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What to Make of Strategic Narratives in International Relations?

An Integrated Framework for Strategic Narrative Analysis and the Study of France's
Protracted Military Intervention in the Sahel

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. PROBLEM AND RESEARCH AIM

In the past decades, the concept of strategic narrative was mainstreamed in studying contemporary protracted military interventions while it was also used to analyse various phenomena in the field of International Relations (IR). Nevertheless, puzzling theoretical frameworks and selective analytical practices led to confusion in the emerging research agenda on strategic narrative in IR. Instead of progressing towards a synthesized and complex use of broader interdisciplinary results, authors mostly tried to come up with findings in separate enclosures. The problem of fuzzy theorizing and the absence of interdisciplinary foundations coupled with the selective use of this term as a label for various types of discourses. Addressing these problems, this dissertation builds on the insights of various disciplines, including political science, war and strategic studies, international relations, political communication, as well as communication and literary studies, narratology, cognitive and behavioural studies.

Therefore, this dissertation proposes a new, Integrated Framework for the concept of strategic narrative in International Relations, focusing on protracted military interventions. This project

1) builds on the synthesis of the literature from a broad, interdisciplinary perspective:
   - by combining insights from narrative theories and the hermeneutical cycle,
   - by clarifying links between narrative and framing,
   - by synthesising theories on the persuasion capacity of strategic narratives;
2) provides a new conceptual and methodological framework;
3) is applied to gain new empirical results on the strategic narrative of France's protracted military intervention in the Sahel.

1.2. PROPOSITION AND HYPOTHESES

This dissertation argues, that to overcome the problem of ambiguous theorizing and selective analytical practices connected to the concept of strategic narrative in International Relations, a new conceptual framework is needed based on interdisciplinary foundations and the synthesis of relevant theoretical perspectives. Such new framework should provide a conceptual toolbox and detailed operationalisation supporting the analysis of strategic narratives.

In a deductive approach, the research identifies key gaps, controversies and potential solutions synthesising interdisciplinary perspectives in the Conceptual Background part. Based on these

synthesised findings, the project proposes the Integrated Framework in the Research Design part, with the main hypotheses claiming that:

H1: An Integrated Framework for the analysis of strategic narrative can be drawn up by integrating narrative theories through Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutical cycle with framing theories, as well as with theorizing on the persuasion capacity of strategic narratives in International Relations.

A) Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutical philosophy can integrate key notions of structuralist and narrative paradigm perspectives, retaining the analytical edges of structuralists perspectives as well as the broader conceptual horizon in the narrative paradigm approach.

B) Ricouer's framework supports focus on the mind-narrative nexus, it is well adaptable to the loop of narrative representations and the inherently dialogical, multi-perspectival and fragmented context of the contemporary media ecology.

C) Ricoeur's narrative hermeneutic philosophy provides a foundation for conceptualizing strategic narrative in International Relations, through a cyclic understanding of narrative figuration, incorporating semiotic and non-semiotic aspects, integrating the analytical potential of framing theories as well as perspectives on the persuasion capacity of strategic narratives.

D) Framing practices solely strengthen the persuasion capacity of strategic narrative, and gain frames are dominant in the strategic narrative of a protracted intervention.

To demonstrate the empirical applicability of this framework, the research project conducts a case study, focusing on the protracted military intervention of France in the Sahel region, in Operation Serval and Operation Barkhane. This Integrated Framework is used to generate new empirical results on this specific case, contributing to area studies and understanding France's intervention in the region.

1.3. STRUCTURE OF THE DISSERTATION

Apart from this Introduction, the dissertation consists of three main parts:

1) Conceptual Background – highlights gaps, controversies and problems in the literature and synthesizes relevant theories.

2) Research Design – presents the Integrated Framework and the methodology for applying it on a case study

3) Case Study – demonstrates the applicability of the Integrated Framework, presents new empirical results.

The Conceptual Background part provides a historical, theoretical and integrative overview, building on problematizing as well as gap-spotting in the literature (Sandberg & Alvesson 2011). In a historical focus, it addresses the conceptual roots of strategic narratives, its disciplinary origins both within the field of strategic studies and war studies, as well as in communication and narratology studies.

Chapter 2.1. *Persuasion in the Intersection of Communication and Strategy* starts from studying the concept of persuasion, examining Clausewitzian ideas and the development of warfare, highlighting the nexus of communication and public opinion in war, including the communication turn in warfare and the mass self-communication patterns of the 21st century. I emphasise focusing on the disciplinary background of strategic narratives, particularly on the cognitive domain and the broader policy framework of Strategic Communication.

In Chapter 2.2. *Understanding the Concept of Narrative*, the relevance of narratology and the concept of narrative for International Relations is elaborated through highlighting the link between storytelling and emotions. I highlight that structural narratology and classical perspectives on the role of narrative in rhetorical discourse can provide a set of clear conceptual contours, while the narrative paradigm perspective's focus on narrative rationality can disrupt fundamental assumptions on distinct forms of discourse. The main argument of this chapter is that the juxtaposition of structuralist and narrative paradigm perspectives provides complementary insights for the conceptual curation of narrative, while the hermeneutical philosophy of Paul Ricoeur can integrate key notions of both streams, retaining the analytical edges of structuralists perspectives as well as the broader conceptual horizon in the narrative paradigm approach (see: H1/A). Moreover, since Ricouer's framework highlights focus on the mind-narrative nexus, it processes well the loop of narrative representations and the inherently dialogical, multi-perspectival and fragmented context provided in the contemporary media ecology (see: H1/B).

In a theoretical focus, Chapter 2.3 *Conceptualizing Strategic Narrative* discusses precursor and relative concepts, definitions, typologies and theorizing on the ontology and epistemology of strategic narratives. Aiming at a critical review, the core literature from International Relations is contrasted with theoretical insights from the previous chapter. Based on that I argue that there is a lack of reflection on key notions of narratology, since theorizing in IR is limited to showcasing seemingly new ideas without grounding them in narrative studies, although most

of these ideas echo certain narratology traditions. Moreover, due to arbitrary theoretical categorisation, existing typologies on the concept of strategic narrative hold limited potential for empirical analysis. Addressing these limitations, a key argument of is this dissertation is that Ricoeur's narrative hermeneutic philosophy can complement and provide a comprehensive ground for conceptualizing strategic narrative through a cyclic understanding of narrative figuration while it can also incorporate non-semiotic aspects (see: H1/C).

In Chapter 2.4. *Connecting Strategic Narrative and Framing* the relative position of frames and narratives is addressed: while the idea of frames directs attention to specific discourse patterns, narrative serves as the broader framework containing frame devices. I highlight the potential of framing in enhancing the effectiveness of narratives and the relevance of framing theories (framing tasks and frame alignment practices, prospect framing) for narrative analysis. These perspectives lead to examining assumptions on the role of framing practices in strategic narratives (see: H1/D).

In Chapter 2.5. *The Persuasion Capacity of Strategic Narratives,* the review provides a synthesis of theories on the effectiveness of strategic narratives, highlighting conditions of resonance, purpose, probability, and prospects. As primary tools for *resonance*, the review highlights the importance of political myths, master narratives, national role concepts and cognitive priors. Regarding *purpose*, the review concludes that framing is relevant in both enhancing the clarity of purpose as well as providing strategic ambiguity. The review underlines that *probability* integrates focus on semantic *consistency*, *coherence of narrative projection* and the narrative's perceived *congruence*. Concerning *prospects*, emphasising positive prospects is generally considered a vital condition in the literature, however relying solely on gain framing can lead to reverse effects, while the impact of loss frames on the risk-taking preferences of the audience (prospect theory) is also relevant to consider.

The Research Design part presents the proposal of the *Integrated Framework for Analysing Strategic Narratives* (Table 1. in Chapter 3.1). Combining research on narrative, strategic narrative, and framing theories, it applies the cyclical philosophy of hermeneutics by Ricoeur, integrating insights both from structural narratology and narrative paradigm perspectives, incorporating insights from the literature on strategic narratives in International Relations and framing theories. The Research Design part clarifies *Key Concepts of the Case Study (*Chapter 3.2) and *Research Method and Strategy* (Chapter 3.3.) Operating with a case study methodology, this part outlines case selection rationales in focusing on France's protracted military intervention in Mali and the Sahel region from 2012 to 2022. Data collection and the

scope of data analysis are discussed with regards to all stages of analysis. Chapter 3.4. contains the operationalisation of the proposed Integrated Framework.

The Case Study part presents the analysis of France's strategic narrative of its protracted military intervention in the Sahel using the proposed Integrated Framework. The Case Study part is segmented to three chapters along the cyclic stages of *Prefiguration* (4.1), *Configuration* (4.2) and *Refiguration* (4.3). In Prefiguration, the objectives of narrative fidelity and desirability is addressed through an analysis on preexisting interpretive structures. Prefiguration analysis highlights key preexisting interpretive structures shaping the resonance of the audience to an emerging narrative. In Configuration, the analysis focuses on how purposes and prospects appear in the narrative, how key frames shape narrative consistency and clarity and how they resonate with interpretive structures identified in the prefiguration stage. In this chapter, semantic analysis is conducted through a conceptually guided thematic analysis framework along key empirical periods. Refiguration focuses on non-semiotic factors impacting the coherence of narrative projection and the congruence of the strategic narrative, assessing the dynamics of narrative contestation as well.

The final chapter of *Conclusion* (5.) addresses research aims, evaluates hypotheses and highlights the Integrated Framework's use for empirical analysis. It summarizes the research project's theoretical contribution to the literature as well as the main empirical results that contribute to the understanding of France's protracted military intervention in the Sahel region. Besides addressing limitations of the research project, the chapter also provides recommendations for future research avenues continuing and complementing the research agenda on strategic narratives.

1.4. KEY RESULTS AND CONTRIBUTION TO THE LITERATURE

The dissertation proves that a new conceptual framework for the analysis of strategic narratives can be drawn up based on the interdisciplinary synthesis of theories.

- The proposed Integrated Framework reflects the *loop of narrative representation building on Ricoeur's cycle of mimesis,* (stages of *Prefiguration, Configuration, Refiguration*) revising the linear process (narrative formation, projection, and reception) mainstreamed in International Relations.
- This new Framework combines framing theories with concepts from International Relations, which are synthesised with structural narratology perspectives and narrative paradigm concepts.

- The dissertation demonstrates that *structuralist and narrative paradigm perspectives can be integrated in Ricoeur's theoretical framework*: structuralist perspectives support understanding a narrative's persuasion capacity focusing on the configuration of semantic structures, while narrative paradigm perspectives offer concepts (i.e. narrative probability and narrative fidelity) exceeding focus on the semantic configuration of a narrative.

- The Integrated Framework also highlights the *mind-narrative nexus* focusing on narrative competence through addressing *preexisting interpretive structures* which shape the desirability and fidelity of a potential strategic narrative. Prefiguration analysis identifies and evaluates *master narratives, political myths, national role concepts and cognitive priors* as influential interpretive structures shaping prior expectations of an audience.

- Configuration analysis combines conceptual tools to uncover complex layers in the semantic configuration of a narrative by focusing on *clarity and consistency in purpose framing, resonance with preexisting interpretive structures and prospect framing*. Here the framework offers novel thematic categories for configuration analysis, upgrading previous categorisation attempts by extending focus on framing theories.

- Refiguration analysis focuses on how a narrative is restored to the world, how semantic configurations meet reality Here the framework highlights non-semiotic aspects, as *coherence of narrative projection*, *narrative congruence and the dynamics of narrative contestation*, thereby expanding focus and surpassing mere emphasis on semantic configuration in narrative analysis.

- Addressing the *link between strategic narratives and framing*, theoretical results also show that although *framing practices often strengthen the persuasive capacity* of Strategi Narratives, they can have a *reverse effect* too. While diagnostic and motivational framing tasks can strengthen, the use of prognostic framing can weaken a strategic narrative's persuasive capacity through decreasing narrative probability. Frame alignment practices, such as frame amplification and frame bridging in diagnostic and motivational framing tasks strengthen a narrative's persuasive capacity by increasing narrative fidelity and narrative probability. But when frame extensions and frame transformations are used excessively to cover inconsistencies in the narrative, it ultimately harms narrative probability through decreasing narrative clarity.

- Instead of permanent gain framing, the narrative of a protracted military intervention may use both loss and gain frames along the evolving dynamics of politico-military realities, highlighting the relevance of prospect theory's framing effect for narrative configurations.

Besides theoretical contributions to the literature, this research project has empirical results from applying the Integrated Framework on the case study of a protracted foreign military intervention, analysing the strategic narrative of France's intervention in the Sahel region from 2012 to 2022.

- France's strategic narrative *resonated with key preexisting interpretive* structures as master narratives of sovereignty and humanitarianism, political myths of the Gaullist consensus, and France's active-independent national role concept, while the narrative also attempted to fade cognitive priors of colonialism, neocolonialism and France's unilateral intervention policy through consolidating the "rupture" narrative. While resonance with France's active-independent national role concept was constant in the narrative, diminishing resonance with the rupture narrative reinforced cognitive priors, weakening narrative fidelity.

- P*rospect framing* in the narrative was tailored to the politico-military developments of the intervention. The narrative applied loss framing to underline the need for France's new or continuous engagement even when operational realities progressed and gain frames when operational realities challenged prospects of France's engagement in the region.

- Showing a *compelling purpose* in narrative configuration faced challenges as operations evolved. While diagnostic frames were consistent, clear and focused in the narrative, the use of prognostic frames was confusing, decreasing narrative probability. Moreover, several contradictions challenged *narrative consistency*, while certain frame alignment practices – such as frame extensions and frame transformations – decreased *narrative clarity*, ultimately harming narrative probability.

- Although France's semi-presidential system supported the *coherence of narrative projection* through a centralised projection platform, coherence was weakened by bureaucratic politics and France's parallel public policy narrative on Africa.

- *Congruence* with French security policy objective supported narrative probability, but incongruence with structural realities of French economic and geopolitical interests challenged narrative congruence as the intervention prolonged. The mediated environment also challenged narrative probability with the emergence of numerous counternarratives.

- While problems with the narrative's coherence and congruence, weak operational results and local cognitive priors fuelled counternarratives, external actors also boosted them by amplifying anti-colonialist and anti-French frames, driving *narrative contestation* and triggering information warfare activities from France.

2. CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND – SYNTHESISING INTERDISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVES

This part of the dissertation provides a conceptual background for developing an integrated framework for the concept of strategic narrative in International Relations. Starting with a review on the intersection of communication and strategy focusing on the notion of persuasion, I highlight the origins and relevance of strategic narratives in International Relations, War and Strategic Studies. Following that, I contrast narratology perspectives with the construction of strategic narrative as a concept in IR, while I also address the relationship between strategic narratives and framing. Doing so, I highlight theoretical problems and conceptual muddles in the literature; reject superfluous typologies; argue why Ricoeur's hermeneutical framework would be the perfect foundation for a new framework; and propose theoretical links and resolutions based on interdisciplinary perspectives. As a result of synthesising perspectives from narratology, international relations and strategic studies, as well as framing theories, I identify key components of strategic narratives' persuasive capacity.

2.1. PERSUASION IN THE INTERSECTION OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS, COMMUNICATION AND STRATEGY

The conceptual construct of strategic narrative originates from the intersection of Communication and International Relations, and it is fundamentally linked to the concept of persuasion. This chapter looks at persuasion as a topic in International Relations while taking stock of relevant ideas in the field, discussing their disciplinary roots and transformation within the intersection of Communication and International Relations, focusing on the umbrella concept of Strategic Communication in strands of War and Strategic Studies.

2.1.1. Persuasion in International Relations

The notion of *persuasion* and the *formation of public views* are intertwined with strategic affaires, as they have been essential components throughout the history of strategy and war. The concept of strategy reflects the "*art of creating power*" (Freedman 2013). In economics, strategy refers to the process of gaining competitive advantage that generates political or economic benefits (Krugman 1986). The action of persuasion serves as a tool of strategy. Renowned examples exist from the antiquities, such as Pericles' efforts to gain the support of Athens' *demos* for his defensive strategy during the Peloponnesian War, as told by Thucydides,

or Alexander the Great's success in convincing his soldiers about his vision of conquering the world. The civil wars of the Roman Empire, the call for the first Crusade, and the series of religious wars in Europe have dealt with the issue of gaining the support of the public for political objectives. The invention of the printing press helped the proliferation of ideas and their availability to the public, while practices of persuasion became institutionalized, primarily from the era of the Counter-Reformation. From the 20th century, the technological inventions (radio programmes, motion pictures) broadened the means of reaching the population and resulted in an increased level of state-led institutionalization of persuasion practices. For example, the Committee on Public Information in the United States encouraged Americans to support the First World War. While during the Second World War, Nazi Germany's Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda, the British Political Warfare Executive and the United States Office of War Information held similar functions. Besides the accelerating institutionalisation of persuasion and propaganda, the role of political leaders in crafting convincing and motivating narratives of the war was crucial, such as in the case of Winston Churchill, whose "*myth-confectionary skills*" turned the spin on the Allied troops' disaster at Dunkirk into a story of victory and heroism (O'Shaughnessy 2004, 95). Persuasion, and the imperative to engage and influence wider audiences are strongly attached to matters of leadership such as shaping political discourse by setting the agenda and determining the frameworks of discourse with the objective of gaining political power or to shape regional and international order (Bryne 2020).

The formation of public views became a puzzling topic for many thinkers in the 19th and 20th century, such as Marx and Engels (1848), LeBon (1896) Gramsci (1971), Sorel (1999), whose works have influenced the study of persuasion. Focusing on the relationship between public opinion and international power, in the 20th century, scholars such as Carr (1939), Nicholson (1935) and Deutsch (1953) started to integrate communication as a feature in international politics and power relations, arguing that communication contributes to the creation of power and influence in defence of national interests. The concepts of relational and structural power further strengthened the understanding of communication as a tool in building and sustaining power. (Strange 1988) On a similar note, Krasner (1991) argued that communication provides legitimizing interpretation to external action, aiming at converging actors' views and expectations on principles, norms, rules and decision-making procedures in international relations. The analysis of power structures and the relational capability to influence the knowledge, judgment and behaviour of individuals and institutions is intertwined with studying

communication (Manfredi-Sánchez 2020, 4-5.). Nevertheless, the strategic use of communication is not one-sided, but technological transformation amplifies its clouding potential as a double-edged sword, blurring virtual borders through the expansion of standardized content and thereby weakening the delineation of state power (Steensen 2015; Manfredi-Sánchez 2020).

2.1.2. Persuasion in War and Armed Conflict

The literature connecting persuasion and strategic affaires was profoundly influenced by Carl von Clausewitz, whose seminal work *Vom Kriege* (1832) is still used as a foundation for theorizing strategic affaires and war, establishing that "*war therefore is an act of violence intended to compel our opponent to fulfill our will.*" (Clausewitz, 1832, 3) Clausewitz introduced the concept of the *centre of gravity* which he translates as the "*hub of all power and movement.*" When the centre of gravity is struck as a target, it yields the "*greatest effect*" for the attacker's effort (Clausewitz, 1832 cited in Douglas 2007, 392). Adapting the centre of gravity metaphor in strategic affaires, Douglas argued that the concept's ethereal (persuasion, public opinion) and earthly (physical manifestation of the chief icons of hope) elements can be bridged in the notion of strategic narrative, primarily for the analysis of irregular wars and counterinsurgency efforts. (Ibid, 396) Furthermore, as auxiliary concepts to the centre of gravity, Clausewitz's notions on waging war as both a product of physical means and "*moral forces*" – such as passion and will – were also recycled in Strategic and War Studies, through arguments that "*moral forces*" are central to the concept of strategic narratives (Betz 2015, De Graaf et al. 2015). These authors also took into consideration Norman Gibbs' interpretation, who defined *moral forces* as "*something more comprehensive than simply political doctrine; something which, operating in the hearts and minds of men, moves them and inspires them to action*" (Gibbs 1975, 15). His interpretation suggested a link between *moral forces*, winning *hearts and minds* and ideology (Betz 2015, 45). Furthermore, the notion of a political centre of gravity can be linked to the unity of command and control, and the ability to control narrative at home and to project the same abroad, as well as to the capability to conduct broad spectrum influencing operations.

Besides these classic Clausewitzian concepts, the notion of persuasion (and auxiliary concepts such as strategic narrative) can be relevant in studying generations of warfare (Lind 2004). Persuasion plays a key role in all generations but its significance for the fourth generation is paramount, where a decentralized form of war indicates states' loss of their monopoly on armed

forces. Terms such as asymmetric conflict, guerrilla warfare and irregular warfare denote violent conflicts where at least one belligerent is usually a non-state actor, and the literature points to the ideational roots in fourth (and fifth) generation of warfare. A seminal work for this genealogy is *The politics of asymmetric conflict* by Mack (1975) dealing with the question why big countries loose small wars. Building on that, the topic of democracies and casualty aversion (Merom 2003, Smith 2005) have been assessed as part of the developing literature on the characteristics of war in the 21st century (Hammers 2006). Guerrilla warfare and counterinsurgency (Kilcullen 2005, 2009), as well as netwar and terrorism studies by Arquilla and Ronfeldt reaffirmed the Clausewitzian notions on the importance of strengthening the determination and will to fight, arguing that parties need a "*sense of cause, purpose, and mission*" (Arquilla & Ronfeldt 2001, 328). Key authors and practitioners from the field of guerrilla warfare, like August Neidhardt von Gneisenau, Mao Zedong, Che Guevara and others all emphasized the critical importance of persuading the population to continue their fight against the opponent (Forgács, 2020).

Persuasion and communication also play a key role in deterrence theory as "*the practice of discouraging or restraining someone – in world politics, usually a nation-state – from taking unwanted actions, such as an armed attack*" (Mazarr 2018, 2.). Deterrence also builds heavily on the use of military force, but in contrast to war, its central aim is to avoid the use of violence, through persuading the opponent that losses will outweigh any potential gains in case of a military aggression (Brown – Arnold 2010, 298.). This can only work if one's intentions to cause losses (damages) are credible and openly communicated towards the opponent (Ibid.). These studies all share an underlying resonance for integrating effective persuasion practices, and concepts like strategic narrative can encapsulate the specificities and elements of such practices.

2.1.3. Communication, Public Opinion and War

The nexus of war and public opinion has been addressed from different perspectives. The first studies emphasised that an ill-informed, irrational public attitude is unimportant and does not constrain decisions on the use of armed force (Almond 1956, Lippmann 1955, Verba et al. 1967, Morgenthau 1948 [1993]), and the public was believed to rally round the flag in times of crisis, preserving the primacy of a rational foreign policy decision-making process. This perspective shifted with the multiplying body bags of the Vietnam War, as such images eroded public support (Mueller 1971), and the notion of a Pretty Prudent Public was introduced in

relations with the use of military force, arguing that public support for the use of the military "*varies according to the principal policy objective for which force is used*" (Jentleson 1992, 49). Similarly, Ringsmose and Børgesen also challenged elitist perspectives, emphasising that domestic processes can restrict options in decision-making, highlighting a causal link between public attitudes and policy. (Ringsmose & Børgesen, 2011, 510) As a reflective synthesis of these diverging perspectives, recent literature argued that while casualties have a negative impact on the public support, the public conducts "*a cost-benefit analysis comparing the likely benefits of continuing to fight with the expected cost*" (Gelpi 2010, 89) and "*under the right conditions, the public will continue to support even relatively costly military operations*" (Gelpi et al., 2009, 1-2). This perspective suggests that the public tolerance to the body bag syndrome is conditional on a set of variables. Such factors can be the nature and extent of the threat to national security, perceived national interest at stake (Ladd 1985), united leadership (Zaller 1992; Larson 1996), multilateral support (Kull and Destler 1999) and the prospect of success (Record 1993, Eichenberg 2005, Gelpi, Feaver, & Reifler 2009). Furthermore, public opinion can be shaped by the elite's (strategic) communication practices (i.e. strategic narratives and framing) (Ringsmose & Børgesen, 2011, pp. 510–12). Marton argues that public opinion can be both ignored and influenced in the long term, but it is not a set of unconnected attitudes to the extent suggested by the Almond-Lippmann consensus, nor is it autonomous to the extent claimed by the Pretty Prudent Public hypothesis (Marton 2013, 144).

In the 21st century, the focus on power relations and networked communication highlighted the emergence of "*mass self-communication*" patterns within a networked society enabled by new media technologies (Castells 2011). Relations between armed forces and the media, the impact of the information age on irregular warfare, particularly insurgents' increased ability to influence war coverage through recording and publishing attacks in a new media ecology produced a new research agenda, establishing a new paradigm for war (Rid & Heckner 2009)

The non-physical side of war, influencing perception and persuasion became a key tenet of contemporary warfare, producing the description of "*21st century combat as politics*" (Simpson 2012), as well as references to the "*improvisational theatre of operations*" (Smith 2006, Douglas 2007) where networked social actors fight for the perception of all relevant target audiences. (Betz 2011, Dimitriu 2012) Furthermore, narrative as mission command in military operations was operationalized as "*outlining an organization's plan of action in a logical framework*" (Culkin 2013 cited in Freedman 2015, 25.)

The relevance of the communication turn in warfare highlighted the importance of the virtual domain (Betz 2008) of operations, and the impact of increased connectivity (Gleick 2011) with its potential for more frequent leaks (Bolt 2010). In a problem-solving approach, strategic communication and its agents were assessed as possible sources of success in counterinsurgency (Paul, Clarke, & Grill 2010) as well as journalists' potential for acting was considered as "*force multipliers*" (Rid 2007, 9). This was only amplified by the controversial concept of hybrid warfare that builds heavily on the combination of "*conventional and unconventional instruments of power and tools of subversion*," with the aim to create ambiguity, weakening social cohesion, thus making it easier to persuade the opponent (Bilal 2021; Resperger, 2018).

2.1.4. Origins of Strategic Narrative

The construction of strategic narrative as a term is embedded in the broader framework of Strategic Communication. The term *Strategic Communication* was introduced by the U.S. Department of Defense from 2002, replacing and carrying on elements from the concept of *Strategic Influence* (Kuehl & Armistead, 2007, 13 cited in Dimitriu, 2012, 198–99). The U. S. Army War College's research project defined Strategic Influence as "*significant actions taken by governments in and of themselves, the appropriate and most desirable arrangements of such actions, and the manner and emphasis of the publication of such actions to the world, that advance the struggle for men's minds and create a desirable climate of world opinion*" (Gough 2003, 1). According to this research, Strategic Influence contained the structuring of all informational activities (including public affairs, political warfare, political advocacy, public diplomacy and psychological operations) which aimed at influencing opinions, attitudes, and behaviour of foreign actors in order to achieve national objectives. As relative concepts to Strategic Influence, foreign information program, international information activities, political warfare, propaganda, psychological warfare, psychological operations, public information, public affairs, public diplomacy, international military information, information operations, influence operations, and perception management were listed as well. (Ibid, 2) Superseding the term Strategic Influence, Strategic Communication offered a more neutral frame while maintained focus on key informational activities. Strategic Communication remains a dominant concept, entrenched as a policy language in the practice of international organisations such as NATO or the EU.

Against this background, the concept of strategic narrative is situated in a broader context of the terminological evolution and its political drivers. Introduced by Lawrence Freedman in 2006, it reflects the insight that conflicts are to be resolved in the cognitive domain, with the underlying assumption that "*within the cognitive domain humans understand things in terms of stories*" (Freedman 2015, 22.)

Introducing the term strategic narratives to the literature, Freedman defined the concept as "*compelling storylines which can explain events convincingly and from which inferences could be drawn*" (Freedman 2006, 23). Freedman's approach reflects notions from cognitive psychology, in arguing that strategy can be considered as a story about power told in future tense (2013). Referring to the work of Schank and Abelson 1977, he argues that strategy can be seen as subconscious-based expectations for the developing situation, consideration of how participants will engage in future developments through applying the idea of a *script* (Freedman 2015, 23). Freedman's work signals a common core for narratives and strategy, through their roots in the cognitive domain, while it is also connected to ideas about the centrality of narrative to cognition (Bruner 1986, Polkinghorne 1988). Freedman further defines strategic narratives as products of deliberation "*designed with the intention of structuring the responses of others to developing events*" (Freedman 2015, 19). In connection with the cognitive aspects, the inherent characters of narratives, such as that they can elicit emotions reflect the compatibility of narratives for strategic deliberations.

Policy documents and governmental strategies started to feature the concept of strategic narrative after its introduction by Lawrence Freedman in 2006. The publication of *A National Strategic Narrative* in 2011 under the alias of Mr. Y (evoking the Mr. X pseudonym of *The Sources of Soviet Conduct)* was a foundational moment in this regard. The authors included Captain Wayne Portes from the US Navy and Colonel Mark Myleby from the US Marine Corps, whom the US Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff charged with leading a team at US Special Operations Command developing a grand strategy that can act as a guideline and inspiration for all US governments strategies. Following that, the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars published the "A National Strategic Narrative" with preface by Anne-Marie Slaughter, who argued that there is a need for developing a national strategic narrative besides national security strategies. (Mr. Y, 2011, 1)

The literature on strategic communication attributes specific *functions* to strategic narratives by which they support strategic goals. They can fulfil legitimizing functions by explaining or justifying certain issues through storylines. Within the broader context of communication

strategies, they can be tools for agenda-setting as well as for diverting attention. (Miskimmon et al. 2013, 8). Strategic narratives can be used to form and maintain alliances (Flockhart 2012; Roselle 2017; Miskimmon et al. 2013); to mobilize domestic and international public audience, or to secure acquiescence by impacting public opinion (Betz 2011; Ringsmose – Børgesen 2011; De Graaf et al. 2015; Jakobsen 2017); to enhance status and power (Antoniades et al. 2010); to prevent radicalization (Archetti 2013); furthermore, the use of strategic narratives can be highly relevant during crises and transition periods (Bentley 2013).

In sum, the literature's take on strategic narrative suggests that it is applicable to a broad variety of objectives. Dixon argues that idealist approaches emphasise the ability of a strategic narrative to "create reality", meaning that persuading the public becomes more important than reality. As opposed to that, "*objectivist approaches emphasise the role of the material and events in shaping and determining both ideas and outcomes*" therefore placing limits to what extent strategic narratives can persuade key audiences. (Dixon 2019, 656).

2.1.5. Summary – Persuasion and the Origins of Strategic Narrative in IR

This chapter provided a review on the concept of persuasion in International Relations and specifically in conflict studies. Clausewitzian concepts, and the development of warfare was examined, highlighting the evolving focus on the nexus of communication and public opinion in war, underlined by the communication turn in warfare and the mass self-communication patterns of the 21st century. It also showed how the term strategic narrative is nested in the cognitive domain, embedded in Strategic Communication as a policy framework. Due to the widespread, however often arbitrary use of strategic narrative as a concept, the next chapter will provide grounding for conceptualization from the perspective of narratology studies.

2.2. UNDERSTANDING THE CONCEPT OF NARRATIVE

To provide a disciplinary background for discussing narratives, this chapter introduces the use of narrative as a concept, its origins, and debates surrounding it. The chapter addresses the relevance of narrative for International Relations in the nexus of storytelling and emotions, as well as the disciplinary origins of narrative research through structuralist and narrative paradigm perspectives and reviews the hermeneutical framework of Ricoeur for potential synthesis.

2.2.1. The Relevance of Narrative for International Relations

Addressing the question why the concept of narrative is relevant for studying International Relations, one should examine the relationship between storytelling and emotions. Storytelling and narratives are universally present in human societies across cultures. Humans use stories to understand and deal with the problem of time, since narrative can interweave the perspective between the time lived now and cosmic time (any point in time) (Ricoeur 1983-85). Narrative anthropology shows that storytelling through communicating descriptive memories is central to the human experience. Storytelling is essential to the constitution of a common identity by providing a platform to the interaction of emotions (White 1987; Suganami, 2008; Erll, 2009; Fludernik, 2009). Meuter summarized it as follows: "*emotions are made understandable through stories and in turn, stories also generate emotions. Even though they rely on the discursive medium of language, stories speak to us on a far deeper emotional level than discursive symbolizations such as abstract argumentation or scientific theories can ever do*" (Meuter 2013, 15). Emotions in International Relations are emphasised in theoretical approaches as emotional states driving human and international behaviour. Fear in realists, trust in institutionalist, greed in Marxists and affect in constructivists approaches are key drivers, while anger in diplomacy, dynamics of humiliation in global politics, affective attachments of foreign policy decision-makers, nostalgia and collective memory are also important in IR (Sasley 2013). But the literature on studying emotions in International Relations lacks focus on the role of narratives and their capacity to act as catalysts and carriers of emotions in International Relations, suggesting the need for complementary research.

2.2.2. The Disciplinary Background of Narrative Research

The study of narrative belongs to the field of the general theory of communication since accordance with Aristotle's "*rhetorical triangle*" (somebody tells somebody about something) narrative as an utterance is a communicative act (Tjupa 2014, 2). Consequently, narrative is situated in a communicative framework, embedded in discourse, language, and rhetoric. Narrative's embeddedness requires a focus on the nature of language and interpretation. Language is polysemic since it can have more than one meaning, therefore any use of language necessarily calls for interpretation, since "*the symbol gives rise to thought*" (*Ricoeur* 1967, 247–257). Therefore, hermeneutics have a fundamental role in studying discourse, the use of signs and sign systems, where narrative can be identified as a form of extended discourse (Pellauer & Dauenhauer 2021). According to Hans-Georg Gadamer's theory of hermeneutics "*what is*

finally at stake in interpretation is a kind of appropriation" and the goal of interpretation is "*to enable us making sense of our embodied existence with others*" (including our predecessors and successors in the world) (Mootz III & Taylor 2011; Pellauer & Dauenhauer 2021).

The discipline of narratology in humanities is dedicated to studying the practices of narrative representation, providing a theory of narrative coexisting with other, non-narratological theories (Prince 1995, 110; Nünning 2003, 227–28; Meister 2014, 8). The term narrative representation cannot be reduced to text-based narratives, since it is not media specific, while the notion of representation reflects its duality being a product as well as a representative practice – basically "*narrative is an act and it is an object*" (Prince 1990, 4). Meister argues that while the classical focus of the discipline was centred on narrative forms as a text theory approach, postclassical narratology expanded its focus to include historicity and contextuality of modes of narrative representation and its pragmatic function across various media in their focus, "*while research into narrative universals extended to cover narrative's cognitive and epistemological functions*" (Meister 2014, 6).

Interest in narrative and storytelling led to the so-called narrative turn in the 1980s inspired by the application of narratological tools to extra-narratological research, including in history (White 1973), philosophy (Ricoeur 1983-85; MacIntyre 1981), cognitive sciences and psychology (Bruner 1991). The general turn toward narratives influenced various areas, such as law, ethnography, education, urban planning, anthropology, organizational behaviour, and communication (Kreiswirth 1992; Polletta et al. 2011; Baker 2017).

2.2.3. Debate between Structuralist and Narrative Paradigm Perspectives

Understanding narrative is embedded in the context of debates between theories highlighting differences in communication forms based on motives in discourse (structuralist perspectives) and the claim that fundamentally all form of human communication can be perceived as a story (narrative paradigm).

Looking at the classical roots of narrative as a concept, works of Plato, Aristotle and Quintilian all highlighted differences in communication forms, laying the foundations for structuralist perspectives on narrative. Plato differentiated between the arts and persuasion: compared to the arts (*technai*) which aims at the good as a true form of caring, rhetoric is no more than mere knack (*empeiria*) for persuasion. This is bitterly addressed in the dialogue of Calliceles in *Gorgias*, who advocates along the "*law of nature*" displaying a perspective of Realpolitik where rhetoric is means to an end. In the antique world, the decline of public speaking into persuasion

and demagoguery produced negative connotation to rhetoric, as sophists were considered "*mere rhetoricians*" in the antique world. Plato's works showed that Socrates treats poems and poets (myths and myth tellers) with critique over the harmful effects of persuasion, as through their works' falsehoods constitute models of exemplary behaviour to the youth, who cannot judge what is true and false. (Griswold 2020) Keum argued though, that Plato's works also suggest that myths have the potential to be both harmful and constructive, by treating them as dynamic stories open to reinterpretation rather than monoliths which were impervious to changes (Keum 2021). In contrast to the harsh criticism on the false content of myths, Plato's dialogues also incorporate elements of poetry, reworkings of myths and narrative interludes (even Socrates calls himself a myth teller in the Republic) while the dialogues also display formal features of dramas. Furthermore, the dialogues can be treated as works of fiction, as imaginary conversations or imitations: "*none of them took place exactly as presented by Plato, several could not have taken place, some contain characters who never existed.*" (Griswold 2020) By featuring the narration of several myths, Plato's philosophical literature attested to the power of myth to shape worldviews through the more elusive, symbolically rich narratives rather than through rational arguments. (Keum 2020; Keum 2021) His writings also introduced key "proto-narrative concepts": "narrative" (*diegesis)* is either "simple" (*haplos*) through the voice of the poet; or "imitative" (*mimesis)* which is accomplished as the poet speaks through a character. (Griswold 2020) Aristotle's differentiation between Rhetoric and Poetics established a fundamental reference for the structuralist perspective. Aristotle assigned narrative as a subject of poetics, leaving minor, functional role to narrative in rhetorical discourse, as examples and statements through "*the mention of actual facts*" or the "*invention*" of facts (narratio) (Aristotle 1984: 1393 cited in Iversen 2014, 9) Following this perspective, Quintilian's approach on *narration also* emphasised factuality compared to poetic and artificial aspects, describing it as "*the persuasive exposition of that which either has been done, or is supposed to have been done*" (Quintilian 1920, 67).

