

# 'BrOthers in Arms': France, the Anglosphere and AUKUS

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Key middle powers are often missing from analyses of world order-building.<sup>1</sup> Yet, France, the United Kingdom and Australia often match and occasionally exceed the interventionism of the United States. For example, in Libya, Syria and Mali, France led calls for the military-premised defence of the liberal international order. In these and other key theatres, France and the Anglosphere have been reliable security partners.<sup>2</sup> However, with the surprise 2021 US–UK–Australia announcement of the trilateral AUKUS security partnership, France experienced a spectacular and humiliating public abandonment. With AUKUS having been established to defend liberal order and out-compete an increasingly belligerent China, it is vitally important to understand how and why this new security partnership emerged and how it affects broader multilateralism, especially with like-minded partners and coalition allies such as France.

Early research on AUKUS tends to focus on its military technology aspects and, particularly, on nuclear-powered submarines. However, the pact is about far more than that: it is a historical 'security partnership' with wide-reaching implications for twenty-first-century geopolitics.<sup>3</sup> While it might be expected that relatively little research on AUKUS exists given its youth, it is puzzling that France–Anglosphere relations remain 'overlooked', especially given the significance of contemporary French interventionism.<sup>4</sup> The fallout from AUKUS with

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<sup>1</sup> Gabriele Abbondanza, 'Whither the Indo-Pacific? Middle power strategies from Australia, South Korea and Indonesia', *International Affairs* 98: 2, 2022, pp. 403–21, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iab231>.

<sup>2</sup> On the relatively recent appreciation of French military efforts by Anglosphere states, see Olivier Schmitt, 'The reluctant Atlanticist: France's security and defence policy in a transatlantic context', *Journal of Strategic Studies* 40: 4, 2017, pp. 463–74, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2016.1220367>.

<sup>3</sup> Prime Minister of Australia, 'Joint leaders statement on AUKUS', 14 March 2023, <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/joint-leaders-statement-aucus>; see also Kate Clayton and Katherine Newman, 'Settler colonial strategic culture: Australia, AUKUS, and the Anglosphere', *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 69: 3, 2023, pp. 503–21, <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajph.12941>. (Unless otherwise noted at point of citation, all URLs cited in this article were accessible on 13 Dec. 2023.)

<sup>4</sup> Falk Ostermann, *Security, defense discourse and identity in NATO and Europe: how France changed foreign policy* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2018).

respect to France–Anglosphere relations has only been considered fleetingly, in noting the poor diplomacy that led to France’s ‘blindsiding’.<sup>5</sup> And, as Alice Pannier argues, extant research on France–Anglosphere relations has tended to be the preserve of historians, lacking ‘the theoretical outlook that could help understand the more general mechanisms that can explain ... strategic relations between allies’.<sup>6</sup> In particular, what is missing from existing research is a historically informed ontological conceptualization of France–Anglosphere relations and their socially constructed foundations.

Addressing these gaps, the article develops four contributions. First, contributing to constructivist and ontological security theory, we develop a novel theorization of alliance politics through the concept ‘brOthers in arms’. Second, contributing to critical studies of foreign policy and research on national identity, we locate France–Anglosphere relations; specifically, towards the thicker end of an alliance identity spectrum, held together in mutual alterity by complementary, competing and co-constitutive exceptionalisms. That is, we show France and the Anglosphere to be entwined by fundamental narrative synergies: symbiotic exceptionalisms hold the two together, in mutual antagonism. Third, contributing an important new case to studies of alliance politics and historical foreign policy analysis, we evaluate the membership rationales, underpinnings and impacts of AUKUS, situating its announcement in the fractious *longue durée* of France–Anglosphere relations. Fourth, these contributions are premised upon the development of an original, contemporary dataset, enabling thematic analysis of 37 elite interviews and discourse analysis of 540 political and media texts.

The article is structured in three principal sections. In the first section, we set out our theoretical contribution, developing the (general) concept of ‘brOthers in arms’ and its (specific) exceptionalist ontological underpinnings in the France–Anglosphere relationship. Second, we detail our methodological approach. Third, we develop our analysis of France–Anglosphere relations, setting AUKUS in its historically informed theoretical context. We conclude by reflecting on the implications of our analysis for studies of alliance politics in general and the France–Anglosphere relationship more specifically.

## Conceptualizing France–Anglosphere relations

### *Fraternity and ontological security: from brotherhood to ‘brOthers in arms’*

Although often overlooked, brothers and brotherhood are deeply naturalized concepts in histories of nation-building and international relations.<sup>7</sup> At a national

<sup>5</sup> Two exceptions on the impact of AUKUS on France–Australia trust are: Eglantine Staunton and Benjamin Day, ‘Australia–France relations after AUKUS: Macron, Morrison and trust in International Relations’, *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 77: 1, 2023, pp. 11–18, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10357718.2022.2070599>; and Jamal Barnes and Samuel M. Makinda, ‘Testing the limits of international society? Trust, AUKUS and Indo-Pacific security’, *International Affairs* 98: 4, 2022, pp. 1307–25, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiaa111>.

<sup>6</sup> Alice Pannier, ‘From one exceptionalism to another: France’s strategic relations with the United States and the United Kingdom in the post-Cold War era’, *Journal of Strategic Studies* 40: 4, 2017, pp. 475–504 at p. 476, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2016.1230546>.

<sup>7</sup> This is despite *and*, in part, because of their overtly gendered nature. See Megan MacKenzie, ‘Why do soldiers

level, such (often Christian-inspired) language has been mobilized in efforts to include minorities—Muslims, Jews and others—as co-nationals. These efforts acknowledge both difference and unity simultaneously; *e pluribus unum* (out of many, one).<sup>8</sup> At an international level, fraternal narrations of international cooperation have long been commonplace. There are few better examples than the Anglosphere.<sup>9</sup> From explicitly social Darwinist and civilizational language built upon perceptions of shared, superior racial origins, through to the sanitized variables of culture and shared values, the Anglosphere has long been underpinned by formative understandings of familial kinship—a ‘blood of the body’, as much as the mind.<sup>10</sup> For the core Anglosphere states—the ‘old Anglosphere coalition’, comprising the US, UK and Australia—this fraternal proximity has recurrently been narrated as more than the reuniting of distant cousins, but rather the inexorable loyalty that derives from brotherhood’s intimate bonds, knowledge and trust.<sup>11</sup> As Srdjan Vucetic succinctly argues, the core Anglosphere states unite as an ‘Anglo-Saxon brotherhood’.<sup>12</sup>

Such familial understandings and cultural intimacies<sup>13</sup> do not readily extend beyond the Anglosphere. And ‘brother’ is not a term which encapsulates French views of France’s relationship with the Anglosphere. Yet, France and the Anglosphere do repeatedly cooperate, fighting together as ‘brothers in arms’, united in mutual cause on a range of consequential battlefields. Indeed, remarkably, France leads calls to allied warfare with a frequency that has in recent decades exceeded the insatiable militarism of the old Anglosphere coalition. The term ‘brothers in arms’ captures the comradeship of mutual endeavour in warfare, with ties to Shakespeare’s sixteenth-century use of ‘band of brothers’. However, it reduces the familial kinship of the term ‘brother’ (to unity through mutual service), as well as the implicit recognition of proximal Otherness (sufficiently motivated, one could fight shoulder to shoulder with *anyone*). Therefore, we introduce the concept of ‘brOthers in arms’ to better encapsulate an important double inscription of identity that can undergird alliance warfare generally and help to theorize France–Anglosphere relations specifically.

swap illicit pictures? How a visual discourse analysis illuminates military band of brother culture’, *Security Dialogue* 51: 4, 2020, pp. 340–57, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010619898468>.

<sup>8</sup> For example, Harris Mylonas, *The politics of nation-building: making co-nationals, refugees, and minorities* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

<sup>9</sup> Jack Holland, *Selling war and peace: Syria and the Anglosphere* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2020), p. 82.

