Making ends meet. A bottom-up approach to austerity's impact on policymaking in defence

Catherine Hoeffler, Jean Joana

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Catherine Hoeffler, European School of Political and Social Sciences, Catholic University of Lille & Jean Joana, Université de Montpellier

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Abstract

Political science accounts of the debt crisis in Europe have highlighted the changes observable in national and European policymaking. These changes have vastly showed an emphasis on economic imperatives and more precisely on the crisis' impact on public expenditure. Defence policy offers a particularly interesting perspective on the politics of state adaptation to spending cuts. While being at the core of state sovereignty, this policy has not been immune to attempts at decreasing public expenditure. Yet, we argue that contrary to many accounts so far, the crisis' impact cannot be solely analysed through the mere budget numbers. Based on neo-institutionalism and public policy analysis, this paper demonstrates that actors have lessened the crisis' impact through their use of defence acquisition instruments. They have shown three strategies to decrease the impact of budgetary cuts: compensation, delaying and re-categorizing acquisition procedures.

Key words: Defence expenditures; budget cuts; France; defence; arms procurement; military policy; austerity

1. Introduction: What does austerity politics change, by the way? Going beyond spending cuts

The 2007 financial crisis has profoundly changed public policies across Europe. Going back to a fundamental issue in political economy (Gourevitch, 1986; Scharpf, 1991), scholars from comparative political economy and public policy analysis question the impact of this crisis on nation-states' economies and policymaking (Bermeo and Pontusson 2012; Kickert and Randma-Liiv, 2015; Peters 2011; Peters and Raess 2012; Pontusson and Raess, 2012). Even though the crisis is according to many a direct consequence of the neoliberal turn in the late 1970s-early 1980s in Europe, it apparently has not fundamentally questioned the core tenets of (neo-)liberal reforms (Crouch, 2911; Schmidt and Thatcher, 2013). In that respect, austerity[1] has become highly valued across Western governments (Blyth, 2013; Schäfer and Streeck, 2013). While the objectives of austerity have appeared much before the financial crisis, the latter has empowered pro-austerity actors and ideas (Hassenteufel and Saurugger, forthcoming), so much so that spending cuts seem to have become the 'new normal' after decades of policy expansion. What an impact the crisis or austerity politics have had on specific policies has therefore been approached by a battle about the budget numbers: more or less austerity, as evidenced by more or less spending cuts.

However, spending cuts only constitute the tip of the iceberg when it comes to policy change. While spending cuts are useful devices to track budgetary evolutions, taking them as a measure of austerity's impact begs a fundamental question: how do spending cuts affect a given policy? Policy decisions are rarely if ever implemented one-to-one. How bureaucrats translate, shape, mitigate spending cuts thus determines *if and how* a policy changes. We therefore contend that spending cuts are but one step in the process of analyzing change: taking seriously austerity's impact requires us to re-conceptualize what austerity politics actually changes by including how these spending cuts are implemented. Building on implementation approaches in public policy and institutional change theories (Hall, 1993; Pierson, 1993, 2004; Lascoumes and Le Galès, 2005; Streeck and Thelen, 2005; Mahoney and Thelen, 2009; Saurugger, 2013), this article aims at filling this gap by shedding light at austerity through its construction and implementation, that is, how spending cuts are handled with by bureaucrats. This bottom-up reconceptualization of austerity's impact on policy is beneficial to a better understanding of austerity itself. It also better addresses the more practical question of whether austerity undermines state capacities.

[1] Blyth defines austerity as "a form of voluntary deflation in which the economy adjusts through the reduction of wages, prices, and public spending in order to restore competitiveness which is (supposedly) best achieved by cutting the state's budget, debts, and deficits" (2013: 12).

This article applies this bottom-up approach to French defence policy between 2008 and 2015. Notwithstanding its shortcomings, this case analysis is interesting at different levels. First, French defence posture and ambitions made spending cuts appear unlikely. Nonetheless, defence has suffered many cuts throughout that period, with analysts and officials disagreeing over whether or not these constitute a threat to French defence capacity. Second, given France's strong bureaucracy and industry, defence policy is an interesting case to further implementation and institutional change theories as the number of layers, the expertise and discretion of French military bureaucracy are likely to lead bureaucrats to resist policy change in any way possible. To analyse austerity's impact from a bottom-up perspective, we chose therefore to focus on the period where austerity has been translated into spending cuts. We have thus tried to analyse how these spending cuts have been constructed within the Ministry of defence's budget and how at a second stage actors have handled them at the level of armament programs and military acquisition procedures. We aimed at looking if actors had implemented cuts (was there less money?) and if so, to what changes had this led. For our purpose, we relied on primary sources such as reports by the MoD, the Court of Audits and the Parliamentary Defence Committee in order to trace the controversies surrounding spending cuts in the realm of defence. We completed this material with interviews with officials from the MoD and the Parliamentary Defence Committee. This information allows us a nuanced tracing of the policymaking processes and the actors' use of different policy procedures.

Our analysis reveals an unexpected picture of how austerity impacts policy-making, Our results pertain specifically to two scholarly debates. First, our paper contributes to the literature on policy change. While they have not altered fundamental policy goals in Hall's typology (1993), spending cuts have led to changes in policy instruments and their uses and settings. In line with an actor-centered account of implementation and institutional change theories, we find that bureaucrats were able to mitigate spending cuts' impact by using the full spectrum of available strategies in order to fulfill policy goals and minimize change; in short, bureaucrats innovate to maintain the status quo. We concur with authors who stress the long-term radical impact of marginal changes (Streeck and Thelen, 2005). We argue that these first and second order "small" changes do matter for two reasons: (i) they can lead to a third order change since initial policy values and goals can increasingly appear as anomalies once they don't fit with policy procedures. And (ii) these changes matter as they pertain to a fundamental feature of policymaking: they introduce a high level of uncertainty to policymaking, by disrupting 'normal', predictable and planned procedures and make adaptive, ad hoc strategies the norm[2]. This leads to our second result, which concerns the debate about austerity's impact. Whatever its impact on budget through spending cuts, austerity is hard to pin down to actual numbers: finance programming is hardly

[2] This is not an entirely true phenomenon, but spending cuts have fed into and reinforced the dynamic.

ever respected, and actors' strategies to cope with cuts makes it hard if not impossible to establish what an impact spending cuts had in terms of defence capacity. This impossible task of measuring austerity's impact on the ground should neither discourage us from adopting a bottom-up strategy nor should it make us think that austerity has no impact given bureaucrats' expected resistance. Rather, our argument is that beyond its impact on budgets, austerity politics induce a much more fundamental and long term change: it disrupts policymaking by changing policy instruments, and by this, changes the nature and capacity of state planning.

