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Understanding French Foreign Policy under Emmanuel Macron's Presidency: examination, adjustments, and updating of France's National Role Conceptions

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**Universiteit
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c'est la vie ... diplomatique

Understanding French Foreign Policy under Emmanuel Macron's Presidency

examination, adjustments, and updating of France's National Role Conceptions

Master of Arts in International Relations
under supervision of: Dr. Andrew Gawthorpe

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I. INTRODUCTION

States' actions and positions are subject to continuous evolution. Evolving political interests, economic conditions, alliances, regional integrations, international institutions, and supranational organizations all affect the way states behave. Moreover, the justifications for their behavior change just as often, depending on who they are addressing and what their intentions are.

In a constantly changing world, where countries interact on different scales daily, and where every explanation requires subtle parameter changes, the behavior of states can become difficult to understand.

To make sense of these complex relationships and shifting power dynamics, we need a clear and effective way of analyzing the behavior of states. One way to make sense of a state's behavior is through National Role Conceptions (NRCs), a concept first introduced by K.J. Holsti in 1970.

NRCs help explain and, in the best cases, predict a country's actions by looking at two elements: what the country's decision-maker perceives its country's role on the international stage to be, and what they believe the other states expect from their country. More specifically, NRCs are built on the idea that a country's actions are shaped by both how the country sees itself and how it believes others expect it to act. This paper argues that this dual approach, involving self-perception and external expectations, guides the state's behavior.

As such, NRCs are not just theoretical tools; in practice, they enable a better understanding and prediction of how countries behave. Most national role conceptions have been identified and described by Holsti (1970). For France two predominant role conceptions were assigned - the NRC of Active Independent and the NRC of Mediator/Integrator (both defined below).

However, with few exceptions, these national role conceptions have rarely been subjected to re-evaluation. Established nearly five decades ago, these NRCs are still the ones on which many researchers rely and base their work when it comes to France's NRCs. These roles identified for France in the mid-20th century need to be reassessed in light of today's world.

Hence, this thesis aims to explore French NRCs under Emmanuel Macron's presidency. More specifically, it asks the following questions: Are the "active independent" and "mediator/integrator" NRCs identified by Holsti in 1970 still representative of France's leadership under Emmanuel Macron? Furthermore, in re-examining Holsti's NRCs, and based on the literature on recent French foreign policy, is there a new NRC that better reflects France's current role in the world?

To address these questions, the paper will be organized as follows:

First, a comprehensive review of the existing literature on national role conceptions will be conducted to identify and highlight the existing research gap.

Secondly, the paper will introduce and elaborate on the qualitative method of content analysis that will be employed to examine the NRCs. This section will provide a detailed explanation of the methodological framework, including data collection, analysis procedures, and coding sheets.

The subsequent three chapters will be dedicated to an in-depth analysis of France's national role conceptions. The first chapter will focus on the role conception of Active Independent. The second chapter will delve into the national role conception of Mediator/Integrator. The third chapter will suggest a new role for France that aligns with contemporary global dynamics and France's strategic interests based on its increasingly collaborative identity.

The paper will then discuss the findings in a broader context, comparing them with the initial research questions and objectives, before coming to its conclusion.

By examining France's national role conceptions and identifying a new one, this thesis aims to inform academic debate and offer practical insights. Moreover, as countries and their contexts evolve, NRCs need to be re-examined to remain relevant. This study aims to provide a contemporary understanding of France's national roles, to ensure that NRCs remain a useful tool for the study of international relations.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

In the following sections, this paper examines existing research on national role conceptions in international relations. In doing so, this literature review begins with theoretical considerations within the concept of national role conceptions. Following, it will explore the origins of NRCs while presenting the capacity versus history debate. The third section of the literature review navigates the complexities of the NRC concept and the challenges previous studies faced when establishing its validity as an analytical tool. After addressing these challenges, the review shifts focus to studies specifically related to France's national role conceptions. The final section identifies gaps in the existing literature and discusses the relevance of this paper to the field.

On the use of National Role Conceptions to understand state behavior

In his seminal 1970 work, "National Role Conceptions in the Study of Foreign Policy", K.J. Holsti pioneered the application of role theory in International Relations (IR). His goal was to merge Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) with the broader discipline of IR using role theory as a mediating framework. In other words, he aimed at harmonizing two fields of policy relevance which, until then, had been considered somewhat estranged.

For this paper, a 'role' will be defined according to Holsti's understanding of the concept. A 'role' is a framework that seeks to make sense of an actor's behavior. When an actor performs an action, Holsti (1970) argues that its behavior is shaped by two elements: how the actor perceives himself, and how the others influence the actor. It is the interaction of the two elements - self-perception (the *ego*) and perception of the others (the *alter*) - that eventually informs the actor's action.

This focus on actors, beliefs, perspectives, and interactions inherently anchors role theory in constructivist theories of international relations. Considering the international to be a socially constructed place where interactions between states are influenced by shared ideas and cultural norms rather than by material factors (Kirste and Maull, 1996), constructivism emphasizes the importance of meaning-making in shaping relations among international actors. States are nothing "more than the material facts (brains) that constitute them" (Wendt, 2004, p.290). Rather than just states, constructivist theories therefore favor an analysis of governmental elites, decision-makers, and individuals within the bureaucracy.

In doing so, national role conceptions aim to understand the state's behavior by trying to understand the actors that constitute it. In that sense, NRCs serve as the bridge between international relations and foreign policy analysis as NRCs refer to the decision-maker's perception of the appropriate

functions and objectives of their state on the international stage (Holsti, 1970; Kirste and Maull, 1996; Krotz, 2002; Harnish 2011, Frank 2011).

Considering NRCs' roots in role theory, they are naturally made of two elements: the *alter* and the *ego*. On the one hand, the 'alter' is the reflection of external actors and the international system's expectations. It shows how these expectations influence a state's perception of its behavior toward the outside world. On the other hand, the 'ego' is the reflection of the decision-maker's own desires and ambitions for his state. It includes the values, norms, and ideas that the decision-maker shares domestically.

Considering the importance of perception and individual agency in the study of NRCs, political elite decision-makers are considered to be the main bearers of NRCs (Aggestam, 2004). To that, their unique position in the government means that they are the ones experiencing the shortest distance between the formation of NRCs and the formulation of policy (Krotz, 2002). While decision-makers are involved in policy-making in general, and foreign policy-making in particular, their perception of themselves and others is in constant evolution. Because the variation in perception creates a variation in individual behavior, which eventually leads to a variation in state behavior, understanding why a decision-maker perceives the world a certain way is crucial to making sense of how the state behaves in the international sphere. Hence the role of NRCs.

Origins of National Role Conceptions for States

Following these necessary theoretical considerations, this paper now examines the origins of NRCs, as there is indeed a debate amongst the academic literature on the factors that influence the creation of role conceptions. On the one hand, a part of the literature (e.g. Wish, 1987) argues that NRCs stem from capacity, i.e. the socio-economic characteristics of the state itself. Wish is the main proponent of this realist origin perspective. Relying on the works of Holsti (1970), Puchala (1971), and East (1978), she argues that national characteristics (demography, geography, etc..) not only shape a nation's foreign policy decisions by delineating its ability to take action, but they also indirectly impact its foreign policy conduct by shaping the goals and objectives of its decision-makers (Wish, 1970). For example, a state cannot consider itself a regional nuclear hegemonic power if it does not have any nuclear weapons. In that sense, capacity precedes role conception.

On the other hand, other scholars believe that NRCs originate in more subjectively defined elements. This strand of literature, rooted in constructivist ideas, believes that foreign policy behavior is shaped by the history and the memory of the state (Krotz, 2002). How individuals in the decision-making process understand the state's history is therefore crucial. History does not only refer to what

happened at a moment in time, but it also refers to a long process of “historical learning and adaptation”(Kirste and Maull, 1996, p.309) which leads people to understand their country’s role in a certain way. Some also highlight the role of national culture in creating NRCs (Sampson III and Walker, 1987). Similarly to history, how an individual perceives their culture directly influences the way in which they should act.

Despite the controversies regarding the origins of national role conceptions, scholars however all agree on how NRCs are transmitted. Thereby it is understood that NRCs are passed down and integrated through socialization processes that take place within the impermeable circles of government elites (Kirste and Maull, 1996). As NRCs integrate further into the political culture of a nation, their influence on interests and policies (the *ego*) amplifies and becomes increasingly strong among societal groups and within civil society (Krotz, 2002). Once a NRC is associated with a state, it is therefore hardly subject to change.¹

Navigating Complexity: Understanding Multiple and Conflicting roles within a State

Individuals assume a variety of social roles that reflect the different dimensions of their lives and relationships daily. Over the course of a day, the same person can be a mother, a friend, a wife, a teacher, and a sports coach. Despite entailing distinct sets of expectations, obligations, and behaviors, social roles can be multiple and overlapping.

States have similar overlapping relational dynamics: from the perspective of a policymaker, their state has various established relationships (could be global, regional, or local) that lead to the emergence and coexistence of multiple roles. In an analysis of 71 policymakers' national role conceptions, Holsti found that “the average number of different role conceptions per country is 4.6” (Holsti, 1970, p.47). Foreign policy decision-makers internalize multiple roles that mirror their various relationships in diverse contexts. It would therefore be wrong to consider national role conceptions as immutable, single, attitudinal characteristics (Holsti, 1970). Analyses of the international system that fail to recognize the existence of multiple roles will therefore be empirically insufficient and, except in specific contexts, theoretically inadequate (Holsti, 1970; Barnett, 1993; Kirste and Maull, 1996; Krotz, 2002; Thies, 2009). However, as Barnett (1993) explains, just like roles can conflict in the daily life of a person (sometimes, your parents can not be your friends), the same goes for states. Role conflict occurs when the expectations issued by two or more institutions are incompatible (Barnett, 1993). On an international scene, these multiple roles embodied by states can lead to complications.

¹ There is a whole body of literature on role change, however, it falls outside the scope of this study.

