transfers
1612	Reserve forces	Includes issues related to military reserves and reserve affairs
1614	Hazardous waste	Includes issues related to military nuclear and hazardous waste disposal and military environmental compliance

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1615	Civil	Includes issues related to domestic civil defence, national security responses to terrorism, and other issues related to homeland security
1616	Civilian Personnel	Includes issues related to non-contractor civilian personnel, civilian employment in the defence industry, and military base closings
1617	Contractors	Includes issues related to military contractors and contracting, oversight of military contractors and fraud by military contractors
<b>1619</b>	<b>Foreign operations</b>	Includes issues related to direct war-related foreign military operations, prisoners of war and collateral damage to civilian populations
1620	Claims against military	Includes issues related to claims against the military, settlements for military dependants, and compensation for civilians injured in military operations
1698	Research and development	Includes issues related to defence research and development
1699	Other	Includes issues related to other defence policy subtopics

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Source: Comparative Agendas Project (2021)

## A.B Semi-directed interviews

Table A.5: Interviews with British agenda-setters

ID	Date	Length (min)	Position of the interviewee
1	27-02-2018	120	Defence policy advisor to a political party
2	28-02-2018	45	Defence policy advisor to the government
3	29-02-2018	60	Staff of the NAO
4	08-03-2018	60	Civil servant at the FCO
5	09-03-2018	60	Civil servant at the MOD
6	12-03-2018	60	NAO secondee at the Defence Committee
7	12-03-2018	60	Staff of the Defence Committee
8	13-03-2018	60	Defence policy advisor to the MOD
9	13-03-2018	60	Civil servant at the FCO and the MOD
10	22-03-2018	60	Staff of the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy
11	26-03-2018	60	Staff of the Public Accounts Committee
12	27-03-2018	120	Civil servant at the MOD
13	29-03-2018	45	Staff of the NAO
14	26-04-2018	90	Civil servant at the FCO and the MOD
15	04-06-2019	75	Defence journalist

Table A.6: Interviews with French agenda-setters

ID	Date	Length (min)	Position of the interviewee
16	02-04-2019	45	Deputy at the <i>Commission de la défense nationale et des forces armées</i>
17	03-04-2019	60	Civil servant at the <i>ministère des Armées</i>
18	03-04-2019	60	Civil servant at the <i>ministère des Armées</i>
19	03-04-2019	60	Civil servant at the <i>ministère des Armées</i>
20	03-04-2019	45	Civil servant at the <i>ministère des Armées</i>
21	03-04-2019	120	Civil servant at the <i>ministère des Armées</i>
22	26-04-2019	45	Staff of the <i>Cour des Comptes</i>
23	09-05-2019	60	Defence journalist
24	13-05-2019	60	Civil servant at the <i>ministère des Armées</i>
25	20-05-2019	60	Deputy at the <i>Commission de la défense nationale et des forces armées</i>
26	06-06-2019	60	Defence journalist
27	13-06-2019	90	Defence policy advisor to the government
28	14-06-2019	45	Military staff at the <i>ministère des Armées</i>
29	09-07-2019	60	Civil servant at the <i>ministère des Finances</i>
30	11-07-2019	75	Defence policy advisor at the <i>Sénat</i>

## A.C National and international data on defence

I used a variety of national and international defence data, in particular to justify the Franco-British comparison in Chapter 2. The latter include data on:

- the size and the composition of the armed forces (International Institute for Security Studies, 2019);
- personnel inflows and outflows (British Ministry of Defence, 2018d; French Ministry of the Armed Forces, 2019a,b);
- the international presence of the military (International Institute for Security Studies, 2019);
- operational deaths (British Ministry of Defence, 2019; French Ministry of the Armed Forces, 2020);
- the arms industry (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2020a), including on exports (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2020b);
- defence spending patterns (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, 2019; Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2020c).

In addition, I made several FOI requests in the UK as some defence data were not available in the public sphere yet when I started working on the agenda dynamics of defence-related policy issues (e.g. British Ministry of Defence (2018a,b,c)).

# Appendix B

## Data analyses

This appendix provides data analyses that I referred to in the manuscript, and explains in more detail certain methodological choices I made while running those analyses.

