Almost unnoticed, over the last five years the French government has altered its attitude towards American missile defence plans. The country’s most important defence firms are taking part in the technical development of NMD, even though the political elite have yet to publicly announce their participation in the programme. This paradox can only be understood through an analysis of the specifics of French security culture. Defence industry enjoys a central place in the formulation of French security and defence policy, thanks to Paris’ insistence on its quest for security autonomy. French thinking on defence has also moved closer to that of America, despite a difficult ongoing relationship within NATO. But these policy shifts have to be protected from the accusation of being too dependent on or too close to the United States, as a refusal to accept subordination to Washington is also part of French security culture. At present therefore this policy U-turn is being strategically and linguistically reconstructed as a genuine French project.

The French government is generally considered to be theologically opposed to American plans for National Missile Defence (NMD). Although, following an increase in the number of French troops participating in out-of-area missions, the government had become convinced of the need for theatre missile defence (TMD), and had indeed embarked on a research and
development programme in this area, French opposition to a continental shield had been vociferous. In fact, NMD was initially viewed by the French policy-making elite as a repeat of the ill-fated 1980s Strategic Defence Initiative (SDI), and seen as a source of growing global insecurity rather than security, given that the US plans spelt death to the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty.

The French position though has undergone a ‘silent revolution’ on missile defence since Chirac originally firmly rejected NMD plans in 1999. Proponents of Democratic Peace Theory would suggest this policy shift can be explained by the country's self-understanding, its regional as well as global role, its type of regime, the role it attaches to military alliances and the strength of its military-industrial complex. This article supports these claims to some extent. In part this change is due to a more general acceptance of the Pentagon’s insistence that there is no difference between TMD and NMD, but the policy mood has also changed in several ways in France, most radically after 9/11. An internal rethink of French deterrence logic, carried out by a confined policy-making circle due to the specifics of the French model of democratic governance and so not widely noticed, led to the conclusion that deterrence could no longer be solely understood as nuclear and defensive but also as conventional and offensive. French security analysts also share the US view that the threat of a missile strike is growing. Moreover, the growing importance of network-centric warfare in French military thinking has meant that a premium is being placed on space as a means to link French forces into a comprehensive force package. This new reliance on space has increased the salience of missile defence for French policy-makers.

Perhaps even more important in this regard however, is the role of the French defence industry. Its bid for participation in the development and construction of NMD, and the potential for French firms to thus enter the American defence market, has indubitably
influenced the government’s reasoning on missile defence. Its anti-American rhetoric was gradually silenced as it came into collision with the interests of those industrial segments, which were trying to participate in the technological development of the programme. Thanks to the close entwinement between politics and the armaments industry in France and the value of the armaments industry to the French political elite, political opposition has largely been relinquished although no political statements have been made as yet in favour of NMD. The argument has moved from the theological to the technological, and now focuses on the feasibility rather than the desirability of missile defence. This article therefore argues that the French policy shift on missile defence is a perfect illustration of the way in which Paris’ positions on critical security capabilities are shaped, often without publicity, not just on the grounds of changing French perceptions of their national security needs but also based on the interests of its Military-Industrial Complex. The policy space is further shaped by the institutional structures and cultural context that belong inherently to French security policy.

Our argument goes further then Democratic Peace Theory though in sharing many of the concerns of the culturalist turn in Security Studies; that is the study of national, transnational and international security cultures. A culturalist or social constructivist analysis of French missile defence policy thus far offers much, as it allows for consideration of the ideas, interests and concepts of identity that are moulding the policy and thus writing its narrative or history. National security culture explanations emphasize the nationally specific attributes of security beliefs and policies generated by historical experience, the shared attitudes and beliefs which inform policy-making and the continuities and trends that can be observed. However, the French case makes it clear that economic interests also have a constitutive effect on security policy-making, something that social constructivist analyses of security policy have thus far rarely taken into account. To understand the reasoning shaping the way in
which the French debate has developed therefore, it is important to understand how the factors that shape French defence and security culture interplay and so this article will analyse firstly the constants of French security culture, then consider the changing threat perceptions, the role of the military industrial complex and finally the way in which these factors are articulated in the evolving French policy on missile defence.