The Aristotelian understanding of narrative as a subject of Poetics paved the way to the study of fictional narrative and the evolution of structural narratology. In 1975, the journal of New Literary History published a compendium of continental structuralist linguistic essays on narrative, while in the same year, Jonathan Culler's Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics, Study of Literature (1975) translated and synthesized works of Vladimir Propp, Tzvetan Todorov, Roland Barthes, A. J. Greimas, Gérard Genette and Claude Bremond, whose works shaped the conceptualization of narratives (Kreiswirth 1992). Barthes' influential essay

focused on the study of narrative forms and laid down the basics of the structural analysis of narratives based on linguistics, arguing that "*narrative belongs with the sentence without ever being reducible to the sum of its sentences*" (Barthes 1966). Greimas developed the notion of semiotic square (Greimas 1966, 1983) which influenced further theorization of narratives following the logic of structural semantics. Todorov argued that narratives are frameworks, which allow humans to connect apparently unconnected phenomena around causal transformations (1971). Labov & Waletsky defined narrative as an account of a sequence of events in the order they occurred to make a point (1967). Structuralist theorists consider narrative as a distinct form of communication, leading to the assumption that all narratives share an underlying structure. (Labov 1972) Parts of such structure are defining sequential elements (Labov & Waletsky 1967), casual transformation (Todorov 1971) and distinct grammar to constitute stories (Brown 1990) or a form of coherence through plot structuring the narrative (Czarniawska, 1998; Gabriel, 2002; Poletta et.al., 2011). The impact of structural narratology was profound in providing analytical tools for studying narrative, although its predisposition to homogenising systemisation and closed focus to the configuration of the story limits its use to facilitate a comprehensive and exhaustive understanding of narrative (Baker 2017). Structuralists focused on the *how* rather than the *what* in studying narrative just like Saussurean linguist studies, where the emphasis on "*code over message*", the focus on "*the system of language (langue) rather than the individual messages made possible and intelligible by that system (parole)*" reflects a similar position. (Herman 2013)

Building on the classical perspective which differentiates Rhetoric from Poetics, the seminal works of Kenneth Burke, *A Grammar of Motives* (1945) and *A Rhetoric of Motives* (1969) formed the foundation of the study of persuasive components in literature and human conduct, contributing to the development of rhetorical theory, communication theory and modern literature. Burke's emphasis on human as "*symbol user to persuade other*" relied on sociological theories, such as on the work of George H. Mead's "*philosophy of the act*", forms of identification as role-taking thorough symbols, as well as Talcott Parson's concept of "*action system*". Burke's notion of rhetoric as identification through the use of symbols expanded the "*old rhetoric of*" Aristotelian notions where the key term was "*persuasion and its stress was upon deliberate design*" to a broader "*new rhetoric*" where the "*key term is identification and this may include partially 'unconscious' factors in its appeal*" (Burke 1951, 203). This approach moves beyond rational persuasion, as it includes processes of positive (consubstantiality) and negative (diversification) identification. The question of what makes

discourse rhetorical can be addressed from a continuum of narrow (specific genres) and inclusive (all kinds of symbol use) definitions. Bitzer (1968) argued that rhetorical discourse can be anchored in the notion of rhetorical situation: "*the situation which calls the [rhetorical] discourse into existence*" (Bitzer 1968,5). Such rhetorical situations depend on an *exigence* as "*an imperfection marked by urgency*"; on a *rhetorical audience* who are "*capable of being influenced by discourse and of being mediators of change*"; and on *constraints* with the "*power to constrain decision and action needed to modify the exigence*" (Bitzer 1968, 5-7). Iversen's review also highlighted that rhetorical discourse is strategic in the sense that it manifests linking means to an end, while being aimed at "*specific audiences for specific reasons in specific situations*" (Iversen 2014, 1). Similarly to how Plato incorporated narration of myths in his philosophical literature, contours of a fictional narrative can also appear in rhetorical discourse as a rhetorical device. Nevertheless, although the use of narrative elements as means to the argumentative ends of rhetorical discourse exists, such discourses are rarely "complete narratives or completely narrative" according to structuralist perspectives. (Ibid, 1) Adopting the lines of classical perspectives, Lucaites & Condit defined rhetorical narrative as interpretive lenses: "*rhetorical narrative is a story that serves as an interpretative lens through which the audience is asked to view and understand the verisimilitude of the propositions and proof before it*" (Lucaites & Condit 1985, 94).

The narrative turn in the 1980's led to increased theoretical contributions on understanding narrative. Among them, propositions of *narrative paradigm* by Walter Fisher deviated from the assumption that narratives carry different functions in different types of discourse such as poetic or rhetoric, thereby challenging the mainstream structuralist approach differentiating between narrative and non-narrative forms of thinking and communication. Fisher argued that his position is "*in marked contrast to the view that narration is merely an element in rhetorical discourse or is a specific literary genre*" (1984, 59). The assumption that stories have a certain structural form implicitly holds the view that there are non-narrative forms of thinking and communication, as Bruner (1991) and Polkinghorne (1988) suggested by contrasting "*logico-scientific modes of knowing based on rational argument with those based on narrative.*" (Fenton & Langley 2011, 1175). Building on the assumption that storytelling is essential to human nature, Fisher's narrative paradigm claimed that "*all forms of human communication can be seen fundamentally as stories, as interpretations of aspects of the world occurring in time and shaped by history, culture and character*" (Fisher 1989, 57). The premise of Fisher's concept rest on understanding humans as *homo narrans,* implying that storytelling's centrality

to the human experience fundamentally impacts our decision-making. Underlying this notion, Fisher argued that "*the world is a set of stories which must be chosen among to live the good life in a process of continual recreation. In short, good reasons are the stuff of stories*" (1984, 8).

The narrative paradigm's attendant logic, *narrative rationality was* introduced by Fisher (1984, 1987, 1989) and it was addressed by Polkinghorn (1988) and Bruner (1991) as well. According to Polkinghorn, narratives have explanatory power for understanding the domain and developments of human sciences, since beside formal logic, narrative rationality constitutes human rationality. (Polkinghorn 1988) Unlike an explanation, narrative represents cause and effect relations through its sequencing of events rather than by appeal to standards of logic and proof. Corresponding with this reasoning, Bruner (1991) described the construction of reality according to narrative principles, as the "*narrative imperative*" (1991,5). Narrative rationality was adopted as a key concept in cognitive linguistics and narrative psychology, working with the assumption that narratives are an essential instrument of human mental activity in that the human brain captures and organizes complex relationships in the form of narrative structures (Sarbin, 1986; Sommer, 2009; Turner, 1996 cited in Opperman & Spencer 2018). According to Fisher, narrative rationality explains relations between different narratives and the choice in identifying with stories (as good reasons) which ring "*true to the human condition*" (Fisher 1987,176). The operative principles of Fisher's narrative rationality are the twin tests of *narrative probability* and *narrative fidelity*. Narrative probability focuses on how probable the story is, as it should "*hang together*" and it should be "*free of contradiction*" (Fisher 1985, 349). Narrative fidelity focuses on to what extent the story coheres with its cultural environment, displaying a certain level of fidelity to already existing narratives. Iversen's review on Fisher's narrative rationality highlights that "*the decision to identify with or discard a line of narrative rationality is thus made with recourse to the structure of the proposed story as well as to the ways in which the story connects to other stories already accepted as valid in the life of the group or individual*" (Iversen 2014,15).

Fisher's understanding of narrative as a master metaphor – a general master trope of human communication and existence – is in stark contrast with structuralist perspectives, such as Lucaites & Condit's understanding of rhetorical narrative as an interpretive lens. According to Fisher's narrative paradigm, narrative can be seen as a fundamental meta-discourse, which is "*epistemologically unavoidable, part of the very ground upon which other types of communication take place*". This view was challenged by Rowland (1989) as being too broad

as a general model of understanding (Iversen 2014,16). The debate on the epistemological reach of narrative can be complemented with what Fenton and Langley described as problematizing whether narratives are manifested as "*whole stories*" in which concrete and coherent structural elements can be identified, or rather as "small stories" such as story fragments in everyday conversation. In contrast with story fragments and antenarratives[1] (Boje, 1991; Barge, 2004) the ideas of "*grand narratives*" or "*master stories*" (Deuten & Rip, 2000) are highlighted, which "*can be distilled from the analysis of sets of texts at particular times in history, and that provide meaning within a community of practitioners or a field of organizations*" (Fenton & Langley 2011,1175).

Despite such fundamental debates, I would argue that narrative paradigm and structural perspectives offer similar emphasis on the underlying functional elements of persuasion in narratives. Fisher's narrative rationality advocating narrative fidelity and probability is harmonious with the emphasis on the contextual, audience and purpose sub-functions of narratives based on the Quintilian framework highlighted in Lucaites & Condit's work. Narrative fidelity resonates with the Quintilian idea of adaptation to a specific context, the requirement that a story must be coherent with the cultural context where it appears. Narrative probability (a story hanging together or being free from contradictions) concurs with the idea of adaptation to the audience through requirements of consistency (internal coherence, fitting).

2.2.4. Ricoeur's Hermeneutical Framework

Focusing on the need to interpret and to make sense of human life, Paul Ricoeur's philosophy highlights the task to develop a theory of interpretation (a hermeneutical phenomenology) which takes into consideration the fullness of language. Ricoeur's work highlighted that plot construction has a mimetic quality in dealing with the problem of time, history and processing lived experience, which should be understood comprehensively to address narrative. I argue that the rival structuralist and narrative paradigm approaches on narrative can be synthesised and integrated in a single framework, which is based on Ricoeur's comprehensive philosophical theory of narrativity called *mimesis*. The narrow structuralist focus on the story as a closed system of patterns and sequences is broadened with the "*deep-level*" of narratives as a "*pre-understanding*" of our historical mindedness "*an intelligibility of the historicality that characterizes us*" (Ricoeur 1980, 1981; Greimas & Ricoeur 1989, 552). Parallelly, this

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[1] With reversed temporal logic, antenarratives start from bets on the future (as potential ends) and draw on retrospective elements to generate narratives in the present.

framework can provide the necessary grounding against the floating epistemology in the narrative paradigm approach.

Ricoeur's theory aims at "*broadening, [and] enriching*" the Aristotelean idea of plot with the Augustinian understanding of time ([1985] 1988,4). Narrative, as a form of extended discourse allows to make practical sense of human action and time by configuring concepts that apply to action as well as concepts reflecting on time and locating them in narrative discourse as a followable story (Pellauer & Dauenhauer 2021). Using the concept of mimesis as an "*imitative representation of the real world through narrative*" Ricoeur integrated insights of classic philosophers, literary and historical theory into a comprehensive narratological hermeneutics (Ricoeur 1985; 1988). The three parts of mimesis are not seen in a hierarchical relationship, but in an integrative one (Meuter 2013,20). *Prefiguration* marks the first stage of the arc (Mimesis I), which refers to the already-existing interpretive structures as "*pre-narrative quality of human experience*" since the narrative competence built through previous exposure of the audience to stories profoundly shape their experience and expectations (Ricoeur, 1991, 29). Every story point to a "*before*" to the "*lived world*," which is itself already organized as narrative, at least in part. Due to their symbolic and temporal aspects, real-life actions have an inherently pre-narrative structure (Meuter 2013,20). The second part (Mimesis II) is *Configuration*, which covers the creative act of emplotment, providing a new and unique view of reality as well as the composition of an explicit story as told or read. This is where the structural narratology can find its ground. Ricoeur's perspective highlights that "the story (configuration) can only work if it is recognisable as a story in reference to [the audience's] prior understanding of a believable story […] Therefore, "*what is believable as a story is contingent on the prefigured worlds of authors and readers*" (Baker 2017). The concluding moment (Mimesis III) in the arc is *Refiguration,* which refers to the final narrative stage when the world of the story is restored to the real world through reaching its conclusion in its audience Therefore, a story configuration meets its intended target only when it is perceived by a recipient. (Ricoeur 1991).

Mimesis describes narrative from a temporal and circular perspective, one that is constantly evolving. "*Through reception, the explicit narrative configuration once again becomes part of the real-life experience of the experiencing and acting recipient who can expand, confirm or vary the preexisting pre-narrative structures. Such a newly and differently (re-)configured real-life situation in turn forms the basis for the next explicit configuration*." (Meuter 2013, 20) This theoretical insight highlights that narrative can be a resource for mediating changes of cultural standards, "*a complex interplay of tradition and innovation*". (Ibid, 20).

Adopting this understanding can mitigate criticism towards narrative paradigm's failure to deal with inventions of new narratives or rhetorical revision of old ones (McClure 2009); as well as arguments that the nexus of new narratives and value change would be incompatible with the idea of narrative fidelity (Stroud 2002). In parallel to this, integrating conceptual imports from structuralist approaches offer useful analytical tools for studying the configuration, modality, and intrigue of narrative emplotment.

Ricoeur's notion of prefiguration also highlighted the importance of the mind-narrative nexus and narrative competence. The increasing focus on the mind-narrative nexus in ethnography and sociolinguistics "*resulted in a shift from studying the textual system of narratives and focusing on how people deploy various sorts of symbol systems to refer to and constitute aspects of their experience*" and on "*the mental states, capacities and dispositions that provide grounds for — or, conversely, are grounded in — narrative experiences*" (Herman 2013,1) As a subfield of cognitive theory, cognitive narratology focuses on the roles of stories within the ranges and intersections of perception, language, knowledge, memory, and the world. (Jahn 2005) Research on the mind-narrative nexus "*encompasses not only how stories can be used to build worlds but also how such acts of narrative worldmaking are themselves mind-enabling and mind-extending.*" (Herman 2013,1) While the focus on the mind-narrative nexus can illuminate the structure and functions of situated storytelling acts, this connection can invoke research on how "*story designs allow for tentative, defeasible ascriptions of authorial intention—ascriptions to story creators of the reasons for acting that (probabilistically) account for why a given text has the structure it does*". (Herman et al. 2012; Herman 2013,43).

The increasing concern for reader/audience response in postclassical narratology highlighted the concept of narrative competence. Echoing the notions of prefiguration, Fludernik, argued that narrativity instead of being "*a quality inhering in a text*" is "*rather an attribute imposed on the text by the reader who interprets the text as narrative, thus narrativizing the text*" (2003: 244). In her approach "*human experientiality*" becomes the essential quality of narrativity, as "*readers encounter texts formally described as narratives, they draw on an immense accumulation of frames and scripts that arise from the experience of life itself*". (Abbott 2014,28) The focus on narrative competence was augmented in cognitive research, through schema theory and concepts of scripts and frames, while importing schema theory from cognitive psychology contributed to the understanding of sequentiality. (Abbott 2011,17) Prefiguration and narrative competence also has a fundamental connection to the causal connection and the sense of casual agency which is considered as a necessary condition of

narrativity (Richardson 1997, 106) Others have also highlighted that a more adequate understanding of narrativity is necessary in relation to the complex and evolving process of causal interference which is "*set in motion by heuristic reading and semiotic reading*" (Pier 2008,134 cited in Abbott 2011,17)

In this section, I argue that Ricoeur's philosophical framework offers important insights for analysing narratives in an integrated approach combining the mind-narrative nexus with the text-based, structural elements of narrative configuration. This tripartite structure offers adequate focus to narrative competence (Prefiguration); to structural elements (Configuration) and to the narrative's surfacing in the world (Refiguration). Moreover, this framework can account well for the evolving media ecology. Addressing tools for narrative analysis is also important considering the technological change brought by the digital revolution, which requires contemporary focus on narrative in the present media environment. This is especially necessary with the shift from mass media to mass self-communication (Castells 2011) presenting new demands and options for communicating actors and the modality of expression which results in changes to the forms and functions of narratives in rhetorical discourse. (Iversen 2014) This shift is parallel to the pattern of transformation from the monopolistic mass-communication strategies towards the proliferation of narrative representation through "*the non-traditional narrative practices of the 20th and 21st centuries which are characterised by a trend towards polystrategic symbioses and eclectic unities of the narrative act*" (Tjupa 2014,22).

2.2.5. Summary – The Conceptual Foundations of Narrative

This chapter reviewed the concept of narrative, highlighting its relevance to International Relations through the link between storytelling and emotions. By addressing the disciplinary origins of narrative research. I argue that the ideas of the rival structuralist and narrative paradigm approaches on narrative can be synchronised in Ricoeur's framework, retaining both the analytical edges of structuralists perspectives as well as the broader conceptual horizon in narrative paradigm approach. Studying structural narratology and the role of narrative in rhetorical discourse based on the foundations of classical perspectives can provide a set of clear conceptual contours. However, these structuralist perspectives can be contrasted with the narrative paradigm approach, highlighting narrative rationality and disrupting fundamental assumptions on distinct forms of discourse. The juxtapositions of structuralist and narrative paradigm perspectives provide complementary insights for the conceptual curation of narrative,

and they can be integrated in the hermeneutical philosophy of Paul Ricoeur. Ricouer's perspective highlights focus on the mind-narrative nexus, and it works well in understanding the loop of narrative representations and the inherently dialogical, multi-perspectival and fragmented context provided in the contemporary media environment. Such applicability makes this framework adequate for enhancing the understanding of concepts such as strategic narrative.

2.3. CONCEPTUALIZING STRATEGIC NARRATIVE

This chapter discusses the concept of strategic narrative based on insights from Narrative Studies. The chapter shows how dominant narratology traditions are represented (often as neologisms) in the discourse on strategic narratives. Although this discourse mostly displays structural approaches, it also showcases a varied mix of concepts reflecting narrative rationality and Burkean identification theory. Drawing on the previous chapter's review on narrative, this chapter also addresses the question of how narrative research can enrich and complement theorizing on strategic narratives.

2.3.1. Precursor and Relative Concepts to Strategic Narrative

Social sciences, International Relations and Strategic Studies have seen precursor concepts strongly resembling the associated meaning with strategic narrative. To understand where strategic narrative as a concept emerges from, it is important to address such antecedent notions.

As a general precursor and relative concept, propaganda is inevitably in the forefront of theorizing on the nexus of persuasion and strategy. Related to the study of persuasion, the differences between the concept of *propaganda* and strategic narrative are important to examine, while noting that the contemporary use of strategic narratives in International Relations gained insights and inspiration from the study of persuasion and propaganda studies. The objective of persuasion is a shared characteristic in both the conceptualization of strategic narratives and propaganda. The term propaganda is used to describe spreading ideas and thoughts to be made available to the public and ultimately to influence the public, in times of peace or war. This term has been used to describe communication warfare during and around conflicts (propaganda war) (Dixon 2003). Nevertheless, it implies a pejorative, normative context, which is not attached to the same extent to the use of the term strategic narrative. David Betz (2015) argued that contemporary western societies shy away from using the term propaganda "*as organized myth*" (Ellul 1973,11), in favour of euphemistic neologisms such as

strategic narratives. Beyond the rather pejorative meaning attached to the notion of propaganda, the potential difference between the conceptualizations of propaganda and strategic narratives relates to the action of "co*ntrolled transmission*" (Nelson 1996, 232) as spreading a message that "*tries to surround man by all possible routs*" (Ellul 1973, 11). Compared to this perspective, the concept of strategic narrative can apply more specific conceptual frameworks, which look beyond a mere focus on the controlled spreading of ideas, as this chapter will elaborate it later in greater detail.

Besides the *old* notion of propaganda, transformation in the media ecology suggested a shifting paradigm, prompting an increased focus on studying discourse in International Relations, resulting in concepts that strongly resemble the characteristics of strategic narratives, such as "*rhetorical frameworks of political leaders in action"* (Kuusisto, 1999). Applying the concepts of *storyline* and *script* in discursive-argumentative perspective, Ó Tuathail (2002) argued for examining the process of *practical geopolitical reasoning*, understood as "*how foreign policy decision-makers make sense of international crises, how they construct stories to explain these crises, how they develop strategies for handling these crises as political challenges, and how they conceptualize 'solutions' to these crises*" (Ó Tuathail 2002, 604). From a broader perspective, Burke simply referred to "*verbal tactics*" when he argued about avoiding the focus on polemic (international) rhetoric, "*such as verbal tactics now called 'cold war'"* (Burke 1969, xiv). Outside of the Anglo-Saxon, Western socio-linguistic area, the notion of *tifa* in Chinese can be relevant here as well, as the "*ways of putting things*" signalling a form of state power (Zhang & Orbie 2021).

Evidently, the use of narrative as an interpretive framework in IR is not limited to constructs with the adjective "*strategy*". A wide variation of combinations can be constructed to denote specific characteristics in narrative representation such as *institutional narratives* (interpretative framework presented by a certain institution (i.e. military narratives) or *dominant narratives* which may contest or pose as alternatives to other narrative representation, especially with regards to bureaucratic politics. For example, Krebs argues that *"dominant narratives of national security establish the common-sense givens of debate, set the boundaries of the legitimate, limit what political actors inside and outside the halls of power can publicly justify, and resist efforts to remake the landscape of legitimation" (Krebs, 2015, p. 3).*

2.3.2. Definitions of Strategic Narrative

Lawrence Freedman introduced the concept of strategic narratives as "*compelling storylines which can explain events convincingly and from which inferences could be drawn*" (Freedman 2006, 23). Freedman's understanding of strategic narrative originates in cognitive science, and cognitive narratology, which is also reflected in his argument that strategy can be considered as a "*story about power told in future tense*" (2013). This approach resonates with Fisher's narrative paradigm ("*all forms of human communication can be seen fundamentally as stories*") and its operative concept of narrative rationality, even though Freedman does not address antecedent narrative theories, such as the works of Fisher.

Complementarily to Freedman's definition, Michale Vlahos' take on war narratives, "*organizational framework, a story with an existential vision and* a *rhetorical handbook* for *arguing and describing war*" have fundamentally influenced the conceptualization of strategic narrative, primarily in studies of strategic communication and public opinion (Vlahos 2009; Betz 2008; Betz 2015; De Graaf et al. 2015). With regards to the breakdowns and failures in the conduct of strategic communication on the ISAF mission in Afghanistan, Betz proposed to address strategic narrative as "*a message of purpose which answers the oft-asked question: why are we here?*" in reference to conducting a foreign military intervention (Betz 2011). While in the beginning, the literature on intervention and military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq used war narratives and strategic narratives as interchangeable terms, strategic narrative came to be understood as a more comprehensive expression, which can contain the subject of conflict and war, particularly intervention operations, but it is not limited to that. This was highlighted in theorizing efforts linking strategic narrative to the study of power relations.

Inspired by Freedman's concept, Antoniades, Miskimmon and O'Loughlin (2010) linked strategic narratives to great powers' activities and Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, and Roselle (2013) subsequently applied the concept in the field of international relations and foreign policy analysis. According to their definitions, strategic narratives "*are representations of a sequence of events and identities*" (Miksimmon O'Loughlin; Roselle 2015) which are shaped by "*political actors attempt to build shared meaning of the past, present, and future of international politics in order to shape the behavior of domestic and international actors*" (Miskimmon; O'Loughlin; Roselle 2017, pp. 77-78). These narratives are *strategic*, because of their inherent focus on achieving short- and long-term goals (desirable end-states) (Antoniades, Miskimmon, & O'Loughlin, 2012).

Linking their work to structural narratologists, such as Todorov (1971), Miskimmon et al. emphasised the temporal and causal features of narratives arguing that they "*contain events, plot, setting and implicit with these a temporal dimension – beginning, middle, end – or before during after a casual transformation*" (Miskimmon et al. 2013, 6.). This conceptualization of narrative reflects a fundamentally structuralist approach, where narratives are manifested as wholesome stories with coherent structural elements. Drawing from Burke's (1969) ideas on narratives, Roselle et. al. addressed main component parts of narratives such as *Character or Actor* (who have agency and are portrayed as important to the narrative); *Setting, Environment or Space* (where the action takes place); *Conflict or Action* (temporality is highlighted here); and *Resolution and suggested resolution* (presentation of action to resolve a disruption to the status quo) (Roselle et al. 2014, 75-76). Further structuralist understanding of narratives can be identified in works on narrative analysis (Roberts 2006; Suganami 2008), as well in Opperman and Spencer's emphasis on three essential (though overlapping) narrative elements: 1. *Setting* (location and environment in which the narrative is set); 2. *Characterization* (description of actors involved), 3. *Emplotment* (the way in which setting characters and events are temporally and causally linked) (Opperman & Spencer 2018, 269).

Freedman's work on strategic narrative resonates with notions of the narrative paradigm, considering reflections on the cognitive domain and treating strategy as a story, influencing the conceptualisation of strategic narrative primarily in War and Strategic Studies. In parallel, works of Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, and Roselle reflects fundamentally structuralist perspectives, highlighting component parts and narrative elements, influencing further research on narratives of power relations in International Relations. Nevertheless, both disciplinary fields understood as SN as "*multi-layered and interlocking*" (Betz 2015) or "*multi-faceted, non-linear, broad in scope*" (Miksimmon et al 2015, 69) and "*dynamic and ever negotiated social products*" (Miskimmon 2013, 45.). Such perspectives are harmonious with a cyclic understanding of narrative figuration in the hermeneutic philosophy of Ricoeur (even though there is no reflection on that in works discussing strategic narratives).

2.3.3. Typologies of Strategic Narrative

In War and Strategic Studies, Freedman's distinction of the audience's position based on social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner 1979), differentiates narratives aimed at members of an out-group (e.g. potential partners or adversaries) and narratives aimed at an in-group (i.e. internal organization). *"Narratives that serve strategy"* are aimed at *"out-groups, who are presumed to*

be hostile or indifferent with the aim of either deceiving, confusing or even winning them over". (Freedman 2015, 22.) *"Narratives about strategy*" are about "*persuading members of a particular in-group about the course to be followed and their roles if shared objectives are to be achieved*." (Ibid, 22.) The strength of this binary distinction besides simplicity lies in the focus at the targeting of different messages, frames and ideologies through narrative. Nevertheless, it is weakened by inherently assuming an anachronistic environment, which allows for the separation of audience of narratives in a contemporary media environment. Therefore, it is important to highlight that a such artificial distinction of narrative types is not entirely possible.

Miskimmon et al. (2013) proposed a typology for strategic narratives that identifies international system narratives; actor or identity or national narratives; and issue or policy narratives. *International System Narratives* describe how the world is structured, who the players are, and how the system works. They contain the past, present and future of the international system, and the Cold War, the War on Terror and the rise of China are highlighted as examples to that. (Miskimmon et al. 2013; Roselle et al. 2017). A further example to this category is regional order narratives, and the points of convergence and dissonance in states' conceptions on such. For example, how India, Australia, the United States and Japan's strategic narratives influence each other's construction on regional order as well as revealing the distinct political and social dynamics that produce these conceptions (Barthwal-Datta & Chako 2020).

Actor (Miskimmon et al. 2013) or *Identity* (Miskimmon et al. 2015) or *National* Narratives (Roselle et al. 2014) describe the identity and character of an actor in the system. They set out the story of the nation and the values and goals it has. On this note, they mention the literature on national role concept and role theory in Foreign Policy Analysis (Holsti, 1970; Thies, 2012, Walker, 1987 cited in Miskimmon et al. 2013 and Roselle et al. 2014) without elaborating how these relate to narratives. They bring the narrative of the United States as an example, as either a state portrayed as being committed to freedom and democracy or depicted as a world bully (Miskimmon et al. 2013). Furthermore, Roselle et al. (2014) highlights Berenskoetter's notion on the biographical narrative of the state that outlines "*an experienced space (giving meaning to the past) intertwined with an envisioned space (giving meaning to the future) and delineated through horizons of experience and of possibility, respectively*" (Berenskoetter 2013,3). Considering this layer of strategic narratives, it is also useful to highlight that the literature on narratives has recognized the centrality of narrative to self (McAdams 1993) as well as to community identity (MacIntyre 1981, Carr 1986) such as with national bonds of belonging

(Poletta et al. 2011). Narrative inquiry as a research area focusing on narrative approaches and personal identity also examines how personal and community identity is formed and stabilized through the telling of stories. (See: Ricoeur [1990] 1992; Kerby 1991; Brockmeier & Carbough eds. 2001; Strawson 2004) Such narrative identities are understood as "*selfhood*" or *ipse*-identities which are constantly reconfigured through the telling of stories. (Meuter 2011)

Issue Narratives (Roselle 2014) or *Policy* Narratives (Miskimmon et al 2015) are about a specific domain, such as war, economy or climate. They "*set out why a policy is needed and (normatively) desirable, and how it will be successfully implemented or accomplished*" (Miskimmon et al 2015, 58). Miskimmon, Rosselle and O'Loughlin reflect on Alexander George's (1989) insights on policy legitimacy, the role of political elites and public opinion arguing that issue narratives "*set governmental actions in a context, with an explanation of who the important actors are, what the conflict or issue is, and how a particular course of action will resolve the underlying issue*" (Roselle et al. 2014, 76.; Miskimmon et al 2013, 8).

Miskimmon et al. argue that this typology helps to highlight exclusive focus on a specific narrative layer such as issue narrative as war narratives (Miskimmon et al. 2015, 58). Therefore, their typology aims to reflect the dynamics of constraining and enabling roles of narratives in international relations since "*such layered understanding of narratives shows how great powers can be constrained by their own narratives: while broader, systemic narratives can shape and constrain conflict narratives, while conflict narratives can interact, challenge and reinforce broader system narratives*" (Miskimmon et al 2015, 62). Meanwhile, the fixed tripartite typology of Miskimmon et al. is inherently constrained, through the unavoidable overlaps of narrative layers. For example, the distinction between issue and system narratives proves difficult in the "War On Terror" example, which can be categorized as a system narrative just as well as an issue narrative due to the specificity of its focus and its policy implications. Similarly, distinction between actor and system narrative in the example of the *"rise of China"* may prove challenging, as actor and system layers are co-constitutive, therefore they are also both applicable categories. Furthermore, strategic narrative – just as language – is polysemic, since it can have more than one meaning calling for interpretation.

2.3.4. Ontology and Epistemology of Strategic Narrative

The understanding of strategic narrative goes beyond focusing on narrative in rhetorical discourse: given that stories are not just things people told, but also things that people lived (Ricoeur 1984, Polkinghorne 1988, McAdams 1993, Polletta 2011). There is a consensus that

rhetorical and functional actions both constitute strategic narratives (Flockhart 2012, 83–84), meaning that both what political actors say and what political actors do matter in forging strategic narratives (Tatham 2008, 3; Vlahos 2009, Betz 2011, Freedman 2015, Miskimmon et al. 2015, Roselle 2017). This understanding is coherent with the narrative paradigm approach, as it reflects an inclination to treating narrative as a master trope of communication, resulting in an epistemological omnipresence and enlargement of the concept.

The consensus on strategic narratives as being constituted by both rhetorical and functional action is consistent with the soft constructivist approach that authors in the field of International Relations applied towards narratives. This means understanding narratives as having a social ontology, while their epistemology is closer to rationalists than constructivist and post-structuralists approaches, since narratives can also be dealt with as interpretive frameworks that correspond with events in the physical world (De Graaf et al. 2015,8). Here, a related approach is thin constructivism, which builds on differentiating between the prioritisation of ideational factors and constitutive logics ("thick constructivism") and prioritising material factors and causal logics ("thin constructivism") (Marsh 2009). A thin constructivist approach contends that the relationship between the ideational and the material is dialectical but emphasises the constrains the world places on discursive constructions (Hay 2002, 205–8). Therefore, critical realists who adopt this position are "*empirical but not empiricist*" as empirical evidence is a crucial starting point for them (Hay 2002,252). Dixon (2019) recommends following Marsh's (2009) and Hay 's (2002) science philosophy approach in the study of strategic narrative, claiming that the dialectical relationship between the ideational and the material is alike the relationship between structure and agency (Dixon 2019, 654). The soft and thin constructivist approach makes sense of using terms such as *interpretive framework, interpretive construct, sense-making device, analytical tool* as references for strategic narratives. Such approaches are reflected in the definition proposed by Manfredi-Sanches, stating that strategic narrative "*measures the persuasive effects that an interpretation of the international order has on the convergence between power and communication, between tangible assets and emotional elements in the globalization story, and between historical experience and expectations*" (*Manfredi-Sanches 2020, 12).* Relying on the use of narrative as an interpretive framework, Opperman and Spencer (2018, 271) pointed out, that the method of narrative analysis has been used for various topics in International Relations, such as on national identity (Campbell, 1998; Honneland, 2010), security (Hansen, 2006; Krebs, 2015), foreign policy (Browning, 2008; Ringmar, 1996), violent non-state actors (Spencer, 2016). Roselle et al. (2014) argued that

strategic narratives have the explanatory power for the concept of soft power. As an interpretive tool, it has been used and it was argued to be useful for analysing IR concepts such as power, cooperation, contestation and order, which have been shaped by the new media ecology (Miskimmon 2013 et al. 4.).

Treating strategic narratives as having a social ontology, Miskimmon et al. proposed a framework highlighting the processes of *formation, projection and reception* with regards to narrative (Miskimmon et al. 2013). This framework is essentially identical to what Polletta et al. identify as the narrative text studies' tradition focusing primarily on studying the *context* of storytelling, through addressing the conditions of the texts' *production, circulation and reception*. (2011, 111). The notion of propaganda can be once again relevant here, as the activity of spreading and the action of controlled transmission can be identical with projection and circulation while it is also connected to aspects of formation and production as well as to the reception of a narrative. This connection strengthens the impression on the concept of strategic narrative as yet an euphemistic neologism in contemporary scholarly works.

Miskimmon et al.'s analytical framework on the *formation, projection and reception* of strategic narratives can be applied depending on what the researcher wishes to explain along the spectrum of persuasion (2013, 14-16). Roselle et al. (2014) highlighted key analytical methods for studying different narrative processes. Researching the *formation* of strategic narratives, one can rely on careful process tracing, textual analysis, and interviews to understand the underlying domestic political pressures of policy narratives as well as to explore how political actors conceive the realm of the possible under the constrains of national or international narratives. Studying the *projection* of strategic narratives involves tracing the flow of narratives through the media ecology by doing network analysis, content studies, textual analysis and big data analysis. Finally, the *reception* of strategic narratives can be studied by relaying on the methodologies found in political communication, social mobilization and public opinion studies. Q methodology and focus groups can be well suited here in understanding how people make sense of narratives (Roselle et al. 2014, 78-79). From a broader narratology perspective, the conceptual framework to be presented in the second part of the dissertation will argue that it could be enriching to the analysis of strategic narrative to integrate Ricoeur's cyclical perspective of mimesis with the stages of narrative figuration, addressing how formation, projection and reception activities can be synthesised in a broader framework of narrative hermeneutics.

Complementing previous perspectives, others highlighted that focusing on agency when studying strategic narrative is imperative. Barthwal-Datta and Chako argued that relying on a wholly post-structural approach anchored in Foucauldian notion of discourse as "*a set of meanings and practices that contain rules about what is say-able and know-able and that create roles which actors fill*" could collapse the social into discourse by neglecting the focus on agency, power and the historical relations of force (Barthwal-Datta & Chako 2020, 379). Following this line of thought, in the analysis of strategic narrative, they recommend a "*Cultural Political Approach*" based on the framework of Sum & Jessop (2014), which can help understanding "*why particular forms of meaning making become prominent in certain times*". (Barthwal-Datta & Chako 2020) This approach builds on what Suganami (1999) has already highlighted, meaning that social structures, agents and narratives interact and shape one another in a complex relationship: structure enables actors to become storytellers while actors shape and construct structures through narratives. Through the Cultural Political Approach, Barthwal-Datta & Chako argues that "*Strategic Narratives can be understood as the result of interdependent processes of semiosis and structuration that co-evolve through the mechanisms of variation, selection and retention.*" (2020, 246) Semiosis denotes meaning and sense making through speech, text and visual imagery. Structuration refers to the non-semiotic aspects of social practices such as institutional logics, media ecologies and control over resources "*that operate 'behind the backs' of agents and may not correspond to their meaning- making efforts*'" (Sum and Jessop 2014, 155). While semiotic practices "*produce meaning and thereby help to generate social structure, […] this is constrained by emergent, non-semiotic features of social structure (such as such as their material resources, proficiency with promoting their viewpoints and broader regional material power constellations) as well as by inherently semiotic factors*" (Ibid, 154).

2.3.5. Summary – Conceptualizing Strategic Narrative

This chapter reviewed precursor concepts to strategic narrative, showing that the term is not a unique invention, but it fits into a line of predecessor constructs with similar functions concerning persuasion and communication. Contrasting the core literature on strategic narrative in IR with theoretical streams of narratology, I argue that there is a lack of reflection and synthesis with key notions and crucial debates on narrative theories. Nevertheless, the literature on strategic narrative in IR showcase ideas which resonate with a blend of structuralist and narrative paradigm approaches. While Freedman's emphasis on the cognitive embeddedness of narrative can be linked to the notion of narrative rationality, Miskimmon et al.'s theorizing

clearly highlights a fundamentally structuralist approach, where narratives are manifested as wholesome stories, while the plot consisting of coherent structural elements becomes a central focus point. Nevertheless, the literature generally resonates with the narrative paradigm approach through recognizing that both rhetorical and functional actions can constitute strategic narrative. The typologies offered by the literature on strategic narratives show limited potential for empirical analysis due to arbitrary categorisation: they either fail to consider the contemporary media environment by separating audience groups or create artificial layers which are co-constitutive.