This paper proceeds in five parts. The next section discusses how austerity's impact has been analyzed by spending cuts so far and shows some limits to this approach. The third section lays out our theoretical contribution through which we reconceptualize how to address austerity's impact from a bottom-up approach: most importantly we develop our model of three strategies available to bureaucrats in order to cope with spending cuts (compensation; delaying; re-categorizing). The following three sections are each devoted to one of these strategies. We then conclude by discussing the implications and limits of our results.

2. Capturing austerity through spending cuts. Strengths and limits of taking budget numbers as an indicator of the crisis' impact

2.1. Focusing on budget evolution: how austerity is hitting on defence capabilities

Dealing with change when it comes to defence policy is not politics as usual. As in many countries, the French defence policy is usually characterized in comparative politics, foreign policy analysis and public policy analysis by its inertia or continuity (Irondelle and Joana, 2004; Cohen, 1994; Vennesson, 2000). Defence policy is considered as being a highly institutionalized policy, organized around strong norms (Gaullism and French « grandeur policy » in our case) and interests, as codified in organizations and rules. In that account, French defence policy is not expected to change much because of the crisis: actors are likely to isolate this policy from cuts in public spending. Both a cross-party consensus on the Gaullist tradition of military autonomy, public and private actors' interests, and the power of the MoD within the government are supposed to prevent any kind of significant changes. Yet, these accounts reveal insufficient, since they don't account for recent budget cuts.

For obvious reasons, money has always represented a huge issue for security studies. In that sense, many authors in security studies and defence economics have used the defence policy budget as a proxy to analyze and measure the crisis' impact. Some authors focus at the macro level through the analysis of the crisis's impact on strategic capabilities and geopolitical influence. Evans, for instance, analyses the US domestic budget crisis's consequences on US policy towards Southeast Asia (Evans 2013). Paul

Cornish analysed Britain's Strategic Defense Review adopted by the government in the wake of the financial crisis. He underlines that the incremental budget reductions planned in the SDR will have a long-term impact on UK's strategic influence (Cornish, 2010). Stephen Larrabee, Stuart Johnson and their colleagues studied the crisis's impact on NATO countries: beyond mere short-term effects, budgetary cuts may question NATO countries' ability to set up ambitious military operations in the long run (Larrabee et al., 2012). More precisely, they argue that what has changed depends on the countries. Regarding military ambitions, only the UK has clearly reduced its goals, whereas other governments have not clearly drawn the consequences of the crisis on their military ambitions. This also led countries to renew their promotion of multilateral cooperation, showing persistent differences among states as to which arena (NATO, EU, ad hoc groupings) to privilege in that respect.

The impact of spending cuts on the military capabilities of European countries is a concern shared by many authors. According to Keller (2011), capability gaps caused by budgetary cuts are visible in all EU countries and this is very preoccupying given that member states had all acted on their own without any coordination. Indeed, Mölling and Brune underline that EU member states have each adopted very dissimilar strategies through the crisis (2011).

At a more meso level, Meese calls for a thorough analysis of the politics of the US defence budget and of its evolution (Meese, 2014). Although he does not go as far as to test his claims, he makes a strong case in favor of studying the impact of the way government reduce budgets in times of crisis, relying on budget management literature (Schick, 1983; Lieberman, 1991). Getting somewhat more specific than talking about the crisis's impact on countries' influence as well, Sophie Brune and her colleagues have analyzed more precisely and in a comparative manner (UK, France, Germany and Poland) the crisis' impact on the structure of armed forces and of national defence industries (Brune et al, 2010).

This focus on budgets to analyse the evolution of defence policies is also observable on the case of France. Many authors have highlighted the strong impact of the crisis. Foucault (2012) and later Droff and Malizard (2014) have analyzed the evolution of the French defence policy, insisting on the fact that defence budgets have indeed decreased a lot and served as an adjustment variable in the overall search for spending cuts in the recent years. Maulny (2010) explains that crisis-induced budgetary cuts represent a « crisis » for defence policies, in France but also more generally in Europe. He affirms that these current cuts have a stronger impact than those implemented in the 1990s at the end of the Cold War first because they are smaller in quantitative terms. These cuts are also riskier according to him because of the cumulative impact of cuts in a highly technological sector where going below some thresholds of investment is dangerous: French actors could lose their technological edge and recovering their know-how could prove impossible.

2.2. Half empty or half full? Why focusing on budgets does not explain the crisis's impact on French defence policy

Despite its many merits, there are many empirical and theoretical reasons for why this focus on the evolution of budgets only partially - and we would argue insufficiently - explain the crisis's impact on defence policy, as analysed here in the French case.

First, at a very basic level, many pieces written on the topic reveal a strong normative dimension, loaded with prescriptive policy recommendations: talking about the crisis's impact, translated in terms of declining budgets' impact on military capabilities or even further, on strategic influence, is often no neutral or apolitical debate. This also explains why the topic is also dealt with by think tanks, advising firms and governments on this question. For instance, Krepinevich, Chin, and Harrison, from the Washington D.C.-based CSBA think tank, formulate recommendations about how « a leading power in the international system (can) sustain its global position while facing the prospect of relative decline and an extended period of fiscal austerity » (Krepinevich et al., 2012:x).

The second reason why focusing on budgets is not sufficient is that it does not necessarily make sense of broader military ambitions or actual military operations. For instance, in France, while budget cuts have been announced in the various White Papers on defence, some of them have been renounced officially in the aftermath of the 2015 terrorist attacks. But more importantly, these announced budget cuts have taken place while the succeeding governments have shown an increasing military interventionism, with operations in Libya, Mali, Central African Republic, Syria, and Iraq. Cuts may therefore not impede, at least in the short run, military ambitions and operations, while they question at the same time the relevance and sustainability of austerity politics in defence[3].

