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## Resilience and the world order: the EU and the RIC states

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# **Resilience and the world order: The EU and the RIC states**

## **Abstract**

The aim of the article is to analyse the way the RIC (Russia, India and China) states understand resilience in the world order. In doing so, the article compares their interpretation to that developed by the European Union (EU). The first part of the article surveys the way the literature has analysed the role of resilience in the foreign policy of the EU. One of the main findings here is that the mainstream interpretation of resilience tends to be rather circular and leads to process of securitisation of the external environment. The second part of the article then presents and applies to the case of the RIC states a more nuanced framework that examines resilience along three complementary dimensions: resilience as ontology (attribute), as process and as outcome (agency and intentionality).

Keywords: World order, resilience, Russia, India China, European Union

## **Introduction**

During the last decade the concept of resilience has increasingly made its way in the foreign policy of the European Union (EU). This development has been primarily influenced by the widespread perception that the Western-led liberal world order is entering a period of decline, instability and disorder (Acharya, 2018; Apeldoorn, 2018). The literature on international relations and the nature of the world order has aimed, for at least two decades, to apply insights from other disciplines such as sociology in order to highlight the relevance of resilience for international processes (Evans and Steven, 2009; Korosteleva and Flockhart 2020). To that extent, resilience offers the promise of an attractive and clear framework for understanding the

way states<sup>1</sup> engage with internal or external challenges. The scholarship has jumped on this opportunity and highlighted how the EU can develop resilience and the way the concept would complement its foreign policy (Bendiek 2017; Kerr and Wiseman 2017). Nevertheless, critics drawing on Foucauldian views on governmentality argue that resilience portrays limited explanatory power, as it is mainly a by-product of neoliberalism and paves the way for states to abdicate responsibility for their actions in the face of crises (Korosteleva 2016; Juntunen and Hyvönen 2014). Experiencing a wide range of deep crises (such as the financial crisis, Brexit, the migrant crisis, or the Ukraine crisis), EU policymakers seem to have identified an ultimate panacea in the concept of resilience (Wagner and Anholt 2016). The latest iterations of the Global Strategy or the revisions of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) place resilience at the centre stage (European External Action Service 2016, 2017; European Commission 2015a, 2017). These external challenges have forced the EU to recognise that the resilience of the liberal world order has been crippled due to the actions of ‘illiberal states’ such as China or Russia.

What is interesting here is that the example of the EU has been mimicked by non-western states such as the RIC group (Russia, India and China).<sup>2</sup> Leaders such as Vladimir Putin, Xi Jinping or Narendra Modi have frequent alluded to their countries’ resilience in the face of challenges originating from the liberal world order (Xia 2019; Wang 2019; the Economic Times 2019; BBCnews 2014).<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, the scholarship tends to focus

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<sup>1</sup> In this article the terms ‘states’ and ‘international actors’ are used interchangeably.

<sup>2</sup> The literature points to the fact that these states have developed the most coherent alternative views (to the Western model) regarding the dynamic of the world order (Beeson and Zeng, 2018; Thies and Nieman, 2017)

<sup>3</sup> For example, in the case of Russia, President Putin has primarily referred to the country’s resilience towards the sanctions imposed by the West (Guter-Sandu and Kuznetsova 2020), the broader challenges of the EU and US in the post-Soviet space (CAN 2020; White 2018) or more recently fluctuations in oil prices (Weltman 2020). For Indian Prime Minister Modi, the need to enhance resilience has been articulated in relation to potential economic crises (FE Bureau 2019), the range of values that it seeks to promote in the world order (Xavier 2020), and more recently the supply of utilities during the coronavirus crisis (All India 2020). During the last year, China’s leader Xi Jinping has emphasised the country’s growing resilience primarily in relation to the medical and economic crisis caused by the coronavirus (Bloomberg News 2020; Majman 2020; Wu 2020; Xinhua 2020).

primarily on the case of the EU, with only a limited number of studies enquiring into the approach of non-Western states in relation to the nature of the world order (Deudney and Ikenberry, 2018; Acharya, 2018). In this context, the aim of the article is to analyse the way the RIC states understand resilience in the world order. In doing so, the article compares their interpretation to that developed by the EU – the literature highlights that one of the salient transformations based on developing resilience has been experienced by the EU (Tocci 2020). In this context, the first part of the article surveys the way the literature has analysed the role of resilience in the foreign policy of the EU. One of the main findings here is that the mainstream interpretation of resilience tends to be rather circular and leads to process of securitisation of the external environment. The second part of the article then presents a more nuanced framework that examines resilience along three complementary dimensions: i.e., resilience as ontology (attribute), as process and as outcome (agency and intentionality). In the final part, based on data from speeches, official documents and media sources, the article discusses the nature of the contrasts between the approach to resilience in the world order of the EU and the RIC states (Russia, India and China).