<sup>10</sup> Madhav Das Nalapat, ‘India and the Anglosphere’, *New Criterion* 29: 5, 2011, pp. 1–7 at p. 1, <https://newcriterion.com/issues/2011/1/india-the-anglosphere>; see also Inderjeet Parmar, ‘Anglo-American elites in the interwar years: idealism and power in the intellectual roots of Chatham House and the Council on Foreign Relations’, *International Relations* 16: 1, 2002, pp. 53–75, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047117802016001005>; Christopher Browning and Ben Tonra, ‘Beyond the West and towards the Anglosphere?’, in Christopher Browning and Marko Lehti, eds, *The struggle for the West: a divided and contested legacy* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2010).

<sup>11</sup> Srdjan Vucetic, *The Anglosphere: a genealogy of a racialized identity in International Relations* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2020); Holland, *Selling war and peace*.

<sup>12</sup> Srdjan Vucetic, ‘A racialized peace? How Britain and the US made their relationship special’, *Foreign Policy Analysis* 7: 4, 2011, pp. 403–21 at p. 404, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1743-8594.2011.00147.x>.

<sup>13</sup> Jelena Subotic and Ayse Zarakol, ‘Cultural intimacy in International Relations’, *European Journal of International Relations* 19: 4, 2013, pp. 915–38, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066112437771>.

We mobilize ‘brOthers in arms’ as a heuristic device designed to capture this double inscription, which enables the simultaneous holding of two seemingly oppositional terms. Neither pure ‘brother’ nor ‘Other’, the notion of ‘brOthers in arms’ captures the possibility that coalition allies can at once be both and neither, occupying a third category. This bears parallels to research on minorities and nationalism.<sup>14</sup> The politics of the concept moves us away from a concern with the enemy, towards relations among friends.<sup>15</sup> We argue that the term ‘brOthers in arms’ is helpful for understanding a range of alliances and their politics. At the thinnest end of a coalition-identity spectrum, ad hoc alliances remain principally motivated to act (and are defined) in opposition to an antagonistic enemy Other. At the thickest end of a coalition-identity spectrum, alliances are held together primarily by the internal bonds of fidelity. As Jennifer Mitzen identified, in addition to fear of a mutual foe, ontological security can be pursued through internal security practices and narrative dovetailing.<sup>16</sup> AUKUS is a prime example, as the old Anglosphere coalition has lined up to fight a range of evolving enemies, with the alliance always anticipating facing emerging threats together. Cultural intimacy naturalizes military cooperation and underpins intertwined and harmonious identity narratives in pursuit of ontological security.

Ontological security is the need for a consistent, familiar and sustainable story of the Self.<sup>17</sup> To be ontologically secure is to possess a coherent sense of Self and have that recognized and reaffirmed by Others—a uniting maxim for psychological and narrative strands of ontological security theory. Giddensian approaches emphasize the need to *story* behaviour in order to construct stable meanings and identities. For states, national identity narratives serve as historical biographies, projecting forwards into the future.<sup>18</sup> They tell the world and the domestic population who ‘we’ are, such that tomorrow’s actions will reflect who ‘we’ have always been. Within this understanding, narrating the Self constitutes ontological security-seeking behaviour in a quest to increase certainty and decrease anxiety in the face of complex and evolving global challenges; foreign relations are navigated by narrating a clear, guiding identity. Such storying is affective, habitual and strategic—and these narratives structure world politics—but fixity and stability necessarily remain elusive.<sup>19</sup> Complete ontological security inevitably exists out

<sup>14</sup> On ‘British Muslims’ as a ‘third’, between Self and Other, see Stuart Croft, ‘Constructing ontological insecurity: the securitization of Britain’s Muslims’, *Contemporary Security Policy* 33: 2, 2012, pp. 219–35, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13523260.2012.693776>.

<sup>15</sup> Jacques Derrida, *The politics of friendship* [1994] (New York: Verso, 2005).

<sup>16</sup> Jennifer Mitzen, ‘Anchoring Europe’s civilizing identity: habits, capabilities and ontological security’, *Journal of European Public Policy* 13: 2, 2006, pp. 270–85, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501760500451709>.

<sup>17</sup> Mitzen, ‘Anchoring Europe’s civilizing identity’; Brent Steele, *Ontological security in international relations: self-identity and the IR state* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2008).

<sup>18</sup> On narrative (and entelechial) power, see Laura Considine, ‘Narrative and nuclear weapons politics: the entelechial force of the nuclear origin myth’, *International Theory* 14: 3, 2022, pp. 551–70, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1752971921000257>; and Jack Holland and Xavier Mathieu, ‘Narratology and US foreign policy in Syria: beyond identity binaries, toward narrative power’, *International Studies Quarterly* 67: 4, 2023, sqado78, <https://doi.org/10.1093/isq/sqado78>.

<sup>19</sup> Following Lacan, Laing, and ‘psychoanalytic political theory’ and interlocuters. See John Cash, ‘Psychoanalysis, cultures of anarchy, and ontological insecurity’, *International Theory* 12: 2, 2020, pp. 306–21, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1752971920000147>. On instrumental narrating, see Jelena Subotić, ‘Narrative, ontological security, and foreign policy change’, *Foreign Policy Analysis* 12: 4, 2016, pp. 610–27, <https://doi.org/10.1111/fpa.12089>.

of reach and should therefore be thought of as processual: a striving to achieve reassuring and confirmatory stories of the Self.

Drawing on Mitzen,<sup>20</sup> we argue that ontological security and the reduction of international anxiety are pursued as much in the writing of Otherness relative to recurrent coalition partners as to military opponents. Specifically, more than merely ‘rivals in arms’,<sup>21</sup> France and the Anglosphere are ‘brOthers in arms’. In the contemporary era, France and the Anglosphere are allies, not enemies. Yet, despite their shared interests, analogous strategic cultures and similar world-views—as well as repeated participation in coalition warfare—France and the Anglosphere are Others. Their identities rely on a relationship with each other that is premised as much on relational alterity as shared values. As such, they are fully imbricated in each other’s storying of biographical continuity; their ontological security and sustained sense of Self are wrapped up in familiar distinctions with their ally.<sup>22</sup>

### *France and the Anglosphere: complementary, competing and co-constitutive exceptionalisms*

France–Anglosphere relations exist a step back from the fraternal imbrications of the old Anglosphere coalition. They are, however, unique, deeply enmeshed and conditioning of bilateral policy possibilities. What marks out the France–Anglosphere relationship from others (who might equally claim to be ‘brOthers in arms’) is that it is built upon symbiotic exceptionalisms, which are complementary, competing and co-constitutive. The countries fight together readily and frequently in pursuit of mutual goals due to the *complementarity* of their exceptionalist (universalist) objectives, yet they *compete* with each other for influence and ascendancy due to precisely these similar aims and understandings. They are also *co-constitutive*, relying on each other to narrate and construct a sense of Self in pursuit of ontological security. France and the Anglosphere are ‘brOthers in arms’, defined in mutual contradistinction to their allies.

US, British and Australian exceptionalisms underpin the ‘old Anglosphere coalition’, inspiring coalition militarism in pursuit of liberal values.<sup>23</sup> As the junior coalition partner, Australia is often overlooked, despite its historical significance in allied campaigns and recent centrality to US, UK and French Indo-Pacific strategies. Australian exceptionalism is fiercely contested,<sup>24</sup> while three principal themes sustain exceptionalist sentiment. First, is the powerful political mythology of ‘mateship’ which draws on and helps to sustain claims of egalitarianism at home

<sup>20</sup> Mitzen, ‘Anchoring Europe’s civilizing identity’.

<sup>21</sup> Alice Pannier, ‘Introduction’, in Alice Pannier, *Rivals in arms: the rise of UK–France defence relations in the twenty-first century* (Montreal: McGill–Queen’s University Press, 2020).

<sup>22</sup> Jennifer Mitzen, ‘Ontological security in world politics: state identity and the security dilemma’, *European Journal of International Relations* 12: 3, 2006, pp. 341–70, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066106067346>; Catarina Kinnvall and Jennifer Mitzen, ‘Anxiety, fear, and ontological security in world politics’, *International Theory* 12: 2, 2020, pp. 240–56, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S175297192000010X>.