Beyond this empirical paradox, a third and more fundamental issue with analyzing the crisis through the budget is methodological. It lies in the indicators chosen to assess its impact. Defence expenditures and their negative or positive evolution can show a very different face depending on what timeframe or unit of measurement (are chosen overall defence budget, ratio of defence budget in overall state budget or in regard to GDP, their annual variations vs pluriannuel statistics, etc) (Foucault, 2007). In the same line, the defence budget is not indicative of a government's commitment to national security or of its international ambitions. Not only are some defence-related expenditures not encompassed in the MoD's budget (such as nuclear dissuasion in the US, military operations in some countries like the US or the UK), the MoD performs and thus finances some activities that are not related to defence strictly speaking (Bellais et al., 2014:17-18). These differences make comparative analysis highly complicated,

[3] For an exemple of this debate in a national newspaper, see : « La France a-t-elle les moyens de faire la guerre sur trois fronts ? », *Le Monde*, 16-17 nov. 2014.

while they question fundamentally the causal relationship between the MoD's budget and security or military ambitions.

Indeed, a last critique targets the often taken for granted two-step causal relationship between the evolution of budgets, military capabilities and security: a decrease in budgets would automatically translate into a decrease in defence capabilities (equipment or manpower), which would automatically mean a decrease in security. The two steps of this causal relation are problematic. First, concerning the latter link between the amount of military capability and security : there is no consensus whatsoever about a linear or direct causal relationship between them. In other words, if there are certainly thresholds under which the lack of military capability may threaten national security, one cannot not take for granted that decreasing capacity means decreasing security *per se* (Sköns 2005). Second, the other causal link at stake is a little bit trickier to dismiss. The assumption of papers focusing on budgets is that of course, the crisis would impact defence policy most visibly or importantly on its budgets. This seems so obvious that one hardly needs to comment. Based on approaches pertaining to policy change in times of crisis in the fields of comparative political economy and policy studies, we but contend that the budget is not a sufficient indicator of the budgetary crisis' impact on defence policy, as is set out in the next theoretical section.

3. A bottom-up approach to the politics of budgeting and acquisition practices

3.1. Theoretical foundations

Historical neo-institutionalism and sociological approaches to public policy analysis help explain a little further the crisis' impact on policy. What do we mean by crisis – financial or budgetary – and how can we conceptualize its impact? The literature has highlighted how domestic factors – varieties of economic and political institutions, actors' preferences and norms, electoral considerations for politicians – shape its concrete and distinctive national forms (Peters, Guy, 2011; Pontusson and Raess 2012; Kickert and Randma-Liiv, 2015; Kickert, Randma-Liiv and Savi, 2015). In that respect, crises are being mostly defined by the play of domestic institutions and by how actors seize this period of uncertainty to redefine rules and norms about the appropriate ways to govern a policy domain (Saurugger and Terpan, 2016). Speaking to the traditional dichotomy between incremental and radical policy change, not only have neo-institutionalist authors shown how change could not only happen despite an inertia bias, but they also provided conceptual tools to understand how this incremental change could possibly be transformative (Streeck and Thelen, 2005; Mahoney and Thelen, 2009). Analysing the crisis' impact on defence policy requires to take a closer look at how actors mediate change. More precisely, studies have shown that the crisis – and before that, the neoliberal turn against

state interventionism – had an impact on the distribution of power among state actors, empowering clearly financial and budgetary actors at the expense of "spending" ministries, thus explaining decisions in favor of spending cuts and like-minded reforms.

We argue that this focus on domestic actors and institutions can be complemented by policy studies' emphasis on policy making as an open-ended process, rather than taking it from the perspective of decisions or reforms only. Policy studies help us construct a bit further our understanding of *what* is actually impacted on by the crisis. Authors have highlighted that policy formulation and decision do not account for policy's impact on the social world for many reasons: announcements and reforms are not always followed by actions; policies "on the ground" are likely to differ a lot from the initial intent (if one assumes there even exists one single and coherent policy design in the first place) (Pressman and Wildavsky, 1973; Bardach, 1977; Mazmanian and Sabatier, 1981; Sabatier, 1986). In a most radical way, implementation has been depicted as being more important than the decision itself: in other words, rather than policy-takers, bureaucrats act as policy-makers in their own right (Lipsky 1980) since they shape very strongly, depending on their level of bureaucratic discretion, the content of the policy and its impact. In that sense, understanding the crisis impact requires to understand how actors construct the budget and implement it.

3.2. Making ends meet: how innovation maintains the status quo

Building on neo-institutionalist theories of change and sociological approaches to policy implementation, this paper suggests that a fruitful way to analyse the crisis' impact on a policy is to look at how bureaucratic actors use policy instruments to shape reforms, at the level of both decision and implementation. In other words, what matters is not so much the aggregated budget numbers themselves but how the budget is constructed and implemented. We therefore expect to find actors fighting for different interpretations of what austerity means for defence, and actors using different policy instruments and procedures to mediate how spending cuts are to be implemented. This involves looking at how different actors –mostly from the Prime minister cabinet, the Budget ministry and the Ministry of Defence – have tried to imprint austerity politics and its emphasis on spending cuts on the defence ministry.

More precisely, we expect MoD actors to try to resist spending cuts, either at the levels of budget construction or budget implementation. Resisting spending cuts can take many forms. Actors can try to lessen the crisis by three strategies displayed throughout budget construction and budget implementation: (1) compensation, by which cuts are compensated by other financial resources; (2) delaying, by which expenditures are not written off but simply postponed, thus creating an illusion of

cuts in the short-term, and (3) re-categorizing, by which actors discard traditional armament procurement procedures in favor of another procedure for the very same purpose, thus changing the administrative category of accounting.