### **Resilience and the world order**

Scholars interested in the transformation of the world order have paid increasing attention in the last decade to the concept of resilience. The focus here is twofold. Firstly, the resilience of the world order itself tends to feature prominently in studies that examine global power transitions (Deudney and Ikenberry, 2018; Kahler, 2013). Resilience is generally equated with stability and preservation of order, with the actions of rising powers (such as China, India and or Russia) being framed as key sources of risks and challenges (Gaskarth 2016). Attention to the structure of world politics and the way states interact with it is the focus of this strand of

scholarship. There is also a strong hint of normativity straddling throughout these studies, as most tend to discuss how the resilience of the Western-led liberal order can be preserved or enhanced. What is at stake here is the need to safeguard the current liberal shape of the world order (i.e. principled behaviour and multilateralism) in the context of increasing challenges from what are perceived to be illiberal regimes (Thies and Nieman 2017). In short, the attention to resilience as a characteristic of world orders emphasises a rather monistic understanding which obscures and securitises alternative or opposing views. Rather than conceptualising the evolution of the world order as robust, many studies focusing on resilience tend to be built on the assumption that deviations from liberalism represent key challenges. In this logic, the decline of the liberal world order is portrayed as a structure prone to disorder and deep asymmetrical power relations coupled with the breakdown of international governance based on values and principles.

Secondly, resilience has been explored in relation to the way states act in the world order. This strand of scholarship shares with the former the assumption that the current Western-led liberal order is characterised by an increasing lack of stability, with key pillars such as the United States (US) or the United Kingdom taking a step back from preserving its key features (Higgott and Proud 2017; Harold 2014). The concept is generally seen as the intentional ability of international actors to predict and identify challenges in world politics, manage them, and overcome and bounce back from any adverse consequences and effects (Juncos 2017; Thiele 2016; Arbolino, Di Caro and Marani 2016; Christou 2016; Juntunen and Hyvönen 2014; Cafruny 2015; Chandler 2015). Scholars here analyse the way liberal international actors in the West (primarily the US or the EU and its member states) understand and adapt to the changing world order (Joseph, 2018; Deudney and Ikenberry, 2018; Christou, 2016). Discourse analysis coupled with interview data allows some scholars to shed light on the way resilience has entered official discourse and rhetoric (Juncos 2017). Others provide in-

depth accounts of the policies and strategies that have been enacted in order to build resilience (Bendiek, 2017). Finally, institutional transformations, as well as the development of new rules and procedures meant to enhance resilience are analysed on the basis of detailed process tracing (Cross, 2016). Similarly to the previous strand of literature, there is a rather deep normative underlying assumption that the perceived decline of the liberal order represents a major challenge which international actors such as the EU and the US should tackle by focusing on enhancing their resilience (in relation to challenges originating from the world order).

### **The EU's approach to resilience in the world order**

The EU has been engulfed during the last decade by a deep identity crisis which forced it to rethink its role in the international arena (Beauregard 2016). **To a larger extent than crises previous decades, the EU has forced to rethink its identity and role in the world order.** What is at stake here is the need to accommodate the seemingly unavoidable rise of geopolitics as a key driving force in the world order. Up until the start of the Arab Spring, geopolitics was perceived in the EU as a remnant of the violent past of the European continent which the Union helped overcome. The concept has thus been to a large extent associated with the pre-eminence of power politics, self-interested behaviour in world politics and increased proclivity for conflict in specific geographical areas (Nitoiu and Sus, 2019). The EU does indeed frame resilience to a large extent through the perspective of risk management in order to ensure effective governance (European External Action service 2017). However, as both a challenge and a deep threat to the EU, geopolitics has been securitised and interwoven to the need to develop resilience. Moreover, the EU has tried to put a positive spin on the realisation that the world order is not as receptive to its liberal version of international governance as it believed during the decade surrounding the big bang enlargement towards Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). The Global Strategy of 2016 and subsequent strategy documents emphasise the strong commitment of the EU to address its identity crisis and deal with heightened geopolitical risks by embracing the concept of resilience (Juncker, 2018; European External Action Service 2016; Morgherini 2017). This strategy securitises the EU's external environment as a key source of challenges and threats. Students of realism would rightly claim that the intentional

pursuit of resilience to external risks, paradoxically decreases resilience and leads to deep and sometimes irreconcilable security dilemmas (Smith, 2016). Advocates of liberalism, in turn, contend that the focus on resilience gives the EU and its foreign policy a fresh lease on life and empowers it to engage in an effective manner with a whole host of challenges (Juncos 2017; Smith and Youngs 2018; Christou 2016).

