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Conflicting Interpretations of Nativism: Understanding Radical Right Discourse towards Military Interventions

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**Conflicting Interpretations of Nativism: Understanding Radical Right Discourse
towards Military Interventions**

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Conflicting Interpretations of Nativism: Understanding Radical Right Discourse towards Military Interventions

I. Introduction

This thesis is concerned with the politics of military interventions. More specifically, this study will research the language and arguments of radical right parties towards overseas military deployments. In so doing, this thesis will answer the following research question: “*How do radical right parties perceive and position themselves towards military interventions?*”

Although the fields of international relations and comparative politics have often been regarded as separate branches within political science research (Verbeek & Zaslove, 2017, p. 388), more recent studies have attempted to bridge the gap between the two. This development makes sense, because in a rapidly globalising world, domestic politics and foreign policy become increasingly intertwined. The idea that “politics stops at the water’s edge” (i.e., political parties set aside their differences over domestic issues when discussing foreign affairs), expressed by U.S. Senator Vandenberg in the late 1940s, is now outdated (see Wagner & Raunio, 2020, pp. 515-517). Political parties, as Wagner and Raunio demonstrate, hold significantly different views over foreign policy. And because of these differences, it matters which parties govern a country – not only for domestic issues, but also for international ones.

An especially salient area of political contestation between parties is deciding about the use of military force abroad. And, despite earlier research on this topic, we do not yet fully understand the positions of radical right parties towards interventions. The second chapter of this thesis will show that, while earlier works are successful in explaining the positions of other party families, this is not the case for the radical right. This fits in with a general lack of attention given to (populist) radical right parties in foreign policy research, as observed by Verbeek and Zaslove (2015). In recent years, radical right parties have attracted much scholarly attention within political science research, but the fact that their relationship with military interventions remains a puzzle is problematic. It is important to better study and understand these parties, not only because of their impact on the national political environment, but also because of the increasing entanglement of domestic politics and foreign policy. How do radical right parties behave with regard to these foreign policy decisions, and what are the consequences of this behaviour – both domestic and international? Through asking these important questions, this thesis will provide another piece of the puzzle that will help in understanding these parties.

It is known that the radical right, compared to other party families, holds the least homogenous positions towards military interventions (see Haesebrouck & Mello, 2020, p. 577). It remains largely unclear, however, why (and how) exactly this is the case. An interesting research puzzle, that will be further explained in the next chapter, emerges. This research aims to increase our understanding of radical right parties by studying their discourse on military interventions. Simply measuring how radical right parties vote will only reveal a part of the story. This thesis is interested in the full picture, and will therefore delve into their arguments and motivations.

In the coming chapters, this thesis will argue that these heterogenous positions are due to the fact that a radical right party could interpret its nativist tendencies in two distinctly different ways. The next chapter will first discuss existing works on this subject before presenting the theoretical framework. Chapters three and four will subsequently introduce the case selection and research method of this thesis, while chapter five will give the results of the case study conducted. The final chapter will wrap up with conclusions and offer implications for further research.

II. Literature and Theory

First things first: the concepts of this thesis. The most important concept of this research is, without a doubt, the notion of *radical right parties*. What kind of parties are understood under this notion? We need to look at the work of Mudde (2007) for this definition. Mudde writes about “populist radical right parties”, which are not exactly the same as radical right parties. According to Mudde, populist radical right parties are characterised by “three core ideological features: nativism, authoritarianism, and populism” (pp. 22-23). Considering that this thesis is primarily concerned with the radical right, not the *populist* radical right, only the first two of these are of importance here. Mudde defines nativism as “an ideology, which holds that states should be inhabited exclusively by members of the native group”, and authoritarianism as “the belief in a strictly ordered society, in which infringements of authority are to be punished severely” (pp. 22-23). The radical right is then defined as an “opposition to fundamental values of liberal democracy” with a “belief in a natural order with inequalities” (p. 26). This definition will serve as the main theoretical foundation for this thesis.

It is important to clarify the reason why this thesis does not consider the *populist* radical right. The focus of this thesis, as explained above, is on the radical right. The parties studied in this research could very well be populist (parties of the radical right party family often are), but the phenomenon of populism itself does not constitute the main subject of this thesis. Mudde (2004), in his earlier work, defines the core of populism as the division of society between two groups: “the pure people” and “the corrupt elite” (p. 543). It seems unlikely, however, that the friction between these two groups plays a large role in determining a party’s position towards military interventions. As this chapter will show, the other two ideological features of the radical right defined by Mudde – nativism and authoritarianism – are of greater importance here. Mudde regards populism as a “thin-centred ideology” (2004, p. 544), which in itself is not enough to define a party. Populism comes in many forms, is combined with many other ideologies, and is found on both sides of the political spectrum. As populism is not an exclusive feature of the radical right, it is difficult to theoretically disentangle. Because of these reasons, populism itself is not included in the theoretical groundwork unveiled in this chapter.

Literature Review

What do existing studies teach us about what different party families (specifically, radical right parties) think about military interventions? Generally speaking, the works introduced below provide interesting insights, but do not yet adequately address and explain radical rights parties’

behaviour on interventions. The most relevant work that specifically studies radical right parties' support to interventions is Greene (2022), who studies the role of Front National, AfD and UKIP concerning the Syrian civil war. Greene rightly points to a general lack of scholarly attention for radical right parties' responses to foreign policy issues, including interventions (p. 2). Greene sees the radical right's response to interventions through a lens of political opportunism: when an intervention is unpopular, a radical right party will contest it for political gain. A more popular intervention will imply that "these parties try and shift the discourse to issues which better align or fit their ideology – both nativist and populist dimensions – with public sentiments" (pp. 6-7). There is a problem with this theory, however. Greene argues that radical right parties base their positions towards interventions on the public support an intervention receives. This implies that radical right parties are merely opportunist actors, and lack any own sets of beliefs, convictions, or ideologies on which they decide their positions. This rather one-dimensional interpretation of the radical right is disputed by this thesis.

In essence, Greene sees a certain tension between nativism on the one hand, and populism on the other. This approach is markedly different from this thesis: rather than a tension between nativism and populism, this thesis theorises a tension between different interpretations of nativism. The concept of nativism is not as straightforward as it is often viewed, and, as the remainder of this thesis will argue, radical right parties can also interpret nativism in a way that allows them to argue *in favour* of military interventions. Greene's work also insufficiently succeeds in explaining the different positions within the radical right party family itself. This can be explained by his case selection: Greene considers three European radical right parties, although two (Front National and UKIP) were scarcely represented in their respective national parliaments, while the third (AfD) only entered the Bundestag in 2017. This case selection, in turn, allows Greene to study only one particular military intervention (the Syrian civil war), which raises doubts about the suitability of this case selection. This chapter will show that this is a common error made by authors within this field.

