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Resilience and EU Foreign Policy: the Promise of Justice

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Abstract

The appearance of 'resilience' as a core concept within the EU Global Strategy (EUGS) is a significant focus of scholarly interest while for their part, EU institutions are anxious to put flesh on the bones of that strategy. The aim of this paper is to suggest that far from representing a collapse of European ambition or indeed a 'middle ground' position between liberal ambition and realist pragmatism, resilience potentially entails a profound re-engineering of EU foreign policy, serving the cause of an overarching concept of global justice. Such an approach, being grounded in reciprocal and accountable relationships in search of "fair terms of social cooperation". It also implies the creation of institutional decision-making and adjudicating fora which are profoundly deliberative in their orientation. This paper will argue that 'resilience' has therefore the potential to be a transformative concept in the design and pursuit of EU foreign policy. It also faces significant challenges, not least where there is profound disagreement or stark choices to be made over foundational principles. Resilience nonetheless opens pathways to perhaps a different kind of EU foreign policy, offering significant added-value to EU member states' diplomacy.

Keywords

European Union; Justice; Foreign Policy; Security; Resilience

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Introduction

The profile of 'resilience' in the EU's 2016 Global Strategy (EUGS) has been a significant focus of analytical interest (Biscop 2016; Juncos 2016; Wagner and Anholt 2016; Bendiek 2017; Svitkova 2017). Featuring more than three dozen times within the Union's strategy statement and frequently linked to the broader concept of 'principled pragmatism', the concept has come in for some criticism – and indeed praise – that it represents a retreat in European ambition. Meanwhile, European institutions have been quick to try to put resilience flesh on the bones of the EUGS and to look at ways in which the concept may be operationalised and how it can serve the goal of a credible, coherent and consistent foreign, security and defence policy (Commission 2017:2). The aim of this paper is to suggest that rather than a retreat to realpolitik, resilience has the potential to be transformative of the way that the Union conceives and practices foreign policy, with consequent implications for the pursuit of global justice.

Resilience has a pedigree stretching across the social and physical sciences (Alexander 2013). For our purposes, its most significant early deployment was in the field of psychology from the mid twentieth century (Martin Breen and Anderies 2011). Here it was a focus of study as to how individuals coped with crisis – with resilience coming to be understood as the individual's capacity for dealing with unexpected tragedy or loss and identifying the skill set necessary to overcome same. This then spread into numerous other scientific fields – from engineering to biology. There it was used as means to assess the response of both systems and materials to shocks and their associated capacity to recover or to adapt and move on/return to an equilibrium point. The concept migrated to the social sciences through development and ecological discourses – looking at how societies and social groups could strengthen their capacity to resist, respond and regenerate from adverse systemic shocks such as those of drought, famine, climate change etc.

It was through these discourses centred on the development/security nexus, that brought resilience to the attention of practitioners and scholars in international security and foreign policy. Its obvious utility was as a concept that promised to measure and to define the dynamic ability of states and communities to absorb external shocks and adapt to associated changes. It was very highly profiled within the study of emergency management and, post 9/11, was drawn more directly into the analysis of security preparedness in the face of terrorism. It also reflected increasing anxiety on the part of policy makers, that states were facing a range of new and evolving threats that did not lend themselves to traditional security prediction, planning, scenario-building and strategy per se, but which were instead diffuse, unpredictable and uncertain and which were either directed by non-state actors or determined by diffuse human agency. Being 'secure' was thus seen as a less tenable policy objective in practice than was being 'resilient' in the face of such abstruse threats (Fjader 2014:115)

As a result, from the early 2000s, national security and defence strategies became increasingly interested in the concept of resilience as a way of defining preparedness for these 'new' kinds of security threats in a more open and globalised world. While globalisation itself was – by and large – officially celebrated and the 'openness' of national societies seen as a positive attribute, it was noted that these gave rise to new kinds of vulnerabilities which were ill-suited to being addressed in traditional security/defence terms. This led many developed states to adopt "a risk based 'all hazards' and 'all of society' approach" as their security model (Fjader 2014:119). In Australia, Canada, the

Netherlands, the US and the UK resilience was noted or featured in national security doctrines and associated policies and initiatives. It had also permeated debates among and within IGOs and NGOs as an organising concept, intersecting – in a sometimes confusing fashion – with parallel pre-existing resilience discourses in specific policy areas (UN 2012, 2013). It has, as a result, become a pervasive organising concept across fields as diverse as climate change, disaster-preparedness, counter-terrorism, urban design and development policy.