<sup>23</sup> Holland, *Selling war and peace*.

<sup>24</sup> Keith Dowding, ‘Australian exceptionalism reconsidered’, *Australian Journal of Political Science* 52: 2, 2017, pp. 165–82, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10361146.2016.1267111>; see, also, on the infamously misinterpreted phrase ‘lucky country’: Donald Horne, *The lucky country* [1964] (Camberwell, VIC: Penguin 2008).

and longstanding loyalties abroad.<sup>25</sup> Second, Australia has long, infamously, been torn between its geography and history. Fears regarding an unstable (and relatively) proximal region juxtapose the cultural intimacies of fraternal bonds with geographically distant Anglosphere allies.<sup>26</sup> Third, these combine in Australia's formative origin myths, which narrate an autobiography that begins with, and takes shape through, key military campaigns at Gallipoli, in 1915/16, and Kokoda in 1942.<sup>27</sup> Here we see that Anglospheric brotherly sacrifice was—and is storied as—a central component in the birth of Australian national consciousness, telling a nation who 'we' are, and will continue to be.<sup>28</sup>

Brotherly berating (as PoHMs)<sup>29</sup> is familiar to Britons visiting Down Under. Perhaps this is to be expected, given the importance of umbilical connection and the perceived pomposity of British (and English) exceptionalism.<sup>30</sup> Global leadership has long been at the heart of British foreign policy discourse.<sup>31</sup> It finds its twin bases in the mythologized history of standing alone to defeat Nazi Germany and a colonial amnesia, enabling pride in the British empire.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, in recent years, British exceptionalism has reached something of a crescendo with Brexit and the turn to the Anglosphere as a core component of 'Global Britain'.<sup>33</sup> For Tom Howe and Christopher Browning, Britain's turn from the EU to the Anglosphere, like British foreign policy more generally, can be understood as ontological security-seeking behaviour in the context of a thousand years of imagined community.<sup>34</sup> This imagination developed, of course, in dialogue with France, through imbrication and synthesis, as well as war and alterity.

Notwithstanding the importance of Australian exceptionalism for Anglosphere unity, the principal dyadic relationships for understanding France–Anglosphere

<sup>25</sup> Nick Dyrenfurth, *Mateship: a very Australian history* (Melbourne: Scribe, 2015); Jack Holland, *Selling the war on terror: foreign policy discourses after 9/11* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2012).

<sup>26</sup> Graeme Cheeseman and Robert Bruce, eds, *Discourse of danger and dread frontiers* (St Leonards, NSW: Allen and Unwin, 1996).

<sup>27</sup> Anthony Burke, *In fear of security: Australia's invasion anxiety* (Annandale, NSW: Pluto, 2001). Gallipoli is now known as Gelibolu, Turkey; Kokoda is in Papua New Guinea, formerly the Australian Territory of Papua.

<sup>28</sup> Holland, *Selling war and peace*; Holland, *Selling the war on terror*.

<sup>29</sup> Prisoner of His/Her Majesty.

<sup>30</sup> Ben Wellings, *English nationalism, Brexit and the Anglosphere: wider still and wider* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020).

<sup>31</sup> Srđjan Vucetic, 'Elite–mass agreement in British foreign policy', *International Affairs* 98: 1, 2022, pp. 245–62, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iab203>; Benjamin Tallis, 'The art of Brexit', *International Studies Quarterly* 67: 1, 2023, sqado09, <https://doi.org/10.1093/isq/sqado09>; see also Adrian Rogstad and Benjamin Martill, 'How to be great (Britain)? Discourses of greatness in the United Kingdom's referendums on Europe', *European Review of International Studies* 9: 2, 2022, pp. 210–39, <https://doi.org/10.1163/21967415-09020007>; and Jack Holland, 'Blair's war on terror: selling intervention to middle England', *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 14: 1, 2012, pp. 74–95, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-856X.2011.00469.x>.

<sup>32</sup> Inderjeet Parmar, "'I'm proud of the British empire": why Tony Blair backs George W. Bush', *The Political Quarterly* 76: 2, 2005, pp. 218–31, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-923X.2005.00674.x>.

<sup>33</sup> Kristin Haugevik and Øyvind Svendsen, 'On safer ground? The emergence and evolution of "Global Britain"', *International Affairs* 99: 6, 2023, pp. 2387–2404, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iad186>; Wellings, *English nationalism*; Andrew Gamble, 'The Brexit negotiations and the Anglosphere', *The Political Quarterly* 92: 1, 2021, pp. 108–112, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-923X.12957>; Oliver Daddow, 'Global Britain™: the discursive construction of Britain's post-Brexit world role', *Global Affairs* 5: 1, 2019, pp. 5–22, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23340460.2019.1599297>.

<sup>34</sup> Tom Howe and Christopher Browning, 'Nobody does it better: security-seeking in a context of a thousand years of imagined continuity', working paper presented at a workshop on 'Global Britain and the Anglosphere', University of Warwick, 15 June 2023.

relations are those with the UK and particularly the US. For the United States—the exceptionalist state *par excellence*—exceptionalism remains a powerful underpinning of self-understanding, an enduring motivator for military (in)action and a resonant component of political oratory.<sup>35</sup> Historically, two principal dimensions have structured this narrative: the geographical and the ideological.<sup>36</sup> Infamously, from Alexis de Tocqueville onwards, exceptionalist thinking proclaimed that America's fortune was to have been blessed by divine providence—a vast, bountiful land, protected by two great oceans. This prosperous New World awaited those fleeing the persecutions of the Old—the whim of European autocrats and the hounding of the church. Exceptionalist narratives thus took shape in explicit juxtaposition with Europe; a sense of ideological superiority—and freedom—was built through direct contrast, as alterity was rendered formative and productive.<sup>37</sup> This afforded the American experiment universal significance, positioning the US as the last great hope for mankind. While the impact of exceptionalism on US foreign policy has not been linear,<sup>38</sup> it has led the US time and again to seek to shape the world in its own image—whether through benign inspiration or force—taking on the self-proclaimed role of leader of the free world.

Like the US, the concept of 'French exceptionalism' is complex and multifaceted.<sup>39</sup> France's international status has altered significantly since the eras of Louis XIV or Napoléon Bonaparte, but French leaders have continued to promote France's 'rank',<sup>40</sup> arguing that France is 'more than a middle size power'.<sup>41</sup> The arguments put forward to underpin claims of exceptionalism have remained relatively constant in the post-Cold War era:<sup>42</sup> 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

<sup>35</sup> For example, Hilde Eliassen Restad, *American exceptionalism: an idea that made a nation and remade the world* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2014); Hilde Eliassen Restad, 'Whither the "city upon a hill"? Donald Trump, America First, and American exceptionalism', *Texas National Security Review* 3: 1, 2019, pp. 62–92, <https://tnsr.org/2019/12/whither-the-city-upon-a-hill-donald-trump-america-first-and-american-exceptionalism>.

<sup>36</sup> See, for example, Trevor McCrisken, *American exceptionalism and the legacy of Vietnam: US foreign policy since 1974* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Walter Russell Mead, *Special providence: American foreign policy and how it changed the world* (New York and London: Routledge, 2002).

<sup>37</sup> See David Campbell, *Writing security: United States foreign policy and the politics of identity* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1992).

<sup>38</sup> H. W. Brands, *What America owes the world: the struggle for the soul of foreign policy* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

<sup>39</sup> See Philip H. Gordon, *A certain idea of France: French security policy and the Gaullist legacy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); Emmanuel Godin and Tony Chafer, *The French exception* (New York: Berghahn, 2005); Pernille Rieker, 'French status seeking in a changing world: taking on the role as the guardian of the liberal order,' *French Politics*, vol. 16, 2018, pp.419–38, <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41253-018-0078-5>.

<sup>40</sup> The term 'rang' (rank) is commonly used in France.