A slightly different reading frames the focus on resilience as the EU's retreat from its previous ambitions, goals and rhetoric. Taking a step back and facing challenges to the universality of its liberal but progressive model of global governance, resilience provides the EU the framework to preserve, at least in discourse, and when comes to its own perceptions of the self, the idea that it possesses strong and effective international actorness, or it has the potential to achieve it the medium to short term (Bendiek 2017). Resilience, thus, prescribes the limits of the EU' aspirations in the world order, and offers it a utilitarian framework for mitigating potential failures and turning them into potential success.

In its most simple form resilience provides an attractive framework for framing and engaging with challenges regardless of their nature (Juntunen and Hyvönen 2014). Besides the rather high degree of intellectual legitimacy granted to the concept by increasing academic attention, the EU's approach to resilience presents an effective way to manage complexity and reduce it to seemingly technical binary problems and solutions. Consequently, the EU focuses on three key aspects in developing resilience: the ability to predict, manage, and overcome or bounce back from a wide range of risks and challenges (Gaub and Popescu 2017). Firstly, the EU has aimed to develop the capacity to predict and identify the range of factors that have led to its recent and current pressing challenges. In practice, this entails enhanced cooperation between the various actors in the EU, such as the institutions and the member states, as well as significantly greater levels of coherence between the development of policies and strategies in different policy areas. In the world order, increased coherence presupposes better communication between internal actors, together with greater dialogue with the outside world, in a bid to better understand the self and the other. The process of developing the Global

Strategy or the common approach on sanctions towards Russia are evidence of the EU's ability to enhance internal communication, coherence and coordination (Tocci 2016). Not the same can be said about the external environment, where few attempts have been made to understand the actions of other actors or build new sustainable dialogues. Rather the focus on resilience has branded the external world as a source of conflict and provocations.

Secondly, in terms of managing challenges, the EU has focused on developing new institutions and fora that can provide technical and bureaucratic solutions. At the same time, there seems to be continuity in the EU's habit of reframing political reality when it does not suit its goals or expectations (Schumacher 2015; Cianciara 2017). Resilience is merely a shortcut that allows the EU to manage and spin the success of failure. Thirdly, through embarking on a process of renewal and revision, the EU has strived to overcome its challenges. The strategic review or the review of the ENP are instances that underline the way the EU packages resilience as a key remedy and innovation that can further enhance its international actorness.

The EU's use of resilience ultimately underlines a deep process of securitisation of the outside world (see for example European Commission 2018; 2016; 2015b; 2012). Faced with increasing challenges, the EU has chosen to dress its retreat and isolation, or loss of credibility and legitimacy, in the seemingly simple and effective bid to develop resilience. In turn, this article contends that a fixed and binary understanding of the outside world is decreasing the EU's resilience. Other non-Western important international actors like the RIC states have reacted and incorporated the concept of resilience in their strategy and rhetoric. However, they have done this in a more unspecified way than the EU. A simple and binary approach would thus not be useful for understanding the nuances and hidden meanings behind the RIC states' recent interest in the concept of resilience. Consequently, in what follows this article presents an alternative framework for analysing the way states understand and aim to enhance their resilience in the world order.

## **Resilience as ontology, process and agency**

The ability of international actors to manage challenges as a key aspect of building resilience is primarily examined in the literature by looking at institutional developments and capacity building. Studies look here for examples of the way states have managed their response to the financial crisis of the previous decade, or the way in which the EU has addressed the migrant crisis or the Ukraine crisis (Juncos 2017). For example, following the latter, an emerging debate on the possible appearance of a so-called new Cold War has emphasised the need for the West (both the US and the EU) to manage the assertive and aggressive moves of Russia (in relation to the liberal world order) while avoiding direct conflict with Moscow (Legvold 2016). As the previous sections have shown, much of the focus on resilience that has influenced the literature in the last decade has drawn on the experience of international actors in the Western hemisphere. In this context, this article presents a rather more nuanced conceptualisation of resilience, which frames it on three overlapping levels: i.e. resilience as ontology (attribute), process and agency (outcome and intentionality). Such a conceptualisation offers greater scope for analysing the approaches of non-Western states such as the RIC countries (Russia, India and China) which have less well defined (and arguably abstract) approaches to resilience than the EU and the US.

