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On my honour as a student of the Diplomatische Akademie Wien, I submit this work in good faith and pledge that I have neither given nor received unauthorized assistance on it.

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Abstract (ENG):

The present thesis is an analysis of the origins, formation and effects of strategic culture on the basis of two case studies of regionally organised cooperation on defence: the United Kingdom and France, and Benelux. Applying a model of strategic culture that consists of cultural norms and ideas, as well as the practical military capabilities of a political system, I have sought to analyse how states frame cooperation with partners, and their strategic position in the official discourse of political declarations and treaties. Through an analysis of the national and military history of the states, I have identified prevalent narratives and themes that have shaped and informed the formulation of strategic positions. The goal was to find the elements in states' strategic culture that facilitate cooperation with certain partners, highlight the challenges their partnership faces and thereby draw lessons for other projects of defence cooperation, such as more ambitious EU defence coordination.

The findings of the analysis show that the success of both the UK-France cooperation and Benelux is influenced by key commonalities in either the ideational security identity aspect of strategic culture, or the practical defence architecture dimension. Both partnerships repeatedly draw upon recurring narratives and themes that have their origins in history to frame their cooperation in the official discourse. Another important takeaway is that commonalities in one aspect of strategic culture can at least partially bridge divides in others, yet it appears that deeply-rooted cultural similarities, as well as a tradition of committed multilateralism, make for a partnership that is more resilient in the face of unexpected political developments. Accordingly, the Benelux partnership seems more promising on the long term than the partnership between the UK and France, which, despite reaffirmed efforts to cooperate, will be under considerable pressure stemming from fundamental disagreements over their own role as global leaders, and the role of international institutions such as the EU.

Abstract (DEU):

Die vorliegende Arbeit ist eine Analyse der Ursprünge, Formierung und Wirkung von strategischer Kultur anhand von zwei Fallbeispielen regionaler Zusammenarbeit im Bereich von Verteidigung: Großbritannien und Frankreich auf der einen Seite, Benelux auf der anderen. Die Arbeit untersucht wie Staaten ihre Zusammenarbeit mit Partnern, sowie ihre eigene strategische Position anhand von offiziellen Dokumenten wie Verträge und gemeinsame Erklärungen diskursiv konstruieren. Dabei wurde ein Modell strategischer Kultur angewandt, welches sowohl einen ideellen Aspekt kultureller Normen enthält, als auch die materiellen militärischen Fähigkeiten berücksichtigt. Anhand einer historischen Analyse der nationalen und spezifisch militärischen Geschichte der untersuchten Staaten wurden wichtige Narrative herausgearbeitet, welche die Formulierung strategischer Positionen beeinflusst und geformt haben. Das Ziel der Arbeit war es, die Elemente strategischer Kulturen zu identifizieren, die Zusammenarbeit mit bestimmten erleichtern, sowie Hindernisse zu beleuchten, um dadurch Lektionen für andere Initiativen solcher Zusammenarbeit zu formulieren, wie etwa die ambitionierte EU Koordinierung im Sicherheits- und Verteidigungsbereich.

Die Ergebnisse der Analyse zeigen, dass die Erfolge beider Partnerschaften von bedeutenden Gemeinsamkeiten in beiden Aspekten der jeweiligen strategischen Kulturen beeinflusst werden. Beide Partnerschaften greifen auf wiederkehrende Narrative zurück, die ihren Ursprung in der Geschichte der jeweiligen Staaten haben, um ihre Zusammenarbeit im politischen Diskurs zu formulieren. Ein weiteres Ergebnis zeigt, dass Gemeinsamkeiten in einem Aspekt strategischer Kultur in der Lage sind, Unstimmigkeiten in einem anderen zumindest zum Teil zu überbrücken. Dennoch zeigt sich, dass identitätsbezogene Gemeinsamkeiten, sowie eine Tradition von starkem Multilateralismus, robuster gegenüber unerwarteten politischen Entwicklungen zu sein scheinen. Es folgt, dass die Benelux Partnerschaft auf lange Sicht vielversprechender zu sein scheint als die Zusammenarbeit zwischen Großbritannien und Frankreich. Letztere wird, trotz mehrfach beteuerter Absichten, die Partnerschaft fortzusetzen, unter dem Druck fundamentaler Gegensätze im Bezug auf die eigene Rolle als globale Führungsmacht, sowie die Rolle internationaler Organisationen wie der EU, in Zukunft in Mitleidenschaft gezogen.

1. Introduction

1.1. Background: NATO, the EU, and regional cooperation

With the end of WWII, Europe had to rethink its security architecture. The war and the unprecedented destruction caused by the war had shown the nations of Europe that going it alone was no longer a real option. Lasting peace could not be achieved through the old balance of power system. Likewise, for some smaller states, neutrality had lost its appeal, as it had been repeatedly violated over the course of two World Wars. The new approach was going to be cooperation and alliance building. On one hand, the idea was to bind countries together, economically, politically and military, to reduce the risk of them going to war with each other. On the other hand, strong alliances and cooperation in the field of security would protect the alliance from the real and perceived outside threats. The two broader frameworks that were created to achieve these goals were NATO and the European integration project (eventually leading to the EU). As early as 1946, Winston Churchill called for the establishment of a "kind of United States of Europe" and other leaders, French, German, American, expressed similar desires, yet all out of different considerations[1]. The French wanted to once and for all put an end to German aggression. The Germans, equally weary of war, were aching for a lasting peace as well. On a global scale, the US already prepared for the Cold War to come, and needed strong and dependable allies against the dreaded future conflict with the Soviet Union, that was expected to lie ahead. To this end, NATO was established in an attempt to unite the Western hemisphere in one military alliance.

Although in the context of the Cold War, security and defence matters would be left to NATO, the European integration process did originally envision a Common Defence component as early as the 1950s. This initially failed however, as it soon became apparent that questions of national sovereignty and individual concerns and interests would pose considerable obstacles, especially in the defence sector, one that has traditionally been considered to be in the domain of national affairs. An early attempt to establish a defence union, the European Defence Community (EDC), failed in the face of questions of financing, membership (the German question) and a lack of commitment by France in 1954[2]. Reconciling the different interests

[1] Simon Duke, *The Elusive Quest for European Securi*ty: *From EDC to CFSP* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), 13.
[2] Duke, *Elusive Quest*, 29-31.

would become a considerable obstacle, as not only the major powers had their caveats. Naturally, the smaller nations had their own considerations, fears and wishes as well[3].

Considering the sensitive nature of defence, NATO adopted a less political and more technical approach to defence cooperation, fostering interoperability through standardisation in communications, technical language, organisation and joint military manoeuvres. Creating interoperability in the field lies at the heart of NATO, as its identity is "nested in planning, exercising, conceiving (all the conceptual work behind doctrine, interoperability, capability development) and partnering"[4].

Still, security and defence never left the discourse of European integration, and with the end of the Cold War, Member States would now be willing to seriously consider a common foreign security and defence policy, in a shift brought about by the end of the Cold War and the desire by many European citizens to have the Community play a bigger role in international affairs[5]. Besides kicking off the formal process of actual political integration, the Maastricht Treaty of 1992 also brought new life to the plans to create a Common Defence (CD), falling under the second pillar referred to as Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). With the Lisbon Treaty further consolidating and substantiating common security policy as Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), defining clear tasks and priorities of a European defence as previously outlined in the so-called Petersberg Tasks (1992), continuous effort was made to formalise defence co-operation. France under President Macron openly advocates the creation of a European Army as military contingents already co-operate in the field not only in the context of NATO missions, but of the EU's own CSDP missions[6]. Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) aims to streamline the structural integration of the EU national armed forces.

Nevertheless, both frameworks continue to encounter considerable problems. While NATO standardisation was a success in many areas of practical and technical cooperation, there is dissent on some larger issues: different defence spending priorities[7] and apparent disagreement over military intervention (although the 2003 invasion of Iraq was not planned as a NATO operation, it clearly showed the vastly different positions of the alliance members) paint a

[3] George J. Stein, *Benelux Security Cooperation: A New European Defense Community?* (London and New York: Routlege, 1990),24.
[4] Michel Yakovleff, "The Identity of NATO," accessed February 18, 2021, https://www.nato.int/docu/review/articles/2017/01/20/the-identity-of-nato/index.html.
[5] Duke, *Elusive Quest*, 80-82.
[6] Anh Thu Nguyen, "Macron's Call for a European Army: Still Echoing or Forgotten?," European Law Blog, accessed January 16, 2021, https://europeanlawblog.eu/2020/06/22/macrons-call-for-a-european-army-still-echoing-or-forgotten/.
[7] Holly Ellyatt, "Trump's NATO criticism is 'valid,' Europe isn't spending enough on defense, UK ex-minister says," *CNBC*, July 11, 2018, https://www.cnbc.com/2018/07/11/trumps-nato-criticism-is-valid-europe-isnt-spending-enough-on-def.html.

somewhat less harmonious picture of NATO cooperation. On the other hand, the EU is plagued by a chronic lack of political will, concerns over state sovereignty and political costs associated with a Common Defence, effectively rendering some of the more promising EU initiatives, such as the Battlegroups, toothless[8].

The issue that lies at the heart of this is what is an apparent lack of a common strategic culture (a concept, which will be more precisely defined in the next chapter). So if neither NATO nor the EU were able to create a common strategic culture or security identity, one has to look elsewhere to find such examples. One intuitive reason, why NATO and EU have so far not been successful, is likely to be the large number of actors involved in both frameworks. The intuitive argument here would be that the more actors are involved, the more diverse and difficult to reconcile their interests will be. Accordingly, it would make sense to approach initiatives of defence cooperation on a smaller scale – bilateral or regional.

Indeed such smaller scale cooperation has happened before the two larger frameworks emerged: the first formal post-war security arrangement in Europe was the Treaty of Dunkirk of 1947 between the United Kingdom and France, while the governments of Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg already planned to cooperate on security matters during their London exile[9]. These early initiatives have survived the formalisation of security cooperation through NATO and the EU in their basic form. Within NATO for instance, Benelux grouped itself together as a region to aggregate its interests and avoid domination by great powers[10]. This fact informs the hypothesis, that a common strategic culture is more integrated on the smaller, regional scale than in the larger NATO and EU framework in which many of these regional projects are embedded. This is where the present thesis will address a number of pertinent questions, which are not only relevant for the regional projects themselves, but also potentially give insights into problems and opportunities of the larger framework, such as European Common Defence.

In this thesis, I will explore how states use official documents to discursively frame and shape their strategic position in general, and their cooperation with key regional partners in the sector of defence in particular. What are the origins of a common or diverging strategic culture, and what role does it play in the processes of choosing, framing and operationalizing cooperation projects? Through this analysis, I aim to identify aspects of strategic culture, that can be found in

[8] Yf Reykers, "EU Battlegroups: From standby to standstill," in *Multinational Rapid Response Mechanisms: From Institutional Proliferation to Institutional Exploitation*, edited by John Karlsrud and Yf Reykers (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019), 49.
[9] Stein, *Benelux Security Cooperation*, 18-21.
[10] Stein, *Benelux Security Cooperation*, 24.

historical narratives, the political discourse and military capabilities, that facilitate cooperation between two or more political systems. Similarities in what field (identity, short-term interests, materiel, etc.) make for more durable cooperation? To what degree do similarities have to exist, and is it possible for commonalities in one aspect of strategic cultures to make up for differences in another? Finally, what conclusions and lessons can we draw from the two examined smaller-scale case studies for projects of a larger and more ambitious scale, such as a potential EU Common Defence?

To provide answers to this question, I will, after defining the theoretical framework and specifying the key concepts, analyse two case studies of such regional cooperation: Benelux and the UK-France security cooperation as formalised in the Lancaster House Treaties, by examining how these projects are framed in treaties, political declarations and strategies. Through this, combined with a historical analysis of relevant national themes and narratives, I will be able to present these countries' strategic cultures and what make them distinct. Looking at the remaining challenges, failures or successes, I will then make an assessment of the role the strategic culture has played in kickstarting, framing and operationalizing the examined cooperation projects. Which aspects of a strategic culture make them compatible with each other and which types of strategic culture are more durable? The underlying implication for defence integration on a broader scale would be that defence is still very much in the realm of national interests. A recent example for this would be EUTM Mali, which initially struggled to attract support from other MS, as the mission was perceived to be a largely French undertaking and in the French national interest[11]. It follows that the question whether and how effectively states can cooperate in this field will depend on the state's (and its military's) strategic culture. On a societal level, when security interests are framed in a common context and the strategic culture of two countries align, leaders should be more willing to bear the political costs of contributing to a multinational force, as those common interests should be echoed by the public opinion as well[12].

As mentioned before, the key concepts of the questions that this thesis seeks to address will have to be more clearly defined. A first step will be a review of the existing literature on the subject.

[11] Yf Reykers, "EU Battlegroups", 47.
[12] Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 161-162.

1.2. Literature review

1.2.1. EU and NATO

Although the focus of this thesis will be on regional cooperation clusters, regardless of what broader framework they are embedded in, it is important to have an idea of that framework, in order to identify possible obstacles and challenges that NATO or the EU have faced. In *The Elusive Quest for European Security: From EDC to CFSP*, Simon Duke (2000) gives an in-depth account of how the security and defence aspects of European integration came to be, while shedding light on the Member States' differing motivations and interests and how they shaped the process of security policy and co-operation. Duke points out the weaknesses of previous projects and the reason for their failure – highlighting the necessary ingredients for successful co-operation. One important factor that Duke brings up is the issue of common values and identities. During the discussions about giving the EU a security component, questions of a security identity were high on the agenda and the cause for much friction[13]. A key takeaway from Duke's work for this thesis is the division of roles between NATO and the EU, with the former being the primary consultation venue for defence matters and the latter focusing on capacity development[14]. This will help us better understand the context in which the case studies are operating, while the friction between two camps (Atlanticists vs. Europeanists) might give an insight into some of the fault lines and broad political limitations that affect the cases.

Work on initiatives of regional co-operation is also abundant: while George Stein (1990) gives an account of the history, problems and opportunities of Benelux security co-operation in the EU and NATO context up to the 1990s, Biscop, Coelmont, Drent and Zandee (2013) focus stronger on the benefits of a Benelux-based approach to integration in the post-Lisbon era of CSDP. Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver make a case for their Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) in *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security* (2003). The end of the Cold War has lifted the superpower overlay from Europe and gave regional security dynamics a higher degree of operational autonomy[15]. Security complexes are defined as "a group of states whose primary security concerns link together sufficiently closely that their national securities cannot reasonably be considered apart from one another"[16]. Within RSC, subcomplexes can equally exist, sharing the general definition of an RSC, but which are firmly embedded within the larger RSC. Buzan and Wæver see the EU as centred RSC, integrated by institutions – a

[13] Duke, *Elusive Quest,* 87.
[14] Ibid. 97.
[15] Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver, *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 17.
[16] Buzan, *Regions and Powers,* 44.

highly developed security community on one hand, but on the other as a great power of its own right[17]. Their theory offers a framework to analyse regional co-operation clusters as possible RSCs, adding another approach to understand these initiatives and how they function.