So, if there are multiple NRCs for every state, if they conflict at different levels, and if they are prone to evolve, what is their analytical value? In other words, what is the analytical value of a “complex and often ambivalent” (Kirste and Maull, 1996) concept aimed at elucidating state behavior if it is subject to contradictions, conflicts, and substantial subjectivity?

Although not a particularly compelling answer, the responses to these claims found in the literature, as early as Holsti, consistently suggest that despite being subjected to evolution, conflicts, or multiplicity, national role conceptions remain a stable attribute (Holsti, 1970; Krotz, 2002). Indeed, role theory assumes that there is a coherence between the actor’s conception and the subsequent behavior associated with that role (Frank, 2011). Because individuals or entities tend to behave in ways that are consistent with their perceived role expectations and norms, “temporal stability makes NRC a useful analytic concept” (Krotz, 2002, p.5). Therefore, while these challenges of multiplicity and conflict need to be addressed and understood, they do not undermine the value of the concept as an analytical tool.

On top of being a framework for explaining the dynamics of foreign policy behavior (Holsti, 1970; Wish, 1987; Walker, 2017) and a prescriptive tool to understand what motivates a state to act (Krotz, 2002), the concept of NRC is also useful at a theoretical level. Thies and Breuning (2012) and Kirste and Maull (1996) reconnect with the original intention of Holsti. Both studies argue that NRCs are the link that bridges FPA and IR, allowing two disciplines that draw from different analytical traditions (Thies and Breuning, 2012) to meet a mutually beneficial synthesis. Indeed, “roles, like the civilian power role, make intuitive sense to policymakers and offer great potential to translate foreign policy and IR theory into meaningful, policy-relevant advice” (Thies, 2009; Harnisch et al., 2011 as cited in Thies and Breuning, 2012).

Thus, while NRCs may evolve and encompass multiple and sometimes conflicting facets of a state's behavior, their capacity to elucidate and influence state behavior remains crucial: confirming NRCs' significance in both academia and practical policy formulation.

France's National Role Conceptions

Traditional considerations

As this paper focuses on French national role conceptions, it is pertinent to now review how the literature has previously addressed them.

France's role in the international system after the Second World War is inevitably linked to Gaulist thinking. De Gaulle's France was a France of opposition, a France of unity, a France of standing, and a France of identity. De Gaulle's France was a France which, in a bipolar world, sought to protect its independence, both political and military, as well as its international influence. After all, according to de Gaulle and subsequent chauvinists, France was “the heir to a unique history and genius” (Thumerelle and Leprestre, 1997, p.132), the land of indivisible republicanism, the nation of the first great army, the continental dominator for two centuries, the conqueror and organizer of Europe, the cradle of the Napoleonic Civil Code which would serve as a model around the world, of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen of 1789, as well as of Rousseauist and Cartesian thought (Holsti, 1970; Krotz, 2002).

Although these ideas were not invented by, nor first associated with De Gaulle's foreign policy, they were certainly highlighted and instrumentalized by it. This was not just an international strategy: this privileged role that De Gaulle intended for France was to be projected both externally and internally (Barrès, n.d., as cited in Thumerelle and Leprestre, 1997). Internally, this promotion of status, rank, and French glory was a means of uniting the French in search of a role and a place, while creating and facilitating a new internal consensus (Cerny, 1980 as cited in Krotz, 2002).

Consequently, it is no surprise that Holsti (1970), analyzing more than 21 sources from the period of 1964 to 1967 (De Gaulle was in power from 1959 to 1969), identified two main national role conceptions for France that both reflected independence and non-alignment: Mediator/Integrator and Active Independent. Mediator/Integrator is defined by Holsti (1970) as the ability or responsibility to accomplish or undertake reconciliation of conflicts between other conflicting states. The concept of Active Independent, on the other hand, is defined by assertions of national independence which suggest that foreign policy decisions will be made to serve national interests rather than the interests of others (Holsti, 1970). In addition to avoiding permanent military or ideological commitments, the NRC of Active Independent suggests proactive efforts to foster relationships with as many states as possible (Holsti, 1970).

While these roles had analytical and empirical grounding in De Gaulle's France, the international sphere as we know it today is vastly different. Most importantly, from 1989 onwards, the significant, independent, and unaligned role that France had managed to carve out for itself within the bipolar system and that was at the origin of Holsti's diagnosis, became irrelevant and obsolete (Montbrial, 1992 as cited in Thumerelle and Leprestre, 1997). It is therefore reasonable to assume that new or additional national role conceptions have been established for France.

As such, one might assume that when it comes to understanding French foreign policy, adequate additional NRCs have been researched, particularly given France's growing involvement in European integration, the increasing number of military interventions, the efforts against both domestic and international terrorism, the evolving relationships within NATO, the multiple engagements in Africa, the shift toward a multipolar world, the Yellow Vest movement, the war on the EU's border, the rising nationalism, or even the Brexit.

Surprisingly, France's NRC identification has received little attention from scholars since Holsti. Although the circumstances surrounding the *diagnosis* of NRCs Mediator/Integrator and Active Independent have considerably changed, and while the literature highlights this new quest for meaning in French foreign policy, researchers still almost exclusively rely on the NRCs identified by Holsti in 1970. Even disregarding any of these significant geopolitical and social changes, it is surprising to note that France's national role conceptions have not been revised in over five decades. The works of Sampson III and Walker (1987) and Krotz (2002) are no exception. Among the few, Thumerelle and Leprestre (1997) highlighted the central points of the French role, as they sought to question whether these conceptions had undergone a modification or transformation under Mitterrand's presidency. However, they did not identify a new salient or prominent NRC.

The need for a reexamination of France's NRCs

Holsti's national role conceptions have been an undisputed reference in the study of France's foreign policy for over half a century (54 years). It is noteworthy that (with the exception of Thumerelle and Leprestre (1997)) the accuracy of these NRCs has not been subjected to rigorous re-evaluation or reconsideration since their initial formulation. Plus, these NRCs were diagnosed based on 21 foreign policy statements from a period from 1964 to 1967. Since then, French national role conceptions have evolved.

As academic literature on French politics and foreign policy has shown since 1967 French politics have undergone significant transformations.

Internationally, the role of France was questioned after the end of the Cold War (Thumerelle and Leprestre, 1997). The transition from a bipolar world order where France pursued a policy of grandeur and independence (Barrès, n.d., as cited in Thumerelle and Leprestre, 1997), to a multipolar era where its foreign policy increasingly focuses on European integration leads to substantial evolutions in its behavior. The tenures of recent presidents like François Hollande and Emmanuel Macron have been marked by efforts to assert France's role in global affairs, including military interventions in regions like Libya and the Sahel (Charillon, 2018; Gaulme, 2021), and strong advocacy for global agreements on climate change like the Paris Agreement (OECD, 2021). Macron's presidency, in particular, has been characterized by attempts to balance traditional French interests with the demands of contemporary global leadership, emphasizing the importance of technology, economic reform, and enhanced European cooperation (Fischer, 2022; Guerout and Moyer, 2024).

Regionally, France has played a pivotal role in the formation and development of the European Union and has been at the forefront of advocating for EU expansion and deeper integration. In parallel, France's involvement in NATO has considerably shifted, as it reintegrated NATO's military command in 2009 under Sarkozy (De Gaulle had withdrawn in 1966) (NATO, n.d.).

Nationally, the period since 1967 has seen substantial policy shifts beginning with the May 1968 protests which were a turning point, leading to significant social reforms and cultural liberalization (Gobille, 2008; Peters et al., 2019). Following governments have tackled economic liberalization and privatization, especially under center-right presidents like Valéry Giscard d'Estaing and Nicolas Sarkozy. The introduction of the Euro in 2002 also marked a major economic transition. Furthermore, France's approach to issues of immigration and integration, security policies post-9/11, and more recently, its handling of terrorism on domestic soil have led to internal policy shifts and debate (Passot, 2018).

Based on this literature, and given the various and diverse new circumstances on the national, regional, and international stage, there is an urgent need for a reconsideration of French national role conceptions. As such, this paper challenges the prevailing notion that the national role conceptions identified between 1964 and 1967 under de Gaulle's presidency remain sufficient for understanding France's foreign policy as this one has become undeniably more collaborative.

Indeed, France's commitment to cooperation is evident through its modern cooperative engagements. Since 1970, the country has strategically engaged in bilateral relationships, particularly with Germany, to exercise joint leadership and establish common positions on EU issues (Krotz & Schramm, 2021). To that, France's proactive involvement in international organizations and treaties

has positioned it as a key player in shaping and benefiting from global collaboration (Heimann, 2015). France actively participates in international organizations like the EU, NATO, and the OECD, contributing to collaborative efforts in, amongst other things, sectors of economic development, defense, and diplomacy. France also participates in strategic bilateral partnerships, high-level exchanges, and cooperation in areas such as defense, counter-terrorism, and nuclear energy underscoring its dedication to expanding its international role (Nandy, 2020).

Especially in light of the growing role and deepening integration of the European Union, of which France is a key member, it is imperative to re-examine France's national role conceptions with regard to the undoubtedly more collaborative and European role it now occupies.

To that, challenging the NRC status quo is particularly important given that most of the existing research on national role conceptions focuses broadly on general state behaviors explained through NRCs without delving deeply into the influence of individual leaders' perspectives and ideologies.

Most existing NRC research (e.g. Hermann, 1987; Wish, 1987; Banchoff, 1999; Krotz, 2002; Harnish, 2011) indeed conducts depersonalized analysis, analyzing political elites' discourses within a fixed timeframe without specifically focusing on national leaders or the timeframe of their mandate.

This paper seeks to break away from such depersonalized NRC analysis. By taking a thorough and detailed approach to its subject matter, it aims to move beyond merely summarizing general trends and tendencies within French foreign policy. The objective is to provide a detailed exploration of how Macron's distinct leadership style, ego, alter, and ideological stance influence France's behavior on the global stage. Therefore, this paper wants to examine France's national role conceptions not just simply through a set timeframe, but by focusing on specific foreign policy statements released under Emmanuel Macron's presidency. Through a focused analysis of Macron's foreign policy statements, this paper intends to reexamine France's national role conceptions. On top of an examination of the relevance of Holsti's (1970) observed NRCs, this paper also identifies a new more collaborative, and European role for France, and thereby contributes to updating the literature on NRCs. A detailed examination of Macron's policy decisions and public statements will indeed enrich our understanding of how contemporary leaders shape national roles, ensuring that the analysis of NRCs remains relevant and representative of the current state of affairs.