### B.A The policy agenda

#### B.A.1 French defence white papers and strategic reviews

Figure B.1: Hierarchical cluster analysis of the 1994 French defence white paper

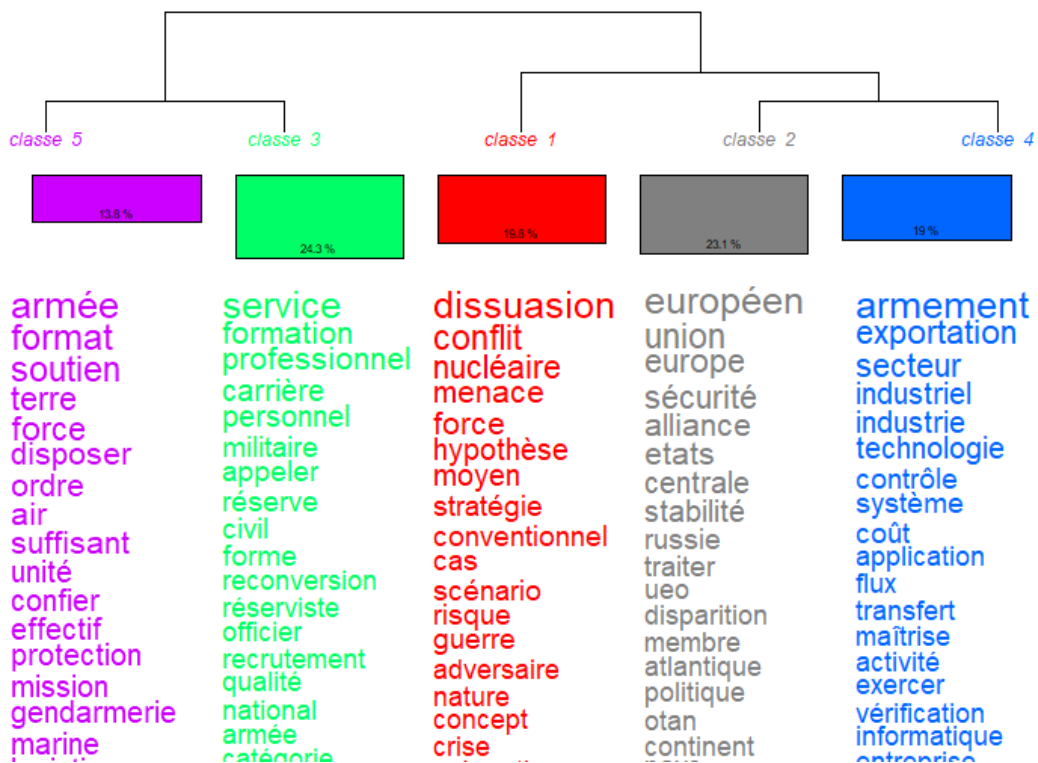


Figure B.2: Hierarchical cluster analysis of the 2008 French defence white paper

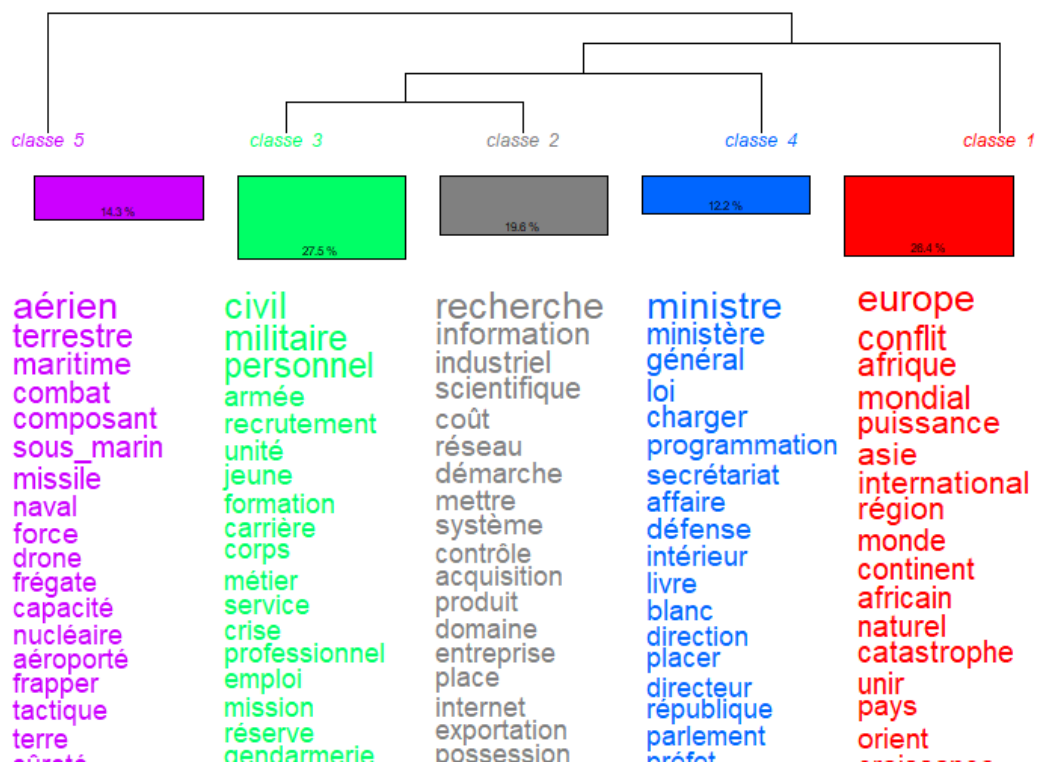


Figure B.3: Hierarchical cluster analysis of the 2013 French defence white paper

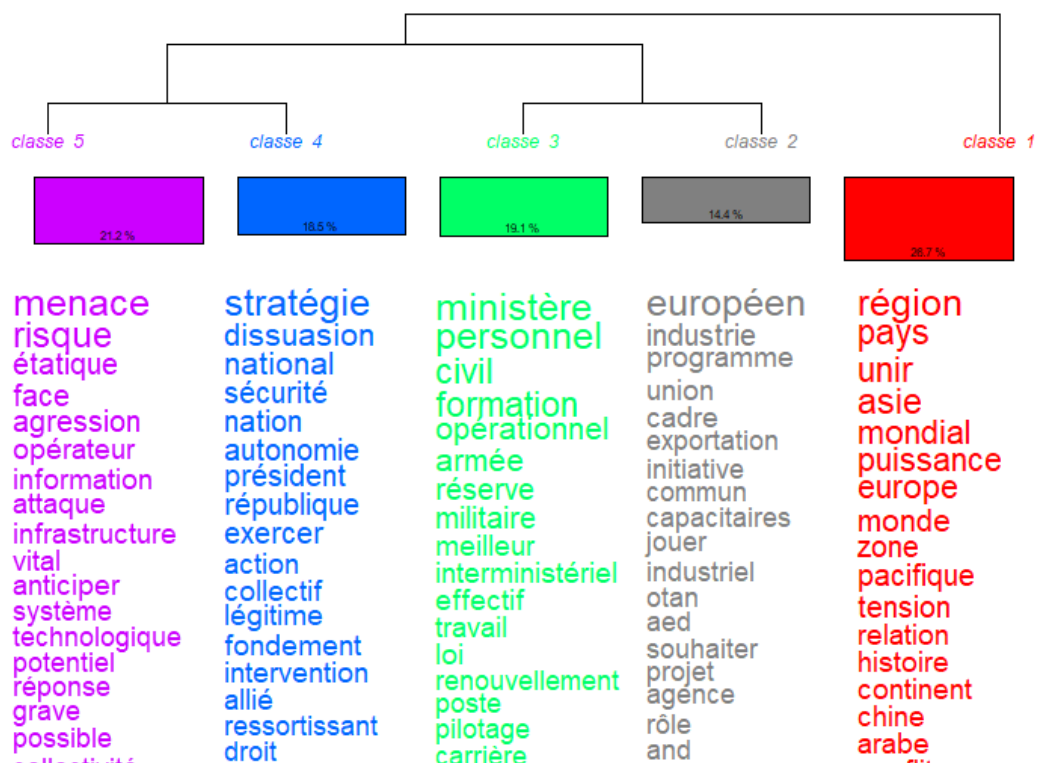
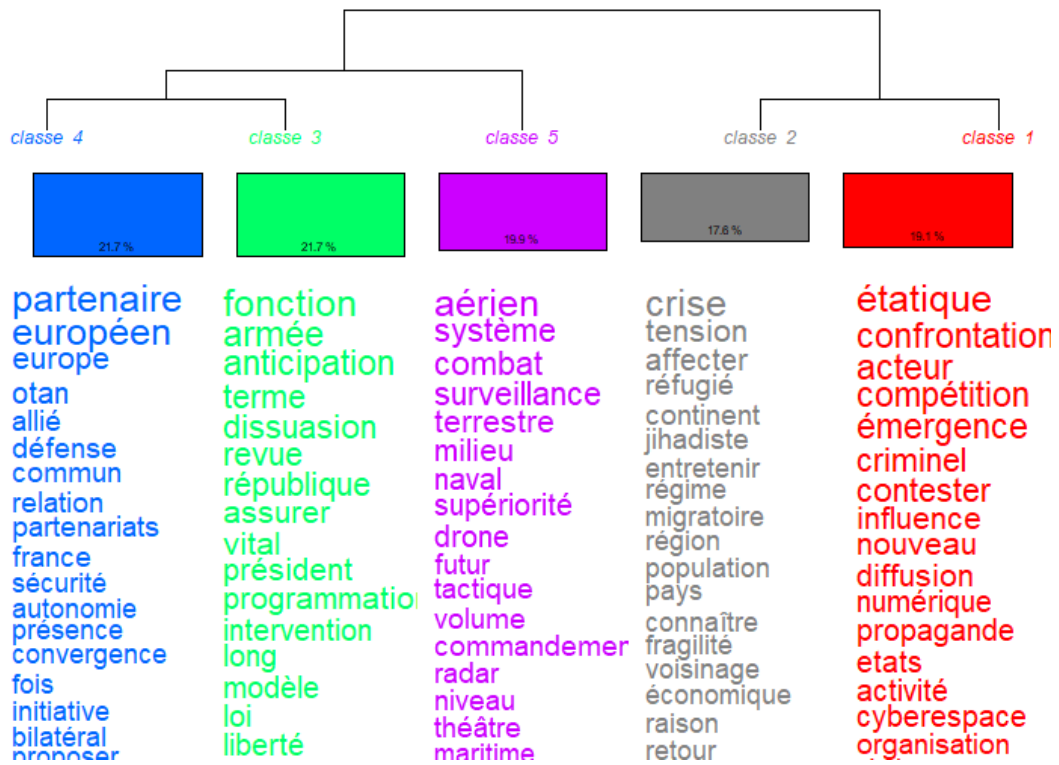