Although the concept of strategic culture will be more closely defined in the theoretical section, it is useful to get an overview of the concept's origin and how it has been applied to other cases. It is commonly agreed upon that the concept's first use goes back to Jack Snyder's 1977 RAND report *The Soviet Strategic Culture: Implications for Limited Nuclear Operations*. In his report, Snyder opposes American strategy-making, largely done by civilian intellectuals and system analysts and as a result, has a strong emphasis on game theory and logical formulations, with the Soviet strategy, developed by mostly military officers. Snyder highlights the need to think of Soviet leaders as politicians who were socialised into a strategic culture with distinctive predispositions in their crisis behaviour. Snyder defines strategic culture as the "sum total of ideas, conditioned emotional responses, and patterns of habitual behavior that members of a national strategic community have acquired through instruction of imitation and share with each other with regard to nuclear strategy"[18]. This culture influences the way that strategic issues are formulated, developing a specific vocabulary and conceptions which frame the strategic debate. Perpetuated by both individuals and organisations, strategic culture can change over time but is also bound to a certain degree of continuity. While "shared images" of strategic rationality can indeed lead to effectiveness and better consensus formulation, they also lead to a certain stiffness, meaning that internalised concepts and doctrines cannot be changed or amended easily in times of conflict or crises.[19]

Applied to the European context, Howorth (2002) has already analysed the need for a process of socialisation of European armed forces if they are to make their co-operation and integration more efficient in the time before the Treaty of Lisbon. To Howorth, it appeared necessary that vital questions needed to be addressed in a socialisation process in Brussels, ideally leading to agreement about when to resort to military force, about the size of a military, procurement and divergence over NATO states and neutral EU Member States. Nicole Gnesotto (2000) also elaborates on the need of a strategic culture as "the aim and the means to incite common thinking, compatible reactions, coherent analysis – in short, a strategic culture that is

[17] Ibid, 56.
[18] Jack Snyder, *The Soviet Strategic Culture: Implications for Limited Nuclear Operations* (Santa Monica: RAND, 1977), 8.
[19] Snyder, *Soviet Strategic Culture,* 34.

increasingly European, one that transcends the different national security cultures and interests"[20].

Sten Rynning (2003) applied the constructivist approach of strategic culture, which, in contrast to Realist views, focuses on societal imperatives and the idea that states act on the basis of domestic ideas. Culture becomes a context, which can either help actors to overcome obstacles in co-operation if integrated, or conversely become a primary source of strategic incoherence. Rynning described certain implications of strategic thinking, such as the existence of conflict and enemies, which an actor like the EU would have to be ready to engage in lethal action. Rynning saw elite socialisation as a key to achieving a common strategic culture, but overall advocated a model in which the EU would not command military forces for the purpose of war, but rather make available resources in solidarity with MS that have suffered from aggression along the lines of terrorist attacks or disasters. His view on this was likely very much influenced by the strategic zeitgeist and priorities of the early 2000s, under the recent impression of the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the shift of security to the War on Terror.

Amelia Hadfield (2005) examined the way that strategic culture develops. Strategic culture suggests that national interests arise from a cultural substratum of identity.[21] This would imply that the majority of the EU's interests are uploaded from national level to the EU level, as defence is among those areas very heavily influenced by respective national interests. Although the EU does possess a cultural, historical foundation, this same history has made distinctive the histories of the various nations. Therefore, Hadfield concludes, the European identity is operable, but not translated into an institutionalised EU-level identity[22]. Strategic culture works on three levels: macro (culture, ethnicity, history, geography), intermediary (economic, political) and micro (military itself). The idea is that from macro to micro, the history and geography produce political characteristics, which in turn produce a mindset for elites responsible for the shape and role of the armed forces.

Irondelle, Mérand and Foucault (2015) offer another model of strategic culture and disaggregate strategic cultures into four social representations of strategic postures: Pacifism, traditionalism, humanitarianism and globalism. While national identities and threat perceptions certainly play an important role in determining one's support for CSDP, these individual postures form the basis for Europeans' preferences. Despite evidence for a certain degree of

[20] Jolyon Howorth, "The CESDP and the Forging of a European Security Culture," *Politique Européenne*, 8, no. 4 (2002): 89.
[21] Amelia Hadfield, "The EU and Strategic Culture: Virtual Identity Vs Uploaded Preferences," *Journal of Contemporary European Research*, no. 1 (2005), 60.
[22] Hadfield, "EU and Strategic Culture", 65.

normative and ideational convergence in Europe since 1989 with regard to the goals of use of force, considerable differences persist also because of the vague and non-consensual definition of European defence, which means different things to different people. These different definitions are oftentimes mutually exclusive: while globalists are in favour of hard security and EU power projection, pacifists support a soft security approach[23]. Yet both camps, despite having completely different things in mind, show particularly high support for CSDP[24].

Again in the European context, Rieker (2000) also offers a constructivist model for how a European identity can form and end up informing national strategy, rather than the other way around:

"A constructivist analysis of the future of European security arrangements will suggest that four decades of co-operation may have transformed positive interdependence into a collective 'European identity' in terms of which states increasingly define their self-interests. Even if egoistic reasons were its starting point, the process of co-operating tends to redefine those reasons by reconstituting identities and interests in terms of new intersubjective understandings"[25]

She describes the process of how gradual integration of European states was initially defined by self-interest, but through the mere act of co-operation, notions of actual community and solidarity were formed. When justifying policies such as integration to their citizens, governments will employ a process of persuasion, which is stronger than rational, instrumental bargaining. Through this persuasion, actors begin to develop a collective understanding, informing and shaping their identities and leading them to determine their interest. Rieker offers a concrete example of this: Sweden and Finland, originally very attached to their neutrality, came to redefine their understanding of neutrality to fit in the context of the European integration process, which had come to include security and defence[26]. There is a clear link between identities and socialisation, as the assumption stands that identities are learnt through a process of socialisation.

Boncourt (2017) has made thorough research on the international socialisation process of French officers in the context of NATO and the EU. He describes different phases of careers. On

[23] Bastien Irondelle, Frédéric Mérand and Martial Foucault, "Public support for European defence: Does strategic culture matter?," *European Journal of Political Research* 54, no.2 (2015): 364.
[24] Irondelle, "Public support for European defence", 363.
[25] Pernille Rieker, "Security, integration and identity change," *Norsk Utenrikspolitisk Institut*, no. 611 (2000), 21.
[26] Rieker, "Security, integration and identity change", 30.

the micro level of the individual, officers only need to truly function in a multinational environment during the late phases of their careers. He also found that national identities do play a role in daily interactions with soldiers from other nations. As a Frenchman, whenever he interacted with Germans, he noted that "the weight of history means that, when we interact with Germans, it's always peculiar"[27]. With his research, Boncourt highlighted some of the challenges that are apparently inherent in interactions between members of different cultures. Although this thesis will focus more closely on the macro level, such difficulties as presented by Boncourt can clearly have implications and effects that complicate cooperation. Conversely, an absence of such difficulties (in other words, related cultures) can facilitate successful exchanges and cooperation.

1.2.2. UK-France and Benelux

While looking at studies on cases like the EU are helpful in getting a better grasp for the context of the topic, general challenges, as well as a good reference on how to approach other case studies, a closer look at previous work on my specific cases, the United Kingdom, France and Benelux, is also necessary to get an overview of what has been done and what still needs to be explored.

Despite being a relatively recent development, there exists a fair amount of research on UK-France defence cooperation. In his study on strategic culture and the use of force, Wilhelm Mirow has provided valuable insights into the strategic cultures of the United Kingdom and France. In terms of their history, both countries have similar experiences. Both were former empires that extended over the entire globe and can look back on an eventful and oftentimes successful military history. They both experienced a decline of their empires and eventual loss thereof at roughly the same time. Still, for both countries, the legacies of their past glory persists in national narratives, making them, as seen through their foreign policies, the most aggressive of European states in the international system[28]. These historical facts are also reflected in public opinion. On questions regarding willingness to fight for ones country or the importance of strong armed forces, both countries show more militaristic tendencies than Germany, another European powerhouse[29]. Assessing their proclivity to use force, Mirow places both countries in similar categories, between the proactive and the aggressive stance[30].

[27]Boncourt, "French military careers and European security integration," 251.

[28] Wilhelm Mirow, *Strategic Culture, Securitisation and the Use of Force: Post-9/11 security practices of liberal democracies* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), 59-72.
[29] Mirow, *Strategic Culture, Securitisation and the Use of Force*, 79-83.
[30] Ibid. 100-101.

Jeremy Ghez et al. have looked at the impact of Brexit on the United Kingdom's cooperation with EU in defence matters. After presenting the current projects of cooperation with France under the Lancaster House Treaties, the study concludes that these defence projects are much more bilateral in nature than they are European and should therefore not be considerably impacted by Brexit, apart from the political friction with EU Member States trying to balance showing the image of a strong united EU and protecting their security interests[31]. Nevertheless, the study found notable challenges: complications in the defence industry and the possibility of Germany replacing the United Kingdom as France's main partner on defence matters[32].

Both works give a good background on both countries' strategic cultures and their current projects of cooperation. I will draw upon Mirow as a reference point for assessing and comparing strategic cultures and his application of strategic culture as a theoretical concept. However, where Mirow focused on the comparison of both countries' proclivity to use force, I will draw conclusions regarding their potential to successfully cooperate. The study by Ghez et al. was particularly useful to assess the impact of Brexit on bilateral cooperation and highlight some of the challenges and issues that I will be looking out for during my own analysis and assessment of the project's state of play.

Regarding Benelux, scholarly literature is unsurprisingly scarcer than for the Anglo-French cooperation, especially concerning the strategic culture aspect behind it. There are no elaborate polls on public opinion with regard to norms of use of force or the value placed upon armed forces. However, work on the historical background of Benelux cooperation on defence is readily available, most notably Stein's *Benelux Security Cooperation*, where he examines the three countries' security policies from the moment of their independence in the 19th century, over their role during the Cold War within NATO, their relationship with other European and Transatlantic powers all the way to the defence initiatives of the EU, highlighting trends, stances and shortcomings. Despite differences, Stein sees in Benelux security cooperation the promise of serving as a model for European defence integration on a larger scale[33]. Stein provides valuable insights and background for deeper examination of the strategic culture aspect, and will serve as a starting point for my analysis.

[31] Jeremy Ghez et al., "Defence and security after Brexit: A snapshot of international perspectives on the implications of the UK's decision to leave the EU," *RAND* (2017), 23, https://www.rand.org/randeurope/research/projects/defence-and-security-after-brexit.html.
[32] Ghez et al., "Defence and security after Brexit," 7-9.
[33] Stein, *Benelux Security Cooperation*, 133.

A similar viewpoint is taken by Biscop et al., who see the Benelux defence cluster as a possible model for EU integration as a whole. They place importance on the proper communication of plans and goals and the need for forums to discuss issues and foster trust, including on the political level[34].

Van Raemdonck brings up a pertinent point regarding the apparent uniformity of Benelux in security matters. Even though the three countries have a tradition of cooperating in many areas, including security, where cooperation was a means to have a stronger voice vis-à-vis the greater powers[35], there is a strategic divide within Benelux. This divide boils down to what in strategic culture literature is commonly referred to as the divide between Europeanists and Atlanticists. Historically, having been the most sceptical out of the three countries towards multilateralism, the Netherlands retained their own strategic views by placing much more importance on the Transatlantic alliance and leadership by the United States[36]. This stance found its strongest expression with the Dutch participating in the US-led coalition in Iraq, while Belgium and Luxembourg always continued to speak out against a unilateralist and interventionist United States[37]. This point will be one of the key issues that have to be addressed in the analytical part of this thesis. It shows that even though the three Benelux countries have a long history of cooperation and share cultural similarities, strategically, they have diverging points of view. The impact (or lack thereof) of this imbalance on post War On Terror security policy within Benelux merits consideration when analysing strategic cultures.

Taking stock of the existing literature on the case studies shows that while more in-depth research has been conducted on the Anglo-French cooperation, Benelux security cooperation is still a matter of interest, mainly because of its potential as model for larger EU integration. This seems to be a preliminary sign that Benelux cooperation is advancing successfully. However, more detailed research on the strategic culture impact on their cooperation, most notably the persistent divide between Atlanticist and Europeanist camps, is still missing. In addition to that, due to very recent advancements and commitments in security matters by the leaders of the Benelux countries, there is the need for updated research on the current state of play. A final gap that exists in the literature is the perspective of Luxembourg, which, as the smallest Benelux country is often glanced over in the available research. Shedding more light on the Grand

[34] Sven Biscop et al., "The Future of Benelux Security Cooperation," *Clingdael Institute* (2013), 5, https://www.egmontinstitute.be/the-future-of-the-benelux-defence-cooperation/.
[35] Dirk C. van Raemdonck, "Benelux Security Policy," in *Old Europe, New Europe and the US: Renegotiating Transatlantic Security in the Post 9/11 Era*, ed. Tom Lansford and Blagovest Tashev (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 79.
[36] Raemdonck, "Benelux Security Policy," 89-97.
[37] Ibid., 97.

Duchy's role and perspective on cooperation with its Belgian and Dutch partners is therefore one of the key added values of this thesis.

Regarding Anglo-French cooperation, existing research is more up-to-date and detailed. Apart from reports on the technical aspects of the two countries' cooperation, Mirow has already provided us with insightful foundational work on France's and the United Kingdom's strategic culture. More valuable even is Mirow's research from a methodological point of view, particularly with regard to operationalizing the theoretical concept of strategic cultures. This thesis will therefore follow his approach and use his work as orientation. However, Mirow's focus lay specifically on the proclivity to use force. This thesis will tie in at this point and focus on the implications and compatibility of strategic cultures when it comes to cooperation projects.

1.3. Theoretical framework

After having an overview of the most relevant academic work done on the subject, I will now define the key theoretical concepts as they will be used in the context of this thesis.

Strategic culture will be the theoretical framework for the analysis of regional defence cooperation. However, before being able to employ it, it is important to outline what precisely is meant by it to be aware of its significance and limitations. I will mostly base my definition of strategic culture on the work done by Becker and Malesky, as well as the in-depth theoretical elaborations by Mirow.

For the purpose of this thesis, strategic culture is to be understood as a persistent set of cultural and ideational norms, widely held and reproduced by the population, institutions and elites of a state. It is derived from a state's historical identity, informed by collective narratives. It is further understood to comprise the architecture of a political system's defence institutions, including specific military capacities, as those are both manifestations of the aforementioned cultural and ideational norms, and delimit the range for certain strategic postures. The fact of these norms being persistent is the reason why it is valid to speak of a culture: in contrast to mere interest-based policy, strategic culture is typically resistant against changes in the external factors which were originally seen as its framework. The example of NATO makes this abundantly clear: originally conceived as a military alliance against a specific threat (the Soviet Union), the alliance eventually grew beyond this purely interest-driven project. Through decades of cooperation and standardisation, a process of socialisation set in which gave NATO a cultural component that made it persistent to outside change. With the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the common threat, the original raison d'être for NATO was gone. Yet despite

that fundamental change in circumstances (which effectively changed the world order), NATO persisted and even expanded[38].

For better comprehension and more targeted analysis, I understand strategic culture as consisting of two main aspects: the defence architecture and the security identity. While the defence architecture refers to the tangible aspects of strategic culture, such as the political framework and material factors (budget, military personnel, equipment, …) , security identity denotes the more abstract and ideational factors (self-perception, historical narratives, collective memories, …).

Strong emphasis has been placed on the role and agency of elites. As strategic culture finds its expression in concrete state behaviour given a certain policy window, as well as in political and strategic documents, it is important to keep in mind the role of the political elites in shaping, formulating and taking action based upon a strategic culture. Vice versa, elites socialised in a strategic culture are also shaped and socialised by it, which can be seen in elites from different strategic cultures behaving differently in similar circumstances[39]. Understanding the role of elites is important in order to analyse changes in strategic culture, as well as to identify and qualify a specific strategic culture.

Next, it is important to gauge the effect of strategic culture. According to Mirow, who applies the Aristotelian conceptions of causation in his theoretical outline on strategic culture, identifies it as a "formal conditional cause"[40]. Concretely, this means that it informs, shapes and delimits the range for state behaviour in strategic matters. In regular times, strategic culture will be relatively constant, guiding and steering security policy. Its effects become clearer when a state is confronted by a specific triggering event, which Mirow refers to as "policy window". In that case, strategic culture will determine whether securitisation processes take place (i.e. the formulation of an event or challenge as a security issue) and if yes, how and to what extend this process will be expressed and manifested[41]. Mirow divides the spectrum for strategic cultures into four ranges: passive – reactive, reactive – proactive, proactive – robust and robust - aggressive[42].