<sup>41</sup> See, for instance, Elysée, 'Interview de M. Jacques Chirac, Président de la République, accordée à "Time Magazine"', 4 Dec. 1995, <https://www.elysee.fr/jacques-chirac/1995/12/04/interview-de-m-jacques-chirac-president-de-la-republique-accordee-a-time-magazine-le-1er-novembre-1995-et-publie-dans-le-numero-date-du-4-decembre-sur-les-ambitions-de-la-france-notamment-en-matiere-de-construction-europeenne-dunion-monetaire-et-d>.

<sup>42</sup> Eglantine Staunton, *France, humanitarian intervention and the responsibility to protect* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), pp. 16–17.

through factors such as French cuisine). The belief is simple: France has ‘a global vocation’<sup>43</sup>—a fact rendered seemingly self-evident through its overseas territories. French ‘rank’ in the world is thus central to its self-understanding; a foreign policy goal in itself,<sup>44</sup> even at times equated to a ‘cult of rank’.<sup>45</sup>

As a result, US and French exceptionalisms are *complementary*, sharing common purpose, but also *competitive*, seeking influence and ascendancy on the international stage. Both are outward-looking, assertive and mutually defined, promoting a central role in world affairs and the proactive defence of liberal order. Born of a heady mix of enlightenment moralism and revolutionary zeal, they share a universalizing impulse and willingness to risk destabilizing the international system through the use of force. As Ronald Granieri puts it, the fact that the US and France clash so frequently is proof not of their difference, but of their exceptionalist similarities.<sup>46</sup> They are simultaneously sustained through their antagonisms, as mutual foils. Defined in opposition to each other—Old World corruption and the vulgarities of the New World—US and French exceptionalisms are *co-constitutive*.<sup>47</sup> They pull together towards common goals, even while sustaining each other in productive antagonism. Many of these productive tensions run through everyday life, including the preservation of French cuisine and the French language, especially contra globalization conflated with Americanization.<sup>48</sup> From such everyday cultural synecdoche, formative juxtapositions extend upwards to structure distinct foreign policy emphases on humanitarian intervention and democracy promotion, respectively.

French uneasiness around American-led democracy promotion and regime change peaked with the 2003 Iraq War, which exposed the depth of France–Anglosphere antagonisms. Opposition was partly enabled by a key pillar of French foreign policy since the presidency of Charles de Gaulle: the notion that France and the US are ‘amis, alliés, mais pas alignés’—friends, allies, but not aligned. This Gaullist exceptionalism has continued into and through new eras of greater Anglospheric cooperation.<sup>49</sup> Incumbent French president Emmanuel Macron has followed the Gaullist positioning of a French third way,<sup>50</sup> arguing that the EU—led by France—needs to be a ‘balancing power’<sup>51</sup> since the United States ‘are in

<sup>43</sup> Marie-Claude Smouts, ‘Political aspects of peace-keeping operations,’ in Brigitte Stern, ed., *United Nations peace-keeping operations: a guide to French policies* (Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 1998), p. 7.

<sup>44</sup> Alfred Grosser, ‘Le rôle et le rang,’ in André Lewin, ed., *La France et l’ONU depuis 1945* (Condé-sur-Noireau: Arléa-Corlet, 1995), p. 64.

<sup>45</sup> Smouts, ‘Political aspects of peace-keeping operations,’ p. 7.

<sup>46</sup> Ronald J. Granieri, ‘Exceptionalism, empire, and the dark side of national greatness,’ Foreign Policy Research Institute, 3 Oct. 2016, <https://www.fpri.org/article/2016/10/exceptionalism-empire-dark-side-national-greatness>.

<sup>47</sup> See, for instance, Philippe Roger, *The American enemy: the history of French anti-Americanism* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

<sup>48</sup> On France–Anglosphere culinary antagonisms after Iraq, see Stuart Croft, *Culture, crisis and America’s war on terror* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

<sup>49</sup> Pannier, ‘From one exceptionalism to another’.

<sup>50</sup> Eglantine Staunton, ‘“France is back”: Macron’s European policy to rescue “European civilisation” and the liberal international order,’ *Third World Quarterly* 43: 1, 2022, pp. 18–34, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2021.1994384>

<sup>51</sup> Emmanuel Macron, ‘Emmanuel Macron in his own words,’ *The Economist*, 7 Nov. 2019, <https://www.economist.com/europe/2019/11/07/emmanuel-macron-in-his-own-words-english>.



the western bloc but they do not carry the same humanism. Their sensitivity to climate issues, to equality, to the social equilibrium that is ours does not exist in the same way'.<sup>52</sup> Blunter still, Macron has stated that France and the EU are 'not the United States of America. They are our historical allies ... but ... our values are not quite the same. We have an attachment to social democracy, to more equality ... culture is more important [for us]'.<sup>53</sup> He has even blamed the US for the decline of liberal order, by risking NATO, the Paris Agreement and the Iranian nuclear deal.<sup>54</sup> As well as these actions on the part of Donald Trump, Macron has lambasted Barack Obama's 'red line' backdown in Syria as the 'first collapse of the western bloc', and has lamented Joe Biden's rushed US withdrawal from Afghanistan.<sup>55</sup>

## Methodology

### *Case selection: AUKUS*

The development of AUKUS represents an urgent contemporary case-study for France–Anglosphere relations. The partnership's founding constitutes an important research puzzle, as to why a security partnership designed to promote liberal order would spectacularly, and without forewarning, shun a like-minded, reliable ally with mutual aims, risking their future cooperation.

Announced in September 2021, AUKUS promises cooperation between the US, UK and Australia in advanced military technology (such as artificial intelligence, quantum and hypersonic), as well as the delivery of eight nuclear-powered submarines to Australia. However, AUKUS is far more than that: the partnership represents the drawing of lines in the battle to influence and shape the Indo-Pacific at a moment when China is particularly bellicose.<sup>56</sup> The announcement, therefore, is highly significant: AUKUS is designed to be at the heart of efforts to manage global reordering in the twenty-first century, defending liberal international order through advanced military capability.

In the post-Cold War security environment, this is a position that has also been readily and repeatedly taken up by France. Playing a central role in the defence of liberal norms—in the fields of human rights and human protection, in particular<sup>57</sup>—France has not hesitated to intervene militarily, as illustrated by recent deployments in Libya, Syria and Mali. In Libya, for example, assertive French calls to intervene created the policy embarrassment for Obama of being seen to

<sup>52</sup> Elysée, 'Discours du Président de la République Emmanuel Macron à la conférence des ambassadeurs et des ambassadrices de 2019', 27 Aug. 2019, <https://www.elysee.fr/front/pdf/elysee-module-14146-fr.pdf> (authors' translation).

<sup>53</sup> Elysée, 'Interview granted to Le Grand Continent magazine by the French President Emmanuel Macron', 16 Nov. 2020, <https://www.elysee.fr/en/emmanuel-macron/2020/11/16/interview-granted-to-le-grand-continent-magazine-by-the-french-president-emmanuel-macron>.

<sup>54</sup> Staunton, "France is back", p. 20.

<sup>55</sup> Staunton, "France is back".

<sup>56</sup> See, for instance, The White House, 'Joint leaders statement on AUKUS', 15 Sept. 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/09/15/joint-leaders-statement-on-aukus>.

<sup>57</sup> Eglantine Staunton, *France, humanitarian intervention and the responsibility to protect*.

'lead from behind'. Similarly, in Syria, Macron—and his predecessor, François Hollande—led the call to defend the rules and norms of liberal international order, even when US and UK counterparts had struggled to achieve consensus on military responses to enforce declared 'red lines'. Likewise, in Mali, it was France that from 2013 led almost a decade of counterterrorism and counter-insurgency efforts with Opérations Serval and Barkhane.