An example of this is the work of Wagner et al. (2018), who study party families and their different positions towards military interventions, and concluding that the "strongest predictor" of a party's support towards interventions is the left-right axis (p. 557). Haesebrouck and Mello (2020) confirm the conclusion of Wagner et al. and write about a "curvilinear relationship" between a party's stance towards military interventions and its position on the left-right scale of the political spectrum (p. 567). They demonstrate that radical left parties are the least supportive of military interventions, while (centre-)right parties are the most supportive – with

the level of support decreasing again for radical right parties. Radical right parties, Wagner et al. write, are less supportive than (centre-)right parties, and “about as supportive as the Greens” (2018, p. 548) towards military deployments. They do, however, add that the robustness of their observation leaves much to be desired, as it is based on countries with barely any radical right MPs, which have only casted a few votes (2018, p. 550). In their conclusion, Wagner et al. therefore state that “[...] evidence for the positioning of parties on the Radical Right is still inconclusive” (Wagner et al., 2018, p. 557). This is not solved by Wagner in his following work (2020), and Haesebrouck and Mello (2020) similarly observe that not many scholars “have examined the impact of far-right and far-left parties on military intervention” (p. 569).

Hlatky and Massie (2019) study how different political ideologies lead to different decisions on the use of military force. They find that – next to ideology – both “alliance preferences” (wanting to present yourself as a reliable ally) and “electoral calculations” (taking public opinion around a particular military deployment into account) play a role in determining a (ruling) party’s position towards interventions (pp. 111-112). This intriguing conclusion is not a particularly useful theory for understanding the behaviour of the radical right. Considering that many radical right parties are almost perpetually in opposition, the mechanism determining their position towards military deployment will be quite different than that from governing parties. If a party is not governing, it does not carry any responsibility for government policies, and will not be punished for any unpopular military mission abroad. If anything, this mechanism could work the other way around: in order to stand out from the general consensus among mainstream parties, radical right parties might even vote differently on interventions in order to be able to lambast the government for their policy. In other words, if a government is in favour of intervention, the radical right might be against, and vice versa. Greene (2022) also mentions this political strategy, writing that radical right parties regard interventions – especially unpopular ones – as “mobilising opportunities” for political gain (p. 6).

How do radical right parties behave when they *are* in government? Vignoli (2021) analyses the Italian radical right’s behaviour in deciding over the use of force. This contribution specifically looks at Lega Nord’s conduct in 2011, when the Italian government eventually decided to participate in the military intervention in Libya. Despite LN’s resistance to this intervention, the party nevertheless agreed to it as it determined that dissolving government over this issue would not be worth it. This is because Lega Nord, Vignoli writes, did not see this issue as a “salient issue *per se*”, and was more concerned about the intervention’s consequences for domestic issues, such as migration (p. 37). Vignoli’s theory is relevant and, despite the

specificity of this case study, might tell us something about the radical right's positioning towards military interventions in general. This is because Vignoli argues that radical right parties, even when in government, do not find interventions a particularly salient issue. But it remains unclear when radical right parties do find an intervention salient enough to support or contest it – and which arguments they would use to argue either in favour or against any intervention.

Interpreting Nativism

As the section above has shown, existing theories do not yet satisfactorily explain the position of radical right parties towards interventions. In order to solve this, we need to go back to Mudde's (2007) conceptualisation of radical right parties. Remember that, for Mudde (besides populism), there are two "core ideological features" that characterise radical right parties: nativism and authoritarianism (pp. 22-23). In domestic politics, these two (partial) ideologies usually mutually reinforce each other. A radical right party, for example, might call for the immediate expulsion of refugees who have committed minor crimes (due to the party's authoritarianism), because it wants to protect the country's native population – nativism. Betz (2019) writes that, unlike populism, nativism has remained an understudied subject, and explains why it is important to disaggregate nativism "[f]or the purpose of theoretical analysis" (p. 113). The theory outlined in this chapter could be understood as a further elaboration of nativism.

How would nativism and authoritarianism manifest itself within a radical right party when it debates whether to support a military intervention? Authoritarian tendencies would result in a party that has little concern for constraints on the use of force, or for a mission's democratic legitimacy. While other parties care about how an intervention's toll on innocent civilians could be minimised or debate whether a certain intervention is legal according to international law, such considerations will likely be largely irrelevant for a radical right party. In other words, a party's authoritarianism will not stand in the way of an intervention. That brings us to nativism. Nativist tendencies could be interpreted in two distinctly different ways. A nativist party, when debating military interventions, could see any intervention as something that is not the West's responsibility, and therefore argue that embarking on a foreign military adventure would not be in the interest of its home country or its people. Alternatively, a nativist party could see any intervention as directly beneficial to (or even necessary for) the freedom and safety of its home country or people, and therefore argue in favour of intervening. To put it another way, a radical

right party could translate its nativism into either arguing against an intervention because it does not regard it as their responsibility, or arguing in favour of an intervention because it sees it as necessary for their security. These different interpretations of nativism will henceforth be referred to as *isolationist nativism* and *protective nativism*.

Could these two different ways in which radical right parties might interpret their nativist tendencies help us understand how these parties interpret military interventions? Interestingly, some scholars have hinted at this idea. Wagner (2020) for example writes that it is still unclear why the radical right is not more supportive of military interventions because of their otherwise authoritarian tendencies, and wonders “[w]hether this results from an anti-cosmopolitan refusal to ‘save strangers’ and whether exemptions are made for the fight against Islamic terrorism” (p. 97). In the same vein, Haesebrouck, Reykers and Fonck (2022) contemplate whether radical right support for interventions could be linked to these parties’ tough stance on migration (p. 86). And, finally, Greene (2022) writes about how radical right parties have to choose between resisting the globalist aspects of interventions, and protecting the nation from terrorism or migration (p. 2). Unfortunately, neither of these thoughts are developed any further.

This thesis will. In order to study whether the relationship between radical right parties and their positions towards military interventions can be explained by different interpretations of their nativist tendencies, this thesis will test the following hypotheses:

H1: A radical right party will consistently and exclusively use the isolationist nativism frame when opposing a certain military intervention.