2.4. STRATEGIC NARRATIVE AND FRAMING

Addressing the concept of framing and framing theories related to the literature of strategic narratives is an important task, since the topic has only limited critical literature review yet. Therefore, this chapter asks what the relationship between the concept of framing and strategic narrative is, and what links can we identify between framing theories and theories on strategic narrative. Addressing these questions can provide a stronger foundation for conceptualising strategic narrative relative to other interpretive frameworks of discourse.

Over past decades, several academic disciplines such as anthropology and sociology (Goffman 1974; Benford & Snow 1998, 2000); behavioural economics (Tversky & Kahneman 1984) and political communication (Entman 1993; Lakoff 2004) have discussed and integrated the concept of frames and framing theory. So far, the literature on strategic narrative have avoided in-depth theoretical synthesis in this intersection, particularly framing theories in sociology and behavioural economics have been missing from writings on strategic narratives. Sporadic references are limited to works in the field of framing and political communication – such as to Robert Entman (by Ringsmose & Borgensen 2011; Miskimmon et. al 2013), to George Lakoff (by Freedman 2015) and to Norris, Kern, & Just (2003) by Ringsmose & Borgensen (2011) – acknowledging that strategic narratives are closely related to the concept of framing, but they do not follow up on this observation.

A fundamental common ground for framing and strategic narrative are present in their common purpose, considering their use in persuasion. The polysemous concept of power as the ability to influence and modify the environment through actions or decisions closely relates to the thematic agenda of framing and priming, and to the spiral of silence. Entman's definition summarizes these aspects noting that "communication contributes to the creation of power and influence as part of a strategy to protect national interests, which is equally as important as

foreign trade or defence." From the perspective of a state, this involves "the organized attempts by a president and his foreign policy apparatus to exert as much control as possible over the framing of [U.S.] policy in the foreign media". (Entman, 2008, p. 89).

Although persuasion is a common objective in framing and strategic narratives, the technique of facilitating it differs in the approach of two concepts. Therefore, the nexus of strategic narrative and framing as well as their use by communicating actors should be addressed in depth.

2.4.1. Framing as a Fractured Paradigm

According to Erving Goffman's important definition, the term *frame* denotes a "*schemata of interpretation*" enabling individuals "*to locate, perceive, identify, and label*" occurrences (Goffman 1974, 21). Cognitive aspects were highlighted in framing, by referring to frames as "*individual cognitive structures, located within the black box of mental life that orient interpretation of individual experience*" (Snow et al., 1986, 464). Based on the cognitive organizational function of framing, frames as "*definitions of a situation*" or "*schemata of interpretation*" make social events meaningful, by organizing and guiding action and our subjective involvement in them (Goffman 1986,10; Benford and Snow, 2000: 614).

Amongst framing theories, Goffman's (1974) work highlighted that frames function to organize experience and guide action, whether individual or collective by rendering events or occurrences meaningful. This insight inspired the concept of frame alignment process in social mobilization (Snow et al. 1986). By frame alignment, Snow et al. refer to "*the linkage of individual and social movement organizations (SMO) interpretive orientations, such that some set of individual interests, values and beliefs and SMO activities, goals, and ideology are congruent and complementary*" (1986, 464). Snow et al. identified various forms of frame alignment, such *as frame bridging, frame amplification, frame extension and frame transformation* arguing that one variety or another is a necessary condition for the interactional process of participant mobilization.

The challenges of conceptualizing framing were captured in the work of Robert Entman, who addressed framing as a *fractured paradigm*, which is "*often just defined casually, with much left to an assumed tacit understanding of the reader*" (Entman 1993,52). As a solution to this problem, Entman highlighted the importance of *selection* and *salience*, defining that framing is about the selection of some aspects of a perceived reality, making them more salient in a communicating text by promoting "*a particular problem definition, causal interpretation,*

moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described." (Ibid.) Kuypers also highlighted these aspects, arguing that in framing, communicators construct "*a particular point of view that encourages the facts of a given situation to be viewed in a particular manner, with some facts made more noticeable than others*" (Kuypers 2009, 181).

2.4.2. Problems in delineating framing and Strategic Narratives

Delineating framing and frames from strategic narrative must tackle complications regarding the similarities of the two concepts. Such similarities are present in understanding both as interpretive frameworks, in temporality; their expected functionality in structuring and sequencing; and in the identical functionality of framing tasks and narrative parts.

Both frames and strategic narratives can be treated as interpretive frameworks. There is evidently a wide variety of conceptual construction denoting several specific forms of interpretive framework, as this is presented in discussing precursor concepts to the notion of strategic narrative. It has also been shown that the soft or thin constructivist approach adopts the use of *interpretive framework, interpretive construct, sense-making device, analytical tool* as references for strategic narratives, and the very essence of operating this concept reflect the intention to capture how and what frameworks of interpretation are used for persuasion.

Several scholars have argued that the concept of strategic narrative differs from framing through the narrative's focus on temporality and the causal structuring of a story, understanding narrative, as a "*temporally, spatially and causally connected sequence of events, selected and evaluated as meaningful for a particular audience*" (Riessman, 2008: 3). Addressing the link between framing and strategic narratives, Miskimmon et al. argued along the ideas of Tversky (2004) that "*Strategic narratives' focus on temporality and space goes beyond framing*" (2015,73). Others too have argued that the temporal dimension distinguishes narrative from discourse and frames: "*as structures present in discourse, frames as analytical units also lack the temporal and causal features that narratives necessarily possess. Strategic narratives, by contrast, provide a means of linking together events according to a desired endpoint by filtering out or selectively structuring the components. This temporal dimension in strategic narrative compensates for the shortcomings of research that focuses on discourse and frames.*" (Zhang & Orbie 2021, 4) Nevertheless, such differentiation can be challenged as one of the first description on framing by anthropologist Gregory Bateson argued that framing is "*a spatial and temporal bounding of a set of interactive messages*" (1972). Furthermore, it implies an underlying structuralist approach, without considering the narrative paradigm approach.

Differentiating between framing and strategic narrative is also challenged as some definitions emphasise that strategic narrative supports sequencing by "*linking together events according to a desired endpoint, usually by filtering out or selectively structuring the components. This filtering and ordering of events can establish causality, meaning and closure, and signal the realization of a goal, and is often of a transformational character.*" (Pamment 2014 cited in Zhang & Orbie 2021, 4) Others argue that strategic narratives can be regarded as *speech-acts*: "*discursive processes through which an issue is foregrounded or backgrounded, filtered-in or filtered-out, and through which strategic targets are realized*" (Nyman & Zeng 2016 cited in Zhang & Orbie 2021, 2.)The problem is, that sequencing, filtering, and selective structuring is not a proper basis for differentiating framing from narratives, since, depending on the angle of a scholarly definition, selection and salience can be characteristic to both. Furthermore, much alike to the idea of framing, emphasis on selection and salience is also present in narratology studies, through concepts such as the structuralist (Russian formalist) idea of *the dominant*. Based on the work of Tynjanov ([1927] 1971) the *dominant* is the "*focusing component of a work of art: it rules, determines, and transforms the remaining components*" and as such, it guarantees "*the integrity of the structure*" (Jakobson [1935] 1971, 105). Similarly to the idea of the dominant, the notion of *master plots* (Schwemmer 1987) were highlighted, which generate understanding by narrativizing history through the selective process of configuring a narrative connection between dates of a simple chronicle.

Finally, in comparing framing and strategic narrative, a further similarity can be identified in what framing theory calls *framing tasks*, while theorizing on strategic narrative addresses it as *narrative parts*. Snow & Benford (1988) introduced the notions of *diagnostic, prognostic and motivational framing tasks*, arguing that the degree to which framers attend to these tasks will determine participant mobilization. Diagnostic framing concerns the identification of a problem and assignment of blame; prognostic framing suggests solutions, strategies, and tactics to a problem, while motivational framing serves as a rationale for action. These framing tasks concord with David Betz's framework on "*key narrative parts",* which "*diagnoses problem, offers solution and provides a compelling rational for action*" (Betz 2015,38). It is also identical to Dimitrou's take on strategic narratives, who argued, that they "*tell the story why a state is in conflict, why it is of such importance and how success will look like*" (Dimitrou 2012, 196).

2.4.3. Resolution for Strategic Narratives and Frames

Acknowledging the common constructivist origins of frames and strategic narratives, Livingston & Nasetta (2018) argued though that these theoretical concepts can be differentiated:

"*Frames are less ambitious and are situated within the contours of Strategic Narratives; they are to Strategic Narratives what particular storms are to global weather patterns. Frame contestation emerges as struggles over the meaning of events within the contours of broader Strategic Narratives.*" (Livingston & Nasetta 2018)

Kuypers' insights on how to do framing analysis in a rhetorical perspective can well complement Linvingston and Nasetta's syntheses on framing and strategic narrative (Kuypers 2009, 2010). Looking first inductively to news narratives on an event, Kuypers identified themes present across time in the text, then analysed how these long-term themes were framed. Based on the works of Gamson & Modigliani (1987, 1989), Kuypers emphasised that frames "*are located in the communicator, the text, the receiver, and the culture at large*" and "*frames thus act as central organizing ideas within a narrative account of issues or events; they provide the interpretive cues for otherwise neutral facts*" (Kuypers 2009,301). Specific linguistic structures, such as metaphors, visual icons, and catchphrases that communicate frames can constitute such *framing devices* (Gamson and Modigliani 1989). The notion of *central metaphor* in cognitive linguistics as a potential framing device and organizing idea for narrative is also relevant here, based on George Lakoff's argument that in understanding and describing a complex phenomenon, people are highly influenced by a central metaphor (Lakoff 1991). Parallelly, the literature on social movement research introduced the notion of *master frames* (Snow and Benford, 1992: 138; Benford, 2013: 1, Carroll & Ratner, 1996: 610). Benford and Snow defined it as "*collective action frames that are quite broad in terms of scope, functioning as a kind of master algorithm that colours and constraints the orientations and activities of other movements*" (Benford and Snow, 2000: 618). I find that the notion of master frames is highly alike the idea of the dominant in narratology in terms of functionality.

Livingston & Nasetta (2018) also pointed out the limitation of framing contestation models to local and national political institutions, since most framing case studies focus on American foreign policy and the role of national news media and US political institutions in modelling framing contestation (Entman 2003), press-state relations (Bennett 1990), political economy of the mass media (Herman & Chomsky). Therefore, Livingston & Nasetta argued that strategic narrative can be a better suited concept for studying the complexity of contemporary networked flows of conflicting narratives among adversarial states. Furthermore, based on the insights of Lakoff (2004), applying framing can strengthen strategic narratives against rival alternate narratives.

2.4.4. Summary – Linking Strategic Narrative and Framing

By delineating the conceptual boundaries and the relative position of frames and strategic narratives, I argue that the persuasion capacity of strategic narratives can be strengthened through framing. Strategic narrative as concept helps focusing on rival and counternarratives in contestation of international communication. The concept of strategic narrative helps operationalising a better focus on the communicating actor, whilst the idea of frames directs attention towards those specific discourse patterns which build up a narrative, just like bricks and blocks constitute a building. A strategic narrative can apply various framing devices, with relative difference in their relevance to the overall persuasion objectives. Provided these insights in the literature, narratives are well suited to serve as broader frameworks which contain and communicate frames devices**.** Therefore, I highlight the benefit of considering framing theories such as framing tasks and frame alignment practices in narrative analysis. The next chapter will further elaborate combining framing theories with theorising on conditions influencing the persuasion capacity of strategic narratives.

2.5. THE PERSUASION CAPACITY OF STRATEGIC NARRATIVES

While the epistemological perspective on strategic narrative highlights its use as an analytical tool for studying various phenomena in International Relations; the ontological perspective includes the study of their functionality in supporting strategic objectives, such as their effectiveness as tool of persuasion. In War and Public Opinion Studies, theorizing on the effectiveness of strategic narrative was primarily influenced by studying the relationship of public opinion and communication in foreign military interventions, while the IR perspectives also addressed the persuasion capacity of strategic narratives in power relations and foreign policy.

The literature has identified various expectations towards strategic narratives which impact their persuasive capacity. Lawrence Freedman emphasised that narratives are most effective when they "*reinforce established views and concerns"* (2015, 23-24.) and they work when "*strategic purpose is immediate and clearly defined*", while "c*hanges in perspective required are not too radical"* (Freedman 2015, 18). David Betz emphasised the importance of *narrative coherence* and *resonance with societal myths* (Betz 2008, 2011, 2015). Regarding coherence, Betz argued that "*truthiness is more important than truth – a story that is sufficiently coherent from top to bottom without obvious cracks*." Based on the works on the power of *myth* by Georges Sorel (1915) and O Shaughnessy (2004*)*, Betz argued that strategic narratives need to

be culturally resonant, employ a coordinating and motivating set of beliefs, although clash between the power of myth and postmodernity poses a challenge for such practices.

Building on works of Freedman 2006, Betz 2008, Gelpi Feaver & Reifler (2009), Castells (2011), and Paul et al. (2010), four key aspects of the effectiveness in strategic narratives (*consistency and coherence; clear and compelling mission purpose; showing the prospect of success; and the absence of strong competing narratives*) were highlighted by Ringsmose & Borgensen (2011). First, reinforcing the ideas of Betz (2008) on narrative coherence and how wavering different mission objectives can undermine the understanding of war effort, they emphasise *consistency and coherence* in words as well as in deeds as crucial elements in strategic narratives' effectiveness. Second, they argue that since the audience should perceive the objective to be clear, therefore strategic narratives need a *clear and compelling mission purpose.* Different mission purposes have different effects on audiences, therefore missions believed by the public to be in defence against vital national interests would generally enjoy greater popular support than missions deemed to be humanitarian interventions and about protecting other people's interest (Larson 1996, Klarevas 2002, Smith 2005, Davies and Johns 2010 cited in De Graaf et al. 2015, 9) Third, according to Ringsmose & Borgensen (2011), strategic narratives need to *show the prospect of success.* The fundamental assumption here is that the public is more likely to accept wartime casualties with a credible prospect of success on the probability of achieving the mission than in the absence of a narrative of progress, and a narrative of progress can be cultivated by portraying a belief about victory (Ringsmose & Borgensen 2011, 513-514). Finally, *the absence of strong competing narratives* is identified and linked to Larson's (2000) ideas on how united support within foreign policy elites can boost the support of the public. (Ibid.)

Based on expectations highlighted in the literature regarding the effectiveness of strategic narrative, it can be concluded that the essence of Fisher's (1984) twin tests of narrative rationality – narrative probability (how the story hangs together, free of contradictions) and narrative fidelity (to what extent the story resonates with the audience) is reflected in works of Freedman, Betz, and Ringsmose & Borgensen as well. Furthermore, Alexander George's work (1980) on rhetoric and policy legitimacy employed a complementary framework, which emphasised *desirability* – the normative, moral component in rhetorical frames that is rooted in local values and norms; and *feasibility* – the cognitive aspect in policy legitimacy which assures that one will be able to carry out the proposed policy. Synthesising these insights with works on the effectiveness of strategic narratives (as introduced above), my review highlights focus

on resonance, purpose, probability as consistency, coherence and congruence, and prospects as prominent conditions impacting the effectiveness of strategic narratives.

2.5.1. Resonance

Correspondingly with Betz, many scholars have argued that strategic narratives are effective when they resonate with national values, when they are tailored to a society's cultural context, when they echo local political myths, values and role conceptions while correspond with factual reality (Gow & Wilkinson 2017, Colley 2017, Schmitt 2018). Focusing on the likelihood of resonance between external strategic narratives and local *political myths*, Schmitt (2018) have addressed the difference between political myths and strategic narratives. While ontologically both are narratives; they differ in the ways they are constituted. Based on the insights of Bottici (2007) and Blumenberg (1985), political myths have a "*semi-permanent feature*" within political communities, understood as a continuous process of reinterpretation and adaptation, they are subject to gradual evolution and no single actor is responsible for crafting a political myth, but they are constantly tailored to the present needs of a specific political community. Strategic narratives, however, are crafted by political actors with the specific intention of influencing the audience, and political myth can be actualized through strategic narratives (Schmitt 2018,2).

Correspondingly to the idea of political myth, the relation of strategic narrative to *master narratives* (Coticchia & Catanzaro 2022) can be relevant here, highlighting that a strategic narrative is always culturally embedded and linked in a deeper level. (Colley, 2017: 21) The notion of master narrative acts as an umbrella concept for various synonyms addressing cultural background narratives, such as a "*transhistorical narrative that is deeply embedded in a particular culture*" (Halverson et al., 2011: 14); a "'*historical' narrative that utilizes a deliverance story" (Halverson et al., 2012: 8). As well as "narratives from religion and cultural history that are deeply embedded in a given culture and are well known to its members*" (Corman, 2016: 10–11).

Concerning resonance, the above-mentioned ideas from narrative theory can be well combined with similar notions in framing theory, highlighting the importance of resonance with local values as *cultural congruence*: "*Frames that employ more culturally resonant terms have the greatest potential for influence. They use words and images highly salient in the culture, which is to say noticeable, understandable, memorable, and emotionally charged*" (Entman 2003, cited in Livingston & Nasetta 2018, 103) *Furthermore,* Snow & Benford's frame alignment

process and forms, as well as frame resonance are complementary concepts. *Frame resonance* was also highlighted as an important catalyst in frame alignment and argued that "*the higher the degree of frame resonance, the greater the probability that the framing effort will be relatively successful*" (Snow & Benford 1986, 477).

George's (1980) concept of desirability also facilitates the applicability of resonance frames in strategic narratives. Notions of the past can be instrumentalized, therefore the *durability of the past* (Hobsbawm & Ranger 1983) and *cognitive priors* (Acharya 2009), the robustness of an existing (local) belief system can turn to be an essential framing device for strategic narratives. This research adopts the notion of cognitive priors for showing those historical registers which can be used to inscribe a contemporary situation in past events. (Tull 2021) For the sake of parsimony, this dissertation will focus on political myths, master narratives, cognitive priors as primary tools for resonance.

2.5.2. Clarity of Purpose

Showing a compelling, immediate, and clear purpose for action is a criterion that can be closely linked to the notion of Fisher's narrative probability. The clarity of strategic (mission) purpose is an important expectation towards strategic narratives and conceptually it overlaps with the condition of coherence (see Betz 2008, 2015). However, deeper insights from narrative theory can lead to questioning the criterion of a clear and fixed mission purpose, while showing the prospect of success as an end point of the narrative.

The presentation of a desired endpoint as an essential part of a narrative is worth to be contrasted with studies on expectations about stories. While people expect for stories to have both causal sequencing (Stein & Policastro 1984) and to have a beginning and middle (Stokoe & Edwards 2007) it is more debated whether people expect stories to have a clear ending (Stein & Policastro 1984 in Poletta et. al. 2011). Therefore, Poletta et al. (2011) asked whether scholars have overrated the importance of clarity in persuasive messages. They argue that storytelling can be an effective way to communicate ambiguous meanings given the allusive nature of storytelling, casting doubt on the assumptions that powerful stories are simple, or that their persuasion capacity lies in their consistency. Stories can be powerful insofar they seem to hang together while they might be pointing to quite different normative directions (Poletta et al. 2011, 122). Framing acts as a tool for both enhancing the clarity of purpose through alignment, as well as for providing strategic ambiguity in a narrative.

Addressing the effectiveness of a narrative in protracted military operations, the question of narrative adaptation and shifts in mission purpose are central issues. For example, in Afghanistan, the UK's *meta-narrative* shifted from humanitarianism to a pessimistic realism that was sceptical about using ground forces to democratise (Cawkwell, 2015, p. 150). Shifts in mission purpose can entangle the question of framing and the level of strategic ambiguity in communicating the purpose of the mission. Jaap De Hoop Scheffer, former NATO Secretary General argued that framing the mission as "*nation-building*" or "*peacekeeping*" rather than "*war*" did not help its objectives. (de Hoop Scheffer, 2015, xxiv, xxvi). Shifts in mission purpose or framing in view of strategic ambiguity can contribute to confusion as in the case of the United Kingdome's involvement in Afghanistan, "*the narrative of UK security protection was muddled by notions of humanitarian objectives, thus adding to the confusion over mission purpose*" (Jensen, 2015, 314).

2.5.3. Probability as Consistency, Coherence and Congruence

Fisher's narrative probability highlights focus on how the story hangs together, being free from contradictions. Probability consists of consistency, coherence and congruence aspects which jointly influence the effectiveness of strategic narratives. The aspects of probability have relevance in various stages of the narrative process: the consistency of the semantic configuration of the narrative matters in the emplotment stage, while coherence is crucial in the projection of the narrative, and narrative congruence is tested in the reception of the narrative.

The literature on strategic narratives uses concepts of narrative consistency, coherence and congruence interchangeably (without engaging with the notion of narrative probability) although there is consensus on the challenge of achieving an ideal state regarding these attributes. Miskimmon et al. highlight that in a heterogenous environment, the presence of counternarratives is beyond the control of the strategic communicator, although the lack of rival narratives and narrative contestation can support a strategic narrative. But it is rather questionable whether the current media ecology makes it possible to have a strategic narrative without strong counternarratives (Miskimmon et al. 2013). Betz also argued that due to the increased connectivity, achieving coherence and congruence is particularly challenging in an extremely heterogenous environment such as in the improvisational theatre of contemporary conflicts, which ultimately results in multiplicity, fragmentation and cacophony. (Betz 2015, 44). According to Krebs, while a dominant narrative is achievable, the possibility of a clear, consistent narrative is rather an illusion (Krebs, 2015, p. 296). Coherence is further subjected

to the need to respond to events and external pressures, as well as to appeal to diverse, incompatible audiences (Dixon, 2003). Digressive communication and errors further complicate the ideal of coherence and clarity, as communication is often linked to certain phenomena more as an anecdote (such as Schabowski's error contributing to the fall of the Berlin Wall) than to a central concept through which messages were conveyed to shape public opinion (Manfredi-Sanches 2021). Nevertheless, the problem of narrative contestation (rival and conflicting narratives, and their potential entanglement) might diminish by reflecting on how holding conflicting ideas are hardly foreign to human experience, nor to quantum physics, as Niels Bohr's idea of superposition was also inspired by remarks *"on the human ability to hold conflicting ideas in our heads at the same time"* by the philosopher and psychologist William James (Orrell 2022).

Although the framework proposed by Miskimmon et al. (2013) builds on the Rational Actor Model, treating the state as a unitary, rational actor in applying respective strategic narratives (identity, system, policy) which layers can complement and constrain each other, this framework does not provide adequate explanation for further fragmentation in strategic narratives. Here the bureaucratic politics model can be of assistance explaining how coherence of a strategic narrative can be affected by governance dynamics. Graham T. Allison's influential *Bureaucratic Politics Model* highlights how actors favour policy options that fulfil their bureaucratic role and increases their power in the decision-making process, rendering policy to the subject of bargaining as "*compromise, coalition, competition and confusion*" (Allison 1968, 708). Taking into account the effects of bureaucratic politics on strategic communication suggests a limited potential for a clear, consistent narrative that offers the prospect of success and which has few narrative rivals, while factoring in governance models, Dixon argued that "*the requirements of a successful strategic narrative would appear to be better achieved by an authoritarian regime than a liberal democratic one*" (Dixon 2020, 657). While in case of a liberal democracy, narrative can be subject to internal contestation in both the formation and projection processes. In case of an authoritarian regime, strategic narrative may witness confusion, bargaining of the elite groups during the formation of a narrative, but due to regime features, these might become less visible in the projection stage. As an example to how governance models can impact strategic narrative, Zhang and Orbie suggest that in China's case, the study of strategic narrative through the formulations or official terminologies (known as tifa or ways of putting things) should be combined with the understanding of the unique

features of China's discourse context ("*discourse coalition*"), which should involve analysing the most influential groups shaping the formation of strategic narratives (Zhang & Orbie 2021).

A further example to the effects of bureaucratic politics on strategic communication is the case of the United Kingdom's policy on Afghanistan after 2010. According to Thomas Cawkwell, the UK's Ministry of Defence successfully defined Britain's strategic narrative "*as the realist pursuit of the national interest through a counterterrorism narrative*", while "*the Labour government's 'stabilisation' or humanitarian narrative was rejected*" (Cawkwell, 2015, 152). Introducing the concept of strategic narrative, the military could argue that a strong strategic narrative could sustain military intervention even in the case of rising military deaths (Dixon 2019). Cawkell argued that this concept was used by the military to increase its impact on Afghan policy by putting pressure on politicians, and other organisational interests, such as the Department of International Development and the Foreign Office, to conform to the military's narrative of what is in the state's interest (Cawkwell, 2015). According to Dixon, such practice can increase the power of the military in the "*organisational war of narratives for achieving influence over policy*", while this endeavour was also supported by the academic literature, which advocated the concept of strategic narrative and thereby (implicitly) adopted the view of military elites blaming politicians for failure in Afghanistan (Dixon 2019, 658-659). In fact, Dixon argued that this meant academics echoing that the political elite are responsible for adopting, or failing to adopt, an effective strategic narrative (i.e. the military's strategic narrative) and that is arguably responsible for the decline of domestic support and failure of mission (Ibid.).

2.5.4. Prospects

Finally, the requirement of Strategic Narratives in *showing the prospect of success*, and the relevance of framing theory are especially paramount here. In prospect framing of Strategic Narratives, it is important to highlight the distinction between emphasis and equivalency frames. Chong & Druckman (2007) have underlined that the literature on framing focused on either *emphasis* or *equivalency* effects. Building on Entman's (1993) conceptualization of framing, emphasis frames are "*qualitatively different, yet potentially relevant considerations*" which individuals use to make judgments (2007,10). Based on the work of Tversky & Kahneman (1987) equivalency effects occur when "*different, but logically equivalent phrases cause individuals to alter their preferences*" (Chong & Druckman 2007,23). Equivalency frames operate with materially identical descriptions with terms such as gains vs. losses, which

is rooted in the framing effect described in prospect theory, developed by Daniel Khaneman and Amos Tversky to explain anomalies of decision-making behaviour described by expected utility theory. Prospect theory, as a cognitive psychology model fertilized the study of social sciences – particularly behavioural economics – and it has been further refined in several theoretical studies. (Kahneman & Tversky 1979, 1984, 1992) The key argument of the theory predicts that individuals tend to be risk averse in their choice when they see themselves to be facing gains, and risk acceptant in selecting options when they perceive themselves to be facing losses. The dynamics of prospect theory can be divided into two phases: the editing or framing phase – where the issue of reference point is essential – and the evaluation phase – featuring the main insights of loss aversion, endowment effect and certainty effect. The framing effect was demonstrated through the reversal of preference when the solution to the problem was presented in different ways (Kahneman & Tversky 1984, Tversky & Kahneman 1981).

While recommendations on strategic narrative's effectiveness emphasises the prospect of success, such approach seem contradictory with the insight of the framing effect in prospect theory by Kahneman and Tverksy (1984), who highlighted that the prospect of losses can invoke stronger risk-taking preferences. Since equivalency framing can have important consequences due to the cognitive effect of loss-aversion, it is important to address the requirement of positive prospects (showing success) in a strategic narrative.

While highlighting positive outcomes, the prospect of success is an important element for boosting morale in public opinion as well as among troops, but positive prospects can also have controversial effects. Based on the works of Cowper-Coles (2011) and Porter (2018), Dixon argued that it can contribute to the emergence of a deceptive strategy of optimism, through presenting the war as *winnable* if there is sufficient political will, and it can encourage escalation, while also hinders conducting "*an accurate (re)assessment of the war and the prospects of victory, potentially locking the military into a 'long war' that cannot be won*." (Dixon 2019, 659) Concerning decision-making, groupthink can facilitate such controversial effects, promoting hostility to *counternarratives* and a *culture of silence* that inhibits criticism of strategy and tactics (Cowper-Coles, 2011; Porter, 2018). It can encourage the view that "*military interventions involving substantial losses can be sustained and successful*" (Gelpi et al., 2009 cited in Dixon 2019, 661). The progress of a military operation can undermine the credibility of an optimistic strategic narrative, leading to greater disillusionment and perception of failure (examples to that can be the Tet Offensive' 1968; the failure to find Weapons of Mass

Destruction in Iraq 2003, and the abrupt evacuation of troops and refugees from Afghanistan in 2021).

Finally, considering framing effect, the perspective of narrativizing through rational IR theories should be addressed. Strategic narrative may rely on framing centred on the evasion of losses in a framework emphasising national interest and tenets of realism. Alternatively, strategic narrative may rely on notions reflecting theories of liberalism, such as democratic peace, humanitarianism, peacekeeping. The arc of strategic narrative can vary from liberal-humanitarian frames emphasising potential gains to realist perspectives highlighting the focus on national interest-oriented loss-aversion. In protracted military interventions, a recurring pattern manifests itself in applying liberal-humanitarian framing in the beginning of a military intervention, and later to complementary security and national interest emphasis frames. "*Missions believed by the public to be a defence against vital national interests will generally enjoy greater popular support than missions deemed to be humanitarian interventions embarked on to protect other people's interests*" (De Graaf et al., 2015, 357).

2.5.5. Summary – The Persuasion Capacity of Strategic Narratives

Synthesising Fisher's narrative rationality with works of Freedman, Betz and Ringsmose & Borgensen on the effectiveness of strategic narratives, this chapter's review highlighted focus on resonance, purpose, probability, and prospects as prominent conditions impacting the effectiveness of strategic narratives, while it also addressed the relevance of specific framing concepts and theories along these aspects. As primary tools for resonance, the review highlighted the importance of political myths, master narratives, national role concepts and cognitive priors. Regarding purpose, the importance of framing in enhancing both the clarity of purpose as well as providing strategic ambiguity was introduced, while challenges in narrative adaptation with regards to shifts in mission purpose during protracted military operations were addressed. The key aspects of probability are consistency, coherence, and congruence. The requirement of congruence and coherence can be fundamentally influenced by the mediated environment (parallel narratives and counternarratives) and by bureaucratic politics including organisational efforts to achieve influence over policy. Finally, the controversial effects of prospect framing were highlighted. I argue that although emphasizing positive prospects is mostly considered as a necessary condition for boosting morale in protracted military interventions, stressing positive outcomes (gain framing) can miss out on the force of loss frames (which can strengthen risk-taking preferences in the audience), and it can potentially

contribute to a failure in the assessment of the situation, leading to greater disillusionment through optimistic frames.

2.6. RESULTS OF SYNTHESISING INTERDISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVES

This part of the dissertation provides the foundation and the building blocks for presenting the Integrated Framework for Strategic Narrative Analysis. Addressing the conceptual background of strategic narrative, I provide a review on the concept of persuasion in international relations, highlighting the relevance of strategic narrative in the intersection of communication, public opinion and armed conflicts, focusing on the function of strategic narratives in strategic communication.

I argued that the concept of strategic narrative, its potential and limits need a thorough understanding, which can benefit from interdisciplinary research, and a deeper understanding on the concept of narrative. I argue that key notions from the rival structuralist and narrative paradigm approaches on narrative can be integrated in Ricoeur's hermeneutical framework, retaining both the analytical edges of structuralists perspectives as well as the broader conceptual horizon in the narrative paradigm approach.

By contrasting narratology perspectives with the conceptualization of strategic narrative in international relations, I pointed out that the burgeoning IR literature on strategic narrative lacks deeper theoretical foundations. Instead of building on perspectives from narratology, theorizing on strategic narrative resulted in conceptual confusion as authors developed disconnected frameworks. The lack of reflection on key notions and crucial debates of narratology, and the ad-hoc use of strategic narrative as a label also led to selective practices in empirical attribution. Moreover, I argue that strategic narrative typologies in the literature have limited potential for empirical use due to arbitrary categorisation: they either fail to consider the contemporary media environment by separating audience groups (Freedman 2015) or create artificial layers (System, Actor, Issue) constraining empirical analysis as such layers are often co-constitutive. Instead of such typologies, I argue that harnessing insights from framing theories and considering a cyclic perspective of narrative figuration instead of a linear process (formation, projection, reception) can enhance strategic narrative analysis in International Relations.

Addressing the relationship between framing and strategic narrative, I argue that the persuasion capacity of strategic narratives can be strengthened through framing practices, and narrative analysis benefits from considering framing theories, particularly on framing tasks and frame alignment practices, as well as prospect theory's framing effect. I take the position that the

concept of strategic narrative helps operationalising a better focus on the communicating actor. While the idea of frames directs attention to specific discourse patterns, narrative serves as the broader framework containing frame devices.

I argue that using Ricoeur's hermeneutical framework as a foundation can be used to synthesise notions from narrative paradigm and structuralist approaches while integrating insights form the literature on strategic narrative as well as from framing theories. Ricoeur's narrative hermeneutic philosophy provides a suitable foundation for conceptualizing strategic narrative, since a cyclic understanding of narrative figuration (prefiguration, configuration, refiguration) can illuminate the dynamic and ever negotiated traits of strategic narratives as social constructs, overcoming a linear focus (formation, projection and reception) as well as complementing the emphasis on the multi-layered and interlocking nature of strategic narratives.

Finally, this conceptual background synthesised the literature to highlight components shaping the persuasive capacity of strategic narratives. As a result, I emphasize resonance, purpose, probability (as consistency, coherence and congruence) and prospects as prominent conditions impacting the effectiveness of strategic narratives. I argue that to assess the persuasive capacity of strategic narratives, concepts of narrative probability and narrative fidelity should be used. Narrative probability can be assessed based on consistency and clarity of semantic configuration, coherence of narrative projection, and narrative congruence. Narrative fidelity is linked to ideas on strategic narrative's resonance with the cultural context, which I specify as resonance with preexisting interpretive structures, categorised as master narratives, political myths, national role concepts and cognitive priors. Prospect framing can contribute to both narrative probability (consistency and clarity) and narrative fidelity (strengthening resonance with preexisting interpretive structures). Furthermore, I argue that the literature's expectation on gain frames in narratives of military interventions should be contrasted against prospect theory's insights. Ricoeur's hermeneutical framework is an ideal foundation for an integrated framework which can nest the above detailed interdisciplinary theoretical perspectives supporting the analysis of strategic narratives' persuasive capacity.

3. RESEARCH DESIGN – PRESENTING THE INTEGRATED FRAMEWORK

This part of the dissertation presents the main proposition, clarifies key concepts, specifies research method and strategy, and describes the operationalisation of the Integrated Framework working with a case study methodology.

3.1. PROPOSING AN INTEGRATED FRAMEWORK FOR STRATEGIC NARRATIVE ANALYSIS

The Conceptual Background part has presented a rich collection of theories related to the analysis of narratives and strategic communication in International Relations. This research proposes that synthesizing this knowledge corpus allows for the construction of an *Integrated Framework for Strategic Narrative Analysis*. The foundation of this Framework is Ricoeur's hermeneutical cycle (Figure 1.), as it provides a temporal focus for strategic narrative analysis.
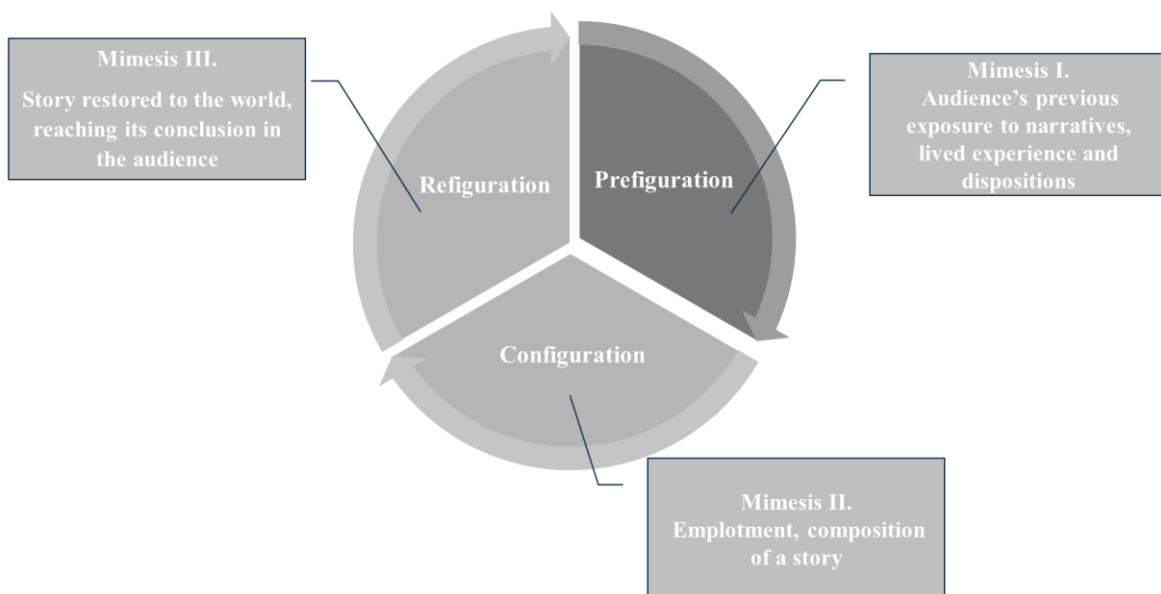
Figure 1. Ricoeur's Hermeneutical Cycle – Source: Author's own work.

