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# **The Diplomacy of Arms Manufacturing: How the European Military Industrial complex influences EU Member States' Foreign Policy**

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# The Diplomacy of Arms Manufacturing

How the European Military Industrial complex influences EU  
Member States' Foreign Policy

**Thesis**

**BSc Political science**

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## Abstract

This thesis examines the dynamics of the military-industrial complex and its impact on defense procurement and foreign relations within the European Union. Analyzing the Dutch submarine order and Rheinmetall's industrial expansion into Ukraine, it explores the interplay between government policies, corporate interests, and international security. Utilizing realism and corporatism, the study highlights how states and industries navigate defense procurement to achieve national security and economic goals. Realism emphasizes state interests and competition, which is utilized by the military-industrial complex to their advantage. Corporatism focuses on collaborative interactions between government and industry which can be used by governments to get the best offer. The findings reveal that defense procurement is influenced by government priorities, key players, corporate strategies, and lobbying. Overall, this research provides insights into the military-industrial complex's role in shaping EU defense policies and international relations.

**Keywords:** Military-Industrial complex, Realism, Corporatism, Iron Triangle, Rheinmetall, Defense procurement

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## Introduction

During the economic crisis of 2008, one of the first things European countries cut spending to was the army (Centre Delàs, 2020), (Sandler & George, 2016). Besides the war in Georgia, which was seen as far away, the chance of a large-scale conflict on European soil was seen as small. In 2014 When Russia invaded Ukraine, the first alarms began to go off. The European Union reacted hesitantly and came with small sanctions. When Russia started the full ground assault on Ukraine in 2022, the real panic started. It led to a dramatic shift in international dynamics, the neglected armies of Europe had to bolster their own defenses while also keeping up the Ukrainian shield that guarded them from further Russian aggression. As of 2024, Ukraine still is under the relentless assault of the Russian federation and is waiting desperately for Western support. It had to come to a full-scale invasion of a neighboring partner of the EU to realize that something had to change. This moment sparked the start of the remilitarization of the pacifist European Union. The first problem that arose was that Ukraine alone used more shells than the whole of NATO could produce (Bo Lillis, 2024). This showed how neglected the military industry had become. The first month of the Russian invasion did show admirable efforts to bolster defenses (Runey, 2022). As the war progressed, it became clear Ukraine needed more and heavier equipment and planes, tanks and heavy artillery were to be supplied to Ukraine. As the military-industrial complex starts to revitalize, it becomes a powerful player in the geopolitical landscape (Newlove-Eriksson & Eriksson, 2022)(Barigazzi et al., 2024). As countries collaborate on weapon production and design, the military-industrial complex becomes inseparable from foreign affairs and will seek to gain influence. To address this complex field, this thesis seeks to answer the following research question: "To what extent does the military-industrial complex of EU-member states influence their foreign relations?".

This research will contribute to the academic debate on the intersection of economics, politics and international relations, searching for connections between the political theories of corporatism and realism. While both theories are incompatible at first glance, a deeper analysis will show that knowledge of both theories can be utilized to the advantage of companies and countries. The rapidly evolving role of the military-industrial complex becomes vital to understand national and international security policies. While realism focuses on security and international balance, proving that governments are susceptible to prioritize national security when framed along these lines, corporatism can shed light on how companies are bound by government funding and how governments can play companies out against each other while also having to balance important factors as economic growth and loss of knowledge. This study will offer a nuanced understanding of the mechanisms driving

defense procurement decisions from the industry and the government and their implications for foreign policy.

This study will employ a comparative case study approach, focusing on the Dutch submarine order of 2024 and Rheinmetall's ongoing industrial expansion kickstarted by the Russian invasion of Ukraine, to explore the influence of the military-industrial complex on the EU-member states' foreign affairs. Both cases were chosen because of their differences in relationships between government and the military-industrial complex. The theoretical frameworks of corporatism and realism guide the analysis, examining how companies strategically align with countries' realist perspectives and how countries leverage competition among companies to their advantage.

The thesis includes a comprehensive literature review, discussing key theories and concepts, providing an understanding for realism and corporatism and if and how they intersect, followed by an outline of the research methodology, detailing the data and analysis methods employed in this study. After that both cases will be analyzed showing how interactions from countries towards companies play out and conversely how companies interact with countries. The findings from this research will be discussed and compared and contrasted to the case studies and finally a conclusion will be formed summarizing the insights and discussing the implications for policymakers and industrial leaders ending with suggestions for further research.

## Literature review

When researching the military-industrial complex, this concept can easily be broken into two parts: military and industry. However the complex part of the concept is not there just for show. While military and industry seem to be compatible, realism and corporatism can not be seen the same way.

### Realism

Realism is and always has been one of the dominant theoretical approaches for international relations that emphasizes the role of power, security and national interests in shaping state behavior (Mearsheimer, 2014; Lobell, 2009) . Already rooted in philosophers like Thucydides and Machiavelli, realism states exist in an anarchic international system where self-interest and survival is the most important (Doyle, 1997). Realists argue that the international system

is anarchic, meaning there is no overarching authority to govern state interactions. This anarchic structure would lead to states maximizing their power to ensure their security. An important part of this power is power projection and thus the capabilities a state might have. What part is of the capabilities a state might have varies between scholars within realism. While classical realism focuses on human nature and the inherent desire of power and security as driving forces in international politics, Neorealism or structural realism shifts the focus to the structure of the international system (Morgenthau, 1958). Introduced by Kenneth Waltz (2008), he argues that the anarchic structure of the international system forces states to behave in certain ways regardless of their internal characteristics.