It is of course important to understand that in such processes, strategic culture does not exist in a vacuum. It is not the only factor determining state behaviour and state response. A

[38] Beatrice Heuser and Jeannie Johnson, ed. "Introduction: National Styles and Strategic Culture," in *Insurgencies and Counterinsurgencies: National Styles and Strategic Cultures*, ed. Beatrice Heuser and Eitan Shamir (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 10.
[39] Jørgen Staun, "The Slow Path Towards 'Normality': German Strategic Culture and the Holocaust," *Scandinavian Journal of Military Studies* 3, no.1 (2020): 85.
[40] Mirow, *Strategic Culture*, 33.
[41] Mirow, *Strategic Culture*, 8-12.
[42] Ibid. 101.

state's economy, its institutions, current government and geopolitical standing will also affect such decisions[43]. While this is important to keep in mind, it must not deter us from focusing our analysis on strategic culture. As long as one remembers that other factors are involved as well, there is nothing that would speak against examining the cultural aspect of strategy as an additional venue to explain policy or state behaviour.

While Mirow looked at how strategic culture can determine a state's proclivity to use force in a given situation, I will shift the focus towards ability to cooperate. Applying a similar theory, strategic culture will allow me to make assumptions about whether two or more countries are likely to engage in efficient cooperation, facilitated by shared cultural norms about strategy and use of force. As Mirow has applied a model according to which strategic culture delimits the range for state behaviour in a use of force context, it makes sense that one is also able to apply it to delimit the range for close cooperation in defence matters. It appears intuitive that a state with a passive strategic culture in which use of force is employed very reluctantly will have difficulties pooling resources and procurement, and organising joint operations with a state having a much more interventionist stance and has less concerns over the use of force. One hypothesis relating to this, that will be explored in this thesis, is that strategic cultures of two countries do not have to be entirely the same. Perhaps two countries will possess very different capabilities of a different scale, but their similarities in cultural norms and identity will push them to cooperate effectively despite their different capabilities. Conversely, two countries might define their identities in entirely different terms, but their shared physical conditions and abilities simply make them very efficient and almost natural partners.

The next question to address is how strategic culture can be measured. This is particularly relevant with regard to the aforementioned other factors affecting state behaviour in security matters. Strategic culture is based on constructivist thinking[44]. As such, when analysing it, a particular focus must be put on the importance of strategic narratives. Becker and Malesky elaborate on this nexus between strategic documents and strategic culture: as strategic culture is inherently elite-driven, strategic and political documents express an elite consensus on the direction a state is taking in security matters, serving as a basis for concrete planning. These documents also serve as an instrument of public policy, communicating intents to both the public within the country, as to international actors[45]. In order to determine and analyse a state's strategic culture, the most straightforward method is to look at how the guiding political and

[43] Ibid. 42.
[44] Jordan Becker and Edmund Malesky, "The Continent or the 'Grand Large'? Strategic Culture and Operational Burden-Sharing in NATO," *International Studies Quarterly* 61 (2017):165.
[45] Becker and Malesky, "Continent or the 'Grand Large'?," 165.

military elites express their intents and how their vision of their country's defence is elaborated and framed in these documents. The relevance of such documents is further underlined by the findings of Becker and Malesky that changes in strategic documents chronologically precede choices in budget allocations[46]. As mentioned before, with strategic culture partly being an expression of common norms and assumptions, another venue to analyse it is through polls. For norms to be considered as part of a nation's culture, they should be held by a large number of people within said nation. As one example for this, Mirow has found that in a country like the United Kingdom, which, due to its history as a superpower and empire, could be expected to have a more robust strategic culture, people place more importance on having strong armed forces and are more ready to fight for their country in case of a conflict than in countries like Germany, which have a more passive approach to the use of armed force[47]. Focusing on a more material approach, one can also look at the organisation, size and composition of a military to make assumptions strategic culture. If a country's military possesses formidable power projection capacities, such as aircraft carriers, it is fair to make the reasonable assumption that said country has a more proactive or aggressive culture. Conversely, countries with a (relative to their size) smaller military with overall lighter equipment and weaponry is likely to have different strategic norms and goals as the first country. Here again, other factors play a role in these choices, but looking at the composition and capabilities of a military allow for conclusions about the country's strategic culture, or at the very least, its military doctrines.

The final important aspect to clarify before having a concept of strategic culture that is operational for this thesis' theoretical framework, is to address the question of how strategic culture changes. The answer to this has been implicitly given already. On one hand, strategic culture is shaped through events and practice. Being closely linked to a country's history, this process takes time. Therefore, it is not easy to clearly say, when a state practice has been in existence long enough for it to shape culture, but a practice of a certain duration, combined with striking changes in strategic and political documents, will allow for reasonable assumptions about that practice's impact.

Constructivist identity theory can give us further insight into how these changes in strategic culture take place. In order to more adequately explain this, I will make the distinction between strategic culture and security identity. In the following, strategic culture is the larger, umbrella term for all historically developed and politically elaborated norms regarding strategy and security. It includes security identity, but also denotes the more technical military aspects

[46] Ibid. 164.
[47] Mirow, *Strategic Culture*, 100.

like doctrine, equipment, training and organisation under the term defence architecture. By security identity, I refer to the specific identity part of this culture: ideas about how a country sees and understands itself and its role as a security actor. Thereby, it excludes the concretely observable aspects of the larger strategic culture concept (budget allocation, equipment, etc.) to focus on the more abstract and ideal values and self-perceptions of a polity.

Despite this higher level of abstraction, McSweney with his sociological approach to identity can help to concretise this concept. McSweeney defines identity not as a "fact of society", but a "process of negotiation among people and interest groups", resulting in a labelling process that reflects a political conflict of interest[48]. As such, a collective identity should be understood as a choice made by the members of a society, not a mere property of said society that is out of reach of the members' agency. Here, McSweeney insists that the identity discourse is influenced by political leaders and intellectuals formulating a collective image[49]. The most pertinent part for my analysis and the explanation for how a security identity can change, is the connection between identity and interest: "the range of interests available to us can cause us to reinvent the social identity appropriate to them", leading to the conclusion that a state's identity can vary and adapt in the process of relations with other states[50].

Applying this to the strategic culture theory as a whole, McSweeney gives us a theoretical explanation as to why and how the security identity within strategic cultures can change and why we can expect to observe these changes in political and strategic documents. He also confirms the elite-driven aspect that we have previously assigned to strategic culture. Relevant is also the notion that identity is chosen through a negotiation process rather than it evolves by chance, as this leaves us with a much less abstract conception of security identity. It suggests that identity is not random, but calculated and operationalized to fit the ranges of interests available, making it a much more valid and concrete subject for analysis.

The understanding of security identity as part of a constructivist theory also draws upon Alexander Wendt's *Social Theory of International Politics,* where he elaborates on the basics of constructivism. The fundamental constructivist idea is that the structures of human association are determined rather by shared ideas than material forces[51]. Interests are understood as ideas, which are constructed domestically and informed by collective memories. Those are myths, narratives or traditions with a strong historical component and are kept alive over decades

[48] Bill McSweeney, *Security, Identity and Interests: A Sociology of International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 73.
[49] McSweeney, *Security, Identity and Interests*, 76-78.
[50] Ibid. 127-129.
[51] Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 1.

through socialisation[52]. This further underlines the importance of analysing how states translate these narratives into policy and strategic documents. Wendt also mentions the role of culture, which is very much in line with what Mirow understands as the role and impact of strategic culture in security policy: "culture matters insofar as it affects the calculations of actors, no more, no less"[53]. This assessment again cautions us not to overestimate the impact of culture in general, or strategic culture in particular, and to rather see it as one of many factors affecting decisions of political leaders.

While the analysis portion of this thesis will not go into a detailed examination of identity or identity formation, it is important to keep this framework in mind when assessing strategic culture, as it helps to better understand the mechanisms behind the concept. It also validates the focus on strategic and political documents as official expressions of strategic culture and security identity.

1.4. Methodology

In order to find answers to my research questions, I will take recourse to an interdisciplinary approach, using a varied range of sources to address each specific aspect and a case study method. The two case studies will be the British-French security cooperation with the Lancaster House Treaties at its centre, and Benelux security cooperation as formalised in a number of strategic and political documents. At least since the end of WWII, with the formal emergence of Benelux as a politico-economic union, the three countries are paragons of co-operation and integration. Besides their historical and political commonalities, they are also very compatible in terms of language. The Benelux region is already co-operating in a number of defence areas that I would examine in my thesis. The Luxembourg Army does not only train its NCO staff and officers at Belgian military schools[54], it also deploys its personnel integrated into Belgian units in the context of NATO, UN and EU missions. Belgium and the Netherlands co-operate in the naval field, having an integrated command, conducting common training exercises and sharing maintenance facilities[55]. The three countries have also co-operated in the context of several EU Battlegroups, the latest being the Benelux Battlegroup of 2018. Yet despite already existing cooperation in military matters, the three countries have different strategic priorities on a larger scale, which is not least due to the considerable differences in size and budget of their militaries.

[52] Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*, 163.
[53] Ibid. 161.
[54] "Engagement, Formation, Nomination," Luxembourg Army, accessed 16 January, 2021, https://www.armee.lu/recrutement-carrieres/officiers-de-carriere-recrutement-indirect/engagement-formation-nomination.
[55] Biscop, *Benelux Defence Cooperation*, 1.

The UK-France co-operation would serve as a counter example to test the limits of the hypothesis that cultural closeness is an important prerequisite for a common strategic culture. Despite sharing a more antagonistic history than in the other case study, two World Wars against common enemies have shown them that there is merit in alliance. This led to them creating the first formal defensive arrangement in post-war Europe – the Treaty of Dunkirk of 1947[56]. Still, as European integration progresses, the differences between the two persisted and surfaced time and time again, creating friction and obstacles. Similar in terms of strategic doctrine[57], they have strongly diverging view regarding political integration processes (with the UK formally leaving the EU in 2020) and are linguistically largely incompatible. Nevertheless, both countries remain committed to continuing their co-operation in matters of defence.

The fundamental differences between those two cases make them particularly interesting for study and potential comparison: while Benelux is culturally, linguistically, economically and politically close and intertwined, it diverges in the grand strategic culture: they have different military-historical experiences, different priorities of military capacity and intervention and place different a value on their armed forces. On the other hand, France and the UK are culturally far apart and share an antagonistic and at times even belligerent history, but are far more compatible in terms of their strategic orientation and capabilities. Both cases therefore serve as imperfect examples for a cluster consisting of two or more sovereign states with similar strategic cultures.

For the analysis of the two case studies, I will first give an overview of the countries' military history to find the origin of national narratives and patterns. In a second step, I will assess the countries' strategic culture through a discursive analysis of current political and strategic documents which are outlining and framing the cooperation projects. In accordance with the previously elaborated theory, such documents do not only formalise and initiate these projects, they also offer an insight into the discursive components which constitute, manifest and shape strategic culture. I will also rely on polls and interviews or statements with and by military and political officials to assess the progress of projects of cooperation. This combination of historical background, political and strategic documents, and qualified assessments should lead to the combined goal of the first and second step to give us clear, up-to-date idea of each countries strategic culture and make informed assumptions about their compatibility, differences and challenges. Certain documents were difficult to access through publicly available channels

[56] Stein, *Benelux Security Cooperation*, 21.
[57] Dick Zandee, "British-French Defence Cooperation as the Core of European Military Capabilities," *Clingendael Institute* (2012), 2.

and were therefore obtained through personal connections. They can be made available upon request.

I will critically analyse statements by officials and experts to see if successes or obstacles can be traced back to the assumptions that were previously made based on the countries' strategic cultures.

To shed light on a less researched aspect, namely the perspective of Luxembourg, the smallest of the Benelux countries, I have also conducted an interview with a high-ranking officer of the Luxembourg Army personally involved in Benelux projects.

2. Analysis of the case studies

In the following part, I will analyse the previously presented case studies in order to find answers to the questions about the origin of the analysed countries' strategic cultures, their framing in official documents and the impact of the strategic cultures on compatibility with others. The case studies will be treated separately, before I draw broader conclusions about them in one combined chapter. In the first step of each case study, I will look into the history of each country that will be examined, with a primary focus on military and international history, in order to identify trends, narratives and events that have shaped the countries' strategic culture. Although it is difficult to trace certain trends and developments back to a certain period in time, and more ambitious and historically focused research could go back further in time, I will begin my analysis in the modern era, in the centuries leading up to the emergence of the nation state. In the following, I will argue that many of the trends and narratives that constitute the analysed countries' strategic culture find their first explicit expressions here. Following the historical contextualisation of relevant security identity related aspects, I will examine how these states frame their cooperation in strategic and political documents, gaining further insight into the current strategic postures, priorities and narratives. Combining the results with other relevant data such as polls, I will then make a description of these countries' strategic culture and relate them to each other, with the goal of making reasonable and informed assumptions about their compatibility. The case studies will be concluded by a look at the current state of play of the cooperation projects and by drawing conclusions about the relation between successes and challenges with the compatibility in strategic culture.

2.1. The United Kingdom and France

The first case study analyses the United Kingdom and France. Both countries are arguably among the European powerhouses in economic, political and military terms. Historically, both countries are heirs to world-spanning empires with decisive roles and considerable influence on world history. Despite their common history being one of repeated rivalries, two World Wars have led them to re-evaluate their relationship and cooperate in the face of greater, common threats[58]. Although Cold War era relations were far from being free of friction, overall common interests have brought both countries consistently closer together[59]. A changing geostrategic environment and a shared perception of pertinent threats have led to both countries to formalise concrete cooperation in the 2010 Lancaster House Treaties, which aims to address the need to work together in safeguarding their most vital interests. Nevertheless, as differences on key policy areas persist (notably the role of NATO, the United States, the EU and Germany)[60], not to mention significant cultural and linguistic divides, it is as of now unclear how successful their cooperation will prove in the future. In light of these differences, and bearing in mind the earlier discussed influence of strategic culture in delimiting the range of action for policy, it will be useful to analyse both countries' strategic cultures and relate them to the goals, challenges and successes of the envisioned cooperation. Through this, it should be possible to shed light on the underlying reasons for successes and challenges, and even to make careful predictions about the future of their cooperation. A necessary first step will look at the history of both countries, in order to find common and diverging narratives and experiences which have influenced their respective security identity.

2.1.1. History: exceptionalism, empire and rivalry

Rather than just aiming to create a simple historical overview of both countries, this section will systematically look to identify the purpose of specific historical narratives in the national discourse of the respective countries and outline some of the key aspects of these narratives, making them distinct for their country.

[58] Sean Greenwood, "The most important of the Western nations France's place in Britain's post-war foreign policy, 1945–1949," in *Anglo-French Relations in the Twentieth Century: Rivalry and Cooperation*, ed. Alan Sharp and Glyn Stone (London: Routledge. 2000), 144.
[59] Martin Thomas, "From Dien Bien Phu to Evian: Anglo-French imperial relations, 1954-1962," in *Anglo-French Relations in the Twentieth Century: Rivalry and Cooperation*, ed. Alan Sharp and Glyn Stone (London: Routledge. 2000), 185.
[60] "The UK-France Defence and Security Relationship: How to Improve Cooperation," Institut Montaigne, accessed March 26, 2021, https://www.institutmontaigne.org/en/publications/uk-france-defence-and-security-relationship-how-improve-cooperation.