If practice-oriented concepts are not regularly updated and verified for accuracy, there is a risk they may become outdated. Hence the need for a critical reexamination of national role conceptions, specifically focusing on France.

III. METHOD

This paper's goal is to reevaluate the current two national role conceptions at use for France against the backdrop of Emanuel Macron's Presidency, to readapt them, and then propose a new, more collaborative, and synergic NRC. To do so, this paper's analysis will be divided into three chapters. The first two chapters will aim at reevaluating the national role conceptions identified by Holsti (1970) namely Active Independent (AI) and Mediator Integrator (MI). The third chapter will present the new, more collaborative NRC of the Multilateral Regional Leader.

In doing so, this paper will make use of a qualitative content analysis research method.

Definition

Content analysis (CA) is a method of analyzing data. The data analyzed by CA can have any written, verbal, symbolic, or visual form (Cole, 1988; Elo and Kyngäs, 2008; Krippendorff, 2019). Content analysis is set up to provide replicable, systematic, valid, and objective means of describing and quantifying phenomena (Schreier, 2012; Cole, 1988; Elo and Kyngäs, 2008; Krippendorff, 2019) by reducing the concepts and classifying them into categories (Schreier, 2012). Thereby condensing data into fewer content-related categories (Elo and Kyngäs, 2008; Zhang and Wildemuth, 2009) to provide new insights, new findings, or additional content to the data (Krippendorff, 2019).

In doing so, CA does not take into consideration all the information provided by the data but rather filters its analysis through aspects relevant to the research question (Schreier, 2012), therefore losing the fine details within data in the name of broader encompassing research categories.

Qualitative or Quantitative?

Content analysis can be approached both qualitatively and quantitatively. Yet in certain contexts, a qualitative approach is more appropriate, particularly in research projects where interpretation is essential. Qualitative content analysis (QCA) fundamentally focuses on the interpretation of non-standardized data i.e. texts or images which inherently contain multiple layers of meaning and require a nuanced understanding that numerical data often do not require.

Therefore, while quantitative CA plays an important role in academic research, qualitative methods of content analysis have also proven their effectiveness (Krippendorff, 2019). Given this, this paper will make use of qualitative content analysis as it is best suited for the data used during this research: speeches are qualitative data sources by nature that require a contextual understanding before their analysis.

QCA or Discourse Analysis?

It would seem that content analysis and discourse analysis share a number of common features, as they both provide qualitative tools for analyzing texts.

So the question arises: why choose content analysis when critical discourse analysis is more widely used and seems to offer a deeper, less selective insight into the social and psychological contexts of communication?

The answer lies in the core assumption of critical discourse analysis (CDA). Critical discourse analysis examines the nuances of language use, power dynamics, and societal norms within the text because it contends that language doesn't merely reflect reality; it actively creates and shapes it (Van Dijk, 1994). CDA therefore does not revolve around analyzing texts themselves, but rather around how language shapes and interacts with social reality (Schreier, 2012). On the other hand, QCA focuses on organizing units of the text into smaller content categories (Elo and Kyngäs, 2008) to answer previously designated research questions.

Accordingly, CDA and QCA differ significantly. Unlike discourse analysis, qualitative content analysis does not explicitly assume any specific relationship between language and social reality or power relations, nor does it make particular claims about their nature (Schreier, 2012). QCA is simply concerned with what is said, discourse analysis is concerned with its implications.

QCA, therefore, emerges as the more relevant choice for this paper's research project.

The question of induction or deduction

Content analysis can be done using both an inductive and a deductive research method.

The choice is eventually the researcher's but can be informed by two questions:

First, is there enough former knowledge?

Second, if yes, what do I want to do with it - do I want to test it and rely on it or am I looking for a new insight within the data?

If the answer to the former question is negative, inductive methods are preferred. Inductive methods move from the specific to the more general (Elo and Kyngäs, 2008) and therefore imply that the content-related categories of the analysis will be derived from the data.

If the answer however is positive and one wants to rely on and engage with previous findings (testing concepts, or research questions from previous research on other cases or data sets (Marshall and Rossman, 1995; as cited in Elo and Kyngäs, 2008)) a deductive method might be more appropriate. Deductive methods move from the general down to the specific (Elo and Kyngäs, 2008) and thereby imply that the content-related categories from the previous studies are being used.

As this paper reexamines Holsti's 1970 NRCs for France, in the first two chapters deductive qualitative content analysis methods are applied. Whereas for the third chapter, inductive QCA has been used to identify the new collaborative NRC.

Steps of Qualitative Content Analysis

Qualitative content analysis is about systematically analyzing text, to interpret and understand the underlying meanings of data by classifying 'the many words of the text into much smaller content categories' (Weber, 1990, as cited in Elo and Kyngäs, 2008, p.109)

Regardless of whether the analysis will be deductive or inductive, the organization in smaller content categories' is always divided into three main phases: preparation, organization, and reporting (Elo and Kyngäs, 2008). The subsequent steps presented here are based on the articles of Elo and Kyngäs, 2008; Cole, 1988, Zhang and Wildemuth, 2009 and Schreier's 2012 book.

1. Preparation

a. The research questions

First, the guiding research question(s) need(s) to be defined as they "will identify the variables or concepts of interest for the investigation" (Cole, 1988, p.54).

Therefore this paper will be guided by the following questions:

RQ1: Are the 1970 identified national role conceptions of Active Independent and Mediator Integrator still representative of France's leadership under Macron's presidency?

RQ2: In re-examining Holsti's NRCs, and based on the literature on recent French foreign policy, has a more collaborative NRC been identified?

b. The data

This paper follows Holsti's data selection criteria that have set a precedent for any subsequent² data selection in NRC literature.

Holsti outlines four parameters:

1. The statements and speeches are only from the highest political officials
2. The sources used are set within a fixed time frame (from ... to ...)
3. The number of sources used must be representative (minimum of 10 sources)
4. The speeches and statements refer to general foreign policy statements, thus excluding sources that refer directly to specific issues³

² Wish (1987), Hermann (1987), Kirsten and Maull (1996), Thumerelle and Leprestre (1997), Krotz (2002), and Thies (2009) all follow Holsti's data selection criteria.

³ While all the authors cited in (footnote 1) followed guidelines 1 to 3, none made use of the fourth

On the French government website vie-publique.fr, a filter has been applied to yield only Emmanuel Macron's speeches, from April 2017 to April 2024, only for material relating to international relations (a pre-existing category in the vie-publique.fr search engine).

With these criteria applied, vie-publique.fr found 381 matching results. However, it is important to consider that not all results were relevant with regard to this paper's RQs. Consequently, each of the 381 speeches was then individually evaluated to select only those that appeared to address the research questions.

In doing so, any speech or statements that:

- is too specifically focused on a particular subject (i.e. is not in general focused on foreign policy)
- is bilateral
- is of an economic nature
- is too vague on a repetitive subject (for example, in 2018, Emmanuel Macron gave 34 speeches on '*the European construction*' - a neutral selection is not possible without disproportionately enlarging the data sample),
- or focused on the French national government

was not included.

Following these additional research paper-specific guidelines, 22 speeches and foreign policy statements from April 2017 to April 2024 have been selected. Emmanuel Macron having acceded to the presidency in April 2017, the sample takes into account all seven years of his presidency to get a sample that is representative of his presidency.

All seven years have been carefully scrutinized, yet certain years contain a higher number of speeches that align with the established criteria than others.

The years 2020 and 2021, for example, contained a large number of speeches regarding the Coronavirus, diverting Macron's attention from international politics. The years 2022 and 2023 have been marked by France's presidency of the Council of the European Union consequently several speeches regarded France's role in this position. 2022 and 2023 were also marked by conflicts on the borders of the European Union and the Israel / Hamas conflict in the Middle East.

The materials analyzed in this paper were initially written in French. For linguistic integrity, the author translated all quotes into English. Since this paper involves content analysis where precise vocabulary is essential, translations were done with careful consideration to keep the original meaning.

c. Definition of the unit of analysis

The unit of analysis refers to a portion of the content to be measured (Cole, 1988), in other words, it refers to what or who is being analyzed to find answers to the research questions.

In QCA, individual themes are usually used as the unit of analysis (Zhang and Wildemuth, 2009).

The themes for Chapters I and II have been derived from the author's interpretation of Holsti's (1970) definitions of Active Independent and Mediator Integrator. The themes can also be found under the 'code' column in Figures 1 and 2 hereunder.

As such, for Chapter I: Active Independent, the following themes were used as units of analysis (codes in Figures 1 and 2):

- Emphasis on national interests
- Independence from major powers
- Autonomy
- Economic and cultural sovereignty
- No military commitments to major powers
- Conditional support for international agreements
- No ideological commitments to major powers
- Establishing diplomatic relations in all world regions
- Enhancing commercial relations in all world regions
- Expanding international presence
- Participation in international organizations
- Mediating in bloc conflicts
- Intervening diplomatically in international disputes
- Conflict resolution efforts

For Chapter II: Mediator Integrator, the following themes were used as units of analysis:

- Self-identification as a mediator
- International recognition as a mediator
- Continuous efforts to mediate
- Hosting peace talks
- Facilitating negotiations
- Establishing communication channels
- Proposing peace plans
- Statements of ethical duty to mediate
- Moral justification for mediation
- Humanitarian motivations
- Promotion of global peace and stability
- International community's expectation of mediation
- Reputation as a peacebuilder
- Regional leadership roles in conflict resolution

Chapter III focuses on identifying the new collaborative national role conception of the Multilateral Regional Cooperator, as anticipated from the literature review. Thus, the inductive units of analysis are:

- More Collaborative position
- Attachment to a Multilateral World Order
- Less self-identification as an independent actor
- Increased focus on the European Union

d. Developing categories and coding scheme

Coding schemes (for Zhang and Wildemuth, 2009) are the categories developed to classify the afore-identified units (Cole, 1988, p.55). They organize the material (Schreier, 2012). Coding sheets consist of main categories which represent important parts of the material to answer the research question(s) (Schreier, 2012), and subcategories, which explain the content of the main categories (Elo and Kyngäs, 2008).