In the context of defense procurement and the military-industrial complex, realism provides valuable insights into the strategic calculations, security dilemmas and power dynamics that influence state decisions. Realist perspectives can help explain why states prioritize certain defense capabilities, form alliances or engage in arms races as is happening right now. Realism provides a lens through which to understand the escalation of the arms race in Europe in 2022 following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. According to realist theory, the balance of power among states is a key determinant of international relations (Morgenthau, 1949). Prior to 2022, this balance may have been relatively stable, but the invasion of Ukraine upset this equilibrium, leading neighboring European states to perceive an increased threat to their security. In response, these states made a strategic evaluation, prioritizing defense measures and military buildup to safeguard their interests and deter potential aggression. Realism also emphasizes the competitive nature of international politics, and the invasion intensified strategic competition among European states as they sought to assert their influence and protect their positions in the regional hierarchy. This dynamic reflects the core realist concepts of power, security, and the pursuit of national interests in an anarchic international system, providing insights into why the arms race in Europe escalated in 2022.

## Corporatism

Corporatism is a theoretical approach that emphasizes the role of organized interest groups, particularly corporations, in shaping state policies and decision-making processes. Originating from European political and economic traditions, corporatism examines the relationships between the state, business, and other societal actors in governance. The core of corporatism lies in the collaboration and coordination between organized interest groups and the state (Siaroff 1999). The state's role is to mediate between different societal

interests, aiming to achieve stability. Organized interest groups become well embedded in the state, wielding major influence on policy formulation and implementation. A form of triologue is established between the state, corporations, and labor unions, through which policy is crafted (Molina & Rhodes 2002).

In the context of defense procurement and the military-industrial complex, corporatism offers valuable insights into the intricate relationships between governments and defense industries. Corporatist theories explain how defense policies and procurement decisions by governments are influenced by corporations through structured collaboration and mutual interdependence. Governments rely on defense industries for military equipment, while defense contractors depend on government contracts, fostering a collaborative environment where both parties align their interests. This interaction occurs through formal mechanisms, such as advisory boards and defense committees, as well as informal networks of relationships. Consequently, procurement decisions often reflect negotiated compromises and strategic considerations rather than purely competitive processes. Defense policies may adapt in response to corporate input, reflecting both economic interests, such as job creation and industrial growth, and national security concerns. These dynamics underscore the significant role of corporatism in shaping defense procurement, providing a framework for understanding the reciprocal influences between state institutions and defense contractors.

### Military-industrial complex

The definition used in this thesis for the military-industrial complex is the network of individuals and institutions that are involved with the production and research of weaponry. First mentioned by President Dwight D. Eisenhower when getting out of office on January 17, 1961. He warned the people of the United States that the military-industrial complex that came out of the second world war became so influential, that it was able to turn and promote policies in their interest and not that of the United States. Big companies like Boeing, Lockheed Martin and Northrop Grumman had the power to influence members of the United States' congress (Weber, 2024). Mills (1956) wrote about this before the speech given by Eisenhower. He argued that there was a 'power elite' who are characterized by the interlocking nature of their interests and positions. Mills argues that the focus of the power elite is within the military, corporations and the political arena. He states that the concentration of this power could undermine democratic processes and institutions. Mills describes how the military and defense contractors work closely together which directly influences government policy and prioritizing military spending. Ofcourse, the military industry always has had an influential and strong tie to a country's government. Military



industry is almost solely funded by national governments thus becoming major lobby targets for the heavy industry of weapons and steel. In countries like France, the major arms manufacturers are still in the government's hands making the links really tight. The military-industrial complex only really comes to fruition when a country has certain characteristics. It needs to have a strong, industrial base that is able to operate independently. The advantage military markets have, is that they have an advantage in domestic markets. The military market is this way able to ask for higher prices in its own country, knowing that they have influence in job creation and wield a certain economic power which would be lost if a country decides to get his equipment elsewhere. How Eisenhower's warning echoed during the cold war, critics say that his fears have not come to fruition (Bacevich, 2007). Research shows that when EU member states are in economic downturn, the military is one of the first branches to receive a hit. This became evident when in 2008 the markets crashed (Centre Delàs, 2020), (Sandler & George, 2016). Furthermore, industry is put in a shady light nowadays due to the rapid realization of the effects of climate change. The military industry has an even harder time with people realizing that the armaments are made to wage war. In a lot of countries, investors that are tied to important civilian branches like insurance or banks are avoiding to invest in the military (Butler, 2024). This leads to less investment for the military and creates even more dependance on central governments. The question arises if tying the military-industrial complex so close to the government and avoiding public investment could lead to an unhealthy relationship of indispensability.

### The iron triangle

While corporatism and realism look from different optics to different problems, they are unifiable (Mearsheimer, 2014). To start binding them together one has to look to the concept of the Iron triangle.

This concept is used in political science to describe the mutually beneficial relationship between three key actors: interest groups, parliamentary committees and government agencies. In the concept it is explained how certain policy decisions are made and implemented in certain sectors (Lowi, 1964). The iron triangle becomes primarily apparent when talking about the military-industrial complex (Adams, 1981).