Notwithstanding the existence of important nuances, the overriding objectives of AUKUS are shared by France;<sup>58</sup> the four states are 'powers who share a common goal—to contain the growing influence of China' and defend liberal international order.<sup>59</sup> As a result, AUKUS can readily be interpreted as a paradox. On the one hand, the partnership symbolizes a long-term resolve to confront China, protect the Indo-Pacific and defend an international order built in the Anglosphere's own image. On the other hand, AUKUS recklessly risked isolating the single state more prepared to fight for liberal international order than any other: France.

### *Data selection and methods: discourse analysis and elite interviews*

To analyse the rationale behind AUKUS, and its impact on France–Anglosphere relations, two complementary methods were employed: 1) a computer-aided discourse analysis of key texts from French and Anglosphere political elites and the media; and 2) a series of semi-structured interviews with policy-makers and practitioners.

First, the project analysed 540 political elite and media texts from France, the US, UK and Australia in the ten months following the announcement of AUKUS (September 2021–June 2022).<sup>60</sup> Texts were selected based on keyword inclusion and following Lene Hansen's 'model 2' approach to data composition for discourse analysis:<sup>61</sup> sources included government, opposition and media texts.<sup>62</sup> Political elite texts were sourced from authorized speakers, such as state leaders, and foreign and defence secretaries. Parliamentary and congressional debates on AUKUS were also included. For media texts, data was collected from key newspapers in each state, which respected broad representative partisan coverage.<sup>63</sup> Texts were imported into the qualitative software NVivo for coding. The French and English codebooks were developed thematically and abductively, with extensive case knowledge allied to the inductive coding of a small (approximately 10 per cent) sample of the data. Two coders, one whose native language was English and the other French, conducted the coding of the data, applying the codebook.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>58</sup> Ostermann describes France's 'Atlanticising' foreign policy, from 2007's NATO reintegration and especially 2011's Libyan intervention: Ostermann, *Security, defense discourse and identity in NATO and Europe*; see also Schmitt, 'The reluctant Atlanticist'.

<sup>59</sup> Staunton and Day, 'Australia–France relations after AUKUS', p. 14.

<sup>60</sup> This covers the period from the announcement of AUKUS' creation in September 2021 to the 'reset' of relations in June 2022 following the election of Anthony Albanese's Labor Party in Australia's federal election.

<sup>61</sup> Lene Hansen, *Security as practice: discourse analysis and the Bosnian war* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2006).

<sup>62</sup> See Appendix 1 for full data selection parameters: <https://doi.org/10.5518/1455>.

<sup>63</sup> See Appendix 1 for details of data sources and text frequencies: <https://doi.org/10.5518/1455>.

<sup>64</sup> See Appendix 2 for English and French coding frameworks: <https://doi.org/10.5518/1455>.

Following aggregate coding, data was analysed discursively, with a focus on identity construction (at a variety of levels), historical and security narratives, and geopolitical framings.<sup>65</sup>

Second, we employed semi-structured interviews with 37 political elites, working broadly with a remit that includes AUKUS and/or France–Anglosphere relations. The questions asked were informed by our own expertise and the large computer-aided discourse analysis discussed above.<sup>66</sup> Interviewees were selected for inclusion from across all four states and included government, opposition, civil service, military, diplomatic, media, analyst and academic roles. Interviews were conducted online and thematically analysed, in line with the most prevalent codes from the discourse analysis. In addition to revealing the broader discursive landscape that structured the reception and framing of AUKUS through the discourse analysis, interviews enabled us to explore motivated reasoning at the heart of government.

Mixed methods also enabled triangulation, identifying points of policy and discursive congruence, as well as disjuncture in what was said publicly and privately. Taken together, employing multiple methods enabled us to reveal the spoken and unspoken bases that conditioned the rationale and impact of AUKUS, helping shed light on this key moment of the France–Anglosphere relationship, underpinned by the enduring exceptionalist foundations that unite ‘brOthers in arms’.

### **AUKUS and France–Anglosphere relations: *plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose***

Before AUKUS and despite the challenge of Brexit, military relations between France and the Anglosphere were largely flourishing. Consider, for example: day-to-day operational cooperation with the British, following the Lancaster House Treaties of 2010;<sup>67</sup> extensive interoperability with the US in Afghanistan and Libya; and a decade of deepening ties with Australia. Indeed, France–Australia security relations strengthened significantly in the decade prior to AUKUS. Enhanced cooperation was reflected and manifested in a series of agreements from 2012,<sup>68</sup> peaking with ‘the contract of the century’, an A\$90 billion contract for twelve diesel-powered Attack class submarines, signed in 2016.<sup>69</sup> This rapproche-

<sup>65</sup> Holland, *Selling war and peace*; Holland, *Selling the war on terror*; Norman Fairclough, *New Labour, new language?* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000); Richard Jackson, *Writing the war on terrorism: language, politics and counter-terrorism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005).

<sup>66</sup> See Appendix 3 for details on interview questions, interviewee selection and expertise, as well as ethics: <https://doi.org/10.5518/1455>.

<sup>67</sup> Alice Pannier, ‘Understanding the workings of interstate cooperation in defence: an exploration into Franco-British cooperation after the signing of the Lancaster House Treaty’, *European Security* 22: 4, 2013, pp. 540–58, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09662839.2013.833908>; Pannier, ‘From one exceptionalism to another’.

<sup>68</sup> See for instance, Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, ‘Joint statement of strategic partnership between Australia and France’, 19 Jan. 2012, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/about-us/publications/Pages/joint-statement-of-strategic-partnership-between-australia-and-france>.

<sup>69</sup> *Le Parisien*, ‘Australie : la France a signé un mégacontrat pour 12 sous-marins’, 20 Dec. 2016, <https://www.leparisien.fr/economie/australie-la-france-a-signe-un-megacontrat-pour-12-sous-marins-20-12-2016-6477060.php>.

ment was a French priority, with Australia at the heart of an Indo-Pacific strategy developed by an ‘Indo-Pacific nation’.<sup>70</sup> Just weeks before the AUKUS announcement, the two countries had held their first bilateral ministerial dialogue on national security, emphasizing the ‘strength of our strategic partnership, in promoting an open and inclusive Indo-Pacific region and a rules-based international order’.<sup>71</sup>

Despite these extensive and deepening links, the AUKUS announcement unceremoniously—and with seeming disregard—sidelined France, spectacularly derailing France–Anglosphere relations.<sup>72</sup> The announcement initiated a diplomatic furore from Macron’s administration. In a highly unusual and symbolic move, France recalled its ambassadors to Australia and the United States. Worse, feeding into perceptions of ‘perfidious Albion’, the French ambassador remained in London, with the proclaimed judgement being that British betrayal was in keeping with five years of Brexit negotiations. French officials spoke of France’s deliberate blindsiding, equating AUKUS with a ‘stab in the back’.<sup>73</sup> Outrage was expressed both at the loss of the submarine deal and the secretive nature of planning around AUKUS. French indignation was voiced publicly, in Macron’s insistence in October 2021 during the G20 summit in Rome that Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison had lied,<sup>74</sup> and privately, in the breakdown of individual relations, such as French chief of naval staff Admiral Pierre Vandier’s avowal of a sense of personal betrayal by his UK counterpart Tony Radakin.<sup>75</sup> To French ears, AUKUS breached Australia’s commitment to ‘develop a joint approach in the region for the next 50 years’,<sup>76</sup> as well as the Lancaster House agreements, with the UK seemingly brokering a deal, deceitfully, to France’s detriment.

### *Anglosphere symmetries and brotherly bonds*

Our analysis revealed both the (general) finding that AUKUS was motivated by concerns regarding an emergent external threat, and that it was driven by (specific) internal security dynamics premised upon cultural intimacy. At the most general

<sup>70</sup> Government of the French Republic, Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs, ‘Partenariats de la France dans l’Indopacifique’, 2021, [https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/fr\\_a4\\_indopacifique\\_16p\\_2021\\_v7\\_cle4e-bee1.pdf](https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/fr_a4_indopacifique_16p_2021_v7_cle4e-bee1.pdf).