Figure B.4: Hierarchical cluster analysis of the 2017 French strategic review





## B.A.2 British defence white papers and strategic reviews

Figure B.5: Hierarchical cluster analysis of the 1981 UK defence review

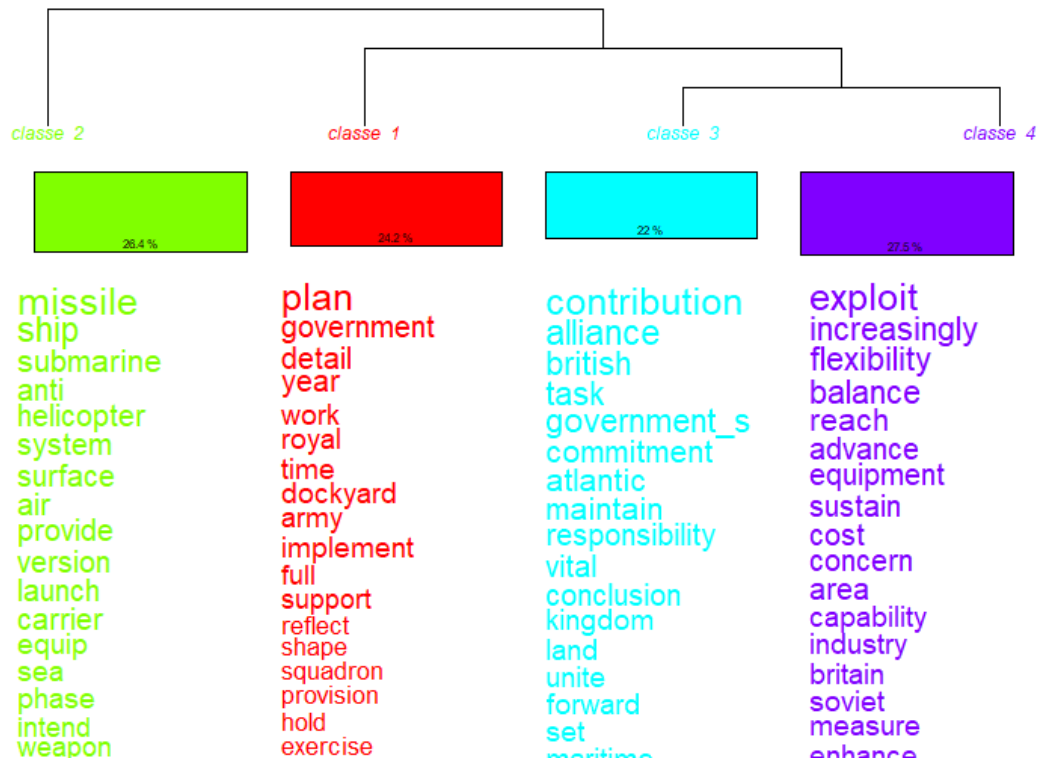


Figure B.6: Hierarchical cluster analysis of the 1994 UK defence review