The first cornerstone of the triangle are interest groups. As interest group, the military-industrial complex seeks to influence government policies and decisions related to defense procurement. Through lobbying efforts, campaign contributions and other forms of political influence, defense contractors aim to secure lucrative contracts and ease regulation (Rufanges, 2016). This aligns strongly with the realist perspective that emphasizes the pursuit of power and security by states and the role of defense capabilities in achieving

these goals. According to the realist perspective national governments prioritize and expand their military strength and their national military industry to be on par, but preferably stronger than their opponent.

The second corner of the triangle are government agencies. Examples are the ministry of Defense or the cabinet. They work closely with the defense contractors to develop strategies, evaluate bids and award contracts to companies for military equipment production and technological advancements. They are also involved and subject to the regulatory requirements and oversight mechanisms that are in place to ensure accountability and, if possible, transparency. They must comply not only with laws and regulations, but also have to look to the ethical standards and conflict-of-interest regulations.

The last corner to finalize the iron triangle are the parliamentary committees. Members of these committees have close ties to the defense industry and are the main lobby targets for the defense industry. They are a group of members within parliament who do research on the specifications of certain topics like defense procurement (Schmitter & Lehbruch, 1979). The relationship between the parliamentary commission members and the defense industry is tied to both realism and corporatism. From a realist perspective, legislators prioritize military spending to maintain or enhance national security. From a corporatist perspective, legislators may collaborate with defense industry representatives to make more efficient choices while making the policy and also accelerate the realization of policy. It also strongly supports the industry's role in the economy making it possible to ensure that when a company loses an order, they will be favored to gain other orders. This way the military-industrial complex can be assured of orders and does not go bankrupt which would, from a realist perspective, become a threat to national security.

The convergence of corporatism and realism within the Iron Triangle shows the deeply woven dynamics of the military-industrial complex and its influence on defense procurement policies. The industry, represented by defense contractors, leverages its influence to shape policies and secure contracts, aligning with realism's focus on expanding military capabilities for national security. Government agencies, such as the Ministry of Defence, play a central role in procurement, balancing industry interests with regulatory requirements. Parliamentary committees, closely tied to the defense industry, prioritize military spending for security while streamlining policy-making. Backers of this trilogue will argue that this collaboration ensures efficient, responsive defense procurement decisions while supporting the industry's role in the economy (Huntington, 1957). Opponents would argue that it also gives the military industry a strong connection with the government, which can be seen as unhealthy since it would fuel a continuously weaponized world (Mills, 1956; Weber, 2024).

## Data

This section outlines the data used to examine the influence of the military-industrial complex on the foreign relations of EU member states. Utilizing a comparative case study approach, this thesis investigates two specific instances, the Dutch submarine order concluding in 2024 and Rheinmetall's industrial expansion into Ukraine during the Russian invasion. Theoretical frameworks of corporatism and realism guide the analysis, offering insights into the alignment of corporate interests with national security objectives. Data from primary documents and government reactions are used as well as media coverage and statements from the industrial branch to ensure a deep examination of defense procurement policies and international security dynamics. This section lays the groundwork for understanding the complex interactions within the military-industrial complex and their implications for EU member states' foreign relations.

Rheinmetall's expansion into Ukraine illustrates how a major defense contractor can leverage geopolitical conflicts to expand its influence and market presence. This case offers insights into the intersection of corporate interests, government policies, and international security dynamics, particularly in the context of how the military-industrial complex can take initiative in defense procurement. Within the context of realism, which emphasizes the pursuit of national self-interest and power in international relations, Rheinmetall's actions in Ukraine demonstrate how corporate actors align themselves with governments and leverage the perception of security threats to bolster their market position and influence.

Similarly, the Dutch submarine order was selected because of its high-profile nature and its implications for both domestic politics and international relations. This case highlights the complex interplay between competing defense contractors, government decision-making processes, and strategic alliances within the EU. By examining the procurement process of submarines, a critical component of national defense capabilities, this case study provides a nuanced understanding of how defense procurement policies are formulated and implemented, and how they impact diplomatic relations and strategic alignments within the European Union. Corporatism, which emphasizes collaboration between government, industry, and labor in policymaking, is evident in the competitive process involving defense contractors and government agencies vying for lucrative contracts. By analyzing the submarine procurement process, this case study sheds light on how corporatist arrangements shape defense policies and international engagements, highlighting the interplay between economic interests, political decision-making, and strategic imperatives.

In summary, the selection of these two cases was guided by their relevance in illustrating the dynamics of the military-industrial complex within the framework of realism and corporatism. They offer valuable insights into how corporate interests intersect with government policies and international security considerations, contributing to a deeper understanding of defense procurement processes and foreign policy dynamics within the member states of the European Union.

## Dutch submarine order

The Dutch submarine ongoing since 2013. The choice of this case fell because of the real time battle that occurred between Thyssenkrupp, Damen/Saab and Naval. At the first of may 2024 the German based ThyssenKrupp Marine Systems even chose to object to the Dutch submarine order falling into the hands of the French Naval (ANP, 2024). The order, being valued at 4 to 10 billion Euros, was a race between the three competitors. According to the German shipyard, the procurement was not done properly and they tried to stop the deal via the judicial route (Heerschop, 2024). Damen, who worked together with the Swedish company Saab, also wanted to try to stop the deal going to Naval trying it via the parliamentary way. They point out that the loss of the order to the French would lead to the loss of knowledge of building submarines on Dutch soil. Since the Dutch parliament made a big pull towards the nationalistic right wing it may well be possible that those parties will have a blocking majority favoring Damen/Saab over Naval. The legal and parliamentary blockades will lead to even more delay, even when this puts the Netherlands at a security risk, losing 50% of its deployable submarine force before the new submarines are laid down and christened (Brouwers, 2024).