H2: A radical right party will consistently and exclusively use the protective nativism frame when supporting a certain military intervention.

Before moving on, one important caveat must be made. Radical right parties can be inconsistent. Multiple studies have identified inconsistency within this party family, most notably on social-economic issues (see, e.g., Ennser-Jedenastik, 2016). Rovny (2013) calls this “position blurring” – the phenomenon of radical right parties taking deliberately vague and ambiguous positions on certain issues in order to attract more voters (pp. 5-6). Inconsistent positions of radical right parties might thus be a deliberate political strategy. This is important to keep in mind, and part five will discuss this in more depth. The following chapters will explain how these hypotheses will be tested, which cases will be studied, and what these two conflicting frames will look like.

III. Case Selection

Concerning the case selection of this study, three choices have to be made: (1) which countries are studied; (2) which radical right parties are studied; (3) and which military interventions are studied. These three choices are, naturally, all dependent on each other.

First and foremost, the countries studied. Important to note here, is that not every country is similarly suitable for this research. Remember that this thesis studies the positions of radical right parties towards military interventions after previous studies have brought inconclusive results for this party family. Wagner et al. (2018) write that the strongest predictor of a party's position towards military interventions is the left-right axis (p. 557). There is one caveat, however, about this relationship. Wagner and Raunio (2020) point out that the left-right dimension works differently in Eastern Europe (p. 518). Wagner (2020) finds that for many Eastern European post-Communist states, the relationship between the left-right axis and support for interventions is "weaker, or entirely absent" (p. 96). Eastern European parties will therefore be excluded from this thesis.

That being said, there are two main criteria for selecting countries. Firstly, any suitable country must have a party system that includes a relatively stable presence of at least one radical right party in parliament over a longer period of time. If these parties are not in parliament (or are simply non-existent) studying them is of course impossible. Although this might sound straightforward, one of the main reasons why we do not yet sufficiently understand the radical right's positioning towards interventions is that many studies have researched party systems in which the radical right is almost (or even entirely) absent (see, e.g., Wagner et al., 2018; Hlatky & Massie, 2019; Wagner, 2020).

Another criterion to consider when selecting cases is that the countries studied are reliable Western allies, and therefore, preferably, member states of both NATO and the EU. Ideally, selected countries would have a long history of not shying away from – and actually taking part in – military interventions. It is noteworthy to point out that each country has its own practices and rules for voting on military interventions (Peters, Wagner, & Glahn, 2011, pp. 5-11; Wagner, 2020, p. 54). While some national parliaments must constitutionally approve any intervention, others are not formally required to do so. This does not necessarily pose a problem for this research. As long as a parliament has debated a certain military intervention, the position of radical right parties can be studied. This thesis, as explained earlier, does not only measure how parties vote, but is also interested in their arguments and motivations.

By taking these two criteria into account – a country must have a stable radical right presence in parliament, and be a reliable Western ally that has participated in military interventions – the 2010 Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES; Bakker et al., 2015) shows that multiple European radical right parties can be excluded on the basis of their minimal (or non-existent) and unstable presence in parliament, or because their country is not in NATO or the EU. This essentially leaves four radical right parties that fulfil both criteria: the Belgian *Vlaams Belang* (VB), the Danish *Dansk Folkeparti* (DF), the Italian *Lega Nord* (LN), and the Dutch *Partij voor de Vrijheid* (PVV). See Table 1 for more details on this selection.

As Haesebrouck and Mello (2020) show, the variance of radical right parties’ positions towards military interventions is high (p. 577). In fact, the radical right party family is the least homogenous party family in this respect. Going back to the CHES 2010 survey, which, inter alia, measures parties’ positions towards international security and peacekeeping missions, we can compare the values for the radical right parties that satisfy the two selection criteria. For this variable, a value of 0 means that a party strongly favours troop deployment, while a value of 10 denotes strong opposition to sending troops abroad. On this scale both DF and LN have a value of 4.3, VB has a value of 5.5, while PVV has a value of 7.1 (Bakker et al., 2015). The average of radical right parties on this scale is 5.3. VB, in other words, comes closest to the average value, while PVV represents an extreme outlier – a good representation of this party family’s heterogeneity.

Table 1 Selecting suitable radical right parties in Europe for case study

<i>Party Name</i> (English)	<i>Party Name</i> (Native)	Country	Stable Presence in Parliament	In NATO?	In EU?	CHES 2010 Intervention Score
<i>National Front</i>	Front National (FN) / Démocratie Nationale (DN)	Belgium	No	Yes	Yes	5
<i>Flemish Interest</i>	Vlaams Belang (VB)	Belgium	Yes	Yes	Yes	5.5

<i>Danish People's Party</i>	Dansk Folkeparti (DF)	Denmark	Yes	Yes	Yes ¹	4.3
<i>National Front</i>	Front National (FN)	France	No	Yes	Yes	5
<i>Movement for France</i>	Mouvement pour la France (MPF)	France	No	Yes	Yes	5.4
<i>Northern League</i>	Lega Nord (LN)	Italy	Yes	Yes	Yes	4.3
<i>Freedom Party</i>	Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV)	Netherlands	Yes	Yes	Yes	7.1
<i>British National Party (BNP)</i>		United Kingdom	No	Yes	No ²	4.5
<i>UK Independence Party (UKIP)</i>		United Kingdom	No	Yes	No ²	5.6
<i>Freedom Party of Austria</i>	Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (FPÖ)	Austria	Yes	No	Yes	6

Of these four parties, three have either been in government or have supported a governing coalition in the 21st century: DF, LN, and PVV. But there are large differences between these parties, with both DF and LN having been part of government on multiple occasions. DF supported liberal-conservative minority governments between 2001 and 2011, and again between 2015 and 2019. Likewise, LN has often been part of government over the past two

¹ Although Denmark is an EU member state, it has secured an opt-out on CSDP matters.

² The UK officially left the EU in 2020 after the 2016 Brexit referendum.

decades. PVV, on the other hand, has only endorsed one coalition (2010-2012) and triggered new elections when it pulled its support. PVV only signed a limited coalition agreement, which did not cover foreign or military affairs. The party was thus completely free to vote the way it wanted with respect to military interventions. PVV's situation, in other words, is not comparable to that of DF or LN.