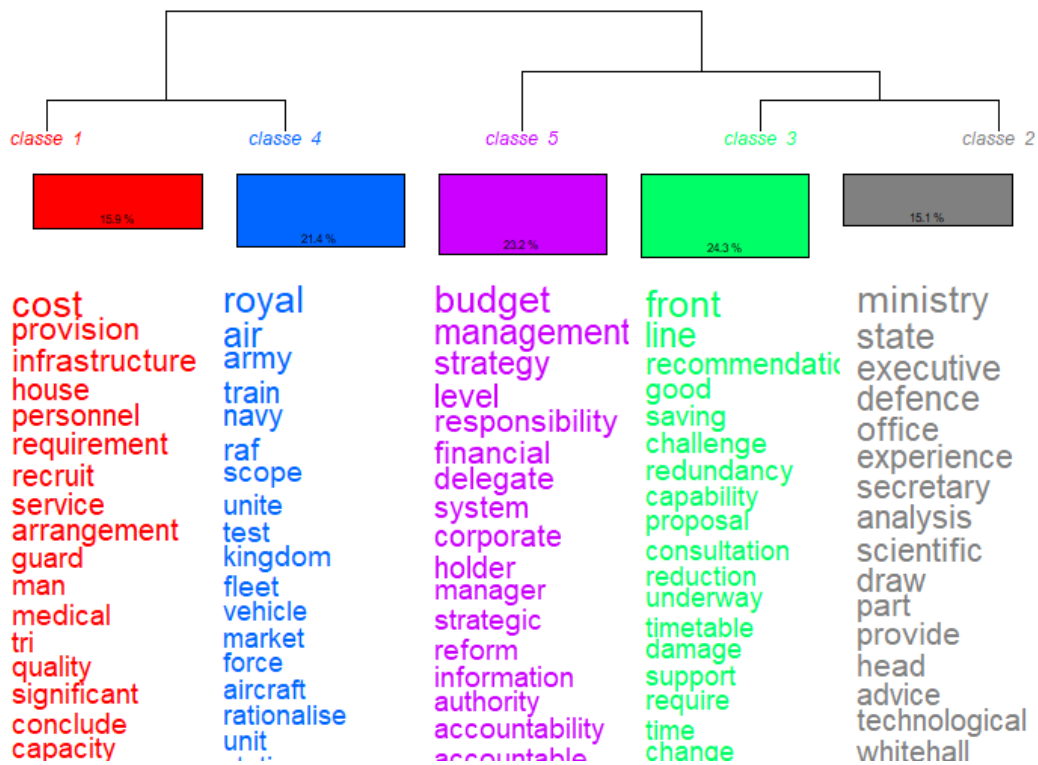


Figure B.7: Hierarchical cluster analysis of the 1998 UK defence review

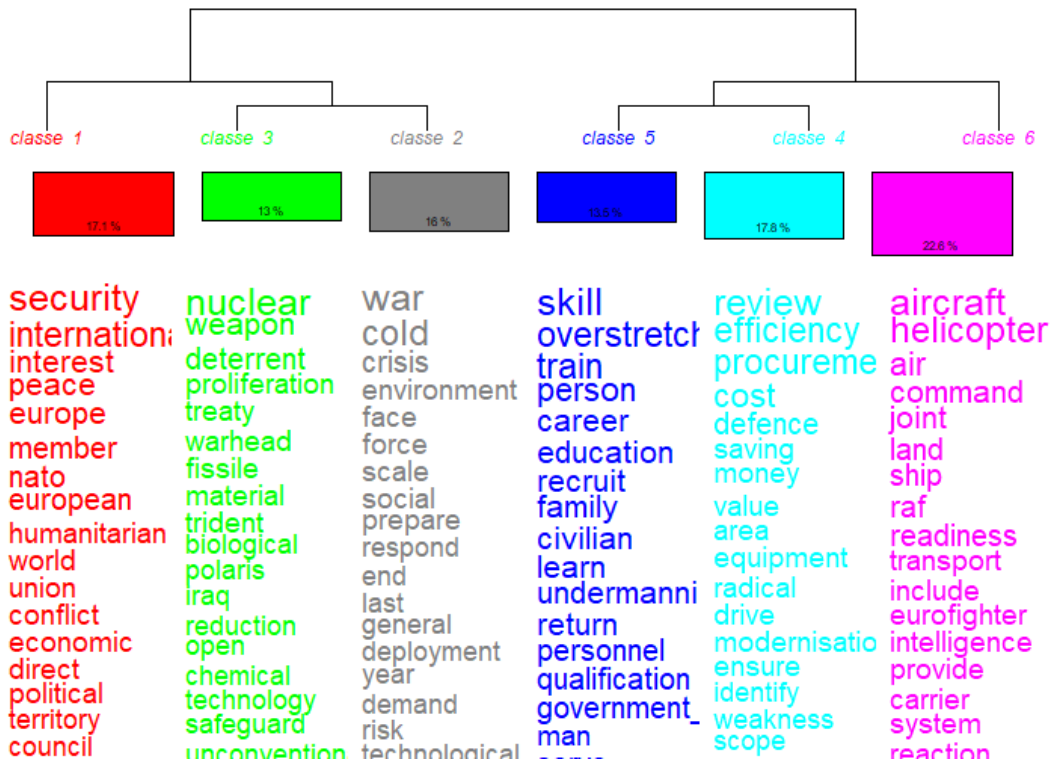


Figure B.8: Hierarchical cluster analysis of the 2002 UK defence review

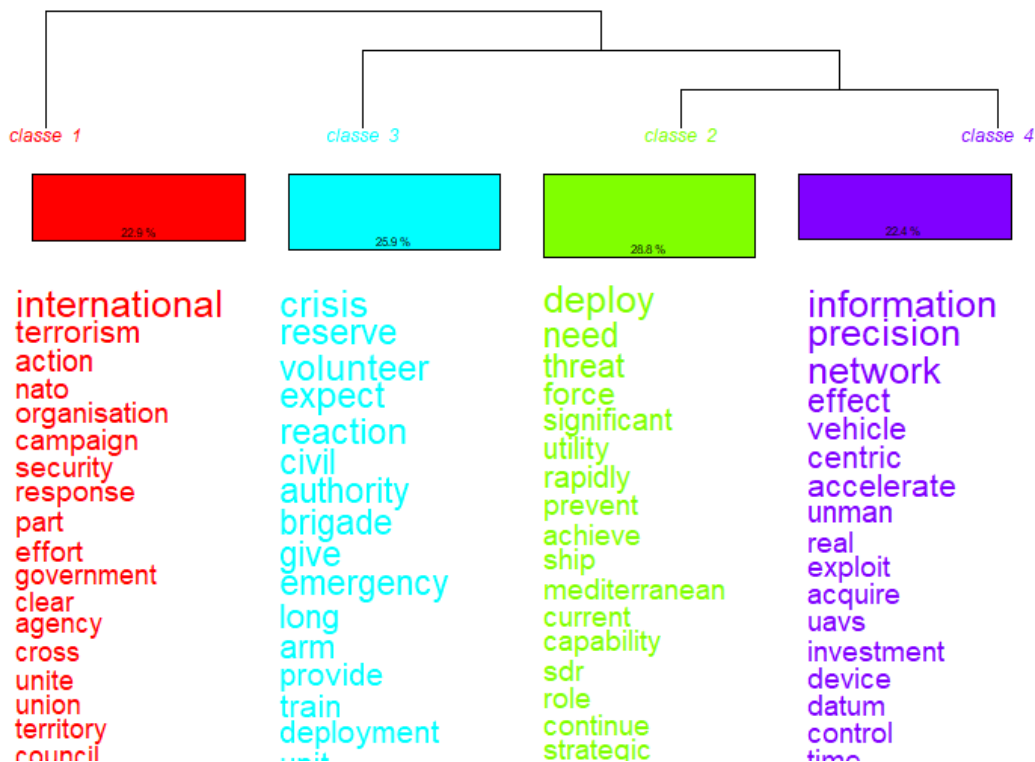


Figure B.9: Hierarchical cluster analysis of the 2003 UK defence white paper