<sup>71</sup> Australian Government, Minister for Defence, ‘Joint statement: inaugural Australia–France 2+2 ministerial consultations’, 30 Aug. 2021, <https://www.minister.defence.gov.au/statements/2021-08-30/inaugural-australia-france-22-ministerial-consultations>.

<sup>72</sup> See Barnes and Makinda, ‘Testing the limits’ for analysis of trust, betrayal and the impacts of renegeing on an agreement.

<sup>73</sup> Angélique Chrisafis and Daniel Boffey, ‘“Stab in the back”: French fury as Australia scraps submarine deal’, *Guardian*, 16 Sept. 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/sep/16/stab-in-the-back-french-fury-australia-scraps-submarine-deal>; see also Leonie Cater, ‘French ambassador likens submarine deal cancellation to “treason”’, *Politico*, 18 Sept. 2021, <https://www.politico.eu/article/france-ambassador-australia-jean-pierre-thebault-submarine-contract-strategic-partnership-treason>.

<sup>74</sup> Andrew Probyn and Matthew Dora, ‘French President Emmanuel Macron accuses Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison of lying about submarine contract’, ABC News, 31 Oct. 2021, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-11-01/france-macron-accuses-morrison-of-lying-submarine-contract/100584196>.

<sup>75</sup> An anonymous reviewer pointed this out.

<sup>76</sup> French Ambassador to Australia Jean-Pierre Thébault cited in Timothy Moore, Natasha Rudra and Natasha Gillezeau, ‘“Get on with it”: PM on fallen France deal’, *Financial Review*, 3 Nov. 2021, <https://www.afr.com/politics/federal/pfizer-raises-vaccine-revenue-forecast-to-48b-20211103-p595fz>; Government of the French Republic, ‘France’s Indo-Pacific strategy’, 2019, [https://franceintheus.org/IMG/pdf/Indopacifique\\_web.pdf](https://franceintheus.org/IMG/pdf/Indopacifique_web.pdf).

level, the pact's publicly de-emphasized but privately acknowledged *raison d'être* is to counter the influence of an increasingly belligerent China. As a former Australian diplomat explained, China's more assertive foreign policy is 'the animating reason' behind AUKUS; what 'binds AUKUS members more than perhaps others, is that they all share a fairly similar view of the rise of China'.<sup>77</sup> The old Anglosphere coalition indeed brings a shared view of—and approach to—China, seeking to alter the balance of power in the region: the US, UK and Australia 'have the most aligned vision of what a rules-based international order looks like'.<sup>78</sup> Additionally, the decision made sense in practical terms. As one interviewee explained, if the question was: 'Who are going to be your most useful partners in the Indo-Pacific if you are feeling threatened by a rising China? It's the US primarily. They're the only game in town, aren't they? So, you need to get closer relations with the US and it helps [to] balance what could be quite an uneven relationship if you have the UK involved as well'.<sup>79</sup>

Recurrently, however, it was not only, or primarily, the rational logic of the decision that the discourse analysis and interviewees revealed as underpinning Anglosphere cooperation.<sup>80</sup> At the thickest end on an alliance identity spectrum, the decision was seen to make political and security sense on the basis of fraternal cultural intimacy. This point was reiterated publicly and privately. AUKUS states' leaders<sup>81</sup> and interviewees emphasized that these three Anglosphere states constitute 'natural partners'<sup>82</sup> and are 'just about as close as partners get'.<sup>83</sup> This kinship rested upon a 'shared history of standing together in conflict',<sup>84</sup> the 'shared values of Anglosphere nations',<sup>85</sup> and a 'common language'<sup>86</sup> as well as 'deep institutional links'.<sup>87</sup> Describing these links, one member of the UK Parliament spoke of Anglosphere 'symmetry' in political systems and political cultures that significantly lowers the barriers to advanced cooperation.<sup>88</sup> The flip side, of course, is the recognition of France–Anglosphere asymmetries, which render cooperation more difficult and the foundations of AUKUS more explicit.

The result is that the AUKUS states share 'a level of strategic trust ... that is (not) replicable in any other relationship that any of the three countries share with any other country'.<sup>89</sup> This 'perception of underlying strategic trust' was funda-

<sup>77</sup> Interviews with former Australian diplomats. See also interviews with Australian think tank analyst; former Australian strategic policy adviser; British foreign policy academic; US think tank analyst; Australian analyst; and former US military strategist.

<sup>78</sup> Interview with US think tank analyst.

<sup>79</sup> Interview with British foreign policy academic.

<sup>80</sup> See also Holland, *Selling war and peace*.

<sup>81</sup> The White House, 'Joint leaders statement on AUKUS'; US Embassy in Canberra, 'Remarks by President Biden, Prime Minister Albanese, and Prime Minister Sunak on AUKUS', 14 March 2023, <https://au.usembassy.gov/transcript-remarks-by-president-biden-prime-minister-albanese-of-australia-and-prime-minister-sunak-of-the-united-kingdom-on-the-aucus-partnership>.

<sup>82</sup> Interview with former British senior diplomat.

<sup>83</sup> Interview with former Australian diplomat.

<sup>84</sup> Interview with former British senior diplomat; see also interview with member of UK Parliament.

<sup>85</sup> Interview with former British senior diplomat.

<sup>86</sup> Interviews with US think tank analyst; member of UK Parliament; former Australian strategic policy adviser.

<sup>87</sup> Interview with Australian analyst.

<sup>88</sup> Interview with member of UK Parliament.

<sup>89</sup> Interview with US think tank analyst; see also interviews with member of UK Parliament and former

mental to the partnership, since it 'provide(d) a foundation to do things that are more ambitious and more risky, such as the kind of undertakings that AUKUS is allowing'.<sup>90</sup> The upshot of this brotherly trust is of longstanding real and material consequence: 'these three countries share the highest levels of intelligence and information'<sup>91</sup>—for instance, through the Five Eyes agreement<sup>92</sup>—and have developed an extant 'longstanding defence relationship'.<sup>93</sup> These ties are evident in everyday practice and interoperability at a military level; for example, 'there's just a lot more links between the Royal Navy and the US Navy and the Australian Navy than any other of the navies'.<sup>94</sup> While AUKUS might therefore be new, the foundations upon which it was built are deep and enduring, to the exclusion of others, even close allies such as France.

### Questioning France: *brotherly exceptionalism*

While AUKUS constitutes a seemingly natural continuation of long-term behaviours,<sup>95</sup> France's exclusion—and the way it was kept in the dark—makes less intuitive sense. As the Foreign Affairs Committee of the UK House of Commons asked, to some amusement, in its inquiry into the UK's 'Indo-Pacific tilt', 'why not FAUKUS?'. Interviewees put forward numerous rationales, from French language barriers,<sup>96</sup> to France's EU membership,<sup>97</sup> to better US–UK arms deal de-escalation.<sup>98</sup> However, a key part of the answer lies in the fact that France's exceptionalist model failed to convince its Anglosphere partners for three principal reasons.

First was the French pursuit of a *sui generis* approach to China. As French Ambassador to Australia Jean-Pierre Thébaud explained, Macron's administration believed that 'the logic of confrontation is not a good one for the peace and stability of the region'.<sup>99</sup> As a result, Macron referred to China as 'a partner, a competitor, and a systemic rival',<sup>100</sup> with France proposing the development of an alternative 'third way' in the Indo-Pacific.<sup>101</sup> The notion of a 'third way' certainly did not imply French equidistance between Beijing and Washington<sup>102</sup>—it was

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Australian strategic policy adviser.

<sup>90</sup> Interview with former Australian strategic policy adviser; see also interviews with former Australian diplomat and Australian think tank analyst.

<sup>91</sup> Interview with US think tank analyst; see also interview with Australian think tank analyst.

<sup>92</sup> Five Eyes is an Anglosphere intelligence alliance comprising Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States.

<sup>93</sup> Interview with British foreign policy academic; see also interviews with Australian think tank analyst and member of UK Parliament.

<sup>94</sup> Interview with Australian defence academic.

<sup>95</sup> See, for example, Clayton and Newman, 'Settler colonial strategic culture'.