As Vignoli (2021) has already studied how radical right parties might behave within government, this thesis is more concerned with how they behave outside of government when debating military interventions. A party in opposition will have more freedom to speak their mind about any issue. The paragraph above has argued that PVV can be regarded as practically outside of government for the past two decades. With this in mind, what follows is that Belgium and the Netherlands are the most suitable countries for this study, and, therefore, the radical right parties to be analysed are the Belgian Flemish Interest (*Vlaams Belang*) and the Dutch Party for Freedom (*Partij voor de Vrijheid*). These two parties are from neighbouring countries with highly similar party systems, and are therefore ideally positioned to be compared.

Table 2 Selected interventions and the positions of each party

	VB Position	PVV Position
<i>Libya 2011</i>	Against	Against
<i>Mali 2013-</i>	Abstained	Against
<i>Anti-IS 2014-2017</i>	In Favour	In Favour
<i>Anti-IS 2017-</i>	In Favour	Against

PVV entered Dutch parliament in 2006. In order to be able to compare these two's positions towards military interventions, this study will consider interventions from 2006 onwards. Taking this into account, the three exact interventions to be studied are the following: (1) NATO Operation Unified Protector in Libya, 2011; (2); the intervention in Mali, both EUTM and MINUSMA, 2013-present; (3) and the anti-IS coalition in both Iraq and Syria, 2014-present. These interventions were selected due to the fact that the parties' views varied most on these interventions. As Table 2 shows, both VB and PVV argued against the Libya intervention, while both were in favour of the anti-IS intervention (although PVV changed its mind a few years later, something chapter five will explain). Concerning the Mali intervention, the two parties held conflicting opinions. Ideally, the case study would also have included an intervention supported by PVV, but not by VB. This intervention, however, does simply not

exist. Although this is certainly unfortunate, it does not come as a surprise, seeing that the CHES data show PVV's unwillingness to support interventions.

IV. Research Method

Remember that the main theory of this thesis posits that differences in radical right positioning on military interventions originates from how these parties interpret nativism. Radical right parties could interpret nativism in two ways (isolationist vs. protective nativism) which in turn implies different appreciations of military interventions, with the latter type of nativism more supportive to interventions than the former.

This thesis will study two radical right parties in order to test this theory. As explained in the previous chapter, the parties are similar in many respects: both are members of the same party family; have been continuously represented in their respective national parliaments since the mid-2000s; are from long-time NATO and EU member states, which have participated in numerous military interventions in the past; and, finally, are from similar party systems, as both Belgium and the Netherlands have a large number of politically represented parties. Despite these similarities, however, the CHES 2010 data tell us that these parties have divergent positions towards military interventions (Bakker et al., 2015). In other words, this case study could be described as a most similar research design (see, e.g., Anckar, 2008; Seawright & Gerring, 2008, pp. 304-306).

Before going any further, it is necessary to formulate what we expect radical right parties to say and argue under either interpretation of nativism. Under isolationist nativism, we expect radical right parties to argue that getting entangled in foreign conflicts and interventions is not in 'our' interest. Embarking on such costly endeavours (both in monetary terms as well as regarding the cost of human lives), these parties will say, is just not worth it, and could prolong conflicts (or make them worse). Not that radical right parties are particularly concerned with the situation on the ground. Their primary concern is the interests of their 'own' people. And isolationist nativist parties will conclude that it is simply not the responsibility of the West to play the role of a global police force, which often means that they want to stay out of the conflict altogether.

A protective nativist party, on the other hand, would be more supportive of interventions. Such a party would argue that, as opposed to intervening not being 'our' responsibility, 'our' free society and way of life are at risk. We expect protective nativist parties to directly link impactful real-world events close to home, such as high migration flows or terrorist attacks in Western countries, to the necessity of intervening. Because of this threat to 'our' civilisation, a

military intervention would be justified. Importantly, this justification has not much to do with saving the local population, but is mainly aimed at (protecting) the party's electorate at home.

The two theoretical expectations formulated above will be labelled as the isolationist nativist frame and the protective nativism frame, respectively. For a more detailed description of what exactly is understood under these frames, see Appendix A. In order to capture the radical right's positioning towards military interventions in an even more complete fashion, this thesis will also categorise VB's and PVV's arguments in parliamentary debates according to the frames of Wagner (2020, pp. 116-119). Categorising these parties' arguments will enable this thesis to more compellingly compare the conclusions about the radical right's position towards military interventions to other party families. It will also be possible to see if and where the frames of Wagner overlap with the nativism frames, and this will enable this thesis to find out whether the frames of Wagner work well in studying the radical right. The discussion section of chapter five will discuss this in more detail.

The next chapter will analyse to what extent the language of the two selected parties falls under these frames. This content analysis will be conducted with these parties' parliamentary speeches as the main source. In studying VB's and PVV's contribution to parliamentary debates on military interventions, this thesis will be able to discern which frames are used. Why are parliamentary speeches the most suitable source for measuring a party's position on interventions? A debate on any particular intervention will naturally be about the specific conflict and (possible) intervention under discussion. As this research is specifically concerned with the arguments that parties use to argue either in favour or against interventions, studying the very debates in which these arguments are used is the most direct and appropriate way to conduct this content analysis. Even though some parties will be more willing to support interventions than others, we expect parties to make up their mind on a case-by-case basis. Every conflict is unique, and, therefore, any intervention could be distinctly different from another. That is why it is necessary to dive into specific debates about specific interventions.

For these reasons, electoral manifestos – another source often used to gauge political parties' position on a subject – are not suitable for measuring a party's position on interventions. Many manifestos are primarily concerned with domestic politics, and therefore spend little attention to foreign conflicts (let alone possible interventions). Debates in European Parliament (EP), likewise, are not workable. The EP competences around foreign missions or interventions are very limited (Peters et al., 2011, pp. 11-15).

V. Case Study and Results

This chapter will provide the results of the case study conducted in order to test the theory and hypotheses formulated in chapter two. The arguments of both VB and PVV in parliamentary debates concerning the three interventions selected (Libya, Mali, and the anti-IS coalition) are studied, as well as the frames under which these arguments can be categorised. Both the frames of Wagner (2020), and the two interpretations of nativism (isolationist vs. protective nativism) will be taken into account. After studying each party individually, this chapter will combine the results to draw further conclusions about the radical right's positioning towards military interventions.