In deductive QCA the categories of the coding scheme are directly taken over from prior research, theories, or concepts (Schreier, 2012; Elo and Kyngäs, 2008). In this paper, deductive QCA is used because it aims at retesting existing theories.

Therefore in Figures 1 and 2, the columns MAIN CATEGORY, GENERIC CATEGORY, and SUB-CATEGORY are all directly derived from a rigorous and careful implementation of Holsti's definition (1970).

In inductive QCA, the categories of the coding scheme emerge freely during the open coding process (Elo and Kyngäs, 2008) as they are derived from the data's analysis (which is the case of Figure 5)

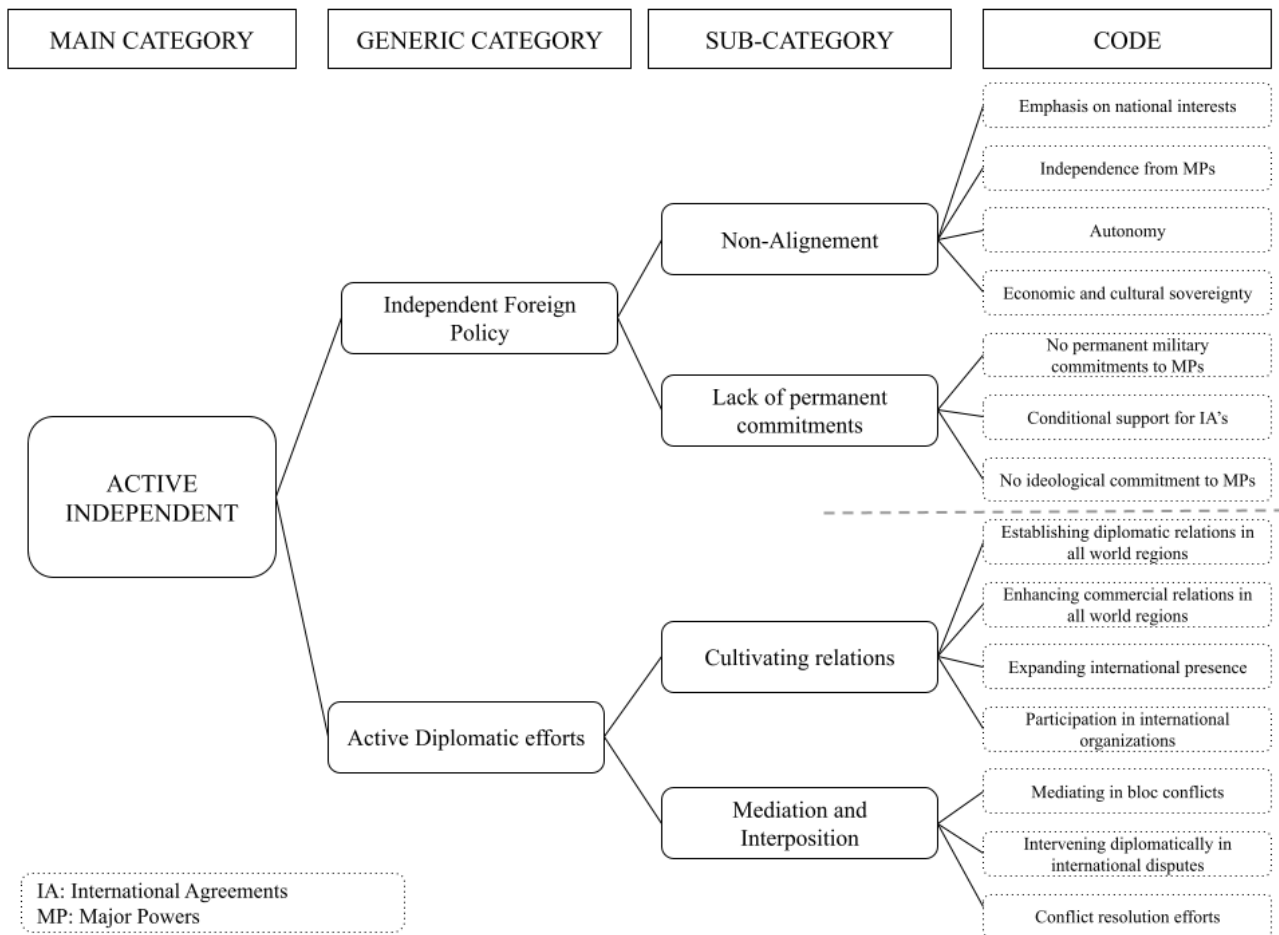


Figure 1: Coding sheet for Chapter I. Active Independent based on a model suggested by Elo and Kyngäs (2008). Source: Leoni Schmitz.

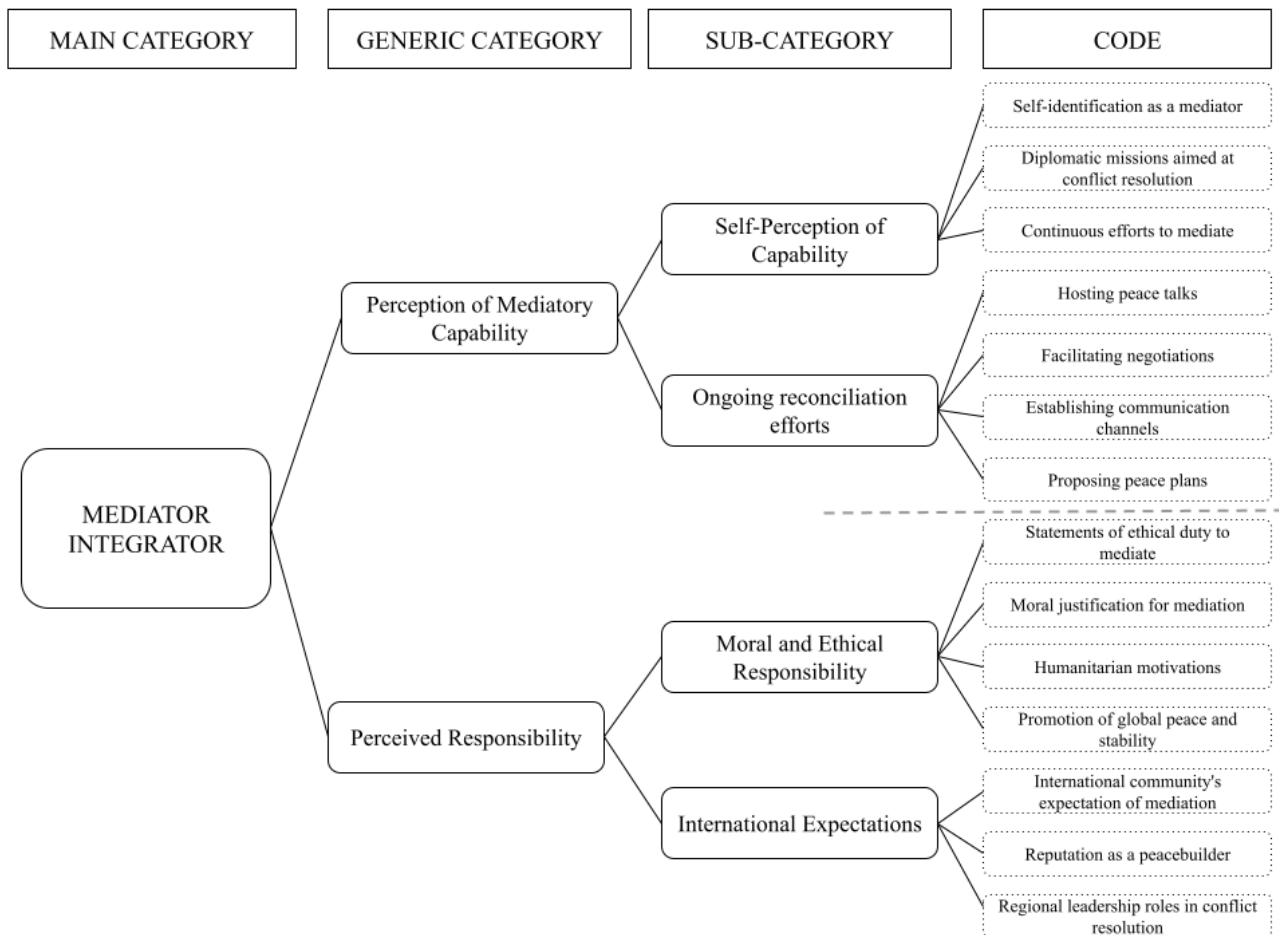


Figure 2: Coding sheet for Chapter II. Mediator Integrator based on a model suggested by Elo and Kyngäs (2008). Source: Leoni Schmitz.

2. Organization

a. Coding

Open coding is defined by Elo and Kyngäs (2008) as the process of integrating oneself into the research while noting and heading the text. Essentially, this step is about coding the text according to either previously developed categories and subcategories (for deductive QCA) or emerging categories (for inductive QCA)

b. Assessment of coding consistency

After coding the data set, the researcher needs to check the consistency of their coding (Zhang and Wildemuth, 2009). The coding of the first sources will certainly have been done differently than the coding of the following ones. In the interest of homogeneity, the researcher must cross-check his coding.

3. Reporting

a. Drawing conclusions from the coded data

This step is where conclusions from the analysis will be drawn and answers to the research questions identified.

b. Reporting of the results and the conclusions

For qualitative content analysis to be trustworthy it must be replicable. To ensure that the study can be replicated, it is important to document and describe the analysis and processes as thoroughly as possible (Zhang and Wildemuth, 2009). The researcher must therefore apply themselves to be as consistent and rigorous in the reporting of the results. Elo et al. (2014) and Elo and Kyngäs (2008) argue that relying on multiple direct quotations can be a preferred way to significantly increase trustworthiness.