The Constants of French Security Culture

The central element of French security culture is the maintenance of national autonomy in security and defence policy. France understands itself to be a global player. The country is proud and protective of its status as a nuclear power and a permanent UN Security Council member. Commentators on French security policy frequently refer to the French aim of independence in national security, the belief in the primacy of the nation state and the search for grandeur or rang as tenets of Gaullism, although in fact they enjoy a much longer historical pedigree. These aims are expressed in three ways: the concentration of security policy power within a small elite, the importance given to military industry and technology in overall economic and technological policy and an unwillingness to be subordinate to any other country, most importantly the United States.

This self-image is supported by the institutional structures of the Fifth Republic, which concentrate security policy power within a comparatively small elite and thus restrict the potential of those outside of this circle to influence security policy. The Fifth Republic is of course a democracy but has some specific features. Using Lijphart’s classifications of democracies, it would be classified as a majoritarian democracy, while commentators on contemporary French politics have additionally pointed towards a presidentialization of the system. The French constitution gives the President huge powers in the area of foreign and
security policy, which have been exercised to the full, while the legislative has few. This means that security decisions tend to be taken by a policy elite, often with little transparency and without the involvement of party politics.

Moreover, a broad consensus exists on the foundations of French security policy. The symbolic status afforded to French nuclear weapons enjoys cross-party support and there is broad agreement on the importance of the defence industrial base for France’s technological and economic future. Similarly, the peace movement in France is almost entirely devoted to a critique of US military policy. Relatively little critical attention is paid to France’s own policies. NGOs have little access or influence. As Cohen argues the resistance of the French state to NGOs, viewing them at worst as a threat to the independence of the state and its democratic spirit,\(^9\) means that particularly in areas seen as vital to the state interest like security, they have little impact.\(^{10}\) Where missile defence is concerned, the lack of a focus issue, unlike in Denmark with Thule or Britain with Fylingdales,\(^{11}\) coupled with the initial very critical stance of the French government has meant that civil society attention to the debate has been and still is minimal. This concentration of power in an uncritical environment means that the security policy elite can construct policy almost at will.

The French quest for autonomy is also observable in its defence industrial policy. As Kolodziej points out,

French arms production and strategic military policy, including the raising, training and equipping of armed forces are inextricably entwined. However much French regimes – royal, imperial or republican – may have differed in composition, claims to legitimacy, or objectives, they could agree that France’s independence, security, big-power role – grandeur no less – required an autonomous military strategy and national armed forces free from outside control.\(^{12}\)
This quest for autonomy necessitated autarky in armaments production. Defence technology though also fitted well into successive French governments’ desire to make developing high technology and shaping systems integration into a key economic development priority.\textsuperscript{13} Varadarajan is correct to point to the important constitutive role of the global economy for security policy, and it is clear that the economic and technological dimensions of security policy are a key part of French security culture.\textsuperscript{14} As Hecht points out, the French policy-making elite based their recovery from a post-World War II identity crisis, with its anxieties about wartime losses, American dominance, decolonization and the demands of reconstruction, by fostering visions of a new technological France, based on industrial development and engineering prowess.\textsuperscript{15} These interlinked aims mean that the defence economy plays a greater role in the French economy than in most other European countries and its administrators, the \textit{Délégation Générale pour l’Armement} (DGA), still remain a powerful force not only within the Defence Ministry but also within the state as a whole. It also means that new military technologies such as missile defence are hard to ignore for the French security elite. The future interests of the defence industrial sector are therefore \textit{de facto} a key part of any wider security policy decision.

The French aim for autonomy in security affairs is no longer completely viable, so the French aim has been Europeanized in recent years. It is rare to find a speech by a French Minister on European Security and Defence Policy, which does not refer to the imperative of maintaining a European defence industrial base. However, French aims for French – or now European – autonomy have meant a difficult relationship with the United States. France remains a semi-detached member of NATO and is open in its belief that Europe, in the shape of the EU, needs fully independent military resources to counter American domination. The view that it is undesirable to have a unipolar world, and that NATO risks becoming an
imperial structure designed to serve the hegemonic power of the United States, is widely spread in France. This has the consequence that security ideas, policy changes and technological developments emanating from the United States are almost inevitably received with mistrust in Paris. France was legitimately concerned that the United States was embracing an NMD system as an alternative to cooperative diplomacy in order to reduce foreign threats. ‘By doing so, France worries, the United States would worsen the security dilemma for its friends and foes without significantly improving security at home’. The political classes in Paris were neither convinced by the technical feasibility of the American plans nor saw NMD as a way of strengthening the strategic balance at that time. Even worse they thought that the shattering of the ABM Treaty not only damaged their own nuclear deterrent but also could lead to a renewed arms race. For a long time therefore the French government was one of the most vehement critics of Washington’s plans on missile defence.