These strategies can rely on old procedures but also on new ones created or first used in the wake of the rise of austerity politics. This has important theoretical and empirical implications. First, the political imperative of cutting the debt and state expenditure is far from new in the defence policy: spending cuts have been on the agenda for a long time before in many Western European countries, and the respective ministries of defence have delayed some armament programmes since the 1990s. In that sense, if the crisis gave a new political visibility to spending cuts, the nature of change that was required from the MoDs' was not. Second, while the nature of the change was not new, the MoDs' strategies to cope with it relied on both old and new policy procedures. This shows that while actors are innovative to push for change, they also have to be innovative to maintain the status quo: MoD actors not willing to suffer the impacts of spending cuts can use new procedures allowing them to either compensate for cuts with other sources of funding in the first place (compensating) or bypass cuts by re-categorizing purchases (re-categorizing). This shows the ambiguous nature of change at stake: next to literature emphasizing the new distribution of power among actors, we argue that austerity politics impacts policy instruments and procedures. These new procedures and instruments reflect the prevailing norms regarding the state's role and how it should be reformed: they emphasize the need for the state to get "leaner", and to rely more on the market as a more cost-efficient and quicker tool to procure weapons. Attached to their liberal understanding of the state, these new procedures also introduce more uncertainty: they disturb traditional military pluri-annual planning and its budgeting methods, in favour of what is seen as being more flexible and hence efficient policy-making.

3.2. Case selection and methodology

Our analysis focuses on French defence policy from 2008 to 2015: notwithstanding its shortcomings, this case analysis is interesting for many reasons. First, defence policy constitutes an interesting case to question the financial and budgetary crisis's impact on public policies for at least three reasons. First, because, most obviously, this public policy shows most vividly the heart of the dilemma of public spending (cuts), namely the political fight for the allocation of resources between different public policies, one of which being the provision of national security, one of western nation states' core attributes. Second, because defence policies have been under stress since the end of the Cold War, it allows us to put contemporary budgetary imperatives and disputes in historical perspective. Third, defence policy is also a very interesting case to analyse the crisis's impact because of its relative inertia and its least politicization in contrast to other public policies. This said apolitical nature (for a

discussion of this common assumption, see Hofmann, 2013) and the relative inertia of defence policies are interesting for they constitute a very unlikely case to analyse policy change.

Second, *French* defence policy is puzzling in its own right since the existing literature accounts fairly poorly for two developments. In contrast to other Western countries, French defence policy is considered particularly embedded and insulated from change thanks to its resourceful actors (both private companies and powerful MoD bureaucracy) and their connections to one another (among other through a network of elitist *corps d'Etat* navigating in both public and private organizations) as well as to long-standing norms of national military autonomy justifying large defence expenditures. Yet, as section four shows, French defence expenditures have decreased quite dramatically since the crisis. This decrease needs to be addressed, especially since France has also launched or contributed to an unusually high number of military operations in that same period. In other words, while the defence budget has been decreasing, the military has nonetheless been highly deployed. The French case study on defence policy provides us with an opportunity to illustrate the crisis' impact on a policy, and more specially to question the role of actors' strategies to shape this change.

Our analysis relies on qualitative empirical material to identify and then trace the strategies to cope with the crisis over time. This led us first to analyse primary sources from different sources: annual reports by the Ministry of Defence, the Court of Audits and the Parliamentary Defence Committee, the two latter organizations having a role of oversight in these matters. These have been complemented by an extensive collection of media content such as the national press (Le Monde, Le Figaro, Les Echos) and specialized blogs[4] (, the latter giving us insider knowledge on some issues. This information was useful to conduct interviews with MoD officials and parliamentary defence committee experts to discuss more thoroughly these issues and consult first hand confidential documents).

The remainder of this paper sets out its empirical results. Sections 4 and 5 will respectively discuss strategies of compensation (section 4) and delaying and re-categorizing (section 5).

4. Budgeting national defence: exceptional resources and the market's failure at funding defence policy

This section is devoted to the analysis of budget construction: rather than looking at the level of resources available to the MoD, we argue that the *nature* and *source* of these resources are of paramount

[4] Bruxelles2, by Nicolas Gros-Verheyde (https://www.bruxelles2.eu) is admittedly one of the best insider blog on European defence policies; regarding France more specifically, we consulted "Secret Défense", by Jean-Dominique Merchet (http://www.lopinion.fr/blog/secret-defense), and "Lignes de defense" by Philippe Chapleau (http://lignesdedefense.blogs.ouest-france.fr).

importance to understanding the crisis' impact on defence policy. While the budget level has indeed decreased, state actors have tried to find ways to partially *compensate* for these cuts by finding financial resources elsewhere. These resources, called exceptional resources, stem from commercial activities, in other words from outside the state's budget. This makes them legitimate short-term solution for actors to combine spending cuts *and* maintaining traditional activities. These resources are nevertheless two-sided: while their reliance on the market makes them acceptable in the framework of austerity, it also surrounds their implementation with much uncertainty, thus making them eventually hard to implement.

4.1. Declining defence policy budgets: a crisis' hit?

French defence expenditures[5] show a steady decrease since the financial and budgetary crisis (see figure 1, below). After a decade of defense budget increases, partially spurred because of the changing security environment (in particular with new counterterrorism policies and investments), the financial crisis resulted in a more or less immediate and significant defense budget drop that left MoD bureaucrats at first sight with much less room for maneuver for policy-making.