A key argument of this dissertation is that Ricoeur's cyclical philosophy of hermeneutics can integrate insights from structural narratology (such as the focus on emplotment) and narrative paradigm perspectives (focus on narrative rationality as fidelity and probability). Besides narratology perspectives, it can also incorporate framing theories and insights on the concept of strategic narrative from International Relations. Therefore, this hermeneutical cycle is

adapted accordingly, integrating the various theoretical perspectives for strategic narrative analysis:
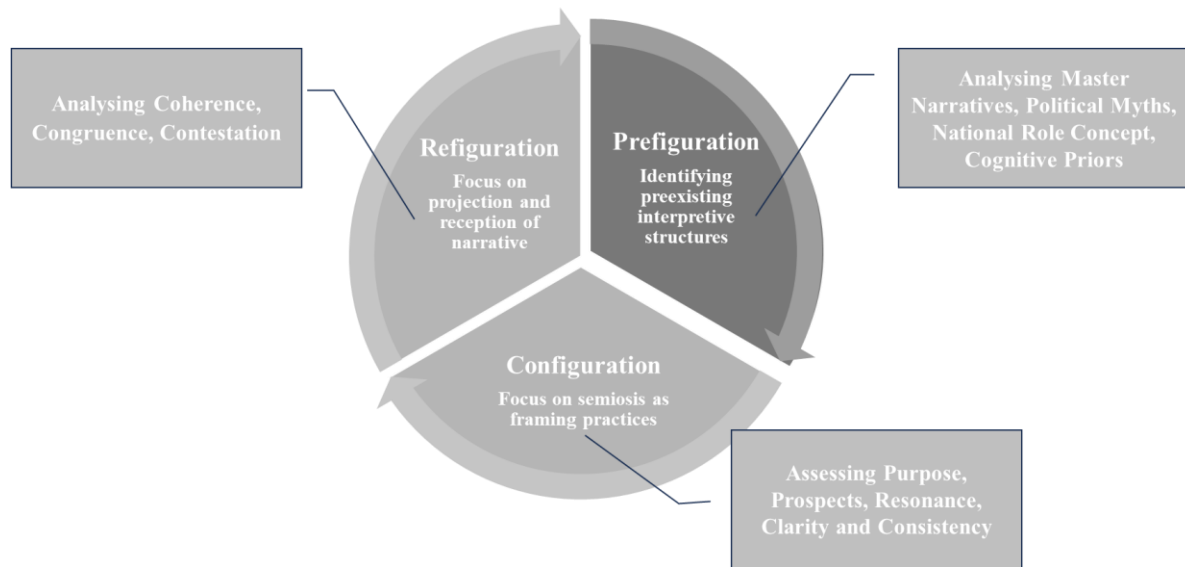
Figure 2. Adapting the Hermeneutical Cycle to the Analysis of Strategic Narratives. Source: Author's own work.

The first stage of the cycle is *Prefiguration,* and it focuses on preexisting interpretive structures determining narrative fidelity and desirability. In this stage the analytical task is to detect existing master narratives, political myths, national role concepts and cognitive priors, which can fundamentally shape the resonance of the audience. Exploring resonance, this framework proposes to ask: *What preexisting interpretive structures influence the resonance of the audience to the emerging narrative?* as a guiding question*,* while conducting historical institutional analysis to explore drifts and practices of layering in these structures.

The second stage of the cycle is *Configuration* is examined in the dimension of semiosis. Semiosis contains semantic innovations such as emplotment and framing. Semantic analysis focuses on narrative consistency and clarity, resonance of purpose frames with preexisting interpretive structures and the framing of prospects in the narrative. Therefore, this framework has the following guiding questions: *What are key purpose and prospect frames in the narrative? How do purpose frames resonate with interpretive structures identified in the prefiguration stage? To what extent is there clarity and consistency in the semantic configuration of the narrative? How does prospect framing change along the narrative's evolution?*

The third stage of the cycle is *Refiguration*, and it focuses on how the narrative is restored to the world by addressing how semantic configurations meet reality. Besides assessing the

internal coherence of narrative projection, this stage evaluates congruence in light of structuration and the mediated environment and it outlines the dynamics of narrative contestation. Thus, this framework proposes the following questions for studying Refiguration: *What factors influence the coherence of narrative projection and narrative congruence? What are the driving factors in narrative contestation?*

The Integrated Framework is proposed in *Table 1*, highlighting specific focus in each stage of the hermeneutical cycle, presenting the underlying interdisciplinary theoretical background, offering guiding questions and detailed operationalisation for analysis.

Stage of Cycle	Prefiguration	Configuration	Refiguration
Stages of Mimesis	Audience's previous exposure to narratives, lived experience and dispositions	Emplotment, composition of a story	Story restored to the real world, reaching its conclusion in the audience
Focus on	Preexisting interpretive structures: Master Narratives, Political Myths, National Role Concept, Cognitive Priors	Semiosis as framing practices: Purpose, Prospects, Resonance, Clarity and Consistency	Projection and reception of narrative: Coherence, Congruence, Contestation
Interdisciplinary theoretical background	• Narrative rationality as narrative fidelity (Fisher 1984) • Narrative's desirability (George 1980) • Master Narratives (Coticchia & Catanzaro 2022) • Political Myths (Colley 2017, Schmitt 2018) • National Role Concept (Holsti 1970) • Cognitive Priors (Acharaya 2009) • Historical institutionalism, drift, layering (Skocpol & Pierson 2020; Chafer et al. 2020)	• Conditions influencing the persuasive capacity of strategic narratives (Freedman 2006, 2015; Betz 2008, 2011, 2015; Ringsmose & Borgensen 2011) • Narrative rationality as narrative probability (Fisher 1984); narrative's feasibility (George 1980) • Framing clarity of purpose (Poletta et al. 2011) • Framing theories (Entman 1993); framing tasks (Snow & Benford 1988); frame alignment (Snow et al. 1986) • Prospect theory's framing effect Khaneman & Tversky (1992); Chong & Druckman (2007)	• Narrative rationality as narrative probability (Fisher 1984) • Bureaucratic politics (Allison 1968) • Structuration (Sum & Jessop 2014) • Narrative contestation & mediated environment (Miskimmon et al. 2013; Betz 2015)
Key questions guiding analysis	• What preexisting interpretive structures can influence the resonance of the audience to the emerging narrative?	• What are key purpose and prospect frames in the narrative? • How do purpose frames resonate with interpretive structures identified in the prefiguration stage? • To what extent is there clarity and consistency in the semantic configuration of the narrative? • How does prospect framing change along the narrative's evolution?	• What factors influence the coherence of narrative projection and narrative congruence? • What are the driving factors in narrative contestation?
Operationalisation	• Identifying key master narratives, political myths, national role concepts and cognitive priors. • Conducting historical institutional analysis highlighting practices of drift and layering.	• Thematic Analysis of purpose frames: identifying diagnostic, prognostic, status and role frames; highlighting practices of frame alignment • Assessing consistency and clarity • Assessing resonance with interpretive structures identified in the prefiguration stage • Assessing prospect framing practices	• Analysis of institutional practices, governance model, bureaucratic politics and parallel policy narratives influencing coherence of narrative projection. • Analysis of non-semiotic, structural aspects of social practices and counternarratives from the mediated environment influencing the narrative congruence • Process tracing of narrative contestation dynamics

Table 1. Integrated Framework for Strategic Narrative Analysis. Source: Author's own work.

3.2. KEY CONCEPTS OF THE CASE STUDY

Following Freedman's conceptualization, strategic narratives are understood as *compelling storylines, with the intention of structuring the responses of others to developing events*. I complement and refine this definition with highlighting that strategic narratives are understood as *deliberate practices of narrative representations*. Such practices of narrative representations are not limited to state actors. since non-state actors can also produce narratives according to their strategic intent. Nevertheless, this concept is used primarily in connection with state actors, since they have relatively comprehensive means for configuring and projecting their narrative. Therefore, this research's empirical focus is on a strategic narrative employed by a state actor, with the caveat that deliberate practices along the loop of narrative representation (prefiguration, configuration, refiguration) are universal phenomena, applied by a broader variety of actors in International Relations. Beside focusing on a state actor, the proposed Integrated Framework will be tested on the strategic narrative of a protracted foreign military intervention. The concept of strategic narrative is especially relevant for studying persuasion in *protracted foreign military interventions with combat mission mandate*. While studying framing and narratives in armed conflicts in general is an important research area, the narrower focus on *foreign military interventions* is preferred due to the assumed higher relevance of strategic narratives in persuasion as securing public support for such intervention policies. Focusing on *protracted* interventions holds a similar rational, since the significance of strategic communication is assumed to be higher in securing long-term public support in cases of prolonged operations. Besides that, focus on protracted interventions supports research on the evolution of framing in strategic narratives by providing longitudinal case studies. In this research, protracted interventions are operationalized as military operations which did not have an exit date set for most of their duration, or which had their exit dates postponed repeatedly. Finally, the contemporary aspect in focus ensures that contextual effects of recent technological transformation can be accounted for.

3.3 RESEARCH METHOD AND STRATEGY

The research adopts case study methodology as research strategy (Yin 2009). A case study provides an in-depth empirical inquiry into a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, which facilitates the contextual account of contemporary technological transformation in the communication of protracted military interventions. The time horizon of the case study is longitudinal, making repeated data collection on the same sample possible.

The research operates with a single case study, whereby the case selection is conducted with a non-probability sampling method, as homogenous purposive sampling, meaning that the scope of country case selection is homogenous, focuses on a continuous foreign military operation. Although this type of heuristic sampling has low representativeness, it provides an in-depth focus, which is in line with the research objective (George & Bennett 2005).

France was selected based on holding the highest record of military interventions among European states. As a member of both NATO and EU, it has been involved in parallel and continuous foreign military interventions with the largest troop numbers, however, compared to the United States it has limited power projecting capacity. The selection of France and is also driven by the lack of empirical analysis on their contemporary strategic communication compared to studies on key western military powers such as the United States or the United Kingdom. Based on this deliberate, pragmatic selection strategy, the contemporary protracted foreign military interventions of France are organized in a list of potential cases, presenting their theory-relevant configurations (Table 2.).

Operation	Main Location	Period of combat mission	Mandate	Coalition framework	Junior/Senior Partner in coalition
Opération Pamir; Opération Ares	Afghanistan	2001-2012	UNSC Res 1386	NATO ISAF, Operation Enduring Freedom	Junior
Opération Serval; Opération Barkhane	Mali/Sahel	01/2013 – 15/07/2014 – 15/08/2022	Mali government; UNSC Res 2085	Sahel G5	Senior
Opération Chammal	Iraq	19/09/2014 – ongoing	Government of Iraq; UNSC Res 2170	CJTF Operation Inherent Resolve	Junior
	Syria	07/09/2015 – ongoing	UNSC Res 2249		Junior

Table 2. France's Protracted Foreign Military Interventions in the XXI century. Source: Author's own work.

France's intervention in the Sahel between 2012 and 2022 (Operation Serval & Operation Barkhane) is its largest foreign deployment since the Algerian War. In this case, France qualifies as senior partner in coalition warfare, while its operations in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria (Operation Pamir, Operation Ares, Operation Chammal) France qualifies as a high-utility junior partner in coalition warfare. Therefore, the non-selection of the latter operations is due to the theory driven selection rational focusing on France as *a hegemon strategic communicator in a protracted foreign military operation*. Furthermore, the operations of France in the Sahel

region qualify as contemporary, given that France withdraw from Mali on 15 August 2022 and announced the reformulation of Operation Barkhane. Therefore, besides testing a framework of strategic communication, this research also aims at generating empirical results. The contemporary aspect of the selected case study matters, because there are potential lessons learned from the heightened focus on strategic communication in preceding and/or parallel protracted foreign military operations (e.g. ISAF).

3.4. OPERATIONALISATION OF THE INTEGRATED FRAMEWORK

3.4.1. Prefiguration

In *Prefiguration*, the key question is:

- *What preexisting interpretive structures influence the resonance of the audience to the emerging narrative?*

Prefiguration analysis focuses on narrative fidelity and desirability, reflecting insights from Fisher's theory on narrative rationality (1984) and George's framework on rhetoric and political legitimacy (1980). Narrative *fidelity* means that the story coheres with its cultural context, displaying resonance with already existing narratives. Narrative *desirability* refers to the normative, moral component in rhetorical frames that is rooted in local values and norms. This Integrated Framework combines fidelity and desirability as complementary concepts for analysing prefiguration, and adopting the concept of *preexisting interpretive structures,* it identifies those components which influence the audience's resonance with a potentially emerging narrative. As key preexisting interpretive structures, the Framework analyses master narratives, political myths, national role concepts and cognitive priors.

Through the concept of *master narrative*, the comprehensive cultural background aspects can be grasped, including transhistorical and historical narratives – which can project ideology and religion – which can fundamentally help identifying the cultural embeddedness of a narrative. (Halverson et al., 2011). The idea of master narrative shows strong similarity with *political myths,* which can be present within a political community as a semi-permanent feature, albeit "*in a constant process of reinterpretation, adaptation and evolution*" (Schmitt 2018, 2). The main difference between master narratives and political myth is their relative endurance: while master narratives contain a permanent, enduring core, political myths are rather exposed to transformation and alteration. Compared to master narratives and political myths, the notion of *National Role Concept* has more thorough parameters, focusing on domestically shared views

and understandings on the role and purpose of one's own state as a social collective in the international arena: "*National Role Concepts are internal reference systems which affect what states want and do, and what they do not want and do not do; they prescribe, proscribe, and induce certain processual preferences*" (Krotz 2002, 31). The use of typical classification labels for role attribution (e.g. "*interventionist*" or "*non-aligned*") is common in characterizing foreign policy behaviour (Holsti 1970, 233), while role as a dramaturgical metaphor highlights a narrative dimension in International Relations, and reflexive role ascriptions can lead to actor normalization, shaping how actors become understood (Fazendeiro 2016, 487). Finally, the notion of *cognitive priors* is also applied for resonance analysis, which is understood as "*an existing set of ideas, belief systems, and norms, which determine and condition an individual or social group's receptivity to new no*rms". (Acharya 2009, p. 21). Such collective norm sets of a society are constructed by previous experiences, therefore accounting for the imprint of key events which shape collective perceptions and the resulting norm sets are also indispensable in the prefiguration stage.

Besides identifying key interpretive structures, the prefiguration stage integrates them through historical institutional analysis. Institutions can be formal (structures) as well as informal (rules, norms, practices), while master narratives, political myths, national role concepts and cognitive priors can be building blocks to both forms of institutions. Analysing institutional configuration and context, historical institutionalism provides a framework for tracing processes through time (Skocpol & Pierson 2020, 710). Chafer et al. proposed the use of a historical institutionalist framework for exploring French policies in the Sahel as it can be adept at embedding new or seemingly new policy directions in a *longue durée* perspective (Chafer et al. 2020, 483). Institutional structures can adapt either "*as an effect of critical junctures as key moments driven by external events that provide an opening for significant change*", or gradually, with an endogenously driven "*incremental change with transformative results*" (Ibid, 485). As a potential result of critical junctures, the concept of *drifts* refer to changes in the aim or the underlying logic of the policies themselves, meaning that the previously held norm no longer has the same impact. Chafer et al. highlighted that in case of incremental institutional change, *layering* may occur, which do not necessarily entail the removal of preexisting rules, norms and practices and their replacement by new ones, but *new* ways of doing and thinking can be introduced alongside or on top of existing ones. (Ibid. 485-486)

Therefore, the prefiguration stage will rely on historical institutional concepts along key interpretive structures (master narratives, political myths, national role concepts and cognitive

priors) with the potential to influence the resonance of the audience to an emerging narrative. Concerning data collection and data analysis techniques, the research relies on multiple sources as secondary literature, as there is already a vast secondary literature on France's history and foreign policy which provides a steppingstone for identifying and analysing key interpretive structures for this research's purpose. As a result of the prefiguration analysis, key interpretive structures and institutional mechanisms can be highlighted as a baseline for follow-up analysis on narrative fidelity and desirability.

3.4.2. Configuration

Addressing *Configuration*, key questions are:

- *What are key purpose and prospect frames in the narrative?*
- *How do purpose frames resonate with interpretive structures identified in the prefiguration stage?*
- *To what extent is there consistency and clarity in the semantic configuration of the narrative?*
- *How does prospect framing change along the narrative's evolution?*

These questions build on the interdisciplinary synthesis of the literature outlining key conditions for the persuasion capacity of strategic narratives. (See Chapter 2.5.) Configuration analyses focuses on semiotic aspects, based on the understanding that consistency is paramount to a narrative, while having a clear purpose is more debated, as storytelling can be used to communicate ambiguous meanings too. Besides consistency and clarity in purpose framing, it also incorporates focus on resonance with the cultural context and prospect framing. Although the literature considers both resonance and prospect framing important for narrative effectiveness, my interdisciplinary review shows that although it is often argued that showing the prospect of success is crucial, prospect theory suggests that highlighting potential losses can increase risk acceptant preferences in the audience.

Since language is a central tool for interpreting and producing social reality, semantic analysis is adopted as a primary tool in addressing the research questions (Dunn & Neumann 2016). Therefore, this research relies on specific discourse analysis techniques to identify key purpose and prospect frames in the narrative. Identifying such frames provides the basis for analysing resonance with preexisting interpretive structures; examining clarity in purpose and consistency in the semantic configuration of the narrative; and assessing how expectations on prospect

framing is reflected in the narrative. Data analysis is conceptually guided: based on insights from framing theory, an analytical framework is created which serves as a guideline for thematic analysis. The conceptualization of this analytical framework is introduced in *Figure 3.*

| Diagnostic frames | Prognostic frames | Motivational frames (Status & Role) |

| Threat and Security Frames | Norm and Value frames |
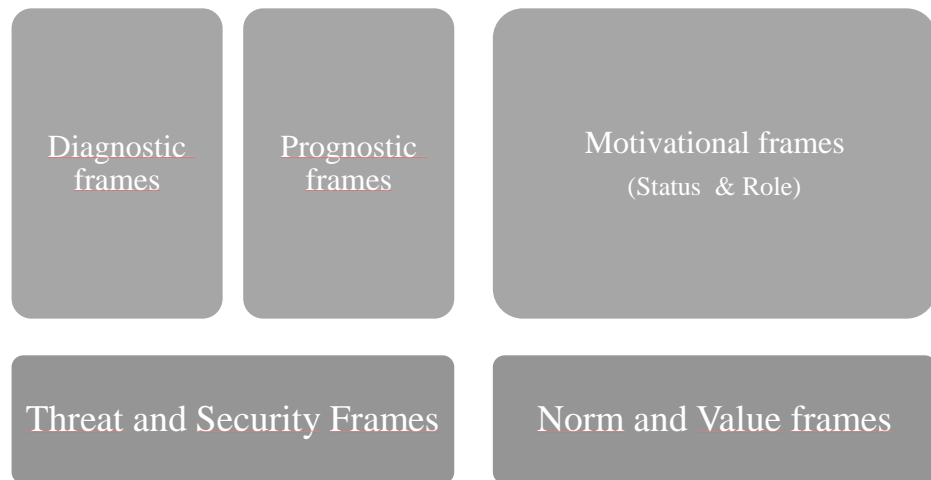
Figure 3. Framework for Purpose Frame Analysis. Source: Author's own work.

The proposed framework combines focus on framing tasks as purpose frames. Purpose frames contain *Threat and Security* frames and *Norm and Value* frames as main categories. While De Graaf et al.'s ideal-type coordinate also distinguishes orientations of security and norms (De Graaf et al. 2015, 355), this Integrated Framework extends focus on framing by integrating it with the distinction of diagnostic, prognostic and motivational framing tasks (Snow & Benford 1988). Both categories contain two-two subcategories, and since frames are often interlinked, this framework primarily serves as a tool for identifying key configurations of purpose frames. *Threat and Security frames* consist of arguments which highlight security concerns of the intervening actor. The subcategories of *Diagnostic frames* focus on why action is needed based on security concerns, while *Prognostic frames* address the proposed policies or actions to these security concerns. As motivational framing tasks, *Norm and Value frames* are grasped through the complementary concepts of status and role as subcategories. Indicators for *status* frames are terms reflecting on norms and values projected on the actor's external relations, how it perceives other actors and the international system. *Role* framing highlights frames of norm and value that are projected internally on the state as a self. Role framing is inspired by role theory (Holsti, 1970; Wendt 1992; Aggestam 1999), with the understanding that role functions as "*bridge*" between perceptions of identity and (expected) foreign policy behaviour (action orientation). This research argues that role concepts and strategic narratives can mutually constitute one and other, therefore integrating insights from role theory into the proposed

analytical framework for strategic narratives is essential for studying the configuration of a narrative. Furthermore, focusing separately on status framing (as norms and values-based projections on other actors) and role framing (as norms and values-based projections on the self) provides greater conceptual and analytical clarity than Miskimmon et. al.'s (2013) distinction between actor and system narratives.

Besides a comprehensive take on purpose frames, configuration analysis also focuses on identifying key *loss and gain frames* based on prospect theory's framing effect (Khaneman & Tversky 1987). Loss frames are operationalized through framing devices which convey the prospect of losses, such as key terms like "*threat*", "*risk*", "*loss*" and specific linguistic structures, like as metaphors. Gain frames are operationalized through framing devices which convey the prospect of gains, such as key terms like "*victory*", "*success*" and specific linguistic structures like metaphors. Besides the future prospect of losses and gains, retrospective loss and gain frames (describing past events) are also identified, to assess the overall use of loss and gain frames in the narrative.

Based on the identified purpose and prospect frames, configuration analysis will highlight practices of frame alignment based on the work of Snow et al., including frame bridging, frame amplification, frame extensions, and frame transformation (Snow et. al. 1986). *Frame bridging* is understood as linking frames over a particular issue, implying that they are structurally connected. *Frame amplification* is understood as ""the clarification and invigoration of an interpretive frame that bears on a particular issue" (Ibid. 469), and this invigorating practice is often used in connection with values and norms. *Frame extension* refer to practices to extend the boundaries of an interpretation by encompass broader issues. *Frame transformation* refers to practices which aim at converting interpretations by proposing new meanings in place of a previous frame.

Regarding *Data Collection and Scope,* the research relies on secondary data, since its availability supports longitudinal studies as well as the comparative and contextual use of permanent data sets. The data collection is based on official primary sources of elite discourse. In a deductive approach, the proposed analytical framework is used for structuring thematic analysis on the selected documents of elite discourse. Therefore, empirical analysis is conducted through examining key pieces of text-based documents which are selected with a theory-driven rational. This text corpus consists of 76 speeches from President Hollande and President Macron. The selection rational of these texts is based on cases of immediate communication in critical junctures such as communication of deployment decisions, communication of crucial

gain and loss incidents, statements, and speeches from bi-and multilateral meetings addressing the region of the intervention; speeches and declaratory policy documents on the topic of foreign operations and French security and defence policy. In the case study, the selection of these sources is tailored to the time horizon of Operation Serval and Operation Barkhane. Focusing on immediate communication in critical junctures, the framing of deployment decisions throughout the duration of a protracted intervention can outline how framing patterns change in time.. Sources for this purpose are statements and speeches of the political elite (e.g. Presidents/Prime Ministers) as well as communiques on the respective operations issued by the relevant government agencies. Therefore, statements on deployment decisions from President Hollande and President Macron were selected as well as presidential statements and speeches reflecting key gain and loss incidents. Gain incidents are conceptualized as events where key political or military objectives are achieved concerning the intervention. Loss incidents are understood as events when failure to achieve politico-military objectives, loss in human lives and/or in substantial military capabilities occur. Bilateral press conferences during official state visits, statements and speeches from multilateral conferences, and annual addresses to armed forces by Presidents were also selected along the timeline of the case study. Based on the hierarchy of strategic documents, the timely relevant national security strategies, defence white papers, and strategic reviews are also used for complementary analysis as declaratory policy documents defining the broader context of military interventions. Drawing on secondary data from these primary sources is considered suitable to the research questions and objectives, since this research focuses on the public communication of political elites and governmental bodies, therefore the internal validity of these sources is adequate. Sources of elite discourse are elaborated in greater detail in the Configuration chapter along each section of the analysed periods.

3.4.3. Refiguration

Refiguration analysis focuses on how the narrative is restored to the world, addressing how semantic configurations meet reality, looking at factors shaping narrative probability. Coherence of narrative projection, narrative's congruence and the process of narrative contestation are analysed to highlight aspects of strategic narratives beyond their semantic configurations. The guiding questions of Refiguration are:

- *What factors influence the coherence of narrative projection and narrative congruence?*
- *What are the driving factors in narrative contestation?*

Analysing the coherence of narrative projection updates the mainstream framework by Miskimmon et. al. which relied on the *Rational Actor Model*, treating the state as a unitary actor crafting strategic narratives. In this Integrated Framework, Refiguration analysis includes focus on fragmentation by taking into consideration institutional practices, such as governance models, as well as bureaucratic politics based on Allison's B*ureaucratic Politics Model.* This is crucial because policies – such as a military intervention or foreign policy – can be the subject of bargaining where bureaucratic actors seek options which increase their role in the decision-making process, while this bargaining feature "compromise, coalition, competition and confusion" (Allison 1968, 708). While in authoritarian regimes, bargaining of elite groups may occur during the formation of a narrative, it becomes less visible in the projection stage; in liberal democracies, narrative can be subject to internal contestation in both the formation and projection processes. Therefore, factoring in governance model and institutional practices complements the perspective on the coherence of narrative projection. Besides institutional aspects, narrative coherence is also examined with regards to parallel policy narratives projected by the same communicating actor. The analysis of coherence in narrative projection relies on secondary sources, incorporating existing research and relevant literature .

Besides coherence of narrative projection, narrative congruence as the harmony of a narrative's configuration with the outside world is also a key aspect of Refiguration, impacting narrative probability. The Framework proposes to examine narrative congruence through an analysis of non-semiotic, structural realities and counternarratives influencing public perception. The analysis of structural realities (such as economic and geopolitical realities) is based on the concept of structuration, understood as non-semiotic, structural aspects of social practices which operate "*behind the backs' of agents and may not correspond to their meaning-making efforts* (Sum and Jessop 2014, 155). Congruence is also influenced by the mediated environment, since in a heterogenous environment, the existence of counternarratives is beyond the control of the communicating actor. Counternarratives are examined as competing narratives produced by other actors containing purpose frames that confute key purpose frames of the strategic narrative. The Framework identifies and analyses key counternarratives and assesses to what extent frames of the strategic narrative were reflected in public perception based on the available survey results. This part of the research relies on relevant ad-hoc and regular survey results as secondary data, exploratory media analysis as well as secondary sources of interpretations.

Addressing the second question, the dynamics of narrative contestation is analysed, highlighting drivers in the narrative contestation process, building on coherence and congruence analysis, focusing on external actor's role and the emergence of information warfare activities. In the Refiguration chapter, process tracing is used as the primary method to analyse the evolution of narrative contestation. As a qualitative analysis method, process tracing shows whether and how causes influence changes based on Bayesian probability. Process tracing is "*the analysis of evidence on processes, sequences, and conjunctures of events within a case for the purposes of either developing or testing hypotheses about causal mechanisms that might causally explain the case.*" (Bennet and Checkel 2015, p. 7.) Data collection and analysis in this part of the research relies on multiple sources of secondary data as snap-shot secondary data.

4. CASE STUDY – APPLYING THE INTEGRATED FRAMEWORK ON THE STRATEGIC NARRATIVE OF FRANCE'S MILITARY INTERVENTION IN THE SAHEL (2012 – 2022)

In the following case study, the proposed Integrated Framework is used for analysing the strategic narrative of France's military interventions in the Sahel region from 2012 to 2022. The first, Prefiguration chapter looks at preexisting interpretive structures determining narrative fidelity and desirability. The second, Configuration chapter focuses on emplotment and framing, conducting a semantic analysis to assess narrative consistency and clarity; resonance of purpose frames with preexisting interpretive structures and evaluates prospect framing in the narrative. The third, Refiguration chapter examines coherence of narrative projection and narrative congruence and analyses the dynamics of narrative contestation.

4.1. PREFIGURATION

The first part of the case study focuses on the question asking what preexisting interpretive structures influence the resonance of the audience to the emerging narrative. Prior to configuring narratives, a strategic communicator can take into consideration the context of an emerging narrative, through reflecting on interpretive structures that shape the audience's perception and therefore determine narrative fidelity and desirability. This analysis focuses on the most important interpretive structures that can be deduced from social and historical analysis, relying on multiple sources as secondary literature that have touched upon these elements from various perspectives. Based on the secondary literature review, this chapter highlights relevant master narratives, national role concepts, political myths, and cognitive priors conducting historical institutionalist analysis, exploring drifts and practices of layering regarding these interpretive structures.

4.1.1. Master Narratives, Political Myths and France's National Role Concept

The master narratives and political myths of the French Republic sustain France's active-independent national role concept as well as to its fundamental idea of sovereign statehood and emphasis on humanitarianism in its foreign policy. As a master narrative, the formation of nation-state emerged from the catalytic idea of sovereignty from the history of the French Republic. In line with the interpretation of Rousseau's social contract, this idea of sovereignty was based on citizens acting collectively, giving *"way to the state being identified with the*

people, who were then considered a nation" (Gurminder 2007,109). Cobban argues that "*there had been no necessary connection between the State as a political unit and the idea of a nationality as a cultural one*" before the Revolution but it "*split the nations vertically and forced men to declare themselves for or against it, and so acquired in their minds a unity and a personality which even historians have taken for granted*" (Cobban, 1960, 204, 207). This conception of sovereignty had a fundamental impact on French (and more broadly European) political thought (Kolla 2017, 201; Berger 1990), and it functions as master narrative determining the centrality and indisputability of statehood. This influence is undeniable in contemporary Western politics today, underpinning French foreign policy practice as well as projecting a state-centred approach in its conduct with other actors of world politics, fuelled by the resonance potential of this master narrative. Therefore, such state-centric disposition has its roots in France's historical development, including the master narrative on the concept of sovereignty.

Complementarily to the master narrative of the French nation state, the norm of humanitarianism had a lasting influence on French political thought. As the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen states "*Men are born and remain free and equal in rights. Social distinctions may be based only on considerations of the common good*" (Élysée, 1789). The rise of the concept of humanitarianism paved the way for the *sans frontiers* movement (Davey, 2015); and it served several times as a moral basis for future humanitarian interventions (e.g. in Libya in 2011). Accordingly, President Hollande's administration recurringly conveyed messages of democracy and human rights towards African states (Türke 2021,335).

From the perspective of role theory, France's foreign policy operates with an active-independent role concept which "*emphasizes at once independence, self-determination, possible mediation functions, and active programs to extend diplomatic and commercial relations to diverse areas of the world*" (Holsti, 1970, 262). Independence, activism and global presence are key substances of this coherent national role concept, underpinned by ideas like greatness, rank, and glory (grandeur, rang, gloire) (Krotz 2002,15). This national role concept builds on the political myth of the "*Gaullist consensus*" which provides consensual norms for the State: "*the great principles set out during the Second World War by the national council of the Resistance remain the basis of its actions: 'defending the nation's political independence, restoring France to its power and greatness and its universal mission*". (Vernet 1992; 663) Charles de Gaulle's *Memoirs of Hope* encapsulated key themes of this active-independent role concept by elaborating on how France has to play an active role on a global scale while being

independent of others (de Gaulle 1970). This ambition is underpinned by political myths highlighting that France must live up prominence and high expectations based on its past: "*France cannot really be itself (elle-même) but in the first rank*" and "*France cannot be France without grandeur*" (de Gaulle 1954, 5-7). As Raymond Aron highlighted, such Gaullist notions of greatness (*grandeur*) global rank (*rang mondial*) and independence became fundamental principles in French diplomacy (Aron 1983, 445- 450). During the Cold War, the notion of independence from block politics manifested famously in pulling out of the integrated NATO command in 1966. The same notion was reflected in Mitterrand's remark of "*friends, allies, but not aligned*" with reference to the United States and France's participation in the Gulf War (Vernet 1992; 663). French opposition to the Iraq War, particularly in Dominique de Villepin's speech at the United Nations highlighted the notion of independence as well, that France being a great power shall not necessarily align with anyone else (Schmitt 2018, 17). During his campaign, Francois Hollande followed a similar line when he promised to withdraw French troops from Afghanistan as well as to aim for reorienting NATO towards its original aims concerning collective security (Türke 2021,337). Accompanying *grandeur, the* idea of *gloire* is often evoked with looking at French history and the French defence forces, complemented with notions of pride, prestige, and dignity (de Gaulle 1954, 5-7). Such political myths preserved their influence in public perceptions about France's role in the world, independently from party-political orientations, gaining permanence in the French political discourse and providing a common denominator for conducting France's foreign relations (Cerny 1994, 99). Beyond De Gaulle's proclamations, themes of France's national role concept, especially the notion of independence and grandeur can be argued to portray a fundamental foreign policy rational of statehood (autonomy and sovereignty as fundamental aims). Such norms and objectives can be traced back to deeper historical foundations (Capetian heritage, Louis XIV, Napoleon Bonaparte) highlighting their *longue durée* aspects (Gordon 1993,4; Krotz 2002, 19).

 The explicit ambition of restoring the country's greatness [la grandeur de la France] has been also "*justified in terms of French exceptionalism*" (Rieker 2017, 3). Consequently, France's inclination to "*punching above its weight*" is shown in the tendency of embodying Europe on the world stage and using the European integration project as a vehicle for achieving independence as a first rank power. As Zbigniew Brzezinski put it, "*France seeks reincarnation as Europe*" (cited in Erforth 2020, 572). French officials have called for a multipolar world since the 1990s "*with the implication that France or a French-led Europe would be one of those poles*" (Schmitt 2018, 17). France's permanent seat at the UN Security Council, its nuclear

striking capabilities (*force de frappé*) aimed at all direction (*tous azimut*), the global deployment of French military forces with a predisposed readiness to intervene, and an attempt to balance between bipolar blocks while building a multipolar world all fall in line with France's national role concept forged on independence, activism, and global status (Treacher 2000,24, Cogan, 2003; Rieker, 2017; Schmitt 2018).

In conclusion, master narratives of the French Republic concerning sovereignty and humanitarianism and political myths of the Gaullist consensus sustain France's active-independent national role concept as well as in its state-centric and humanitarian approach in foreign policy. This suggests an important configuration for resonance considerations in connection with potential strategic narratives.

4.1.2. Drift from Cognitive Priors of Colonialism

During the era of French imperial colonialism, France developed various conceptual tools to legitimise its policy in its colonies, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. Among these, the notion of *mission civilisatrice* (civilising mission) provided an ideological anchor for the French security policy in Africa, as it underpinned French foreign policy in general as the primary rationalization for colonialism. *Mission civilisatrice* was based on the thought that indigenous societies are yet to attain the requirements of civilisation and cannot provide for their own security, stability and development, therefore France has a duty as a superior civilisation (heir of enlightenment) to westernize and modernise indigenous people who can evolve and become French through learning the language and the values of France (Hobsbawm 1987, Charbonneau 2008, 43).

Signalling an end to the colonial era, the Africa policy of the Fifth Republic was shaped by the gradual but inevitable process of decolonisation partly driven by the realisation that maintaining an empire is unsustainable and resources are needed to be focused on Metropolitan France (Gerbi 2006,25)[2]. Nevertheless, the construction of *Francafrique* preserved France's position in Africa through convincing most colonies to join the French Community prior to declaring their independence, while France was able to maintain strong influence over former colonies based on the networks of interpersonal relations, and Paris' systematic financial and political support to African elites. France's Africa policy was was run from the Elysée (not by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs). Here, a special secretariat (Secrétariat aux Affaires Africaines et

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[2] The expression of "*Plutôt la Corrèze que le Zambèze!*" conveyed this sentiment.

Malgaches – SGAAM) first run by "*Monsieur Afrique*", Jacques Foccart (1960-1974), and the subsequent African-cell (*cellule africaine)* advised consecutive Presidents.

Griffin highlights that former French colonies in Sub-Saharan Africa (except Guinea) as well as three former Belgian colonies (Zaire, Ruanda, Burundi) signed military cooperation agreements (accords de cooperation) with France in the decolonisation period. Besides cooperation in military matters, France also entered into defence agreements with eight of its former colonies (Cameroon, Central African Republic, Comoros, Ivory Coast, Djibouti, Gabon, Senegal and Togo) transferring responsibility for these states' external (in practice also internal) security to Paris, while such treaties and their clauses for intervention in internal crises were secret for many years (Griffin 2016, 909). Such Treaties of Cooperation provided a transition from colonial to neo-colonial dependence by engineering the nominal independence of African states through providing legitimacy for France to intervene and running a network of African bases for the French prepositioned forces, helping to maintain a permanent French military presence (Gregory 2000, 435).

Following the continuous period in French Africa-policy between 1960-1990, the post-colonial ties started to break up due to the co-occurrence of several factors. Beside the systemic changes diverting France's focus from Africa due to the end of the Cold War, other key components were the diminishing trust in the material advantages of France's African backyard *(pré carré Africain*) coinciding with the consequences of France's participation in the European Monetary Union in terms of growing budget restrictions (Erforth 2020, 565). Testifying this transformation, the Balladur-doctrine (Abidjan-doctrine) adopted principles of the Washington Consensus, compelling indebted African governments to turn directly to the IMF first, rather than to France for loans (Charbonneau 2016, 75). Moreover, the number of military bases quickly decreased following the defence cuts after the end of the Algerian War in 1962. (Foccart 1997, 174–5 cited in Griffin 2016, 909). Legitimacy destroying consequences of French security policy in Africa also contributed to France scaling back its military presence in the region, such as the controversial role of Paris' in the Rwandan genocide, the universally condemned support of Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire (now DRC); and the revelation of numerous corruption scandals related to the *Françafrique* networks (Erforth 2020, 565).