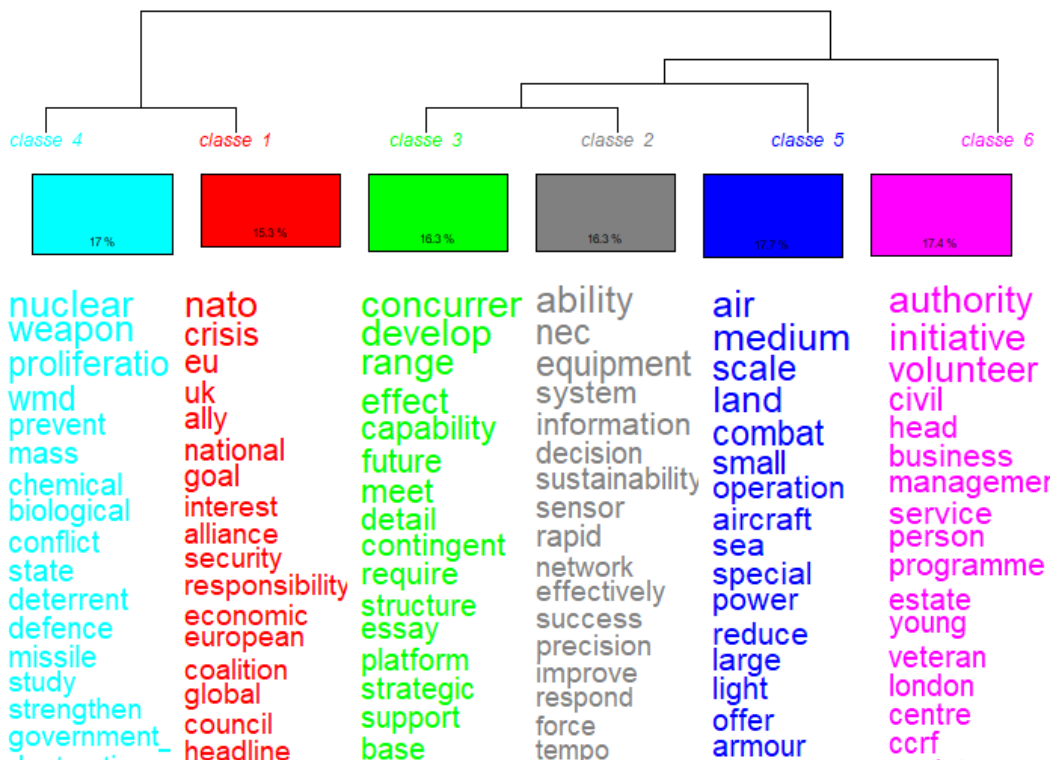


Figure B.10: Hierarchical cluster analysis of the 2004 UK defence white paper

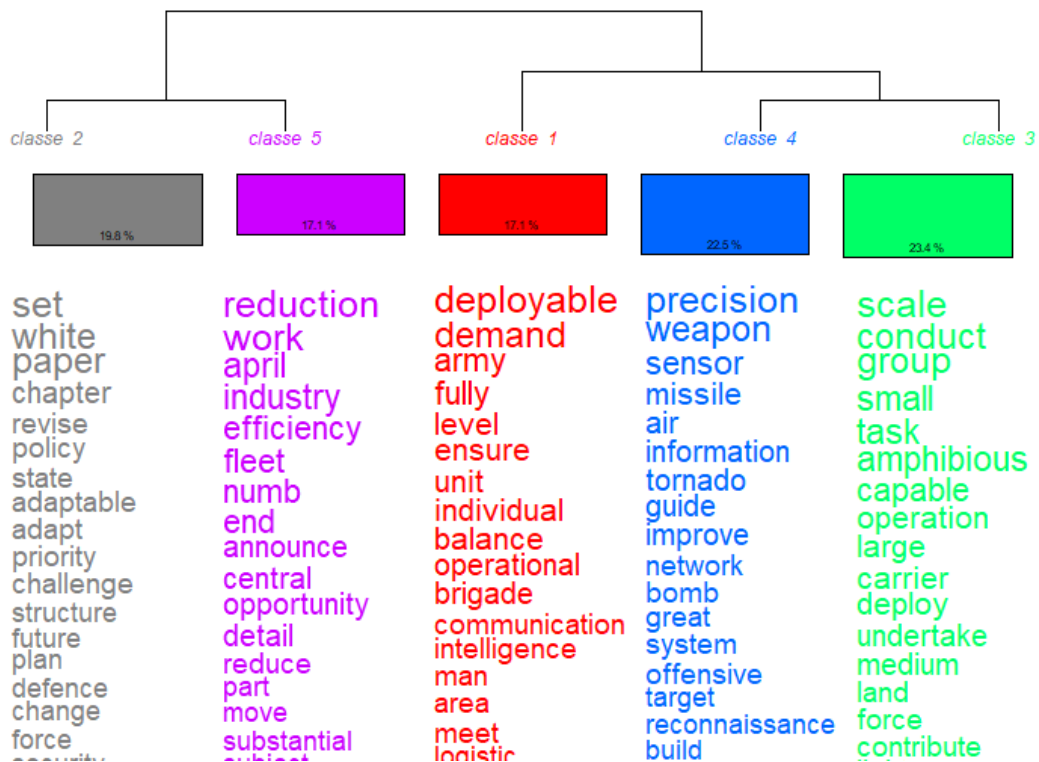


Figure B.11: Hierarchical cluster analysis of the 2010 UK defence review

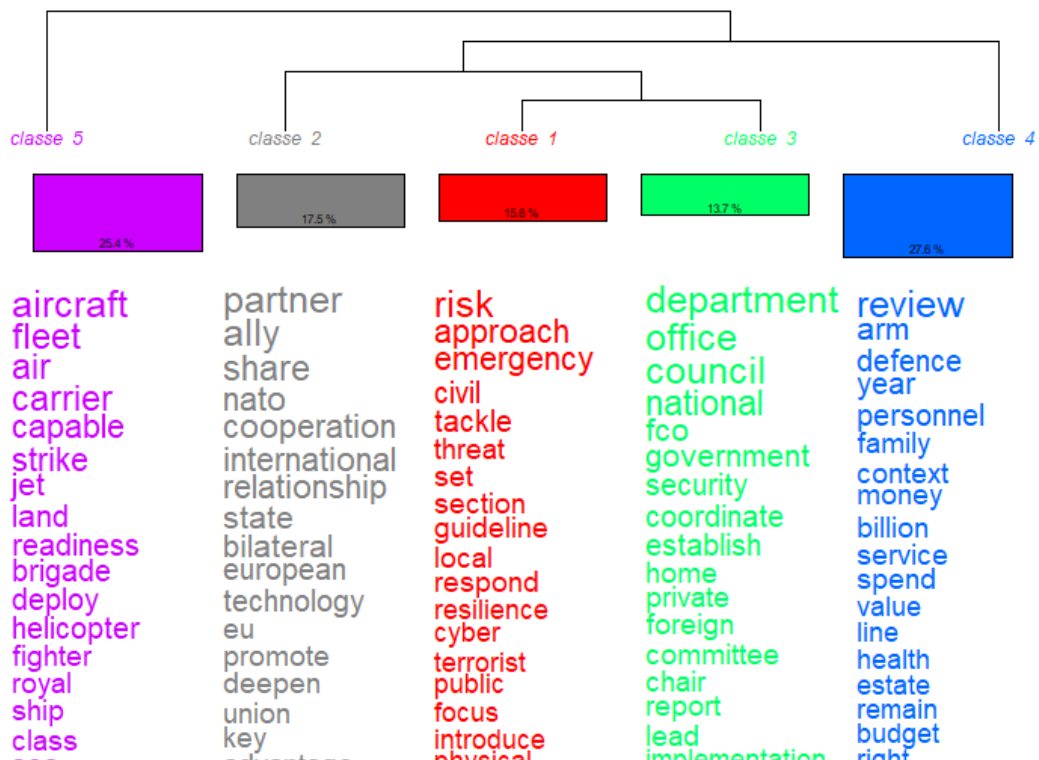
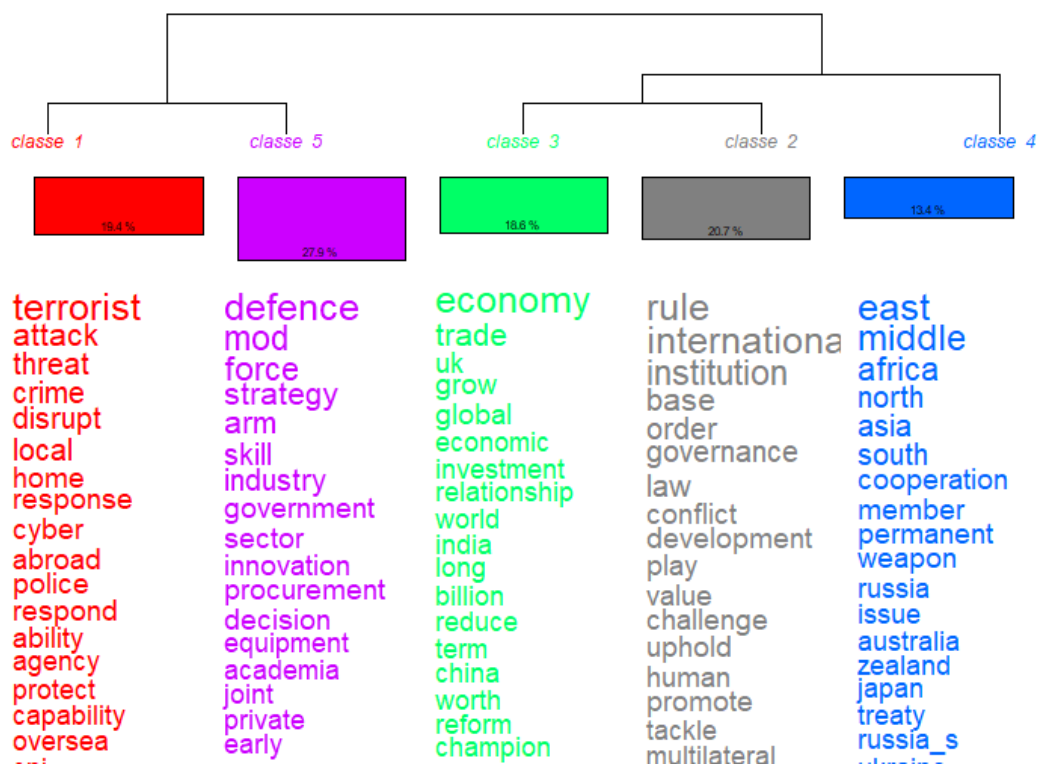