First, it is important to understand that the idea of constructing national images through the use of historical events is not new. In the case of the United Kingdom, specifically military history was used to spin narratives that were meant to "glorify the national story", intending to "nourish patriotism" and thereby build a sense of pride of belonging to the nation[61]. With the emergence of the nation state in the 19th century, the need to construct a powerful and inspiring national identity in order to mobilise their subjects under their flag was rapidly recognised and inextricably linked to military campaigns. Although both the United Kingdom and France can look back on an eventful military history that reaches back into the Middle Ages, it was not until the French Revolution and the subsequent Napoleonic Wars that the more lasting developments, trends and narratives manifested. Using the military as a vessel for instilling patriotism for the newly conceptualised nation state was not possible until the French levée en masse completed the transformation of cabinet wars into people's wars, characterised by the unprecedented implication of a country's broad population in the military and war[62]. In the *Grande Armée*, soldiers were "exposed to a steady supply of images, propaganda, festivals, and ceremonies that continuously informed them that they were members of the French nation and that they were required to protect it and its honor"[63]. Through such indoctrination, the idea of the nation, embodied by an emperor by the grace of the people, was instilled in the soldiers. Rather than fighting out of a personal loyalty for a monarch, the loyalty now extended to the nation as a whole, and fighting now also meant defending the interests of that nation[64]. Considering the success of the French model, it makes sense that other countries with similar ambitions recognised the value of the military as a vessel for nationalist narratives, both to convey them to those serving in it, as by setting it as the origin for these narratives. In this context, it is relevant to note that the historical accounts of military campaigns were frequently written by military officers, who had also taken part in them and therefore having a vested interested in shaping both the judgment of their contemporaries, as well as the verdicts of later historians on their achievements[65]. The importance of decisive battles and of the military leaders who had fought them was amplified not only in contemporary military history, but also in the emerging popular history genre. Such stories saw decisive battles as important turning points which had set the course of history in a better direction and determined the fate of the nation. The narrative of the

[61] Ian F. W. Beckett, *A Guide to British Military History: The Subject and the Sources* (Haverton: Pen & Sword Books, 2016), 11-12.
[62] Beckett, *British Military History*, 85.
[63] Michael J. Hughes, *Forging Napoleon's Grande Armée: Motivation, Military Culture, and Masculinity in the French Army, 1800-1808* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2012), 228.
[64] Hughes, *Napoleon's Grande Armée*, 228.
[65] Beckett, *British Military History*, 8-9.

so-called "Great Captains", the leaders of such battles and campaigns, sought to underline their monumental impact on history as a whole[66].

Establishing this narrative-centric outlook on (military) history is important for the purpose of my analysis of the influence of historical narratives on strategic culture. We must bear in mind that history is not a straightforward, linear and factual recollection of events, but rather a selective and often instrumentalised interpretation of certain events. This underscores the constructivist nature of strategic culture and of nationalist narratives as a whole. By looking at those events which had been chosen by previous generations of historians to construct their national narrative, it is possible to draw conclusions about their impact on strategic culture and identify their distinct traits.

A key trait that both countries share is that of exceptionalism. Impacted by the United Kingdom's status as an island nation, it is unsurprising that many of its formative narratives are built on this geographic factor, bestowing onto the country both security through the lack of borders vulnerable to foreign incursions but also a fundamental dread of invasion as a worst-case scenario. Fears of invasion have not only resulted in a spike in popularity of the military, particularly the oftentimes overlooked Army, but have also strengthened the sense of Britishness through incorporation of the invasion theme in the arts[67]. As a result, Britain had to focus its strategy on three key areas: maintaining a powerful navy, a capable citizen army in the case of an invasion and proactively maintaining alliances with strong continental allies[68]. One important takeaway from this, is that although often considered as a more isolationist actor, the need to rely on allies both to maintain a balance of power and to have partners in the event of a conflict, Britain has shown a proclivity to cooperate and form alliances with important partners, which were chosen and swapped in order to best serve British interests. Still, the status as island nation has separated Britain from the continent and has given it a more Atlanticist outlook in the purest sense of the word, which can still be seen in its geopolitical positions today.

The French flavour of exceptionalism ultimately stems from its revolutionary, and, more importantly, its republican heritage. Although a national conscience already existed in the times of the monarchy, it was the enlightened institutions of the republic, embodied by the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen which gave the French people its defining position. The French nation's image of a chosen people stemmed from its new role as champion of universal rationalism, a calling to serve as a role model for all people and capable of integrating every

[66] Ibid., 11-15.
[67] Beckett, *British Military History*, 95, 103.
[68] Ibid., 54, 184-185.

human being willing to assimilate to this identity[69]. The character of French colonialism as a civilising mission can therefore be understood as a result of this self-image. Setting the French concept of their exceptional self-image apart from the British national identity is a certain rigidity and radicalism in its values, which is opposed to the more liberal outlook of the British[70].

Another important aspect of identity, which ties in more with the military dimension that this thesis aims to focus on, is the legacy of imperialism. In this section, I will treat imperialism as the ultimate expression of the militaristic aspect to the two countries' respective national and strategic identity, which, I would argue, has a had a profound and lasting impact on their strategic culture and the self-perception of their role as an international actor. As hinted at before, apart from obvious material benefits, both countries drew their motivation to construct an empire out of their self-image of exceptionalism: the British as an outwards-looking island nation and, as liberal capitalists, lured in by the markets of the new world, and the French committing to their civilising mission as champions of universal rationalism. For the British, the origins of their imperialism can be traced back as far as to the late Middle Ages, with some sources referring to the 16th and 17th century campaigns in Ireland, North America and the Caribbean as "England's Colonial Wars"[71]. But it was not until the victory at Waterloo in 1815 that British supremacy would become unchallenged and with particular emphasis of its naval primacy, and the United Kingdom was able to embark on the conquest of its empire[72]. During its colonial conquest campaigns, the Empire further cemented its militaristic nature: for military leaders, colonial campaigning was a vessel for reputation and the military successes, linked to a mythical, particular "British Way in Warfare" would leave their mark on the British national identity, as it was "transformed by the experience of war"[73].

The militarism that would fuel imperialistic aspirations in France found its origins at the end of the *Ancien Régime* and particularly with the Revolution, a military heroism was cultivated: patriotism was used by military leaders to enhance effectiveness of the soldier, while in return, military successes contributed to patriotic narratives[74]. Through the *levée en masse* in 1793, the narratives of the *Grande Nation* got their vessel, achieving the long-term goal of creating soldier-citizens and establishing the military as the ultimate source for French glory,

[69] Roya Mesbah, "Identité nationale française a l'aube de la mondialisation: A la recherche d'une nouvelle cohésion" (PhD diss., Ohio State University, 2008), 73.
[70] Mesbah, "Identité nationale française," 76.
[71] Beckett, *British Military History*, 74.
[72] Ibid., 52-53, 113.
[73] Ibid., 87, 127.
[74] Christy Pichichero, *The Military Enlightenment: War and Culture in the French Empire from Louis XIV to Napoleon* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2017), 163, 190.

power and moral virtue[75]. Revolutionary and Imperial France would establish itself as the "beacon of enlightenment that would bear liberty and civilisation to the oppressed peoples of Europe", a notion that would serve as the foundation for imperial conquest in Europe and the world[76].

From that point onwards, militarism and empire would be deeply rooted in the national consciousness of both nations. It is clear that these experiences of glory and grandeur, communicated through empire, would have a great impact not only on the national roles of the respective two countries in general, but also specifically on their strategic identity, stretching into the present[77].

Their roles as empires leads us to another important aspect of their identities, as their rivalry as the two largest empires[78] would entail direct comparison. When analysing the strategic culture of the United Kingdom and France, it is necessary to keep in mind that both countries often identified themselves in direct opposition to the other. For the British, the threat of French invasion as a hostile Catholic power already sparked the emergence of a British identity before the imperial age formally begun[79]. It was however, the impact of the Napoleonic Wars, possibly the most explicit and direct confrontation of the two great powers, which cemented the rivalry between the two. Enabling British supremacy in the world, the victory at Waterloo was hailed a decisive turning point of British history, and was subsequently subject to nationalist revisionism (ignoring the contribution of the Prussians in favour of a purely British image of the victory) and gave birth to a great amount of popular literature, enshrining both the victory itself and important figures such as the Duke of Wellington as national symbols[80]. Following the defeat of the Napoleonic Wars, the French would constantly define themselves in comparison with their British rival. Jealous of their superior empire, they however took pride in what they articulated as their own type of imperialism, the *colonisation douce*, which stood in opposition to the more excessive and expansive British version[81].

Despite their rivalry, both countries also share some common defining moments, which arguably contributed to them moving past their centuries-old rivalry, beginning with the turn of the 19th century. A major shift in the Anglo-French relationship is the emergence of a united Germany as an international actor. As previously discussed, one of the United Kingdom's

[75] Pichichero, *Military Enlightenment*, 193-194.
[76] Ibid., 206.
[77] Kate Marsh, *Narratives of the French Empire*: *Fiction, Nostalgia, and Imperial Rivalries 1784 to the Present* (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2013), 109.
[78] Marsh, *Narratives of the French Empire*, 109.
[79] Beckett, *British Military History*, 95.
[80] Ibid., 106-108.
[81] Marsh, *Narratives of the French Empire*, ix, 109.

primary concerns had always been the maintenance of balance of power on the continent, including through alliances with the appropriate allies. Although France had already served as a British ally during the Crimean War in the mid 19th century, true rapprochement between the two rivalling empires would not be achieved until the British leadership recognised, that the primary threat to its global supremacy would not come from France, but the increasingly militaristic German Empire[82]. The *Entente Cordiale*, signed in 1904, would not only largely appease concerns over France as a colonial rival, but also serve as foundation for the later alliance in both World Wars. Coordination between both countries over a post-war Germany remained the underlying reason for maintaining good relations[83].

Yet with the beginning of the Cold War, new areas of friction arose. Although the process of decolonisation and the ensuing loss of empire is an experience both countries share, and which left a mark on their self-image, the relationship between the two fluctuated as a result of the need to cooperate between European colonial powers to secure Africa as a market and source of raw materials on one hand[84], and the diverging ideas of how to manage the inevitable decline of their empires on the other[85].

The other significant area of disagreement was the role of the United States in the European security architecture. Although the United Kingdom was committed to restore France's power in an effort to achieve European security, wary of US dominance, it increasingly distanced itself from the idea of assuming European leadership through an alliance with the French and steered closer towards the special relationship with the US, leading to an American-dominated Atlantic system[86]. Needless to say, this special relationship also served as a source of distrust from France's point of view, which increasingly came to see the United Kingdom as a vessel for American interests in Europe[87]. The poor management of the Vietnam War, and later on the War in Yugoslavia however was an important turning point, leading both the UK and France to distance themselves from the US. The UK began to share France's view that Europe could not fully depend on the US to manage its security[88]. Despite regular dips and surges in

[82] Beckett, *British Military History* ,133.
[83] Sean Greenwood, "The most important of the Western nations France's place in Britain's post-war foreign policy, 1945–1949," in *Anglo-French Relations in the Twentieth Century: Rivalry and Cooperation*, ed. Alan Sharp and Glyn Stone (London: Routledge. 2000), 146.
[84] Greenwood, "France's place in Britain's post-war foreign policy," 149.
[85] Martin Thomas, "From Dien Bien Phu to Evian: Anglo-French imperial relations, 1954-1962," in *Anglo-French Relations in the Twentieth Century: Rivalry and Cooperation*, ed. Alan Sharp and Glyn Stone (London: Routledge. 2000), 177-178.
[86] Greenwood, "France's place in Britain's post-war foreign policy," 153.
[87] Joanne Wright, "The Cold War, European Community and Anglo-French relations, 1958– 1998," in *Anglo-French Relations in the Twentieth Century: Rivalry and Cooperation*, ed. Alan Sharp and Glyn Stone (London: Routledge. 2000), 189-191.
[88] Wright, "The Cold War, European Community and Anglo-French relations," 196.

their relationship from then onwards, it is safe to observe an overall upwards trend in relations between the two countries since the end of the Cold War. Key disagreements over the role of the European Union and NATO would still remain.

Such disagreements culminated in France largely withdrawing from NATO in 1965 over having to integrate its nuclear arsenal into the alliance, as well as the feeling by the French that their sovereignty was being infringed by projects that would require France to give up some control over its military.[89] Despite this, the UK and France gradually strengthened their cooperation over the decades. A powerful example of this is the British-French Joint Declaration on European Defence agreed upon at the St. Malo Summit of 1998, in which both countries asserted the need for the EU to "play its full role on the international stage", giving the Union "the capacity for autonomous action, backed up by credible military forces, the means to decide to use them, and a readiness to do so, in order to respond to international crises"[90].

After having systematically examined the shared history of both countries, I will now take stock of the key points that I identified as most relevant for the elaboration of their respective strategic cultures.

First, a critical analysis of particularly military history of the 19th century has shown the importance of the narrative. National narratives, focused on military successes were carefully constructed and, combined with political and geographical factors, inform both countries' sense of exceptionalism and grandeur, and served as catalyst for the expansionist foreign policy. Second, the impact of both countries' role as empires must not be understated. Always wary of each others' ambitions for grandeur, their status as the world's largest empires has both lastingly influenced their self-image as aggressive or interventionist actors, cementing their global outlook, and has been the source for mutual distrust and rivalry. One could even go as far as to suggest that the distinctions they made at the time between their types of colonialism (*colonisation douce* vs. excessive colonialism) could explain the generally more robust and aggressive position with regard to its proclivity to use force by Britain, which has been asserted by scholars such as Mirow[91]. Tied in with imperialism is also the assessment of both countries' militarised, and sometimes even militaristic history. Third, since the end of the Napoleonic Wars, no major conflict between the two countries broke out. Accordingly, their relationship saw a constant, general improvement, with two World Wars as major turning points towards a true friendship. Fourth, despite both countries being committed to strengthening Europe's security

[89] Duke, *Elusive Quest*, 55.

[90] "Joint Declaration on European Defence at St. Malo 1998," Governments of the United Kingdom and France, https://www.cvce.eu/content/publication/2008/3/31/f3cd16fb-fc37-4d52-936f-c8e9bc80f24f/publishable_en.pdf.

[91] Mirow, *Strategic Culture, Securitisation and the Use of Force*, 101.

through alliances, the exact direction has been the cause of disagreement. The British preference for a transatlantic solution with strong US leadership can be explained on one hand by its status as an island nation with a historically more global, than purely European outlook, and on the other by France's relative weakness and inability to contribute to European security like the US could[92].

Based on my historical analysis, I would contend that for both countries, ideas of grandeur, the legacy of empire (and empire lost) with a degree of militarism, the experiences of two World Wars fought side by side are the key aspects which shaped their strategic culture to this day, and which make them largely compatible. Conversely, a long-standing rivalry (and persistent distrust) as part of their national identities, and disagreements over Transatlantic vs. European solutions in terms of strategic culture are detrimental for cooperation. In the next chapter, I will look at their strategic relationship today as it is communicated through treaties, strategies and statements, and examine, whether the aforementioned elements can still be identified in today's discourse.

2.1.2. Document analysis: discourses of alliance and global leadership

In this chapter I will turn to official documents, and analyse them on a discursive level, in order to find out how both states frame and communicate their cooperation. In this discursive analysis, I will pay particular attention to the evoking of national narratives and role images and relate these back to the historical foundations of their security identity which I have identified above.

As noted in the previous chapter, the political events after the Cold War led to the United Kingdom reconsidering its reliance on the United States as primary guarantor for European security. At the same time, cooperation between the United Kingdom and France during the War in Yugoslavia strengthened the sense of partnership between the two. Within the European Community, both had their own reason for enhanced cooperation: the French sought to counter the growing influence of a reunited Germany, while the UK wanted to balance the prospect of a European superstate with a stronger Anglo-French balance and involvement of the United States. Most importantly, with both countries converging on the role of and design of European security, nothing further stood in the way of pursuing ever closer cooperation.[93] Despite the UK fully committing to assist the US in its campaigns in the Middle East, the overall poor handling of the conflicts gave the UK further reason not to put its full stock in its transatlantic partner. After increased intensification of partnership, the security cooperation between France and the United

[92] Greenwood, France's place in Britain's post-war foreign policy," 150.
[93] Wright, "The Cold War, European Community and Anglo-French relations," 194-197.

