

## **CONSTRUCTIVIST ASPECTS OF THE UN SECURITY COUNCIL'S PERMANENT MEMBERS' CONDUCT: THE CASE OF FRANCE AND THE UNITED KINGDOM**

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### **Abstract**

While all five permanent members (P5) of the UN Security Council (UNSC) have the same statutory rights and privileges, not all of them use these rights and privileges in the same way. These differences cannot be explained solely by the differences in material factors between the P5 – the differences in power or wealth – as realist theories in IR would claim, but the explanation should involve the ideational factors behind them as well, as constructivist theories in IR would argue. This paper deals with the main constructivist aspects – the ideas, identities, norms, beliefs – of the behavior in and around the UNSC of two permanent members – France and the United Kingdom (UK). These two countries have many similarities in their positions and behavior in the Council, which are mainly expressed in these two countries being pro-active in the UNSC and in advocating for a proactive UNSC in accordance with its responsibilities; in their non-use of their veto in the UNSC; and in their pledges to reform the UNSC, especially the use of the veto by the permanent members in cases of mass atrocities. There are also some differences between France and the UK, stemming mainly from the different identities they build and present for themselves on the international scene and the role of their countries in international politics, related to the importance of Africa for France; to their different relationships with the USA; and their different relationships with the EU.

**Keywords:** UN Security Council; France; United Kingdom (UK); international peace and security; constructivism.

### **I. Introduction**

As the international community's primary institution tasked with maintaining international peace and security, the UN Security Council (UNSC) is always under criticism when it is ineffective at addressing certain conflicts, especially when this ineffectiveness is because the Council is blocked by one of the major powers. This body which consists of fifteen UN member states, where each state has one vote, adopts its decisions for international peace with a minimum of nine votes, and in these nine votes, the votes of the five permanent members (P5) must be included.<sup>1</sup> But despite the same statutory opportunities under the UN Charter, not all P5 – USA, China, Russia, France and the UK – act similarly in and around the UNSC. Some permanent members, for instance, have not used their veto for more than thirty years, whereas others actively use it; some permanent members are more committed to reform of the Council than others; finally, some permanent members want a more active UNSC that would use, if necessary, more force to fulfill its responsibilities, while others want a less active one. The difference in behavior of the

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<sup>1</sup> Charter of the United Nations, 24 October 1945, 1 UNTS XVI, Art. 27.

permanent members could be explained by the difference in the material factors between these countries – different territory and population size, different military and economic power, or different geographical locations – as it is most often done by the proponents of the realist theory in international relations (IR). However, this does not explain, or it does not explain fully, why, despite the material differences, the P5, which have equal privileges, rights and responsibilities in the UNSC, use these privileges, rights and responsibilities differently and, hence, behave differently in and towards this institution. This is better explained by constructivist theories in IR, according to which an equally important factor to material considerations in explaining a state's behavior in international politics is its ideational considerations – its beliefs, values, identities, or norms.<sup>2</sup> For constructivists, material factors do not speak for themselves – behind material factors there is always an ideational context which frames and clarifies their use, thus explaining the behavior of the state.

This paper deals with the main constructivist aspects – the ideas, positions, identities, beliefs – of the behavior in and around the UNSC of two permanent members – France and the United Kingdom (UK).<sup>3</sup> These two countries have many similarities in their positions and behavior in and towards the Council, and that is why they will be analyzed together. The similarities, which will be presented in the first part of this paper, are due primarily to the similar position they find themselves in international politics, as well as to the similar democratic values and views on international law and international relations (and probably also geographical position) that these two countries share. These are mainly expressed in these two countries being proactive in the UNSC and in advocating for a proactive UNSC in accordance with its responsibilities; in their non-use of their veto in the UNSC; and in their pledges to reform the UNSC, especially the use of the veto by the permanent members in cases of mass atrocities. Certainly, there are also some differences between France and the UK, stemming mainly from the different identities they build and present for themselves on the international scene and the role of their countries in international politics, related to the importance of Africa for France; to their different relationships with the USA; and their different relationships with the EU, which will be explained in the second part of this paper.

## II. Similarities

The similarities between France and the UK for the Security Council as an institution and for their role in it, are mainly due to the “necessity to manage [the] relative decline in [their] power” after the end of the Second World War.<sup>4</sup> They are no longer considered the superpowers they were in the past, but rather “middle powers”. During the Cold War, these two countries were largely marginalized by the dominance of the two superpowers, and although they can and do project their military power beyond their borders today, “[t]he era of the Falklands War and of French nuclear

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<sup>2</sup> Christian Reus-Smit, *Constructivism*, in Scott Burchill, Andrew Linklater, Richard Devetak, Jack Donnelly, Matthew Paterson, Christian Reus-Smit & Jacqui True (eds.) *Theories of International Relations*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, pp.188-212.

<sup>3</sup> For the constructivist aspects of the USA, see, Ljupcho Stojkovski, *Constructivist Aspects of the UN Security Council's Permanent Members' Conduct: The Case of the USA*, Political Thought No. 57, Year 17, 2019, pp. 5-19.