Resilience and its Critics

As with all importations of concepts – especially one as promiscuous as resilience – there is criticism of its translation as it crosses disciplinary and policy borders. Some have already decried the propensity of foreign policy elites to latch onto empty catch phrases and ambiguous concepts so as to disguise a paucity of truly innovative or original thinking (Hanisch 2016) or to represent it as the latest 'bumper sticker' in International Relations (Stetter and Tocci 2017). Resilience for some is simply the latest in a long list of concepts designed to substitute for substantive foreign policy development and delivery. Moreover, its very ubiquity and utility across disciplines and policy fields may be seen as a sign of weakness, evidence of unacceptable 'concept stretching' and 'false expectations of being a universal remedy against all kinds of challenges.' (Hanisch 2016:2).

The analytical looseness of the concept is of particular concern. Hanisch (2016) breaks this down very effectively, arguing the confusion as to the nature of resilience is grounded in contrary answers to three core conceptual questions. First, where does resilience become evident? Is it at the point at which the society/state 'bounces back' from a specific shock (i.e. it reacts and responds) or is it at the moment of resistance – being, as it were, 'shock proof' (i.e. it anticipates and effectively counters). Secondly, he asks, against what kinds of 'shocks' is resilience to be designed/engineered? Is it against rare, catastrophic and unexpected events (i.e. acute shocks) or should it also/instead be understood as a response to long-term, structural tensions, such as inequality, poverty, hunger and oppression? Finally, he asks what is the post resilient state that we are seeking – a return to the original state (aka 'normality') or some new balance/accommodation following the shock? This latter is especially problematic. In the light of terrorist threats, for example, is it enough if resilience delivers a new, securitised and surveiled society successfully to meet the threat of terrorism or is it only achieved if we manage to return to the norms that applied before the global terrorist threat? In sum, it is rarely clear if resilience is about successfully meeting and beating shocks (through anticipation and preparation) or adapting and transforming so as to accommodate and mitigate the shocks. And again, in the policy makers' world, would it be an appropriate or acceptable response to say that the function of a foreign, security and defence policy was to facilitate adaptation to security threats – or, on the other side – promise that all threats might be successfully forestalled? Hensch therefore concludes that resilience is necessarily 'multifaceted, controversial and unclear' (Hanisch 2016:3), while its constructive ambiguity over definition, scope and implications is a necessary device to ensure widespread buy-in to the concept itself (Wegner and Anholt (2016:418)

For others, however, there is little enough ambiguity and confusion. They have identified a universe of adverse implications arising from resilience. First, resilience can be seen as potentially depoliticising foreign policy by generating the expectation that foreign policy crises should be seen more as acts of God than the result of human agency (Dunn et al 2015). Resilience here has the effect of ignoring the structural or historical injustices

which rest at the heart of international crises and instilling instead a sense of doomed inevitability rather than galvanised activism to combat them. Indeed, in some perverse scenarios, crises may even be seen as healthy – as unfortunate but necessary means by which robustness and social vitality might be sustained and developed (Duffield 2011).