Kingdom culminated in the signing of the Lancaster House Treaties in 2010. Building upon collaborations from the 1980s, 1960s and the *Entente Cordiale* from 1904, the Lancaster House Treaties foresee collaboration in three main dimensions: political and strategic, pooling, sharing and joint acquisition of capabilities and achieving increased interoperability of their armed forces, including a deployable Combined Joint Expeditionary Force (CJEF)[94]. Objectives include the maximisation of capacities, reinforcing the defence industry and attaining the ability to deploy together in the context of agreed upon operations. Interoperability is to be achieved through joint exercises, work on military doctrine, personnel exchange, sharing and pooling of materials and facilities and industrial cooperation[95]. With a high level of ambition, the treaties mark the culmination of Anglo-French security cooperation, setting it outside of both NATO and EU frameworks, while nevertheless embedding it in the context of both ("strengthens the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation" and "supporting the role of the European Union's Common Security and Defence Policy"[96] The Lancaster House Treaties will be at the centre of this analysis.

In addition to the treaties themselves, joint statements as issued after the annual summits of the partners, as well as recent national strategies will also be analysed to complete the picture and contextualise the bilateral cooperation within the general strategic orientation of each country.

In terms of language regarding narratives and role images, the treaty itself does not offer a lot of insights. Apart from the preamble, the articles cover the necessary technical and political provisions, laying the groundwork for the cooperation. However, the preamble does allow for some interpretative work regarding the guiding ideas and concepts behind the cooperation. First, both parties recall that "their foreign and defence policies are founded on common interests, values and responsibilities". This serves as the fundamental precondition for their cooperation, placing their interests at the same level and alluding formally to common values and responsibilities, albeit unspecified. Later statements will elaborate on these concepts. The commonality of interests is even more explicitly expressed further down, stating that they "do not see situations arising in which the vital interests of either Party could be threatened without the vital interests of the other also being threatened", coining a key phrase which we will see repeated in other contexts as well. In effect, this declaration creates a fundamental link between

[94] Alice Pannier, "Understanding the workings of interstate cooperation in defence: an exploration into Franco-British cooperation after the signing of the Lancaster House Treaty," *European Security* 22, no.4 (2013): 540.
[95] "Treaty between the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the French Republic for Defence and Security Co-operation," entered into force July 1, 2011, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/238153/8174.pdf.
[96] "Treaty between the UK and France," Preamble.

both parties, with their interests being completely aligned. Regarding their role perceptions, the preamble also offers some information, as it refers to their permanent membership of the Security Council and their status as nuclear powers. Moving away from the pure security identity aspect, this portion also evokes the defence architecture aspect of strategic culture, which have to be understood as fundamental for both countries' strategic positions. A first hint at the strategic posture of the parties is also made, as they show themselves determined to "address strategic challenges", "deter and dissuade against potential aggressors and counter threats". Although this by itself does not reveal a particularly proactive or robust strategic stance, the picture will complete itself once we consider it in combination with other statements and national strategies. A final insight regarding strategic culture is the role of NATO and the EU, which are clearly separated in the treaty: while NATO "remains the foundation of their collective defence", both parties agreed that the role of the EU CSDP is to "strengthen international security". This reveals a possible concession by France, or at the least a convergence of both countries' views on the role of these two organisations. The UK, fundamentally Atlanticist, and France, a committed Europeanist[97] seem to have come to the understanding that at least for the time of the signing of the treaty, the EU is not capable of providing the collective security that NATO does. This alludes to the bridging of a fundamental difference in both countries' strategic views and certainly makes them much more compatible in all joint ventures. By making the cooperation bilateral and placing it outside of the EU framework, it is considerably more acceptable for the (already at the time) EU-sceptic United Kingdom.

That same year, at the announced summit, a joint declaration by the two goes into more detail about some of the concepts that had been alluded to, but not specified. Importantly, they elaborate on their role, affirming that they are "natural partners in security and defence", again referencing their role as permanent members of the UNSC and they status as nuclear states, serving as foundation for their common responsibilities[98]. Pride in their "outstanding and experienced armed forces" is another aspect, that will come up again later in the context of their self-perception as capable military powers. Even more relevant regarding their role, is their commitment to be "determined to act as leaders in security and defence", highlighting their high defence budgets, their active contributions to military operations around the world and their special status as being "among the few nations able and ready to fulfil the most demanding military missions". This, considered with their expressed need to dispose of a force that can be

[97] Becker and Malesky, "Continent or the 'Grand Large'?," 166.
[98] "UK–France Summit 2010 Declaration on Defence and Security Co-operation," GOV.UK, accessed 31 March, 2021, https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-france-summit-2010-declaration-on-defence-and-security-co-operation.

rapidly deployed, gives us a clear indication not only of their role in the international security environment, but also of their strategic posture. Particularly the qualifier as "able and ready" does not only refer to their military capabilities, but also their political willingness to commit to robust operations. Regarding their relationship, the declaration also mentions a "level of mutual confidence unprecedented in our history".

In the 2012 summit declaration, many of the previous formulations and commitments (UNSC members, joint vital interests,…) resurface. What is more interesting about that declaration is that it also reports on successes and advancements of their partnership. In particular, the partners take stock of their combined operations in the Libyan civil war of 2011, calling it a "defining moment" and a "shared experience", which has "validated and accelerated our cooperation"[99]. Framed as a highly positive experience, it sheds light both on the importance of real-world experience in joint combat operations, going beyond mere political declarations, and on the apparent progress the cooperation has made. The partners also highlight that they were able to derive some lessons from their cooperation. One would believe that there is hardly a better test for cooperation projects than real combat operations. The declaration also announces that cooperation will be broadened, such as by expanding military officer exchange programmes.

The 2014 declaration provides more insight into the framing of the partners' narrative of their relationship, explicitly tracing back their bond to them fighting together in two World Wars, liberating Europe[100]. This marks the first declaration which explicitly refers to historical events to solidify their cooperation. Besides taking stock of past efforts, the partners also announce an expansion of their operational support to each other, with the UK providing more troops and material to the French-led mission in Mali. Again, their proactive and global strategic posture is expressed through the announced commitment to leadership in European and Transatlantic security and the need to address threats and instability beyond their own borders to guarantee their own safety. The importance of narratives and common values is also explicitly mentioned, stating that their dialogue "reaffirmed the shared priorities and common world view at the core of the Lancaster House Treaties", giving these ideational factors a central role in their cooperation.

It is perhaps to be seen in light of the British exit from the European Union, that the 2018 Communiqué from the bilateral summit finds even stronger words of friendship and union. The

[99] "UK-France declaration on security and defence 2012," GOV.UK, accessed 31 March, 2021, https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-france-declaration-on-security-and-defence.
[100] "France – UK Summit: 31 January 2014 Declaration on Security and Defence," GOV.UK, accessed 31 March 2021, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/277167/France-UK_Summit-Declaration_on_Security_and_Defence.pdf.

partners frame themselves as "two of the world's oldest and greatest democracies" and invoke the legacy of the world wars to underline their common belief in freedom, which gives their partnership a strong idealistic undertone[101]. Regarding their strategic posture, they now describe their proactive and global role even more explicitly than in previous declarations: "As global, outward looking nations we remain committed to defending our people and upholding our values as liberal democracies in the face of any threat, whether at home or abroad". The strong wording employed underlines the role of both powers as robust and interventionist actors, willing to employ military force in global operations. One area of operations is the fight against the Islamic State, which they commit to fight on the "battlefields in Syria and Iraq", where French and British fast-jet pilots have conducted combat missions together in their function as exchange officers[102], giving their statement a noticeable martial flavour. In another theatre, the UK also announces ramping up its support for Operation BARKHANE in the Sahel region, a region which is traditionally seen as a French area of influence, following its history as French colonial territory. The two countries again highlight their special role as "Europe's two leading defence powers". The communiqué is also the first document which directly refers to the need for a common strategic culture in Europe, as both countries see their cooperation as contribution to that goal. Elaborating on the success of joint exercises such as Griffin Strike in 2016, interoperability has also been practised during the UK-led Battlegroup of NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence.

In the same year, the UK government has issued a guidance document framing the bilateral cooperation. Here again, they characterise the partners as "the only European powers willing and able to deploy and sustain significant military capability when it is necessary", referencing strategic culture, which is much more robust and proactive than that of their European neighbours[103]. Attached to this guidance is a document "UK and France: our shared history", which is directly used to frame their cooperation from a historical viewpoint, while trying to provide common ground through a joint narrative. The document traces their cooperation back to the Crimean War and places importance on the experience of two world wars, as well as operations conducted during the Cold War and the Gulf War.

[101] "United Kingdom-France Summit Communiqué 2018," UK.GOV, accessed 31 March, 2021, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/674880/2018_UK-FR_Summit_Communique.pdf.
[102] "Security and Defence 2018," UK.GOV, accessed 31 March 2021, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/674881/Security_and_Defence.pdf.
[103] "Guidance on UK and France defence cooperation 2018," UK.GOV, accessed 31 March, 2021, https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-and-france-defence-cooperation.

Before discussing these findings and relating them back to the previous chapter, I will first steer away from the joint documents released by both countries, and take a look at their respective national strategies, which are not placed in the framework of bilateral summits.

In the 2021 Integrated Review, the UK lays out its strategy for the years to come. Despite the presentation of France as closest and most important ally in the joint statements, the national strategy names the US as the most important strategic ally and partner[104]. Aligning with combined statements, the UK commits to its "more robust approach" responding to the deterioration of global security, through persistent engagement overseas and aiming at a greater global presence with the readiness to fight major wars and lead flexible campaigns[105]. NATO leadership is understandably (as Britain is no longer a part of the EU) named as a priority, but the UK nevertheless shows itself ready to continue cooperation with the EU on security issues. Already hinted at by the very title of the document ("Global Britain"), this global stance is also reflected in the areas of interest for its strategic and foreign policy: the Indo-Pacific and East Africa[106]. Interestingly, despite the increased support for French operations in Mali, the Sahel region does not explicitly feature as a key area of interest.

As expected, the French strategy paper for 2021 also places high importance of military capacities, including through improved armaments, an intervention capacity for the EU and preparing for inter-military cooperation in the event of a major conflict[107]. In terms of partners, the paper first names EU Member States: Germany, Spain, Belgium and Italy get referenced before the United Kingdom, which is undoubtedly due to Brexit, and France staying committed to the EU as primary framework to consolidate European defence[108]. Very much akin to the notion of "Global Britain", the French paper also clearly positions the role of France in the world, as a "puissance nucléaire européenne aux intérêts globaux" and a little further on, a "puissance d'équilibre".[109] These two descriptions perfectly summarise some of the key aspects of France's strategic culture: nuclear power, Europeanist, global interests and committed to an international system in balance, without domination by one superpower.

After having extracted the most important concepts and images with which both countries frame their cooperation and their role as an international actor, I will now discuss these concepts

[104] "Global Britain in a competitive age: The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy," HM Government, 60, https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/the-integrated-review-2021.
[105] "Global Britain in a competitive age," 69-73.
[106] Ibid., 69, 72.
[107] "Actualisation stratégique 2021," Défense, 27-32, 45-46, https://www.defense.gouv.fr/dgris/presentation/evenements/actualisation-strategique-2021.
[108] "Actualisation stratégique," 34, 36.
[109] Ibid., 35, 48.

as expressions of strategic culture, relate them back to the historical analysis and draw some conclusions about both countries' compatibility with regard to their real-world cooperation.

2.1.3. Preliminary conclusions: shared mindsets and future uncertainties

After having analysed the relevant political and strategic documents, identifying the main discursive elements that constitute the framing of the Anglo-French defence cooperation, I will now take stock of these results, making first assessments of their compatibility, and drawing preliminary conclusions of the impact of strategic culture on their partnership.

The first main takeaway is the conclusion, that both strategic cultures appear very compatible, based on their similarities. The key unifying elements that they have in common is the imperialist legacy, which has transformed into an active global outlook. This, combined with the militaristic heritage, that never experienced the same drastic curb as it did for example in Germany after WWII, leaves the UK and France with an interventionist and robust strategic culture, willing to commit forces to operations and theatres far beyond their borders. This willingness, and the self-perception as leaders in defence matters, should clearly facilitate joint operations in terms of scope, complexity and intensity. Indeed, this is reflected in the fact that they conducted joint combat operations both in the Libyan Civil War and the fight against the Islamic State[110]. In terms of budget and capacity building, their self-perceived role as leaders puts them on the same page regarding the future of conflict: both see the need to prepare for major conflicts again.

As a second takeaway, it appears that strategic culture particularly facilitates cooperation in the military dimension. Even though commonalities such as the threshold for use of force or the readiness to sustain casualties for foreign policy goals falls into the realm of political willingness, the biggest impact of a common strategic culture is on the pure military cooperation. This should not come as a surprise, as research has shown that national identities aside, the military already has a strong professional identity that transcends national borders, leading to a situation where military officers feel closer to officers from other European nations than to civilians in their own country[111]. Once these militaries also share a similar strategic culture, mutual respect seems to be at a very high level. In an interview about Anglo-French defence cooperation, a British military officer commented that "the shared military mind-set rests on the

[110] Edward Llewellyn and Catherine Colonna, "Points of View on Franco-British Defence Relations," *Revue Défense Nationale* 834, no. 9 (2020): 88.
[111] Christophe Pajon, *La coopération militaire franco-allemande au concret: Cultures, structures et acteurs* (Paris: C2SD, 2006), 154.

idea that military people are prepared to kill and get killed. That is a mind-set that very few nations have"[112]. This common respect is of particular importance for the success of cooperation projects such as those envisioned by the Lancaster House Treaties, as the specific implementation rests on the lower levels, whereas the broader guidelines are defined in a much more politicised context[113]. As those left in charge of the lower level implementation share this strong sense of respect based upon shared norms about the military profession, the weight they assign to their country on the international stage and the accepted risk of death and killing as a part of their profession[114], the Anglo-French cooperation has been very successful in military terms. Related to this element is also the beneficial impact of actual real-life experience in joint operations. While combined exercises and manoeuvres can certainly help build familiarity and trust[115], it cannot replace the shared experience of combat action[116]. Additionally, the similarity in both nations' defence architecture is another factor which creates compatibility. Often referencing their status as nuclear powers, both countries make for natural partners in that area, for the simple fact that there are no other nuclear powers in Europe. Albeit somewhat trivial, we can draw the conclusion that in some areas, cooperation can only take place if both countries possess capabilities in these areas: they can only coordinate their nuclear strategy if they are both nuclear powers.

The third key takeaway should not be a surprise, if one keeps in mind the limitations of strategic culture, which have already been discussed in the theoretical section. Strategic culture does not exist in a vacuum, and its influence on policy should not be overrated. The primacy of politics over all things military is something that has been famously formulated by Clausewitz in the 19th century and probably rings even truer today. On one hand, the big divide between Atlanticist Britain and Europeanist France, which has long transcended the mere strategic dimension and has to be understood as a part of fundamental foreign policy, plays a significant role in the cooperation. As I have hinted at in the previous chapter, the Lancaster House Treaties and the subsequent joint statements somewhat surprisingly agree on the different roles of NATO and the EU, with NATO serving as the foundation of collective defence, while the EU's purpose is to strengthen security. This convergence (possibly a concession from France) was a necessary prerequisite for agreement on defence cooperation since, as I have shown in the historical analysis, French scepticism towards NATO and its preference for EU-based solutions has long

[112] Pannier, "Understanding the workings of interstate defence," 549.
[113] Ibid., 534.
[114] Pannier, "Understanding the workings of interstate defence," 551-552.
[115] "British and French troops train together," GOV.UK, accessed 1 April, 2021, https://www.gov.uk/government/news/british-and-french-troops-train-together.
[116] Pannier, "Understanding the workings of interstate defence," 555.

been a cause for friction between both countries. However, the context since the signing of the treaties has changed, with Brexit potentially endangering the partnership. Nevertheless, France did already take some provisions for this new reality, namely the European Intervention Initiative (E2I), which is seen by some as a way to keep the British integrated into European defence after Brexit[117]. Still, the language used in the national strategies analysed in the previous chapter suggests that a change did take place: the UK places more emphasis on its partnership with the US and with Commonwealth nations, while France sees the EU and its member states as its primary partners. Particularly the possible shift towards Germany is a factor which can negatively impact the Anglo-French partnership.