<sup>4</sup> Thierry Tardy, Dominik Zaum, *France and United Kingdom in the Security Council*, in Sebastian von Einsiedel, David M. Malone and Bruno Stagno Ugarte (eds.), *The UN Security Council in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2016, p.121.

tests in the Pacific is now a historical curiosity.”<sup>5</sup> Today, in the eyes of China, Russia and India, individual European countries do not have the prestige on the world stage that they had some 30 years ago.<sup>6</sup> To be sure, even in the post-Cold War era there are occasional assertive outbursts and leadership steps that restore the sense of power that these countries once had – such as Jacques Chirac's opposition to the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, or the votes of both Britain and France in February 2011, or in June 2025, for the draft resolutions on Palestine, which only the US vetoed – but the fact remains that they are no longer superpowers.<sup>7</sup>

Hence, their permanent seat on the Security Council, together with their status as nuclear powers, is the main reminder of their former prestige and power. Furthermore, being put in a position to decide on security matters on a global scale as permanent members of the UNSC, France and the UK consider they have an increased responsibility to make this body function in accordance with the letter and the spirit of the UN Charter. Accordingly, France and the UK are quite committed – politically, financially and militarily – to maintaining and improving the UN system, including the Security Council in particular.

#### A. A Proactive Security Council and Active Permanent Members

France and the UK's position as middle powers, unlike the other three permanent members of the Security Council, allows them to advocate for a more active Council and not to feel threatened in their freedom of action by the activities or decisions the Council produces.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, these two countries share the view that they have a ‘special responsibility’ in the UN,<sup>9</sup> which includes the UNSC as well. They emphasize that the Council should not be deadlocked (by the veto of the permanent members) and thus ineffective in stopping bloodshed around the world, and they often call upon this body to act more decisively to stop certain crises.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, they also often stress that it is crucial for international peace to uphold international law (human rights and humanitarian law) as it represents one cornerstone for the prevention and resolution of conflicts.<sup>11</sup>

All these views on the role and activity of the UNSC are deeply connected to France and the UK's views on human rights, responsibility, and use of force, which are similar in many aspects. Firstly, both countries put strong emphasis on the respect of human rights and democratic principles as essential parts of their international identity and consider their defense and promotion

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<sup>5</sup> Christopher Hill, *Powers of a Kind: The Anomalous Position of France and the United Kingdom in World Politics*, International Affairs, vol.92, is.2, 2016, pp. 393-414, p. 397.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p. 397, 398; Thierry Tardy, Dominik Zaum, *France and United Kingdom in the Security Council*, in Sebastian von Einsiedel, David M. Malone and Bruno Stagno Ugarte (eds.), *The UN Security Council in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, p. 126.

<sup>8</sup> Thierry Tardy, Dominik Zaum, *France and United Kingdom in the Security Council*, in Sebastian von Einsiedel, David M. Malone and Bruno Stagno Ugarte (eds.), *The UN Security Council in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, p. 136.

<sup>9</sup> Jason Ralph, Jess Gifkins & Samuel Jarvis, *The United Kingdom's Special Responsibilities at the United Nations: Diplomatic Practice in Normative Context*, The British Journal of Politics and International Relations vol.22, is.2. 2019.

<sup>10</sup> See for example, one of the latest statements by France's special envoy to the UN at the open debate on the promotion of international peace and security through multilateralism in Esra Taskin & Seda Sevensan, *France Urges Greater African Representation on UN Security Council*, AA, 23 July 2025 available at <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/france-urges-greater-african-representation-on-un-security-council/3639141>

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

key aspects of their foreign policies.<sup>12</sup> Both countries react to violations of human rights in other countries, especially if the violations are on a massive scale, which sometimes include the invocation of the right of states to intervene (*droit d'ingérence*) militarily in cases of mass suffering. This is why both countries support a right of a 'humanitarian intervention', if it is necessary to stop mass atrocities, although it must be added that this right is always accompanied by a duty of protection (*devoir d'ingérence*) that states have of populations that are suffering.<sup>13</sup> Thus, both France and the UK have been supportive of the 'Responsibility to Protect' (R2P) norm, which was adopted at the UN Summit in 2005 and replaced the debate on humanitarian intervention with a wider paradigm that included reaction (so-called 'collective action' under Pillar 3 of R2P) but also prevention and assistance to the population suffering mass atrocities<sup>14</sup> (though the UK often still uses the language of humanitarian intervention instead of R2P). In this regard, France, for instance, considers R2P as a "principle of action"<sup>15</sup>, meaning that the UN Security Council, which is the body invested with the power to authorize collective action in the name of R2P, should not be blocked or inactive when there are mass atrocities on the ground.