Resilience may also be condemned as shifting responsibility from states to citizens – who become 'their own 'apparatus of security'' (Kaufman 2013:61) or else makes 'micro-vigilantes' of us all (Wagner and Anholt 2016). If the focus is on how local actors and networks can be resourced and encouraged to respond to crisis, this will have the effect of at least partially absolving state actors of their responsibility to prepare for and to overcome such crises. For some analysts, resilience necessarily thus entails a new social contract between citizens and state, one that is 'based on a mutual understanding that acknowledges at least a partial shift from prevention of threats to management of the impacts of threats.' (Fjader 2014:128)

Third, the suspicion also exists that resilience comes cheap: that by offsetting responsibility onto the backs of neighbours and partners for their own security and stability, the EU can pare-back resources on direct foreign aid and security assistance. It also means that if resilience is not successfully learned or applied – responsibility for that failure can also be offloaded to the shoulders of those that were not up to the task – in effect blaming the victims.

Finally, there is the fear that resilience itself becomes the goal, rather than the means. In other words, that it quickly conflates to the objective of 'stability' and the capacity of states and societies to return to a steady state existence following crisis.

The EU and Resilience

Bearing these criticisms – and possibilities – in mind, what does resilience look like in specific European terms? Resilience made its first appearance as a substantive focus of EU policy in the field of development and emergency aid. In 2012 the European Commission issued its communication "The EU Approach to Resilience: Learning from Food Crises". This called on the Union to put resilience at the core of its development and humanitarian efforts. This was followed in 2013 by the Commission's Action Plan for Resilience in Crisis Prone Countries 2013-2010, which drew specifically upon lessons learned from the 2010 Sahel and Horn of Africa food crises. Both of these documents in turn had drawn from the 2009 European Report on Development which had suggested 'resilience' as a specifically European policy approach to fragility in Africa.

The EU's early approach defined resilience as "the ability of an individual, a household, a community, a country or a region to withstand, adapt and quickly recover from stresses and shocks". It was presented as one which focused on human well-being (with a poverty-reduction focus), boosted the effectiveness of aid in the promotion of sustainable development and offered a joined up vision between different policy portfolios. It was also one which was framed in some quarters as being 'post-liberal' in as much as it eschewed explicit linkage to wider normative goals (Chandler 2012). From these roots, specific policy measures were drawn up and applied, most notably the SHARE (Supporting the Horn of Africa's Resilience) and AGIR Sahel (Global Alliance for Resilience Initiative) programmes which both sought to address issues related to regional food insecurity and development. The approach was very much that of 'problem solving' in a specific context and addressing the inadequacies of fragile states through the capacity building of local stakeholders.

In 2014 the Commission also developed and published its own 'Resilience Marker' to structure resilience into its Humanitarian Implementation Plans so as to assess to what extent humanitarian actions funded by its agencies (most especially ECHO) were integrating resilience considerations into their work European Commission 2014). It also set out to create a forum for its NGO and other partners, to discuss how best resilience mighty be included in humanitarian programming, to reflect on what resilience might mean in different operational contexts, and to support ECHO's own performance monitoring in this field. Resilience also made an appearance as a foreign policy goal in the Union's revised European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) of 2015. Therein, the aim was to "strengthen the resilience of the EU's partners in the face of external pressures and their ability to make their own sovereign choices" (European Commission and HR/VP 2015: 4).

The 2016 EU Global Strategy took the concept much further, speaking of resilience as "a broad concept encompassing all individuals and the whole of society" that features "democracy, trust in institutions and sustainable development, and the capacity to reform". Critically, resilience was framed now not as a solution for failed, fragile or weak states but as a means by which all states, sharing vulnerabilities in an increasingly complex, contested and yet interdependent world, might better address security challenges.

Significantly, while state and societal resilience in the Union's neighbourhood ("to our East and South") was defined as one of five key strategic priorities for the Union's Global Strategy, it was also framed as a domestic priority for the Union itself as well as for its physical infrastructures, networks and services in areas such as energy and information technologies. The Global Strategy pulled no punches in its delineation of the nature and scope of the challenges the EU faced, speaking of an 'existential crisis' in which the Union's very peace, prosperity and democracy was being threatened from within and from without. Critically, this drew together a core theme of the document, the need to address 'security' across the internal and external policy boundary and to frame security in terms of responding to multivariate threats.