The cognitive prior of France's neo-colonial practices called for an emerging narrative promoting *'African solutions to African problems'* from the mid 1990's (Erforth 2020, 261). This drift was displayed in specific policies, such as in the scaling back of the French military presence in Africa, supporting capacity-building initiatives and revising defence treaties. The

1997–2002 military planning law (*loi de programmation militaire*) reduced the number of French troops stationed in Africa and established the Reinforcement of African Capacities for Peacekeeping Operations (RECAMP)[3] program (CICDE, 2011). RECAMP provided bilateral and multilateral training programs, military education, continental and regional military exercises, several depots with available military equipment for African armies (Griffin 2016, 901). During his election campaign, Nicolas Sarkozy emphasised ending "*neocolonialist*" relations, and as a symbolic step, the *cellule africaine* at the Elysée Palace was dissolved, transferring African matters officially to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, nevertheless decisions on Africa policy continued to be determined by the President. (Thiam, 2008). In 2008, President Sarkozy initiated a revision of the defence treaties and decided to publish them openly. (French Defense Ministry, Défense et Sécurité Nationale 2008, 154–5).

The narrative of African ownership gained traction in French foreign policy discourse and it was strengthened with the beginning of the Hollande presidency, emphasising that the "*future of Africa will rest on Africans' increased capacity to handle by themselves the crises that the continent is going through*", promising an effective rupture with the colonial past, and its operationalization in policymaking (Hollande 2012). The "*leftist vision on Africa*" emphasised focus on African defence capacity-building initiatives, while France's military presence in Africa as well as its traditional role as first intervener (primarily in the case of intervening in the name of regime stability) was questioned, calling for the annulment of existing defence agreements with African countries (Melonio 2011, 28-33, cited in Erforth 2020, 567). Condemning the injustice and brutality of the colonial system, President Hollande acknowledged the sufferings of the Algerian people caused by colonialisation in the Algerian Parliament in 2012 (Le Monde 19/12/2012). Although the promise of rupture was dominant in the initial policies of the Hollande presidency, it soon faced a clash with France's traditional security provider role (the guarantor of stability), as various audiences still saw Paris "*as a source of diplomatic, military and financial pressure on or support for the countries in the region*". (Melly & Darracq 2013, 3 cited in Erforth 2020, 568).

The cognitive priors of colonialism (e.g. *mission civilisatrice*) and neo-colonialism (*Francafrique*) led to a drift from the post-colonial practices through the rupture narrative to a new configuration emphasising support for local ownership and Africanisation. The inconsistency between Africanisation and France's traditional security provider role (active-

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[3] Renforcement des capacités africaines de maintien de la paix.

independent national role concept) was solved through layering, as such new narratives can be introduced alongside or on top of existing ones (without removing preexisting ones).

4.1.3. Drift from Unilateral Interventionism to Multilateralism

Compared to other former colonial powers, France intervened in significantly higher level in its former colonies: following the termination of the French colonial empire in 1962, France has launched more than 35 external operations in Africa (Schmidt 2013, 176). Among these, key operations in cooperation with African forces were in Chad (1983), Somalia (1992-1993), Ruanda (1994) and Ivory Coast (2002) (Fregán 2021, 201). Until the mid-1990s, the frequency of French military interventions reached an average of one a year (Chafer 2005, 10). In the 21st century, France has led 17 military interventions in Africa, and five of them were major interventions started in the last decade in Libya (2011), Côte d'Ivoire (2011), Mali (2013), Central African Republic (2013), Mali (2012) and consecutively in Sahel (2014). Logistics of such interventions were made possible through French overseas military bases in Dakar, Abidjan and Libreville.

France's interventionism in the post-colonial era underlined France's active-independent role as "*the guarantor of stability and a hegemonic power*" in Africa (Brüne, 1994, p. 56). Nevertheless, by the end of the 20th century, there has been a visible change in French interventionism, turning away from solo operations based on bilateral defence agreements towards multilateral operations endorsed by international organisations. Applying Finnemore's binary distinction, the multilateralization of French interventions can be addressed from a qualitative (institutions-based) and a quantitative (coalitions-based) perspective (Finnemore, 2003, 80-81) and both perspectives suggest that the drift towards multilateralism created new path dependencies for France (Chafer et al. 2020).

From the qualitative perspective, securing a multilateral blessing – a formal approval of standing international organisations with mandates in the field of international security (primarily the UNSC, but also regional bodies) – adheres to the norm of legitimate intervention. Following the independence of former French colonies, French interventions were conducted based on bilateral defence agreements and assistance requests from local elites. "*French policymakers had long viewed relations with Francophone Africa as a family affair, and the frequent military interventions intended to maintain stability there appeared ipso facto legitimate when viewed from Paris*" (Recchia 2020, 509). The first time France asked for multilateral approval was for Operation Turqoise in Ruanda in 1994 (UNSC Res. 929,

22/6/1994). Following this example, French interventions in the 21st century all secured multilateral endorsement from the UNSC and /or regional bodies (AU, ECOWAS, Arab League, G5 Sahel), either in advance or within weeks of the initial deployment. (Recchia 2020, 508)

There are multiple complementary explanations on why France started to seek multilateral approval for military interventions. The most relevant of these are the normative precedent of the United States' example in obtaining UNSC Resolution for the 1991 Persian Gulf War; the international disgrace of France's intervention in Rwanda; and the gradual realisation that multilateral backing is necessary to manage opposition from within the target country against French military presence – as a lesson learned from Ivory Coast in 2003. Several scholars have highlighted that the precedent of the US's conduct on the Gulf War –securing UNSC approval for it – set new parameters for a legitimate intervention by socializing liberal democracies into a rules-based international order. (Risse-Kappen 1997; Russett 1994; Cronin 2001; Voeten 2005 cited in Recchia 2020, 509). This normative precedent delegitimized militarily interventions based on purely unilaterally defined strategic interests and empowered the UN by elevating the principle of obtaining a UN Security Council Resolution to legitimize the use of force. Nevertheless, as Recchia argued, it took some time for this principle to take effect, since France continued to intervene in Africa without multilateral approval under the era of President Mitterrand (1981–95) and President Chirac (1995–2007) (Ibid.) France's unilateral intervention in Rwanda led to serious damage in France's international image, triggering its shift towards multilateral conduct. This shift was not immediate though, as Recchia highlighted that after Rwanda, France still deployed troops alone to the Comoros Islands, Cameroon, the CAR, and Côte d'Ivoire. (Ibid, 510). According to Recchia's argument, the turning point was the military intervention to Côte d'Ivoire, which was launched unilaterally in 2002, but in 2003 it obtained multilateral endorsement from the ECOWAS (26/1/2003) and the UNSC (Res. 1464, 4/2/2003). In a context of growing mass popular mobilisation against French military presence in Africa, France shifted towards embracing qualitative multilateralism, realising that "*unilateral interventions could be exploited by nationalist elites within the target state and in neighbouring countries to fuel anti-French sentiments, undermining France's regional influence*". (Ibid)

While qualitative multilateral conduct in French military interventions was mainstreamed in the 21st century, quantitative multilateralism – participation in peacekeeping operations and coalition building for interventions instead of solo operations – started to gain prominence earlier, with the progress of the UN's peacekeeping agenda already in the 1990's. France

realised – explicitly proclaiming it in official documents – that active participation in multilateral peacekeeping operations serves its interest and it "*can contribute to its continued bid for international rank*" (Treacher 2000, 27). Moreover, as the number of French external operations grew, applying multilateral solution, particularly initiating operations within the framework of the EU, and encouraging member state's contribution to burden sharing became a strong motive besides legitimacy-oriented considerations approach.

In fact, besides participation in multilateral peacekeeping initiatives, France also started regionalizing intervention operations through coalitions based on the African Union or the Sahel G5, as well as on the level of European security and defence policy (EU missions and operations, European ad-hoc coalitions). The internationalization of the RECAMP programme in 2002 intended a regionalizing purpose towards both the African and European directions. As part of the institutional development of the African Union (2002) creating an African Standby Force (ASF) became a priority under the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) since 2003 (Bah et al. 2014, 50–55.). RECAMP's purpose was adapted to support creating ASF as a regional capability, seeking legitimacy by "*promoting all initiatives leading to full African autonomy in security matters*" while it was also brought under the umbrella of the EU in 2007, transforming to EURORECAMP (CICDE 2011, 17-18; Haastrup 2010).

France started to show increased preference for proposing multilateral solutions for African security problems within the framework of the European Security and Defence Policy in the early 2000's. As part of this effort, Paris initiated Operation Artemis in the Democratic Republic of Kongo in 2003, as well as EUFOR Chad-CAR in 2008 as EU military operations. This policy direction was paved out by the 1997–2002 military programming law, which "*identified the goal of establishing a more credible European military instrument, to be pursued in partnership with Great Britain*", leading to its implementation in the 1998 Franco-British St. Malo Declaration (Erforth 2020, 266). The direction was reinforced with the adoption of the European Union (EU) strategy for Africa in 2005, as the first initiative to demonstrates the priority of the continent by introducing a cross-pillar approach to EU action in Africa and a basis for coordination on interventions of the Council and the European Commission in Africa (EU Strategy for Africa, 2005). This was followed by the European Commission's call for a "*Euro-African*" strategic partnership, based on strengthening African capacities for conflict prevention and management. (COM/2007/0357) Transferring military responsibilities to the European level was emphasised from the beginning of the Hollande presidency as well, embedded in the larger national debate between supporters of the traditional Franco-African

relationship and those who aimed for updating this affiliation. (Erforth 2020, 564). Nevertheless, practices of involving European partners in France's military activism in Africa as well as initiating missions and operations under the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy has often been translated as France "*using the EU as a means to perpetuate certain national preferences that date back to the colonial period*". (Ibid, 561)

From the cognitive priors of unilateral interventionism and post-colonial dependencies, France drifted towards multilateralism in military interventions (both through securing institutional legitimacy as well as through relying on multilateral frameworks in the execution of operations). This multilateralist disposition outlined a new configuration, featuring the practice of layering, integrating multilateralism in the service of France's pursuit of global standing, merging it with its identity as a puissance d'influence (influential power) on the international stage. Therefore, practices of regionalization (through the Sahel G5) and multilateralization primarily through the EU provided complementary and reinforcing features to France's new configuration in multilateral interventions.

4.1.4. Summary of Prefiguration

The aim of prefiguration analysis was to uncover those interpretive structures which determine narrative fidelity and desirability, as they can influence the resonance of the audience to the emerging narrative. The analysis highlighted master narratives of sovereignty and humanitarianism, rooted in the French Republic's historical identity as heir of enlightenment. It elaborated political myths of the Gaullist consensus, including notions of gloire, grandeur, global rank and exceptionalism. These master narratives and political myths contribute to sustaining France's active-independent national role concept, as well as its state-centric and humanitarian approach in foreign policy. Through historical institutional analysis, the chapter has shown that cognitive priors of colonialism (e.g. *mission civilisatrice*), neo-colonialism (e.g. *Francafrique*) and the practice of unilateral interventions necessitated a drift through a new "rupture" narrative which included emphasising support for local ownership (Africanisation) and adopting multilateralist disposition in military interventions, seeking multilateral legitimacy (qualitative multilateralism) as well as multilateral frameworks for military operations (quantitative multilateralism). The clash between the rupture narrative and France's national role concept resulted in the practice of layering, such as integrating multilateralism in the service of France's pursuit of being an influential power through practices of

regionalisation, while capacity building initiatives facilitated balancing its security provider role with its emphasis on local ownership and Africanisation.
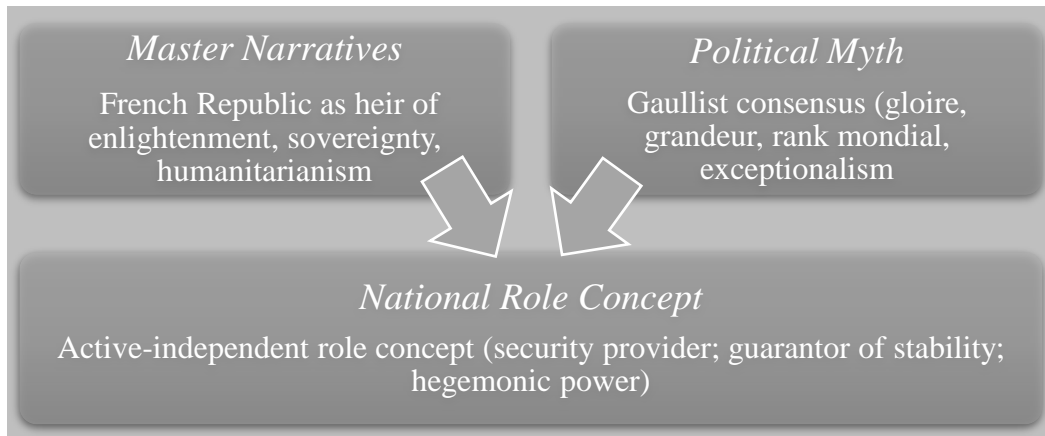
Figure 4. Key Preexisting Interpretive Structures Shaping France's Strategic Narrative. Source: Author's own work.
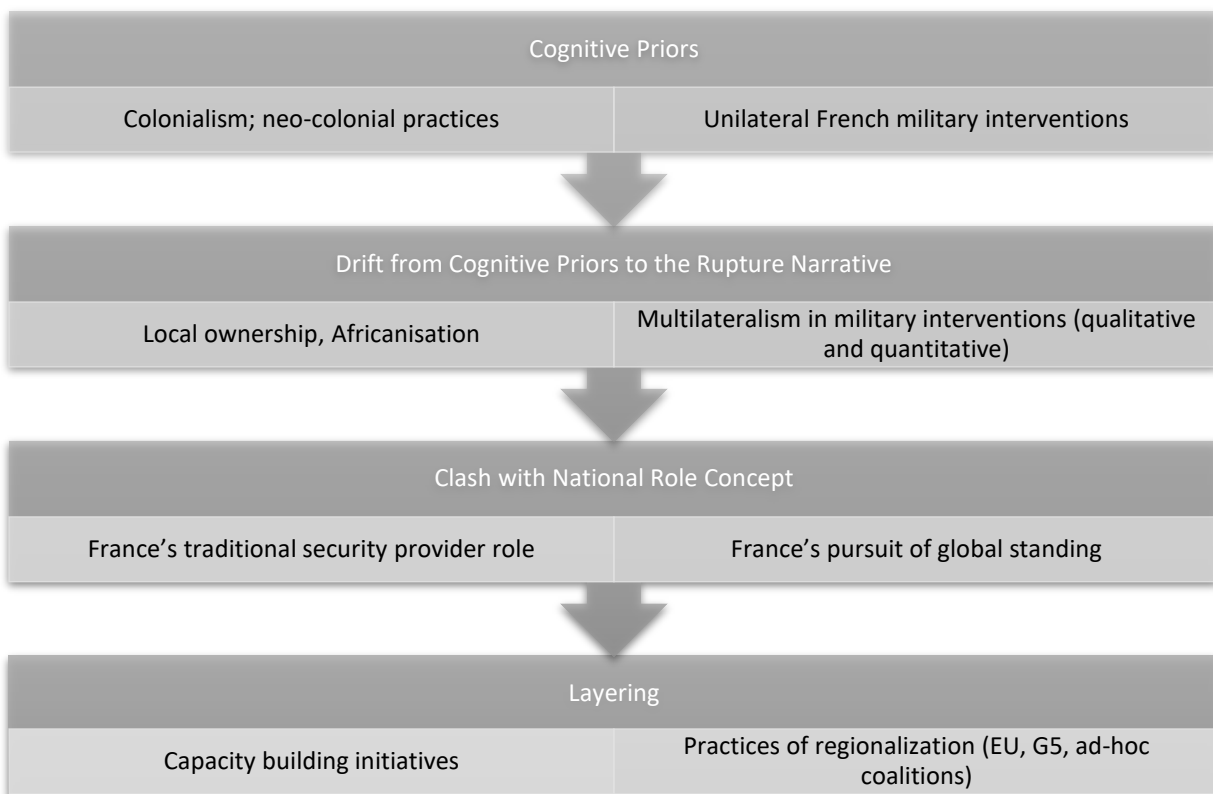
Figure 5. Historical Institutional Analysis of Relevant Interpretive Structures. Source: Author's own work.

4.2. CONFIGURATION

This chapter addresses the following questions:

- *What are key purpose and prospect frames in the narrative?*
- *How do purpose frames resonate with interpretive structures identified in the prefiguration stage?*
- *To what extent is there consistency and clarity in the semantic configuration of the narrative?*
- *How does prospect framing change along the narrative's evolution?*

Configuration analysis identifies frame configurations and occurrences of frame alignment along key empirical periods. The empirical periods cover key junctures in the evolution of the intervention, and frame configurations are highlighted based on the conceptually guided analytical framework, while the chapter also addresses practices of frame alignment (amplification, extension, bridging, transformation).

The analysed period starts from the pre-intervention discourse from May 2012, and it ends in August 2022, with the eventual withdrawal of French forces from Mali. Configuration is analysed in four key periods based on empirical deliberations, as these stages can outline the evolution of the narrative in a longitudinal study: 1) the narrative in the pre-intervention phase (2012); 2) the narrative during Operation Serval's evolving timeline (2013-2014); 3) the narrative along the transformation from Operation Serval to Operation Barkhane under Hollande's presidency from 2014 to 2017; 4) the narrative during Operation Barkhane under Macron's presidency from 2017 to 2022.

Semantic analysis in conducted through the proposed Framework for Purpose Frame Analysis (*See: Research Design, p. 61*). Along the key empirical stages of the case study, diagnostic and prognostic frames as well as status and role frames are identified and complemented with analysis on prospect framing while identifying practices of frame alignment. Based on its results, the configuration chapter presents a comprehensive assessment on the narrative's consistency and clarity, its resonance with interpretive structures from the prefiguration stage, as well as an assessment on how expectations regarding prospect framing are met in the narrative.

4.2.1. Pre-intervention (2012)

During the pre-intervention discourse, France' narrative regarding the situation in Mali and the preparation of a UNSC Resolution was elaborated in various press conferences and declarations by President Hollande. The pre-intervention narrative was analysed in 10 speeches which focused on Mali and the situation in the Sahel between May and December 2012. They include interventions at the NATO Chicago Summit, the UN in New York, the Western Mediterranean Forum Summit in Malta, as well as bilateral Press Conferences with heads of African states (Benin, Niger, Cote's Ivoire) and the UN Secretary General, furthermore, a presidential interview by France 4, TV5Monde and RFI.

Concerning *Diagnostic frames*, the threat of terrorism and its potential repercussions were highlighted, with the aspects of international threat to the world (26/09/2012 – A) with recurring reference to issue-linkages with organized crime activities in "*all kinds of trafficking, drug trafficking, arms trafficking, human trafficking.*" (25/09/2012; 26/09/2012 – A; 05/10/2012; 11/10/2012) This pre-intervention discourse featured frame extension on the geographic scope, emphasising a regional perspective, the neighbouring states of Mali, "*the entire Sahel zone*" and occasionally mentioning West Africa and the Maghreb. Starting from Mali through Africa, the threat frame was extended to the whole World. "*The African continent is the closest today to Europe; what is happening in Mali in reality concerns the whole world. Not only the Economic Community of West African States, Africa as a whole but also Europe, France and the world*" (29/05/2012). The impact of the Sahelian crisis on the security of Europe was addressed recurringly (11/10/2012; 05/10/2012). Such geographic threat extensions were adapted to the various primary audiences: at bilateral press conferences with the president of the African Union and with heads of states and governments, geographic frames contain more regional and country references (Mali, Niger, Mauritania, Sahel) while reference to the risks to France was highlighted in the interview to French media (France 4, TV5Monde and RFI).

The most important *Prognostic frames* focused on the goal of Mali regaining *its constitutional order, its territorial integrity and peace.* Hollande applied frame-bridging through issue-linkages by emphasising a complex, integrated approach which governs the relationship of France with Africa, building on the principles of good governance, economic development, stability and security (29/05/2012; 11/06/2012). The security-development nexus also appeared in reference to the connection between Areva's presence in Niger and the need for stability and

security in Africa (11/06/2012).[4] The narrative also featured frame transformation through decoupling specific issue-linkages. This was shown in the intention to treat separately the Areva hostage crisis from France's policy objectives on Mali, arguing that aiming at the release of the hostages and obtaining a Security Council resolution on Mali are separate issues (26/09/2012/ – B; 11/10/2012). Regarding the question if by declaring war on al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) France could "*import terrorism*", Hollande negated such possibility, arguing that by letting AQIM prosper in the Sahel, it poses a risk to France through French nationals returning to their country with potentially terrorist aims, therefore "*preventively cutting terrorists' route*" was a necessary policy. (11/10/2012).

Concerning *Status frames*, frames highlighting the multilateral legitimacy of the intervention and African ownership were dominant in the narrative. At this stage of the narrative, France's declared that key objectives – regaining Mali's constitutional order, its territorial integrity and peace in line with the goal of eradicating terrorism – were contingent on the decision of multilateral bodies. President Hollande emphasised that France would support all initiatives based on a Security Council resolution, which gives international legality to any policy on Mali. Besides the Security Council authorization, the role of ECOWAS and the African Union was frequently emphasised as key implementing actors, whom France can support. The narrative urged the international community to decide on Mali, calling for their responsibility, while addressing France's consideration to join a "*peacekeeping mission*" strictly based on the request of the relevant international and regional bodies (29/05/2012). Besides multilateralism, a key status frame in the narrative on Mali was the emphasis on African leadership and ownership in taking initiative, "*settling the question of Mali*" and organizing an intervention, since "*it is up to the Africans to lead the intervention and the reconquest of the North*" (26/09/2012B; 29/05/2012; 11/10/2012). Complementarily with multilateral and Africanisation frames, the historical, cultural, linguistic, and economic links between Africa and Europe were emphasised, together with the collective responsibility of Europeans and Africans. In the wake of the Eurocrisis, the dependence of Africans "*linked by currency*" through the CFA was also acknowledged, among development initiatives (29/05/2012; 2012/05/29).

Complementarily to highlighting the need for African leadership, France's *role* was assigned as being "*loyal to these partners*" by supporting African initiatives (11/10/2012). Such support

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[4] Areva S. A. is a French multinational group specializing in nuclear power. In 2022 the French state has a 92.2% ownership stake in the company. Before 2017 the French state's ownership stake was somewhat lower but still over 80% (Areva, 2017).

included "*giving them all the elements of international legality*" by facilitating the adoption of a UNSC resolution, as well as the readiness to support an African-led intervention logistically, politically and materially (Hollande 09/10/2012;) 11/10/2012; 26/09/2012 B). Engaging French troops in an intervention was categorically excluded: "*There will be no men on the ground, no French troops engaged*" as the President argued that France will not intervene in place of Africans, but it can give material support, training (11/10/2012). France's responsibility in this supportive role was reasoned with value frames, highlighting that there could be a resolution "*not in the name of France, but in the name of peace, in the name of the rights of human beings*" (11/10/2012). The narrative also applied emotional frames emphasising human suffering and humanitarian needs (*severed hands, raped women, displaced children, slaughtered men, destroyed cultural heritage)*, which made it "*impossible for France to stay inactive.*" (26/09/2012)

Considering *prospect framing*, loss frames were dominant in the pre-intervention narrative, calling for attention and action in Mali, emphasising the negative prospects of any delay in stepping up against terrorists. In reference to proposals (particularly from Algeria) advocating for further negotiations and dialogue, Hollande argued that "*any waste of time would be an additional complication*" and "*there can't be any delays that would be requested to find solutions that cannot, by definition, be sought with forces that want to spread terrorism, not only in Mali, but throughout the region*" (26/09/2012 – A). Hollande also argued that political dialogue with non-terrorist political groups in northern Mali can happen, but it "*must not be a delay factor, neither of the resolution of the Security Council, nor of the operation when it is made legal and therefore legitimate*" (05/10/2012). Such urgency frames were complemented with the loss prospects conveyed through the extended geographic threat featuring the Sahel region, Europe and the World.

To summarize, during the examined pre-intervention phase key threat and security frames focused on terrorism and its potential geographic expansion (frame extension) and issue linkages with organized crime activities (frame-bridging). Security objectives aimed at securing Mali's territorial integrity through an integrated approach, taking into consideration the security-development nexus. Considering norm and value framing, the importance of international legitimacy was emphasised at multilateral platforms, urging the engagement of the international community. The narrative highlighted the vital role of Africans in leading and taking initiative, while France's role was framed as being ready to assist in a supportive posture, backing Malian forces. Loss frames were dominant in prospect framing, highlighting the

negative consequences of delays. Frames emphasising Mali's territorial integrity, sovereignty as well as the emphasis on human suffering provided resonance with master narratives of the French Republic on sovereignty and the defence of human rights, as well as with France's active-independent role concept as being compelled to act in line with its values. Frames on the need for proper multilateral legitimacy, African leadership and France's supportive role reinforced the drift from cognitive priors (i.e. colonialism, unilateral interventions).

4.2.2. Operation Serval (2013-2014)

The narrative during Operation Serval was analysed in 32 speeches by President François Hollande, addressing the intervention in Mali and the security situation in the Sahel. Analysed texts include declarations made from Paris and Tulle regarding France's intervention as well as press conferences from Brussels, Rabat, Warsaw, Athens, Dubai, and Berlin, during a World Bank conference and a meeting with the UN Secretary General addressing the situation in Mali. Speeches from visits in the Sahel region, particularly at Bamako and Timbuktu as well as joint press conferences from N'Djamena and Niamey were also included in the corpus.

Concerning the *Diagnostic frames* of the narrative during Operation Serval, the geographic extension of the threat theatre was continuously emphasised (through tripartite sets listing Mali – West Africa – Europe or Africa – the West – the Whole World) highlighting that terrorism has no borders (17/01/2013; 21/03/2014). Compared to frames focusing on Mali, France, West Africa and the World, frames focusing exclusively on the Sahel region were less frequent at the beginning of the intervention (08/11/2013). References to Europe, European countries and Europeans were frequent in the discourse, and Mali's proximity, the potential consequences of the conflict, the threat of terrorism on Europe was emphasised. In connection with the operation, the security of thousands of French nationals in Mali was highlighted in the early speeches (11/01/2013, 15/01/2013). Speaking before home audience, Hollande emphasised that besides saving Mali and the entire Sahel from the grip of terrorism, the intervention was needed since there was "*also a threat to our security*" (24/05/2013). Safeguarding French nationals in Mali and fighting against terrorism in general were used as diagnostic frames from the beginning of the intervention (12/01/2013; 02/02/2013 – A). Justifying the operation, the death of the hostages in Algeria was also referenced as an additional argument for taking action against terrorism (19/01/2013). Issue-linkages were also continuously repeated concerning terrorist groups' interests and activities in trafficking drugs, humans, weapons (15/01/2013; 17/01/2013; 15/05/2013 – A; 08/11/2013).

Concerning *Prognostic frames,* the aim of the intervention was to stop terrorist attacks, to secure Bamako and as an ultimate goal, to allow Mali to recover its territorial integrity (15/01/2013; 16/01/2013; 17/01/2013). Following the first successes of the operation, post-conflict reconstruction (rebuilding public services, cultural sites) and development related frames started to appear in the message, and they continued as the intervention progressed (02/02/2013 – A; 15/05/2013; 17/05/2013; 05/06/2013; 19/09/2013). By June 2013, organizing elections (on the scheduled date, without disturbance) appeared as a new objective for the operation, embedded in the broader frame of "*regaining the security of Mali*" (09/06/2013), while Hollande also voiced that "*Operation Serval means that we can ensure the Malians' transition to democracy*" (30/09/2013). The consolidation of democracy was embedded in a security-development-climate nexus (in connection with the World Bank's aid policy in the Sahel) (08/11/2013). This tripartite frame of security, global warming and development was also repeated at the conference of African heads of states in December 2013.

Concerning *Status frames*, the legality of the intervention was emphasised consistently, by referring to the invitation of the President of Mali; to the support of West African states, regional and multilateral bodies such as the African Union and ECOWAS; and to the international mandate from the United Nations (11/01/2013; 19/01/2013; 15/01/2013; 19/09/2013 – A; 19/09/2013 – B). Hollande emphasised that "*France is not alone*" meaning that actions taken are conducted with multilateral support, with the support of Europeans and working jointly with the Africans, as France "*acts with its allies, its partners, and in particular Europeans*" (08/01/2014; 17/01/2013; 19/01/2013). Cooperation between Africa and Europe was highlighted frequently, praising the solidarity of "*Europe*" and "*Europeans*" and highlighting their material contribution (humanitarian aid and training) and political support to the intervention, as a proof of multilateral legitimacy, as well as a reference point in calling for their further support in joint capacity building (15/01/2013; 16/01/2013; 17/01/2013; 19/01/2013; 02/02/2013 – A; 19/09/2013 – A). Such proofs of operational multilateralism were particularly emphasised before home audience, with arguments that crisis response and external military operations must be a joint effort with the European Union, the United Kingdome, and Germany as well as with other EU member states (Belgium, Italy, Spain, Poland, V4 were highlighted) (24/05/2013).

Besides multilateralism, empowering frames regarding the role of Africans ("*Africans are their own defender and protector*") were emphasised throughout the intervention (15/01/2013). Following the first operational successes, Hollande emphasised that: "*it was not France who*

liberated Mali, it was the Africans who themselves liberated themselves from the terrorism and bondage" (05/06/2013). Saluting Malians and Africans' participation in reconquesting territories and praising their "*fight until their new independence*" was tailored to the cognitive priors of the Malian audience, highlighting that this time (as in reference to previous struggles for independence in the colonial era) the fight is for the full restoration of Mali's territorial integrity from terrorist influence (02/02/2013 – A). Emphasising respect, democracy, transparency in Franco-African relations, Hollande argued that this time independence will originate not from the "*victory over the colonial system, but from victory over terrorism, intolerance and fanaticism*" (02/02/2013 – B).

Regarding *Role frames*, the unilateral intervention was framed in a way that emphasised Frances' duty "*to act on behalf of the international community*" (Hollande 15/01/2013). This was further reinforced through references to the UN's lack of action and "*a certain inertia of the international community.*" (15/05/2013). Compared to the pre-intervention discourse, France's special responsibility to Mali was highlighted. This responsibility was claimed through a sui generis frame "*France has a special responsibility because it is France*" (15/01/2013); and with the argument that it is a power with the capacity to intervene ("*simply because it [France] was able to do so by having troops which were not far away, and which could be immediately mobilized. That's what we did*") (22/01/2013; 15/01/2013). France's exceptionalism in taking responsibility was paralleled with arguments on the elevated French global status and recognition in the eye of the international community (15/01/2013; 24/05/2013). Particularly in front of home audience, Hollande argued that taking responsibility in Mali generated respect and praise throughout and beyond Africa, and this "*useful*" intervention resulted in the strengthened influence of France (08/01/2014; 30/09/2013). The framing of an elevated status and increased recognition resonates with the political myth of grandeur and the active-independent national role concept presenting France as a global independent power, with a capacity to act according to its interests and commitments. France's role in preserving peace was also linked to its status as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, and a founding member of the European Union (24/05/2013; 29/04/2013; 08/01/2013). Resonating with master narratives of the French Republic, it was argued that France "*is not just a country closed in on itself*" but a country with values and principles, "*a country which has a message to deliver to the world (...) the message of freedom, legality, fraternity*" (19/09/2019 – B). Frances' role was framed as being determined by acting "*in the name of the Republic*" in the "*service of the values that unite us, service of the Republic*"

(19/07/2014; 02/02/2013 – B). Announcing the delivery of hostages, Hollande elevated the reference to the Republic by emphasising its sacral omnipresence: "*Never lose hope, the Republic is always there, always united*" (29/10/2013). France's commitment to act against human rights violations ("*the suffering of women and children*") (05/06/2013; 19/09/2019 – B), against "*fanaticism, barbarism and terrorism*", and to act based on values and ideals such as democracy, human dignity, peace, and sovereignty of Mali also resonates with master narratives of the French Republic *(*02/02/2013 – A; 10/05/2013; 06/03/2013). The narrative also included frames emphasising the protection of cultural heritage as "*a duty of solidarity*" (11/01/2013; 02/02/2013 – A). These frames portrayed a heroic role for France, as a chivalrous defender of the vulnerable while Mali was framed as a "*friendly*" yet "*one of the poorest countries*" which is a "*victim of terrorism*" (19/01/2013).

Concerning the nexus of France and Africa, France was framed as a benevolent, proud steward enabling the Africans through capacity building to provide for their own security (15/07/2013 – A; 15/07/2013 – B). In this key frame, French troops are portrayed in a supportive, accompanying and training role (19/09/2013 – B). France's unilateral operation was initially framed as a temporary facilitator in advance of the African capacities, with the perspective that as soon as the proposed African force is able to carry out the mission, "*we will only have to support it*" (13/01/2013;15/01/2013) The creation of this African force was also linked to the prospected duration of the French intervention: "*since there will be an African force in the coming days and weeks (…) France has no vocation to stay in Mali*" (15/01/2013) .

Compared to the pre-intervention discourse, a new emotional frame emerged on Mali being a friend of France, who is "*with you*", "*at your side*", and "*proud of you*" (02/02/2013 – A; 11/01/2013; 12/01/2013; 15/01/2013; 16/01/2013). Parallel to the notion of friendship, frames of "*fraternity*" (15/07/2013 – A) "*brothers in arm*" (13/07/2013) and "*blood bond*" (14/08/2014) appeared too. These references emerged predominantly in connection with "*an act of reparation*", as France "*pays a debt to Mali*" with the intervention, for those Malian soldiers who fought and died for the freedom of France in the World War I and II. (2013/07/15; 02/02/2013 – A; 02/02/2013 – B; 05/06/2013; 15/07/2013 – A; 19/09/2013 – A)

The negation of any ulterior interests behind the intervention was consequently repeated in the narrative, reminding the public that France in this operation "*is not pursuing any particular interest*" and "*there is no French interest, except our nationals in Mali*" (15/01/2013; 12/01/2013; 11/01/2013; 02/02/2013 – A). Addressing cognitive priors based on the French colonialist heritage, Hollande argued that "*It is not for us to conquer a territory, to increase our*

influence or to seek I do not know what commercial or economic interest. That time is over" (19/01/2013). Hollande also referred to the Malian public's positive reaction to the French intervention as a proof of no illegitimate interests (19/09/2013 – B). Meanwhile, issues of economic and military cooperation were addressed only in limited instances, during the bilateral state visits in Niger, indirectly linking the protection and security provision of Areva (and other French enterprises) to the conflict in Mali (11/06/2012; 10/05/2013). But even in these instances, the emphasis was on the benefits of cooperation (e.g. *"spin-offs for Niger's economy"*) rather than on security concerns.

Similarly to the pre-intervention phase, in *prospect framing* the risk on non-action was emphasised in the beginning of Operation Serval, particularly in reference to questions on the consequences of declaring war on AQIM, and its potential repercussions for France. Hollande emphasised that: *"There are always risks when fighting terrorism, but the worst risk is to let it thrive"* as terrorism overtaking a country could grow, with access to money and weapons from organized crime activities, therefore, the narrative emphasised that the risk was greater if France did nothing (15/01/2013). The frame of *"preventing a conflict being imported to France"* was also highlighted with regards to the purpose of the intervention (18/07/2013). The delay frame was also used to highlight the averted prospect of loss after the first six months of the operation: *"Any delay would have been disastrous. Any hesitation would have been tragic. Any inertia would have been fatal"* (05/06/2013). In retelling the story of the intervention, the threatening prospect of a *"terror offensive which could conquer the whole of Mali"* (19/09/2013 – A) was emphasised **"***if there had been no military intervention in Mali, terrorist barbarism would have occupied this country, and doubt would have settled in all West Africa"* (13/07/2013).

Parallelly to loss frames, the beginning of the operation also featured *gain frames* with the prospect of success, declaring *"complete confidence in the effectiveness of our forces and in the success of the mission"* (12/01/2013) as well as a message of victory over terrorism and the prospect of a *"new independence"* (02/02/2013 – A). As the operation proceeded, swift successes were highlighted, emphasising the effectiveness in liberating key cities, and stopping the terrorist offensive, giving purpose to the sacrifices of French soldiers', as *"martyrs"* and *"heroes"* in service of operational advances which led *"to the victory against terrorism"* (28/01/2013; 02/02/2013 – A; 15/07/2013 – A; 19/09/2013 – A). Building on that, preserving successes became a further key frame through emphasis on *"preventing the return of terrorists"* (04/04/2013; 15/05/2013; 08/01/2014). There was also a gradual extension of gain frames, starting from the military successes of the intervention (29/04/2013; 10/05/2013) as it was

argued that these can lead to more, contributing to "*democracy, elections, security, the quality of development*" (10/05/2013). Operation Serval's success frame was accentuated as "*an operation that was successful in every way, from start to finish*", allowing elections, transition and dialogue (13/07/2013). The combination of military and political successes of the intervention were framed as "*a double victory*", "*a military victory against terrorists, but also a political victory*" obtained by "*the Africans and France*" (18/06/2013). Following the presidential elections, the volume of frames projecting victory increased, such as "*great victory for Mali*", "*all of Mali liberated and sovereign over all of its territory*" were used, with energetic verbs "*we have won this war, we have driven out the terrorists, we have secured the North and finally, and it was not the easiest, you managed to organize elections*" (19/09/2013 – B). The rapidity of success was also highlighted by Hollande, who argued that "*I don't think there is any operation that could have had this success in such a short time. Between January 11 and on August 11, to be able to restore to a country, Mali, the integrity of its territory, to secure the population and lead to today a democratic consecration allowing transition, reconciliation, and renewal*" (19/09/2013 – A). Concerning France's global recognition, mobilizing international cooperation ("*global unity*") and funding for Mali's reconstruction was framed as a political success (15/05/2013) as well as gaining international recognition for France through the success of Operation Serval (08/01/2014).