In addition to advocating for a more active Security Council, France and the United Kingdom are two of the most active permanent members in the Council. Their activity is seen in several areas. To begin with, France and the UK (individually, jointly, or with other countries) are sponsors or "penholders", and have supported two-thirds of all draft resolutions in the Security Council in the first three decades after the Cold War.<sup>16</sup> Although they are divided on the basis of individual national priorities in the areas they draft – France is the leader on resolutions on sub-Saharan Africa and its former colonies, and the UK leads primarily in "thematic resolutions" – the two countries support each other in the proposals they make.<sup>17</sup> For instance, out of over 800 draft resolutions submitted from 2000 to 2013, France and the UK differed in voting on these resolutions in only 11 cases (one country abstained on the other's proposals).<sup>18</sup> Significant for these two countries, probably due to their declining power but also due to their desire to contribute and remain relevant, is that they are leaders in drafting and resolving a large number of so-called horizontal issues that have security aspects and that transcend national borders – such as climate change, poverty, health, migration, and the like.<sup>19</sup>

The second main area where the activity of France and the United Kingdom is reflected is in their significant contribution to UN peacekeeping missions. The contribution is primarily financial, in the budget of these missions, where for the 2024-2025 budget year, the UK and France

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<sup>12</sup> David Grealy & Jamie Gaskarth, *Human Rights and British Foreign Policy: Case Studies in Middle Power Diplomacy*, Cambridge Review of International Affairs, vol.36, is.4, 2023, pp.467-473; Christian Lequesne, *Support for Democracy and Human Rights in France*, Research Report Freedom House, 2014.

<sup>13</sup> Edward Newman, *Exploring the UK's Doctrine of Humanitarian Intervention*, International Peacekeeping, vol.28, is.4, pp.632-660; Eglantine Stauton, *France and the Responsibility to Protect: A Tale of Two Norms*, International Relations, 2018, pp.1-22.

<sup>14</sup> For more on R2P and its difference with humanitarian intervention, see Ljupcho Stojkovski, *Sovereignty under Threat? Responsibility to Protect and the Understanding of Sovereignty*, Journal of Law and Politics, vol.2 iss.1, 2021, pp. 13-22.

<sup>15</sup> Débat interactif informel sur la Responsabilité de protéger, *Intervention prononcée par M. François Delattre, Représentant permanent de la France auprès des Nations Unies*, New York, 8 September 2015, available at <https://www.globalr2p.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/2015-IID-France-Fr.pdf>

<sup>16</sup>Ibid. p.124.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. pp. 125, 128, 129.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p. 124.

<sup>19</sup> Christopher Hill, *Powers of a kind: the anomalous position of France and the United Kingdom in world politics*, International Affairs, vol.92, is.2, 2016, 393-414, p. 408.

are the fifth and the sixth largest contributors to these missions respectively (5.36% and 5.29%), only behind the United States (26.95%), China (18.69%), Japan (8.03%), and Germany (6.11%).<sup>20</sup> Similar to the other permanent members of the UNSC, both France and the United Kingdom contribute very few troops to UN-led missions,<sup>21</sup> but France, for example, has made a large contribution to missions mandated but not led by the UN, participating with 5-9,000 troops annually for more than ten years in the previous decade.<sup>22</sup> The United Kingdom, on the other hand, makes additional voluntary contributions in support of UN peacekeeping missions and is the leading donor to the peacebuilding fund.<sup>23</sup> Finally, both countries send a significantly higher number of political and research missions to countries in crisis/conflict compared to the US, China, and Russia.<sup>24</sup>

### *b. The Use of the Veto*

The second major similarity in the behavior in and towards the Security Council between France and the UK is that both countries have not used their veto right even once since the end of the Cold War. This is completely different from the other three permanent members, who continue to actively use this right although with different frequency – the USA has more than halved its use after the Cold War (and, in fact, almost 90% of its vetoes in the post-Cold war period (21 out of 24 total vetoes) are for the Israeli-Palestinian issue), Russia has also casted fewer vetoes after the Cold war than during it, but the trend in the last decade and a half is of its increased use compared to the first two decades after the Cold war, and China is the only permanent member that has casted more vetoes in the three and a half decades after the Cold War than it did in the four decades during the Cold War.<sup>25</sup> Several explanations can be given for the complete non-use of the veto by France and the UK after the Cold War. First, the non-use of the veto can be explained by the need to be responsible and constructive members of the Security Council and thus justify their place there, given that they are weaker than the other three permanent states.<sup>26</sup> In addition, not using the veto has a practical value for them – knowing that today they are only ‘middle powers’, the only way they can influence world events today is if they act together with the more powerful states and not

<sup>20</sup> United Nations Peacekeeping, *How We Are Funded*, available at <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/how-we-are-funded>

<sup>21</sup> France, for example, sent fewer than 900 troops to UN peacekeeping missions in 2016, out of a global total of 102,000 peacekeepers, and the UK only 345. Thierry Tardy, *France: Unlikely Return to UN Peacekeeping*, International Peacekeeping, 2016, vol.23, is.5, 2016, pp.610-629, p.610; UN, *Contributions to United Nations Peacekeeping Operations*, available at [https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/dec16\\_1.pdf](https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/dec16_1.pdf). In 2025, out of total of 61.577 peacekeepers, France has sent 698, whereas the UK only 275. UN, *Uniformed Personnel Contributing Countries by Ranking*, available at [https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/02\\_country\\_ranking\\_86\\_may\\_2025.pdf](https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/02_country_ranking_86_may_2025.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> Thierry Tardy, *France: Unlikely Return to UN Peacekeeping*, International Peacekeeping, 2016, vol.23, is.5, 2016, pp.610-629, p. 620.

<sup>23</sup> David Curran, Paul D. Williams, *The United Kingdom and the United Nations peace operations*, International Peacekeeping, vol.23, is.5, 2016, pp.630-651, p.632.