The focus on resilience in the EU Global Strategy was swiftly followed up in October 2016 with a call from the EU's Foreign Affairs Council to develop clear policy initiatives and action. As part of this, the EEAS and associated Commission Directorate Generals (NEAR, DEVCO and ECHO) initiated a consultative process to draw up a policy framework on resilience across EU foreign policy domains (Hauck 2017). This process evidenced some concern from among those in the broader EU foreign policy community who were already framing their work through the concept of resilience. While welcoming their inclusion in the consultative framework on implementing the strategy's resilience framework, development and humanitarian NGOs expressed some concerns (VOICE 2017).

The Global Strategy itself had walked a fine line in acknowledging – if not resolving – the obvious tension between the resilience of states vs the resilience of societies. To what extent, for example, might a focus on strengthening state capacity serve the interests of state elites and 'stability' against the interests of vulnerable local populations? Indeed, to what extent might an overwhelming focus on empowering local stakeholders serve to disempower effective state governance? The textual resolution in the Global Strategy was to underscore the primacy of human rights as the context through which resilience would be pursued and noting that "a resilient society featuring democracy, trust in institutions, and sustainable development lies at the heart of a resilient state." Notably, however, the

Strategy also argued that while repressive states are inherently fragile "…there are many ways to build inclusive, prosperous and secure societies." For many in the NGO community the concern was that 'resilience' could, in a sense, be weaponised and designed as tool through which traditional foreign policy priorities of security, stability and prosperity for the Union and its member states would be pursued. Instead, they insisted that the "transformative aspect of resilience" had to prevail. (VOICE 2017) They also feared that any prioritising of state resilience would potentially undermine movements for necessary and legitimate social, political and economic change.

Ultimately, in their 2017 Joint Communication, the Commission and the HRVP firmly drove away from the resilience as retreat narrative. In its very first paragraph it restates the Union's 'transformational' agenda while acknowledging that its pursuit in a 'connected, contested and complex' global environment represents a challenging backdrop. The communication goes on to itemise resilience's scope across three interlinked lines of a) contributing to the resilience of partners, b) integrating resilience across European policy portfolios c) addressing the Union's own security deficiencies. The communication is careful in pulling together two significant threads in contemporary debates surrounding EU foreign policy: the need for flexibility and dynamism (contra the 'stability' thesis and 'one-size-fits-all' policy menus) and in pursuing a holistic/comprehensive approach of breaking down policy silos. Moreover, the communication is clear that the underlying causes of insecurity have to be addressed in a "structural, long-term and non-linear" approach with the focus on "anticipation, prevention and preparedness" In sum, it would be difficult to argue that resilience – at least as framed here – represented a paradigm shift from idealism to realism (Bendiek 2017:13).

The Potential of Resilience as a frame of Global Justice

Framed as above, resilience has the potential to offer a transformational agenda in terms of both foreign policy and diplomacy. The first step is to assert that resilience is not the mid-point of a pendulum swing between liberal universalism and statist realpolitik. If it is successfully defined as 'realpolitik with European characteristics' (Biscop 2016) it will have manifestly failed as an effective and dynamic organising concept. Instead, resilience can indeed credibly be presented as being transformative of how foreign policy can be conducted as well as enhancing its efficacy and credibility. It could then be defined as 'very much a liberal rather than a post-liberal strategy' (Juncos 2016: 12). This is certainly the case if resilience is understood as a process not a goal; a means to greater ends, and also if it is centred upon responsiveness, adaptability, flexibility and hybridity – very much as a proactive strategy rather than a defensive approach.