<sup>96</sup> See, for example, interview with Australian defence academic.

<sup>97</sup> Interview with former Australian diplomat.

<sup>98</sup> Interview with former US military strategist.

<sup>99</sup> Masha Macpherson, 'French envoy to Australia: deceitful sub deal raises risks', ABC News, 9 Oct. 2021, <https://abcnews4.com/news/nation-world/french-envoy-to-australia-deceitful-sub-deal-raises-risks>.

<sup>100</sup> Atlantic Council, 'President Macron on his vision for Europe and the future of transatlantic relations', 4 Feb. 2021, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/news/transcripts/transcript-president-macron-on-his-vision-for-europe-and-the-future-of-transatlantic-relations>; see also Staunton and Day, 'Australia–France relations'.

<sup>101</sup> Government of the French Republic, Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs, 'Partenariats de la France'.

<sup>102</sup> Anonymous interviewee.

more a case of shared ends, different means<sup>103</sup>—but the term was nonetheless vital in reproducing exceptionalist thinking. France was, once again, different from like-minded allies. For AUKUS partners, the position however lacked strategic clarity or sufficient policy convergence. As one interviewee explained:

There's a question as to how much France has been willing to (discuss) how to characterize its relationship with China ... The thinking in Washington [is] that France is still wrestling with that conversation internally and hasn't really come [out] on one side or the other [certainly not] as strongly as the UK and Australia did [and] that was decisive'.<sup>104</sup>

That sentiment was shared in the UK<sup>105</sup> and Australia, where 'you're not as sure that France shares the same goals as those other three countries, and that probably introduces some risk'.<sup>106</sup>

Second, French exceptionalism—and its status as an Indo-Pacific power with a global force projection capability—was doubted. The idea that France is more than a 'middle size power' is a key part of its identity and has been a core component of Macron's foreign policy.<sup>107</sup> A significant (and relatively novel) element of Macron's insistence on the exceptionalism of French 'rank' is that France is 'an Indo-Pacific power'<sup>108</sup> in light of its almost two million French citizens and 7,000 troops in the region, with more than 90 per cent of France's exclusive economic zone being located in the Indo-Pacific.<sup>109</sup> However, at the time of the AUKUS negotiations, it was clear that France had failed to convince Canberra of its capability to address the rise of China, being seen, rather, as 'a European power' that 'is not going to be a major strategic actor in this region' and which has, ultimately, 'a very peripheral role'.<sup>110</sup> A similar assessment was made in the US: 'the French always saw themselves as a global partner for the Americans and wanted to have a say in global strategy and global debates',<sup>111</sup> while

the Americans always see France as a regional power ... So, on European issues they get consulted, but I don't think that the Americans see a need to consult the French on Indo-Pacific issues ... It's been happening for decades now and you have just seen yet another episode of that.<sup>112</sup>

Third, France was not perceived as a reliable security partner precisely because of the need 'to have its own sense of independent exceptionalism and greatness'.<sup>113</sup>

<sup>103</sup> Interview with US think tank analyst; see also Schmitt, 'The reluctant Atlanticist'.

<sup>104</sup> Interview with former US military strategist; see also interview with US think tank analyst.

<sup>105</sup> Interviews with British adviser and British foreign policy academic.

<sup>106</sup> Interview with former Australian diplomat.

<sup>107</sup> Staunton, *France, humanitarian intervention and the responsibility to protect*; Staunton "France is back".

<sup>108</sup> Interview with former US military strategist. See also, for instance, Elysée, 'Discours du Président de la République à la conférence des ambassadeurs,' 27 Aug. 2018, <https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2018/08/27/discours-du-president-de-la-republique-a-la-conference-des-ambassadeurs>; Government of the French Republic, Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs, 'Partenariats de la France'.

<sup>109</sup> Government of the French Republic, 'France's Indo-Pacific strategy', 2022, [https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/en\\_dcp\\_a4\\_indopacifique\\_022022\\_v1-4\\_web\\_cle878143.pdf](https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/en_dcp_a4_indopacifique_022022_v1-4_web_cle878143.pdf).

<sup>110</sup> Interview with Australia-based think tank research analyst.

<sup>111</sup> Interview with Australian defence academic.

<sup>112</sup> Interview with Australian defence academic.

<sup>113</sup> Interview with former Australian strategic policy adviser; see also interview with British foreign policy academic.

Interviewees in Australia, the US and UK emphasized the legacy impact of events in French foreign policy history. These included French withdrawal in 1966 from NATO's integrated military command structure and the sinking of the Greenpeace flagship, the *Rainbow Warrior*, in 1985 by the action division of the French secret services.

Rightly or wrongly ... there is a perception in Australia that though ... the French are definitely constructive, good partners to have in the Indo-Pacific, that ... France is a very fickle, self-interested player ... there will always be ... inherent limits on the amount of trust that can ever exist between Australia and France, relative to Australia and the UK and the United States. That's not to say that the US and the UK are necessarily inherently more trustworthy, but it's all about the perception and the assumptions that people bring to making these kinds of decisions.<sup>114</sup>

The outcome of a history of antagonistic exceptionalist-inspired foreign policy events was thus a lack of faith in French intentions that contrasted with perceptions of Anglosphere trustworthiness. Historical instances of co-constitutive relational alterity resurfaced to continue to structure the biographing of France–Anglosphere relations in the contemporary era. It was precisely France's pursuit of exceptional status, in partial juxtaposition to the Anglosphere, that had marked it out as not wholly friend or foe, but something more complex. As a result, 'there simply [wasn't] the same underlying level of strategic trust and cultural affinity with France for Australia as it has with the United Kingdom and the United States',<sup>115</sup> and 'both the political confidence and the organizational confidence that you would need to do something like (AUKUS) with the French just wasn't there'.<sup>116</sup> This lack of trust helps to explain not only France's AUKUS exclusion but also its blindsiding.<sup>117</sup>

### Why not FAUKUS? French exceptionalism par excellence

A vital and often overlooked feature of the fallout from the AUKUS announcement is that France would not have wanted to join the partnership. Narrated in partial opposition to the old Anglosphere coalition, inclusion would threaten French biographical continuity and undermine its ontological security. Indeed, AUKUS was always antithetical to Macron's preference for 'European strategic autonomy' and France's long-lasting 'allied but unaligned' positioning *vis-à-vis* the US. Macron's emphasis, throughout his presidency, has been that liberal order is under threat and the EU—led by France—should play a primary role in its defence.<sup>118</sup> In a clear example of relational allied alterity, Macron deemed that this task could not be left to the US because it was part of the problem, rendering

<sup>114</sup> Interview with former Australian strategic policy adviser.

<sup>115</sup> Interview with former Australian strategic policy adviser.

<sup>116</sup> Interview with Australian defence academic.

<sup>117</sup> Michelle Grattan, 'How will Emmanuel Macron's "liar" claim about Scott Morrison play in the focus groups?', ABC News, 2 Nov. 2021, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-11-02/how-will-focus-groups-respond-to-macrons-pants-on-fire-claim-/100588684>.