With all this in mind, one has to conclude that although strategic culture can greatly facilitate implementation and cooperation in the military area, while also stimulating political will to commit to certain operations, the overall political direction of the countries has the potential to make or break their cooperation. Nevertheless, the importance of strategic culture must not be understated. Once general political consensus has been achieved, a common strategic culture can dramatically facilitate meaningful progress of the partnership. As even though the grander political direction can be expected to operate relatively independently from strategic cultures (after all, Russia and the United States do not manage to cooperate military despite their obvious similarities in strategic culture), strategic culture does touch upon the political dimension in a relevant field when it comes to allow for successful cooperation: the political willingness to commit troops to potentially dangerous operations and campaigns. The importance of history and the narrative must also be considered. As shown, not only does history shape a country's position in the current world system (both countries' status as former empires is the reason for their status as great powers today), it also serves as the source for the narratives that are used to frame and strengthen partnership. This is particularly apparent in the fact that official government agencies compile guidance documents which explicitly evoke both countries' common history as allies in war.

The Anglo-French defence cooperation has been a success up to this point. Since the signing of the Lancaster House Treaties, the areas of cooperation have been broadened, full operability of the CJEF has been reached, and they have conducted joint combat missions. It is said that their military ties are now closer than ever. It is clear that a common strategic culture has facilitated this development. Whether this commonality will suffice in the face of Brexit,

[117] Thibaud Harrois, "Franco-British Defence and Security Cooperation after Brexit: An Exception in Europe," *French Journal of British Studies* 25, no. 5 (2020): 6, https://journals.openedition.org/rfcb/6582.

increased tensions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, and changing geopolitical circumstances (including the strengthening of other partnerships) is too early to say.

2.2. Benelux

In the second case study, I will examine the Benelux countries. As the governments of Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg were in their London exile during WWII, they decided upon cooperating more closely on a broad variety of areas. Since its formation as a customs union in 1944, the three countries have gradually expanded their areas of cooperation and were actively involved in the launch of the European integration process and further count among the founding members of the UN and NATO. Their cooperation grew ever closer, leading to the formation of the Benelux Union, a formal economic union in 1958. With the new 2008 Benelux Treaty, the three dimensions of partnership would focus on the internal market and economic affairs, but also cover justice and security[118]. Despite this clear focus on the economic sector and on non-military security, the three countries increasingly rely on each other in defence matters, both trilaterally inside the framework of the Benelux Union, and outside, on bilateral terms. Belgium and the Netherlands maintain close naval cooperation, based on the BeNeSam Accord, including joint procurement of anti-mine capabilities and a combined military staff of both countries' naval components, named Admiral Benelux (ABNL)[119]. Luxembourg and Belgium also share strong bilateral bonds, such as Luxembourg training its officers in Belgian military schools and both armies typically deploying together[120].

Unlike the cooperation between the United Kingdom and France, the three Benelux countries possess very different capabilities, which is largely explained by their considerable difference in size. Nevertheless, their cooperation is almost universally considered a success story, and frequently championed as a model for inter-governmental cooperation and integration[121]. In this case study, I aim to identify the underlying reasons for this success in the three countries' strategic culture. The hypothesis being, that despite there existing considerable differences regarding their defence architecture (namely their capabilities), their historical commonalities have still led to a very compatible strategic culture in terms of their security identity, which greatly facilitates their cooperation. The analysis will again begin by looking the

[118] "Union Benelux," Benelux, accessed 5 April, 2021, https://www.benelux.int/fr/benelux-unie/le-benelux-en-quelques-traits.
[119] "Belgisch-Nederlandse marinesamenwerking," Marineschepen, accessed 5 April, 2021, https://marineschepen.nl/dossiers/belgisch-nederlandse-samenwerking.html#2.
[120] "Luxembourg Defence Guidelines for 2025 and Beyond," Luxembourg Directorate of Defence, 33, https://defense.gouvernement.lu/en/la-defense.html.
[121] Stein, *Benelux Security Cooperation*, 133.

three countries' history, and identify the major themes and narratives that have shaped their strategic culture. In the second step, I will analyse official documents, namely a number of joint declarations in the Benelux framework, and the countries' respective national strategies.

2.2.1. History: the Low Countries, foreign power domination and multilateralism

As opposed to the previous case study, the historical section in this one will not focus as much on military history. This is largely due to the fact that the three Benelux countries simply do not have the rich and expansive military history of the United Kingdom and France, with the relative exception of the Netherlands, a special case, which will be dealt with somewhat later on.

The first important theme in their history, which has likely had the biggest impact on their strategic culture in terms of compatibility, is their joint history as the Low Countries. The Low Countries was the common designation for the three Benelux countries since the Middle Ages[122]. As the protestant provinces revolted and broke away from Spanish Habsburg control, the United Provinces of the Netherlands, with its independence recognised in 1648, temporarily turned away from the region to become one of Europe's first overseas empires[123]. The Southern Netherlands (today's Belgium and Luxembourg) remained under Habsburg control, first under the Spanish, later the Austrian branch, enjoying a large degree of autonomy. It was already during this time that the previously strong regionalism had weakened and was replaced by an increasing feeling of unity throughout the 17th century[124]. After another change in foreign control, being incorporated into Revolutionary France and the French Empire, the Southern Netherlands were joined to the new Kingdom of the Netherlands as a result of the Congress of Vienna, uniting the Low Countries for the first time since the Dutch had broken away. Yet the cultural divide, linguistic (French vs. Dutch) and religious (Protestant vs. Catholic), would eventually lead to the Belgian Revolution in 1830. Despite attempts by the Dutch to invade Belgium, intervention by the great powers would see Belgium recognised as an independent, neutral state, guaranteed by the European powers[125]. In the process, Luxembourg would be split in two, with the eastern part going to Belgium (today's province of Luxembourg) and the western half becoming the de jure independent Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, under a personal union with the Dutch crown and as a personal possession of the Dutch King. It was not until 1867, when the Dutch King considered selling Luxembourg to France, alarming the Prussians,

[122] "De landen van herwaarts over," Dutch Revolt, Leiden University, accessed 5 April, 2020, https://dutchrevolt.leiden.edu/dutch/verhaal/Pages/verhaal01.aspx.
[123] Jeff Wallenfeldt, ed., *Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands* (New York: Britannica Educational Publishing, 2014), xiv-xv.
[124] Wallenfeldt, *Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands*, 88-91.
[125] Wallenfeldt, *Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands*, 93-96.

that Luxembourg's sovereignty was reaffirmed and it was given perpetual neutrality. Though it would remain under personal union with the Dutch crown until 1890, the Grand Duchy had become the last of the three Low Countries to be an independent state[126].

Ties between Belgium and Luxembourg remained strong, and though both countries kept their neutrality after having it violated in WWI, they decided to strengthen their cooperation, by concluding an economic union in 1921, tying their currencies together. During WWII, this time all three countries saw their neutrality violated. As their countries were occupied, the governments in their London exile, saw the need to cooperate in the face of the hitherto constant threat through foreign great powers, and conceived the Benelux Economic Union in 1944. Abandoning neutrality after the war, all three countries became founding members of both the EEC and NATO, where they saw that working together as a bloc, they could have more leverage against the greater powers[127].

After this brief and more general overview of the three countries' history, I will now extract the aforementioned important themes that have shaped their national and security identities, greatly influencing their strategic culture. I will show that these themes are tied together, with one leading to the other, making the final theme the logical consequence of the previous ones and therefore dominating the Benelux countries' current strategic culture.

The first important theme is the most straightforward one: their common history as the Low Countries. Under some political configuration or another, the three countries belonged to the same larger entities for centuries, albeit as fragmented counties and principalities. Although a formal reunion as the Kingdom of the Netherlands in 1815 resulted in armed conflict between the Belgians and Dutch, the conscience of a common identity seems to have persisted. As a result of heavy taxation, Luxembourg supported the Belgian revolution in 1830[128], but later on Luxembourgers were also eager to serve in the Dutch Colonial Army in the East Indies, up until WWI[129]. Their similar experiences as neutral victims during WWII brought the three of them closer together yet again. The links are also cultural: the Belgian Flemings sought unification with the Dutch as a Great Netherlands over their linguistic connection[130], Luxembourgers and Belgians share their Catholic identity, the French-speaking Walloons are close to the equally francophone Luxembourgers, and the linguistic similarities between Dutch and Luxembourgish

[126] Ibid., 131-132.
[127] Ibid., 103-107, 207.
[128] Wallenfeldt, *Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands*, 131.
[129] Ulbe Bosma and Thomas Kolnberger, "Military Migrants: Luxembourgers in the Colonial Army of the Dutch East Indies," *Itinerario* 41, no. 3 (2017), 555.
[130] Wallenfeldt, *Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands*, 206.

certainly facilitate exchange from that angle as well. Although far from homogenous, the three countries are intertwined in many ways.

Their similarities, despite clear differences, become even more apparent in the face of the second major theme: great power domination. Though such foreign domination has led the Dutch to successfully break away relatively early on, Belgium and Luxembourg remained under foreign rule throughout the 17th and 18th century. But even the independent Netherlands were not safe from foreign invasion: they too were invaded by Revolutionary France and the French Empire, which established the Batavian Republic and the Kingdom of Holland as puppet states[131]. French domination led to strong resistance in Belgium and Luxembourg, where the harsh conscription laws resulted in brutally suppressed rebellions, strengthening national identities[132]. Even after the Napoleonic Wars, the influence of the great powers cannot be understated: Belgium and Luxembourg were added to the Netherlands "for the convenience of Europe"[133], they were the guarantors of Belgian independence, and Luxembourg became a federal fortress under the German Confederation, with a Prussian garrison.

As all three countries were independent, the preferred method for limiting the intervention by foreign powers was the practice of neutrality – the third major theme in their history. This sentiment was arguably strongest in the Netherlands, where it had surpassed mere military calculations, but came to include moral and idealistic elements, which greatly influenced its self-image. This was reinforced by the narrative of successful neutrality during WWI, which was explained by the deterrence capabilities of the army[134]. It is safe to assume that the negative experience with neutrality by Belgium and Luxembourg already led to a re-evaluation of the principle in the interwar period, as Belgium concluded a military assistance treaty with France[135].

Consequently, as WWII also devastated the Netherlands, the experience of failed neutrality led to the final major theme, the one which heavily shapes the Benelux countries' strategic culture to this day: active multilateralism. As all three countries had to experience that neither their capabilities alone, nor neutrality could guarantee their security, they went on to become the champions of economic, political and military integration in Europe, founding Benelux and being founding members of the UN, EEC and NATO, always remembering the

[131] Ibid., 196.
[132] Ibid., 130.
[133] Ibid., 94.
[134] Wim Klinkert, "'In the interest of peace and quiet in Europe': The military and strategic role of Dutch neutrality, 1890-1940," *Journal of Modern European History* 17, no. 1 (2019), 62.
[135] Wallenfeldt, *Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands*, 103.

necessity for them to work together as a bloc to balance major power domination in these frameworks[136].

Before concluding the historical analysis, I will briefly mention a few national peculiarities that are separated from their joint history and still have an impact on the different flavour of each country's strategic culture.

For one, there is the Netherlands' role as a former empire. As previously mentioned, the Netherlands went on to become one of the first European colonial powers, capable of rivalling the rising England for a period[137]. However, the Dutch imperial experience is different from the British and French experience, as the loss of empire and the relegation to a smaller power lies much further back in the past. With first neutrality and then multilateralism dominating Dutch strategic considerations, the Netherlands seem to be under no illusion regarding their own importance and power. Nevertheless, I expect the experience of empire to play a role in the Netherlands' current security identity and defence architecture. For the first, a certain nostalgia with the past cannot be denied, as the period between 1609 and 1713 is still described as the Dutch Golden Age[138]. For the second, the fact that the Netherlands still possess overseas territories in the Caribbean, can be expected to have implications for their preference for naval power[139].

Belgium also has an imperial legacy to look back on. With the Congo first being a personal possession of the King, the Belgian government formally took control of the colony as late as 1908. During the decolonisation period, Belgium struggled much less than its European counterparts in letting go of its colony, as pursuing colonialism had never been an active initiative by the Belgian state. This leads to the country being frequently described as a "reluctant imperialist"[140]. It is therefore to be expected, that the colonial legacy of Belgium has only had a negligible impact on the Belgian security identity. However, what can be expected to have an impact on its strategic culture is the internal divide between Walloons and Flemings, with the latter side historically being attracted by the Dutch neighbour.

Finally, Luxembourg's peculiarity lies in its status as the smallest of the three countries. Never having had strong national ambitions of its own, its national identity did not evolve until the end of WWII, as a result of occupation and germanisation attempts. This has made Luxembourg naturally dependent on the support of other powers, making it a flexible and

[136] Stein, *Benelux Security Cooperation*, 130.
[137] Wallenfeldt, *Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands*, 184.
[138] Ibid.
[139] Guy Vanthemsche, *Belgium and the Congo, 1885-1980* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 269.
[140] Vanthemsche, *Belgium and the Congo*, 267-269.

adaptable actor, further facilitated by its linguistic situation. Nevertheless, the historically strong bonds with Belgium have likely affected the preference for Belgium as a strategic partner.

To summarise, the foundations of the security identity of the Benelux countries derives from narratives and themes that can be found in the history of the region, and that are closely interlinked, often one being the consequence of a previous thematic development. Those main themes are the shared history as the Low Countries, the domination by foreign empires, traditions of neutrality as a means of achieving security, and finally, a strong commitment to multilateralism and alliances (economic, political and military), born out of the experience of failed neutrality. The shared identity serves as the basic foundation of their cooperation. The experience of foreign domination led to stronger regional and national identities. Multilateralism is the most relevant factor today, as it largely steers all strategic considerations of the three countries.

In addition to these three underlying commonalities, I have identified national peculiarities, also based in history, which both influence the security identity, and the defence architecture: As a former empire with overseas territories to this day, the Netherlands can be expected to have the most proactive and global stance in strategic matters, placing the most importance on the military out of the three. Belgium's colonial past has barely influenced its strategic culture as a whole, but some ties to the African continent can be expected to persist in today's narratives. Its internal divide between Walloons and Flemings should also have an impact on preferences regarding strategic partnerships. Apart from the Middle Ages, Luxembourg has no strong military tradition to speak of. Although there was a short period of conscription and higher defence expenses during the early Cold War, it makes no attempts to build up a strong, independent military. Its history of relying on other, stronger partners, but also of attaching its soldiers to the militaries of its partners (historically with Luxembourgers serving in the *Grande Armée*, the Dutch military and colonial armies, the Belgian, French, Prussian and Austrian armies)[141], which can be expected to continue as a practice today.

In the next step, I will trace these elements to the current day and identify how they are reflected in official documents.