One of the most common and shorthand ways in which resilience is seen in the policymaking world is as an ability or attribute which is inherent to the nature of international actors (Cooper and Shaw 2009). Rather than being framed as a target that states need to work on improving, resilience represents an integral part of their ontology (i.e. the first level in the model presented in this article), which is interwoven into their perceptions of the self and other. The ontology of states predisposes a certain level of resilience in world politics, which cannot be structurally altered. Perceptions of the self define the parameters within which states can

achieve resilience, while comparisons with the ‘other’ provide a benchmark for evaluating one’s own level of resilience. As an ontological characteristic, resilience is subject to the interpretation of the actor that possess it, hence across the world order multiple understandings can exist at one time. These contrasts can originate from a wide range of factors. The first relates to the nature of political systems, where for example, liberal democracies emphasise the prominence of a set of seemingly universal rules, norms, values and rights (all meant to empower the individual), while more illiberal systems, tend to value stability, autonomy and order as opposed to individual liberty. Secondly, states’ perception of resilience as an ontological attribute is prescribed by the limits of their resources and power. States that possess diverse resources and sources of power in world politics tend to feel less sensitive to internal or external shocks, and view resilience as a key characteristic of the self (Johansson-Nogués 2018). A lack of resources coupled with limited sources of power increases the vulnerability of states and frames resilience as an imperative which should be preserved. Consequently, states that find themselves lacking various ontological characteristics are prone to attribute more weight to the need to enhance resilience. An opposite dynamic is also present in relation to the role and status that states wish to maintain in world politics. Higher status and greater role in the world order pushes states to preserve their place in the hierarchy of politics, with resilience a key prerequisite (Larson and Shevchenko 2010).

The second level of resilience focuses on the intersubjective experience of states in the world order. Rather than being framed by the rather immutable ontology of international actors, resilience here is a constitutive aspect of the way they engage with each other and the structure of world politics (Juntunen and Hyvönen 2014). It is a process of learning and socialisation through which states come to develop and interact with shared understandings of resilience. The web of intersubjective experiences points states to reflect on their own ontological resilience and compare it to that of the ‘other’. A lack of appropriateness in relation to the

constitutive elements of the world order (e.g. power relations, rules, norms or values) directs international actors towards engaging in processes of reflection and revision. Resilience becomes a key part of processes of reflection and revision which aims to lead to the evolution of states in the world order. From this perspective, resilience can be seen as the very process of understanding the way the self relates to the other, and the way it positions itself in the hierarchy of the world order. Miskimmon and his colleagues (2013) show that such interpretations tend to be quite constant and are based on the ontology of states. Salient shocks are required for states to embark more or less intentionally on processes of reflection and revision (Freedman, 2016).

Two powerful emotions play a particular role in triggering processes of resilience: humiliation and trauma. Not being able to fulfil one's goals, framing the self as inferior to the other or the realisation that the other acts based on an inferior understanding of the self, coupled with inadequacy with the constitutive elements of the world order can be seen as key sources of humiliation for states in world politics (Lindner 2006). Trauma represents, on the other hand, a stronger visceral experience which points states to reflect on their ontology. More precisely, trauma can occur as a result of humiliation, but also as a result of processes of reflection of the self (Crossley 2000; Hutchison 2010; Hutchison and Bleiker 2008). For example, acting in a way that contradicts one's own principles or decreases ontological resilience can lead to trauma. The need to avoid experiences of trauma or humiliation (but also achieve redemption) directs states towards processes of (enhancing their own) resilience primarily focused on learning and reflection.

Besides driving significant processes of reflection and learning, or being informed by the ontology of states, the concept of resilience is also the outcome of the intentional actions and behaviour of states (i.e. the third level). This understanding cuts across the mainstream circular interpretation of resilience which was highlighted in the previous sections. As such,

states behave intentionally in order to enhance their resilience and be able to predict, manage and bounce back, with resilience as an outcome of their policies (Gaub and Popescu 2017). In order to gauge the approach of the RIC states, this article employs a slightly less specified perspective which emphasises the agency of international actors in developing resilience in the world order. In this interpretation, achieving resilience becomes a proxy for empowerment and emancipation in the world order. It prompts states to develop strategies aimed at increasing resilience and posturing it in global politics. A successful strategy generally involves the alignment of aims and resources, as well as ensuring the feasibility of these aspects (Nitoiu and Sus 2017). Resilience can also be seen as a metric for evaluating the status of international actors, with higher levels equating to greater rights and duties, as well as the ability to influence the agenda of world politics. At the same time, the behaviour of states meant to create resilience can lead to a wide range of unintended consequences, such as securitisation of the actions of other states (and the structure of world politics), the appearance of security dilemmas, or the very inability to enhance or develop resilience. Ultimately, the level of intentionality behind states' desire to act in order to enhance resilience emphasises their need to achieve autonomy and increased agency in the world order – which makes empowerment and emancipation in the world order synonymous to achieving resilience.