<sup>24</sup> Thierry Tardy, Dominik Zaum, *France and United Kingdom in the Security Council*, in Sebastian von Einsiedel, David M. Malone and Bruno Stagno Ugarte (eds.), *The UN Security Council in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, p.128.

<sup>25</sup> On the exact statistics and resources on the veto use by the P5, see Ljupcho Stojkovski, *Stuck Again? Does the ‘New Cold War’ Impact the Functioning of the UN Security Council?*, HESTIA Review, vol. 2, 2024, pp. 11-22, p. 13-16; Ljupcho Stojkovski, *The UN Security Council Through the Numbers: How Does the Council Maintain International Peace in Practice?*, Journal of Balkan Studies, 5, special issue (2025), pp.29-48, p.35,36.

<sup>26</sup> Thierry Tardy, Dominik Zaum, *France and United Kingdom in the Security Council*, in Sebastian von Einsiedel, David M. Malone and Bruno Stagno Ugarte (eds.), *The UN Security Council in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, p.128; Christopher Hill, *Powers of a Kind: The Anomalous Position of France and the United Kingdom in World Politics*, International Affairs, vol.92, is.2, 2016, 393-414, p. 404.

block their actions.<sup>27</sup> Other factors influencing their non-use of the veto are the fear of international isolation, the reopening of crisis hotspots in post-colonial countries in the resolution of which they were involved, as well as the preservation of international reputation.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, sometimes, they can hide behind the veto of the United States, and less often, of China and Russia.<sup>29</sup> Finally, it is not to be expected that they will use the veto very often, considering the fact that, as was mentioned above, these two countries are the sponsors of the largest number of draft resolutions in the Security Council.

### *c. Reform of the UNSC*

France and the United Kingdom have a similar position on the issue of Security Council reform. In terms of enlargement, as the most common proposal for reform of the Council,<sup>30</sup> their principled position is that they are in favor of enlargement, as long as it does not threaten their place in the Council.<sup>31</sup> But, as Hill points out, it is easy for these two countries to declaratively say that they are in favor of enlargement when they know that China, for example, will veto any proposal that includes Japan.<sup>32</sup> It is even easier to make such a commitment in conditions when there is no consensus among the other UN member states on which format of enlargement will be accepted and which countries will be candidates. The same is true for the reform that focuses on improving the working methods of the Security Council. Publicly, they advocate for improving the working methods, but according to diplomats and experts on the situation, their position expressed behind the scenes is similar to that of their colleagues from the United States, Russia and China – they do not want a change in the status quo.<sup>33</sup> The impression is that these two states, similar to the other three permanent members,<sup>34</sup> want to be on the "right side" of the discussion when it comes to reforming the Security Council and maintaining their reputation as a responsible permanent member, rather than wanting real change.<sup>35</sup>

However, unlike the other three permanent members, these two countries, and especially France, are also taking concrete steps to reform the Security Council. Both countries, for instance, are supporters of and have signed the "Accountability, Coherence and Transparency" Code of Conduct, that calls for a general and positive pledge by all UNSC members (not all the P5) to support an action by the Council aimed at preventing or stopping mass atrocity crimes and a specific pledge not to vote against credible draft resolutions at the Council whose goal is to prevent

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> See, Ljupcho Stojkovski, *Some Perspectives on the UN Security Council Reform Proposals*, Iustinianus Primus Law Review, vol.13, is.2, 2022.

<sup>31</sup> Thierry Tardy, Dominik Zaum, *France and United Kingdom in the Security Council*, in Sebastian von Einsiedel, David M. Malone and Bruno Stagno Ugarte (eds.), *The UN Security Council in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, p. 133.

<sup>32</sup> Christopher Hill, *Powers of a Kind: The Anomalous Position of France and the United Kingdom in World Politics*, International Affairs, vol.92, is.2, 2016, 393-414, p. 404.

<sup>33</sup> Thierry Tardy, Dominik Zaum, *France and United Kingdom in the Security Council*, in Sebastian von Einsiedel, David M. Malone and Bruno Stagno Ugarte (eds.), *The UN Security Council in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, p. 134, 135.

<sup>34</sup> See, Ljupcho Stojkovski, *Some Perspectives on the UN Security Council Reform Proposals*, Iustinianus Primus Law Review, vol.13, is.2, 2022.

<sup>35</sup> Thierry Tardy, Dominik Zaum, *France and United Kingdom in the Security Council*, in Sebastian von Einsiedel, David M. Malone and Bruno Stagno Ugarte (eds.), *The UN Security Council in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, p.135



or end these crimes,<sup>36</sup> which may be considered an attempt at a *de facto* reform of the UNSC.<sup>37</sup> An even stronger example of the genuine commitment to a *de facto* reform of the Council is the French-Mexican initiative to limit the use of the veto in the four R2P situations of mass crimes – genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and ethnic cleansing – the so-called “Responsibility not to veto” (RN2V) initiative. In 2013, sparked by the vetoes of Russia and China in the war in Syria, France called for a voluntary suspension of the use of the veto by the P5, without a formal amendment to the UN Charter, in cases of mass atrocities (and when the “vital national interests” of a P5 member are not at stake in that particular case).<sup>38</sup> In 2015, on the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the UN, France, together with Mexico, further developed this idea and prepared a “Political Declaration on Suspension of Veto Powers in Cases of Mass Atrocity”.<sup>39</sup> To date, 107 countries have signed the Declaration<sup>40</sup>, and France, which has constantly repeated its calls for a reform of the veto in cases of mass atrocities<sup>41</sup>, has vowed in the past to never use its veto power in these situations.<sup>42</sup> Similarly, the UK has pledged that it will never vote against a credible action to prevent mass atrocities in the UNSC,<sup>43</sup> and although the UK has to date not signed the French-Mexican Declaration, it is positively inclined towards RN2V initiatives.<sup>44</sup>