This mistrust though is coupled with a determination that the European Union or France should not fall too far behind the United States in military matters. The latest French security policy document, the Military Programme Law 2003-2008, therefore clearly points out the necessity to

[... ] maintain necessary technical know-how to ensure, through time, the credibility of nuclear deterrence, to develop the resources of protection against new threats, and to preserve an industrial base, essentially European, to manufacture our major defence systems. This means that finding a way to compete on an equal footing with the US is a key element in French security policy.
Changing French Threat Perceptions

These constants of French security culture provide the context for the emerging debate on missile defence in Paris. While the debate was still homogenous throughout the 1990s, focussing only on the risks France might have to face once the US and Russia agreed on a new strategic equilibrium in the post-ABM Treaty era, it diversified with the beginning of the new millennium. The 9/11 terrorist attacks against the United States had a major impact on French thinking about security. The unswerving French desire to play a major role in security politics opened up a debate on whether or not the country’s military capabilities would allow France to deter and confront asymmetrical threats. The ‘2003-2008 Military Programme Law’ states: Having spent too many years for peace to bear fruit, a new effort is now needed to put us in a position to defend the interests of our citizens, in France, Europe and throughout the world.¹⁸

It emphasizes the need to update the 2015 armed forces model, which had been launched by President Chirac in 1996 in order to meet new protection requirements ‘for deployed troops confronted with the danger of massive destruction weapons, notably biological and ballistic weapons for populations within the domestic territory, in particular from mass terrorism’.¹⁹ A few pages later it acknowledges that the imperative protection of its soldiers and citizens is ‘built on the development of a theatre anti-missile capability’.²⁰

Theatre Missile Defence will not be the only protection for French forces. On 8 June 2001, President Chirac announced a major change to French nuclear strategy. In future, its nuclear deterrent has to enable France to protect its vital interests against regional powers possessing nuclear, biological or chemical weapons. This announcement was followed by a controversial debate about whether the current nuclear capabilities could efficiently deter any potential B- and C-weapons aggression. Even if the government has not yet decided definitely to develop
‘mini nukes’, France nevertheless possesses all the necessary technological knowledge and simulation facilities to credibly build them. It is more than likely that Paris intends to establish a new triad, like that mentioned in the American Nuclear Posture Review, built on the interplay between nuclear, offensive and defensive conventional and C4ISR (Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance) capabilities.\textsuperscript{21}

**Broader Efforts to Cope with WMD Proliferation**

These strategic threat perception changes can also be traced in France’s attitude towards the international instruments aimed at ensuring non-proliferation. There are basically two ways to combat ballistic missiles: international agreements and controls to ensure non-proliferation or the building of defensive systems. It is true that France still remains convinced of the sense of international regimes in this area. After all it is only through their maintenance, and above all their further development, that the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and their carrier systems, considered by Paris to be one of the biggest dangers facing France in the future, can be prevented. The government therefore promotes the universal acceptance of the Hague Code of Conduct and seeks to establish effective confidence-building measures between its member states. And it is for this reason that France has submitted some far-reaching proposals relating in particular to the rules on pre-notification of ballistic missile and space launch test firings. Similarly, France acts as the point of contact or secretariat for the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR), organizing at least one meeting per year of the member state delegations. France works particularly here on furthering co-operation with non-members to ensure that the MTCR is better able to act against current ballistic missile proliferation.
However, since the ratification of the Military Programming Law 2003-2008, it has been established that France’s non-proliferation policy is no longer confined to multilateral arms control. Its strategic concept for the prevention of proliferation as well as for dealing with those states having acquired weapons of mass destruction, now includes for the first time the possibility of using military means to enforce French non-proliferation policy goals. In future, France wants to be able to oppose proliferation threats and potential use of WMD with preventive military actions. Paris, in short, is no longer prepared to depend on diplomacy and international organizations to ensure its own security. Once again this shows the strength of the intertwining of French thoughts of themselves as a *grande nation* (‘we are an international actor able to influence every respect of world events’) and autonomy (‘we can manage this on our own, regardless of whether international institutions succeed or fail’). However, grand strategic thinking only explains part of the shift in the French position on missile defence.