### **The RIC's approach to resilience in the world order**

#### *Ontology*

While the RIC countries' ontologies point to contrasting understandings of the self, they share a rather coherent view of the way resilience underpins the world order. Fluidity and disorder are perceived to be the main characteristics of the world order, which point to an in-built lack of resilience. Hence, one of the key constitutive elements of the world order is a proclivity for

change and disorder, making resilience a short-lived ontological aspect. In this context, resilience for the RICs partly resides in the way the self accommodates the dynamic nature of the world order, with some of these countries being in a much better position. China perceives itself as a rising power which aims to interact harmoniously and peacefully with other states in the world order (Beeson and Zeng 2018). Resilience in this case comes from its ontological peaceful predisposition. The development of a distinct brand of democracy (sovereign democracy) as well as the leadership mantle of the former Soviet Union is seen to be synonymous with ontological resilience by Moscow. Unlike the case of China where the self (with its predisposition towards peaceful coexistence) is a source of resilience that can be exported throughout the world, Russia's ontology frames resilience as an attribute that the country has developed incrementally due to the hostile external environment – narratives regarding the constant historical encirclement of the country are widespread in Russian official and public discourse (Tsygankov 2014a). Similarly to China, India places its peaceful nature at the centre of its self, together with the recent experience of representing the largest democratic country in the world order. Nevertheless, India's ontology frames resilience in a much more inward and rather confused manner, as opportunism and the principle of 'being friends with everyone' dominate the country's engagement with other international actors (Jones et al. 2013).

An intrinsic part of the ontology of the three states is the need to maintain domestic unity and coherence in the face of what are seen as multiple external challenges (primarily originating from the liberal world order and the West). Their ontology presents two broad pathways towards resilience. The first entails framing the self as a civilisational state, where historical continuity in a specific geographical space and in the context of a system of administration trump notions of universality (Coker 2019). Larger than a nation, but not claiming universality, civilisational states celebrate a perception of the self which is pervasive

throughout time and highlights ontological unity even in the face of claims for diversity. Understandings of the self tend to be immutable, which provides ontological resilience in the face of increasing calls for diversity and seeming ‘disunity’. While resilience as such has not become a key staple of official discourse in the RIC countries, the idea of the civilizational state has been ubiquitous during the last decade in the discourse of Xi, Modi or Putin as a way of emphasising the ontological resilience of their countries to outside influence (particularly Western). For civilisational states, universalism represents not an opportunity, but a challenge which imposes on them foreign standards that often go against the deep historical continuity that underlines the ontology of the self.

Secondly, creating unity and coherence is ontologically predicated on the need to have strong leaders. To that extent, the very existence and practice of strong leaders at the helm of these countries is a marker for resilience. Strong leaders are equated with driving forward development, maintaining unity and coherence, or securing the country from external influences. The methods for achieving these aspects in an effective manner are what distinguish strong leaders (Tsygankov 2014b). Arguably, Putin represents the most salient example of a strong leader, who has managed to stifle almost any form of opposition, to give a certain civilisational mission to the state (i.e. becoming a beacon of conservative values in the world order, such as sovereignty and primacy of the traditional family), whilst striving to recover the status and glory of the Soviet Union. These aspects have gradually become more prominent in the case of Xi, where the push against corruption has debilitated most of the opposition and the Belt and Road initiative has given a salient civilizational mission to the country – which has the potential to give China the level of respect it deserves. India is somewhat at the start of the journey, but Prime Minister Modi’s approach seems to be bent on limiting the ability of the opposition to challenge the government, while also presenting the potential to elevate India into a key international actor (which in itself is a source of national pride).

Challenges to status and sovereignty are perceived by the RIC countries to be inherent to the dynamics of the Western-led liberal order (Thies and Nieman 2017). Not being treated as equals to the US or the EU, and thus afforded their desired status in the world order, puts the RIC states in a constant state of ontological vulnerability, which, in turn, translates into weak resilience. Greater status in the world order implies the recognition by other states of a wide range of rights that the RIC countries could enjoy. The most important relates to the sanctity of the principle of sovereignty, where external intervention and influence represents a key challenge that should be countered at all cost (Simpson 2009). At the same time, due to their aspiration to be treated equally to their Western peers, the RIC states, in various degrees, see their ontological resilience to be synonymous with the international recognition of their legitimate claims of influence and control over so-called spheres of influence formed by small states around their borders. Russia and China have shown indeed more willingness to complement these beliefs with practical assertive actions in their neighbourhood: i.e. Russia's actions in Georgia or Ukraine, or Beijing's involvement in the South China Sea. Claims for equality in the world order stem, nevertheless, from a rather undisputed assumption that the RIC countries possess the resources that should legitimise higher status, but also provide the grounds for ontological resilience.