Another lead in this delay is the close bond between the president of France Emmanuel Macron and the Dutch prime minister Mark Rutte. Very close to the deadline of the submarine order, the French president brought a visit to the Netherlands. This may seem like a regular occurrence, but this was the first official state visit by a French president to the Netherlands since 2001. What makes this situation even more visible, was that the French FREMM-Frigate FS Normandie visited together with the French president and fired gun salutes to the city of Amsterdam. This was the first time a foreign warship brought a gun salute to the Netherlands in 47 years (Keultjes, 2024). The French presidential palace also told the press that the submarine order was on the agenda of the two heads of government. The pressure from the French president is not only obvious, it also leads to delays in decision making (Schoonhoven & Winterman, 2024).

The Dutch submarine order shows the intertwining between corporate interests, government decision-making processes, and foreign relations, shedding light on the broader implications of defense procurement within the European Union. The intense competition between Thyssenkrupp, Damen/Saab, and Naval underscores the competitive dynamics within the military-industrial complex, where companies fight for lucrative contracts to bolster their market position. The legal and parliamentary hurdles faced by each competitor reflect the complex interplay between nationalistic sentiments, economic considerations, and strategic alliances. Moreover, the diplomatic maneuvering surrounding the submarine order, including the close bond between President Macron and Prime Minister Rutte, highlights the geopolitical dimensions of defense procurement decisions.

## Rheinmetall and Ukraine

The German arms manufacturer Rheinmetall can be seen as one of the biggest supporters of Ukraine. However, the company also has the most to gain from the conflict. From when the war broke out to this day the German company's value has more than tripled. The company's CEO stated that it has the capabilities to supply entire Ukrainian offensives by supplying 700.000 rounds of ammunition on its own and build thousands of tanks a year if the government had the willpower (Korshak, 2024). This rhetoric is used to put pressure on the German government to keep supplying Ukraine with more equipment and bolstering their own military which is in desperate need of replenishment (Scholz, 2022). Rheinmetall also announced that they will build a new ammunition plant in Germany and Lithuania but even more interesting, they are willing to build four new armaments factories in the Ukraine itself (France24, 2024). Agreeing on a settlement with the Ukrainian government that the plant will be 51% in Rheinmetall's ownership and for 49% in the ownership of an Ukrainian partner (Rheinmetall, 2024).

Rheinmetall's involvement in Ukraine significantly impacts the dynamics of EU-Ukraine relations, particularly in the context of defense procurement and security cooperation. As a key player in the military-industrial complex of Germany and with that in the EU, Rheinmetall's activities directly influence the EU's strategic interests in the region. By supplying advanced weaponry and military equipment to Ukraine, Rheinmetall not only bolsters Ukraine's defense capabilities but also encourages the EU's commitment to supporting its Eastern neighbors in the face of external threats. Rheinmetall's actions show the deep interplay between corporate interests, national security imperatives, and EU foreign

policy objectives, underscoring the need for a coordinated approach to addressing security challenges in the Eastern neighborhood.

Rheinmetall's collaboration with Ukrainian partners does show the growing influence of the military-industrial complex on defense cooperation and industrial expansion in Europe. Before the war this was negligible, but after the first two years after the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, weapon producing companies have become economic and political players (Barigazzi et al., 2024). Through joint ventures and manufacturing facilities in Ukraine, Rheinmetall seeks to utilize its technological expertise and production capabilities to strengthen its position in the European defense market and prove itself as a vital asset for Ukraine and the EU member states. This strategic move not only enhances Rheinmetall's market presence but also fosters economic and defense ties between EU member states and Ukraine. By making itself indispensable for the survival of Ukraine and making it a security risk of NATO when Rheinmetall factories fall in Russian hands. Rheinmetall positions itself as a company vital for EU's security interest and for Ukrainian survival.

## Methodology

To research if there is a strong military-industrial complex with major influence in foreign affairs in the member states of the European Union. one has to make a comprehensive analysis. Utilizing the two cases, this thesis will follow a few steps showing the underlying connections. The Dutch submarine order presents itself as a case where competing companies fight over an order in which a high stakes political game is played. The Rheinmetall case shows corporate initiative and how it outplays the German government making itself crucial for European security. To examine both cases, the first step one has to take is to identify key actors and interactions. Who are involved and which agencies and policy makers take part? Specific agencies or even persons can drastically change corporate or government policy (Carlyle et al., 1893)(Collins, 2001). These key actors will create the policy decisions which will ultimately determine over the defense procurement. How do arms sales or military cooperation agreements between EU member states and other countries impact diplomatic relations and strategic alliances. Next to the government, there is the military-industrial complex itself. What is corporate influence on decisions and what is the role of defense contractors in shaping defense policies and international engagements? How are lobbying efforts perceived, and are there campaign contributions on the table like is often the case in the United States (Bacevich, 2007)? When these questions are answered this methodology part of the thesis will show if economic and strategic interests are heavily influenced by both the government and the military-industrial complex.