2.2.2. Document analysis: a beacon of cooperation

In this chapter, I will look at a number of official documents in order to find out how the Benelux countries frame their role in the international environment, how they frame their cooperation amongst each other, and what importance they place on their cooperation. Again, I

[141] Bosma and Kolnberger, "Military Migrants," 563.

will look at these documents as written expressions of their current strategic culture, with the underlying understanding that the culture-guiding elites determine the direction in which they want to steer the culture. The documents that will be considered are three joint Benelux documents (the 1987 Convention, 2012 Benelux Declaration and a 2013 statement), and the respective national strategies of all three countries. These should give us a good picture of the framing and positioning of the countries in the international security environment. In this step, I will mostly limit the analysis to making discursive observations, and interpret them more in-depth, with consideration of the findings of the historical chapter and including a wider viewpoint in the third and final step.

Benelux in itself is primarily not a regional security organisation. Founded as a customs union, its area of interest lies mainly in the economic dimension. However, as the fields of cooperation have been expanded, security and defence have also been incorporated into the partnership with the Benelux Convention of 1987 on cooperation and coordination in the area of defence, projects have been initiated to deepen this cooperation also in a trilateral Benelux context. Extending the 1948 military convention between the Netherlands and Belgium to Luxembourg, the three countries sought to adopt a common position with regard to other powers, enhance their efficiency in defence matters, and create common conceptions on using armed forces in times of crises and war[142]. The Convention set up the basic framework for defence cooperation within Benelux, planning for regular exchanges between the chiefs of staff to foster mutual trust, exchanges of military personnel, progressive standardisation of armament, equipment and tactics, as well as establishing a steering group to implement long-term projects. The convention is largely technical in nature, and refrains from making ideational statements to frame it, apart from evoking the "privileged and friendly connections of cooperation in all areas" between the three countries. It was nevertheless instrumental in launching more comprehensive and coordinated cooperation on defence matters.

Next is is the 2012 Benelux Declaration on Defence cooperation, being the most recent substantial communication on the subject, and is understood to be the bedrock for future tightening of defence relationships[143]. The Declaration is again mostly technical in nature and does not contain much language referring to common values, shared ideas or identities. Elaborating on concrete areas of cooperation (Belgian-Dutch naval cooperation, shared training facilities, and joint preparations for the 2014 EU Battlegroup), it still allows for some discursive insight. The first important aspect and recurring theme from the previous chapter is the

[142] 1987 Benelux Convention, Benelux.
[143] Biscop, *Benelux Defence Cooperation*, 1.

positioning of Benelux as a "beacon of European cooperation" ("phare dans le domaine de la coopération en Europe"), placing the cooperation directly in the context of multilateralism and the European Union and the initiatives to enhance EU cooperation on matters of defence[144]. Often attributed to it in scholarly literature, it becomes apparent that Benelux also places itself in the role of a model for European integration. What is striking however, is that apart from this reference, no ideational points are highlighted to frame the cooperation. To the contrary, the language framing the idea of the declaration is rational and cost-centric, as there are mentions of the paradoxical imbalance between operational requirements and budget cuts, as well as sharing costs as much as possible, in order to augment the output of operational capacities. One of the key objectives is announced to be favourable cost-benefit balance.

In the 2013 joint statement of the Benelux Ministers of Defence to the EU High Representative, we gain more insight into the ideational framing and geopolitical context that is evoked to frame inter-military cooperation. "Shifting balance of power and declining budgets" are seen as catalysts for closer, coherent and efficient cooperation, necessitating that Europe "becomes a credible provider of security and defence". The statement mirrors the rational and cost-centric nature of the 1987 and the 2012 documents, identifying the "pragmatic and result-oriented" approach of Benelux as the reason for its success. Cooperation is framed as central for all defence matters. Importantly, it is not seen as a danger to sovereignty and autonomy. To the contrary, Benelux understands it as an "enhancement of sovereignty and security, enhancing the ability to act"[145].

While joint declarations are certainly helpful in identifying areas of consensus of the involved actors, their commitment can be tested by looking at national strategies, in which countries have more freedom to elaborate on their views and perceptions of their roles and themselves. They will also allow for more insight into the distinctly strategic and military dimension of their role and their cooperation.

Beginning with the *Luxembourg Defence Guideline for 2025 and Beyond*, the document opens directly with the multilateral and alliance-centric theme. Luxembourg is characterised as "open to the world and integrated with the international community, in which it plays a recognized role"[146], alluding to its founding membership in the EU, NATO and the UN, and the 2013-2014 seat on the UN Security Council. This is already a key aspect of the Luxembourg

[144] "Déclaration BENELUX de coopération en matière de Défense," Benelux, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2009_2014/documents/sede/dv/sede250913declarationbenelux_/sede250913declarationbenelux_fr.pdf.
[145] "Benelux Letter to the EUHR, 2013" Benelux.
[146] "Luxembourg Defence Guidelines for 2025 and Beyond," Luxembourg Directorate of Defence, 3.

security identity: integrated into multilateral organisations, it aims to be recognised and involved despite its small size, enabling it to punch above its weight. Benelux is also referenced as key partners in the area of defence policy, adding another layer to the country's integration into multilateral organisations. Apart from integrating itself into multilateral structures, a key objective is also strengthening them, in particular the EU, which must be able to "project peace and stability beyond its borders". The document also echoes the Benelux declaration by placing Benelux cooperation in the context of "improving the EU's strategic and operational autonomy"[147], also hinting towards Luxembourg's Europeanist stance. Mindful of its size and limited capabilities, it clearly states that it defends "its national interests by enlisting the support of other nations"[148]. This consistently repeated reliance on multilateralism is also addressed on a historical, ideational level, as Luxembourg highlights its role as a founding member of the 20th century's major multilateral institutions, stating that "this gives it not only great pride but also an affirmed sense of special responsibility when it comes to defending the founding values of these institutions"[149]. It is out of this commitment to multilateralism and rules-based international order, and the simultaneous awareness of its own limitations that Luxembourg constructs its strategic culture. Although neutrality has often been seen as a preferred choice for small and medium countries, the negative experiences that Luxembourg has made with it, turned it to alliance membership instead, getting its protection by great powers not through the latter's solidary benevolence, but through active contribution to the alliance. This contribution takes the shape of peacekeeping, peace restoration, crisis management and peace-making operations, participating in Battlegroups and training missions[150].

In order to fulfil this commitment, Luxembourg relies heavily on its key strategic partners. This necessity fosters a strategic culture that is built upon advancing cooperation, specialisation and interoperability: "Luxembourg's troops deploy within multinational contingents. For these contingents to be operational, it must be ensured that the troops and resources deployed by each country are interoperable, in order to guarantee the effectiveness of the chain of command. The capabilities acquired by Luxembourg must function within a multinationally coherent whole."[151] Mentioning its particularly strong ties with Belgium, where Luxembourg sends its officers to train and with which it regularly exercises and deploys, the

[147] "Luxembourg Defence Guidelines," 19.
[148] Ibid., 9.
[149] Ibid., 13.
[150] Ibid., 20-30.
[151] "Luxembourg Defence Guidelines," 32.

document confirms the previously identified national peculiarity of Luxembourg's strategic culture: its reliance on partners, with a clear preference for Belgium.

The next document to be analysed is the *Belgium Strategic Vision 2030* of 2016. Belgium positions itself firmly in the multilateral structures, highlighting that while the United States remain the principal partner of Europe, the latter has to be more present as a security provider, as the military will be necessary to defend European interests and values[152]. It rationalises its positioning as a dedicated proponent of multilateralism and active participant in military alliances by drawing on its history and the theme of failed neutrality ("A la suite de la mise en échec de la neutralité belge lors des deux Guerres mondiales")[153]. The text also references the pioneering role of Belgium of these structures, as founding member and host country not only to important NATO facilities, but also of the EU, of which Brussels is considered to be the capital, alluding to Belgium's Europeanist stance. At first glance, the role as a security actor that derives from these positions seems similar to the one presented in Luxembourg's defence guidelines, namely strong advocacy of specialisation and robust contribution to various UN, NATO and EU missions. However, the key difference (reflecting Belgium's superior resources, both in terms of sheer size and of budget – absolute and relative to the GDP) lies in the defence architecture element of its strategic culture. Aiming to close capability gaps of NATO and the EU, Belgium places itself as a key player in Special Operations capabilities, aspiring to contribute to a joint NATO Composite Special Operations Component Command (C-SOCC) in collaboration with the Netherlands and Denmark, maintaining and enhancing cooperation in shared paratrooper schools and coordinating training, operations and material procurement with Dutch special operations forces[154]. The nature of special operations speaks towards a more robust and interventionist security identity of Belgium relative to Luxembourg, which has a direct impact on its defence architecture.

Another telling detail can be found in the chapter on the capability portfolio horizon 2030[155]. Presenting each capability in all areas of the Belgian armed forces and its potential, the text adds one paragraph on possible application in a European context. This again reflects the deep anchorage of Belgian defence in a wider, European perspective, always looking to identify areas for cooperation, joint procurement and operation and closing of capability gaps through specialisation. This aspect alone speaks for the highly collaborative nature of the Belgian strategic culture, which puts cooperation at its core and thereby seeming highly conducive for

[152] "La Vision Stratégique pour la Défense, 2016," Défense, 13-15.
[153] Ibid., 16.
[154] Ibid., 28, 78.
[155] "La Vision Stratégique pour la Défense, 2016," Défense, 49-118.

compatibility with other partners. The previously identified peculiarity of Belgium as a "reluctant imperialist", is also reflected in the document, confirming the hypothesis that Belgium's colonial history had little impact on its current strategic culture. The Congo is briefly mentioned as a fragile state in need of support from the international community, and a reference is made to the Congolese diaspora in Belgium, creating a link between the countries[156]. Nevertheless, no explicit mentions are made regarding the need to focus Belgian efforts on said region in Africa, and no particularly global or (as has been the case for the UK and France) militaristic tendency stemming from the imperial heritage can be identified in the document.

The final strategy to be analysed is the Dutch *Defence Vision 2035: Fighting for a safer future*. The martial title alone gives the reader a hint of the different flavour of strategic culture that the Netherlands formulate in their strategic guidelines. More reminiscent of the British and French strategic documents, the Dutch strike a similarly robust and martial tone. One of the key guiding principles they introduce is that "Ideally, we will prevent conflict. But if we have to, we will fight to win."[157] When compared to the Belgian and Luxembourgish documents, the Dutch's difference in tone hints towards a clear difference in security identity, being considerably more robust. To this end, the capability goal that is set is very broad and ambitious. Mindful of a geopolitical shift towards instability, hybrid threats and great power competition, the Dutch military should have the ability to "keep the peace and use maximum force – and everything in between"[158]. Rather than mostly focus on peacekeeping operations, the Dutch armed forces understand themselves as "first responders" in crisis situations and conflicts[159]. That the lens through which the Netherlands see the strategic environment is one that is focused on great power competition and potential armed conflict on greater scale, is further reinforced by the highlighted need to maintain escalation dominance[160]. This stands in contrast to their Belgian and Luxembourgish partners, who have opted for a more limited and specialised mission profile for their armed forces. Another factor that underlines their different strategic culture, and which is also rooted in the Dutch national peculiarity as a former colonial power, is the fact that the Netherlands still possess overseas territories in the Caribbean. As mentioned before, this will significantly influence both their security identity and their defence architecture, as territorial defence, the most basic function of all armed forces, includes former colonies that are located on the other side of an ocean. This is specifically mentioned as the first main task of the Dutch

[156] Ibid., 15.
[157] "Defence Vision 2035: Fighting for a safer future," Ministry of Defence, 7.
[158] "Defence Vision 2035," 21.
[159] "Defence Vision 2035," 10.
[160] Ibid., 30.

armed forces ("Protection of national and allied territory, including the Caribbean parts of the Kingdom")[161]. Overseas territories speak both for a more global and outwards-looking strategic perspective, and help explain a certain preference for naval power, as it is necessary to defend the territories and is rooted in the historical role as seafaring empire.

In the scholarly literature on the Dutch strategic culture, the Netherlands are frequently understood as belonging to the Atlanticist faction of European states, with a preference for Transatlantic solutions and the United States as primary partner.[162] While this would also be in line with my expectations stemming from their imperial legacy (after all, a part of their kingdom lies across the Atlantic), and while Dutch participation in the 2003 "Coalition of the willing" against Iraq would further support that perception, it seems that since the American pivot to Asia, this preference has weakened to a degree. Though in the document, NATO is still understood as the "main guarantee of security"[163], there is strong language regarding the need for a more capable EU. As such, the document mentions that the geopolitical developments demand "a stronger Europe, one which is an independent geopolitical player" and that "over the next 15 years, Europe will need to become self-reliant in terms of security and to be in a position to defend its own interests". Further, in accordance with the EU Global Strategy of 2016, it "must be capable of conducting military operations at the highest end of the force spectrum"[164], which alludes to the view of the EU not only as an actor in security and stabilising missions, but also in high-intensity conflict situations. Interestingly, the only instance in which Benelux is directly (and briefly) mentioned in the document is in the annexes, regarding additional NATO obligations of the Netherlands in the context of NATO. This could reveal that while joint Benelux declarations continue to reference the exemplary closeness of the three countries in all dimensions of cooperation, for the Netherlands in their national capacity, Benelux does not rank as prominently in their strategic considerations. From this, the assumption could be made that the Netherlands' commitments in the regional dimension are secondary to their commitments on a global (NATO and EU wide) scale. This is an indicator for a much more robust strategic culture of the Netherlands when compared to their regional partners in Benelux.

The major factor in which the Dutch align with Belgium and Luxembourg is the insistence on the need for interoperability and specialisation. Out of the necessity that "Dutch military contributions need to be embedded internationally", interoperability with national and international partners is framed as a "determining factor in the purchase of means and the

[161] Ibid., 20.
[162] Stein, *Benelux Security Cooperation*, 28.
[163] "Defence Vision 2035," 17.
[164] "Defence Vision 2035," 10, 19, 36.

selection and training of personnel"[165]. Although we know from Benelux documents and the strategic visions of the other two partners that interoperability projects are largely embedded in the Benelux context, it is still striking that this is not specifically mentioned in the document.

In the third and final step of the case study, I will discuss the combined findings of the historical and the document analysis and draw preliminary conclusions about the countries' compatibility from a strategic culture point of view, and highlight successes and obstacles.

2.2.3. Preliminary conclusions: committing to multilateralism

Assessing the findings of the previous two steps, it becomes evident that three countries have differing strategic cultures, at least when it comes to the specific defence architecture aspects. In large part due to their differences in size, they have different resources (manpower, material, budget – both in relative and absolute terms)[166], which in turn has an effect on their ambitions and preferences regarding missions and capabilities. Briefly summarised, the Netherlands have the most robust strategic culture (highest spending, and expressed by their ambition to compete in maximum-intensity conflict), Belgium a slightly more passive culture (lower spending, preference for UN sanctioned missions, but still ambitions in aerial combat and Special Operations – more robust and combat-heavy areas of military activity), and Luxembourg with the most passive strategic culture (lowest spending, no dedicated combat roles). One could expect that these differences would not make for very compatible partners. However, the key factor that unites all three strategic cultures, and which must be regarded as the fundamental and guiding principle for their efforts, is their reliance on multilateralism, achieving interoperability with other armed forces and following a logic of specialisation in their cooperation with partners and national organisation, training, and procurement initiatives. This is the key that makes their cooperation work. Once cooperation, interoperability and specialisation become goals in themselves, compatibility is a natural result, leading the three countries to be able to bridge otherwise considerable divides. The imperative of cooperation, which is omnipresent in all three national strategies, allows them to overcome the often self-imposed limitations of forced national strategic autonomy (a concept which is deeply rooted in the old notions of sovereignty and defence), and efficiently assess their areas of expertise in order to pursue specialisation. Reflective and mindful of their own roles, this specialisation allows them to cooperate effectively in those key areas, where political willingness is not an obstacle and thereby always meet in the middle. The Dutch proactive and the Belgians reactive strategic culture can meet in

[165] Ibid., 33.
[166] "Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries (2013-2020)," NATO, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_178975.htm.

the field of Special Operations, while the two meet with the more passive Luxembourgish culture in the field of ISTAR.