### *Process*

Not being perceived as an equal by Western peers has gradually created a deep sense of humiliation and trauma which permeates the construction of notions of the civilisational state in the case of RIC countries. As was highlighted in the previous section, resilience as process can occur due to the way states engage with traumatic experiences or with humiliation. Without a doubt, the colonial period left an important scar in this regard, where the inability to shake

off Western domination produced humiliation (Stuenkel 2016). This is particularly salient in the case of India, and to a slightly lesser extent China. For the former, the prolonged period of Western and British domination altered the self and practically stunted the harmonious development of the civilisational state. Nevertheless, the civilisational state exhibited ontological resilience and, following independence, embarked on a process of learning and reflection. Both in the case of China and India, colonialism is understood to be the main factor behind the inability of these states to maintain unity and coherence.

Through reflection and leaning about the past and current self (as well as its interactions with the outside world), resilience as a process takes root in the practice of states. Ultimately, even though Russia is to some extent a constitutive element of the Western world, it is the perceived exclusion as equals in the world order that has been the main factor that has historically created trauma and humiliation for the RIC countries. Paradoxically, while India's political system, at least on the surface, positions it firmly into Western political culture, it presents the most adept discourse rejecting the claims to salience of 'universal' liberal values and norms (Pant and Super 2015; Saran 2018). In practice, this translates into an opportunistic approach to engaging with other states, where India aims to have close relations with the US or the EU, but also works towards undermining the pervasive character of the liberal world order. On the other hand, the experience of colonialism being slightly less salient in the case of China or marginal for Russia, while challenging the primacy of liberalism in the world order, does not figure so prominently in the narratives produced by the Kremlin or Beijing. Both claim the need to reform the current liberal world order, and give more weight to non-Western actors, ensure harmonious economic development (in the case of China) or return to the post-WW2 status quo and settlement.

During the post-Cold War period the RIC states have had to adapt to the primacy of the US in the world order, and to the view that liberal civilising forces would and should eventually

come to influence the dynamics of the world order (Peterson 2018; Terhalle 2015). This prompted new processes of reflection and learning which complemented their longstanding assumption that the nature of the world order is dynamic and not conducive to resilience in the medium to long term. It also confirmed the perception that the structure of the liberal world order is conducive to patterns of discrimination and exploitation which have the potential to lead to inequality and eventually to trauma. Resilience here is synonymous with learning from the self regarding the potential avenues for humiliation and trauma pertaining to the world order, with the behaviour of the West representing the key source of challenges in the case of the RIC countries.

Resilience also becomes inbuilt characteristic of the process of reflecting on the civilizational model that the RIC countries choose to promote in the world order. Both China and Russia have reflected on the past and adapted ideas which proved to be successful at various times in their history. For Beijing, the ancient Silk Road presents a model of unifying the country and developing its more western parts. The Belt and Road initiative promises to become the signature civilisational marker for China in the world order, while also signifying increased resilience in the face of the constant threat of disintegration that the country is facing (Macaes 2018). Conversely, the Russian elite has looked towards its glorious imperial past, especially the nineteenth century, when the country managed to conquer large territories in the Asian steppes in a relatively short period. To that extent, the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), coupled with the desire to create a broader cooperative entity or community from Lisbon to Vladivostok form the backbone of the Russia's current civilizational model that it seeks to promote in the world order this century (Nitoiu 2017). The project can be seen as part of the aspiration to build Greater Eurasia, an idea which has come to dominate the mindset of Russian elites during the last decade (Tsygankov 2016). It underscores the fact that Russia's increasing focus on the 'East' is the result of processes of reflection regarding the country's relations with

Europe and West. Additionally, Greater Eurasia provides a civilising mission to Russia's foreign policy that has the potential to also enhance its own domestic stability (and that of the regime around Putin).

Most importantly, processes of reflection regarding questions of inequality vis-à-vis the West, as well as subsequent experiences of trauma and humiliation, have pushed the RIC countries towards increased mutual learning and socialisation. On the one hand, they have come to learn that they share similar experiences of engaging in the seemingly unequal and discriminatory structure of the liberal world order. Moreover, the RIC countries as a group have increasingly underlined the salience of sovereignty and peaceful coexistence in their approaches to world politics (Coning, Mandrup and Odgaard 2014). On the other hand, the perceived decline of the liberal world order, and the gradual disengagement of the US has driven the RIC countries to identify and work together on a number of common interests primarily revolving around trade and security relations (Chun 2013; Kiely 2015).