As mentioned in the third chapter of this thesis, countries differ in the way military interventions are approved. As Peters, Wagner, and Glahn write, neither Belgian nor Dutch parliament holds any formal veto right over their government's right to send troops abroad (2011, pp. 8-11). This does not mean, however, that the political decision-making processes of both countries are identical. Peters et al. write that Dutch parliament is "well informed" about its government's military plans due to constitutional obligations, which has resulted in a situation in which "the government almost acts as if the Dutch parliament had formal veto powers in that it normally refrains from sending troops without majority support" (pp. 8-10). In Belgium, by contrast, the executive retains strong control over the deployment of armed forces. Compared to their Dutch colleagues, the position of Belgian MPs concerning military interventions is weak, with Peters et al. writing that the only way to criticize government would be through asking questions in parliament or raising the issue in debates (pp. 10-11). Haesebrouck et al. demonstrate that this has somewhat changed since the 2010s, with some Belgian governments (especially minority or caretaker governments) explicitly asking parliament to support an intervention before sending troops (2022, pp. 81-83).

Because of these differences, Dutch parliament has seen more parliamentary motions on military interventions, although these votes are not constitutionally binding. This is also visible in the Parliamentary Deployment Votes Database (Ostermann et al., 2021). Appendix B shows the votes of VB and PVV for the three interventions studied. The large difference in the number of votes does not constitute a problem for this thesis. Remember that this thesis does not study how radical right parties *vote* on military interventions, but how they *argue*. As long as parliament, either through plenary or committee debates, discusses a particular intervention, a (radical right) party's arguments can be studied. And for the interventions studied in this

chapter, both parliaments have held numerous debates, allowing both VB's and PVV's reasoning to be analysed.

When does a parliamentary statement qualify to be included in this case study? It is relevant when it explicitly or implicitly refers to the party's position towards the intervention under discussion. In other words, it should be possible to infer the party's view of the intervention itself. If that is the case, the statement is relevant, and will be coded according to the frames discussed in the previous chapter. By contrast, arguments referring to specific aspects of a mission (e.g. when discussing how many troops should be sent) are not relevant, and will be excluded from the analysis. A list of parliamentary debates used for this case study can be found in Appendix C.

Vlaams Belang

In February 2011, with the situation in Libya rapidly deteriorating, Belgian parliament discusses the North African country for the first time. While VB expresses its disgust of Gaddafi's regime and its actions, the party calls upon the EU to make clear to Libya's population that they should rebuild their own country into a free and prosperous nation rather than migrating to Europe en masse – a clearly isolationist nativist statement (Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers, 2011a). On 18 March 2011, when debating the UN Security Council resolution concerning Libya, VB again expresses concern for any effects on migration flows into Europe. Lawmaker Gerolf Annemans also raises doubts about the success of any military action in Libya, as he believes that other parties think too positively about what an intervention could achieve (Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers, 2011b). On 21 March 2011, Belgian parliament debates whether Belgium should support Operation Unified Protector in Libya. VB portrays itself as holding back on supporting the intervention, as the party is afraid that Belgium will be dragged into a long-term military conflict with no end in sight. Annemans has more sympathy for the position of Germany, he states, as Berlin has decided not to take part in Operation Unified Protector. The party then expresses its strongest critique of the intervention in Libya:

We believe we have to get out of Libya as quickly as possible. If we want to do something useful there, we have to use this opportunity to serve our own interests in the region. Those are, in the first place: halting illegal immigration through a sea blockade [...]. If there is one thing by which we could help our own people, it is that we should take advantage of the disappearance of Gaddafi and this military operation

to protect our borders to the south of our own Mediterranean Sea and send out a clear signal that the liberation of the people of the North African countries is a reason to stay [...] and that those that flee for this reason, will under no circumstances be accepted by Europe (Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers, 2011c).

Concerning the intervention in Libya, VB consistently and exclusively expresses itself through isolationist nativist statements. After this debate, however, VB votes *in favour* of Belgium's participation in Operation Unified Protector (VB Vote 1 in Appendix B). It appears that a radical right party's voting behaviour on military interventions does not always reflect its position expressed in debate, however convinced and outspoken.

VB's position towards the intervention in Mali is more complicated. On 17 January 2013, when debating Belgium's contribution to EUTM, the party appears unable to take a position either in favour or against the mission. Interestingly, it uses both nativist frames in the same debate, but, in line with the hypotheses formulated in chapter two, expresses support through protective nativist rhetoric and opposition through isolationist nativist rhetoric. MP Annick Ponthier for example argues that recent military successes of Islamic fundamentalist groups in Mali do not only constitute a threat to the "stability and integrity of Mali", but also to international security (Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers, 2013). Later, Ponthier states that the "fight against the threat of radical Islamism" is something they can support. On the other hand, the party also expresses fear that Mali could become another Afghanistan, and explains that there is a risk of "ending up in a hornet's nest yet again" in which it is impossible to say what role Belgian troops would have to play (Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers, 2013). Ponthier then announces that, because of this internal struggle, the party will abstain from voting on this mission. In this debate, both nativist frames are present within the party's discourse. These two conflicting frames seem to cancel each other out, which results in a party unable to vote either way (Vote 2 in Appendix B). The discussion section of this chapter will discuss this case in more detail.

Unlike in the Mali debate, VB is able to formulate a position towards Belgium's participation in the anti-IS coalition. On 26 September 2014, lawmaker Filip Dewinter portrays his party as approving of the mission (although somewhat reluctantly), as he agrees with other parties that IS must be eliminated (Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers, 2014). Dewinter eventually concludes that VB will vote in favour. Interestingly, VB is mostly absent or inactive in subsequent debates on this issue. Only a few years later, in 2020, the party is again present (and

active) in a debate concerning the anti-IS coalition. On 25 June, as parliament debates an extension of the mission, MP Annick Ponthier comes out in favour, and does so with more keenness than in 2014. In a protective nativist fashion, she directly refers to the Brussels attacks carried out by IS in March 2016, and then explains why it is important to remain an active member of the anti-IS coalition:

[...] it is our duty to protect and safeguard our identity and security. National security, as we often see, is directly linked to the foreign and geopolitical situation. In our opinion, we must not fall, but we must fight the legitimate fight against Islamic terrorism, both at home and abroad (Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers, 2020).

Ponthier then states that her party will fully back the continuation of the anti-IS coalition's efforts. The party's statements on this intervention are exclusively protective nativist, in line with theoretical expectations. VB also formally votes in favour of the intervention against IS in Iraq (Vote 3 in Appendix B) and Syria (Vote 4).