**The French Military-Industrial Complex and Missile Defence**

Because of the importance of the technological side of security policy autonomy, the interests of the French military industrial complex have come to play a decisive role in security policy decisions. The interaction between defence industry and policy is particularly clear in the decision over whether to participate in missile defence systems. It has been said that:

> Making arms, conventional and nuclear, is now woven deeply into the fabric of France’s scientific and technological establishment, industrial plant, business practices, governing process – even its cultural mores.23

The comparative weight of the defence industry within the French economy can be explained however not just by the French need for autarky in armaments production if independence in
defence policy was to be sustained, but also by the French state’s *dirigiste* industrial policies, which placed a high value on technological competitiveness. With the partial exception of Giscard d’Estaing’s Presidency, the state has tried consistently to create national champions,\textsuperscript{24} often under at least partial state control, and to support projects that would increase national prestige. Defence firms fitted this pattern perfectly. Although the Europeanization of French armaments policy and the privatization of some defence firms have weakened this national focus to a certain extent, there is still a strong perception among its partners that the French state continues to push its national interests rather than the European interest both within the Franco-German defence group EADS (European Aeronautic Defence and Space Company) and in the wider European defence industrial restructuring process.\textsuperscript{25}

In many ways the American strategy for gaining European acceptance of NMD resembles that of the Reagan administration’s on SDI in the 1980s.\textsuperscript{26} By tempting foreign firms with possible involvement in the programme, they hope that these firms will influence their governments. Where European corporations are concerned, this strategy can be viewed as successful. EADS, for example, wants a role in the US missile defence programme. At a joint press conference at the 2002 Farnborough Airshow, EADS and Boeing announced agreement on a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to begin working on a cross-continent missile defence system. Boeing is the prime contractor for NMD, responsible for the development and integration of the Ground-based Midcourse Missile Defence elements.\textsuperscript{27} The French government is ever mindful of how much of a technological advantage the United States would have if the continental shield works, and so is likely to be affected by this EADS move.

An important facet of the French Military-Industrial Complex is the close relationship between the firms and the state. There are two factors in this, which are difficult to disentangle: the training and career structure of those working in the sector and the attitude of
industry towards the state. The majority of those in executive positions in both the state and the industrial side of the sector have received the same training and belong to the same elite. There is a powerful unifying effect binding the alumni of the elite schools and their professional body, the *corps d’armement*, intensifies this. When this is added to the prevalence of *pantoufage*\(^{28}\), it is clear that there are very strong links between state and industry. Moreover, there are relatively few signs of independent industrial views emerging that are clearly distinguishable from those of government policy. The corrosive relationship between BAE Systems and the UK government for instance is unimaginable in France. This is perhaps because there is little tradition of entrepreneurship in the sector; most industrial figures are first and foremost engineers with less interest in business. However, there are also signs that French industrialists in this sector do not have many problems with the idea of state involvement feeling that pressures from private shareholders are little different. The French governing elite in turn closely identifies with the interests of French defence firms and takes them into account in policy-making.

**French Involvement in Missile Defence Programmes**

It should also be noted that France has long promoted work on more limited theatre missile defence (which arguably raises many of the same proliferation concerns), an area where French firms have enjoyed considerable export success in the past. Theatre Missile Defence is also seen as more strategically useful for South European countries, given that short-range missiles are a more likely threat than long-range ones. France, Italy and to a limited extent Britain are working on an air defence system based on the Aster surface-to-air missile (SAM), built by EuroSAM, a joint venture of the Anglo-French-Italian Matra BAe Dynamics Aerospace (MBDA) company and the French firm Thales. Aster will be used both as a naval
and as a mobile ground-based SAM (SAMP/T) by the French armed forces. The initial Block 1 Aster 30 will only have a limited TMD capability, but a more capable Block 2 system was undergoing discussion in 2004. Work is underway for example on a satellite missile warning and tracking system to cue the missile, as well as on advanced radar to provide missile guidance. The Block 2 Aster is expected to go into service in 2012. The project’s costs were initially fixed at €3 billion, but in 2001, France and Italy agreed on some additional €150 million. On 22 March 2002, France, Britain, and Italy signed an MoU for the production of seven Principal Anti-Air Missile Systems, the main weapon system of the Franco-Italian Horizon-class air-defence frigates and the British Type 45 destroyer. The project’s development costs of €2.08 billion will be equally shared among the three partners. EADS has also proposed a concept for a high-altitude interceptor missile named Exoguard, although details remain unclear. Most recently, on 20 July 2004, Lockheed Martin, Northrop Grumman and EADS signed a Memorandum of Understanding on closer co-operation in the development of the American National Missile Defence.