### III. Differences

Taking all of the above into account, it can be noted that the position in which Britain and France find themselves today, as middle powers and members of the Security Council, is quite delicate. On the one hand, they are not only regional powers, but are also exposed to events and crises in other parts of the world, and on the other hand, they no longer enjoy the capacities of superpowers, nor do they have the systemic responsibilities that they once had. Therefore, they

<sup>36</sup> Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, *Code of Conduct Regarding Security Council Action against Genocide, Crimes Against Humanity or War Crimes*, 14 December 2015, available at <https://www.globalr2p.org/resources/code-of-conduct-regarding-security-council-action-against-genocide-crimes-against-humanity-or-war-crimes/>

<sup>37</sup> See on this, Ljupcho Stojkovski, *Some Perspectives on the UN Security Council Reform Proposals*, Iustinianus Primus Law Review, vol.13, is.2, 2022, p.6,7.

<sup>38</sup> Permanent Mission of France to the United Nations in New York, *24 September 2013 – Opening of the 68<sup>th</sup> session of the United Nations General Assembly – Statement by Mr. François Hollande, President of the Republic*, available at <https://onu.delegfrance.org/24-September-2013-Opening-of-the> ; Laurent Fabius, *A Call for Self-Restraint at the U.N.*, New York Times, 4 October 2013, available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/04/opinion/a-call-for-self-restraint-at-the-un.html>

<sup>39</sup> Political Statement on the Suspension of the Veto in Case of Mass Atrocities <https://www.globalr2p.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/2015-Political-Declaration-on-the-Suspension-of-the-Veto-En.pdf>

<sup>40</sup> Permanent Mission of France to the United Nations in New York, *The Security Council of the United Nations*, available at <https://onu.delegfrance.org/The-Security-Council-of-the-United-Nations>

<sup>41</sup> France in the United States: Embassy of France in Washington D.C., *Speech by M. Emmanuel Macron, President of the Republic (New York, September 25, 2024)*, 1 October 2024, available at <https://franceintheus.org/spip.php?article11573>

<sup>42</sup> Permanent Mission of France to the United Nations in New York, *Address by President Hollande to the UN General Assembly*, 2015, available at <https://onu.delegfrance.org/Address-by-President-Hollande-to-the-United-Nations>

<sup>43</sup> Statement by Ambassador Matthew Rycroft of the UK mission to the UN at the ACT Group Event on the Code of Conduct, Foreign & Commonwealth Office, 1 October 2015, available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/im-proud-to-say-that-the-united-kingdom-is-signing-up-to-the-act-code-of-conduct>

<sup>44</sup> For more details on RN2V and the P5’s attitudes and actions towards these initiatives, see Ljupcho Stojkovski, *The Importance of the Responsibility not to Veto Debate*, in Vasilka Sancin (ed.), “Are we “Manifestly Failing” R2P”, 2017, Faculty of Law, University of Ljubljana, Litteralis Ltd, pp. 87-110.

often rely on soft power and cultural diplomacy, but they must also be quite selective in their diplomatic, political, military and financial engagements.<sup>45</sup> And this is where their main differences begin. They are seen first, in France's attitude and treatment of crises occurring in Africa, in their relationships with the USA, as well as in their relationships with the EU.

#### A. Africa

France's great involvement in Africa is due to its "obsession with status" in international relations.<sup>46</sup> For France, "prestige constitutes an end in itself",<sup>47</sup> and 'rank' is "central to its self-understanding,.. even at times equated to a 'cult of rank'".<sup>48</sup> France's inclusion in the UN after the end of World War II was not due to any political weight that France had at that moment but to the "subtle logic of negotiations among [the] victors" of the war.<sup>49</sup> The French, however, were convinced of their international importance and greatness thanks to de Gaulle's narrative that France had endured until liberation and resisted the German invasion by participating in the Battle of Normandy.<sup>50</sup> But the feeling of fragility remained, thus, Africa is of immense importance to France – "[t]hanks to Africa, France continues to enjoy an international status based on its linguistic, cultural, economic and diplomatic influence in international institutions through the votes of the states of black Africa."<sup>51</sup> France is the largest penholder of resolutions in the Security Council on African countries that were its former colonies, and it sends a large number of its troops to these countries, under the UN heading, in accordance with individual international agreements concluded with these countries when it abandoned its former colonies.<sup>52</sup> In three cases, for instance, in former French colonies in Africa where there were UN peacekeeping missions – in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI)<sup>53</sup>, Mali (MINUSMA)<sup>54</sup>, and the Central African Republic (MINUSCA)<sup>55</sup> – it were French troops that were specifically authorized by the UNSC to (support the missions in the) use force to protect civilians. France also donates large funds for the development of these countries and maintains a linguistic link with them through the Francophonie association.<sup>56</sup> To be sure, France has been criticized for clientelism and neo-imperialism, namely, that through its

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<sup>45</sup> Christopher Hill, *Powers of a Kind: The Anomalous Position of France and the United Kingdom in World Politics*, International Affairs, vol.92, is.2, 2016, 393-414, p.408, 409.