It is here that we can begin to glimpse the potential of resilience as an approach within global justice. The GLOBUS project is looking at global justice through three distinctive lenses: justice as non-domination, justice as impartiality and justice as mutual recognition (Erikson 2016). The latter perspective is arguably the most intriguing – and certainly the most challenging – in a security/foreign policy context. Its focus on cooperative arrangements and active dialogues with affected parties is predicated upon arriving at mutually agreed solutions which identify the right or best thing to do in any given circumstance. It is founded in reciprocal and accountable relationships in search of "fair terms of social cooperation" which assumes that the reasoning of both parties is accommodated and that each partner must be both responsive to, and respectful of, the claims of the other. It also implies the creation of institutional decision-making and

adjudicating fora which are profoundly deliberative in their orientation and to which all parties are willing to submit.

Here, resilience has real potential, if it is predicated first and foremost on genuine partnership and on the heterogeneity of partners. Whether these are states, cities, local authorities, or even private entities (companies, foundations etc.), resilience implies engagement at all levels of state and society since each level is assumed to have its own role and potential in contributing to strengthened capacities for resilience. Significantly too, resilience implies that in its dealings with these partners one is always willing to engage from where each is, as opposed to where one might wish them to be. This is certainly not an unproblematic starting point, implying as it does the absence of preconditions to open engagement. It is also challenging with respect to distinctions between resilience of the state and that of society. How and where might one build resilience where state and society partners differ profoundly on the diagnosis of, and prescription for, any particular crisis?

At the same time, one obvious challenge here is in dealing with non-democratic and authoritarian states. As Biscop (2016:93) notes, 'resilience is a tricky concept to be used in this context. Increasing the resilience of a state…can easily lead to increasing the resilience of a repressive regime' Here, the key will be setting a clear context for resilience – and a prioritisation of actors and interests.

Resilience is also grounded in local ownership It implies being 'open to learning' (Juncos 2016:6) and is predicated upon such listening and learning being a two-way street in which partners speak 'with' rather than 'to' their interlocutors. This would require a virtual volte face in traditional diplomatic practice, with a focus on personnel, training and language skills and the development of the highest quality diplomatic reporting skills. This would be fine-grained diplomacy at its zenith.

Local ownership also suggests that foreign policy is tailored to local conditions and needs. Tailoring suggests not only the aforementioned openness to listening and learning, but the capacity to then adapt overarching policy goals to these local needs and to craft foreign policy practice at the micro-level. This obviously generates the risk of policy divergence and inconsistency as between specific cases but also holds out the prospect of genuine empowerment of local actors and forging substantive and long-lasting partnerships (Schmidt 2015: 416).

Implications for EU foreign policy

If then resilience, per, se, has the potential to make a substantive contribution to the pursuit of global justice; being flexible, inclusive, open, and bottom-up – what might this look like in respect of the European Union's own foreign policy? Does this map onto the trajectory of that policy as outlined above and what are the potential challenges arising therefrom?

Certainly the EUGS is predicated on a more 'flexible' foreign policy approach. It is clear that tailoring is preferred to one-size-fits-all approaches. The aforementioned statement within the Global Strategy that 'there are many ways to build inclusive, prosperous and secure societies' has already been identified as being significant and pointing a way towards just this heterogeneous approach. This kind of flexibility acknowledges the fact that there are different paths to reform, and in a world where states and societies are

diverse and complex, the EU's responses to local needs and insecurities are to be finely tailored.

The basic question here is whether the Union aims towards haute couture or pret a porter. Both of course are more costly than untailored alternatives, but each – to different degrees – demands an exceptionally high skill set, dedication and meticulous attention to detail. The costs associated thereto are not only the high direct input costs of resources, training and experience but also the opportunity costs of differentiation and policy (in) consistency. The obvious danger is where carefully crafted, tailor-made solutions to building resilience in one partner intersects poorly – or even contradicts – principles or practice established elsewhere. The problem is accentuated at the thematic level. In priority foreign policy fields such as climate change and sustainable development, to what extent might flexibility bring disorder to cherished and prioritised global ambitions?