## Dutch Submarine Order

During the procurement of the Dutch submarine order, the stakes were high. Even now, when the battle is over, Thyssenkrupp decided to utilize the judiciary system in a last ditch attempt to stop the Dutch submarine order going to the French company Naval (ANP, 2024; Heerschop, 2024). The politically charged game involved key companies Damen/Saab, Thyssenkrupp and the eventual victor Naval. The Dutch ministry of Defence and the Dutch cabinet were also significant players, while the Dutch parliament played a minor role, mainly asking questions and mildly protesting the order being lost to a foreign company. However, the parliamentary proportions have dramatically shifted towards more nationalistic right-wing parties, which are currently forming a government and could influence future decisions. Key figures such as Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte and French President Emmanuel Macron might have played crucial roles in the decision to award the contract to Naval (Keultjes, 2024). Despite outcries from several Dutch provincial governments, companies, and critics in the Dutch lower house about the loss of knowledge, tax money, and jobs in the Netherlands, these protests were overshadowed by the strong lobbying efforts of the French (Schoonhoven & Winterman, 2024).

Policy is firstly made by the Dutch government. Together with the Ministry of Defence, ministry of finance and the ministry of foreign affairs they wrote the first lines about the new submarines that were to replace the ageing Walrus-class as early as 2013 (Parliamentary paper 33763, no. 33; Karremann, n.d.). Due to delays in procurement and the recovery of the economic crisis, the current fielded submarines were extended in use. While the procurement commission works in secret, leaks were always apparent (Karremann, n.d.; Ministerie van Defensie, 2022). Mark Rutte is chairmen of the commission submarine replacement, and Naval, the winner of the submarine race, is with 62% of its shares property of the French Government making them closely involved in the procurement (NAVAL, 2023). This raises questions about whether the French were even competing on a level playing field with the German and Dutch/Swedish companies. While Thyssenkrupp and Damen/Saab were not able to take major risks because of them having to be a profitable business, the French Naval was able to take on more risks and create a sharp offer because they had financial backing from the French government. It gave Naval an advantage, and now Thyssenkrupp is arguing it was contrary to European laws on competition (Heerschop, 2024). This shows that the background of the companies can play a major role in the competition for a defense tender.

Diplomatic relations played a crucial role in the Dutch submarine procurement process. Insiders suggest that the French government's lobbying efforts were highly strategic and intense. Remarkably, even the Dutch Minister of Defense's coffee preferences were noted and taken into account (Keultjes, 2024). Company officials estimate that lobbying and design efforts cost around 100 million euros, despite the uncertainty of winning the contract (Brouwers, 2024). At the domestic level, the Dutch government's interactions with competing companies and stakeholders involved with the different offers that were put to the table shaped internal dynamics, influencing policy decisions and considerations tied to the fear of the loss of jobs and other economic negatives. By putting these concerns to the table, the competing companies did not only have to come to the table with the right submarine for the right price, but they also had to include which and how Dutch companies would be involved and how choosing a foreign company could still lead to Dutch economic growth. The final proposal documents submitted to the Dutch government amounted to no less than 8,000 pages (Keultjes, 2024). These documents were divided among smaller groups, each tasked with evaluating specific aspects such as speed, weaponry, and defense systems. The Ministry of Economic Affairs used a point system to determine which proposal offered the best economic benefits for the Netherlands. Ultimately, an overarching committee, chaired by Prime Minister Mark Rutte, had the final say. Specific details were discussed within lower layers of the procurement groups, making them prime targets for lobbying due to their direct influence and knowledge. Thus, lobbying efforts were directed not only at the top decision-makers but also at every influential layer beneath (Brouwers, 2024). While weapon-lobbying within the EU were never popular, the war in Ukraine changed this. Within the European union different factions always clashed on the topic of the military (Slijper, 2005). The left, generally more pacifist, preferred cuts in the army. When the war in Ukraine occurred, a shift in opinion put the submarine order high on the agenda. The pacifist parties, first against further militarization, now argued that buying armaments was necessary. On the other side, the right wing parties also saw a major shift. Where once the nationalistic sentiment soared above all else, now some of the eurosceptic right wing parties agree that the EU provides opportunities for the defense of Europe. This way parties within EU member states come closer together with the left being more militaristic and the right becoming a little bit more Europhile. In this environment lobbyists of the military-industrial complex thrive (Demirel, 2024; Wheaton & Bayer, 2023).

The Dutch submarine procurement process carried significant international diplomatic implications beyond the immediate involvement of Dutch and French stakeholders (Heerschop, 2024). Given the substantial financial investment of four to ten billion euros and the strategic importance of the contract, the procurement decision resounds across



diplomatic circles (Brouwers, 2024). The selection of the French company Naval as the victor in the procurement race not only strengthened bilateral ties between France and the Netherlands but also had broader implications for EU-wide defense cooperation and strategic alliances (France24, 2024). The decision shows the interconnectedness of defense procurement between member states and highlighted the potential for defense contracts to influence diplomatic relations within the EU. It showed that foreign companies have the possibility to win over favored national companies, having their own advantages like government backing (Heerschop, 2024). This can lead to more competitiveness and effort by companies to get their hands on foreign procurement. Moreover, the involvement of prominent EU leaders, including Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte and French President Emmanuel Macron, in discussions surrounding the procurement further emphasized the diplomatic significance of procurement decisions (Brouwers, 2024).