Similarly, French participation in NATO development studies on ballistic missile defence points to change on the part of the French government. Indeed there has been a distinct distancing of the French government from its earlier policy of strictly limiting the programmes to in-theatre capacities. Even though earlier overall feasibility studies had leant towards favouring an American coordination of the components of the missile defence and individual national capacities, French participation has continued. Such a configuration would mean a certain level of abandonment of sovereignty, but the expected French protests have not arisen, which industrialists consider to be a further sign that Paris is now unwilling to openly disassociate itself from Washington on this project. Industrial interests again are high. The participation of two French firms (Thales and EADS-ST) in a feasibility study on the
protection of populations, contracted by the NATO NC3A Agency (NATO Consultancy, Command and Control Agency), was the object of a special agreement negotiated with the French interdepartmental commission on arms exports (Commission interministérielle d’étude des exportations de matériels de guerre) in 2003. Science Applications International Corporation/EADS, together with a Thales team and Raytheon, was retained in September 2003 to carry out this follow-on phase of the earlier overall studies. In late 2004, France said it would be open to a transatlantic anti-missile partnership, and is said to be preparing a draft accord that could be discussed soon.\(^{33}\)

The French are already building a space-based early warning demonstration system, Spirale, and are considering launching a kill vehicle demonstrator, or at least components of one. These items could be part of an eventual European contribution, along with EADS missile system test facilities in France. Alain Wagner, the missile defence coordinator at EADS, has said the company had non-exclusive agreements with Boeing, Lockheed Martin, Northrop Grumman and Raytheon. EADS meanwhile is the prime contractor for Spirale and is proposing its Exoguard designs as an alternative kill vehicle booster\(^{34}\).

It seems therefore relatively clear that although the French government has not yet fully committed itself to anything beyond theatre missile defence and some wider research, it is keen to be involved through its firms in any technological advances associated with NMD, probably with the hope of using them in a European missile defence project. The advantages of missile defence for the French firms will inevitably be considered alongside the strategic conditions, when France is forced to make a final decision on proposed intercontinental missile defence schemes or participate fully in a NATO Active Layered Theatre Ballistic Missile Defence programme (the principle of which was agreed in the 2004 NATO summit in Istanbul).\(^{35}\)
An Exceptional Policy Change?

This type of U-turn is by no means unusual. Paris has already acted similarly in two other instances, which also highlight the direction in which French strategy is moving. The government rejected a pre-emptive strike against Saddam Hussein mainly on the grounds that it considered such action to be contrary to international law. Nevertheless, contemporaneously in the ‘2003-2008 Military Programme Law’, the following sentence appeared:

Outside our borders, within the framework of prevention and projection-action, we must be able to identify and prevent threats as soon as possible. Within this framework, possible pre-emptive action is not out of the question, where an explicit and confirmed threat has been recognized.36

Similarly in relation to the further development of nuclear capabilities, France has left open the possibility of building ‘mini-nukes’ and to alter its classic nuclear doctrine.