Inclusivity is also evident from within the EUGS. The principles of partnership with national governments and communities, fostering local engagement and agency is clear. The distinction that is established between state and societal resilience powerfully signals the Union's ambitions to engage with many stakeholders across both geopolitical and thematic boundaries. This promises an EU foreign policy which consciously forges links deep within partner states and which then benefits from multiple perspectives and analyses – allowing then for the kind of detailed policy tailoring required across multiple cases.

The challenge here is that while the Union and its agents must engage with multiple sources they must also – where there are profound differences between and within state and/or societal actors – establish and empower partnerships and programmes. Within functional democracies this is not problematic; choices made are legitimate and accountable therein. In dysfunctional democracies or authoritarian states the stakes are much higher. How does one address the paradox of building state resilience at the expense of societal stakeholders? Here the Union's challenge will be to establish its own clear baselines and here the Union's own normative foundations may offer a possibility. A powerful rededication to fundamental human rights (which can be distinguished from evangelism for liberal democracy) may be the means by which that circle can be squared. It does not diminish challenges in the field, but it provides the Union with a clear anchorage.

The EUGS also signals a significant and new openness in foreign policy. It is striking that resilience is not seen – as it was in 2009 – as a European approach to dealing with fragility among African States. The Union now acknowledges – even makes a virtue of the fact – that the pursuit of resilience is a shared global endeavour. Unstated, but assumed perhaps, is that the Union may well also learn from global partners in how to ensure that its own democracy is resilient in the face of domestic and external shocks. This openness and willingness to learn, is also predicated upon the acquisition of a deep understanding of the political, social, and economic characteristics of other states and societies. It is also represents an openness to working with partners who – for reasons of their own history and/or contemporary choices – are pursuing alternative developmental pathways.

The challenge of openness to EU foreign policy is the extent to which the Union and its members are in fact prepared to listen and learn from partners – while remaining true to their own values and interests. One obvious point of potential contestation here is in the

realm of global governance. The Union and its member states have been at the core of the construction of the post-war multilateral structure. While the Union has offered some tangible support to calls for reform, is it really open to listening from other stakeholders and subscribing to the kinds of transformations demanded by them? Would they be willing to reform the structures of global governance so that such states might genuinely be in a position "to secure access to the global commons"? (Bendiek 2016:2) This might well entail the kind of loss of position and power which, while consistent with global justice, would strike at the heart of Europe's short to medium tern material interests

Finally, the Global Strategy suggests a renewed and perhaps more sustained commitment to partnership and the local ownership of policy and programmes designed to foster resilience. EU support for endogenous forms of resilience is potentially path breaking, if it were to dig deep in partner countries, connecting to the change dynamics of the systems and local actors concerned. Respect for existing local systems, working with local actors to nurture and preserve such systems and acknowledging the strengths of doing things differently in different contexts could bring huge returns. This kind of 'resilience sensitive' approach is clearly – at least in principle – part of a genuine partnership strategy that the EUGS suggests. (Hauck 2017)

Again, however, heterogeneity has its costs – and even its success might pose challenges. Might not this empowerment of local actors threaten the core interests of the Union and at least some of its core member states? How might one ensure that this multiplicity of bottom-up developments across key thematic sectors did not result in contradictory policy overlaps: where the outcomes for different sectors (developmental, environment, humanitarian) and different stakeholders would have profound impact .It is of course assumed that such a development would come the expectation of enhanced effectiveness and legitimacy – but would this necessarily be the case? (Wegner and Anholt 2016)

Conclusion

As has only been briefly touched on above, resilience has the potential to be a transformative concept in the design and pursuit of EU foreign policy. It also has significant challenges, not least (as within the justice as mutual recognition model) where there is profound disagreement or stark choices to be made over foundational principles. Compromise is the root of both diplomacy and politics but can dialogue and learning entertain violence being done to cherished values and norms? Resilience opens pathways to perhaps a very different kind of EU foreign policy, it certainly does not imply – perhaps even heightens the risk – of very difficult choices having to be made. With that caveat, however, the concept has tremendous potential and may yet itself prove to be more resilient than the many empty/ambiguous foreign policy concepts deployed in the past.

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