Computer program

For its qualitative content analysis, this paper relied on computer support. ATLAS.ti⁴ was used to help organize, manage, and code Emmanuel Macron's speeches more efficiently. By enabling codes to be applied to segments of text to categorize and label key themes, Atlas.ti facilitates systematic coding.

Resolving uncertainties

Uncertainty: Is it reasonable to study only the leader's speeches using QCA to draw general conclusions about the state level?

Firstly, one should recall that while national role conceptions are considered to be subject to change, they are largely stable (Krotz, 2002; Thies, 2009). This means that although it is national leaders who embody NRCs, they are still primarily the fruits of socialization. Thus, NRCs are to some extent tied to the state, beyond the actor who embodies them.

Meanwhile, Barnett (1993), addressed these issues of the application of individual language to states, and provided some elements of an answer to this question by underlining that: First, it is not fundamentally wrong to think that the state can be equated with its official leaders. And second, that leaders are socialized within the bureaucratic institutions of states, where, as they internalize this socialization, they externalize it internationally. Thus, the leader is merely the product of the socialization of state institutions. For these reasons, this paper chose to equate the state and its leader to determine the national role conception.

⁴ see: atlasti.com

IV. ANALYSIS

Chapter I: Active Independent

1. Analysis of data

By analyzing twenty-two speeches delivered by President Emmanuel Macron from April 2017 to April 2024, and utilizing the coding schemes presented in Figure 1, the following results were identified.

NRC	CATGEORY	SUB-CODE	Frequence of Sub-code	Frequence of Category	Frequence of NRC
Active Independent	Independent Foreign Policy	Non-Alignment / Independence	34	36	104
		Lack of permanent commitments	2		
	Active Diplomatic Efforts	Cultivating relations	45	68	
		Mediation and interposition	23		

Figure 3: Result of deductive QCA of 22 speeches of Emmanuel Macron from 2017 to 2024, following the coding sheet of Figure 1. Source: Leoni Schmitz.

Out of a total of 620 highlighted and categorized units across all chapters (I, II, III), 104 were assigned to the national role conception of Active Independent.

2. Interpretation

Holsti (1970, p.262) defined the NRC of Active Independent as follows:

“Most government statements supporting the concept of non-alignment are little more than affirmation of an 'independent' foreign policy, free of military commitments to any of the major powers. [...]. Most merely suggest that foreign policy decisions will be made to serve national interests rather than the interests of others [...]. Others imply much more diplomatic activity. In addition to shunning permanent military or ideological commitments, the themes suggest active efforts to cultivate relations with as many states as possible and occasional interposition into bloc conflicts. The role conception emphasizes at once independence, self-determination, possible mediation functions, and active programs to extend diplomatic and commercial relations to diverse areas of the world.”

Therefore, should France act under the Active Independent role conception of Emmanuel Macron, one expects to observe: independent foreign policy i.e. non-alignment, autonomy in decision-making,

unilateral actions, and lack of permanent commitments as well as active diplomatic efforts meaning, enhanced fostering of commercial and diplomatic relations

Independent Foreign Policy

The key points of Holsti's (1970) definition provided the foundation for the categories and subcategories of the coding scheme. In doing so, for the Independent Foreign Policy dimension⁵ of the Active Independent NRC, two key points emerge: first, the idea that an Active Independent is non-aligned, which means that it rather focuses on national interest and policies that benefit its country rather than foreign powers, and second the idea of a lack of permanent commitment, meaning that it refuses to engage in long-term ideological or military commitments with major powers.

At first glance, the results of the analysis seem to confirm that both elements that make up an active independent country are present in Macron's speeches. For Macron, the most important goal of France's diplomacy is to make sure that France's "strength, influence and independence" are upheld (Macron, 2022d). For him, independence is the biggest asset in French foreign policy. Independence is what allows France to act strongly on the international stage, without ever having to comply with any of the major powers' will (Macron, 2017c; 2019b). Macron believes that independence is the only solution to being a respectable, dignified actor on the international stage.

However, if the concept of independence is to be given such importance, it is crucial to precisely define what Macron means by it. In 2017(c), Macron explained how his conception of independence was different from the one Holsti put forward in his NRC definition:

"The kind of independence we're talking about here isn't that of nationalists hiding behind, what they hope to be, impenetrable borders; it's the kind of independence that enables France to make its voice heard, to assert its interests on the international stage, and to influence the course of the world"

While Macron does emphasize the importance of being independent, he seems to have a different conception of this independence. For him, France should not act on its own and completely disregard the opinion of other countries. Independence does not mean "autarky" (Macron 2023b). Instead, independence means that France should carefully select its partners and collaborate with them on only specific issues (Macron 2019b, 2017c). Therefore, it seems as if independence as Macron understands it is rather to be equated with sovereignty, than with isolation (Macron, 2017d). This sovereign

⁵ see Figure 1

independence allows France to acknowledge that “joint action with our partners is essential” (Macron, 2017d) without having to compromise on its national interests.

This semantic precision indicates that caution should be applied when confirming the active independent national role conception in the case of France under Macron’s presidency. Independence here means sovereignty that is open to the world and that is exercised collectively beyond the national framework. This sovereign independence signals that Macron's France acknowledges both its needs and its obligations. It recognizes that dialogues and relations are vain without commitment (Macron, 2018a), and therefore that independence no longer equates to non-alignment or a lack of long-term commitment. Credibility is no longer bound to unilateral decision-making (Macron, 2017b).

This realization is particularly exemplified by Macron’s position with regard to the European Union. He affirms that France’s “commitment to Europe will continue to underpin [France’s] diplomatic activity, insofar that it is inseparable [France’s] day-to-day work on the national level” (Macron, 2018a). His position on NATO is similar (Macron, 2018c).

Both examples significantly refine the initial national role conception of active independent, as they bluntly contradict the principles of non-alignment, the primacy of the national interest, and the avoidance of military commitments to major powers inherent to Holsti’s (1970) definition.

It appears as if Emmanuel Macron's France, while attached to its commitment to independence, had somewhat reinterpreted this independence to include a more relational and collaborative dimension to it. Rather than adhering to a traditional notion of non-alignment, where France does not formally align or commit itself to major powers or international institutions, this reinterpreted understanding of the ‘independent foreign policy’ now emphasizes the strategic selection of partners and allies.

In doing so, it comes as no surprise that the ‘active diplomatic efforts’⁶ aspect of the active independent NRC was identified considerably more frequently (68 times compared to 36 times for the independent foreign policy category i.e. almost twice as often - see Figure 3).

Active Diplomatic Efforts

Following a similar method, the “active diplomatic efforts” dimension of the active independent NRC revolves around two main ideas: first, the cultivation of relations with other countries, and second, visible efforts of mediation and interposition. While the ‘independent foreign policy’ dimension of this NRC certainly invites careful questioning, the analysis of Macron’s speeches suggests that the “active diplomatic efforts” category is subject to far less reconsideration.

⁶ *ibid*

The aspect of cultivating relations has already been somewhat discussed when looking at France's sovereign independence according to Emmanuel Macron. As such, France's independence highlights above all the possibility of cultivating strategically chosen partners and allies (Macron 2019b). This is a privilege that Macron uses with care. While he admits being an ally of the United States, a country he is pleased to share common interests with, and an attachment to freedom and democratic principles (Macron, 2022d), he also prides himself in the fact that he is cultivating useful and strategic relations with China:

“We have China, a systemic rival with whom we do not share our democratic values, but with whom we must continue to act to find answers to common challenges - climate, biodiversity - and with whom we want to continue to talk to try to help resolve regional crises and elements of destabilization.” (Macron, 2022d)

Above merely highlighting how France's independence allows it to foster relationships even with his 'friend's enemies' (Macron, 2019b), Macron also delights in being able to abundantly engage or renew partnerships with other countries allowing him to grow “France's remarkable diplomatic and consular network” (Macron, 2018a). During speeches in the early years of his presidency, he indeed highlighted his many visits to European countries and his fruitful talks with other heads of state as a way to combat “our [the decision-makers] collective inefficiency” (Macron, 2018a). He seems convinced that engaging in discussions with leaders outside France is needed. What appears to be most shocking to him is the fact that some of those countries had not been visited by French presidents in fifteen to twenty years (Macron, 2019b), which illustrates that he is firmly against the idea of a silent France on the international stage.

But Macron is not just restoring lost relationships or giving renewed attention to countries neglected by previous French presidents; he is also committed to maintaining existing relationships, as exemplified by his position on Africa. While Macron acknowledges France's colonial past, he also believes that “African countries will be our [France's] great partners” (Macron, 2017c). He is determined to “build strong and equal partnerships” with African countries (Macron, 2022d), which only confirms his intention to actively engage in diplomatic efforts on the international stage.

On top of the cultivation of relations, Macron also upholds the mediation and interposition aspect intrinsic to the active independent NRC. This aspect appears to be less important in terms of quantity - only 23 instances out of 620 categorized units - but it is still of significant importance considering that mediation is an extraordinary exercise of power.

Macron considers France as a “balancing power”, whose aim is to “promote peace and stability” (Macron 2022d). More than just collaboration with other states, France’s diplomacy works towards ensuring that the international stage is secure and stable.

Macron’s vision was exemplified in several cases where the mediation abilities of France were particularly highlighted. During the Syrian civil war, first, where Macron expressed his pride over the fact that France had established “rigorous dialogue with the Turks, Iranians and Russians” (Macron 2022d). During the Russian invasion of Ukraine, secondly, when he declared - against the expressed wishes of the Americans - that France would continue to talk to Russia to “prepare the terms of peace” (Macron 2022d).