## Rheinmetall

Whereas the Dutch submarine procurement was initiated by a formal request of the government, the Rheinmetall case sheds light on the relationship between governments and the military-industrial complex in a different way. Not the government, but the company takes initiative. Rheinmetall presents itself as one of Ukraine's biggest supporters. The so-called 'zeitenwende' presented by Olaf Scholz (2022) meant good news for Rheinmetall. A flow of billions of euros and new orders from across all over Europe meant that for Rheinmetall the time of cutbacks and austerity was over (Centre delàs, 2020). In the following two years that the war was and still is being fought on the European continent, the company announced major industrial expansion. This, however, is done without direct influence of the German government. The question arises how Rheinmetall able to bypass the German government.

The key players in the Rheinmetall case include Armin Papperger, the CEO of Rheinmetall and president of the Federation of German Security and Defence Industries (BDSV), which represents 221 companies (BDSV, 2024). The rapid industrial expansion of Rheinmetall involves significant roles for both the German and Ukrainian governments. Given Rheinmetall's extensive international network, it collaborates with various other governments as well. Olaf Scholz, the Chancellor of Germany, is a reluctant key figure in procurement. Historically, Scholz's party, the SPD (Social Democratic Party of Germany) has maintained a cautious relationship with the German armed forces. This caution persisted even after 2022, with the coalition showing hesitancy, or outright unwillingness, in supplying Ukraine with critical armaments such as tanks and missiles (Korshak, 2024). This situation is particularly sensitive for the SPD, given its past advocacy for closer relations with Russia (Klingbeil,

2022). Rheinmetall jumped in this gap and looked for other stakeholders like the EU and NATO, which can support the success and sustainability of Rheinmetall's operations in Ukraine. Their involvement underscores the broader geopolitical and strategic implications of Rheinmetall's expansion efforts.

Rheinmetall wields considerable corporate influence in shaping defense policies and international engagements. As a major player in the military-industrial and technological sector, decisions can significantly impact defense procurement strategies and international security dynamics (Bacevich, 2007). The company's expertise in manufacturing military hardware, such as ammunition, armored vehicles, and weapon systems, positions it as a key contributor to defense capabilities worldwide (Rheinmetall, 2024; Vorotnikov et al., 2020). Rheinmetall's global presence and partnerships with governments and defense contractors allow it to actively shape international engagements, facilitating collaborations on defense projects and security initiatives across borders. Through its strategic alliances and technological advancements, Rheinmetall plays a pivotal role in shaping defense policies and international security agendas, contributing to the broader landscape of global defense and geopolitics.

As mentioned in the methodology about the Dutch submarine order, Lobbying plays a major part in defense procurement. Rheinmetall is no stranger to leveraging its influence through strategic advocacy efforts. The company's lobbying activities often involve engaging with policymakers, government officials, and industry stakeholders to advocate for policies and initiatives that align with its business objectives and strategic interests (Wheaton & Bayer, 2023). Rheinmetall's lobbying efforts may include promoting defense procurement policies that prioritize investments in military hardware and technology, advocating for regulatory reforms that benefit the defense industry, and influencing government decisions on defense contracts and partnerships (Hobson, 2008). Rheinmetall's lobbying activities extend beyond domestic borders, as the company is active on a global scale. Through its international network of subsidiaries, partnerships, and industry associations, Rheinmetall engages with governments and defense organizations worldwide to promote its products and services, establish strategic alliances, and secure lucrative contracts (Rufanges, 2016). These lobbying efforts involve participating in industry conferences and government consultations, as well as maintaining close relationships with key decision-makers and stakeholders in the defense sector (Hobson, 2008; Huntington, 1981). In addition to traditional lobbying tactics, Rheinmetall may also deploy other forms of influence, such as strategic communications, public relations campaigns, and industry coalitions, to shape perceptions and attitudes towards its business activities and priorities (Korshak, 2024). By effectively communicating

its expertise, capabilities, and contributions to national security and defense, Rheinmetall aims to build trust and credibility with policymakers and stakeholders, thereby enhancing its influence and competitiveness in the global defense market.

## Results

This thesis started off by presenting the different views on what corporatism and realism are and how they were related defense procurement. In the realm of defense procurement, countries often seem to utilize corporatism as a strategic approach to negotiate better deals and advance their national interests. Corporatism fosters a collaborative framework where government, industry, and labor work together closely to make decisions regarding defense acquisitions and investments (Siaroff 1999; Molina & Rhodes 2002). This approach allows countries to streamline procurement processes, negotiate favorable terms, and keep the ability to prioritize the development of domestic defense industries. As shown in the Dutch submarine order, priorities within procurement can differ. While keeping domestic military industry alive is highly important, other factors like price and capabilities might overrule this. Realism, just as corporatism, serves both as a theoretical framework and a practical approach in international relations. It helps us understand the motivations behind state behavior in prioritizing military spending and national security. Realism captures the essence of state-centric interactions in the international system, irrespective of whether the involved actors consciously recognize it (Morgenthau, 1958; Schmidt, 2007). Secondly, In the context of defense procurement, realism has shown that it can be utilized by defense contractors to leverage states' realist views to promote defense procurement as essential for national security and geopolitical advantage.