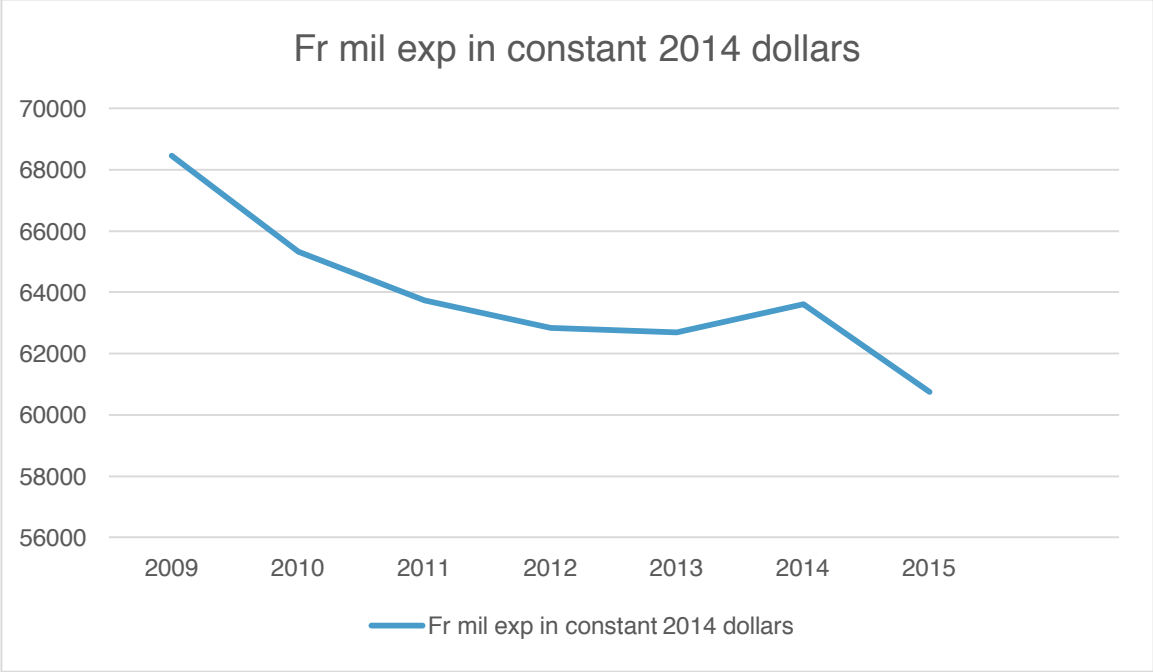

Figure 1. Defence budget in France (in constant 2014 dollars) (source: SIPRI yearbooks)

[5] When talking about defence budgeting, many laws or documents are to be considered. First, the pluriannual Military Planning Law (MPL, Loi de programmation militaire in French) includes and plans ahead the most important armament programmes for the coming years (« programmation pluriannuelle » des grands programmes d'armement in French). Military planning is meant to be programmed for several years to come, and not be dependent on yearly budgetary and strategic re-negociations. Future military needs used to be embedded and updated in a document called the « 30 year-prospective plan » (called the « PP30 », standing for « Plan prospectif à 30 ans » in French.) Military planning is then meant to be translated into law, agreed on by the Parliament and thus budgeted, through the Military Planning Law (Loi de programmation militaire), running for 6 years.

In addition, politicians have time and again acknowledged that the defence budget should decrease and show « solidarity » with the search for overall spending cuts in state expenditures: for instance, the Minister for defence Gérard Longuet stated on November, 16, 2011, that « It is impossible to go on with budgetary deficits. Will defence be the adjustment variable? The answer is no. Will it show solidarity with the government's attempts at reducing the debt? The answer is yes. »[6].

4.2. Supporting defence policy through market-related activities? Exceptional resources and their limits to funding sovereign defence

Discussing the evolution of the mere quantity of money available to finance defence in France is not sufficient to understand the crisis' impact on this policy. The *origin* and *nature* of funds available are of equal importance, since they show a shift towards more market-oriented defence budgeting strategies, and their relative failure. In line with our theoretical discussion, this de-constructs the myth of a strong public-private divide or state-market dichotomy in defense-related activities, just like in any other civilian policy domain, as suggested by economic sociology and political economy.

The defence policy budget is also partly constituted of - and therefore also depends on - financial revenues that do not originate from and are not deducted from the overall government budget. In 2008, the MoD strategizes to find new means to create revenue, the so-called exceptional resources (or sometimes « extra-budgetary resources »). Defined by this non-budgetary origin, exceptional resources can still take many forms: the sale of public real estate, the sale of military radio frequencies, or revenues from some investment programmes. While the legal basis for some of these sales have existed before[7], they have never been used to compensate for budgetary cuts. It was the financial crisis and the reevaluation of the French budget that let bureaucrats to be innovative by looking for solutions to lessen the impact of crisis-induced spending cuts[8]. Pushing for exceptional resources, bureaucrats have enabled politicians to reconcile irreconcilable ends - both reduce defence policy budgets (since they do not originate in public budgets) *and* maintain an acceptable level of funding for defence activities. Exceptional resources therefore constitute a policy instrument which have been used to mitigate the crisis's impact by compensating for spending cuts.

[6] G. Longuet, 16 novembre 2011, cité in M. Foucault, *Les budgets de la défense en France, entre déni et déclin*, op. cit., p. 12.
[7] The taskforce for real estate sales (« Mission pour la réalisation des actifs immobiliers ») has been created in 1987.
[8] J.-Y.. Le Drian, Conférence de Presse, Paris, 3 october 2013 (http://www.defense.gouv.fr/ministre/prises-de-parole-du-ministre/prises-de-parole-de-m.-jean-yves-le-drian/discours-jean-yves-le-drian-conference-de-presse-3-octobre).

Until now, however, the MoD has not implemented many such exceptional resources. After all, market-related policy instruments are at times hard to translate into public policy goals and in any way one should not expect that they could replace traditional defence budgeting. In addition, since the terrorist attacks on French soil, the MoD has been made available more funds again. That said, exceptional resources have been used, but their ratio of the overall defence budget has not been very important. Exceptional resources have been used from 2008 onwards. For the 2009-2014 MPL, they accounted for 2,8% of the total defense policy budget (that is, 5,5 billion €). For the 2014-2019 period it increased to 3,2% (6,1billion €) and then to 4,4% of the budget after the MPL reevaluation in 2014[9]. From 2008 until 2014, one can see a trend towards an increased used of these resources to fund the French MoD. After this date, in particular since the 2015 terrorist attacks in France and the subsequent revision of the 2014 MPL, the MoD's reliance on exceptional resources has decreased, since they only represent a mere 0,6% of its total budget[10] in the updated MPL.

This quantitative assessment of the exceptional resources' significance for defence budgeting is linked to and dependent on a second, more qualitative dimension. The very nature of these exceptional resources, and how they have been concretely used, both let to growing criticism against their unreliability. Indeed, first of all, they are, by definition, exceptional, in the sense that they come as a result of one-shot commercial operations, such as sales, or more rarely, on leasing out equipment. As a result, they cannot be duplicated and they do not constitute predictable incomes that the MoD can count on.