All in all, the narrative during Operation Serval kept and continued threat and security frames from the pre-intervention phase, such as frame extension on the geographic scope of the threat, frame bridging through linking terrorism and organised crime activities, and frame amplifications in objective of securing Mali's territorial integrity. As new diagnostic frames, the security of French nationals in Mali and hostage crises were highlighted as causes for intervention. Frame extensions contributed to new prognostic frames, such as eradicating terrorism was highlighted as a goal (a broader objective compared to restoring the territorial integrity of Mali); and post-conflict reconstruction tasks, such as organising elections and securing democracy were introduced as necessary follow-ups to operational advances. As continuous norm and value frames, the international legitimacy (and legality) of the intervention was emphasised, as well as multilateral support behind the French intervention. As a new status frame, France's increased global status was linked to acting on behalf of the international community (as frame bridging), resonating with the political myth of grandeur, global rank, and exceptionalism. Continuing frames from the pre-intervention narrative, African leadership and France's supportive role was emphasised, with a special frame

amplification suggesting a "*new independence*" of Africans through fighting terrorists, while the duration of the operation was linked to setting up African capacities. As new role frames, the master narratives of the Republic and its values were reflected in humanitarian frames. Highlighting the drift from cognitive priors, the narrative explicitly denied hidden interests of the intervention, emphasising historic links and friendship between Mali and France. Continuously with the pre-intervention narrative, the risk of non-action and delays were retrospectively emphasised. A key loss frame centred on the threat of terrorism but as the operation advanced, it adapted to preserving military successes and preventing the return of terrorists. Threat frames were also balanced with gain frames ("*double victory*") projecting the success of the mission and its positive political externalities (democracy, elections, development).

4.2.3. From Serval to Barkhane under President Hollande (2014-2017)

In this section, the analysis focuses on the transformation of Operation Serval to Operation Barkhane based on 14 speeches given by President Hollande. They included declarations and press conferences from state visits to the Sahel, in Niamey (Niger), N'Djamena (Chad) and in Gao and Bamako (Mali). Furthermore, the narrative analysis of this section covers speeches issued on French foreign and defence policy, declarations on bilateral relations with the Sahelian countries (Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger), and tributes to fallen French soldiers.

In the transformation from Serval to Barkhane during the spring and summer of 2014, the emphasis was on providing a clear distinction between Operation Serval as "*the war of liberation*" for Mali, and the following counter-terrorism phase evolving into Operation Barkhane (21/03/2014; 07/04/2014). Minister of Defense Le Drian declared that "*The war of liberation in Mali is over. It has been won*" and that "*Mali has regained a sense of pride, sovereignty and democratic institutions by holding elections*" (21/03/2014; 07/04/2014). Complementing such success frames, the narrative continued with the argument that *"the fight against terrorism persists, it is not finished, therefore around thousand French forces will stay in Mali*", since the "*long term objective is counter-terrorism*" as "*jihadist groups have not stopped just because we won the war in Mali*", and "*there are terrorist circuits which continue to operate from the Atlantic Ocean to the Horn of Africa*" (21/03/2014). It was announced that the operation continues with a group of 3,000 soldiers, coordinated by a single headquarters, conducting counter-terrorism operations from Gao, but also from Niamey and Ndjamena, with the objective of preventing jihadist groups from reconstituting themselves (07/04/2014).

Meanwhile, the narrative also carefully differentiated Operation Barkhane from the parallelly ongoing Operation Sangaris in the Central African Republic, where interreligious conflict demanded an initially unilateral peace enforcing mission (18/07/2014). Sangaris was described as a difficult operation, created to prevent massacres between distinct populations, while Barkhane was described as "*lighter*" having its profile in counterterrorism (18/07/2014).

As *Diagnostic frames*, direct threat from terrorist groups was emphasised through the kidnapping of French nationals on the ground (19/07/2014 – A; 18/07/2014/). As an indirect threat, the narrative continued the geographic threat extension frames, as the focus from Mali shifted to neighbouring countries hit by terrorism, emphasising that crises cannot be considered specific or regional, but global and international ((21/10/2015 – B; 28/08/2014). Addressing French troops based in Niger, Hollande highlighted that security is non-detachable between France, Niger, and West Africa: "*What can happen in Niger can affect our own security, our own interests, our own people. When you are here ensuring the security of Niger, you also ensure the security of France (...) preventing a conflict from being imported into France*" (18/07/2014). Threat framing highlighted prospects of losses, as the consequences of regional destabilization was also linked to terrorist threats through migration: "*if we let the terrorists thrive in that part of the African continent, there will also be consequences in Europe and France*" (19/07/2014 – A; 18/07/2014). A dominant frame was introduced in emphasising the notion of *"the same fight"* for the French audience, meaning that fighting terrorism abroad allows France to fight terrorism at home (13/01/2017; 18/04/2017) and emphasising for international audience that „*we all have been hit (...) in France as well as in Africa, in Brussels as well as in African capitals: Ouagadougou, Bamako, Grand-Bassam near Abidjan*". (29/04/2015). The narrative thereby presented an overarching explanation and connecting various conflict theatres: "*the terrorists who attack our own territory and act on our own soil, are linked with those who are in the Levant, in Iraq, in Syria but also here in the Sahelo-Saharan strip. It's the same fight, it's the same issue and by coming here to act on behalf of France in Operation Barkhane, you ensure the safety of the French*" (18/04/2017).

Concerning *Prognostic frames*, the operational objectives of Barkhane were gradually enfolded: besides directly fighting terrorist groups in Mali, the objective was recurringly linked to supporting the Malian army in regaining full control over its territory (as a reversal from the clear distinction between the end of the war of liberation and the new counterterrorism phase) (13/01/2017) as well as supporting MINUSMA in its activities (29/04/2015; 13/01/2017). The need for adapting responses to the challenges of operational speed and effectiveness were

highlighted in light of the "spreading, multiplying threat" (19/07/2014 – A). The new thread in the narrative was centred on reorganisation frames, providing prospects of operational rationalisation and efficiency. This reorganisation of force structure in West Africa covered 3000 forces present in 5 countries and a command structure in N'djamena (18/07/2014). The narrative highlighted rationalising the French presence with "*a little more soldiers here and a little less elsewhere*", meaning that *"men who no longer need to be in Mali can be put on other bases"* with the aim of increasing operational efficiency, becoming more mobile, more responsive and having more reliable information through a diffuse presence closer to possible threat areas (19/07/2014 – A); 19/07/2014 – B; 19/07/2014 – C).

Concerning *Status frames*, the narrative during the transition to Operation Barkhane featured less references to the legality of the operation. Compared to the emphasis on multilateral legitimacy (e.g. UN resolution) during Serval, this was less prominent in Barkhane. Instead, references to the "global, general interest" and crises in neighbouring states[5] were to "justify French presence in Chad" in "a relationship based on security, in the interest of West Africa" (19/07/2014 – C) 19/07/2014 – A). Operation Barkhane was also reasoned with the need for "*protecting and respecting the agreements made with the countries of the region*" (21/10/2015 – B). Answering questions regarding the future of French military presence, Hollande referred back to the legitimacy provided for Operation Serval through the request of the Malian authorities for the French intervention. He also linked the duration of French presence to the decision of African countries and emphasised that France is training African forces as well as conducting mixed patrols of French and local forces (14/01/2017). Supporting MINUSMA was also framed as supporting the UN, which allowed further (albeit weak) associations with multilateral legitimacy (29/04/2015; 13/01/2017). Compared to qualitative multilateralism, frames highlighting quantitative multilateralism in Operation Barkhane were consequently continued, with references to local forces (e.g. training of the Malian army) as well as to working together with European partners (21/10/2015 – A; 13/01/2017). Continuously with Operation Serval, frames of African ownership were present in Operation Barkhane, which was argued to be "*an organization to support Africans, enabling them to ensure their own safety*" (18/07/2014; 13/01/2017). Hollande emphasised that setting up the command structure in N'Djamena happened according to "*the will of Chad*" and with the full support of President Deby (19/07/2014 – C). The cooperative and supportive role of French troops with regards to African counterparts was maintained in framing, as Hollande emphasised that G5 countries

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[5] Darfur, South Sudan, Central African Republic, Boko Haram in Nigeria, South Libya

must organise their own safety, and France supports them at their request, through French troops who are "*doing a great and beautiful support mission*" which is "*in perfect osmosis*" with the respective armies (14/01/2015; 05/04/2016; 18/07/2014). Apart from these references though, frames of African ownership were more disperse, as the emphasis was put on the practical adaptation of France's military presence which could guarantee their success in the region.

Therefore, as *Role frames*, France's security provider role was strongly emphasised during Operation Barkhane: "*France will always be present, whenever there is a risk, when there is a resurgence of terrorism, to ensure security and stability*" (21/10/2015 – B). Leading the cooperation of the G5 countries through Barkhane being at the disposal of the G5 countries in preventive action, intervention and ensuring the security of "*the entire region*" (West-Africa) highlighted France's security provider role (28/08/2014; 05/04/2016; (13/01/2017). Operation Barkhane's contribution to ensuring the conduct of the Algiers agreement also framed the role of France as a key actor providing conditions for reconciliation through organising joint patrols (13/01/2017; 14/01/2017). France's security provider role was embedded in frames reflecting France's active-independent role concept based on its historic values and principles, "*bounding French identity and determining collective destiny.*" (18/07/2014; 29/04/2015; 14/01/2017) The frame of acting in the name of the values of the Republic resonated with key French master narratives, as well as emphasising universal values of freedom, democracy, pluralism, dignity, equality, which made it "*impossible to remain indifferent or a spectator when faced with threats*" (14/01/2015). Such behaviour „*would not be consistent with France's history, and even less so with our status as a permanent member of the Security Council. It would not be compatible with our best interests and with our vocation as a great country of values. This is the meaning of our foreign policy: to act for the peace and security of the world.*" (28/08/2014) The service of such universal values as frames were reinforced during visits at the troops on the ground (13/01/2017). In the event of the death of "*a minor [who was] killed in a combat operation*", the narrative resorted to frames on the difficulty of the mission and the preceding death of a French soldier in the area of the operation, while it also rejected the idea of selfish French interests in Mali: "*What we do in Mali, we do not do it to serve the slightest interest. We have nothing to hide. We are simply concerned with serving a cause that is that of freedom which is that of the integrity of the Malian territory*" (14/01/2017). Furthermore, the narrative compared French operational conduct with other theatres of operations, highlighting that in the case of the minor's death, an investigation was initiated by the French Ministry of Defence based on "*France's desire to be attentive to civilian populations*", since France "*do not want to*

give anything to these terrorists as a pretext or as a justification". (14/01/2017). Hollande argued that he also expressed this desire in Iraq, *"for Iraq and for Syria [that such attention to the civilian population] sets us apart from other behaviours*". (Ibid) This framing implicitly resonates with master narratives of exceptionalism, and France's independent role concept. Complementing the security provider role, the "*friendship*" and *"exceptional relations"* frames were continued in the narrative with reference to France's relations with countries of the region (14/01/2017). The notion of *friendship* was used in security, development and economic dimensions as well (05/04/2016; 14/01/2017; 31/03/2017). Historic relations and brotherhood between Mali and France were emphasised as their "*unwavering solidarity*" in the fight against terrorism. (2015/10/21 – A; 2015/10/21 – B). The first French casualty from Operation Serval, the death of Damien Boiteux was referenced recurringly, embodying the sacrifice of French soldiers to Mali's security "*as a symbol of friendship and dedication*". (2015/10/21 – A; 2015/10/21 – B; 13/01/2017) Frames suggesting altruistic sacrifices were continuous in the narrative: „*Africa, despite its assets, is a continent threatened by insecurity. Whenever a friendly country is a victim of terrorism, we stand by it. Whenever it is also a victim of a risk of confrontation that could lead to massacres or even genocide, we are also at its side, without asking for anything in return, without any idea of quid pro quo or mercantile interest*" (28/08/2014). France's comprehensive military, economic and political support to Mali was emphasised as well as its priority in French development policy. (2015/10/21 – A). Continuously with Operation Serval, hidden economic interests were rebuffed, but development issues and economic stakes were addressed during state visits to Niger and Chad (18/07/2014). During such occasions, the "*special link with Niger, through Areva*" was highlighted along with the need to forge a mutually beneficial agreement between the French uranium mining company and Niger. (18/07/2014). Threats and kidnappings of Areva employees were addressed as well, as there was an emphasis on building a balanced economic cooperation, with returns for Niger's economy in the "*interest of all*" (18/07/2014; 19/07/2014 – B). Besides Areva, other the French companies (e.g. Bollore Group's train construction) and the French Development Agency's presence were addressed as well (18/07/2014; 19/07/2014 – B) In Chad, Hollande also talked about the need to express French interests *"in economic terms, because this country has resources: oil resources, the Chinese take care of them, but also agricultural and mining resources. So we have to make sure to be there"* (19/07/2014 – A). Along the economic interests, Hollande also addressed the broader cultural importance of Francophonie in his speech at the Nigerian Embassy of France, highlighting that the work of

French expats is essential to deepening Nigeriens' trust in France, so that Francophonie can develop (18/07/2014).

Concerning *prospect frames*, Operation Barkhane was introduced with increasing frames on the risks of importing terrorists to France (18/07/2014), as well as reasoning the French military's presence in Mali with the aim of "*preventing terrorist actions*" (19/07/2014 – A). As a gain prospect, the frame of neutralising jihadists was used more often from 2014, highlighting headcount numbers as proof of progress: "*In four months, we have neutralized about forty jihadists in northern Mali and in the Adrar des Ifoghas…*" (07/04/2014). This pattern continued under Operation Barkhane, highlighting sums of progress in hindsight: "*Thus, in 2014, last year, 200 jihadists including a few important leaders were neutralized by our troops.*" (14/01/2015) Besides such headcounts, announcements of killing high ranking leaders of various terrorist groups – a such as Hamada Ag-Hama (AQIM Katiba) Ibrahim Ah Inawalen (Ansar Dine) – also contributed with gain frames to the narrative. The reorganisation frames of Operation Barkhane also featured gain prospects, emphasising operational efficiency, higher mobility, grater responsivity and increasing capacity to faster reactions by having more reliable information through a diffuse presence closer to possible threat areas (19/07/2014 – A; 18/07/2014; 19/07/2014 – B). Economic cooperation was framed as mutually beneficial opportunity before French audience, prospects of competition and potential losses to Chinese investors in resources were also articulated (18/07/2014; 19/07/2014 – B).

To summarize, the transformation from Serval to Barkhane featured continuous threat and security frames, such as highlighting direct threats to French nationals in the region as well as the indirect threats of regional destabilization and global terrorism. In this phase of the narrative, new prognostic frames were introduced through frame transformation (shifting from the frame of "war of liberation" to "counterterrorism operation") and through frame amplification emphasising reorganisation and rationalisation and highlighting that France is in the same fight against terrorism be it in Metropolitan France or Africa. Compared to previous emphasis on multilateral legitimacy, in this phase the French military presence was justified with references to the global general interest, to the security interest of West Africa, to France's crisis response abilities, and to the consent of the host nations. Although frames of qualitative multilateralism diminished in this stage, frames of quantitative multilateralism (France not acting alone, but with the support of key partners) continued. The frame amplification of France's security provider role was also used to legitimize Operation Barkhane, while frames on African ownership significantly decreased, but did not disappear altogether from the narrative.

Resonance with master narratives of the Republic and France's active-independent role concept continued, emphasising France's inability to remain indifferent to human suffering, highlighting French sacrifices and an exceptional sense of responsibility towards the local population. Frames of economic interests and opportunities were limited to the occasions of state visits when the prospects of potential gains and losses to competitors were addressed. The transformation from Operation Serval to Operation Barkhane amplified loss framing in connection with preventing the return of terrorists and preserving military successes. As gain frames, announcing the reorganisation of the operation highlighted the prospects of increased operational efficiency. As a frame transformation, the neutralisation of jihadists replaced previous gain frames of tangible military successes (such as reconquesting territories) and political milestones (such as organizing elections).

4.2.4. Barkhane under President Macron (2017 – 2022)

 In this phase of the intervention, the narrative was mainly curated through regular high-level conferences on the Sahel, where President Macron announced new developments of the intervention, addressing the progress of Operation Barkhane, as well as multilateral initiatives in the region. Macron attended the first G5 Sahel conference in July 2017, followed by a conference in December 2017, and he visited each G5 Sahel countries between 2018-2019. Five speeches from these bilateral visits were used for analysing the narrative. As the host of the G7 Summit in August 2019, France dedicated a further conference in Biarritz to the Sahel. The Pau G5 Sahel Summit in January 2020 gave a new momentum to the stock-taking multilateral conferences, as it was followed by the Nouakchott Summit in June 2020 and the N'Djamena Summit in February 2021. The next G5 Summit was conducted through videoconference in July 2021, and it was followed by a conference in Paris about France and its partners' engagement in the Sahel in February 2022. The final piece of text analysed in this section is the announcement of the Barkhane forces' withdrawal from Mali on the 15th of August 2022.

In this period, the fight against terrorism remained a central *Diagnostic frame*, with frame extensions emphasising the broader geographic scope and the international threat of Daesh and Al-Qaeda, operating in the Middle East, Libya and the Lake Chad region, as well as throughout Africa: "*our military action is a response to a global threat that goes beyond the African continent, but whose main targets and victims today are the people of Africa, particularly the people of the Sahel.*" (09/07/2021; 22/12/2019; 17/12/2018; 17/02/2022 – A). "*We must always remember that this threat has a name, that of the two major terrorist organizations, Al-Qaeda and Daesh, and their ramifications in Africa and the Sahel*" (09/07/2021). Macron praised

remarks of the Nigerian president, who "*said it very well*" that France is there for protecting the Nigerian people, and "*also to protect in the long term not only the region, but Europe and the [African] continent.*" (13/01/2020). Emphasising a common threat perception with regional states, Macron highlighted that "*we have also experienced together in our flesh this year in Burkina Faso that terrorism threatens, destabilizes and touches very deeply*" (17/12/2018). This shared experience was reiterated at the N'Djamena Summit in 2021, where Macron argued that "*we are fighting against a common enemy that has also struck us on our own territory, whose agenda is international and who has made the Sahel its main growth area, threatening the stability of the whole of West Africa.*" (16/02/2021 – A) Similarly, at the Summit on the Sahel in February 2022, the President highlighted that terrorist organisations present a "*long-term threat*" and that they "*have struck on several continents, including our own, and even on French soil*", while they have "*a global and regional agenda which justifies our long-term commitment in this region, and we are well placed, having confronted these organizations on our own territory and in other geographies, to know that this implies constancy and tenacity.*" (17/02/2022 – A)

Compared to previous phases of the intervention, there was less frame bridging on terrorism and organised crime activities or migration flows. References to the security of French nationals in the region also diminished by this period. Instead, the emphasis was on the threat to the sovereignty of Sahelian states, in connection with highlighting the intervention's rationale "*to enable Sahelian states to assume their full sovereignty over their territory*" (13/01/2020; 17/12/2018; 16/02/2021 – A). The terrorist threat to their sovereignty was emphasised mostly in relation to the expansion of terrorist activities and the emergence of a territorial platform in the tri-border region, particularly from the second half of 2019. Following operational advances after the 2020 Pau Summit, the emphasis on the threat of a terrorist territorial platform was transformed to highlight an "*evolving threat*" and the "*broadening of the threat*" through the dissemination of terrorist activities in the neighbourhood of the Sahel region at the July 2021 G5 Sahel Summit (09/07/2021). Applying frame transformation, the narrative emphasised that the terrorist organisations' agenda is "*not limited to the horizon of occupying a territory or a capital city*" but it is "*an expansionist, ideological project, of which taking control of a Sahelian territory is only one stage.*" (09/07/2021.) Talking about a "*paradigm shift*" and the "*changing nature of the threat*", the narrative emphasised that "*adversaries have (…) abandoned their territorial ambitions in favour of a project to disseminate the threat, not just in the Sahel, but across the whole of West Africa. (…) unfortunately, this offensive foreshadows increased pressure on all the countries of the Gulf of Guinea, which is already a reality. Facing this pivot*

from terrorist organisations, it would have been a mistake to keep us in a pattern that no longer corresponds to the geography or spread of the threat." (Ibid.) Therefore, from 2021, the narrative called for more focus on the Gulf of Guinea (GoG) region, supporting the GoG states in their fight against terrorism, through the geographic frame extensions of the threat: *"Terrorist organizations have chosen to make Africa, and the Sahel in particular - now increasingly the Gulf of Guinea - a priority in their expansion strategy.* (17/02/2022 – A) Besides operational realities, this frame transformation and extension also reflected political developments, as it corresponded with the G5 Sahel members' changing attitude to the French intervention in the Sahel, and with the increasing challenges brought by the coup d'état in Mali, while GoG states such as Senegal and Ghana maintained cooperation with France, supporting the February 2022 summit on a presidential level. The shifting focus to the GoG region was also highlighted in the joint declaration on the fight against the terrorist threat and the support to peace and security in the Sahel and West Africa issued by France and its international partners. This communique featured similar frame extensions: *"In order to contain the potential geographical expansion of the actions of armed terrorist groups towards the south and west of the region, the international partners indicate their willingness to actively consider extending their support to neighbouring countries in the Gulf of Guinea and West Africa, based on their demands. These actions would support relevant regional initiatives and organisations like the AU, ECOWAS, the G5 Sahel and Accra Initiative and strengthen national strategies to improve resilience as well as living and security conditions in the most vulnerable regions."* (17/02/2022 – B)

In this stage of the intervention, *Prognostic* frames dominated the narrative. These frames focused on the implementation of military and development objectives, as "*the double engine*" or "*two legs*" of security and development (03/07/2017; 13/12/2017; 17/12/2018; 23/12/2018; 26/08/2019). The narrative highlighted multinational efforts, emphasising "*structured cooperation*" and "*collective vigilance*" in the region, developing the G5 Sahel as an "*essential complement on the security level of Barkhane's involvement."* (03/07/2017; 23/12/2018) Key action frames focused on renewing of engagement through "*reorientation*", as "*to redefine,*" "*to reaffirm*", "*to reclarify*" and "*to reengage*" it with "*a new method.*" (13/12/2017; 26/08/2019; 22/12/2019; 13/01/2020). Operational developments were highlighted through frames calling for *"full operationalization", "concrete", "effectively fighting", "more substance and more strength to troops", "working on increased and highly effective engagement"* and "*rapid concrete operations*" in a "*redefined framework*" (13/12/2017; 04/06/2018; 26/08/2019; 23/12/2018; 02/07/2018). Emphasising effective operational organization and mobilisation also highlighted France's material assistance and commitment to

capacity building towards regional states (03/07/2017; 13/12/2017). Nevertheless, even over the occasion of postponing the G5 Summit in 2019, Elysée's communique emphasised that "*the Nigerian and French Presidents will redefine together (…) the political and operational framework for acting for the security of the populations and States of the Sahel.*" (11/12/2019) This ambition was in line with the effort "*to set out clearly on the one hand, the more precise modalities of our fight against terrorism, by reclarifying the territorial and political definition of the enemy.*" (22/12/2019) Based on that, the Pau Summit (January 2020) was announced to be "*the summit of clarification, acceleration and structuring of our common action against terrorism*". (Ibid.).

At the Pau Summit, the tri-border area between Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger and the threat posed by the Islamic State of Great Sahara (IEGS) were addressed as key military objectives, and a joint force command between Barkhane and the G5 Sahel was announced to be set up with the engagement of additional French combat capabilities (13/01/2020). During subsequent summits, President Macron emphasised that the enemy was Islamist terrorism, the IEGS as well as organisations affiliated to al-Qaeda (e.g. RVIM), and not the Fulani people. The narrative also highlighted that G5 Sahel partners had "*consolidated a convergence*" on who are enemies and not interlocutors, clarifying the military objective of targeting the upper echelons of RVIM (30/06/2020; 16/02/2021 – A). Similarly, the operational priority of the tri-border region was also recurringly referenced as originating from the Pau Summit (30/06/2020; 16/02/2021 – A). After recapturing the tri-border region in 2020, Macron called for preserving operational results through frames of "*consolidation*" and "*amplifying the momentum*" of the Takuba initiative which took over the tasks of the French reinforcement of 600 troops who were deployed there from January 2020. (30/06/2020) Concerning military operations, frames such as "*amplifying the Pau dynamic*", the "*consolidation of the military strategy*" and the "*consolidation of gains at the tri-border region*" through the deployment of a Chadian battalion as well as the "*consolidation of the G5 Sahel forces long-term financing*" were highlighted at the N'Djamena Summit (16/02/2021 – A). Still, half a year later the President again referred to continuous exchanges between France and regional states in order "*to converge on the meaning, timeliness and modalities of the evolution of our military presence in the Sahel*" suggesting that clarifications and re-evaluations are yet again key features to France's cooperation with its Sahelian partners. (09/07/2021)

The narrative also strengthened prognostic frames calling for the "*return of the state.*" This meant the restoration of "*administration and services to the population in the Sahel (…) the return of public services, the return of the administration to stabilize the population. (…).*

Prefects, magistrates, police officers and judges will enable us to truly turn the situation around." (30/06/2020) In another speech, the president emphasized that "*if we want to win the support of civilian populations over the long term, once we've defeated the jihadists, it's essential to return security to the hands of the sovereign state. It is essential to ensure that the justice system is in place to prevent all abuses and impunity, and it is essential to reopen schools.*" (16/02/2021 – A) The need for a "*civilian surge*" – to gradually bring as many services as possible into the retaken tri-border area – was further reinforced at subsequent summits (09/07/2021). This purpose was also connected to the multilateral initiative of the Sahel Alliance launched in July 2017, which showed an increasing portfolio of projects and funds dedicated to facilitating services to the population (23/12/2018, 22/12/2019; 30/06/2020; 16/02/2021 – A). In 2022, the Sahel Alliance was supported by 25 partners, with several thousand projects and 22 billion euros of financial commitments (17/02/2022 – A). The frames calling for the return of the state and highlighting initiatives such as the Sahel Alliance amplified the security-development nexus frame in the narrative.

As key prognostic frames, Macron's speeches often highlighted different pillars of implementation with regards to intervention objectives. At the N'Djamena Summit, he highlighted the fight against terrorism; capacity building of G5 Sahel forces, the return of state administration; and development activities as such pillars (16/02/2021 – A). At the next summit, he highlighted two missions for the French military in the Sahel: first, "*to continue neutralizing and disorganizing the high command of the two enemy organizations (Al-Qaeda and Daesh)*" and second, "*to support the development of the region's armies.*" (09/07/2021) These missions were to be organised around three axes. First, combating terrorism in joint operations (G5 Sahel armies together with Sabre task force and Takuba task force) relying on the Niamey command post. Second, capacity building of regional armies as cooperation to train, equip and advise based on the existing operational military partnership mechanisms of the EU Training Mission in Mali as well as bilateral cooperation activities with G5 Sahel nations. Third, a "*reassurance dimension*" maintaining French military capabilities in the region: air force and command and control (coordination of Takuba and G5 Sahel) based in Niger; health, air mobility and rapid reaction force capabilities in Mali; air and ground presence in Chad. The narrative again resorted to the frame of "*implementing transformation*", highlighting that "*such evolution of our organisation [the three axes of the two military missions] best responds to the evolving threats.*" (09/07/2021). The next set of priorities were presented at the February 2022 Summit, establishing four main directions for action. First, "*involving and supporting neighbouring countries of the Sahelian strip, primarily the countries of GoG in the fight against terrorism*"

through the Accra initiative and ECOWAS (17/02/2022 – A). Second, "*to place the civilian population more at the heart of our strategy in the fight against terrorist groups*", aiming for a „*civilian awakening*" through projects and investments allocated by the Sahel Alliance (Ibid). Third, changing the modalities of [French] military presence. This recurring theme was reasoned with the realisation that "*our partners' expectations have evolved"* and *"the sensitivity of public opinion in the countries of the region has also changed".(…) "We need to reduce our footprint (…) we need to refocus where our contribution is needed, always in support and even more integrated, as we are in Niger, with the region's armed forces." (*17/02/2022 – A) The modalities of military support to the countries of the region were kept open, to be defined „*based on the needs they have expressed*" (Ibid.). Fourth, as a new direction, Macron announced withdrawing France and its partners (Takuba Task Force) from Mali, "*reorganising*" their military presence and repositioning European elements alongside the Nigerien armed forces in the region bordering Mali (Ibid.).

Regarding *Status frames*, the narrative continued with references to multilateralism and the sovereignty of host states. The legitimacy of France's engagement in the region was repeatedly emphasised to be based on the request of local authorities, respecting the G5 states' sovereignty, substantiated by intergovernmental agreements as legal frameworks of bilateral cooperation (17/12/2018; 23/12/2018; 22/12/2019). Sovereignty was a key frame concerning France's intervention in the region: "*We will first need to define the political framework in which we intervene, the one without which nothing is possible because States and people are sovereign in the Sahel, and although attacked, although threatened, it is essential that the sovereign people and that each of their leaders recall their wish, their will and their determination*" (22/12/2019). Similarly, at the G5 Summits, the narrative continuously emphasised that the legitimacy of the intervention is based on the request of the Sahelian states: *"We remain committed in the Sahel because the States of the region have asked us to do so. It's an obvious fact that tends to be lost sight of, and one that we must constantly remind ourselves of. France has no vocation, still less the will, to remain eternally committed to the Sahel. We are there because we are asked to be, and for no longer than we are asked to be. This request for French support was reiterated at the Pau and N'Djaména summits.*" (09/07/2021)

As *qualitative multilateralism frames*, the narrative used references to the UNSC Resolution 2391 (2017), but it did not elaborate on the Implementation of the Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law Compliance Framework (03/07/2017; 13/12/2017).[6]

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[6] The UNSC Resolution 2391 (2017) called on the G5 Sahel States to *"establish a robust compliance framework to prevent, investigate, address and publicly report violations and abuses of human rights law*

Nevertheless, the goal of getting a UN mandate was explicitly linked to consolidating a long-term, predictable funding for the G5 Sahel through the UN. (05/07/2021; 16/02/2021 – A; 16/02/2021 – B) "*We also intend to obtain a UN mandate under Chapter 7 in the coming months for this joint G5 Sahel force, to enable it to be financed on a long-term basis.*" (16/02/2021 – A)

As *quantitative multilateralism frames*, references to joint efforts with partners and donors through military coalitions of the willing (G5 Sahel, Takuba) as well as development initiatives (Sahel Coalition, Sahel Alliance) were emphasised. Frames highlighting multilateralism in the fight against terrorism, military capacity building, state building and development were consistently emphasised, underlining that "*a great international coalition for the Sahel will aim to bring together various aspects of international action.*" (13/01/2020) Through the series of G5 Sahel Summits, the narrative aimed at demonstrating this international coalition, highlighting the involvement of prominent international actors, and framing the Pau Summit as it "*marked the advent of an international coalition in the Sahel to fight terrorism.*" (16/02/2021 – A) President Macron expressed appreciation to partners and donors, highlighting contributions primarily from European partners, but also recognized contributions from non-European partners, such as Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, the United States of America, the World Bank, the African Union, and the United Nations, particularly the UNDP (03/07/2017; 13/12/2017; 30/06/2020). The narrative highlighted joint efforts with Chancellor Merkel towards developing the region through the initiative of *Partnership for security and stability in the Sahel*; Spain' leading role in the Sahel Alliance; and the European partners' involvement in the Takuba as further testimonies of the multilateral aspects of France's engagement in the region. (26/08/2019; 13/01/2020; 30/06/2020) At the N'Djamena Summit, the narrative stressed "*the participation of an unprecedented number of partners, in particular the States contributing to the Takuba task force*" listing them one by one, as well as those European states too who have expressed interest to or volunteered to joining the task force. Macron also addressed those non-European states who confirmed their commitment to support the fight against terrorism (USA, Algeria, Morocco) and announced setting up a High Representative for the coalition, to be "*the face of the Sahel*" ensuring that both the military and civilian pillars of the engagement progress well (16/02/2021 – A).

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and violations of international humanitarian law related to the G5 Sahel Joint Force" The Compliance Framework is a package of recommended measures and mechanisms to reduce the risk of international human rights law and international humanitarian law (IHL) violations that could be committed by security forces in the conduct of offensive military operations, including counter-terrorism operations. (UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner)

Complementing the set of quantitative multilateralism frames, Macron also emphasised a joint EU-Africa commitment to the region through the examples of EUTM, MINUSMA and Operation Barkahne, arguing that the G5 Sahel is part of a larger effort to strengthen coordination between African armies (26/08/2019). A multilateral approach was also highlighted with regards to the prospects of French military presence in the region, emphasising "*consultation with all our international partners*", and promising that any significant change to that *would not be immediate as "they will first be the fruit of collective discussion with our Sahelian partners and those who have agreed to follow us, and it will depend on the results achieved and the degree of commitment shown by our partners."* (09/07/2021; 16/02/2021 – A) As a recurring confirmation to this commitment, at the July 2021 G5 Sahel Summit Macron highlighted that *"our action has gradually become part of an increasingly internationalized and partnership-based framework with the countries of the region. Sahelisation, internationalization: these have been the trends in this theatre of operations over the past three years."* (09/07/2021) He also remarked that by 2021, the proportion of French operations carried out jointly with Sahelian partners had exceeded the proportion of operations carried out independently. (Ibid.) In February 2022, shortly before Russia's war against Ukraine erupted, Macron spoke about Europe's commitment to the fight against terrorism, along other multilateral bodies: „*at a time when other strategic threats are weighing on the security of the European continent and rightly mobilizing our diplomatic attention, it was first and foremost important to send a message of continuity on our commitment to the fight against terrorism in the Sahel. Europe is a trusted partner, committed over the long term alongside its allies in the face of long-term threats, and it stands shoulder to shoulder with ECOWAS, the African Union, and the G5 Sahel.*"(17/02/2022 – A) This frame was reinforced while speaking about "*the commitment of our European partners,*" which would be *"maintained, as part of the reorganization of this operation*" meaning to be repositioned alongside the Nigerien armed forces in the region bordering Mali (Ibid.). Finally, when announcing the withdrawal of Barkhane forces from Mali, the official communique also stressed multilateral coordination and cooperation with key partners: „*France will continue the fight against terrorism, acting in support of the political, civil and military efforts of ECOWAS and the States of the region, and in full coordination with our European and American partners engaged in the region."* (15/08/2022)

Concerning *Role frames*, the consolidation of the state and national sovereignty were highlighted as key values. The narrative emphasised solidarity, sharing the pain over sacrifices in a "*common fight*"; the "*conviviality of forces*" and French forces' "*pride in serving the*

security and interest of an ally of the highest level in the region" (17/12/2018). It also emphasised a special, positive relationship between French and local forces: "[French forces] *keep your countries safe with great courage, they serve the populations and they do so with a unique spirit of partnership with all G5 forces*." (23/12/2018; 22/12/2019) On the bilateral level, Macron emphasised the excellent cooperation with Chadian troops, highlighting that France and Chad "*have an axis in terms of security.*" (23/12/2018) Beyond military bonds, the narrative also relied on frames on historic bonds, referring to regional states (e.g. Burkina Faso) as "*ally*" and "*friend*" and a "*fundamental country in this region which is ours*", highlighting "*shared language and interests*" emphasising mutual interests in security and investment (17/12/2018). The frame remembering Malian soldiers' contribution to the liberation of France was revoked once again, during the announcement of decreasing French military presence in Mali: "*These results were achieved in the context of a brotherhood of arms forged in the liberation of France and, fifty years later, in the liberation of Mali.*" (17/02/2022 – A)

The notion of humanitarianism was not central to this stage of the narrative. Compared to previous periods, there were less references to the suffering of the civilians. Nevertheless, the importance of securing the local population's support was highlighted in numerous instances through prognostic frames, emphasising that it is crucial for achieving security objectives and maintaining results in the fight against terrorism. Therefore, frames focusing on civilian actions, and the need for a "*civilian surge*" as providing justice, preventing abuses, opening schools, and restoring state services were primarily framed as means and not ends to such security objectives (23/12/2018; 16/02/2021 – A). Macron addressed reports of human rights abuses by local forces too, stressing that France supports investigations on the matter, yet also hinting at their strategic aspects, as terrorist groups could benefit from a cycle of violence in the region: "*Faced with the serious facts that have been reported, investigations will be carried out, and France, as it has already done, is ready to support these investigations, which must be brought to a conclusion. We agreed on this imperative: the Sahel must not plunge into a cycle of violence and reprisals. This is precisely what terrorist groups are seeking, and what they have succeeded in doing in the past. The Fulani people, in particular, are nobody's enemy.*" (30/06/2020) Later on, the narrative also tried to balance France's engagement in the broader context of regional ethnic-community relations, emphasising that "*France is not, as some people have sometimes said, or tried to manipulate, involved in ethnic-community wars.*" (16/06/2021)

Although consultation and coordination with partners were consistently highlighted as pillars of multilateralism and respecting the sovereignty of regional states, France's leading role in both non-military and military aspects strengthened as a dominant frame by this stage of the

narrative. Additionally, compared to previous stages of the intervention the frame of Africans in a leading role was missing altogether in this stage. In the military domain, France's leadership was highlighted through emphasising its role as a framework nation, bringing together international partners through the Takuba initiative: "*Takuba, let me remind you, is our desire to bring together European special forces to provide a support force for the Malian Armed Forces in combat. France will play a key role, with several hundred soldiers, but we will also be able to bring together Europeans and internationals.*" (16/02/2021 – A) Recounting the story of the intervention, Macron highlighted that France had a prominent role in forging an ad-hoc coalition: "*since 2013, and President François Hollande's courageous decision to intervene in Mali, at the request of the Malian and regional authorities, France has played a unifying role in this international mobilization for the Sahel, where nearly 25,000 troops are now deployed on various international missions. We will continue to play this federating role and, where a military dimension is required, the role of framework nation.*" (17/02/2022 – A) Besides the military dimension, the narrative also emphasised France's leading role in development initiatives, acting as a donor and provider for the region. During Macron's visit to Niger, he also emphasised France's role as the number one development partner of the country (04/06/2018). The narrative emphasised France's unwavering commitment and support, standing responsibly side by side with friendly regional states, providing them support through organizing and financing good governance. (04/06/2018; 17/12/2018; 23/12/2018) This role of a guarantor and development partner who lives up to commitments was particularly strong in the discourse during bilateral visits. During Macron's 2018 visit to Mali, the president argued that "*France is certainly the most committed non-African country in the region, both militarily and financially, and we are meeting all our commitments, both military and budgetary. We keep our word because that's how I intend to run the country's business. When we provide support at the request of a government, we don't charge for the shots that are fired, we are present. It's a matter of security, and part of what France finances through its overseas operations. This is a recurring annual budgetary debate in France, but it is covered by the French budget. So let me reassure you fully on this point.*" (17/12/2018) Similar frames were used during his state visit in Chad, where Macron emphasised that France not only kept its commitments in development assistance, but "*we even went above and beyond what we promised. This is how nearly 150 million euros have been allocated to Chad instead of an initial effort amounting to 125 million euros and the French Development Agency will continue to engage in access to essential services.*" (23/12/2018) France's commitment and ability to steer international – and particularly EU – support for the region was recurringly highlighted in the narrative, including

its role in raising international funds and aid, mobilising partners, and donors for the region, and ensuring that financial commitments and the aid promised by Saudia Arabia and the EU are implemented in concrete deliveries for the G5 countries (17/12/2018; 04/06/2018; 23/12/2018). Besides highlighting the worth of civilian projects financed by France, Macron also reiterated France's commitment to support and strengthen regional cooperation on the security of the Lake Chad region, highlighting that "*we will be present in particular to accelerate support from the European Union*" to release 55 million euros fast. (23/12/2018) Besides France's interceding responsibility, Macron also emphasised his personal dedication to the region, highlighting that since the start of his mandate he had visited the Sahel six times by 2018, arguing that "*I have made a lot of commitments*" to develop the G5 Sahel (23/12/2018; 17/12/2018; 04/06/2018).