Partij voor de Vrijheid

In March 2011, Dutch parliament discusses whether the Netherlands should take part in Operation Unified Protector in Libya. On 23 March, PVV lawmaker Hero Brinkman has doubts about any positive effects of the mission, stating that "if there is one mission we participate in that is nonsensical, it is this one" (Tweede Kamer, 2011a). A week later, on 31 March, Brinkman reiterates his party's opposition to the mission. He regards the Dutch role within the operation as "not minor" while heavily criticising Arab countries, as he believes that they hardly contribute to the intervention at all (Tweede Kamer, 2011c). He also explains that his party is concerned that NATO is being pushed into a long-term war in Libya. A few months later, when parliament debates an extension of the intervention, PVV MP Raymond de Roon expresses even stronger isolationist nativist language: "PVV believes that cleaning up the mess in the Arab region should primarily be done by the region itself, and this is also true for the mess in Libya" (Tweede Kamer, 2011d). De Roon rejects any responsibility for the West over Libya, and wants to end the Dutch contribution to the intervention as soon as possible. The party is clear in its message – it does not support the intervention in Libya – and uses consistent isolationist nativist language to convey this message. The party's votes in parliament also reflect this position, as it introduces a motion urging the Netherlands to refrain from taking part in the intervention in March 2011 (PVV Vote 1 in Appendix B), while also voting against a

motion tabled by other parties that calls for an extension of the mission in June (Vote 2). In both votes, PVV represents the lone outlier in parliament, being the only party to vote against the intervention.

Concerning Mali, PVV has consistently expressed its disapproval of the intervention since its start in 2013 – and has done so through isolationist nativism. On 12 December 2013, when Dutch parliament discusses joining the UN mission MINUSMA for the first time, the party does not want the Dutch tax payer to “bleed” for Mali, and “would rather see the money spent on improving security in the Netherlands” (Tweede Kamer, 2013). PVV also believes – like in the Libya debate – that not the West, but Islamic countries themselves should be responsible for fighting terrorism. The party even expects the intervention to have a negative effect on the security situation in Europe, not only because it fears that taking part in the intervention will turn the Netherlands into a more attractive target for Islamic terrorists, but also because it expects a rise in the number of “refugees and criminals” flowing into Europe (Tweede Kamer, 2013). From these statements, it becomes clear that PVV is only preoccupied with the security of its own people. The party expresses concern for the high costs of the intervention on multiple occasions (see, e.g., Tweede Kamer, 2014c; 2017b), and it regards the situation in Mali as a zero-sum game, with any resources spent on Mali being portrayed as wasted money. On 22 December 2016, lawmaker Raymond de Roon asserts that the Netherlands has nothing to gain from intervening in Mali (Tweede Kamer, 2016). This point is reiterated by MP Gidi Markuszower on 28 October 2021, who argues that “the mission in no way serves Dutch interests” (Tweede Kamer, 2021a). The party also votes for several parliamentary motions, both introduced by PVV itself and by other parties, that aim to stop the Dutch contribution to the mission (Votes 3, 4 and 5 in Appendix B) – accurately reflecting the party’s opposition to this intervention.

On 10 September 2014, the Dutch House of Representatives holds a debate on the recent military successes of Islamic State in Iraq. PVV lawmaker Raymond de Roon calls IS a “threat for the Netherlands”, and sees the necessity of fighting IS not only in Europe, but also in Iraq (Tweede Kamer, 2014a). On 2 October 2014, party leader Geert Wilders is even more convinced of the necessity to intervene. Wilders argues that “the future of the country and that of our children are at risk” – and says PVV supports the government’s decision to send fighter jets to the Middle East (Tweede Kamer, 2014b). He then uses even stronger protective nativist language:

Wake up, cabinet. Do not only talk about Iraq and Syria, but make sure that the Dutch people can safely cross the streets, safely take the train, safely get their groceries. Do not only protect the Iraqi people from Islamic State, but protect the Netherlands from Islamic terrorism [...] (Tweede Kamer, 2014b).

The party's positive attitude towards the intervention is reiterated by De Roon on 2 July 2015 (Tweede Kamer, 2015). And on 13 June 2017, MP Gabriëlle Popken says that "IS has declared war on the West, putting our freedom, culture and future at stake" (Tweede Kamer, 2017a). By directly asserting that the values and freedom of the Western world are at risk, the party is using the protective nativism frame to express its support for the intervention against IS. PVV also expresses its support for the intervention through its voting behaviour between 2014 and 2017 (Votes 6 and 7 in Appendix B).

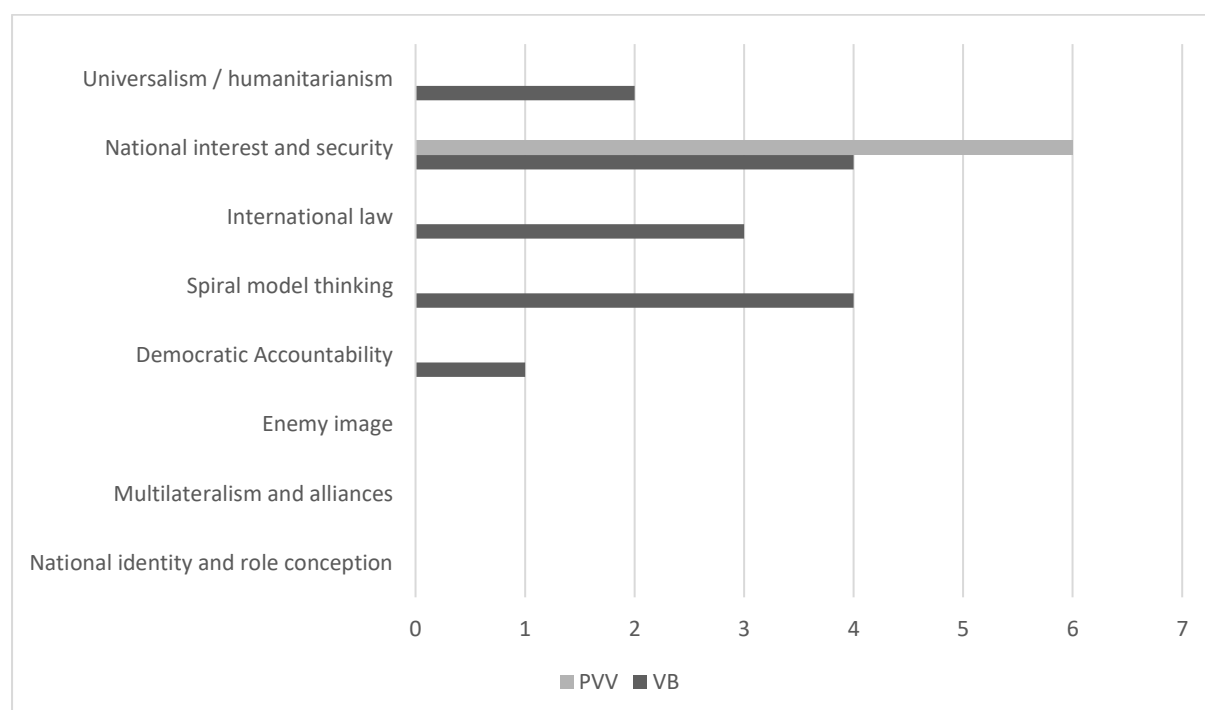
The party's position, however, changes in 2017. And with this change of position, the party also switches from protective nativist to isolationist nativist rhetoric. On 14 December 2017, De Roon explains that in 2014, his party was a strong supporter of the military intervention, but now believes that, due to the success of the initial intervention, the situation has changed. The party is now against a continued military presence in Iraq and Syria, criticising the high cost of the mission, and arguing that it is no longer in Dutch interests to remain there (Tweede Kamer, 2017c). In 2019, De Roon repeats these arguments, and adds that it is now time for others to stabilise the situation. His party, he states, "believes that our people, our resources, our troops should now be in the Netherlands in order to prepare for what threatens us at home" – domestic Islamic terrorism (Tweede Kamer, 2019). A year later, De Roon again laments the fact that millions of tax payers' money is spent on fighting IS (Tweede Kamer, 2020). It is clear from the party's statements since 2017 that its position towards the anti-IS coalition has changed, and it now exclusively and consistently uses isolationist nativist rhetoric to voice this opinion – in line with theoretical expectations. PVV also voices this opposition through voting for motions that want to end the contribution of the Netherlands to the anti-IS coalition (Votes 8 and 9 in Appendix B).