In the dual role that corporatism plays in the realm of defense procurement, serving both as a theoretical framework and a practical approach. As a theory in political science, corporatism offers insights into the complex interactions among states, multinational corporations, and other actors in the global arena. It underscores the interconnectedness of these entities and their influence on defense procurement dynamics (Siaroff 1999; Molina & Rhodes 2002). From a theoretical standpoint, corporatism also highlights the significant role of non-state actors alongside states in shaping defense procurement policies. Multinational defense corporations often exert considerable influence through lobbying efforts, market dominance, and participation in global supply chains (Rufanges, 2016). This theoretical understanding enriches our analysis of defense procurement by acknowledging the multifaceted nature of actors involved and the power dynamics at play. In practical terms, corporatism provides governments with a structured framework to navigate defense

procurement challenges collaboratively. By engaging industry stakeholders, labor representatives, and government entities in decision-making processes, corporatist approaches ensure that defense procurement projects are tailored to meet specific national security requirements. Moreover, corporatist strategies facilitate economic growth, job creation, and technological sovereignty by promoting domestic industry participation and fostering innovation within the defense sector. Integrating corporatist principles into defense procurement enables governments to address broader economic and societal objectives while ensuring alignment with foreign policy priorities and strategic alliances. This 'iron triangle, where companies, governments and parliamentary committees meet, leads to expertise, stable policies and a more efficient allocation of resources (Adams, 1981). It should be noted that critics mention that this is could become unhealthy due to its vulnerability for lobbying efforts and that it conversely can also lead to higher prices. In the eyes of corporatism however, countries can negotiate better deals, promote domestic industries, and enhance overall defense capabilities in a rapidly evolving global security landscape. In the context of this thesis, the discussion of corporatism shows the complexities of defense procurement competition and sheds light on the strategic considerations underlying government-industry collaborations. By incorporating corporatist insights, this thesis provides a nuanced understanding of the interplay between state interests, economic factors, and geopolitical dynamics in defense procurement decision-making processes. Cooperation between government actors and companies strengthens government negotiation positions, leverages better procurement outcomes, ensures domestic industries, and mitigates security risks.

As is shown, realism can also serve as both a theoretical framework and a guiding principle in defense procurement, shaping the interactions between states and the military-industrial complex. As a theory in international relations, realism emphasizes the primacy of state interests and the competitive nature of the international system (Morgenthau, 1958; Schmidt, 2007). This theoretical perspective provides insights into how states prioritize military spending and perceive defense procurement in relation to national security and geopolitical advantage. From a theoretical standpoint, realism highlights the strategic imperative for states to maintain military superiority and technological innovation in an uncertain and competitive global environment. In practice, defense contractors strategically leverage this realist mindset by framing defense procurement as indispensable for safeguarding national interests and maintaining strategic advantage. By emphasizing the necessity of military capabilities to deter adversaries and protect sovereignty, defense contractors seek to secure government contracts and funding for advanced weapons systems and technologies (Demirel, 2024). Practically, realism influences defense procurement decisions by aligning

with policymakers' focus on national security and economic considerations. Defense contractors emphasize the economic benefits of defense spending, portraying it as a driver of job creation, economic growth, and technological innovation. This appeal to economic realism resonates with policymakers and the public, garnering support for defense procurement initiatives even amid budget constraints or competing domestic priorities.

Moreover, the military-industrial complex capitalizes on its extensive networks and lobbying capabilities to influence defense policy formulation and procurement priorities. Through targeted lobbying efforts, defense contractors wield considerable influence over defense policy decisions, shaping the trajectory of defense procurement and the broader landscape of international security and geopolitics (Rufanges, 2016). In the context of this thesis, the discussion of realism shed light on the interplay between state interests, military-industrial dynamics, and defense procurement outcomes. The theory of realism provides a comprehensive understanding of why states navigate defense procurement challenges and prioritize investments in military capabilities to enhance national security and geopolitical advantage in a competitive global arena (Morgenthau, 1958; Schmidt, 2007).

This thesis demonstrates that within the context of defense procurement, competition among companies is influenced by a combination of government priorities and corporate strategies. Both the Dutch submarine order and Rheinmetall's expansion into Ukraine illustrate how defense contractors and governments navigate a complex landscape shaped by geopolitical considerations, economic interests, and lobbying efforts.

In the case of the Dutch submarine order, the competition among companies such as Damen/Saab, Thyssenkrupp, and Naval was fierce. Despite national-based industries often having an advantage due to domestic economic and political support, other factors significantly influenced the outcome. Naval, backed by the French government, leveraged substantial financial and political support, which ultimately led to its selection over Damen/Saab. This case underscores how government-backed companies can leverage their own advantages and navigate the procurement process more effectively, raising questions about the fairness and transparency of such competitions (Sédou et al., 2021; Brouwers 2024). Realism, as a theoretical framework, captures the essence of state behavior in prioritizing military spending and national security (Morgenthau, 1958; Doyle, 1997; Schmidt, 2007). However, it does not fully explain the complexity of how specific companies are chosen for procurement contracts even when security is at risk, by losing valuable knowledge and infrastructure. The corporatist approach provides a more detailed understanding by highlighting the collaborative interactions between government entities and

industries (Schmitter & Lehbruch, 1979; Siaroff, 1999). The Dutch government's decision to award Damen a contract for five frigates, despite losing the submarine order to Naval, exemplifies how corporatist practices help balance national economic interests and maintain domestic industry support.