This intrinsic dimension of exceptional resources has become more apparent with their implementation. Their unreliability creates uncertainty. The French Court of Auditors, the *Cour des comptes*, expressed in its 2014 report that « (T)he use of exceptional resources has been characterized by high irregularities, fiscal management complexities and uncertainties. »[11] This uncertainty is due to exogenous market-based factors. Since 2009, the sales of the MoD's real estate has suffered from the slowdown in the housing market in Paris since the crisis (Artioli, 2014). The exceptional resources planned in the 2009-2014 MPL have for instances not been met, much to Hervé Morin, the Minister of Defence's dismay. Some military radio frequencies were planned to be sold in 2014, the MoD thus counting on this income for its 2014 budget, but they were rescheduled to 2017. But the uncertainty surrounding exceptional resources is also linked to endogenous factors, namely their administrative and legal complexity (how to transfer sales income into specific budget lines, while respecting the new requirements of the 'LOLF', *Loi organique relative aux lois de finances*) and the tensions between the MoD

[9] Cour des comptes, *Rapport public annuel 2016*, t. II. Paris, Cour des Comptes, février 2016, p. 244
[10] Ministère de la défense (2015), *Projet de loi. Actualisation de la programmation militaire 2014/2019. Dossier thématique*, Paris, p. 12.
[11] Cour des Comptes, *Mission Défense. Note d'analyse de l'exécution budgétaire 2014*, Paris, p. 7-8.

and Bercy, the Finance and budget ministry, which has given a hard time to the MoD's search for external funding[12]. Overall, exceptional resources have therefore been promoted as a means to counter the negative impact of the crisis on defence budget, by adding external funding to it. Still, their use has not proved very successful. This, combined with the exogenous shock of terrorist attacks, has led the government to decrease their importance since 2015.

5. Dealing with a budgetary crisis in armament acquisition policy: delaying and re-categorizing acquisition strategies

After having seen how cuts have been partially compensated, we are going to look at how actual budget cuts[13] have been mediated by actors' strategies throughout the budget implementation phase. As neo-institutional analysis and actor-centered policy analysis show, policy instruments and how actors use them do shape how decisions or reforms are implemented, and therefore, carve out the strength and width of policy change. In that respect, defence policy is no exception: although budgets are agreed on for a long period (5 years) through the military planning laws (MPL, "*Loi de programmation militaire*"), their implementation is shaped by many instruments and their use. Even if they can appear substantial, spending cuts therefore depend on their yearly implementation: although defence expenditures are inscribed in the multiannual MPL, they have to be implemented through the yearly budgeting process, more specifically through the annual finance laws (« loi de finance »). This explains how and why bureaucratic factors still affect multiannual commitments and thus also explains the gap between initially agreed on military budgets (or cuts) as contained in the military planning law on the one hand, and defence spending as yearly negotiated and the implementation of armament programmes on the other hand. That discrepancy can play against the MoD when promised funds are eventually not made available, but it can also lead actors to innovative strategies to avoid plans of cutting expenditures.

Here we will focus on two ways by which actors have tried to lessen the crisis' impact by making a specific use of military acquisition procedures: delaying expenses and re-categorizing armament acquisition procedures.

5.1. Strategies of delaying expenses: the management of armament programmes

In that respect, armament programme management strategies show how the ministry of defence has tried so far to contain the effect of budgetary cuts: what we see here is *selective delaying of spending cuts*

[12] Cabirol, Michel, « Budget de la défense : la bombe des recettes exceptionnelles », *La Tribune*, 2 juin 2014.
[13] These cuts were meant to be implemented through reductions in both personnel and equipment budgets. While the former White Paper had announced that 54000 jobs in the MoD would be cut, this number increased with the 2013 White Paper, with additional 24000 MoD position to be suppressed. See: Livre Blanc sur la Défense de la défense et la sécurité nationale 2013, Paris, La documentation française, 2013, p. 140.

(Irondelle, 2011; Hoeffler, 2011). This strategy of crisis-containing shows two main dimensions: (1) a choice made by political, bureaucratic (including military) and private actors relative to what programmes shall be spared by spending cuts or cancelled: it thus involves a process of limited selection; (2) for those programmes that should not be entirely cut loose, a practice of limiting short-term expenditures, by reducing the final target of armament programmes[14] and most importantly by delaying the actual implementation of the programme itself (ie postponing some key stages, the development of one item, the technical accreditation, etc), in order to delay expenses and write them off the annual budget.

Delaying armament programmes is a procurement practice that is not new. It has already been widely used in the 1990s to cope with a first wave of military budget decrease. Indeed, « peace dividends » but also budgetary challenges linked to economic problems and to European integration requirements (Maastricht criteria) led the successive governments to announce cuts in defence budgets. Still, « major » armament programmes[15] have not been cut : rather, they have been delayed and their size has been shrunk. For instance, the MoD has decreased the number of Leclerc tanks to be produced. The Rafale aircraft is both delayed and shrunk: the command is of 272 aircraft in 1988, 100 of them to be delivered in 2000. The 1994 Military Programming Law (for 1995-2000) reduces this number to 62 aircraft, with 5 to be delivered in 2000. Helicopters programmes (Tiger and NH90) know the same fate (Irondelle, 2011a). This strategy of delaying and shrinking production targets are again visible throughout the 2000s. In 2010, the Court of Audit underlined that this strategy was highly inefficient, since it increases the time needed to complete major armament programmes and hence increase their costs. Rather than delaying and shrinking production targets, the Court of Audit strongly suggested that the MoD choose its priorities and stick to its choices[16].