Discussion

This section will discuss the case study results more in depth. A first observation that follows from studying the two parties is that the frames of Wagner (2020) are not suitable for studying radical right parties' arguments and positions towards military interventions. While Wagner's research is undeniably relevant and succeeds in capturing the positioning of other party

families, most of the frames formulated in his work are barely used by radical right parties. Figure 1 shows that the exceptions here are frames two (national interest and security) and four (spiral model thinking) – and, to a lesser extent, frame three (international law). The PVV statements that could be attributed to any of the frames of Wagner even exclusively fall under frame two. Although the party might seem very stable and predictable in its discourse when looking at Figure 1, the previous section has shown that this is not the case – with PVV having expressed both isolationist and protective nativist language. Moreover, Wagner predicts frames three and four to be used most often by left-wing parties (p. 117), but what follows from Figure 1 is that VB does not follow this expectation. Overall, frames two and four can be interpreted as falling under either the isolationist or protective nativism frame. Even though there is some theoretical overlap here, both the isolationist and protective nativism frames are more encompassing than Wagner’s frames, and, therefore, better suited at capturing the radical right’s positioning towards military interventions. The finding that previous frames are largely unsuitable for studying the radical right might also have contributed to the inconclusive results of previous studies, as explained in chapter two.

Figure 1 Wagner (2020) frames used by VB and PVV



A second observation that follows from the case study, is that the theory and hypotheses introduced in chapter two hold up. A radical right party, when it opposes a certain military intervention, articulates this position through isolationist nativist language. And when a radical

right party supports an intervention, it makes this clear through using the protective nativism frame. In addition, when a party changes its position, the language it uses also shifts. This constitutes further proof confirming the theory of this thesis. Two specific cases stand out from the analysis: (1) VB's behaviour on Mali, when the party is unable to take up a position either in favour or against the intervention and voices this undecidedness through both isolationist and protective nativist language; (2) and PVV's volte-face on the anti-IS coalition, when the party, after supporting the intervention for years in a protective nativist fashion, changes opinion and turns towards isolationist nativism to express this new position. Although the theory of this research is confirmed in both of these highly interesting cases, there is more to them than meets the eye, warranting a further discussion of their implications.

The central question here is what these two cases represent. Could a radical right party indeed be torn between supporting or opposing a military intervention for solely ideological reasons? And could a radical right party actually change its position towards an intervention purely because it believes that the situation on the ground has changed to such an extent that the intervention is no longer necessary? Or could something else be at play here, such as electoral calculus or political strategy? In other words: is there a direct, causal relationship between the *actual* positions and convictions of a radical right party towards an intervention on the one hand, and the statements and frames this party uses to argue either in favour or against this intervention on the other? Do their arguments reflect their honest position? Or does this relationship work the other way around, with radical right parties as opportunistic political actors, capable of changing the statements and frames they use to in debate to match the direction in which the political winds are blowing? See, for example, Rovny's (2013) concept of "position blurring". Although it is difficult to fully disentangle these two scenarios on the basis of this case study alone – in fact, the real answer could very well lie somewhere in between these two extremes – there are some subtle hints that suggest that the behaviour of both VB and PVV in the two cases under discussion is at least partly genuine, with VB being actually in doubt of what to do on Mali, and PVV indeed changing position on the anti-IS coalition because of mission-related reasons.

VB, for example, does not shy away from going into detail when revealing its inability to decide whether to support or oppose the Mali intervention (see Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers, 2013). It explains the internal reasoning of the party, as it has ultimately concluded that it will abstain from voting. Of course, abstaining also brings some political benefits, as it prevents the party from alienating voters on either side of the debate. This paragraph, however, does not

claim that political considerations do not play any role in VB's behaviour. It merely claims that there is at the very least some degree of genuine doubt within the party over what to do regarding Mali. If it had really only cared about electoral strategy and did not want to put off any voters, it could have just decided not to take part in the debate at all. Remember that VB was mostly absent from debates concerning the anti-IS coalition for years, whether on purpose or not. The intervention in Mali is certainly not the most salient (compared, especially, to the anti-IS coalition), so it seems unlikely that the electoral consequences would be large for VB, regardless of its behaviour. All in all, and considering that the party explicitly uses both isolationist and protective nativist language, it appears plausible that there is indeed uncertainty within VB on what to do, as electoral considerations cannot explain the full story here.