The French deterrence doctrine, which during the Cold War was based upon pure nuclear deterrence, was extended in June 2001 to cover the deterrence of potential attacks with chemical and biological weapons. This latter development brought into being a discussion on whether the current French atomic capabilities provided a credible deterrence for this new strategy or whether new mini-weapons were needed. A final decision on the continuation or alteration of the French nuclear doctrine to cover this still has not been taken. Those with political responsibility remain vague on the subject. However, given the (in French terms) unusual extent of the agreed build-up of offensive (cruise missiles) and defensive (missile defence) conventional capabilities, the future of nuclear capabilities cannot remain open for much longer. All the conventional activity seems to add up to either a marginalization of atomic weapons or a change in the deterrence strategy.
Recent decisions strongly suggest that a change in nuclear strategy is more probable. In the last four years though, clear increases of the nuclear budget were made, suggesting a continuing requirement for nuclear deterrence. Similarly, France is devoting major financial resources to trying to successfully develop a simulator programme by 2010, which would make it possible to plan and reliably test atomic warheads in line with standard usage regardless of size. A development, which would realign nuclear and conventional deterrence strategies in line with one another, similar to the American new triad, therefore cannot be excluded any longer. Moreover the development of ‘mini-nukes’ as an offensive concept for conflict prevention is being openly discussed in France. They would have the goal of increasing the credibility of conventional deterrence and – according to this argument – become an operational part of defence. This – just like the new acceptance of pre-emptive action – shows the evolution of French strategic thinking in areas cognate to that of missile defence.\textsuperscript{37}

The debate on ballistic missile defence in France is also taking place largely unnoticed (if in fact ‘debate’ is the correct word). The fact that security policy is a Presidential domain means that parliamentary involvement is minimal and not seen as particularly influential. In this regard it is not surprising that three parliamentary reports that recommended a change of policy, passed by the media and indeed many Parliamentarians unnoticed. One Assemblée\textit{ Nationale} report recommended discussing efficient means to counter ballistic threats inside NATO. The key reporter, Paul Quilès, defence minister in the Mitterrand government, could not find evidence that the American projects were directed against the construction of a European Security and Defence Policy. He asked the government to start a dialogue on achieving the conditions for strategic stability after the Cold War with the administration in Washington.\textsuperscript{38} Other MPs demanded increased information on the dangers that French
soldiers are facing in out-of-area operations where they might be attacked by short-range ballistic missiles. A second Palais Bourbon report claimed it was necessary to introduce the notions of active and passive defence to the French concept of deterrence and to introduce new, appropriated military means to do so.39 Similarly, the Senate’s reporter Xavier de Villepin, father of the current Prime Minister, had already predicted in 1999-2000 that the emergence of missile defence would introduce new concepts of defence. Therefore, missile defence would have to be integrated in France’s defence doctrine as an imperative.40 These rapporteurs, however, are known to be members of the French security elite and their reports seem to echo the policy debate going on largely behind closed doors. This policy debate is interesting as it reveals much about the way in which security policy changes are formulated in a way that fits with French security culture constants.

**Constructing a French Missile Defence Policy**

As has been discussed, strategic, technological and industrial factors had combined to make a policy shift from outright opposition to tentative co-operation on missile defence necessary for French decision-makers. How then have they tried to construct missile defence à la française? Firstly, defence policy-making in France is centring on the corps of administrators and officers with the addition of some academics, who tend, however, to have enjoyed a similar training in one of the elite schools such as ENA (Ecole nationale d’administration) or École Polytechnique. These schools – besides offering advanced administrative or technical training – also teach their students to serve the state and their training has a unifying effect on the students. Thus, members of the corps tend to have very similar outlooks and ideas. The corps structure reinforces the unifying effect of the common training and produces a loyalty to each other that frequently outweighs other considerations.
As far as missile defence is concerned it could be argued that we essentially can speak of two overlapping groups. As discussed above, there is a coherent and powerful defence industrial sector. This sector represents the intent to derive the best deal out of missile defence for French firms, and so the French economy, possible. The DGA here identifies itself strongly with the companies’ evident interest in all types of missile defence, which helps to make up a coherent voice. This is not unusual. Mathieu has argued that the coherence of this epistemic community is due to the *corps d’armement*:

What cements it [the Military-Industrial Complex, the authors], which is not to say constitutes it, for it is a part of the complex, is the community originating in the corps d’armement, whose training gives them the thoughts and interests of engineers, who occupy the directorial posts of the DGA as well as those of the main arms companies, who sometimes in the course of their careers pass from the service of the state (conception of specifications, control of the sector) to that of the production companies, amongst which are the shell companies, intended to carry out export operations in such a way that no-one can understand the conditions.\(^{41}\)

This meant that a large section of the French elite could justify the shift on missile defence as being crucial for the maintenance of French defence technological strength.