<sup>46</sup> Daniel Bourmaud, *France in Africa: African Politics and French Foreign Policy*, Issue: A Journal of Opinion, vol.23, no.2 (1995), pp.58-62, p. 59-61.

<sup>47</sup> Eglantine Stauton, *France and the Responsibility to Protect: A Tale of Two Norms*, International Relations, 2018, pp.1-22, p. 9, citing Alfred Grosser, *Le Rôle et le Rang*, in *La France et l'ONU depuis 1945*.

<sup>48</sup> Jack Holland & Eglantine Staunton, 'BrOthers in Arms': France, the Anglosphere and AUKUS, International Affairs 100:2, 2024, pp.711-729, p.718, citing Smouts, *Political Aspects of Peace-keeping Operations*.

<sup>49</sup> Daniel Bourmaud, *France in Africa: African Politics and French Foreign Policy*, Issue: A Journal of Opinion, vol.23, no.2 (1995), pp.58-62, p. 60. За ова види повеќе in David Bosco: *Five to Rule them All: The UN Security Council and the Making of the Modern World*, Oxford University Press, p. 24-38.

<sup>50</sup> Antonio V. Menéndez Alarcón, *French and US Approaches to Foreign Policy*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2014, p. 14.

<sup>51</sup> Daniel Bourmaud, *France in Africa: African Politics and French Foreign Policy*, Issue: A Journal of Opinion, vol.23, no.2 (1995), pp.58-62, p. 61.

<sup>52</sup> Thierry Tardy, *France: Unlikely Return to UN Peacekeeping*, International Peacekeeping, 2016, p.621; Thierry Tardy, *The Reluctant Peacekeeper: France and the Use of Force in Peace Operations*, Journal of Strategic Studies, vol.37, no.5, 2014, pp.770-792.

<sup>53</sup> UN Doc. S/RES/1975, 30 March 2011.

<sup>54</sup> UN Doc. S/RES/2100, 25 April 2013; UN Doc. S/RES/2164, 25 June 2014.

<sup>55</sup> UN Doc. S/RES/2149 10 April 2014.

<sup>56</sup> Daniel Bourmaud, *France in Africa: African Politics and French Foreign Policy*, Issue: A Journal of Opinion, vol.23, no.2 (1995), pp.58-62;



actions in Africa it pursues its own interests and not the interests of the African countries in which it intervenes,<sup>57</sup> and, hence, that it uses the Security Council to "multilateralize its own foreign policy".<sup>58</sup> As a response to this, in the last several years, France has withdrawn all of its military bases across Africa, leaving only the one in Djibouti.<sup>59</sup> Nevertheless, the fact remains that, unlike the United Kingdom, which does not have such a region in the world today, Africa has been and to some degree still remains an area in which France projects its international power, and in this it significantly differs from the UK.

#### *b. Relationship with the USA*

Another important difference is their relationships with the United States. Since de Gaulle's presidency, France has maintained a "friends, allies, but not aligned" relationship with the USA.<sup>60</sup> This policy rests on the three interconnected views of France for itself: the aforementioned obsession with rank, France's exceptionalism, and having autonomy in its foreign policy. French exceptionalism is based on several factors, namely, "the idea that France is 'the homeland of human rights' and, as such, has a special responsibility to protect and promote them; its permanent seat at the UN Security Council; its capacity to intervene militarily in most of the world; the fact that it is a nuclear power; its economic status; and its cultural influence (in particular, through the *Francophonie*, but also through factors such as French cuisine)."<sup>61</sup> Thus, similar to the USA, which perceives itself as an exceptional power in world politics,<sup>62</sup> France claims the same status for itself, though it also claims that it differs from the US in this regard. Namely, France perceives itself (and the EU, led by France) as a third way, a balancing power, because although the USA is part of the Western bloc, they "do not carry the same humanism", they do not quite share the same values of "sensitivity to climate issues, to equality, to the social equilibrium... attachment to social democracy, to more equality ... culture is more important [for France, and Europe in general]".<sup>63</sup> Finally, France has always wanted to be perceived as independent, as autonomous in conducting its foreign policy, which, together with European integration and maintaining its spheres of influence in Africa and the Middle East, are France's three leading foreign policy orientations.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> See, for example, Daniel Bourmaud, *France in Africa: African Politics and French Foreign Policy*, Issue: A Journal of Opinion, vol.23, no.2 (1995), pp.58-62, p. 61; Thierry Tardy, *France: Unlikely return to UN Peacekeeping*, International Peacekeeping, 2016, p.11; Thierry Tardy, *The Reluctant Peacekeeper: France and the Use of Force in Peace Operations*, Journal of Strategic Studies, vol.37, no.5, 2014, pp.770-792.

<sup>58</sup> Arthur Bouetellis, Alexandra Novosseloff, *Côte d'Ivoire*, in Sebastian von Einsiedel, David M. Malone and Bruno Stagno Ugarte (eds.), *The UN Security Council in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, London, 2016 p. 682.