Concerning PVV, it seems odd that the party transforms from one of the most vocal supporters of the mission against Islamic State into one of its most outspoken critics. Opinion polls from 2014 show that PVV voters are the most supportive constituency regarding this intervention, with a small majority of PVV voters even being in favour of the Netherlands sending ground troops (as opposed to only fighter jets) to fight IS (De Hond, 2014). In early 2016, PVV voters are still amongst the most positive backers of the mission, overwhelmingly supporting the government's decision to start targeting IS in Syria (De Hond, 2016). More recent polls, unfortunately, do not exist. This means that it cannot be ruled out that electoral considerations played a role in the party's shift to start opposing the mission in 2017, but it seems unlikely that PVV voters have now turned into the least supportive of the mission overall. Together with the observation that the party, after its change of position, is remarkably consistent in its arguments – by for example repeatedly lambasting the mission's high costs, echoing its critique of the Mali intervention – it is certainly possible to believe that PVV has not changed its position entirely due to electoral or strategic considerations. Its shift could very well be explained by a changing political situation, as the mission has significantly diminished the territory IS controls, which has led PVV to conclude that the mission has now evolved into an “aid mission” (Tweede Kamer, 2017c). Greene (2022) writes that radical right parties uniformly reject “liberal-humanitarian” interventions (p. 5), implying that PVV's change of position is not inconsistent behaviour. To sum up, there is reason to believe that both VB's and PVV's behaviour in these two highly interesting cases is not only due to electoral considerations or political strategy. This directly challenges Greene's interpretation of radical right parties as purely strategic and opportunistic political actors concerning their position towards interventions. This chapter has argued that these parties can in fact be consistent in

their discourse and behaviour towards interventions, and refuses to regard them as parties who only act on the basis of popular opinion.

VI. Conclusion

This thesis has studied radical right discourse around military interventions. By studying the language and arguments of two radical right parties – *Vlaams Belang* and *Partij voor de Vrijheid* – this research confirmed the theory and hypotheses formulated in chapter two. Namely, radical right parties, when against an intervention, use isolationist nativist language, while using protective nativist language when supporting an intervention. Two specific cases from this analysis stand out: (1) VB's behaviour on Mali; (2) and PVV's shift on the anti-IS coalition. The previous chapter has not only explained that these two cases represent further evidence in support of the theory, but also argued that there is reason to believe that both VB's and PVV's actions in these cases is at least partly genuine – and cannot be entirely explained by electoral considerations or political strategy. This conclusion furthers our understanding of the radical right party family.

Another conclusion that follows from the case study is that the frames of Wagner (2020) are not suitable for studying radical right discourse around military interventions. It is plausible that this has contributed to the fact that previous studies have brought inconclusive results for this particular party family. Although this party family is in many ways the odd one out regarding interventions, it is important to make sure that research specifically targets the radical right – especially when earlier studies fail to explain their behaviour. If research designs do not adequately take into account the peculiarities of radical right parties when they behave differently than other parties, understanding these parties will prove difficult. This thesis serves as an important reminder of the necessity of studying this party family.

This thesis also represents a further elaboration of the concept of nativism. Nativism, as this research demonstrates, is not always a straightforward concept. When radical right parties discuss interventions, nativism can manifest itself in two distinctly different ways. It is clear that radical right parties hold diverging positions towards military interventions. This thesis has explained how these parties articulate these positions by developing two conflicting frames of nativism. These frames are based on Mudde's (2007) conceptualisation of radical right parties – and his understanding of nativism as a core feature of these parties. While this thesis has mainly focused on *how* the radical right frames military interventions, we must also look at *why* a radical right party takes a position, and *when* it might change this position. Although this thesis has touched on these questions, answering them is not within the scope of this research. Further studies within this field should therefore focus on the puzzles that remain.

We should, however, ask ourselves whether it is even possible to encapsulate radical right behaviour around interventions into one all-encompassing theory, as this thesis has shown that they are no homogenous group.

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APPENDIX A: CODING MANUAL

A. ISOLATIONIST NATIVISM FRAME

A radical right party is understood to use the isolationist nativism frame when its arguments include any of the following elements:

- The party argues that intervention X is not in the interest of (the people) of its home country.
- The party argues that intervention X is an unnecessary foreign military adventure.
- The party argues that it is not the West's responsibility to intervene.
- The party argues that intervention X is not worth the high costs (in monetary terms).
- The party argues that intervention X is not worth the high costs (in human lives), especially of the country's own troops.
- The party disputes or questions the (possible) positive effects of intervention X.
- The party argues intervention X will or could have counterproductive effects.

B. PROTECTIVE NATIVISM FRAME

A radical right party is understood to use the protective nativism frame when its arguments include any of the following elements:

- The party argues that the safety and security of the people from its home country are at risk.
- The party argues that the culture, freedom, and/or way of life from its home country are at risk.
- The party argues that its home country also stands to gain if intervention X reduces the severity of the conflict.
- The party links its support to intervention X to (relatively) recent and impactful events, such as terrorist attacks in Western states, in order to justify its support.
- The party argues that, in order to prevent such impactful events in the future, intervention X is necessary.

APPENDIX B: VB AND PVV VOTING BEHAVIOUR

VB Votes

Intervention (Name + Date)	Yes	No	Abstentions	Vote Total
1. Unified Protector (Libya) 21.03.2011	12	0	0	12
2. EUTM (Mali) 17.01.2013	0	0	11	11
3. anti-IS (Iraq) 26.09.2014	2	0	0	2
4. anti-IS (Syria) 30.06.2016	2	0	0	2

PVV Votes

Intervention (Name + Date)	Yes	No	Abstentions	Vote Total
1. Unified Protector (Libya) 23.03.2011 Motion Brinkman 32623-7	24	0	0	24
2. Unified Protector (Libya) 23.06.2011 Motion Pechtold CS 32623-20	0	24	0	24
3. MINUSMA (Mali) 12.12.2013 Motion De Roon 29521-220	14	0	0	14
4. MINUSMA (Mali) 12.12.2017 Motion Karabulut 29521-356	20	0	0	20
5. MINUSMA (Mali) 28.10.2021 Motion Markuszower 29521-431	17	0	0	17
6. anti-IS (Syria) 02.10.2014 Motion Van Haersma Buma 27925-509	12	0	0	12
7. anti-IS (Iraq) 21.12.2017 Motion Karabulut 27925-620	0	20	0	20
8. anti-IS 17.12.2020 Motion De Roon 27925-761	20	0	0	20

9. anti-IS 16.12.2021	17	0	0	17
Motion Jasper van Dijk CS 27925-877				

APPENDIX C: CASE STUDY SOURCES

VB

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PVV

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