In practice, with the turn of the millennium, this web of shared views and interests has been gradually formalised and institutionalised through the creation of the BRICS groups of states and the concerted actions of the RIC states in various multilateral fora such as the United Nations or G20. The BRICS arguably represents the most important outcome of the cooperation between Russia, China and India, with the addition of Brazil and South Africa meant to ensure increased global legitimacy and acceptance (Hurrell 2018). The very nexus between reflection and socialization provides here the ground through which resilience takes root as the process which allows these countries endeavour to formalise their cooperation, and in this way stave off challenges deriving from the dynamic nature of the liberal world order: for example, the creation and development of BRICS, as well greater strategic alignment between Russia and China (especially in the Arctic region) have increasingly questioned the resilience liberal world order.

## *Agency*

Unlike the case of the EU, the RIC countries have developed a rather ambiguous and underspecified approach to resilience, which tends to place limited emphasis on agency and intentionality. As the previous sections have shown this abstract view stems to a large extent from the way the RICs engage with their ontology and in processes of learning and reflection. Nevertheless, each of the RIC countries has strived to enhance resilience through intentional actions in a range of different policy areas. For example, China has employed significant resources in order to enhance the resilience of its financial system, and particularly the way it fits into the global economy (Ferdinand 2016). There is an underlying assumption that China's economy has become a central pillar of the global system (Ghiasi and Zhou 2017). However, the basis on which it achieved this is rather unsustainable, making the country sensitive to global shifts. A range of fiscal policies, the focus on the development of high-tech industries together with Belt and Road Initiative, as well as the creation of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank are some of the measures taken during the last decade by the Chinese government in the face global economic uncertainty.

Similar economic concerns have also been shared by India, but to a larger extent than Beijing, India has chosen to focus on developing human resources and technology in order to increase the resilience of the economic dynamic of the world order. Additionally, through the Modi doctrine, India has aimed to achieve leadership in South Asia, and convince the small states in the region to continue to challenge China's assertive actions in the South China Sea. This fits with the overall pattern of contradictions and opportunism that characterises India's foreign policy (Saran 2018; Sachdeva 2016).

Russia has identified the biggest challenge in the world order as the security architecture on the European continent which does not recognise Moscow's interests as equal and poses a constant threat to the status quo of the region. The expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty

Organization (NATO) to Central and Eastern Europe, as well as the extension of the EU's integration model to the post-Soviet space are generally identified as the challenges to Russia's own security and sovereignty. To that extent, Russia has embarked on an assertive path in order to stave off the perceived advance of the EU and NATO, with its actions in Georgia or Ukraine, as well as the presumed involvement in US electoral processes as key moves designed to enhance its resilience (Allison 2017), or the move towards East and increased strategic alignment with China, as highlighted in the special issue. While the RIC states seem to focus on different aspects in enhancing their resilience, they share a lack of strategy in doing so, as they generally act in a rather reactive manner to what they perceive to be challenges originating from the West and the liberal world order. China, India, and Russia seem to be in somewhat constant crisis mode, where responding in the short-term precludes them from developing coherent medium- to long-term strategies<sup>4</sup> for enhancing resilience and dealing with unintended consequences.

One of the peculiar characteristics of the ontologies of the RIC countries is the focus on the need to have strong leaders at the helm. For resilience as an outcome of intentional behaviour this has meant that the main priority in the foreign policies of these countries has been the need to proof their political regimes from external interference that can lead to domestic challenges and unrest. From this perspective, agency on the part of the state aimed at enhancing resilience is useful only if it serves the purpose of preserving the power of the regimes in the RIC countries. Being seen to act in a way that signifies resilience can send a wide range of powerful domestic and external messages (Miskimmon, O'Loughlin and Roselle 2013). On the one hand, external actors are discouraged from interfering in the RIC countries, as increased resilience translates in greater costs and lower effectiveness. On the other hand, the

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<sup>4</sup> One might argue that the Belt and Road Initiative represents an attempt by China to project a medium to long term strategic vision. However, the development of initiative has been to a large extent influenced by Responses of Eurasian states (Macaes 2018) as well as dynamics within the Chinese Communist party (Wenjuan, 2016).

domestic popularity of the regimes in the RIC countries is enhanced as they are perceived to lead to increased order, stability and security. Paradoxically, one the most important lessons that the RIC countries have observed from the experience of the EU is that by bringing resilience to the front of official narratives, states can provide a deeper sense of internal stability and order, while also abdicating large aspects of their responsibility for their agency in world politics.