Corresponding with frames of France's leadership role, at the N'Djaména summit, emphasising the need for restoring governance in the most vulnerable areas, Macron called upon regional states to act accordingly: "*Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger will have to recommit themselves to deploying a system for civilian action comparable to the one put in place for military action, i.e. interministerial action, steered at the highest level by the Heads of State themselves, with weekly steering and very close coordination to identify all the projects, ensure that these projects are properly governed, and enable the return of the State and development projects once the military victory has been achieved.*" (16/02/2021 – A) Such direct calls implicitly strengthened France's leadership role frames, while they also inadvertently resonated with the cognitive priors of France's colonialist heritage. As criticism and challenges to France's intervention in the region grow, the narrative also addressed negative cognitive priors, denying their present relevance. Macron argued that "*France has no vocation, still less the will, to remain eternally committed to the Sahel. We are there because we are asked to be, and for no longer than we are asked to be. [...] the purpose of our presence no longer bears any relation to France's past military interventions on the African continent. The world has changed, as has the software, and our military action is a response to a global threat that goes beyond the African continent, but whose main targets and victims today are the people of Africa, particularly the people of the Sahel.*" (09/07/2021)

Compared to previous periods, the narrative at this stage applied more *gain frames* than *loss frames*. It stressed that over the course of France's intervention in the region since 2013, French forces have "*achieved a number of victories*" pushing back the enemy through neutralising their top leaders, recovering territories and carrying out numerous development initiatives for the locals (30/06/2020). In the final year of Operation Barkhane, the key gain frame remained

"*inflicting defeats on Al Qaeda and Daesh that have changed the nature and projection capability of these two organizations.*" (17/02/2022 – A) Consistently with previous stages of the operation, military results were highlighted through recounting the killings of top military leaders as "*real military victories such as the neutralization of Droukdel, the RVIM's military leader last June. We can come back to the neutralization of Bah Ag Moussa last November. All these groups have come under military pressure, and several of their top leaders have been killed during these recent operations.*" (16/02/2021 – A) Such results were linked to the Pau Summit, as a watershed moment, which succeeded in turning around a dire situation. At subsequent summits, President Macron presented a positive arc in the narrative, describing the situation changing for the better since November-December 2019 when "*the Mali-Niger-Burkina triangle was on the verge of collapse, with armies heavily hit and Sahelian armies also largely demoralized*" while French and Nigerian forces both suffered heavy casualties. (Ibid.) The January 2020 Pau Summit's decisions turned around this desperate situation by "*not only reversing the military balance of power, but also restored the morale of the region's armed forces and boosted their operational momentum*" as it "*led to victories, enabled us to achieve results and saved the Sahel for a second time.*" (Ibid.) The frame of double (military-politico success) also continued in the narrative, framing the Pau Summit as "*not just a military success, but also a democratic one*" in reference to the electoral processes in Burkina Faso and Niger, and praising Niger's first peaceful democratic transition since independence and calling it a "*collective political victory*". (16/02/2021 – A)

As new gain frames, the narrative linked military progress to the success of forming partnerships and setting up a coalition: "*Europe, its institutions and member states, our partners, including the Americans, and neighbouring countries are all on board. They are at your side, because we are convinced that victory is possible in the Sahel, and that it is decisive for the balance in Africa and Europe. We are on the way back, thanks to the efforts made over the last 6 months. We have reorganized a great deal.*" (30/06/2020) It also highlighted the role of effective coordination and reorganisation through setting up a joint command in Niamey and conducting joint large-scale operations. (16/02/2021 – A) France's success in creating a coalition – including ramping up the Takuba initiative, engaging international partners and "*building an intervention model*", "*a model of a respectful and balanced partnership*" enabling Europeans and France "*to continue to play their role of support, backing, training - in a word, partner*", with the potential to extend it to other areas within the framework of AU and EU – was reiterated over the summits, until the last year of Operation Barkhane in Mali (30/06/2020; 16/02/2021 – A; 17/02/2022 – A).

Concerning loss frames, the narrative resorted to earlier frames on the risk of not acting when its necessary: "*At a time when our adversaries are reinventing themselves and modifying their strategies, the mistake would have been to remain static or to lose our way in battles that are not part of the fight against terrorist organizations.*" (17/02/2022 – A) As a further loss frame, the narrative highlighted the risks of not returning state services to the tri-border area, emphasising the role of prevention in ensuring the long-term support of civilians (16/02/2021 – A; 09/07/2021). Regarding developments in Mali, Macron addressed how the August 2020 coup d'état "*penalized the implementation of the Pau roadmap*" but he also spoke about "*a new window of opportunity*" with regards to the establishment of transitional authorities, highlighting that "*Malian authorities are now realigned on the three fundamental axes on which we expect them to focus*" including commitments to the Malian Armed Forces, a roadmap for holding elections, and relaunching the implementation of the Algiers agreement. (16/02/2021– A) Such gain frames soon lost relevance following the next coup d'état in May 2021. In the eventual withdrawal of French forces from Mali by the 15th of August 2022, the narrative was left with the official communique stating that the "*President hails the success of this operational and logistical manoeuvre to withdraw from Mali, which our armed forces carried out according to schedule, without ceasing their fight against terrorist groups and significantly increasing their contribution to securing Eastern Europe.*" (15/08/2022) Besides focusing on the organisational and technical success of the withdrawal, the communique also reiterated the gain frames of neutralising leaders of terrorist groups: *"The effectiveness of our soldiers over all these years and up to the last few days has been demonstrated by the neutralization of most of the highest-ranking members of the hierarchy of Sahelian terrorist groups." (Ibid.)*

4.2.5. Assessing Clarity and Consistency

Configuration analysis has identified frame configurations and practices of frame alignment along key periods of the empirical case study, focusing on stages of pre-intervention; Operation Serval; transformation to Operation Barkhane under President Hollande; and Operation Barkhane under President Macron. Based on the proposed Framework for Purpose Frame Analysis, key diagnostic, prognostic, status and role frames were presented in the previous sections, and the next step is to assess "*to what extent is there consistency and clarity in the semantic configuration of the narrative?*" First, let's see those fundamental frames which were maintained consistently throughout the narrative from the pre-intervention stage under President Hollande to the end of Operation Barkhane under President Macron. Among Security and Threat frames, these included frame amplifications of terrorism as a regional and global

threat. This included the notion that such threat connects Europeans, French people and Africans in the 'same fight" as the prevention of emerging terrorist activities, which ultimately contributes to the protection of homeland. The narrative also consistently highlighted frames reflecting on the security-development nexus, recurringly calling for focus on post-conflict reconstruction objectives through providing development aid and services to the civilian population along the evolving dynamics of operational realities. Concerning norm and value frames, the narrative emphasised the norm of sovereignty as a basis for intervention from the beginning, while references to the sovereign requests of Sahelian states amplified during Operation Barkhane in the absence of a UNSC resolution providing multilateral legitimacy. Frames of quantitative multilateralism were also enduring in the narrative from the beginning of Operation Serval to the end of Operation Barkhane, highlighting that France is not alone, acting with the support of its partners, particularly European states. France's role was also consistently framed through notions of friendship, historic links, shared language and brotherhood with the Sahelian allies, highlighting Paris' enduring support and special commitment to the region.

Although such frames provided consistency for the narrative in certain aspects, the narrative also developed several inconsistencies. Such inconsistencies were often mended through specific framing practices. Looking at the presidency of Francois Hollande, shortly before the intervention, the potential engagement of French troops was categorically excluded with remarks that "*There will be no men on the ground, no French troops engaged*" underlying this position with claims that France would not intervene in place of Africans, but it could give material support and training. (2012/10/11). France's eventual military intervention providing training and material support as well as conducting combat operations with an increasing number of casualties presented an incongruent development against these previous frames. This inconsistency was blurred through the practice of frame extension using the "*support*" term. Based on the UNSC Resolution 2100, the role of France in Mali was defined to be supporting the reconstitution of the Malian Armed Forces and participating in the training of Malian and African armed forces for the duration of one year (09/01/2013). Compared to this delineated role, two days later, the official announcement of France's intervention in Mali contained that "*French armed forces brought their support for Malian units to fight against these terrorist elements*", declaring that "*this operation will last as long as necessary*" (11/01/2013). Applying the *support* frame – arguing that France's engagement was in support of the Malian army in the face of terrorist attacks – blurred the inconsistency in the narrative over the unfolding operation (12/01/2013).

Inconsistencies in the narrative also stemmed from differences in the framing practices of the two presidencies. Concerning threat frames, while issue linkages (e.g. organised crime and migration links with terrorist activities) and the security of French nationals in the region were emphasised in the narrative under Hollande, such references were missing from Macron's speeches. The narrative applied broader prognostic frames under President Hollande, often applying frame extensions (from securing the territorial integrity of Mali to eradicating terrorism and supporting post-conflict reconstruction objectives). Under President Macron, the narrative recurrently detailed technical aspects of implementation (slightly adapting them from one G5 Sahel summit to the next one), thereby presenting a complex vision for intervention actions in the Sahel.

Allegations of France's hidden interests were consequently refuted before international, French and Malian audiences as well. Nevertheless, France's economic interests, cooperation and long-term development aims were acknowledged during state visits in the region. These issues were channelled in a parallel but separate track of discourse (not linking directly to the operation in Mali). Still, addressing questions of general security as well as the protection of French nationals working at French enterprises active in the region was indirectly connected to France's counterterrorism activities. During Operation Serval, the narrative on French interests and the intervention showed inconsistent framing when addressing local (Malian) and home (French) audiences. In the latter case, the frame that "*France has to act whenever its interests are in threat*" was part of the broader narrative addressing French military posture in the world (08/01/2014). Hollande also argued specifically that France will stay in and around Mali because in Niger "*our interests were directly targeted*" by terrorism as local citizens supporting France were murdered. (24/05/2013). Moreover, there was even an instance when the nexus of intervention and economic interests was addressed inconsistently within a single speech before French audience: "*I greet the French nationals, here present in Mali, who have with a lot of coolness kept our interests here, I'm talking about our economic interests (…) We are not defending any interests here. That's why the Malians welcome us this way. Because they know very well that we are here to defend values, principles and a friendly people…*" (02/02/2013 – A). Compared to the era of President Hollande, French economic interests were not addressed directly in the narrative under President Macron. This topic was not brought up at G5 Sahel conferences, but it was mentioned on the bilateral level. A marginal reference linked the fight against terrorism and economic investments in congratulating to the re-election of Malian President Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta in 2018: „*the President of the Republic reiterated France's*

commitment to stand alongside the authorities and the Malian people to overcome the challenge of the fight against terrorism and to promote investment and economic development." (17/08/2018) As part of the broader frame of France's commitment to the Sahel**,** the investment of French companies in the region was also mentioned during bilateral visits, without any reference to the nexus of security and economic interests (23/12/2018). For example, the French Total Group's agreement with the Mauritanian Ministry of Petroleum, Energy and Mines on the offshore exploration in Mauritania in 2018 was framed in the context of strengthening Mauritanian and French private sectors "*in the spirit of a win-win partnership*", without any reference to security developments in the region. (02/07/2018)

Frames of African ownership and leadership in the fight against terrorism were consequently highlighted, and efforts to recognize African agency in making Operation Serval a success was recurringly emphasised. However, highlighting French troops' role in stopping terrorist offense, and references to France's leadership and security provider role increased with the start of Operation Barkhane (19/09/2013; 28/08/2014). Initially, the challenge of coherence between African ownership and French security leadership was mended through systematic references to the end of the intervention, which was recurringly framed as temporary, contingent on the development of African capacities and the setting up of MINUSMA. France's intervention was initially framed with the perspective that as soon as the proposed African force can carry out the mission, France "*will only have to support it*" (12/01/2013). The creation of this African force was also linked to the prospected duration of the French intervention: "*since there will be an African force in the coming days and weeks (...) France has no vocation to stay in Mali*" (15/01/2013). This argument was reinforced as *"France is not intended to stay here in Mali, because it is the Malians themselves, the Africans who will provide security, independence, sovereignty*" (02/02/2013 – B). Throughout the first year, the question of the intervention's duration and its potential end in sight was addressed recurringly. In the first months, Hollande emphasised that France is not intended to stay, but the number of French forces (approximately 3 500) will decrease gradually with the setting up of the MINUMSMA forces, as their operation will be integrated in peacekeeping tasks, and France will focus on rebuilding and reconstruction activities (02/02/2013 – A; 06/03/2013; 17/05/2013; 15/07/2013 – B). Hollande also addressed critical comments on the risk of a protracted intervention, arguing that the support of the population, joint efforts of Africans and Europeans, proper international legitimacy, and a prospect of gradually transforming the operation to peacekeeping are guarantees against such risks (02/02/2013 – A). After the first half year of the intervention, Hollande had a passionate

outburst against such critiques: "*There is still doubt: could we stabilize northern Mali, secure it without taking the risk of being bogged down? There are always grumpy people. It is a species present in all continents, in all latitudes. Those who never believe it. Those who look at the worst that could happen to avoid looking at what could happen better. We also warded off these evil spirits*" (15/07/2013 – A).

In the beginning of the operation, the main objectives were having "*legitimate authorities, electoral process*", "*security in Mali*", and "*no more terrorists threatening the integrity of Mali*" (15/012013). Addressing questions regarding the length of the operation, broad frames were adopted such as "*the time needed to defeat terrorism*" while the perspective of eventual withdrawal was recurringly reinforced (19/01/2013; 02/02/2013 – A). France's future involvement was determined in 1000 soldiers staying in Mali to support MINUSMA by the end of 2013 (decreasing from 3200 in July 2013). Hollande also said that France "*will remain in Mali, as long as the threat will exist*" highlighting that "*we are not done*", not even after the liberation of the whole of Malian territory, since elections in May and the start of MINUSMA was due in July (10/05/2013; 13/07/2013, 19/09/2013). Following the reconquest of the Malian territories, Hollande started to refer to the French military presence around Mali in neighbouring states who can also intervene in case of terrorist attacks and against terrorists taking refuge outside of Mali, "*allowing us to act, not just in Mali, but throughout the region*" (09/06/2013; 15/05/2013; 17/05/2013; 24/05/2013; 13/07/2013; 19/09/2013). Nine months from the start of the intervention, Hollande argued that after the military successes of Operation Serval, France "*could have just ended (…) and say there you go, we're done, and we let the Malians organize themselves as they see fit! That would not have been France's role. France's role was to lead, in full responsibility with the Malians, the electoral process which led to the success that we know*" (19/09/2013). In September 2013, the announced ambition for French troops was to decrease their presence to 2000 by November, and to 1000 by the end of January 2014 (19/09/2013). Nevertheless, by early 2014, the narrative already projected different objectives: "*Our mission is coming to an end in Mali. The workforce will drop from around 2,500 today to 1,600 in the middle of February. Then they will decline to 1000, which will be the level necessary to deal with any threat that may resurface. Because terrorist groups are still present at least in the region*" (08/01/2014).

During the first years of Macron's presidency, the narrative avoided discussing the termination or any potential decrease of French military presence. Eventually, it was only addressed first when it became inevitable in 2022. However, the narrative's constant use of "clarification",

"acceleration" and "structuring" frames reflected a need for recurring confirmation from Sahelian states regarding their public request for France's military presence, as well as their convergence on key objectives in parallel with the continuous adaptation of French military posture in the region. At the G5 Sahel Summits, Macron's speeches repeatedly emphasised that French military presence has been requested by the Sahelian states, supporting their sovereignty. Nevertheless, the often-used clarification frame (meaning „to clarify the request" of G5 States) with recurring references to the Pau Summit where „*we [France] were able to clarify our Sahelian partners' request to maintain our military presence and their desire to play their part in the fight against terrorist groups*" limited the fidelity of the narrative (16/02/2021). Finally, in announcing the "*changing modalities*" (reducing the footprint) of French military presence due to „*evolved expectations*" and the „*sensitivity of the public*", Macron still resorted to highlighting that this change happens based on the request of Sahelian states: "*At the request of our partners, we need to refocus where our contribution is needed, always in support and even more integrated, as we are in Niger, with the region's armed forces.*" (17/02/2022) Besides the constant use of the clarification frame, the narrative overwhelmingly emphasised renewing the method of France's engagement with terms such as "reorientation", as to "redefine framework for action", to "set out more precise modalities", "to reaffirm", "to reclarify the territorial and political definition of the enemy" and "to reengage", with "a new method" (2013/12/2017; 26/08/2019; 22/12/2019; 11/12/2019/ 13/01/2020). Even the eventual withdrawal of the Takuba Task Force from Mali was announced with „reorganising" and "repositioning" frames. (17/02/2022) Although operational realities demand adaptation, the repetitive use of such frames decreased the plausibility of the narrative, as it constantly reverted to the same prognostic frames, offering little progress in sight.

In summary, certain frames – such as the interconnected threat of terrorism involving France, Europe and Africa in the same fight; the emphasis on the security development nexus; and the norm of sovereignty as a basis for intervention – were used consistently throughout the narrative. Besides these constant frames, the narrative featured several inconsistencies (even blunt contradictions). Such instances were the framing of intervention objectives, prospected end of operation, and paradigm shifts in operational objectives. Frame amplification according to French and local audiences also produced inconsistencies, as the narrative emphasised African ownership and leadership before local and regional audiences while it highlighted France's leading role before French audiences. Inconsistencies in the narrative also stemmed from differences in the framing practices of the two presidencies. Under President Hollande,

France's economic interests were often framed in a contradictory manner, while this topic was rather avoided and streamlined into the broader frame of France's commitment to the Sahel under President Macron. Frames emphasising the leading role of Africans was maintained under Hollande's presidency, while under Macron's presidency, the narrative omitted references to African leadership. Instead, it increasingly emphasised France's leading role in both military and development initiatives. Frame extensions such as the "*support*" frame was used to blur inconsistencies stemming from statements prior to the intervention, while "*commitment*" frame was used as a frame extension covering various French activities, from development assistance to economic investments. The prospected end of the operation was also subject to continuous frame transformation and extension under both presidencies. The recurring use of "*clarification*" frames reflected the need for continuous public confirmation from Sahelian states' regarding their request for France's military presence, and the acknowledgement of their convergence regarding objectives of the continuous adaptation of French military posture in the region. The repetitive use of these clarification and adaptation frames hurt both the fidelity and plausibility of the narrative. The overall consistency of the narrative was further burdened with the cyclic paradigm shifts regarding operational objectives, starting from frames on the threat of (re)emerging terrorist territorial platforms, which was followed by the threat of disperse (non-territorial) terrorist activities through regional expansion. The narrative under President Hollande transformed Operation Serval's war of liberation frame to a broader counterterrorism operation initiating Operation Barkhane. Under President Macron, the narrative repeated a similar frame transformation, as Operation Barkhane's focus was first set on a military surge against the enemy's emerging territorial platform in the tri-border region, and later the objective expanded to targeting porous terrorist activities in the broader Sahelian region. Military strategy may necessitate such changes in operational objectives, but narrative consistency and overall plausibility is unavoidably weakened by repetitive shifts.

4.2.6. Assessing Resonance

This section evaluates purpose framing patterns against key interpretive structures identified in the Prefiguration chapter. These interpretive structures are the master narratives of the French Republic's mission as the heir of enlightenment, incorporating historic norms of sovereignty and humanitarianism; the political myths of the Gaullist consensus (including notions of France's exceptional role, the pursuit of global rang, glory and grandeur), and France's active-independent national role concept integrating notions of being a security provider, the guarantor

of stability as a hegemonic power. Besides master narratives, political myths and national role concepts, it is also important to recognise cognitive priors as interpretive structures, since they can also shape the audience's expectations. In the prefiguration analysis, I have highlighted two key cognitive priors, which are the heritage of colonialism and neo-colonial practices and the conduct of unilateral French interventions.

The narrative under President Hollande evoked French master narratives through references to the Republic and its values; such as the defence of human rights; the goal of recovering Mali's territorial integrity and sovereignty; emphasising politico-military progress as the consolidation of democracy through elections. Humanitarian frames were continuously applied from the pre-intervention phase throughout the transition to Operation Barkhane, highlighting France's altruism and the sufferings of Mali's population. These values-based resonance frames reinforced France's role as a messenger of values and principles (freedom, legality and fraternity) in the world. As part of this role concept, France's ability to act (unilaterally) as a security provider was layered complementarily with frames of multilateralism, both in terms of acquiring international legitimacy as well as in terms of operational burden-sharing.

In contrast, the narrative's resonance with master narratives decreased under President Macron, as master narratives of the Republic and its values, such as humanitarian frames were no longer present explicitly in the narrative. Instead, frames emphasising France's support and commitment to the region and its role in ushering an international coalition dominated the narrative. Emphasising France's security provider role strongly resonated with its active-independent national role concept. Under President Macron, threat and security frames were more dominant validating French military presence in the Sahel compared to values-based frames reflecting French master narratives or political myths. Differences in framing practices between the two presidencies also meant that the narrative applied broader prognostic frames and frame extensions (e.g. the goal of eradicating terrorism, supporting post-conflict reconstruction objectives) under Hollande, while President Macron's speeches presented a detailed, rather technical roadmap for the implementation of France's policies on the Sahel.

Under both presidents, the narrative emphasised the strong positive relationship between France and the Sahelian states, through frames of friendship, alliance and solidarity. Such frames complemented the norm of respecting these states' sovereignty, strengthening the drift from colonialist cognitive priors. Highlighting capacity building and recognising African agency also complemented these notions, although it inadvertently resonated with the idea of 'mission civilisatrice" as helping Africans achieving a new state of development. The narrative under

President Hollande recurringly emphasised the fundamental role and leadership of Africans and Malians in the fight against terrorism, reinforcing the rupture narrative. In contrast with that, the narrative under President Macron ceased explicit references to African ownership and leadership in the fight against terrorism. Instead, France's leading role in both non-military and military aspects appeared as a dominant frame. Nevertheless, maintaining consultation and coordination with partners were also emphasised in line with frames of multilateralism and respecting the sovereignty of regional states, highlighting coordination and consultation with the G5 Sahel.

The narrative explicitly negated cognitive priors of Francafrique and colonialist practices based on French interests. Nevertheless, the shift from emphasising qualitative multilateral legitimacy (UN resolution) during Operation Serval to highlighting security partnerships based on intergovernmental agreements during Operation Barkhane weakened consistency with the rupture narrative, as it evoked cognitive priors, falling back to the basis of post-colonial intergovernmental agreements. This inconsistency was mended with layering, emphasising the norm of sovereignty in the narrative and highlighting frames of quantitative multilateralism (France not acting alone, but with the support of an evolving international coalition in counterterrorism and development initiatives) instead of qualitative multilateralism.

4.2.7. Assessing Prospects

Considering *prospect framing*, in the pre-intervention stage, loss frames were dominant in the narrative, calling for attention and action in Mali, emphasising negative prospects of any delay in countering terrorists. The risk of non-action was emphasised during Operation Serval, also retrospectively following operational advances. However, gain frames dominated the narrative during Operation Serval, highlighting military victories and their positive political externalities through the "double victory" frame. This included emphasis on swift operational advances securing the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Mali as well as frame extension highlighting Operation Serval's contribution to democracy and development. Transitioning from Operation Serval to Operation Barkhane, key gain frames highlighted the prospect of operational efficiency in reorganising French military presence. Compared to the focus on territorial advances during Operation Serval, here the narrative's gain frames concentrated on the headcount of neutralised jihadists and the killings of high-ranking leaders of terrorist groups. While the pre-intervention stage operated solely with loss frames, and gain frames dominated the narrative during Operation Serval, the transition to Operation Barkhane under President

Hollande put forward loss frames once again. The narrative under President Macron during Operation Barkhane applied more gain frames again, attributing successes to the results of G5 Summits (particularly the January 2020 Pau Summit). The narrative consistently kept the "double victory" frame highlighting military advances, such as securing territories in the tri-border area, neutralising leaders of terrorist groups, as well securing political progress with the democratic transition of power in Niger and Burkina Faso as a collective political victory. Gain frames in the narrative extended to highlighting the success of initiating international coalitions (Takuba Task Force; Sahel Alliance) and building "a new intervention model" based on "respectful and balanced partnership". As loss frames, the narrative under President Macron continued to emphasise the retrospective risk of not acting, and the risk of not returning state services to the tri-border area, losing the support of local civilians. Developments in Mali following the August 2020 coup d'etat were also framed with positive prospects highlighting temporary setbacks and a new window of opportunity for realignment with the transitional authorities, only to lose their relevance with the second coup. Still, the withdrawal from Mali was announced by hailing "the success of operational and logistical manoeuvre of withdrawal" and the "effective results" of the operation in neutralising leaders of terrorist groups.

4.2.8. Summary of Configuration

This chapter presented the second stage of the hermeneutical cycle, analysing the configuration of France's strategic narrative. Along key empirical periods (Pre-intervention, Operation Serval, transformation to Operation Barkhane under President Hollande and Operation Barkhane under President Macron) the research project identified Security and Threat frames (as diagnostic and prognostic frames) and motivational Norm and Value frames (as status and role frames). It has put into practice the proposed Integrated Framework assessing the narrative's clarity and consistency, its resonance with previously identified interpretive structures in the Prefiguration chapter and the use of prospect framing.

Regarding consistency and clarity, certain frames endured in the narrative, acting as anchors of consistency. Such key frames were the threat of terrorism as a regional and global phenomenon, involving Europeans and Africans in the "same fight" and protecting France from the interconnected threat of emerging terrorist activities. Frames highlighting the security-development nexus, the norm of sovereignty as a basis for intervention, and frames suggesting quantitative multilateralism (France acting with its partners) also remained constant in the narrative. But as the intervention evolved, the narrative battled with more and more

inconsistencies. Amongst these, the analysis highlighted contradictions in the form of France's intervention; controversial communication on the prospected end of operation; frequently changing plans of troops reduction; paradigm shifts in operational objectives; a lack of consistency due to frame amplifications tailored to different audiences and differences in the framing practices of the two presidencies. Inconsistencies were often mended with frame extensions (such as "support" or "commitment" frames) providing obscurity and blurry meanings while frame transformations (such as "clarification and "renewal" frames) aimed at converting the interpretations of the intervention into new meanings. Therefore, the quality of narrative consistency impacted narrative clarity as inconsistencies in the narrative were mended through frame extensions applying ambiguous terms. The excessive use of frame transformations (recurring "renewal" and "clarification" frames) ultimately decreased the plausibility of the narrative.

Resonance with French master narratives, political myths, national role concepts were strong features of the narrative in the beginning of the intervention under President Hollande. However, under Macron's presidency, the narrative dialled down on norms and values-based motivational resonance frames, favouring pragmatic security and threat frames to validate France's intervention in the region. With evolving operational challenges, frames highlighting France's security provider role and its ability to support the region became dominant, resonating with notions of France's active-independent role concept. Regarding cognitive priors, the narrative resonated with France's rupture narrative on a changing level. Under President Hollande, it emphasised the leading role of Africans in the fight against terrorism, while it layered France's security provider role with frames of multilateralism. Although references to African leadership diminished under President Macron, the narrative explicitly negated cognitive priors of Francafrique, and colonialist practices based on French interests. Nevertheless, consistency with the rupture narrative weakened due to the shift from emphasising qualitative multilateralism (e.g. international legitimacy through UNSC Resolution) to arguing legitimacy based on intergovernmental agreements, revoking the cognitive priors of France's unilateral intervention policies based on bilateral security partnerships. To handle such cognitive priors, the narrative resorted to the practice of layering, emphasising the norm of sovereignty and highlighting frames of quantitative multilateralism (e.g.: international coalition, international partners' support).

Considering prospect framing, analysing loss and gain frames showed that certain periods of the intervention featured rather loss or rather gain frames, according to operational and political

realities. While the narrative during the pre-intervention stage operated solely with loss frames, Operation Serval featured more gain frames. The transition to Operation Barkhane put forward loss frames again, highlighting the need for a continuous and expanded military intervention and thereby balancing gain frames around the success of Operation Serval. Under Macron's presidency, while loss frames were used to highlight threats and risks of non-action, the narrative applied more gain frames suggesting prospects of progress. Loss and gain frames were used therefore as complementary: the narrative showcased loss framing when a new operational period started (underlining the need for France's engagement) and featured more gain frames when operational realities challenged the prospects of France's engagement in the region. The latter practice was striking during the last years of Operation Barkhane, as operational setbacks and the announcement of France's withdrawal from Mali was also communicated via gain frames.

4.3. REFIGURATION

As the third stage of the cycle, Refiguration focuses on how the narrative is restored to the world by addressing the following questions *What factors influence the coherence of narrative projection and narrative congruence? What are the driving factors in narrative contestation?* This stage evaluates coherence of narrative projection and congruence as non-semiotic aspects influencing the probability of the strategic narrative as well as narrative contestation featuring counternarratives. First, this chapter assesses the coherence of narrative projections through an analysis of governance model, bureaucratic politics and parallel policy narratives. Second, it addresses narrative congruence focusing on non-semiotic structural realities and counternarratives influencing public perceptions. Third, the chapter analyses key drivers of the narrative contestation process applying process tracing.

4.3.1. Coherence of Narrative Projection

Assessing the coherence of narrative projection, France's governance model, bureaucratic politics of the intervention and parallel policy narratives are at focus here. Due to the French semi-presidential political system, the President of the Republic as executive head of state is a central actor in foreign policymaking, deciding on the use of military force, including deployments abroad as external operations (Opérations extérieures, OPEX) of the French armed forces, as in the case of Operation Serval and Operation Barkhane. The Constitution of the Republic makes the President the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces (Constitution

1958, Article 15.). As Andrew Knapp and Vincent Wright highlighted, "*the president's constitutional position as commander-in-chief and chairman of the National Defence Committee ensures a central role in defence policy at all times, especially but not exclusively when he occupies his normal political position as head of the executive. This applies equally to major strategic initiatives and to the budgetary choices that ensure their implementation*" (Knapp & Wright 2006, 115.). President Hollande had a central role when it came to the decision to launch Operation Serval, and his media interviews, speeches and declarations provided a cornerstone for a centralised narrative projection. Although the government must inform the parliament in the event of an external military operation and the parliament votes on potential extensions to operations, there is no effective control over such operations by the National Assembly**,** which is demonstrated by the fact that the Sahel intervention was only discussed twice in plenary sessions since 2013. The National Assembly approved Operation Serval's extension after four months on 22 April 2013 and this authorisation was considered continuous for Operation Barkhane as well. France has domestic political consensus on external operations, with "no critical discourse on the goals, course and impact of OPEX" in the political and public sphere. (Tull 2023,5) Therefore, France's vertical political system and the general political consensus on French foreign operations provides a setup where configuring and projecting strategic narratives of external operations depend on the centralised decision-making of the Elysée palace.

Although the Elysée Palace is the center of decision-making on the use of force, its decisions are also shaped by bureaucratic politics, involving intervention entrepreneurs, such as defense ministers Jean-Yves Le Drian, who had a key role pushing for intervention with Operation Serval (Henke 2017, 313). Le Drian saw the situation in Mali as a major security threat that can destabilize the whole region and being skeptical that a multilateral ECOWAS force could resolve the crisis, he saw an opportunity to increase the role and importance of the Defense Ministry through the intervention (Ibid. 2017, 314-316). Le Drian employed various framing strategies to convince others – most importantly President Hollande himself – to launch a unilateral intervention in Mali. An example to such framing practice is the MoD's early use of the term "*jihadist terrorist groups*" instead of "*jihadist groups*", hence emphasizing the notion of terrorist threat posed by the crisis. (Henke 2017, 316-318). Le Drian's role was especially important considering that President Hollande publicly declared less than one month prior to the intervention that there will be no French boots on the ground in Mali. Moreover*,* while the French Foreign Office lobbied for a multilateral intervention, the director of the French

intelligence was sceptical about a full-scale French intervention. (Notin 2014, 178-179) Therefore, according to Henke's assessment, the Minister of Defense's role was crucial in pushing back dissenting opinions within the government and it is doubtful that without Le Drian's involvement, France would have deployed Operation Serval as a full-scale unilateral operation. (Henke 2017, 313). While France's vertical political system was conducive for projecting a coherent strategic narrative, bureaucratic politics sometimes challenged such centralised and coherent narrative projection, as Minister Le Drian's case has shown.

As President Macron inherited Operation Barkhane, coherence in narrative projection was continuous with the central decision-making role of the Elysée palace. Nevertheless, the inherited Sahelian intervention posed a difficult heritage for Macron's broader public policy on Africa, since it reinforced cognitive priors of France's traditional interventionist policy, while Macron tried to forge a narrative of change as a 'new approach on Africa". This "new approach" general policy narrative incorporated several initiatives, such as announcing the abolition of the CFA currency, assistance in financing and increasing official development aid, presidential travels to non-Francophone African countries, restitution of cultural property and coming to terms with France's history in Africa (Tull 2023). However, Macron's "new approach" was not entirely new in the sense that predecessors like President Hollande and President Sarkozy produced similar narratives on the need to improve relations with Africa based on new understandings, attempting to mitigate cognitive priors. Macron's speeches clearly reflected an awareness and an intention to dissolve cognitive priors of colonialism amid the Sahelian intervention, but some claims came through as insincere, lacking credibility. For example, stating that "*there no longer is a French policy for Africa*!" (28/11/2017) was in stark contrast with the reality of France's ongoing military intervention, with its largest deployments in the region. (Tull 2023) Besides denying the existence of "Françafrique" and framing colonialist cognitive priors as "representations of yesterday", Macron also emphasised pragmatic security frames and technical policy details to deepen the credibility of the French narrative. Still, such framing practices were insufficient to tackle the continuous influence of cognitive priors of colonialism among the local population and strengthening perceptions of France's insincerity in turning claims into deeds, proving to be a conundrum for the strategic narrative of France's intervention in the region.

4.3.2. Congruence in Light of Structuration and the Mediated Environment

Narrative congruence as the harmony of a narrative's configuration with the outside world is examined in non-semiotic structural realities and the mediated environment, particularly counternarratives influencing public perception. The analysis on structural realities is guided by the concept of structuration and it builds on secondary sources, incorporating existing research and literature on the topic. The Integrated Framework connects the analysis of structural aspects with counternarratives to assess key factors influencing narrative congruence. In identifying counternarratives, the research relies on public opinion surveys, exploratory media analysis and secondary sources of interpretations. Assessing the context of counternarratives, public opinion polls provide insight on to what extent the public's perception of France's intervention correlates with key frames from the narrative, and what counternarratives have emerged amid these perceptions.