Figure B.12: Hierarchical cluster analysis of the 2015 UK defence review



## B.B The media agenda

To measure media attention to defence, I examined the data collected by the French Agendas Project and the UK Policy Agendas Project, and searched print news media in France and the UK *via* two commonly used online databases: Europresse and Factiva. In the following three paragraphs, I shortly outline the search terms for which I received the most relevant results for each of my three case studies.

For articles on recruitment within the British armed forces, I combined the keyword ‘recruitment’ with the names of the three armies - the Royal Air Force, the British army and the Royal Navy - because it provided a better inclusion of possibly relevant stories. Similarly, I used the French word ‘*recrutement*’ and looked for articles that also talked about the ‘*armée de l’Air*’, the ‘*armée de Terre*’ and the ‘*Marine nationale*’. The aim of this combination of keywords was to make sure that the newspaper articles effectively dealt with recruitment in the British and French military, rather than HR management within allied forces, for example.

For articles on aircraft carriers, I used the words ‘*porte-avions*’ in Europresse and ‘aircraft carrier’ in Factiva, and combined them with the names of French and British carriers that have been in service between 1980 and 2018. In the UK, I, hence, looked for the ‘Bulwark’, the ‘Hermes’, the ‘Invincible’, the ‘Illustrious’, the ‘Ark Royal’, the ‘Queen Elizabeth’ and the ‘Prince of Wales’. In France, in turn, I checked for articles that mentioned ‘Clemenceau’, ‘Foch’ and ‘Charles de Gaulle’. For an overview of the carriers included in this study, see Figure 4.1 in Chapter 4.

For articles on military operations, I combined a variety of terms used for deployments in both countries. The latter include ‘*opération(s) extérieure(s)/militaire(s)*’, ‘*intervention(s) extérieure(s)/militaire(s)*’ and ‘*déploiement(s)*’ in the case of France, and ‘military operation’, ‘deployment’ and ‘overseas intervention’ in the case of the UK. This combination of keywords was necessary to account for the changing terminology for out-of-area operations which increasingly focuses on terms not related to war (Fernandez and Jeangène Vilmer, 2020). I combined those terms with the various components of the British and the French armed forces to make sure that the articles effectively dealt with operations in which France and the UK were actively involved.

Table B.1 gives an overview of the terms that provided the most relevant results for my three case studies. I checked those terms for all ten journals included in the study (cf. Table 2.4 in Chapter 2 for an overview of the ten French and British newspapers that I included in the media analysis).

Table B.1: Search terms for the media analysis

	Recruitment Chapter 3	Aircraft carriers Chapter 4	Deployments Chapter 5
France	<i>'recrutement'</i> and <i>'armée de l'Air'</i> or <i>'armée de Terre'</i> or <i>'Marine nationale'</i>	<i>'porte-avions'</i> and 'Clemenceau' or 'Foch' or 'Charles de Gaulle' or 'PA 2'	<i>'opération(s) extérieure(s)'</i> or <i>'opération(s) militaire(s)'</i> or <i>'intervention(s) extérieure(s)'</i> or <i>'intervention(s) militaires'</i> or <i>'déploiement(s)'</i> and <i>'armée de l'Air'</i> and <i>'armée de Terre'</i> and <i>'Marine nationale'</i> and <i>'forces armées'</i>
UK	'recruitment' and 'Royal Air Force' or 'British Army' or 'Royal Navy'	'aircraft carrier' and 'Bulwark' or 'Hermes' or 'Invincible' or 'Illustrious' or 'Ark Royal' or 'Queen Elizabeth' or 'Prince of Wales'	'military operation' or 'deployment' or 'overseas intervention' and 'Royal Air Force' or 'British Army' or 'British Navy' or 'armed forces'

Les armes contre le beurre :

Les dynamiques de mise à l'agenda de la  
politique de défense

Résumé



**Les armes contre le beurre :**  
**Les dynamiques de mise à l'agenda de la politique de défense**

L'objectif de cette thèse de doctorat est de comprendre les dynamiques à l'œuvre dans la mise à l'agenda de la politique de défense, et d'examiner pourquoi et comment les questions de défense deviennent et restent une priorité gouvernementale. Même si les études sur la mise à agenda sont devenues l'une des principales approches paradigmatiques en politique publique, la majorité des chercheurs se concentrent sur la façon dont les questions domestiques émergent dans l'agenda du gouvernement. Peu de recherches ont été menées sur les dynamiques à l'œuvre en matière de politique étrangère, de sécurité et de défense, et les quelques contributions qui existent s'intéressent principalement aux questions saillantes et particulièrement visibles, telles que les opérations militaires. La défense est pourtant une politique publique multidimensionnelle qui ne peut être limitée aux seuls déploiements de forces. Elle couvre divers aspects allant du recrutement et de la fidélisation du personnel civil et militaire à l'acquisition d'équipements destinés à durer plusieurs décennies, en passant par la coopération opérationnelle et industrielle au niveau international. Dans cette thèse, j'analyse donc comment trois questions de défense très spécifiques ont émergé dans la société, comment les médias et le public les ont traitées et comment elles ont finalement été transformées (ou non) en politique publique. Plus précisément, mon but est d'identifier si le même mécanisme de mise à l'agenda s'applique à l'ensemble des questions de défense ou s'il y a des différences dans la façon dont les problèmes de défense sont compris, structurés et traités.