### **Discussion and conclusions: Principled behaviour vs peaceful coexistence**

The last decade has seen the EU embracing the concept of resilience as the main driving principle in its foreign policy and as a miracle medicine that is meant to solve the wide range of pressing crises and challenges that have engulfed it (Joseph and Juncos 2019). On their part, the RIC states have increasingly started to mimic the EU and focus (at least in rhetoric) on building their own resilience in relation to the dynamics of the liberal world order and the actions of the West. Nevertheless, the approach of the RIC countries has been less defined, more abstract, reactive, and un-strategic. In this context, the aim of this article has been to compare the approach of the EU and the RIC states to resilience in the world order, with a view to analyse the approach of the latter. While the mainstream understanding of resilience in the scholarship on the foreign policy of the EU and US tends to be rather well-defined, circular and lead to processes of securitisation, this article proposed a more nuanced conceptualisation of resilience that frames it along three complementary dimensions. The exercise of mapping the approaches of the RICs using this framework finds that in its abstract form resilience tends to stem to a larger extent from the ontology of the self and processes of learning, reflection, as well as socialisation with likeminded actors.

What seems to be at the centre of the contrast between the EU's approach to resilience in the world order and that of the RICs is the fundamental nature of international relations. On the one hand, the current shape of the world order dominated by liberal values emphasises a rather strict version of principled behaviour, where a limited and seemingly immutable range of norms and values, primarily originating from the West, are framed as universal. It is respect for freedoms and liberty, multilateralism, democracy, or free trade that underline principled behaviour and have come to dominate through the actions in the world order of the US or the EU during the post-Cold War period (Deudney and Ikenberry 2018). This approach is predicated on the assumption that states through their agency and intentionality can shape the resilience of the world order, which in its natural state presents a myriad of risks and challenges.

One might contend that the liberal view would argue that a peaceful and stable world order is what states intentionally make of it through their principled behaviour. In turn, contrasting behaviour would lead to disorder and lack of stability in the world order. A resilient world order can only be achieved if liberal values are spread globally and come to permeate the way states act. In an ideal situation, where the world order is dominated by principled behaviour, states do not need to concern themselves with resilience as the very resilience of the world order ensures their own resilience. The EU's recent emphasis on resilience comes in the context of the widespread perception of the decline of the liberal order, the increasing rise of illiberal practices and the general disengagement of the US. While this view ties states' resilience to that of the world order, it is surprising that most of the actions of the EU in enhancing its resilience follow a Foucauldian critique, where the focus of the Union has become very much inward and bent on the survival of the self, abrogating global responsibility.

On the other hand, the RIC states view the world order as inherently dynamic,<sup>5</sup> with resilience being possible only in the short term, and not sustainable in the long term. Uncertainty and a wide range of subsequent evolving challenges and risks dominate the world order. Even though states have agency in shaping the world order, their ability to endow it with resilience is limited if non-existent. The concept of peaceful coexistence (*Panchsheel*, in the way it first appeared in official documents, in the 1954 treaty between China and India over Tibet), as opposed to principled behaviour, underlines the fact that states can act towards mitigating the endemic lack of resilience of the world order, but do not have the ability significantly to alter this characteristic.

More as a general and rough guide of how states should interact with one another, peaceful coexistence underlines the need to assure equality and respect among states (primarily in the form of sovereignty, pluralism, lack of aggression and non-interference). For the RIC states it seems that the nature of behaviour holds little importance, as evaluations are never considered to be universal (but biased towards those at the centre of the world order). It is more the belief in peaceful coexistence as a constitutive aspect of the ontology of the self that if professed individually by states around the world has the potential to co-produce relative stability. To that extent, both Chinese and Russian integration projects in Eurasia – as discussed throughout this special issue – (i.e. the EEU or Greater Eurasia, and subsequently the Belt and Road Initiative) are framed in official discourse by the purposeful promotion of pluralism and peaceful coexistence and development in the region. However, in the long term the world order is prone to experience deep instability and transformations, which peaceful coexistence can only help mitigate. In this context this article should be read as an initial attempt to evaluate the approach of the RIC states to resilience. Future endeavours could focus in more detail on

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<sup>5</sup> One can argue that this perception is to large extent shaped by the experience of the RIC states at the margins of the liberal order. Hence, attaining a hegemonic position might prompt the RIC states to adopt a less flexible approach to resilience of the world order.

the way these countries engage with resilience in a number of policy areas: e.g. security, economy, climate change or diplomacy. Moreover, the conceptualisation of resilience along the complementary dimensions (ontology, process and agency) can be further applied to a larger number of case studies.

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