The concept of structuration facilitates the analysis of non-semiotic, structural aspects of social practices which operate "*behind the backs' of agents and it may not correspond to their meaning-making efforts*" (Sum & Jessop 2014, 155). The key structural aspects examined here are economic and (geo)political realities considering France's role and interests in the region of the intervention. France's position and complex interests in the Sahel region are fundamental to understand the refiguration of its strategic narrative. In the literature, most researchers highlight the security policy aspects of France's intervention rational, which also featured in the configuration of France's strategic narrative. The destabilization of Mali, the spread of radical Islamism and the growing number of AQIM members projected a concrete threat that Mali could become a terrorist safe heaven (Boeke & Schuurman, 2015, 807). The potential for the emergence of a terrorist state in a region that is deeply connected to France clearly endangered France's security interests and posed a direct threat for the Sahel region. French officials were worried that terrorist propaganda could reach the Malian diaspora in France, forcing authorities to combat radicalism in France if they do not fight it in Mali (Henke 2017, 315; Boeke – Schuurman, 2015, 807). Moreover, the rapid expansion of AQIM meant an increased threat of hostage taking, potentially endangering 60 000 French expatriates in the Sahel. (Henke 2017, 315) Therefore, in launching Operation Serval, French decision-makers saw it as an opportunity to push back and weaken AQIM's positions. (Tertrais 2013, 53) As a key security policy objective, weakening AQIM's position was congruent with the semantic configuration of the strategic narrative.

Following the start of Operation Serval, several observers pointed out that France was also motivated by its economic interests, since the spread of the jihadist threat in Mali endangered the stability of the broader region. This left Paris concerned with the potential spillover effect towards the neighbouring Niger, which played a central role in maintaining French energy security, since France's electricity supply rests on nuclear energy, and it acquired approximately one third of its uranium from Nigerian mines (e.g. from the city of Arlit) (Elischer, 2013). Even before the Malian crisis, employees of these mines had been recurringly kidnapped by AQIM, making France interested in a solution to secure these uranium supplying sites. At the same time with launching Operation Serval, Paris sent special forces to Niger to protect the Areva company's uranium mines against heightened jihadist threats (Todd, 2013; Boeke & Schuurman, 2015, 805-807). Besides the energy security aspects of France's intervention, Mali's natural resources often featured as subject of France's economic interests in the region, although some commentators pointed out that such resources were not considered profitable to extract and therefore they did not feature in the decision of launching the intervention (Chivvis 2015, 76). Nevertheless, it was not only natural resources that French corporations were interested in, but French companies from different fields were concerned in various investment prospects in the Sahel region, (e.g. the Bollore Group's train construction project) who also faced their security threatened by the growing jihadist groups. The objective of securing the stability of the region with regards to French economic and geopolitical interests challenged the congruence of the narrative, inadvertently resonating with cognitive priors of colonialist exploitation.

Since the beginning of Operation Serval, the *Institut français d'opinion publique* (IFOP) conducted several opinion polls examining French public attitudes towards the intervention (Table 3. – Table 4.). Their results show strong public support towards the French military presence in Mali throughout the first three months of 2013.

Do you know that French troops are militarily engaged in Mali to fight alongside the Mali to fight alongside the Malian government against armed Islamist movements. Personally, are you completely in favor, somewhat in favor, rather not in favor or not at all in favor to this French military intervention?						
	12-13 January, 2013	17-18 January, 2013	4-6 February, 2013	27 February – 1 March, 2013	25-26 March, 2013	28-29 November, 2019	5-6 January, 2021

Completely in favor	22	20	27	19	21	16	10
Somewhat in favor	41	45	46	41	38	42	39
Total in favor	63	65	73	60	59	58	49
Rather not in favor	23	18	18	25	26	26	32
Not at all in favor	14	16	9	15	15	16	19
Total not in favor	37	34	27	40	41	42	51

Table 3. Level of Public Support to the French Military Intervention in Mali. (Source of data: IFOP 2021, 5)

Although attitudes were dynamically changing from the beginning of January till the end of March, most respondents (59-73%) were in favor of the intervention, while approximately 27-41% were against it. This is remarkable considering the data on French public attitudes towards other military interventions from the same period. For example, other IFOP surveys highlighted that the public support towards the intervention in Syria was much lower (39%) in 2012-2013; and public support was somewhat lower towards the intervention in the Central African Republic (51-41%) in 2013-2014 (Table 4). Correspondingly, the BVA Group's opinion polls from 2013 also confirmed that French public was rather optimistic about the future of the military intervention in Mali. A survey conducted in 2013 found that 60% of respondents had confidence in President Hollande leading France's military intervention in Mali (BVA 2013, 7). At the same time, only 46% thought that the intervention will help protecting France from terrorist attacks, while 51% believed that it will only encourage terrorists to take revenge (BVA 2013, 9). Overall, while the French public was supportive towards the military operation in the first months, it was also skeptical concerning its practical outcomes with regards to the fight against terrorism.

	Syria, 6-8 August, 2012	Syria, 3-6 May, 2013	Central African Republic, 6-7 December, 2013	Central African Republic, 2-4, January, 2014	Iraq, 22-27 May, 2015	Syria, 29 September – 1 October, 2015
Completely in favour	11	11	13	9	25	41
Somewhat in favour	28	28	38	32	41	35
Total in favour	39	39	51	41	66	76
Rather not in favour	29	29	21	26	21	14
Not at all in favour	32	32	27	33	13	10
Total not in favour	61	61	48	59	34	24

Table 4. Level of Public Support to French Military Interventions in Syria, Iraq and the Central African Republic 2012-2015. (Source of data: IFOP 2021, 6)

Although there is no available IFOP societal survey on the intervention in Mali between 2014 and 2019, results from November 2019 show that 6 years later positive attitudes were still dominant among the French public. At this time 58% of respondents were in favor of the intervention in Mali and 42% opposed it (Table 3). But public support towards the intervention in Mali was not exceptional since even more respondents were in favor of military operations in Iraq (66%) and Syria (76%) based on an IFOP opinion poll conducted in 2015, which suggests that counterterrorism operations enjoyed generally higher public support in this period (Table 4). Although the use of the military in Mali was generally supported by the public, this does not prove a distinguished support for the Mali intervention compared to other operations.

The last IFOP survey from 5-6 January 2021 highlights the erosion of the French public support towards the intervention in Mali since this time a slight majority of respondents (51%) were

found to be opposing the intervention (Table 3). But these attitudes could have been influenced by conducting the poll a few days after a controversial French combat operation, which accidentally targeted a wedding ceremony according to local sources.

Malian attitudes towards the intervention have also changed significantly throughout the years. Public opinion polls conducted by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung in Mali highlight a strong negative tendency (Table 5). In 2016 – 49% and in 2018 – 48% of respondents were satisfied with Operation Barkhane, surpassing the number of those who expressed dissatisfaction (37% and 44%). However, positive attitudes have diminished rapidly in 2019, and by the end of the year, only 13% of the local population was satisfied, while 80% was dissatisfied with the operation. This opposition to the operation became more moderate by 2021, when 34% of respondents were satisfied with Barkhane, but the 2022 survey once again highlighted strong negative sentiments in the Malian public. In 2022, only 9% were satisfied and 73% were dissatisfied, which demonstrates that the Malian public's support decreased significantly towards the continuation of Operation Barkhane.

	25 November – 6 December, 2016	10-20 November, 2017	13-27 October, 2018	12-26 November, 2019	March, 2021	April, 2022
Very satisfied	13	10	11	1	5	2
Rather satisfied	36	33	37	12	29	7
Total satisfied	49	43	48	13	34	9
Rather dissatisfied	17	19	15	14	15	13
Very dissatisfied	20	27	29	66	30	60
Total dissatisfied	37	46	44	80	45	73
Do not know/No answer	15	11	9	8	21	18

Table 5. Malian Attitudes towards Operation Barkhane. (Source of the data: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung 2022, 60)

Overall, public opinion polls suggest that while the French public was supportive towards France's intervention in the Sahel, its perceptions did not reflect key frames of the strategic narrative. Respondents were not convinced about security gains, such as that France's

intervention would help to protect France against terrorist attacks, and the notion of the intervention's potential effect in terrorist taking revenge was shared by more than half of the respondents. Poll results also showed that public perceptions did not reflect frames of the narrative on Mali being an ally, however respondents valued France's privileged relationship with Mali.[7]

The Malian public showed diminishing supports towards the intervention. While Operation Serval has met with broad public support, its extension as Operation Barkhane led to increasing dissatisfaction. In this process, several counternarratives emerged in the public discourse, eroding the congruence of the France's strategic narrative. Counternarratives are understood as competing narratives produced by other actors containing purpose frames that confute key purpose frames of the strategic narrative. Results of public opinion polls highlight some of the most popular criticisms towards France's intervention. When expressing their dissatisfaction with the operation, 68.5% of Malian respondents emphasized that Operation Barkhane does not protect the population from the violence of armed groups and terrorists; 51% thought that it is an accomplice of armed groups; and 27% believed that Barkhane supports the partition of the country. (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung 2022, 61) The counternarrative, that France is not interested in stabilizing the country, but rather in supporting Tuareg separatism has emerged already in 2013, when French troops initially did not allow the FAMA (Malian Armed Forces) to enter the city of Kidal, which provided an opportunity for the Tuareg MNLA (National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad) to re-establish its footprint in the city. (Tull 2021, 160) Complementarily, any accidents, failures, or inconsistencies of the military operations as well as France's inability to defeat jihadist forces came to be seen as beyond credible. Instead, such instances were interpreted as proofs of France's secret agenda against Mali (Ibid, 162). Another counternarrative – the exploitation of Mali's natural resources, particularly its mineral wealth – built on a variety of conspiracy theories which were popular among state officials. These included assumptions that French soldiers would smuggle gold from Mali, and France dumping nuclear waste in the country. (Ibid, 161) Such rumours affected every segment of the population (regardless of the level of education) (Tull 2021, 154).

While public perceptions did not reflect key frames of the narrative neither in Mali, nor in France; the French public was rather supportive of France's intervention. The Malian public

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[7] A poll conducted by Harris Interactive from December 7 to 9, 2021 only 14% considered Mali an ally, while 40% saw Mali as a threat and the remaining 44% thought that it is neither of these. At the same time 58% agreed that it is a good thing that France has a privileged relationship with Mali (Harris Interactive 2021, 17).

grew discontent with the intervention, and the rising disgruntlement was conducive to emerging counternarratives. While cognitive priors of colonialist exploitation influenced emerging counternarratives in the Malian public, notions of France's privileged relationship with Mali was seen as a rather positive thing by the French public. Most local counternarratives built on the disappointing results of the intervention, the structural realities of France's interests in the region's stability, and the cognitive priors of colonialist exploitation.

4.3.3. Dynamics of Narrative Contestation

External actors built on and strengthened indigenous counternarratives, challenging France's strategic narrative. For example, Aljazeera accused France with colonialist behavior several times, claiming that France is exploiting the region's gold and uranium, supports Tuareg separatism and French media romanticizes the MNLA. (Kane 2019) Similarly, Turkey also contributed to an anti-colonialist narrative against France, while portraying itself as an anti-colonial ally of Mali (Grigoriadis – Fusiek, 2022). The Turkish TRTWorld characterized the 2022 French withdrawal as a colonial-style retreat, while acknowledging that the increasing presence of Russian mercenaries is a huge concern for the region (Ramdani, 2022).

Increased Russian activities in Mali also led to narrative contestation in the public discourse. As members of the Kremlin-linked Wagner private military company were seen in Mali, Russia started to reinforce its own communication on events in the Sahel region. The Russian Federation's official narrative originally denied the presence of the Wagner group in Mali, claiming that French military found no signs of the company in the country (Tass, 2021). By January 2022, this has changed significantly as Russian Permanent Representative to the United Nations Vasily Nebenzya said that "*The hysteria around a Russian private military company is another example of double standards*" and "*Mali's people have every right to interact with other partners willing to cooperate with them in strengthening security*" (Tass, 2022).

Overall, the increasing local anti-French sentiments met with pro-Russian slogans in various movements across the region, including the Malian collective "Yerewolo", a pro-junta social movement which was reportedly financed by Yevgeny Prigozhin. (Africanews 2021) However, as Alex Thurston points out, it is "*difficult to tell where organic anti-French sentiment ends and Russian-backed astroturfing — creating a fake grassroots movement with opaque sponsorship — begins*" in the region (Thurston 2022). By 2021, several organizations became increasingly anti-French in the Sahel, receiving Russia as a viable alternative, but such developments are not exclusively due to the success of external actors' activities. Anti-

colonialist and anti-French sentiments rooted in cognitive priors increased through dissatisfaction with results of the intervention and the general security situation, while external counternarratives strengthened this process by exploiting local discontent.

Recognizing the threats posed by counternarratives, France started to actively engage them. Defence Minister Florence Parly argued in 2021 that "*Fighting against terrorism implies... protecting yourself during communication and disinformation wars targeting the local populations, which can change perceptions*" (France24, 2021). In fact, such "protection" measures had gone as far that in 2020, Facebook removed a broad account network (originating from France) because of "coordinated inauthentic behaviour". This account network targeted Mali and the Central African Republic, posting supportive commentary about the French military, and criticism of Russia's involvement in the Central African Republic (Gleicher – Agranovich 2020).

The case of the Gossi base genocide accusation also displayed France's information warfare activities as a response to narrative contestation. According to accusations spread in the Russia-linked social media, French troops committed mass killing at the Gossi military base before transferring its control to the Malian Armed Forces. (Doxsee – Thompson 2022) However, on the 22 April 2022, French armed forces released a satellite video featuring members of the Wagner group in Gossi two days after the French forces left, falsifying evidence by digging and burying bodies in the sand (Bensimon – Le Cam 2022).

Towards the end of Operation Barkhane, France's strategic narrative significantly weakened due to a lack of transparency about civilian casualties and operational failures. This process accelerated through deteriorating relations between the junta and French officials. Following the news of Malian authorities' cooperation with the Wagner Group, Foreign Minister Le Drian claimed that the junta is out of control and illegitimate, which led to the expulsion of France's ambassador from Bamako (France24, 2022). Le Drian's remarks also strengthened cognitive priors of France's interventionist tradition, inadvertently weakening the coherence of France's narrative. Parallelly, the expulsion of the French ambassador and the deposition of Malian leaders cooperating with France evoked frames of freedom from colonialists in the local public.
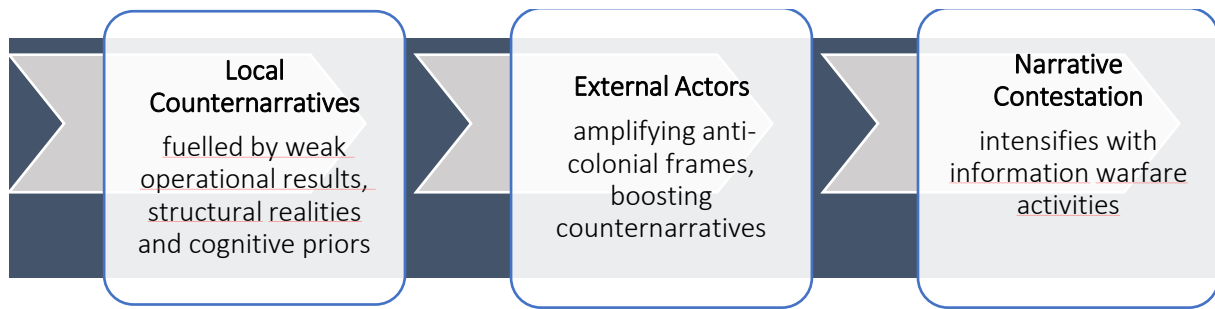
Figure 6. Process of Narratative Contestation. Source: Author's own work.

Factors challenging the congruence of France's strategic narrative contributed to the process of narrative contestation. Structural realities of France's economic and geopolitical interests, weak results of Operation Barkhane (lack of transparency about civilian casualties and operational failures) and cognitive priors of colonialist practices and unilateral French intervention policy fuelled counternarratives claiming a secret agenda behind France's intervention aiming at exploitation and support for separatism. External actors such as Russia, Turkey and Aljazeera capitalized on local dissatisfaction and anti-French sentiments boosting local counternarratives and amplifying anti-colonialist frames. These activities enhanced narrative contestation triggering increasing information warfare activities from France (Figure 6).

4.3.4. Summary of Refiguration

Refiguration analysis focused on how France's strategic narrative is restored to the world, highlighting aspects beyond the semantic configuration of the narrative. The concept of narrative probability guided the focus on coherence of narrative projection, narrative congruence and narrative contestation.

France's vertical institutional system was conducive for projecting a coherent strategic narrative, as these efforts were centralised in the Elysée palace. Nevertheless, bureaucratic politics challenged such centralised and coherent narrative projection, as Minister Le Drian's case has shown. Achieving coherence with parallel public policy narrative on Africa was also difficult, ultimately weakening the credibility of the strategic narrative.

Structural realities of France's regional interests challenged the congruence of the strategic narrative. As a key security policy objective, weakening AQIM's position was congruent with the semantic configuration of the narrative. Nevertheless, the objective of securing the stability of the region with regards to French economic and geopolitical interests posed a challenge to the congruence of the narrative as the intervention prolonged. The narrative's incongruence with structural realities, the intervention's weak results, the lack of transparency about civilian

casualties and cognitive priors of colonialist exploitation influenced the emergence of counternarratives amid diminishing public support for the intervention.

External actors such as Turkey, Russia and Aljazeera also amplified anti-colonialist and anti-French frames exploiting local discontent. As a response to narrative contestation, France strengthened its information warfare activities, but the breakdown of relations with the Malian junta reinforced local counternarratives, evoking cognitive priors of France's interventionist tradition and frames of freedom form colonialism.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1. EVALUATING HYPOTHESES

In social sciences such as International Relations, the concept of narrative has a fundamental role interpreting contemporary phenomena with regards to the multitude of communication platforms and mass-self-communication patterns. Therefore, using this concept in IR requires an understanding of the limits and potentials this term offers based on interdisciplinary foundations. This dissertation started from examining problems that arose from the conceptual confusion and typological difficulties in the literature on strategic narrative. The main premise of this work is that these problems can be solved by creating an integrated framework based on synthesizing interdisciplinary perspectives. Interpreting this concept in an interdisciplinary manner provides a complex, in-depth analytical perspective. This endeavour was conducted through combining insights from narrative theories and the hermeneutical cycle, through clarifying links between narrative and framing and by synthesising theories and thoughts on the conditions influencing the persuasion capacity of strategic narratives. Therefore, this research project was structured through the main hypothesis, claiming that an *Integrated Framework for the analysis of strategic narrative can be drawn up by integrating narrative theories through Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutical cycle with framing theories, as well as with theorizing on the persuasion capacity of strategic narratives in International Relations*. The Conceptual Background demonstrates how an Integrated Framework can be set up by synthesising interdisciplinary theoretical pillars, while the Research Design chapter operationalises the Framework based on these theoretical pillars. This main hypothesis is elaborated through the following subhypotheses:

A. *Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutical philosophy can integrate key notions of structuralist and narrative paradigm perspectives, retaining the analytical edges of structuralists perspectives as well as the broader conceptual horizon in the narrative paradigm approach.*

H1/A subhypothesis is accepted. The juxtaposition of structuralist and narrative paradigm perspectives provides complementary insights for the conceptual curation of narrative. The dissertation has demonstrated that ideas from structuralist and narrative paradigm perspectives can be nested in *Ricoeur's hermeneutical cycle*. Structural narratology and classical perspectives on the role of narrative in rhetorical discourse can provide clear conceptual contours, while the narrative paradigm perspective can disrupt assumptions on distinct forms of discourse with the notion of narrative rationality. Ricoeuer's cycle highlights stages of *Prefiguration, Configuration*

and Refiguration (Ricoeur 1991). *Prefiguration* shows that previous exposure of the audience to stories profoundly shape their experience and expectations as each narrative points to a "before", to the "lived world," which is itself already organized as a narrative. *Configuration* refers to the creative act of emplotment, providing a new and unique view of reality through the composition of an explicit story. *Refiguration* refers to the final narrative stage when "the world of the story is restored to the real world" meaning the process when a story configuration is perceived by a recipient. While structuralist perspectives support assessing a narrative's persuasion capacity by focusing on the *configuration of semantic structures,* the narrative paradigm perspective (Fisher 1984) provides concepts – *narrative probability and narrative fidelity* – linking to all three stages of the cycle. Narrative fidelity is a key aspect in Prefiguration and Configuration, and the Integrated Framework reflects that by highlighting the requirement of resonance between narrative configuration and pre-existing interpretive structures. Narrative probability also fits the hermeneutical cycle, the Integrated Framework highlights focus on narrative probability through semantic consistency and clarity in the Configuration stage; as well as with coherence of narrative projection and narrative congruence in the Refiguration stage.

B. *Ricouer's framework supports focus on the mind-narrative nexus, it is well adaptable to the loop of narrative representations and the inherently dialogical, multi-perspectival and fragmented context of the contemporary media ecology.*

H1/B subhypothesis is accepted. The proposed Integrated Framework reflects the loop of narrative representation by building on Ricoueur's hermeneutical cycle with stages of *Prefiguration, Configuration* and *Refiguration*. The Integrated Framework highlights the mind-narrative nexus by focusing on the narrative competence of the audience in the Prefiguration stage, addressing those *preexisting interpretive structures* which are relevant for strategic narratives in International Relations – as *master narratives, political myths, national role concepts and cognitive priors* – through historical institutional analysis. The Integrated Framework also includes focus on the dialogical, multi-perspectival and fragmented context of the contemporary media ecology by assessing *non-semiotic aspects* of a narrative's refiguration, such as *coherence* in narrative projection, narrative *congruence* with structural realities, the encounter with *counternarratives* and the ensuing process of narrative *contestation*. Focus on the mind-narrative nexus is intertwined with assessing the media ecology and accounting for preexisting interpretive structures and non-semiotic aspects is also linked in the Framework.

C. *Ricoeur's narrative hermeneutic philosophy provides a foundation for conceptualizing strategic narrative in International Relations, through a cyclic understanding of narrative*

figuration, incorporating semiotic and non-semiotic aspects, integrating the analytical
potential of framing theories as well as perspectives on the persuasion capacity of strategic
narratives.

H1/C subhypothesis is accepted. The Integrated Framework highlights Ricoeur's hermeneutical cycle – *Prefiguration, Configuration, Refiguration* – as a basis for integrating interdisciplinary theories and perspectives for analysing strategic narratives in IR. This cyclic perspective helps integrating focus on *semiotic and non-semiotic aspects* of a narrative to avoid reducing analysis to semantic configurations. Integrating focus on context along *temporal* (Prefiguration, Refiguration) and *non-semiotic aspects* (coherence of projection, narrative congruence, narrative contestation) supports reflection on the dynamics and complexity of international affairs. The Framework also integrates *framing theories* highlighting semiotic aspects of emplotment in the Configuration stage. It recognises narrative as the broader structure applying various framing devices. Framing theories from sociology (*frame alignment, framing tasks*) and behavioural economics (*prospect theory's framing effect*) were contrasted with the literature on strategic narratives in IR, highlighting links between *framing practices* and the *persuasion capacity of strategic narratives*. Fisher's narrative rationality perspective is synthesised with theories on strategic narratives' effectiveness, highlighting *resonance, purpose, probability* and *prospects* as key conditions influencing the persuasive capacity of strategic narratives.

Framing practices solely strengthen the persuasion capacity of strategic narrative, and gain
frames are dominant in the strategic narrative of a protracted intervention.

H1/D subhypothesis is rejected. To address the second part of this subhypothesis, this research contrasted insight from *prospect theory's framing effect*[8] (Kahneman & Tversky 1992) with the *literature's expectation of gain framing* for strategic narrative, finding that such expectations on gain framing can be misleading. Results of the empirical case study underline that instead of permanent gain framing, the narrative of a protracted military intervention may use *both loss and gain frames* along the *evolving dynamics of politico-military realities*, applying loss framing to underline the need for engagement even amid progress, and gain frames when realities challenge the prospect of engagement. To assess the first part of this hypothesis (if framing practices solely strengthen the persuasive capacity of a strategic narrative), the research has examined the effect of using *framing tasks* (Snow & Benford 1988) and *frame alignment* (Snow et al. 1986) in a strategic narrative. Findings from the empirical case study showed that while *diagnostic and motivational framing tasks generally strengthen, the use of prognostic*

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[8] Highlighting the impact of loss frames as increasing risk-taking preferences of an audience.

framing can weaken a narrative's persuasive capacity through decreasing narrative probability. Diagnostic framing tasks can strengthen narrative probability by enhancing its consistency and clarity and highlighting a compelling purpose. Motivational framing tasks (as norms and values frames) resonating with preexisting interpretive structures can enhance narrative fidelity, improving engagement with the audience. However, in a strategic narrative of a protracted military intervention, the use of prognostic frames can challenge the persuasive capacity of a strategic narrative, since framing the implementation of an intervention over a prolonged period can decrease narrative probability as changes to the rules of engagement and operational objectives can produce inconsistencies in the narrative. Moreover, the use of *frame alignment practices also shows a mixed impact on the persuasive capacity of strategic narratives*. Frame amplification and frame bridging in diagnostic and motivational framing tasks strengthened the narrative's persuasive capacity by increasing narrative fidelity and narrative probability. But when frame alignment practices as frame extension and frame transformation were used excessively to cover inconsistencies in the narrative, it ultimately harmed narrative probability through decreasing narrative clarity.

5.2. SUMMARY OF THE INTEGRATED FRAMEWORK

As these hypotheses have addressed, the proposed Integrated Framework (*See: Table 1*.) demonstrates how to conduct an in-depth study on a strategic narrative. Building on Ricoeur's hermeneutical cycle – as Prefiguration, Configuration and Refiguration – this framework provides a conceptual toolbox for empirical analysis.

Prefiguration analysis provides contrast material for studying configuration by identifying *preexisting interpretive structures* which shape the desirability and fidelity of a potential strategic narrative. Prefiguration analysis identifies and evaluates *master narratives, political myths, national role concepts and cognitive priors* as influential preexisting interpretive structures. Institutionalist concepts – such as *drift* and *layering* – can facilitate the analysis by outlining relative position and dynamics of rival interpretive structures through historical institutional analysis.

Configuration analysis combines conceptual tools to uncover complex layers in the semantic configuration of a narrative, focusing on *clarity and consistency in purpose framing, resonance with preexisting interpretive structures and prospect framing.* Configuration analysis is based on a *purpose frame analysis*, highlighting specific *framing tasks and practices of frame alignment.* Based on these results, configuration analysis evaluates semantic consistency,

demonstrates how various framing practices tackle contradictions in the evolution of the narrative and how such practices impact clarity. Drawing on pre-identified master narratives, political myths, national role concepts and cognitive priors; configuration analysis evaluates the narrative's resonance with key interpretive structures. Configuration analysis also includes an attention to prospect framing, highlighting how gain and loss frames are used throughout the narrative.

Refiguration analysis focuses on how a narrative is restored to the world as semantic configurations meet reality. *Coherence of narrative projection, narrative congruence and the dynamics of narrative contestation* are analysed to highlight aspects of strategic narratives beyond their semantic configurations. Coherence of narrative projection is evaluated based on governance model, the role of bureaucratic politics, and parallel policy narratives. Narrative congruence is analysed with regards to non-semiotic structural realities and counternarratives shaping public perceptions. Building on coherence and congruence analysis, the dynamics of narrative contestation is highlighted through focusing on external actor's role and the emergence of information warfare activities.

The strategic narrative's *persuasive capacity* is examined in aspects of *narrative probability and narrative fidelity.* Narrative probability is based on assessing *consistency and clarity* of purpose and prospect frames in the Configuration stage; as well as c*oherence of narrative projection and narrative congruence* in the Refiguration stage. Narrative fidelity is assessed based on *resonance* between purpose and prospect frames of narrative configuration and pre-existing interpretive structures identified in Prefiguration.

5.3. CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE LITERATURE

The dissertation contributes to the literature by presenting the above detailed conceptual framework. This Integrated Framework bridges conceptual inventory in the literature from International Relations, with perspectives in narratology (structural narratology and narrative paradigm perspectives), and framing theories and this synthesis results in a refined compendium of key analytical concepts for understanding strategic narratives. This cycle-based Integrated Framework is more comprehensive than the linear process (narrative formation, projection, and reception) mainstreamed in the literature, since it reflects better the intertwined dynamics of narrative figuration. It highlights that Prefiguration fundamentally impacts narrative formation and combines focus on the intertwined dynamics of projection and reception in the Refiguration stage. Prefiguration analysis highlights focus on preexisting interpretive structures embedding

concepts from International Relations and Historical Institutionalism to identify and analyse such structures. In configuration analysis, the framework offers novel categories for thematic analysis, upgrading previous categorisation attempts by extending focus to framing tasks. Distinguishing between status and role frames provides greater conceptual clarity than Miskimmon et. al.'s (2013) distinction between actor and system narratives. While other approaches in the literature lack a thorough theoretical background, configuration analysis is grounded in framing theories from sociology (framing tasks, frame alignment) and behavioural economics (prospect theory). Such interdisciplinary perspectives help excluding bias towards gain frames, integrating the perspective of prospect framing for analysis. Refiguration analysis complements the understanding of strategic narratives with aspects of coherence in projection, narrative congruence and contestation dynamics. Addressing coherence in narrative projection, it includes focus on governance model and bureaucratic politics updating the common practice of working with the Rational Actor Model when analysing strategic narratives in IR. By focusing on narrative probability, the research embeds concepts of consistency, clarity, coherence and congruence into a single framework, bringing unambiguousness to the literature which often used these attributes interchangeably to describe strategic narratives.

5.4. EMPIRICAL RESULTS

Besides theoretical contributions to the literature, this research project also provided novel empirical results testing the applicability of the Integrated Framework on a case study of a protracted foreign military intervention, analysing the strategic narrative of France's intervention in the Sahel region from 2012 to 2022. Such a longitudinal study on the strategic narrative of France's contemporary military intervention in the Sahel region was missing from the empirical literature so far. Using the Integrated Framework for analysing France's strategic narrative, the dissertation has presented the following empirical results in aspects of *resonance with preexisting interpretive structures, prospect framing, consistency and clary of purpose framing, coherence of narrative projections, narrative congruence and narrative contestation:*

- As preexsiting interpretive structures with the potential to influence narrative fidelity and desirability, prefiguration analysis has highlighted master narratives of sovereignty and humanitarianism, political myths of the Gaullist consensus, France's active-independent national role concept and cognitive priors of colonialism, neo-colonialism and France's unilateral intervention policy. To strengthen the drift from burdensome cognitive priors, France relied on the "rupture" narrative, emphasising support for local

ownership (Africanisation) and adopting a multilateralist disposition in military interventions, seeking multilateral legitimacy (qualitative multilateralism) as well as inviting multilateral frameworks for military operations (quantitative multilateralism). The clash between the rupture narrative and France's national role concept evoked the practice of layering, integrating multilateralism in the service of France's pursuit of being an influential power through practices of regionalisation, as well as balancing its security provider role with capacity building initiatives emphasising local ownership.

- *Resonance* with key preexisting interpretive structures, such as master narratives of sovereignty and humanitarianism; political myths of the Gaullist consensus and France's active-independent national role concept was present throughout the narrative. Although France's strategic narrative highlighted norm and value frames resonating with French master narratives and political myths under President Hollande, an identical emphasis was missing from the narrative under President Macron. Resonance with France's active-independent national role concept was constant in the narrative, although the two presidencies highlighted different aspects of this concept. Under President Holland, France's security provider role was layered with frames emphasising African leadership and qualitative multilateralism aiming at international legitimacy. Under President Macron, references to African leadership and qualitative multilateralism diminished and frames emphasising France's security provider role became prominent. The narrative consistently negated cognitive priors of colonialism and Francafrique, resonating with France' "rupture" narrative. However, decreasing emphasis on African leadership and the shift from qualitative multilateralism to intergovernmental agreements as the legal basis of the intervention revoked cognitive priors of France's unilateral intervention policies. As a remedy to such cognitive priors, the narrative resorted to the practice of layering, highlighting the norm of sovereignty (in reference to sovereign decision of Sahelian states) to legitimize changing modalities of France's intervention in the Sahel.

- *Prospect* framing was tailored to the politico-military developments of the intervention. The narrative applied loss framing to underline the need for France's new or continuous engagement even when the operation progressed, and it applied gain framing when operational realities challenged the prospects of France's engagement in the region. As a key gain frame, the "double victory" frame (military and political progress) persisted throughout the narrative. Transforming the intervention to a counterterrorism operation converted gain framing, shifting from emphasising territorial advances to highlighting

headcounts of neutralised belligerents and success in initiating international coalitions. As a key loss frame, the risk of non-action was emphasised retrospectively, and warnings of losing the support of the civilian population by failing to return state services to the tri-border area were dominant throughout the narrative. The narrative in the pre-intervention period operated solely with loss frames, and gain frames were dominant during Operation Serval, while the transition to Operation Barkhane under President Hollande put forward loss frames once again. Under President Macron, the narrative continued to emphasise loss frames. As operational and political realities challenged the prospects of France's engagement in the region (especially in the last years of Operation Barkhane), the narrative tried to highlight positive prospects amid setbacks. As such, it emphasised the chance of realignment after the first coup'd état in 2020. Even France's official announcement of its withdrawal from Mali was communicated through gain frames, highlighting the logistical success and the effectiveness of the withdrawal process.

- *Consistency and clarity of purpose framing* was challenged: although a few key frames were used consistently throughout the narrative (e.g. threat of terrorism; norm of sovereignty), several contradictions burdened it over time. Diagnostic frames were consistent, clear and focused in the narrative, and they conveyed a compelling reason for France' intervention in the region through focused threat and security frames. However prognostic frames were rather confusing than compelling regarding the implementation of the intervention, as communication on the rules of engagement and operational objectives were subject to recurring transformation as the intervention prolonged, which weakened narrative probability. Inconsistencies emerged around the nature of France's intervention; the prospected end of the military operation; plans of troops reduction; paradigm shifts in operational objectives; tailoring frame amplifications to different audiences and differences in the configuration style of the two presidencies. To mend inconsistencies, the narrative often relied on certain frame alignment practices – such as frame extensions (e.g. "support" and "commitment" frames), and frame transformations (e.g. "clarification" and "renewal" frames) which resulted in ambiguous meanings. Blurring inconsistencies through frame extensions ultimately decreased narrative clarity and the recurring use of frame transformations harmed narrative probability.

- *Coherence of narrative projection* was supported by the institutional setup of France's political system, which provided a centralised projection platform through the semi-

presidential system as narrative configuration was spearheaded from the Elysée palace. Nevertheless, bureaucratic politics and parallel public policy narratives challenged coherence, weakening narrative probability. In bureaucratic politics, Minister Le Drian's intervention entrepreneur role and dissenting government agencies affected narrative projection, decreasing its coherence. France's parallel public policy narrative on Africa – which aimed at presenting "a new approach on Africa" – was difficult to reconcile with the ongoing French intervention in the Sahel, strengthening perceptions of France's failure in turning claims into deeds, further deteriorating the credibility of the strategic narrative.

- *Congruence* with French security policy objectives contributed to narrative probability, but structural realities, such as economic and geopolitical interests of Paris, and weak results of the military operation challenged it as the intervention prolonged. These sources of incongruence, and the lack of transparency about civilian casualties as well as cognitive priors of colonialist exploitation also made the strategic narrative vulnerable to emerging counternarratives from its mediated environment. The main counternarratives suggested that France has a secret agenda in Mali, and its military operation does not protect the population from the violence of armed groups, but acts as their accomplice, aiming at the partition of the country and the exploitation of Mali's and the Sahel region's natural resources.

- *Contestation*: While problems with the narrative's coherence and congruence, failure of the military operation and local cognitive priors fuelled counternarratives, external actors (Turkey, Russia, Aljazeera) also boosted them by amplifying anti-colonialist and anti-French frames, triggering information warfare activities from France. Eventually, the breakdown of relations with the Malian junta reinforced local counternarratives, evoking cognitive priors of France's interventionist tradition and frames of freedom from colonialism.

5.5. LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS TO FUTURE RESEARCH PROJECTS

This research project has primarily an academic use, supporting scholarly research in International Relations and Strategic Studies by contributing to the literature through constructing a novel integrated framework for strategic narratives of protracted military interventions. Nevertheless, this project also offers policy implications for strategic

communication, highlighting controversial effects of framing practices, and it produces novel empirical perspectives by using the integrated framework on the narrative of France's military intervention in the Sahel.

Since the primary aim of the research was to construct a framework based on interdisciplinary foundations and to show the applicability of the proposed framework on a case study of a protracted military intervention, therefore a single case study suited this objective. Limitations in the dissertation's size also encouraged a focus on a single case study. Moreover, I recognize that a more concise presentation of the case study could enhance its legibility. Nevertheless, to enhance the generalization prospect of these findings, future research should involve larger sample sizes.

Therefore, the continuation of this project's work could expand focus at strategic narratives of other protracted foreign military interventions, either as multiple cases from a single state or multiple cases from various states. Looking at strategic narratives of alliances or ad-hoc coalitions in armed conflict can be also relevant for generalization objectives. Studying how prospect framing works in a larger sample strategic narratives of foreign military interventions can be a further promising research objective.

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