5.2. Re-categorizing armament procurement: Emergency purchases in the French military

Emergency purchases are a specific procurement mode of military equipment, found in other countries as well[17]: this policy instrument seeks to provide armed forces on the ground with equipment responding to operational needs in a very short time (usually less than a year, contrasting with usual

[14] The target of armament programmes designates the number of « items » that should be produced, for instance, the number of aircraft supposed to be bought or produced.
[15] The adjective of « major » here is borrowed from actors' discourses themselves, not from any judgement or evaluation of the various programs' relevance on the authors' part. As is, the qualification of « major » is co-created by the actors' practices, which differ from other programmes put aside.
[16] Cour des Comptes, *Rapport public annuel 2010*, Paris, Cour des Comptes, février 2010, p. 42-43. For instance, there are 22 years between the first and last delivery of Rafale aircraft, 17 years for the NH90 helicopter or 15 for the Tiger helicopter.
[17] « Fulfillment of Urgent Operational Needs », *Report of the Defense Science Board*, Office of the Undersecretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology and Logistics, Washington, juillet 2009

procurement processes which can take several years). In France, the increasing use of this instrument called « achat en urgence opérationnelle » (Clouet, 2009) throughout the French involvement in the war in Afghanistan demonstrates how French bureaucrats and military have combined renewed political commitments to budget cuts and the demands of a concrete military operation.

5.2.1. Not new, but increasingly used

The creation of this instrument dates back to the early 2000s, hence it cannot be attributed to innovative strategies stemming from the financial crisis and its budgetary ramifications *per se*. However, its application and implementation has been widened with the dawn of the crisis, suggesting that MoD officials innovated at least on the level of implementation. The DGA published on 29 July 2004 an administrative instruction[18], addressing to its own civil servants, not to wider circles. This note spells out the main characteristics of emergency purchases. First, this procurement mode is only to be used to meet needs of « utmost urgency ». This in turns justifies that defence public contracts can derogate from conventional public market laws, that is, that they can be awarded without any publicity or competition. Emergency purchases are meant to fulfill some specific operational needs, such as the purchase of additional items (ammunitions, etc.), buying items to adapt existing equipment to new needs, purchase off the shelve of a new piece of armament, or speeding up the acquisition process of an existing armament programme to fill in the need earlier than planned. The DGA's instructions thereby do not create this instrument from scratch but instead heavily draws on previous instruments, such as the « crash programs », which allowed to speed up the acquisition or use of certain equipments[19].

In the early years, the use of this emergency procedure was limited to some specific equipment for the air force and special forces[20]. With the financial crisis, it gets increasingly used from 2008 and the amount of money devoted to this procedure increases as well, with a peak of 250 millions euros in 2009 (see table 1, below).

Year	**2005**	**2006**	**2007**	**2008**	**2009**	**2010**	**2011**
Amount (M€)	2	80,8	5,5	104,4	250	170	20

Table 1 : Evolution of spending on UOR launched by the DGA in 2005-2011

[18] DGA, Instruction n°04287/EF/DGA/DPM-693/DEF/EMA/PPE relative à la conduite des achats en urgence opérationnelle, 29 juillet 2004.
[19] Interview, Head of the Land Forces Armaments Management Unit, DGA.
[20] DGA, *Bilan d'activité 2007*, Ministère de la défense, Paris, 2008, p. 6 et 11.

Source : DGA, Annual Review (Bilans d'activités) 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, Paris, Ministry of Defence (Ministère de la défense)

In 2008, much of the equipment acquired through that procedure is destined to the Army and it is mostly small equipment: trucks (22 armored Scania truck, and 5 Buffalo vehicles), vehicle armoring kits, 60 RCWS (Remotely Controlled Weapon Station), jammers against radio-controlled IEDs[21] (see table 2, below).

Equipment	**Quantity**	**Delivery Date**
Scania armoured trucks	22	End of 2008
Integration kit for AMX RC 10 counter IED jammers	5	End of 2008
Anti Rocket Propelled Grenade protection fencing	12	End of 2008
Encrypted Radios	50	End of 2008
Mini-drones for the Special Forces Command	1	End of 2008
Protection Kits for Véhicule Blindé Léger (VBL)	50	End of 2008 + first week of 2009
Protection Kits for gunners on Véhicule Blindé Léger (VBL) and Petit Véhicule Protégé (PVP)	69/30	End of 2008 + first week of 2009
Remotely controlled Weapon Station for Véhicule de l'Avant Blindé (VAB)	60	End of 2008 + first week of 2009
Armoured Cab for GBC 180 trucks	31	End of 2008 + first week of 2009
Portable workstation for Multi-sensor interpretation aid system	7	End of 2008 + first week of 2009
Buffalo (Mined Protected Vehicle)	5	First week of 2009
Grenade-Launcher + 1000 rounds	20	First week of 2009

[21] DGA, Bilan d'activité 2008, Paris, Ministère de la défense, 2009.

Infrared mortar shell	4000	First week of 2009
Digital Geographic datas for close air support	1	First week of 2009
Anti IED jammers	135	First week of 2009
Counter IED LEMIR device	32	First week of 2009
Protection Kits for trucks	150	First week of 2009

Table 2: Equipment ordered under UOR procedure in 2008
Sources : DGA, *Annual Review 2008 (Bilan d'activité)*, Ministry of Defence (Ministère de la défense), Paris, 2009, p. 5

5.2.2. The limited use of emergency purchases: obeying or bypassing by re-categorizing austerity restrictions on defence budgets?

Emergency purchases (EP) account for some share of the overall defence equipment budget. For instance, 5% of the army's 2bn euro defence equipment budget is spent on emergency purchases; 116 arms procurement decisions during military operations have been made using this procurement method between 2008 and 2011, for a total of 311 million euros (Schmitt 2015)[22] . This can be explained by many factors. A first one lies in the behavior and opinions of the top military itself. This limited use of the exceptional procurement procedure stands indeed in stark contrast with Great Britain, which is quoted by many French military as a counter-example of what France should do: the massive use of emergency purchases by the British has been considered by many French military as the main cause of the reduction in its military capacities in the long term[23]. Another institutional factor lies in the fact that emergency purchases are paid by the military and that they therefore still suffer from the overall decline in defence budgets[24]. This contrasts with the British situation[25], where emergency purchases are not written off the defence ministry's budget but taken from the budget minister's one. Notwithstanding the speed-related advantages of this procedure, this of course deprives the French military from an incentive to make use of this procurement instrument more abundantly. Also, from an actor-centered perspective, using the emergency purchase procedure has not changed the relationship between the defence and budget ministries so far.