Une telle approche est particulièrement innovante car la défense a longtemps été considérée comme étant très différente des autres politiques publiques, notamment de celles non régaliennes. Clé de la sécurité nationale, elle ne devait donc pas faire l'objet de débat public. Conformément à cet argument réaliste, de nombreux spécialistes en politique publique ont supposé que le grand public ne développait pas de préférences pour la plupart des questions de politique étrangère et n'était donc pas en mesure de tenir le gouvernement responsable des décisions liées à la défense. Pourtant, mes résultats suggèrent que les mécanismes de mise à l'agenda des enjeux de défense sont relativement similaires à ceux que les chercheurs ont déjà identifiés pour d'autres politiques publiques, et ce malgré le fait que les citoyens ont tendance à s'appuyer sur des informations de seconde main pour se forger une opinion sur les questions de défense. Mon argument principal est donc que la politique de défense - qui a la réputation d'avoir un statut exceptionnel sur l'agenda gouvernemental - a commencé à se normaliser, en particulier au cours des trois dernières décennies. La défense, comme toute autre politique publique, est de plus en plus contrainte par des biais structurels et des

dynamiques propres au système, c'est-à-dire que certaines parties du domaine régalien ne se soustraient plus aux dynamiques 'traditionnelles' de mise à l'agenda.

Cette thèse de doctorat est structurée comme suit. Dans le premier chapitre, je fais le point sur la littérature de l'*agenda-setting*, avec un accent particulier sur les recherches théoriques et empiriques qui ont déjà été menées sur la politique étrangère, de sécurité et de défense. Dans un premier temps, je montre comment les gouvernements fixent leurs priorités politiques, en examinant notamment les hypothèses des modèles existants de mise à l'agenda ainsi que leurs conclusions. Ensuite, j'explique que la plupart des spécialistes en politique publique, qui travaillent sur la mise à l'agenda, se sont concentrés sur la dynamique des politiques domestiques et que peu de recherches ont été menées sur la manière dont les questions de défense deviennent et restent une priorité gouvernementale. Sur la base d'une revue critique de la littérature sur la fixation de l'agenda en matière de politique étrangère, de sécurité et de défense, je souligne les limites théoriques, empiriques et méthodologiques des travaux qui sont actuellement menés sur les agendas de défense. Enfin, je propose une nouvelle explication théorique de la stabilité et du changement dans le secteur de la défense. Celle-ci met en lumière la façon dont les nouvelles compréhensions des questions de défense peuvent ou non être acceptées dans différents systèmes politiques. Ce cadre théorique - qui se concentre avant tout sur le rôle des attributs associés à divers enjeux de défense et qui met en outre l'accent sur les interactions entre le niveau national et le niveau international - pose les bases des trois chapitres empiriques de ma thèse (chapitres 3-5). Je conclus en examinant comment la mise à l'agenda affecte les politiques publiques.

Dans le chapitre 2, j'explique et justifie le plan de recherche de cette thèse de doctorat. Je discute notamment de mes choix méthodologiques clés, y compris la décision d'opter pour une analyse transversale, transnationale et longitudinale. Je soutiens qu'il est plus pertinent de tester des explications alternatives pour la stabilité et le changement de l'attention politique lorsqu'on se concentre sur plus d'une question (ici le recrutement de militaires, l'acquisition de porte-avions et les opérations militaires), dans plus d'un pays (ici la France et le Royaume-Uni, les deux principales puissances militaires en Europe) et sur une période de temps relativement longue (ici 1980-2018). J'accorde une attention particulière à justifier la comparaison franco-britannique, étant donné que le Royaume-Uni et la France sont souvent considérés comme semblables en matière de défense. Sur la base d'un ensemble original de données sur les secteurs de la défense britannique et français, je remets en cause ce constat et montre que les politiques de défense de la France et du Royaume-Uni convergent depuis les années 1980. J'avance que c'est précisément cette convergence qui rend mon étude comparative fructueuse. Enfin, j'explique comment l'attention politique peut être mesurée

et comparée entre pays et dans le temps, et je donne un aperçu des données quantitatives et qualitatives que j'utilise dans les chapitres empiriques pour tester le cadre théorique proposé au chapitre 1. Ces dernières comprennent notamment des données provenant du *Comparative Agendas Project*, les livres blancs sur la défense et les revues stratégiques du Royaume-Uni et de la France, des articles de presse extraits d'Europresse et de Factiva, des sondages d'opinion et 30 entretiens semi-structurés avec des acteurs impliqués dans la mise à l'agenda de la politique de défense. En présentant ces différentes données, je souligne également les limites de mon plan de recherche.

Dans les trois chapitres qui suivent, je démontre empiriquement la dynamique de mise à l'agenda de trois questions de défense différentes mais complémentaires : le recrutement du personnel militaire (chapitre 3), l'acquisition de porte-avions (chapitre 4), et les opérations militaires (chapitre 5). Pour faciliter la comparaison entre ces enjeux dans la conclusion de cette thèse, les chapitres 3 à 5 ont non seulement la même structure mais se basent également sur les mêmes analyses empiriques. Tout d'abord, je détermine le moment où chacune de ces trois questions politiques a émergé comme une priorité au sein des agendas politique, médiatique et public, en France et au Royaume-Uni, puis j'examine l'évolution de leur traitement dans le temps. J'analyse ensuite leur dynamique de construction d'agenda, en soulignant en particulier comment les agendas politique, médiatique et public sont liés et influencés par le contexte stratégique. Cela me permet non seulement d'expliquer pourquoi les gouvernements britannique et français accordent de l'attention au recrutement, aux porte-avions et aux opérations militaires, mais aussi de démontrer que chacun des trois problèmes stratégiques a sa propre dynamique politique. Je conclus tous les chapitres empiriques par une discussion sur l'impact de l'*agenda-setting* sur la politique de défense en France et au Royaume-Uni, ainsi que par une réflexion sur ce que ces dynamiques impliquent pour la spécificité ou la non-spécificité de la défense en tant que politique publique.