In light of these statements and actions, Macron's conception of France's role appears to confirm, without any evident contradiction, the mediatory and interposition aspect of the active independent national role conception. His emphasis on dialogue and engagement with various international actors, even when it diverges from the approach of other Western powers, highlights France's commitment to promoting peace and stability through balanced diplomacy, especially within the frame of sovereign independence.

3. Conclusion

This chapter aimed to reexamine the current relevance of the national role conception of Active Independent identified in 1970. The findings indicate that the NRC of Active Independent still holds some validity in Emmanuel Macron’s vision of France's role on the international stage. However, two key points emerged from this analysis. First, quantitatively, the active independent NRC accounted for only 16% of all analyzed national role conception units, which strips it of its place as the all-encompassing NRC. Second, this chapter demonstrated that while the concept retains some validity and presence, the national role conception of Active Independent cannot be applied as is to France’s NRC today. It must be approached with careful reconsideration if it is to serve as an explanation of France’s foreign policy behavior. Specifically, the notion of independence requires refinement and redefinition, and the notion of military non-alignment must be dismissed.

Chapter II: Mediator Integrator

1. Analysis of data

In that same sample of Emmanuel Macron’s foreign policy discourses and using the coding scheme presented in Figure 2, the following results were found for the national role conception of Mediator Integrator:

NRC	CATGEORY	SUB-CODE	Frequence of Sub-Code	Frequence of Category	Total of apprearence of NRC
Mediator Integrator	Perception of Mediatory Capability	Self-Perception of Capability	30	54	101
		Ongoing reconciliation efforts	24		
	Perceived Responsibility	Moral and Ethical Responsibility	42	47	
		International Expectations	5		

Figure 4: Result of deductive qualitative content analysis of 22 speeches of Emmanuel Macron from 2017 to 2024, following the coding sheet of Figure 2. Source: Leoni Schmitz.

Out of a total of 620 highlighted and categorized units across all chapters (I, II, III), 101 were assigned to the national role conception of Mediator Integrator.

2. Interpretation

In his pioneering article, Holsti (1970, p.265) defined the NRC of Mediator Integrator as follows:

“In the sample of seventy-one states, a considerable number of governments perceived themselves as capable of, or responsible for, fulfilling or undertaking special tasks to reconcile conflicts between other states or groups of states. [...]. The themes for this national role conception indicate perceptions of a continuing task to help adversaries reconcile their differences”

This definition is simpler and less complex than the one in Chapter I about the active independent NRC. The main points, which served as the categories and subcategories for the coding sheet used (see Figure 2), are: first, the perception of the ability to undertake mediation and conflict resolution efforts, and second, the perception of a sense of responsibility to carry out these reconciliation and mediation efforts.

Should Macron’s France act based on this NRC, one expects to find evidence of self-identification as a mediator, continuous efforts to mediate, intentions to host peace talks, the establishment of communication channels, statements of duty to mediate, and amongst other things, promotion of global peace and stability.

However, before considering the two main categories that underpin Holsti's (1970) definition (perception of mediatory capacity and perceived responsibility), it is noteworthy that, unlike the active independent NRC which exhibited significant disparities between its two main categories (independent foreign policy and active diplomatic efforts), the analysis of the Mediator/Integrator NRC reveals a much smaller difference in the frequency of these categories (54 against 47: see Figure 4). This suggests that this national role conception is interpreted more uniformly by Emmanuel Macron compared to the active independent one.

Perception of Mediatory Capability

Emmanuel Macron perceives France's role to be one of a mediator, and he demonstrates this belief on multiple occasions and through various actions. He embodies this role in diverse and important instances, repeatedly showcasing France's commitment to diplomacy and dialogue on the international stage. Perhaps the most visible and simple admission of his vision of France as a mediator appeared during a speech he gave to French ambassadors, where he highlighted that France was indeed a mediatory power:

“Our calling is everywhere, and this is what I expect of you [the French ambassadors], to be a mediating power, a diplomatic, military, cultural, educational, national and European power, but always to be a mediator. Mediating means that France never gives up on making its voice heard, but always seeks to build alliances on this basis, It's not a power of compromise, it's not a power of middle ground, no, it's a power of mediation, the very power that seeks to build this international order which I believe very deeply, will enable us to make this era globalization we are living through a little more humane” (Macron, 2018b)

The message is clear: France's role in the world is that of a mediator open to dialogue. A continuous dialogue with everyone “to talk, to negotiate, to innovate, to relentlessly seek political solutions, without complacency and in mutual respect”(Macron, 2018a) is indeed, inherent to France's vision of diplomacy. Emmanuel Macron sees this mediation role not as occasional, nor as sporadic, not even as conditional, but as continuous, sovereign, and intrinsic to the very essence of French diplomacy. To that, Macron considers mediation as essential to (co)construct "this era of globalization" in a more “humane” way (Macron, 2018b). A theme frequently emphasized in Macron's speeches is indeed the goal to cooperate with as many countries as possible. The mediation role he envisions is one where France, independent and sovereign, keeps all communication channels open (see Chapter I: Active Diplomatic Efforts). France aims to “talk to everyone at all times” (Macron 2022d).

It is important to note that these are not just lofty intentions or wishful thinking that is being quoted directly from the speeches. On multiple occasions, Macron highlighted how these ambitions are being

put into action. During the Qatar diplomatic crisis, he “insisted that France should play a supporting role in mediation”, and that discussions between all the parties were essential to restore peace (Macron, 2017c). Similarly, Macron reiterated this mediatory stance in Ukraine, as he insisted that he was talking not only to countries involved in the war, nor solely to European countries but to countries from all over the world, “to create an ever-greater consensus” (Macron, 2022f)

Even when not directly involved in ongoing conflict mediation, Macron consistently highlights France's capacity for mediation by proposing the country as a host for forums and discussions. Some examples include his intention to create a “cooperative conference” in Paris to fight against the financing of terrorism (Macron 2017c), or the hosting of an Africa-France summit in France to involve the respective civil societies “in a spirit of profound reciprocity” (Macron, 2019c).

Therefore, it is clear that Emmanuel Macron sees France as being an international mediating power. He has demonstrated this not only through his intentions in speeches but also through active mediation efforts and continuous proposals to host international conferences and talks. Additionally, this can be affirmed with certainty, as no evidence contradicting this aspect of the NRC was found in the analysis of 22 speeches.

Perceived Responsibility

However, before confirming the applicability of this national role conception, we must examine the second category of this national role conception: the perception of the responsibility to mediate.

France is a proud nation. It is, after all, the country of human rights and the birthplace of the French Revolution, which marked the beginning of the end for absolute monarchies in Europe and inspired movements for freedom and democracy worldwide. These chauvinist sentiments are evident in Emmanuel Macron's speeches when he introduces the responsibility of French mediation in the world. He justifies, or perhaps explains, the importance of French intervention through the lens of French exceptionalism in saying:

“This, I believe, is what sometimes sets us apart from other countries. A certain aspiration to the universal and, in this respect, the defense of human rights and human dignity, partnership with humanitarian actors, the defense of international law and respect for the sovereignty of peoples” (Macron, 2023b)

It is therefore fitting that Macron's France, deeply committed to the defense of human rights and the sovereignty of nations, sees itself as a steward of peace and reconciliation, a peacebuilder driven by solidarity. For Macron, France holds the burden of “building peace everywhere” (Macron, 2017d). Because of France’s past and the fact that ideals about human rights and freedom are anchored in the country’s constitution, Macron (2017c, 2018b) is certain that France should actively advocate for a new “humanist path” on the international stage.

This humanistic solidarity, as Emmanuel Macron describes it, is not merely an idea confined to speeches without real-world application. On numerous occasions, Macron has highlighted this sense of responsibility for intervention, mediation, and integration, particularly in relation to migration flows in Europe. Indeed, he believes that France has a “moral and political duty” (Macron 2017b) as well as a “moral and humanitarian responsibility” (Macron 2018a) to protect refugees (Macron 2017c). In other words, Macron highlights that the rationale behind the welcoming of migrants is not political. France does not act because it altruistically wants to, but because it ought to; because it has a responsibility to act in such crises.

3. Conclusion

This chapter aimed to reexamine the national role conception of Mediator/Integrator that Holsti attributed to France in 1970. To summarize, if this NRC was still relevant, key indicators would involve finding evidence of France’s self-perception as a mediator and the perceived responsibility by Emmanuel Macron to assume the role of mediator/integrator (see Figure 2). Upon analysis, both dimensions were found in sufficient quantity, and most importantly, no evidence invalidating these dimensions was discovered (on the contrary of one of the Active Independent NRC’s categories).

However, one point must be noted before confidently reapplying this NRC to understand French behavior. During the analysis, it became clear that while the content of the national role conception remains accurate, the terminology may need updating. Specifically, most units of analysis contained the self-named role of "balancing power". This suggests that while France’s role as a mediator/integrator is still pertinent, the modern context might better describe this role as that of a "balancing power". Macron himself mentions this term more than a dozen times. According to him, “We [France] have to play our role of balancing power” (Macron, 2019b), and even more explicitly, “this role of balancing power is the one we must play in major crises and conflict situations” (Macron 2019b).

Indeed, this designation of the role as one of a balancing power allows France to keep multiple communication channels open (be it with the major international powers or with smaller regional actors) while also acting as a mediatory counterweight when perceived imbalances arise. This balancing role is made all the more credible by France's significant economic, industrial, and diplomatic strength (Macron, 2019b).

Finally, building on the idea introduced in Chapter I that France refuses to close communication channels because of any subjugation to major powers, this shift from a "perception of mediation capabilities" to a "balancing power" role highlights France's growing dedication to its collaborative role on the global stage. This evolution reflects France's strategic intent to remain an independent and influential actor, unbound by the pressures and interests of larger powers.

Chapter III: A New National Role Conception

1. Analysis of the data

The premise of a new, collaborative national role conception for France arose from a review of French foreign policy literature, as discussed in "Literature Review - The Need for a Reexamination of France's NRCs". This review highlighted several key points, amongst which: France's increasing influence in the European Union, the significance of bilateral agreements in its foreign policy, its connections with Africa, its opposition to the re-emergence of a bipolar world order, and its ambition to position the EU as a global power.