In contrast, Rheinmetall's case presents a different dynamic, showcasing the significant role of corporate initiative in shaping defense policies and procurement strategies. The company's aggressive expansion into Ukraine serves as a prime example of how defense contractors leverage the realism mindset of governments to push and advance their interests (Fiott, 2019; Bo Lillis, 2024; Demirel; 2024, Korshak, 2024). By emphasizing the necessity of military capabilities for national security and geopolitical advantage, Rheinmetall strategically pressures governments to support its initiatives, even in the absence of direct government control (Korshak 2024; France24, 2024). Rheinmetall's actions underscore the substantial influence of corporate strategies and lobbying efforts on both national and international defense agendas (Siaroff, 1999; Rufanges, 2016; Wheaton & Bayer, 2023). While realism provides a framework for understanding the revitalized motivations behind increased military spending, it is essential to recognize that corporatism offers a complementary perspective, offering a more comprehensive explanation of the selection process in defense procurement. By emphasizing the importance of domestic economic considerations, government-industry collaboration, and the strategic use of lobbying efforts, corporatism sheds light on the dynamics of defense procurement.

The results show that the military-industrial complex's influence on the foreign affairs of EU member states is substantial. By strategically leveraging government relations, engaging in robust lobbying efforts, and aligning their corporate objectives with national security goals, defense contractors significantly shape the foreign policy landscape. This interplay between corporatism and realism within defense procurement underscores the complex and powerful role of the military-industrial complex in driving both national and international defense agendas within the member states of the European Union.

## Discussion

While this study provides valuable insights into the dynamics of the military-industrial complex and its influence on defense procurement and foreign relations within the European Union, there are several avenues for further research that warrant exploration. Firstly, while this study focused on the Dutch submarine order and Rheinmetall's expansion into Ukraine as illustrative cases, there is a need for additional case studies to deepen our understanding

of how corporate interests intersect with government policies and international security dynamics across different contexts (Centre Delàs, 2020; Vorotnikov et al., 2020). Exploring a wider range of cases involving diverse EU member states and defense contractors could reveal variations in the strategies employed by the military-industrial complex and shed light on the broader implications for EU foreign policy and security cooperation (Fiott, 2019; Slijper, 2005). While the research conducted in this thesis is backed by realism and corporatism, liberalism presents an possible alternative theoretical lens through which to examine the influence of the military-industrial complex on defense procurement and foreign relations within the European Union. Unlike realism, which emphasizes state-centric power dynamics and security competition, liberalism prioritizes the role of international institutions, economic interdependence, and normative principles in shaping international relations (Keohane & Nye, 1977). Within the context of defense procurement, a liberal perspective would highlight the importance of multilateral cooperation, trade agreements, and diplomatic engagement in fostering peace and security among nations (Russett et al., 1993). By emphasizing the benefits of economic integration and collective security arrangements, liberalism offers insights into how defense procurement policies can be leveraged to promote regional stability, economic prosperity, and democratic governance. Moreover, liberalism underscores the potential for defense industrial cooperation and technology sharing to foster trust and cooperation among EU member states, reducing the likelihood of conflict and enhancing mutual security interests (Doyle, 1997; Rufanges, 2016). By incorporating liberal principles into the analysis, future research could provide a more nuanced understanding of the complex interactions between the military-industrial complex, government institutions, and international actors in shaping defense procurement policies and foreign relations within the European Union. As liberalism shows, future studies could also investigate the role of non-state actors, such as advocacy groups, civil society organizations, and international institutions, in shaping defense procurement policies and promoting transparency and accountability within the military-industrial complex (Hartley, 2006; Fiott, 2019; Barigazzi et al., 2024). By examining the interactions between these actors and traditional stakeholders, such as governments and defense contractors, researchers can provide a more complete understanding of the complexities in defense procurement processes and their implications for democratic governance and international security. While this study offers valuable insights, further research is needed to explore the multifaceted dynamics of the military-industrial complex and its impact on EU member states' foreign relations in an increasingly complex and interconnected world.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this thesis has explored the intricate dynamics of the military-industrial complex and its influence on defense procurement and foreign relations within the European Union. Through the comparative analysis of two case studies, the Dutch submarine order and Rheinmetall's expansion into Ukraine, this research has shed light on the complex interplay between government policies, corporate interests, and international security dynamics. By employing theoretical frameworks of realism and corporatism, this study has provided valuable insights into how states navigate defense procurement decisions in pursuit of national security objectives and economic interests (Morgenthau, 1958; Schmidt, 2007; Siaroff 1999; Molina & Rhodes 2002; Rufanges, 2016).

The Dutch submarine order exemplifies the competitive dynamics within the military-industrial complex, where companies vie for lucrative contracts while governments balance geopolitical considerations and domestic economic concerns (Brouwers, 2024; Schoonhoven & Winterman, 2024). Conversely, Rheinmetall's strategic initiatives in Ukraine highlight the growing role of defense contractors in shaping defense policies and industrial expansion, often leveraging geopolitical developments to advance corporate interests (France24, 2024; Korshak, 2024). Moreover, the discussion of liberalism as an alternative theoretical lens underscores the need for future research to explore additional perspectives on defense procurement and foreign relations within the European Union (Keohane & Nye, 1977; Russett et al., 1993). Overall, this thesis contributes to a deeper understanding of the complex interactions within the military-industrial complex and their implications for EU member states' defense policies, international engagements, and regional security dynamics.



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