<sup>59</sup> France 24, *France Hands Back Last Military Bases in Senegal, Ending 65-year Troop Presence*, 17 July 2025, available at <https://www.france24.com/en/africa/20250717-france-to-shut-last-military-bases-in-senegal-ending-65-year-troop-presence>

<sup>60</sup> Jack Holland & Eglantine Staunton, 'BrOthers in Arms': *France, the Anglosphere and AUKUS*, International Affairs 100:2, 2024, pp.711-729, p.718. For the relationship of France and the USA, see Antonio V. Menéndez Alarcón, *French and US Approaches to Foreign Policy*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2014, pp. 23 -29.

<sup>61</sup> Jack Holland & Eglantine Staunton, 'BrOthers in Arms': *France, the Anglosphere and AUKUS*, International Affairs 100:2, 2024, pp.711-729, p.718.

<sup>62</sup> Ljupcho Stojkovski, *Constructivist Aspects of the UN Security Council's Permanent Members' Conduct: The Case of the USA*, Political Thought No. 57, Year 17, 2019, pp. 5-19, p.11-13.

<sup>63</sup> Statements by President Emmanuel Macron, cited in Jack Holland & Eglantine Staunton, 'BrOthers in Arms': *France, the Anglosphere and AUKUS*, International Affairs 100:2, 2024, pp.711-729, p.718, 719.

<sup>64</sup> Stanley Hoffmann, *French Dilemmas and Strategies in the New Europe*, in Robert O. Keohane, Joseph S. Nye & Stanley Hoffmann (eds.) "After the Cold War. International Institutions and State Strategies in Europe 1989-1991", Harvard University Press, 1993, pp.127-147.

On the other hand, the United Kingdom often invokes and relies on the “special relationship” it has with the United States. The special relationship, which has often been disputed by authors and even some politicians, stems from perceived cultural and linguistic similarities but also includes economic, military and historical ties between the two countries.<sup>65</sup> This special relationship is one explanation, for example, of why the UK followed the United States in its invasion of Iraq in 2003, while France did not.<sup>66</sup> The relationship with the United States probably also influences the position that these two countries have on the Israeli-Palestinian issue. France, after ending the Algerian War and withdrawing from its former colonies of Syria and Lebanon, took a pro-Arab position but always maintained good relations with Israel.<sup>67</sup> The United Kingdom, on the other hand, has historically been more likely to support the United States, and therefore Israel, on this issue, as can be seen in the eleven aforementioned resolutions in which France and the UK did not vote identically, where more than half of these cases were on the Palestinian issue.<sup>68</sup> This, however, is not the case in the latest and current situation between Israel and Palestine. As a result of Israel’s ongoing war in Gaza, the severe international crimes committed there, and Israeli policies aimed at denouncing the eventual two-state solution for the long-standing conflict, France announced it will recognize the State of Palestine at the UN General Assembly meeting in September 2025<sup>69</sup>, and the UK announced it will act similarly (though making the recognition conditional),<sup>70</sup> contrary to the USA’s position on this matter. A similar trend is evident in the debates in the UNSC on this matter in the past two years, where the USA vetoed six different draft resolutions. In the voting on the first four drafts, the UK abstained,<sup>71</sup> while in the final two, the UK cast its vote contrary to the USA’s,<sup>72</sup> and voted for the resolutions (France, on the other hand, voted for all six draft resolutions).

### *c. Relationship with the EU*

The last major difference between the UK and France is the relationship these two countries have with the European Union and its implications in the UNSC. Historically, the EU has been of immense importance to France, and it has always been quite involved in the functioning and

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<sup>65</sup> John Dumbrell, *A Special Relationship: Anglo-American Relations in the Cold War and After*, Macmillan Press LTD, 2001; B.J.C. McKercher, *Britain, America and the Special Relationship since 1941*, Routledge, 2017.

<sup>66</sup> Contrary to this, some authors argue that the special relationship was not the main cause for UK’s decision to go along with the USA but that it was due to a different calculation made in the specific case which was guided by British national interests. See, for example, John Dumbrell, *Working with Allies: The United States, United Kingdom, and the War on Terror*, Politics & Policy, vol.34, no.2 (2006), pp. 452-472.

<sup>67</sup> Antonio V. Menéndez Alarcón, *French and US Approaches to Foreign Policy*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2014, p. 33,34, 37,38.

<sup>68</sup> Thierry Tardy, Dominik Zaum, *France and United Kingdom in the Security Council*, in Sebastian von Einsiedel, David M. Malone and Bruno Stagno Ugarte (eds.), *The UN Security Council in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, p.124.

<sup>69</sup> Ambassade de France au Royaume-Uni, *France to Fully Recognize State of Palestine in September*, 29 July 2025, available at <https://uk.ambafrance.org/France-to-fully-recognize-State-of-Palestine-in-September>

<sup>70</sup> The Guardian, *UK to Recognize State of Palestine in September Unless Israel Holds to a Ceasefire*, 30 July 2025, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/jul/29/uk-to-recognise-state-of-palestine-in-september-unless-israel-holds-to-a-ceasefire>

<sup>71</sup> UN Doc. S/PV.9442, 18 October 2023; UN Doc. S/PV.9499, 8 December 2023; UN Doc. S/PV.9552, 20 February 2024; UN Doc. S/PV.9609, 18 April 2024.