Therefore, unlike the first two chapters, which focused on reassessing the two main national roles that Holsti had identified for France, this third chapter aims to present a new collaborative national role conception. This new national role conception emerged from an inductive research process, where the categories for content analysis were developed throughout the research. Therefore, the main finding of this chapter is the coding sheet, which details this new collaborative national role conception.

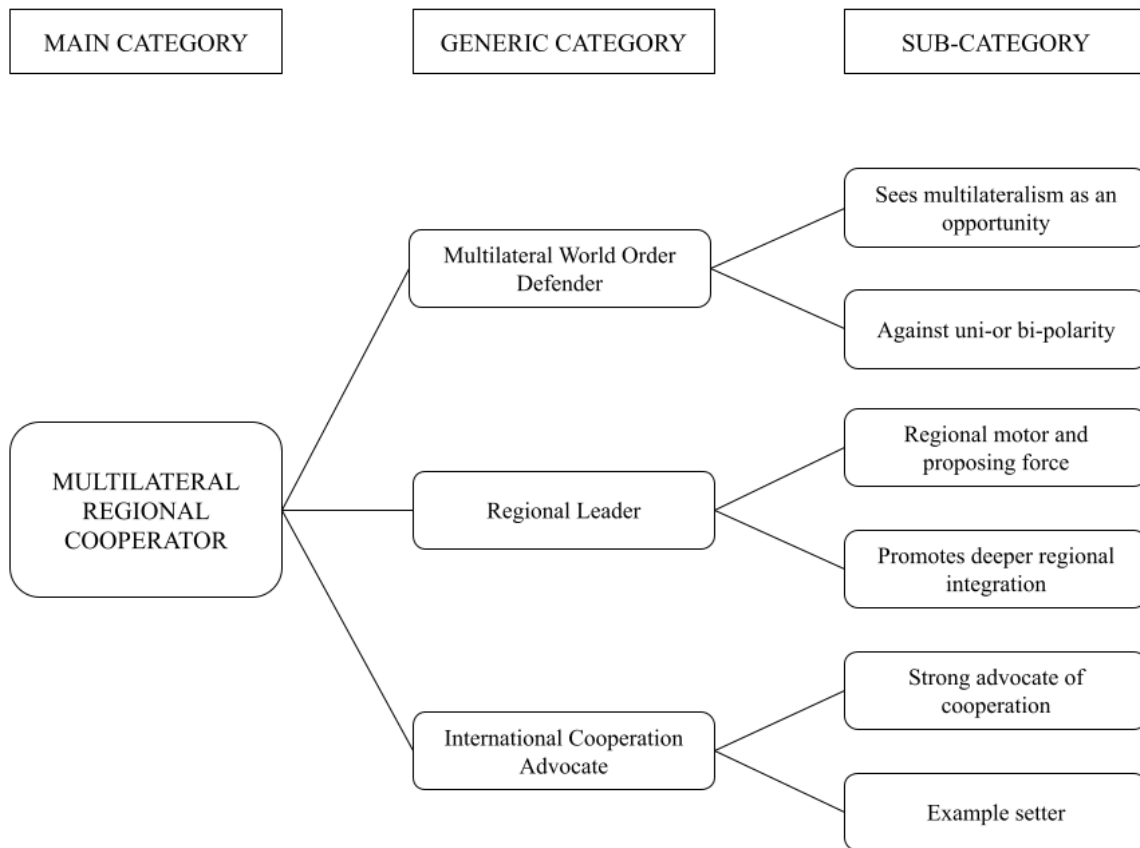


Figure 5: Inductive coding sheet for Chapter III. New national role conception based on a model suggested by Elo and Kyngäs (2008). Source: Leoni Schmitz.

Numerically, the categories that compose the new national role conception of Multilateral Regional Cooperator (MRC) expressed as follows in the inductive QCA:

NRC	GENERIC CATGEORY	SUB-CATEGORY	Frequence of Sub-code	Frequence of Category	Frequence of NRC
Multilateral Regional Cooperator	Multilateral World Order Defender	Sees multilateralism as an opportunity	31	41	415
		Against uni- or bi-polarity	10		
	Regional Leader	Regional motor and proposing force	132	147	
		Promotes deeper regional integration	15		
	International Cooperation Advocate	Strong advocate for cooperation	111	227	
		Example setter	116		

Figure 6: Result of inductive QCA of 22 speeches of Emmanuel Macron from 2017 to 2024, following the coding sheet of Figure 5. Source: Leoni Schmitz.

It appears that this NRC is numerically the most prevalent, accounting for 415 out of the 620 units analyzed in Emmanuel Macron's speeches, which represents about 66% of all analyzed units.

2. Interpretation

At this point, while the NRC has been identified, categorized, coded, and quantitatively analyzed, a formal definition is still required. Consequently, this paper defines the collaborative NRC, as hypothesized from the literature review, as follows:

A Multilateral Regional Cooperator (MRC) actively engages in multilateralism, viewing it as crucial for regional and global stability. Rejecting uni- or bi-polarity, this role advocates for a multipolar world order based on cooperation and mutual respect.

As a regional leader, it initiates and drives policies that promote deeper integration and cooperation among neighboring states or within the regional organization it is a part of. By setting an example through its cooperative practices, it inspires others to adopt similar approaches to regional and global challenges.

Since this paper has found that this Multilateral Regional Cooperator role prevails in Emmanuel Macron's national role conception for France, the following sections will focus on elaborating and justifying this NRC and the categories⁷ that compose it.

Multilateral World Order Defender

According to the coding sheet and the definition provided by the NRC, the concept of a "World Order Defender" comprises two intrinsic key elements. Firstly, states endorsing this role reject any world order that is not multipolar. Secondly, they view a multipolar world order as a significant opportunity.

What Macron calls "effective multilateralism" (Macron, 2021a, 2022d, 2022f, 2023b) where multilateralism gets rethought, through concrete answers to contemporary problems, the emergence of new actors, and the emergence of new coalitions, is not just "an act of faith", it is for Emmanuel Macron, "an operational necessity" (Macron, 2020).

But what is it necessary for? According to Emmanuel Macron, and as cited in various speeches from 2021 to 2023, effective Multilateralism is crucial for multiple reasons.

From an economic point of view, multilateralism is the necessary condition to keep the world from fragmenting, which would harm investment and economic growth (Macron, 2022f); from a diplomatic point of view, multilateralism forces states to reinvest energy and find innovative solutions in international organizations like the UN or the WTO (Macron, 2019b); from a strategic perspective, multilateralism allows France to "realize our vision of the world" (Macron, 2017b) based on justice, human rights, free trade and cooperation (Macron, 2018a); lastly, from a world order perspective,

⁷ See Figure 5

multilateralism is what enables France to be the partner and the counterpart of big powers, not just their obligated subject (Macron, 2017c) multilateralism is the key to France's independence.

All these reasons, both internationally commendable and nationally beneficial, naturally explain Emmanuel Macron's fervor for multilateralism and his rejection of other world orders. This rejection is partly self-interested, as Macron believes that acting outside the multilateral framework is not in France's best interest (Macron, 2019b); but partly selfless, as he sees multilateralism as the solution for bringing stability to crisis regions (Macron, 2018b).

However, Macron is lucid. Multilateralism is facing numerous challenges and Macron recognizes that the frustrations of the middle classes worldwide who feel left behind by globalization, put multilateralism to the test. Yet, even here, Macron's response does not waver into a "guilty short-termist fascination" (Macron, 2018b) where unilateralism is presented as a solution to this globalization discontent. Instead, he advocates for a reinvention of contemporary globalization through 'effective multilateralism'. Essentially, this rejection of bi- or unipolarity is rooted in Macron's belief that a world where nations turn inward and allow major powers to resolve their differences using the rest of the world as their playground is untenable. Multilateralism is the solution to prevent this from happening.

Regional Leader

Another way to prevent states from turning inward and diving into an era of isolationism, according to Macron, is to leverage the European Union. And that is precisely what he does. In line with the regional leadership dimension of the Multilateral Regional Cooperator NRC, Macron undeniably envisions France as a regional leader. On the one hand, this is exemplified by the fact that 147 out of 620 analyzed units correspond to the category of regional leader. On the other hand, this is supported by the presence of both corresponding subcategories (regional proposing force and advocate for deeper integration) in Emmanuel Macron's speeches.

Indeed Macron undeniably places France as a proposing force within the European Union. His ideas and proposals revolve around several recurring themes, from common defense agreements that aim at a "greater strategic convergence, and bringing European armies closer together" (Macron, 2018c), to more EU-sponsored technology innovation (Macron, 2018b), over increased monetary, fiscal, and social convergence that will allow "better identification of the EU with ideas that matter to young people [...] particularly in the cultural sphere, but also in terms of deepening the Europe of defense and strengthening European migration policy" (Macron, 2017c).

However, France is more than just a driving force on specific chosen issues; France holds substantial ambitions for the European Union. With its cooperative incline and its commitment to multipolarity, France aims to make the EU sovereign and independent. Macron himself states that "a strong and sovereign Europe is one of the best guarantees" for achieving this goal (Macron, 2018a).

Yet, to build this strong, independent, and sovereign European Union, Macron asserts that "we must move faster and more decisively because we are not yet up to date and are too divided as Europeans" (Macron, 2023b). In other words, to achieve these ambitions on the international stage, a more united and integrated EU is essential (Macron, 2023b). The European Union must deepen its integration to project its voice "uniquely and strongly" (Macron, 2022b). Without this deeper integration, the EU will not ever become a significant force in the multilateral and cooperative world that Macron's France envisions.

International Cooperation Advocate

Cooperation, hinted at when examining France as a regional leader, constitutes the third category of the new NRC proposed in this paper. As the literature review highlighted, since 1970, France has undergone multiple domestic and international political changes, all suggesting that a new largely cooperative national role conception had emerged.