The countries' security identities and preferences very much correspond to the themes and narratives that were identified in the historical section. They explain the Dutch's global and proactive stance, as well as the close cooperation (sometimes in the form of complete integration) between Belgium and Luxembourg. The narrative of the failed neutrality and the need for multilateral solutions and active participation in alliances is also directly referenced throughout their strategic documents and joint Benelux declarations.

The common history and underlying national identities and the linguistic situation must also not be discounted, as they further facilitate cooperation. For one, it is their common history which prompted the idea of a Benelux partnership in the first place, during WWII. Since then, gradual expansion of areas of cooperation have, in accordance with spillover theories, has brought the countries even closer together, to the point of developing a common role identity of Benelux within the greater European context: as a beacon and role model of cooperation. On the other hand, the linguistic similarities make the constellation of preferred bilateral partnerships a very natural one: francophone Luxembourg cooperates best with francophone Belgians, while the Dutch find their natural partners in the Flemings. A side effect of this is the divide this creates within Belgium. Attitudes seem to diverge on the point of how far Benelux defence integration should go, with the Walloons being satisfied with the current degree of integration, and the Flemings advocating a complete unification of all three militaries under a combined Benelux military[167], which is certainly an expression of their linguistic and cultural proximity to the Netherlands[168].

Nevertheless, when it comes to the practical dimension, it is important to keep in mind the remaining challenges, and take stock of valuable lessons and experiences. When asked about the cooperation in a 2019 interview, high-ranking officers of all three countries' armed forces highlighted the central role of the 2012 Declaration in revitalising and promoting the partnership[169]. This once again confirms the notion of the importance of the official political discourse for real-world cooperation plans. The Belgian and Luxembourgish officers underlined the relevance of historical and cultural similarities on a more ideational level, but also referenced the pragmatic nature of Benelux cooperation; not limiting itself to cooperation between the three

[167] Herman Matthjis, "De toekomst van de Belgische defensive," *Le future de la Défense: horizon 2030*, Minister of Defence and Civil Service, 81-83.
[168] Charles-Henri Delcour, "Le futur de la défense: horizon 2030," *Le future de la Défense: horizon 2030*, Minister of Defence and Civil Service, 21.
[169] Marc Thys, Kees Matthijssen and Yves Kalmes, "Benelux – coopération entre les composantes terrestres," *Revue Militaire Belge*, no. 17 (April 2019): 32.

partners, but also seeking synergies with other countries in a larger European context, embedding their cooperation in an EU framework[170]. The Dutch officer made a particular point of the importance of holding exercises and working together in the framework of NATO missions: The mission in Afghanistan was seen as a particular catalyst for cooperation[171]. All three showed themselves mindful of the position of Benelux as a role model for other countries, and aware that their cooperation was being observed by others. This again reflects the recurring narrative of Benelux as pioneer in the area of cooperation.

The 2013 Interparliamentary Consultations of the Benelux partners had previously discussed all related challenges and opportunities, and offered a number of valuable takeaways. Very much in line with the experiences of the British and the French, as well as the understanding of the interviewed officers, here too the importance of real life cooperation in operations is underlined. The end of ISAF in Afghanistan is a matter of concern, as the armies will have one less context for cooperation. The consultations also reference geopolitical factors for enhanced cooperation, naming the American pivot to Asia as a reason for stronger European efforts to organise security. Interestingly, and corresponding with the Benelux letter to the EUHR, questions of sovereignty are not considered a real concern, as the offical line of Benelux on this sees defence cooperation as an overall, global sovereignty boost[172].

During my exchange with another high-ranking Luxembourg army officer with direct personal experience in the Benelux framework, I was also able to gain some more critical insight into the progress of the various cooperation initiatives. Some programmes with considerable potential would have to be seen as failures from the point of view of multilateral cooperation. One recurring reason for this is the practical handling of the economic side of procurement, resulting in countries tackling these initiatives on their own with varying levels of success, rather than coordinating the procurement of new, standardised equipment. Previously ambitious, yet realistic objectives have therefore had to be adapted and weakened. Specifically speaking about the Luxembourgish efforts, the officer regrets that it often lacks initiative to take a more active role in championing and advancing projects. The potential payoff for the small country would transcend idealistic objectives of solidarity and partnership – successful cooperation as championed by Luxembourg would lead to more visibility and political influence. In terms of cooperation with other outside partners, the officer highlights some of the negative results of such efforts. In this context, he cited the Very High Readiness Joint Taskforce (VJTF) 2019

[170] Thys, Matthijssen and Kalmes, "coopération entre les composantes terrestres," 34-35.
[171] Ibid., 40.
[172] Benelux Interparliamentary Consultative Council, "La Coopération Benelux en Matière de Défense," 2 December 2013.

under German command, in which the Netherlands chose to highlight the aspect of German-Dutch partnership instead of the Benelux partnership, even though Belgium and Luxembourg both heavily contributed to the VJTF as well, with Luxembourg even taking the lead of a reconnaissance unit with Dutch elements. Still, overall, the officer echoes the other assessments with an optimistic view of the partnership, seeing a lot of potential, but also, in light of many missed opportunities, the ability to do better.

The key findings of this case study constitute of the fact that neither the defence architecture, nor the security identity aspect of several countries have to be identical in order for them to cooperate successfully. What truly matters, is that multilateralism, cooperation, the aim to achieve interoperability and pursuing specialisation are deeply anchored within their strategic cultures. And the strategic cultures of all three countries, stemming from their shared historical experience of foreign power domination and failed neutrality, are firmly committed to those four elements. While in the case of Anglo-French cooperation, I would argue that it is political will, born out of geostrategic interests, which allows for cooperation (bridging differences in national identities and then being facilitated by a similar strategic culture), I would hold that in the case of Benelux, it is strategic culture which prompted political will. The similarities in culture and language are certainly contributing factors, but it is the imperative of cooperation and integration, which is ingrained in the three strategic cultures which potentially makes them compatible with any other country willing to find synergies, regardless of the other aspects of their security identity or their defence architecture. Commitment to multilateralism, leading to the pursuit of interoperability through specialisation is the secret ingredient which makes the Benelux cooperation successful, despite expected obstacles stemming from practical issues and an occasional lack of commitment to the Benelux side of cooperation from the part of some countries. Nevertheless, it is striking that when asked outside of a political context, insiders are more reluctant to confirm the all-round rosy depiction of the partnership, instead pointing at obstacles and failures. A last key finding of this case study is therefore, that even though the Benelux cooperation is a comparative success story in the grand scheme, a realistic assessment of its progresses reveals a lack of unity in important areas of the cooperation, and missed opportunities to fulfil the complete potential of the partnership.

3. Parallel discussion of results and implications for the EU

In the final chapter of this analysis, I will now revisit the results of both case studies and conduct a parallel discussion of my key findings. I will then attempt to extract some lessons and relate them to a broader EU-wide perspective, and identify some implications for the ongoing processes regarding EU defence integration.

During the analysis of both cases, I was able to highlight that when assessing the strategic culture of a country, it is useful to be mindful of the political and specific military history of said country. Through deliberately shaped historical narratives, certain themes are being reproduced as carrying particular significance for a country's identity. It is therefore not surprising that an imperialistic and militaristic past, or those moments considered formative for a national identity are linked to military successes, as is the case for the United Kingdom and France. Though there is no doubt that their position as empires has had a material impact on their interests and foreign policies (as empires are typically considered powerful, wealthy and interventionist), the reproduction of narratives recounting national glory through military victories has had a lasting effect on their current perceptions of their national role and, by extension, their strategic culture. In the case of the British and French, their shared experiences as empires have resulted in a similarly interventionist, robust or even aggressive strategic culture, but their constant rivalry has been detrimental to their political will to make concessions to the other side, and their ambitions for leadership roles in the international order led them to frequently disagree on framework and preferred partners in the state system (NATO vs. EU, European vs. Transatlantic). A similar impact of history can be seen in the case of Benelux, though with different results. Though rivalry between the countries did exist for a brief time, the shared experience as the Low Countries has overall had a unifying effect, eventually leading to the formation of the Benelux Union after WWII. Their similar conditions during WWII as neutral countries who had their neutrality violated and ended up being occupied for most of the war have had a very similar impact on their strategic culture, causing them to abandon neutrality in favour of strong multilateralism and active integration in alliances. Even though their strategic cultures differ in considerable ways regarding their defence architecture, it becomes clear that the key to their successful cooperation lies in their commitment to multilateralism. The necessity for interoperability with partners and specialisation to achieve greater efficiency is repeated countless times in the three countries' strategic documents, most of all in the Belgian case, which considers a European anchorage for literally all of its capacities. Judging by their documents, it becomes clear that multilateralism and achieving compatibility is deeply ingrained in all aspects

of their strategic thinking. This particular case is therefore a clear example of the impact of strategic culture on policy. Certain types of strategic culture, namely those making compatibility with partners a key objective in itself, can create and boost political will for deeper and resilient cooperation.

This stands in contrast to the UK-France case. Their strong strategic cultures per se are not conducive to cooperation and highly dependent on the political circumstances and the political will of the sitting administration. A useful analogy to illustrate this would be the United States and Russia, which one can intuitively expect to have very similar strategic cultures based on their history, position as military super powers and strong geopolitical interests. Nevertheless, cooperation between them has come to be unthinkable because of the political circumstances. I expect a similar underlying logic to be at work in the case of the UK and France. What their case shows however, is that once political will is there and consensus on a few key areas has been found, their similarly robust strategic culture can greatly facilitate cooperation, even bridging the great cultural and linguistic divides between the two, making their cooperation a considerable, yet unlikely success. Nevertheless, when compared to Benelux, their cooperation is likely to be much less resilient to political shocks, as everything hinges on political alignment. If the impetus for cooperation stems from the culture, it is more likely to survive political disagreements, as culture is generally understood to be more constant and change much more slowly than political circumstances. The result of the strain under which Brexit puts the Anglo-French cooperation cannot be completely gauged as of yet. Though both sides show themselves committed to continue their partnership in their joint declarations, national strategies already show a shift: the UK is turning towards the United States and the Commonwealth, while France seems to prioritise partnerships with its major EU partners, particularly Germany.

As mentioned in the introductory part, the present thesis is embedded in the broader context of EU defence integration. I will therefore now dedicate the final portion of this analysis to identify some lessons and implications for the EU context.

The first lesson regards the organisation of cooperation in regional clusters. In the absence of a unified and centralised European defence policy, the regional approach appears to be the most promising way to improve capabilities and efficiency, and facilitate deeper integration on an EU level, once or if political will is mustered across the board of all or most Member States. This approach is being pursued by Member States anyway, as is evident in the many initiatives launched within and without the EU framework. The EU would do well to further encourage these initiatives, as time spent on regional coordination and interoperability is

time gained in the later stages of EU-wide coordination. Two lessons the EU can draw specifically from the Benelux case, is the spillover effect and the logic of capability gaps. Spillover in the Benelux Union has been successful, going from purely from economic cooperation to defence integration. Though this has been the aim of the EU anyway, Benelux offers further hope that the spillover approach might pay off. In terms of capability gaps, the EU could help willing Members States by identifying EU-wide capability gaps and support them in finding those gaps where they can make the best contribution fitting their national context.

The second lesson concerns its role, its own EU strategic culture. As became evident in the analysis of the strategic documents, different states have different perceptions of the what role the EU should assume, ranging from focusing on stabilising missions in the security field, to assuming collective defence in a similar way that NATO does. As much of this is depending on the current geopolitical circumstances, the EU would do well to clarify this rather sooner than later. Though the Petersberg Tasks have attempted to answer this question in the 1990s, much has changed since then, and some Member States expect the EU to take an ever more active role. Coordination with NATO, but also with the neutral EU Member States is very important in this context.

Related to the issue of strategic culture, my analysis has shown that not every strategic culture is equally well equipped to foster cooperation. The element of multilateralism, omnipresent in Benelux documents, has been identified as the most effective aspect to improve cooperation and create political will. The EU should contribute to promote and instil this consciousness in all EU militaries, through seminars and the standardisation of military academy curricula.

The case of the UK and France has shown the benefits of conducting joint operations for mutual trust. Though integrated training and exercises are certainly useful, they cannot replace the impact of joint combat operations and deployments in war zones. The EU could encourage more strongly multinational detachments on its CSDP missions to build trust among the soldiers on the ground. Although this cannot replace the greater political will, the British and French have shown that when the smaller scale implementation of cooperation projects is left to the military professionals, their respect for each other on a professional level can bear very good results. Ways to get the Battlegroups out of the political deadlock and find environments which are potentially less politically controversial to deploy them would be important, as states have shown their continued willingness to invest in the promising initiative.

The analysis suggests that the often-cited linguistic obstacle should not be overstated. The case of the UK and France has shown that cooperation works despite language barriers, even during combat operations. This is not particularly surprising, as standardisation of professional terminology has already happened through NATO. The EU can further help by encouraging states to standardise higher military education to be conducted in English. The Belgian Royal Military Academy is one example of a military institution which already aims to switch is course language entirely over to English[173].

The final takeaway is the importance of narrative. The analysis has shown that it matters how states frame their strategic culture and strategic positions. The British and French have specifically issued guidelines to frame their cooperation in historical terms and create a sense of unity and friendship. To do the same, the EU needs two things: For one, actual positive experiences as a security actor, which can be used to frame and create narratives, in order to imbue the EU with the beginning of a military tradition. Again, the Battlegroups have potential in this area. The second thing it needs is clarity over its role, which is connected to the second lesson elaborated above. The EU cannot spin a narrative if it does not know who it wants to be as a security actor. This again underlines the importance of clarifying this question.

4. Conclusion

The present thesis aimed to examine how states frame their strategic position in general, and their cooperation in particular through the official discourse as found in strategic guidelines and political declarations. Combining the major narratives and themes derived from a historical analysis with the recurring elements in the present-day documents, I have drafted a picture of the countries' strategic culture and assessed their compatibility based on these cultural conditions.

One key finding was that history matters. For one, (military) history itself is a deliberately shaped narrative used to frame and elaborate national identities. This became evident, as the explanation for present-day positions can be easily traced back to historical events, and historical themes are being referenced in strategic documents.

The second finding was that strategic culture matters. Though impossible to separate it from other factors (politics, economics, etc.), there is a tangible impact of culture either as facilitating politically motivated cooperation as in the case of the UK and France, or as boosting and fostering political will as in the Benelux case. For the first case, the analysis has shown that a similarly robust strategic culture, deriving from their shared experience as imperial great powers, can bridge certain cultural and linguistic divides and allow for quick advances in

[173] "La Vision Stratégique pour la Défense, 2016," Défense, 126.

projects and trust. Nothing builds trust and generates lessons as joint combat operations, which are more likely to take place when two countries have matching robust strategic cultures. Nevertheless, robustness alone does not incentivise cooperation, and such initiatives will be sensitive to political shocks, such as Brexit. The case of Benelux has shown that countries can have different cultures, particularly in terms of their capabilities and defence architecture, but still work together extraordinarily well. The decisive factor here is the presence of a commitment to multilateralism in their security identity, which specifically incentivises cooperation and can serve as motor for broader political will. For Benelux, this aspect of their security identity can be clearly traced back to their experience of failed neutrality during WWII.

These findings have allowed me to draw lessons which can be applied to the wider EU context. The EU would do well to recognise the importance of strategic culture and narratives, and reflect sooner than later on the role it wants have as a security actor (stabilisation and peace missions vs. collective defence), particularly in the face of a rapidly changing geopolitical environment. In the meantime, due to the success of regional projects, it can do no wrong by encouraging such projects, while finding ways to offer those states that are willing more real-life opportunities in an EU context to test their cooperation and build more trust in the field. This can happen in the CSDP mission context and in the still largely toothless Battlegroup initiative.

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