Secondly, strategic thinkers have been important. The missile defence debate has been affected by the wider debate on the Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA). Broadly speaking, there are three camps. Firstly, there is a group often referred to as the *jeune école*, who believe strongly in the RMA, who feel that new technology may allow for the reshaping of French defence policy to focus on power projection and military intervention and who criticize the consensus on nuclear strategy as stifling a debate.\(^{42}\) This group, often involving young officers and some political figures, tends to agree with the US position on missile defence
arguing that it is riskier to be left behind technologically. The second group, older army officers and intellectuals, reject the RMA ‘in large part because it is American’. Their positions can be differentiated: One section feels strongly that the threat from long-range missiles is not a problem for France and that therefore a limited TMD system would suffice. Another group sees missile defence as predominantly an American exercise in hegemony, which by diverting European money away from European procurement projects would wreck French defence industry. In between these two groups are several analysts, like General Alain Baer and François Géré who have tried to formulate an ‘RMA à la française’. This strategy has concentrated in finding ways to feed this new technology meaningfully into European defence policy and European defence industry, while leaving the special status of the French nuclear component untouched.

This tactic allows for a U-turn on missile defence politically as it can be viewed as a European rather than American project and this seems to be what has happened. Missile defence therefore was originally constructed as an American hegemonic project, which would diminish France militarily through a downgrading of its nuclear deterrent and the weakening of the multilateral arms control structure. It is now constructed as a potential key part of the French RMA that will reconfigure but ultimately strengthen French military power in a European context, while simultaneously allowing the French defence industry to maintain its parity with American defence firms. In other words, while scepticism about the technological specifics of Washington’s NMD project remains, missile defence as a concept has been reconstructed à la française.
Conclusion

As this article stated at the beginning, there is evidence to suggest that this policy shift can be explained by France’s self-understanding, its regional as well as global role, its type of regime, the role it attaches to military alliances and the strength of its military-industrial complex as suggested by Democratic Peace Theory. We have argued though that the wider French security culture must also be taken into account to really explain the evolving French policy on missile defence. The French elite’s continuing commitment to their country’s security and defence policy autonomy is more than just the central element of French strategic culture. It also ensures that defence industry plays a central role in security policy: In France, therefore, unlike in any other European country, defence industrial interests have a constitutive effect on security policy decisions. The important French military firms’ wish to take part in the US missile defence programmes, via which they hope to gain wider access to the American defence market, have largely silenced the, up until recently, very open French political criticism of Washington’s plans. Moreover, French thinking on defence has changed, and moved closer to that of the Americans. This meant a policy reconfiguration to meet these defence industrial and defence policy goals was needed on missile defence. The fact that such a policy shift was accomplished largely unnoticed is due to the concentration of power on security policy in an elite, who – thanks to their common education, training and the system of administrative and professional corps – subscribe to a shared vision of the central features of French security policy.

As another key part of France’s security culture is the refusal to countenance subordination to other powers, particularly the United States, and their ideas, such key security policy changes must always be placed in a ‘French context’. Strategic key thinkers, who are also a part of this small security policy elite, have to help to immunize such policy U-turns against
the accusation of dependence on American dominance, by reconstructing this context. In order to protect their central pillar of strategic culture, and thus the national consensus on French security and defence policy, the political elite makes its decisions in the policy field in silence, behind closed doors. Only by acting in this way, can they fuse divergent defence industrial and political interests strategically but also linguistically, so that missile defence can be eventually conveyed to the nation, as a whole, as a ‘genuine French project’. 

1 For France, geographical location is not a key explanatory factor.
10 See on this the contributions of Jørgen Dragsdahl and Mark Smith in this Special Volume.
13 See Varadarajan 'Identity and Neoliberal (In)Security’.
17 See Ministère de la Défense, Loi de Programmation Militaire, p.2.
18 Ibid., p.9.
19 Ibid., p.10.
20 Ibid., p.23.
21 Particularly in the 1960s and early 1970s, French governments promoted one or two firms per industry thus creating so-called national champions: Chirac and Sarkozy revived this policy in 2004. (See Stefan Theil, ‘What Could They Be Thinking? France riles neighbour Germany with its efforts to promote “national champion” companies’, Newsweek, 21 June 2004.) The earlier strategy was based on the belief that only


28 The network of contacts enables exchanges between the public and private sectors within the course of a career: this practice is known as pantouflage.


36 Ministère de la Défense, Loi de Programmation Militaire, p.23.

37 See Kempin, ‘Frankreichs Nuklearstrategie vor der Revision?’.