<sup>118</sup> Staunton, "France is back".



it France's responsibility 'to exercise its role as a counterweight when imbalances appear'.<sup>119</sup> The directness of the challenge to the US that this narration engendered was explicit: 'France must allow Europe to become the leader of the free world'.<sup>120</sup> Macron has indeed argued that it is 'particularly up to us, as Europeans, to defend the common goods of the free world ... I assume this discourse of *grandeur*, because it is appropriate to the moment that we live'.<sup>121</sup> This, then, is French exceptionalism, *par excellence*. In consequence, as one interviewee put it, joining AUKUS would not only have been in contradiction to Macron's ambitions for France in the Indo-Pacific, it would also have been 'the antithesis to strategic autonomy in the French conception of *what that means to them*'.<sup>122</sup>

The principal driver of French outrage, therefore, was not French exclusion, but the breach of trust and blindsiding. Our extensive analysis of French political and media texts revealed the three most expressed emotions to be betrayal, anger and surprise. While there was a politics to French dismay, since as one Australian commentator noted, Macron's administration 'milked this a little bit',<sup>123</sup> this sense of *humiliation* is important and should not be underestimated. France's AUKUS blindsiding was damaging to French economics and military capability; it involved the loss of 'the contract of the century' and jeopardized their Indo-Pacific strategy. But, above all, it represented a huge embarrassment for a nation obsessed with its international rank.<sup>124</sup> This was recognized within the diplomatic community, given that 'Australia changed horses in a very dramatic way ... So it was maximally humiliating for France'.<sup>125</sup> As a former US military strategist explained, 'it was seen as yet another example of the Anglo-Saxon powers creating and driving grand strategy for the West and not bringing France along, or even advising and consulting France'.<sup>126</sup> The AUKUS announcement was thus *anxiety-inducing* for France as global recognition of its military and diplomatic significance was undermined, generating ontological insecurity. As Staunton and Day explain:

Australia's clumsy handling of the deal's announcement was rooted in a misjudgement of the extent to which French exceptionalism continues to pervade its foreign policy, including in how it conceives its role in the Indo-Pacific. The Morrison government did not adequately gauge how the way they reneged on the submarine contract was an affront to France's prestige and status.<sup>127</sup>

<sup>119</sup> Elysée, 'Discours du Président de la République à l'ouverture de conférence des ambassadeurs', 29 Aug. 2017, <https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2017/08/29/discours-du-president-de-la-republique-a-l-ouverture-de-la-conference-des-ambassadeurs>.

<sup>120</sup> Laureline Dupont, Etienne Guernelle and Sébastien Le Fol, 'Macron, le grand entretien', *Le Point*, 30 Aug. 2017, [https://www.lepoint.fr/politique/exclusif-emmanuel-macron-le-grand-entretien-30-08-2017-2153393\\_20.php](https://www.lepoint.fr/politique/exclusif-emmanuel-macron-le-grand-entretien-30-08-2017-2153393_20.php).

<sup>121</sup> Dupont, Guernelle and Le Fol, 'Macron, le grand entretien' (emphasis added).

<sup>122</sup> Interview with US think tank analyst (emphasis added); see also interview with British foreign policy academic.

<sup>123</sup> Interview with Australia-based think tank research analyst; see also interview with former Australian diplomat. It is important to note that AUKUS was announced in the middle of France's presidential campaign.

<sup>124</sup> Smouts, 'Political aspects of peace-keeping operations'; Grosser, 'Le rôle et le rang'; Staunton, *France, humanitarian intervention and the responsibility to protect*.

<sup>125</sup> Interview with former British senior diplomat; see also interview with former US military strategist.

<sup>126</sup> Interview with former US military strategist.

<sup>127</sup> Staunton and Day, 'Australia-France relations', p. 13.

The perceived public humiliation could thus not be allowed to stand. In the words of Jean-Yves Le Drian, the furore allowed France to make one thing clear: ‘when you have an ally of the stature of France, you don’t treat them like that’.<sup>128</sup> In response, Macron doubled down on his preferred European sovereignty project, arguing that AUKUS reflected the declining reliability of the US as security partners. This message was unmistakable in the French communiqué published immediately after the AUKUS announcement, which stated that the partnership ‘only reinforces the need to make the issue of European strategic autonomy loud and clear’.<sup>129</sup> The French response to AUKUS, therefore, can be understood as an effort to re-establish biographical continuity and ensure its projection into the future, in pursuit of French ontological security. This ‘storm in a teacup’ was, in part, a strategic attempt to preserve exceptional status via reciprocal recognition—‘if we don’t put a marker in the sand now, then they’ll think they can kind of just push us around, and that we’re not to be taken seriously’.<sup>130</sup>

## Conclusion

Despite UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson’s memorable articulation of dissent—the ‘raucous squawkus from the anti-AUKUS caucus’<sup>131</sup>—the security partnership has received widespread bipartisan support and huge financial and political backing. Notwithstanding future electoral risks, the pact appears here to stay. AUKUS, therefore, is likely to be at the heart of the US-led response to the rise of China in the twenty-first century. Given the role this relatively new partnership will play in global reordering, it is vital to understand its composition, history and bases, as well as its oversights, exclusions and tensions. As the US increasingly leans on allies to counter relative decline, the roles played by middle powers—such as the UK, France and Australia—will become more, not less, important. Likewise, the historically problematic actions of the old Anglosphere coalition, from empire to Iraq and beyond, must undergo greater scholarly enquiry. Given the challenges AUKUS faces, sustained critique does not inevitably lead to calls for its disbandment, but rather can help to improve the pact’s legitimacy and efficacy.

The article developed three contributions: the conceptual development of the term ‘brOthers in arms’; a critical theorization of France–Anglosphere relations, premised upon symbiotic exceptionalisms; and the substantive, empirical analysis of AUKUS as a vital new case-study. First, we explored the importance of fraternity for ontological security, noting the naturalization of a language of familial

<sup>128</sup> Kim Willsher, ‘Aukus: France’s ambassador recall is “tip of the iceberg”, say analysts’, *Guardian*, 18 Sept. 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/sep/18/aukus-france-ambassador-recall-is-tip-of-the-iceberg-say-analysts>.

<sup>129</sup> French Embassy in Australia, ‘France takes note of the decision just announced by the Australian government to halt the “Future Submarine Program”: statement by Jean-Yves le Drian, Minister of Europe and Foreign Affairs and Florence Parly, Minister of the Armed Forces’, 16 Sept. 2021, <https://au.ambafrance.org/France-takes-note-of-the-decision-just-announced-by-the-australian-government>.

<sup>130</sup> Interview with former Australian diplomat.

<sup>131</sup> UK Conservative Party, ‘We’re getting on with the job’, speech by Prime Minister Boris Johnson at the Conservative Party Conference, 6 Oct. 2021, <https://www.conservatives.com/news/2021/boris-johnson-s-keynote-speech---we-re-getting-on-with-the-job>.

kinship and brotherhood, and its invisibilization in IR, despite its significance for world politics. In order to capture a third character, between Self and Other, or brother and stranger, we developed the notion of 'brOthers in arms', whereby allies are defined in juxtaposition to their (battlefield) partners. The notion of brOtherhood, we believe, can help to fruitfully open lines of enquiry in constructivist and ontological security theory, as well as parallel efforts to move IR beyond binaries (in studies of liminality, for example).

Second, we theorized the France–Anglosphere relationship, arguing that this exists at the thicker end of an identity spectrum, whereby internal security dynamics bind allies. At its heart, mutually constitutive exceptionalisms reproduce national identity narratives premised upon relational alterity. These symbiotic narratives converge in their universalism and revolutionary zeal but remain entwined, foremost, by their antagonisms. France and the Anglosphere use each other as a foil, as exceptionalist foundations of self-understanding extend from the cultural banalities of everyday life to the high politics of foreign affairs. It is not just that they compete—although they surely do. It is more that their narrative existence, biographical continuity and ontological security depend on the articulation of differences with each other.

Third, AUKUS is a prime case-study to explore this fraught dynamic. To make sense of this key period of pugnacity and quarrelsome tension, we argue, it is necessary to situate AUKUS in the *longue durée* of fractious Franco-Anglo relations. The AUKUS announcement has certainly left considerable 'scar tissue' in the relationship,<sup>132</sup> with reduced scope for short-term coordination in the Indo-Pacific. Yet, notwithstanding significant electoral rupture, France will remain a key ally in the fight to defend the liberal international order. France and the old Anglosphere coalition need each other—both in co-constitutive discursive relationality and to cooperatively tackle some of the twenty-first century's most significant global challenges. Tensions will continue to intermittently bubble over, not least when French aspirations to global significance are threatened, but France and the Anglosphere remain 'doomed to cooperate'.<sup>133</sup>

<sup>132</sup> Interview with Australian analyst.

<sup>133</sup> Christopher Hill, 'Foreword', in Alice Pannier, *Rivals in arms*, p. xi.