This cooperative NRC was foreshadowed in France's increasing integration within the EU, where it views itself as a leader but also in its ties with Africa, its international mediations, and even its internal reforms. As a matter of fact, these aspects, noted in the literature, are all consistently echoed in Emmanuel Macron's speeches.

France is undeniably committed to international cooperation, a theme consistently highlighted in Emmanuel Macron's speeches. Intra-European cooperation is described as "not an option, but a necessity" (Macron, 2018c), and exemplified by Macron through Franco-German collaboration in the Sahel (Macron, 2018b). Extra-European cooperation, on the other hand, is showcased through initiatives like European-Chinese cooperation (Macron, 2022a). But Macron's attachment to cooperation is not only regional. Bilateral cooperation outside the regional context is also of significance, as Macron notes the "crucial cooperation with Washington" (Macron, 2018b).

Otherwise more broadly, France is deeply dedicated to cooperation with Africa, which Macron calls "our indispensable ally for Europe to continue playing its full role in world affairs" (Macron, 2019b). This commitment that Macron holds to Africa involves amongst other things adopting joint declarations (Macron, 2017c) and enhancing strategies on security, cultural, and economic issues (Macron, 2018a).

Consequently, on one hand, this cooperation is geographically diverse and, on the other hand, according to Macron, strategically indispensable. There are no solutions to the major challenges of the 21st century without cooperation (Macron, 2019c). "International cooperation may be difficult, but it is objectively imperative," he declared in 2020.

France is willing to demonstrate its commitment to cooperation. Under Emmanuel Macron's presidency, France has sought to join several international organizations. He integrated Martinique, one of France's overseas departments, into CARICOM (Macron, 2023b) and applied for candidate status in the Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization to cooperate internationally on Amazon protection issues⁸ (Macron, 2023b). This example-setting role is inherent in the International Cooperation Advocate dimension of the Multilateral Regional Cooperator NRC, and France is willing to embrace it.

3. Conclusion

This chapter fulfilled two objectives: First, it aimed to demonstrate the relevance of the NRC of Multilateral Regional Cooperator, inductively diagnosed from Emmanuel Macron's speeches. Secondly, it sought to confirm the foreign policy literature on France, which suggested the emergence and establishment of a collaborative national role conception.

In doing so, this chapter showed how the three dimensions of the NRC of the Multilateral Regional Cooperator were significantly reflected in Macron's speeches.

On one hand, it demonstrated how Macron views effective multilateralism as an operational necessity, essential for addressing contemporary challenges and achieving France's vision of a justice-based and cooperative world. On the other hand, it highlighted that the French president sees France as a regional leader within the European Union, thereby calling for deeper and faster European integration to project a strong and unified European voice on the international stage.

The third dimension of this NRC has been substantiated by emphasizing the importance of cooperation for Macron. Since 1970, France has undergone numerous national and international political changes, revealing a new national role concept centered on cooperation. This cooperative dimension has been illustrated through France's increased integration both within and outside Europe, especially in its ties with the African continent. This transformation, deeply rooted in its historical and political trajectory, reflects a deliberate embrace of a cooperative national role conception that is both geographically diverse and strategically imperative. Emmanuel Macron's presidency has not

⁸ France is officially an Amazonian state because of French Guiana.

only reinforced this cooperative stance but also expanded it through international engagements and initiatives. This ultimately confirmed the conjectures made in the literature review.

V. DISCUSSION

This paper was guided by two research questions. First, the one asking if the national role conceptions of Active Independent and Mediator Integrator, identified in 1970, were still representative of France's leadership under Macron's presidency. The second research question interrogated if in re-examining Holsti's NRCs and based on recent literature on French foreign policy, a more collaborative NRC had been identified.

In addressing the first research question, Chapter I examined the NRC of Active Independent and found that, despite its presence in Macron's speeches, it firstly only accounted for 16% of all analyzed units, which diminished its status as an all-encompassing NRC. And secondly, it found that the Active Independent NRC was subject to numerous contradictions and counter-examples that undermined its credibility. Unless considerable definitional work has been undertaken on the notions of independence and on what it means not to have military commitments, this NRC can no longer be used as such.

Chapter II, which analyzed the NRC of Mediator/Integrator, encountered far fewer invalidating contradictions. It found that the Mediator Integrator NRC remains largely applicable under the Macron Presidency, though it may require some adjustment, as Macron often refers to these activities using the term 'balancing power' rather than Mediator/Integrator.

Chapter III introduced a new NRC relevant to France's current presidency, defined in this paper as the NRC of Multilateral Regional Integrator. This NRC is supported not only by the quantitative analysis of the data but also by the underlying dynamics in Macron's speeches, giving it substantial legitimacy.

In so doing, this paper contributes to the research on national role conceptions by examining and updating France's most prominent NRCs identified in the literature. These reexaminations call for a semantic redefinition of the Active Independent NRC (in the French case) and a renaming of the Mediator/Integrator NRC (*ibid*). Additionally, the paper presents a new national role conception namely the one of Multilateral Regional Integrator. Considering the lack of updates in the literature regarding French NRCs this examination was essential to keep this explanatory constructivist theory relevant.

However, several points should be highlighted regarding the analysis conducted in this research.

Regarding the results: The results are, by all means, partly a consequence of the data selection criteria and process. The data was chosen based on the research questions and the hypothesis derived from the literature on French foreign policy, i.e. not all of Macron's speeches were considered. Speeches more focused on national issues likely contained more chauvinistic units, which, if included, might have changed the quantitative data of this thesis. Similarly, if other international topics outside the 'narrow' scope of academic international relations (e.g., economics) had been considered, different conclusions might have been reached as well.

Regarding the new national role conception identified: an attentive reader of Holsti will notice that what this paper refers to as the "second dimension" or the second sub-category of Multilateral Regional Cooperator (see Figure 5), namely Regional Leader, is a national role conception in its own right, already identified by Holsti in 1970.

The question then arises: why not simply reuse and update the concept of "Regional Leader" to characterize the role Macron perceives for France?

Holsti defined the national role conception of "Regional Leader" as:

“The themes for this national role conception refer to duties or special responsibilities that a government perceives for itself in its relation to states in a particular region with which it identifies, or to cross-cutting subsystems such as international communist movements”. (Holsti, p.261)

By choosing not to extend Holsti's concept of Regional Leader to the multilateral and cooperative aspects inherent to the Multilateral Regional Leader, and instead to formulate a new NRC, this paper touches upon an important issue regarding the scope of NRC definitions. At first glance, the NRC of Regional Leader might seem appropriate, as it not only encapsulates France's desire to integrate further into the European Union but also its desire to be a leader of it. However, this thesis argues for caution as several points of contentions illustrate the need to depart from Holsti's narrow definition and implement a new role conception.

Indeed, equating the new NRC of Multilateral Regional Cooperator and the older one of Regional Leader would have implied two things: If this paper had decided to stretch the 1970 definition of regional leader (for it to not only encapsulate a regional dimension but also an internationally cooperative and multilateral one), it would have lost the analytical value of the original NRC. What is the value of a concept so diluted that essentially anything could fit in it?

If this paper had decided to ignore the internationally cooperative and multilateral aspects of the new national role conception, it would have compromised on thoroughness of the research and thereby not have contributed to NRC research in any way.

In the face of this realization, this paper chose to formulate a new NRC to firstly, not dilute the 1970 definition of the NRC of regional leader, and secondly to not lose any value of the newly identified NRC. Further research is duly required to determine the scope of National Role conceptions' definitions.

VI. CONCLUSION

The premise of this thesis is simple. Given that since their identification in 1970 by K.J. Holsti, France's national role conceptions had not been reexamined thoroughly, yet continued to serve as fundamental references for addressing France's NRCs, a reexamination was sorely needed. To that, a reexamination is especially important considering the numerous domestic and international changes that have shaped contemporary French history.

To develop this premise, this paper employed a qualitative content analysis method in two distinct ways. First, it used deductive QCA to examine the contemporary validity of the two, still commonly referenced NRCs identified by Holsti. Then, it employed an inductive QCA method to empirically identify a new prominent NRC under Emmanuel Macron's presidency.

On the one hand, the analysis determined that the Active Independent NRC, although still identifiable, required significant redefinition due to frequent contradictions between Holsti's original definition and Macron's speeches. On the other hand, the analysis further established that the Mediator/Integrator NRC remains valid and in use, though Macron prefers the term "balancing power". This thesis therefore suggested the possibility of a semantic adjustment.

In the third chapter, the paper inductively identified a new national role conception under Macron's presidency: the NRC of Multilateral Regional Integrator. This finding confirmed the hypothesis derived from the literature review about France's recent history and European integration.

It was highly necessary to undertake a thorough reexamination of France's national role conceptions for several reasons:

Firstly, it is crucial for academic theories that translate into empirical knowledge to be regularly updated to maintain their analytical and explanatory power. This necessity also motivated other recent works, such as Grossman et al.'s 2022 book, which aimed to analyze how the numerous 21st-century international changes redefine the role conceptions of certain international actors.

It is regrettable, however, that in these analyses, the authors primarily focused on validating the hypotheses they had derived from the foreign policy literature of the countries in question (with France notably absent from these role-change analyses), rather than also scrutinizing the validity of

previous national role conception. In other words, the majority of these analyses predominantly concentrated on tasks similar to those outlined in Chapter III of this study, placing a significantly greater emphasis on the causes of changes and adjustments in national role conceptions. These analyses did not include the foundational work encompassed in chapters I and II.

Secondly, this thesis is important to foster constructive academic discussions. It is unfortunate that the lack of recent reexamination has led to somewhat distorted premises in other works. For instance, while this paper has partially invalidated the NRC of Active Independent, many journals and commentaries (e.g. Droin et al., 2023; Chivvis and Droin, 2017; Rapnouil and Shapiro, 2022) still employ this notion to describe France's foreign policy. From a validity perspective, this active independence is more the shadow of a stereotype than an uncontested truth.

Thirdly, this thesis is significant because it identifies a national conception of role that is currently valid for Macron's presidency, thereby elucidating France's foreign policy for international policy-makers and humbly contributing to fill the IR theory-practice gap.

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