<sup>72</sup> UN Doc. S/PV.9790, 20 November 2024; UN Doc. S/PV.9929, 4 June 2025.

direction taken by the Union.<sup>73</sup> Until Brexit, the countries of the European Union consulted with France and the UK in order to formulate their positions before the UN. Countries outside Europe, on the other hand, saw these two permanent members of the Council as a “gateway” to Europe.<sup>74</sup> However, following the Brexit, the role of leader of (Western) Europe in the Security Council remains to be played only by France. France, especially under Macron, believes in the need for a strong EU on the international stage and often emphasizes France’s pivotal role and responsibility to achieve this objective and restore the liberal international order.<sup>75</sup> This does not mean that France would agree, for example, with Germany’s calls to cede its permanent seat in the Security Council to the European Union as a whole,<sup>76</sup> but France is showing openness for greater involvement of the EU in the Council.<sup>77</sup> For instance, France, which was supposed to preside over the Council in March 2019, and Germany, which was then one of the ten elected members of this body and was supposed to preside in April 2019, presided jointly with the Security Council for those two months, which happened for the first time in the Council’s history.<sup>78</sup> On the other hand, following the Brexit, the UK has separated from EU countries with which it has collaborated, as a group, on many issues at the UN.<sup>79</sup> The UK’s reputation and influence in the Security Council have continued to decline immediately after the Brexit,<sup>80</sup> leading some authors to suggest that it might increasingly turn to either the Commonwealth countries or the United States in order to maintain its rank on the international stage,<sup>81</sup> which, however, has not happened to a great degree.

#### IV. Conclusion

This paper dealt with the main constructivist aspects of the behavior in and towards the UN Security Council of two of its permanent members – France and the UK, outlining the main similarities and differences between them in this regard. As former great powers now turned middle powers, both countries, apart from seeing the permanent membership in the Council as a remnant of their former grandeur, consider being a P5 country as an opportunity to satisfy their national interests and influence world politics, but also as an opportunity to exercise their responsibility for international peace and security, and thus impact the functioning of the Security Council. If we add to these two factors the constant sense of duty to justify their privileged place

<sup>73</sup> Antonio V. Menéndez Alarcón, *French and US Approaches to Foreign Policy*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2014, ctp 30-32.

<sup>74</sup> Jess Gifkins, Jason Ralph, Samuel Jarvis, *Diplomats Reveal Concerns Over UK's Waning Influence on UN Security Council*, The Conversation, 26 September 2018, available at <https://theconversation.com/diplomats-reveal-concerns-over-uks-waning-influence-on-un-security-council-103043>

<sup>75</sup> Eglantine Staunton, ‘France is Back’: Macron’s European policy to rescue ‘European civilization’ and the Liberal International Order, *Third World Quarterly* 43:1, 2022, pp.18-34.

<sup>76</sup> Deutsche Welle, *France rejects German wish for EU seat at the UN Security Council*, 29 November 2018, available at <https://www.dw.com/en/france-rejects-german-wish-for-eu-seat-at-un-security-council/a-46513931>

<sup>77</sup> Jan Wouters, *Brexit and its Implications for the EU in the UN Security Council*, in Juan Santos Vara & Ramses A. Wessel (eds.) *The Routledge Handbook on the International Dimension of Brexit*, Routledge, 2021, pp.148-164.

<sup>78</sup> Eglantine Staunton, *The UN Security Council in a post-Brexit world: France and Germany Take the Lead*, The Conversation, 12 March 2019, available at <https://theconversation.com/the-un-security-council-in-a-post-brexit-world-france-and-germany-take-the-lead-113078>

<sup>79</sup> Megan Dee & Karen E. Smith, *UK Diplomacy at the UN after Brexit: Challenges and Opportunities*, The British Journal of Politics and International Relations, vol.19, is.3, 2017, pp.1-16.

<sup>80</sup> Jess Gifkins, Samuel Jarvis, Jason Ralph, *Brexit and the UN Security Council: Declining British Influence?*, *International Affairs* vol. 95, is.6, 2019, pp.1349-1368; Jess Gifkins, Jason Ralph, Samuel Jarvis, *Diplomats reveal concerns over UK's waning influence on UN Security Council*, The Conversation, 26 September 2018, available at <https://theconversation.com/diplomats-reveal-concerns-over-uks-waning-influence-on-un-security-council-103043>

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

in the club of great powers, it becomes clear why France and the United Kingdom are the most active permanent members in the Council, why they call for a more proactive Council, why they are the only two permanent states that have not used their veto since the end of the Cold War, and why they are the only two permanent members (especially France) who support a limitation of their veto powers in cases of mass atrocities. All these similarities are a combination of the similar material factors but also similar ideational factors related to their understandings of human rights, responsibility and use of force. The ideational differences related to the identities they play in world politics lead to some differences among them, mostly expressed in the different behavior towards conflicts in Africa, differences in the relationship towards the USA and differences in their relationship towards the EU. However, despite their differences, both countries demonstrate, and increasingly call for, a more responsible behavior (among the five permanent members) of the UN Security Council, which is very much needed.

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