Dans le chapitre 3, je montre que le recrutement des militaires a été une question de routine pour les gouvernements français et britannique entre 1980 et 2018, et que le cadrage de cet enjeu a évolué au fil du temps. Au lieu de se concentrer uniquement sur l'équilibre des effectifs, les gouvernements des deux côtés de la Manche sont de plus en plus préoccupés par l'image renvoyée par les forces armées en tant qu'employeur. Sur la base du modèle théorique proposé au chapitre 1, qui suggère que le contexte est important pour comprendre la dynamique de l'agenda gouvernemental, je soutiens que les changements dans l'environnement sécuritaire, le taux de chômage des jeunes, les changements démographiques ainsi que la relation entre les forces armées et la société sont essentiels pour saisir comment le recrutement des forces armées a été compris, structuré et traité sur le plan politique en France et au Royaume-Uni. Étant donné

que la dynamique prédominante de l'élaboration de l'agenda se situe entre l'évolution de l'environnement social, politique et économique et les agendas politique, médiatique et public, j'affirme que le recrutement est axé sur le monde réel et qu'il peut donc être considéré comme une *prominent defence issue*. Il s'agit, par conséquent, d'un excellent exemple de la normalisation du secteur de la défense, puisque le recrutement militaire suit une dynamique d'agenda qui a déjà été identifiée pour les questions qui ne sont pas (directement) liées à la défense, telles que le chômage et l'inflation.

Dans le chapitre 4, j'explique que l'acquisition d'équipements de défense est une question de routine pour les gouvernements des deux côtés de la Manche, c'est-à-dire que Londres et Paris traitent régulièrement des questions liées au matériel de guerre. Contrairement au recrutement des militaires (chapitre 3), l'attention portée aux acquisitions en matière de défense dépend fortement du cycle de vie de l'équipement, c'est-à-dire qu'il est dans la nature même de l'enjeu que les porte-avions gagnent et perdent en importance sur l'agenda gouvernemental au fil du temps. Je souligne également que le cadrage de la question a été particulièrement stable entre 1980 et 2018. Étant donné que la France et le Royaume-Uni possédaient déjà des porte-avions dans les années 1980, la question clé pour les deux pays était de savoir s'ils allaient les remplacer ou non (et si oui, comment). Conformément au cadre théorique avancé dans le premier chapitre de cette thèse, je suggère que les priorités gouvernementales ne sont pas seulement essentielles pour comprendre pourquoi Londres et Paris abordent régulièrement la question de l'approvisionnement et de l'acquisition de porte-avions, mais qu'elles expliquent également comment la question est formulée à travers le temps. Étant donné que l'agenda politique détermine en grande partie les priorités des médias et du public, je conclus que l'acquisition de porte-avions est déterminée par la politique et, par conséquent, peut être qualifiée de *governmental defence issue*. En outre, j'affirme que la dynamique d'agenda à l'œuvre pour les porte-avions est similaire à celle que les chercheurs ont identifiée pour l'unité nationale et je suggère que ce parallèle implique que l'acquisition en matière de défense, tout comme le recrutement de personnel militaire (chapitre 3), a commencé à se normaliser en tant que politique publique.

Dans le chapitre 5, j'illustre que les opérations militaires sont un sujet d'actualité en France et au Royaume-Uni, notamment depuis les années 2000. Contrairement au recrutement de militaires (chapitre 3) et à l'acquisition de porte-avions (chapitre 4), le déploiement de forces n'est pas une question de routine. Même si Londres et Paris abordent régulièrement les enjeux liés aux interventions militaires, ils ne peuvent pas anticiper comment ces déploiements vont finalement se dérouler. L'attention politique portée aux interventions militaires est donc extrêmement volatile, c'est-à-dire que certaines années, elles sont une priorité absolue pour les gouvernements, d'autres années,

elles le sont cependant beaucoup moins. En outre, je démontre que le cadrage de l'enjeu a changé au fil du temps et diffère en France et au Royaume-Uni. Alors que les gouvernements britanniques se concentrent de plus en plus sur la durabilité économique et opérationnelle de leurs interventions militaires, l'attention de Paris a commencé à se porter davantage sur l'impact que la couverture médiatique peut avoir sur le soutien du public aux missions françaises à l'étranger. Sur la base du modèle théorique que j'ai proposé dans le chapitre 1, je soutiens que les médias orientent de plus en plus l'opinion publique sur les politiques de déploiement, la presse se concentrant en particulier sur la légitimité et l'efficacité des opérations militaires françaises et britanniques. Je démontre ainsi que les déploiements, qui étaient auparavant une question de défense gouvernementale, se sont transformés en *sensational defence issue* où les médias ont de plus en plus d'importance. Les opérations militaires sont, par conséquent, un autre exemple de la normalisation de la politique de défense, car leur dynamique de mise à l'agenda est très similaire à celle que les chercheurs ont déjà identifiée pour les questions domestiques, telles que le sida, la criminalité et l'environnement.

Enfin, je résume et discute les résultats empiriques des chapitres 3 à 5 dans une perspective comparative. Cela me permet de tester le pouvoir explicatif du cadre théorique présenté au chapitre 1, et de souligner les contributions théoriques, empiriques et méthodologiques de cette thèse de doctorat. Bien que les spécialistes de la mise à l'agenda aient tendance à considérer la politique étrangère comme un cas déviant pour leurs études, ma thèse montre l'utilité d'étudier les priorités en matière de défense du point de vue des politiques publiques. Premièrement, je démontre l'importance de distinguer les enjeux en fonction de leurs attributs : les questions de défense les plus concrètes, comme le recrutement de militaires, sont susceptibles de suivre une dynamique très similaire à celle déjà identifiée pour les questions domestiques ; les questions de défense les plus abstraites, comme l'acquisition d'équipements de défense, mobiliseront beaucoup moins l'opinion publique mais peuvent néanmoins attirer l'attention des médias. Deuxièmement, je montre que les agendas de défense coïncident avec les priorités des gouvernements alliés. J'explique que la convergence des programmes de défense britanniques et français, pour laquelle j'ai fourni de nombreuses preuves empiriques au chapitre 2, est entre autres due à un comportement de mimétisme, la France suivant de près les évolutions au Royaume-Uni. Par conséquent, j'avance que les dynamiques transnationales sont essentielles pour comprendre comment les priorités gouvernementales en matière de défense évoluent dans le temps, en particulier pour les questions qui peuvent être qualifiées de 'gouvernementales'. L'importance des attributs des enjeux et le rôle des dynamiques transnationales, à leur tour, suggèrent que la défense s'est normalisée au fil du temps. Je conclus donc que certaines parties du domaine régali

ne se soustraient plus à la dynamique ‘traditionnelle’ de mise à l’agenda, c’est-à-dire que la défense n’est pas aussi spécifique que nous le croyons souvent. Étant donné qu’il n’existe pas encore de modèle théorique pour la mise à l’agenda des enjeux de défense et que le nombre d’analyses empiriques des dynamiques d’agenda en matière de politique étrangère est encore très limité, je soutiens que ma thèse comble une lacune importante dans la littérature de politique publique, notamment en élargissant le domaine empirique aux questions internationales. Je souligne également qu’une approche comparative des agendas politiques permet de mener des études empiriques sophistiquées portant sur l’élaboration de la politique de défense, améliorant ainsi notre compréhension des relations internationales de manière plus générale. Après avoir souligné la contribution de ma thèse de doctorat à la littérature en politique publique, politique comparée et études stratégiques, je termine le manuscrit en dépeignant les limites de mes travaux de recherche et en proposant un agenda pour les recherches futures.