[22] In this section, we focus our analysis on the Army and not on all branches of the military. Interview, Head of the Technical Section of the Army.
[23] Interview, Former Chief of Staff of the army.
[24] All additional equipment acquired by this emergency purchase procedure are still deducted from the defence policy budget, either from the LOLF 146 budgetary programme (Armed forces' equipment) or from the 178 one (Preparation and use of armed forces).
[25] Interview, Operational Coherence Officer of the Defense Staff.

If factors related to strategic planning cultures or to institutional settings help shed light on this phenomenon, the fact that the military makes a limited use of this procedure is best explained by two correlated factors: first, by the stickiness of instruments (and of the values they embody); second, by the fact that policy instruments help actors mitigate the tensions between different and sometimes conflicting goals, i.e. in our cases, combine the economic imperative - austerity - with renewed security concerns with the Afghanistan war.

First, the military has remained loyal to the principle of multiannual planning of military acquisition and the concrete strategy attached to it, that is, the delaying of big armament programmes: the limited use of emergency purchases is a direct result of the permanence of this procurement strategy. Indeed, emergency purchases have been used as a solution to declining credits: defence equipment which were not considered to be a priority and whose orders had been either postponed or cancelled due to budgets cuts have been acquired through the emergency purchase procedure. In other words, emergency purchases allow the military to acquire armament items that had been identified and planned beforehand but cut because of the budgetary contraction. According to some military, this prior identification of the material is even a prerequisite to a successful use of this emergency purchase mechanism[26]. The speed of the EP procedure requires the military to have already a clear opinion of what it needs and wants, which in turn pushes the military to turn to items they had already sought to acquire. For instance, the Konsberg RCWS exemplifies this use of EP instrument to circumvent the negative effect of budgetary cuts on the ground. Their usefulness to equip and protect armed forces had been acknowledged since the first half of 2000s. The 2005 Military Programming Law states that 500 of them should be acquired soon. Still, given the lack of funding, it is postponed until the first semester of 2008: operational requirements of forces on the ground eventually leads to a 60 pieces order[27]. As such, emergency purchases have been used to compensate - albeit in a limited manner - the effects of the crisis on the armed forces readiness on the ground. We clearly see that this use of EP as a mechanism to circumvent the crisis's impact is important: While not corresponding to first class armament programmes, this type of armament has often proved crucial to forces on the ground since they were necessary to ensure the operational coherence of big weapons systems.

It is worth noticing that the use of EP as a replacement mechanism has triggered internal criticism by some members of the military against « normal » defence procurement procedures and processes[28] in the context of ongoing military operations. Some have gone as far as to say that EP could be taken as "a new, more efficient and quicker procedure to acquire weapons"[29]: in other words, they suggest that

[26] Interview, Head of the Technical Section of the Army.
[27] Interview, Under-Chief of Staff of the army, in charge of Finances, Procurement and Doctrine.
[28] Interview, Operational Coherence Officer of the Defense Staff.
[29] Interview, Inspector General of the Armed Forces.

EP could become the model for a new acquisition policy. This is not even the most radical option for change on the table: some military suggest that the MoD should buy foreign military equipment off the shelf, use them for a short period of time, and then sell them again. While disregarding its effect on the national defence and security industrial base, this way of doing would allow the military to benefit from updated and technologically advanced material at a lower cost and to re-finance this access through the sales. Still, these suggestions articulated among MoD officials are marginal: according to the interviews we have conducted, the experience of the Afghan war and the use of EPs have not led to a fundamental questioning of French defence procurement. Most military representatives say they are satisfied with this procedure[30], but that they also consider it as a mere complement to « normal » official policy procedures. While they do not officially criticize the normal procedure, the emphasis on « modularity » in defence procurement that they see as a key lesson learned in Afghanistan, may well have a big impact on what is normal defense procurement procedure in the long term.

6. Conclusion

French defence policy constitutes an interesting case to analyze the 2008 crisis's impact on public policies. This paper has demonstrated that while looking at budget numbers can be helpful, it is not sufficient of a short cut to explain the crisis' impact on French defence policy. Based on neo-institutionalist accounts of change and the focus on implementation processes in public policy analysis, we have shown that actors' strategies mediate the crisis's impact. By analysing defence budgets, and most precisely defence budgets dedicated to armament acquisition, we demonstrated three strategies have helped actors to use policy instruments in a coherent and structured manner and consequently have lessened the crisis's impact

This paper also points to long-term and indirect changes triggered by the crisis. One is the alteration of programming or planification procedures. The use of exceptional resources and emergency purchases has created and strengthened uncertainty when it comes to planning future defense capabilities. Budgetary constraints have had the indirect consequence of making planning even more uncertain, relying on uncertain market-dependent resources. Not being able to plan ahead and relying on market-centered processes could become the new « normal », in a public policy that used to be pioneer in planification and programming (or even future predictive) methods[31].

This closer look on policy instruments also shows that austerity politics, with its emphasis on more cost-efficient government, has provided policymakers with a problem (how to cut spending), and its

[30] Interview, Former Chieff of Staff of the army.
[31] See the importance of planning and futurology for defence, as for instance in the case of Rand Corporation.

solution (ways to lessen its impact by a more ad hoc policymaking, without long term commitments). We contend that this could be an answer to Blyth's and Crouch's question as to why austerity politics persist in front of repeated policy failures. We would contend that austerity politics bring about changes in policymaking that make its own downsides "manageable" in the short term, thus eluding its impacts in the long term and the political conflicts attached to such a discussion.

Lastly, this paper calls for further comparative analysis. It has pointed to a specific set of strategies in the French case, with the reactivation of old strategies (delaying programmes) and the activation or creation of new strategies (exceptional resources and emergency purchases). Of course, some of these instruments are also visible in other countries, such as emergency purchases. But for now no analysis has made sense of the diversity of responses among comparable countries. Neither the analysis of the crisis's impact on a single national defense policy, nor comparative analysis of the crisis' impact on different countries, can rely only on statistical data[32]. Our case study shows that the crisis's impact cannot be grasped only at the budget level, and that how the budget is mediated by actors' strategies varies across countries. Further research should try to analyse more systematically.

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