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# Understanding the role of resilience in Italian and French strategic documents



## 1. Introduction

**G**lobalisation is a planetary process generating unnumbered economic, political and social relations. At the heart of globalisation is an unprecedented technological advancement in communications, digital, and transport that has reduced space and time and made the world interdependent, leading to the widening of social relations (McGrew & Held, 2002; Martinelli, 2004; Majocchi, 2019). Flows and phenomena on all scales manifest and intersect freely, some of which are managed by non-state actors lacking democratic legitimacy and are able to pass through the meshes of society and nation-state systems of government without the latter being able to control them. As a result, contemporaneity lives in an unfolding complexity that is difficult to govern and where vulnerability and risk are the order of the day. Ulrich Beck (1992) has argued that we live in a risk society: in fact, we are witnessing an almost inexhaustible proliferation of threats whose necessary prevention imposes new security needs to be satisfied, whether in economic, social or political-military terms. In *Liquid Times* (2007), Baumann underlines that today's society experiences the passage from the 'solid' to the 'liquid' phase of globalization marked by instability, ambiguity and fear; the separation between politics and power is more and more significant, communities and nations are facing increasing challenges in providing collective security, satisfying local political issues and managing domestic affairs.

Globalisation's externalities push states to conceive countermeasures, but they are forced to deal with a highly complex and polymorphous scenario. Globalization thus creates unprecedented opportunities and challenges. Their impact in terms of security issues has become a source of concern for every national government, especially considering that the international power relations system is still based upon anarchy and single states remain the main providers of collective security, as well as being primarily responsible for it. Thus, each state has settled different security strategies according to political culture and values, perceptions of possible threats, and other context-specific needs.

## **2. The perceived nature of threats in French and Italian strategic documents**

Prior to the introduction of the concept of resilience in our case studies, as it has been suggested by Proag (2014), it is fundamental to explore perceived systems' vulnerabilities. Therefore, we begin our analysis by looking at the threats identified in the strategic documents considered. Firstly we look at the main characteristics of the international arena that emerge from such documents, then we turn our attention to the actual threats perceived. We distinguish them between threats deriving from the competition between states, threats that are treated as phenomena and threats that are constituted by weaknesses. To conduct our analysis we rely primarily on national white papers. White papers are the most authoritative government documents concerning defence. They are open, publicly available and highly specialized official documents prepared and published by a country's ministry or department of defence that identify areas of concern, setting the states' course of action for the future (Choi, 1996). In both France and Italy, the drafting of such documents is not regulated by law: their publication mainly depends on the will of the countries' incumbent leaders. As a result, white papers are not published on a regular basis. In order to select relevant documents we chose the 2007-2008 Global Financial Crisis as a cut-off event. The reason behind this choice lies in the fact that the 2007-2008 crisis can be considered as the first event in the 21<sup>st</sup> century that affected virtually all the states across the globe, epitomizing the global nature of risks in an interconnected world. In this respect we agree with Joseph's etiology of the term resilience: the concept originated in the literature on the adaptability of ecological systems and entered the political vocabulary on the ground that «[e]cological and social components are

linked by complex resource systems such as economic systems, institutions and organizations» (Joseph, 2013a p.39). In this context the term resilience provides complex systems with the capacity to endure and survive crises, highlighting their capacity for renewal and adaptation. We, therefore, included in our analysis only the documents drafted after (or during) the 2007 crisis so that all the references to the perceived nature of the threats made in the selected documents somehow take into consideration this event that contributed to shaping the current understanding of what constitutes a global risk. Consequently we analyze the 2008 and the 2013 French White Papers, and the 2015 Italian White Paper (République Française, 2008 e 2013; Ministero della Difesa, 2015). To strengthen our analysis in the case of France we also look at the 2017 and 2022 strategic reviews (Ministère des Armées, 2017; Secrétariat général de la défense et de la sécurité nationale, 2022). These two official documents, acknowledging the course of action set in the 2013 French White Paper, constitute a strategic update in the light of recent events and changes in the international system. With regard to complementary Italian strategic documents considered in this research it is worth noting that, «[t]he debate on national security and defence policy has been generally relegated to the margins within institutions, media, and even academia» (Coticchia & Ruggeri, 2022 p.8). As a result public discussions and research on defence issues are scarce. The publication of official strategic documents is occasional, reflecting parliamentary lack of interest and oversight. Given the sparse nature of Italian official strategic documents, in addition to the 2015 white paper we selected other four official documents (Camporini, 2008; Ministero della Difesa, 2018, Ministero della Difesa, 2021; Stato Maggiore della Difesa, 2022). Taken together we believe these official documents are sufficient to characterize the nature of the threats perceived by the Italian government and its military. They should also constitute a representative sample of how the term resilience has been adopted in the Italian strategic milieu.

### ***The characteristics of the international arena***

The characterization of the international arena that emerges from Italian strategic documents is essentially one of disorder and instability. Globalization is associated with a growing interconnectedness that is marked by complexity (of relations, regulations, phenomena etc). The dominant features of a perceived multipolar international arena are those of disequilibrium, asymmetry and instability. Multipolarity is thus associated

to a form of international disorder rather than order. A wide array of actors, both state and non-state, vie for power, influence and resources in an international arena whose rules are increasingly contested. Strategic competition, arms races, nuclear proliferation, malicious cyber campaigns and informational campaigns aimed at destabilizing targets are just some of the features of multidomain competition associated with multipolarity. This unstable international order is thus constantly threatened by protean menaces that are hardly identifiable. French strategic documents characterize the international arena as complex and ridden by uncertainty caused by unpredictable and ambiguous events. French strategic thinking seems however to attach greater importance to cause-effect relationships. Complexity is caused by three main dynamics: acceleration (of events, of their evolution, and of the responses to such evolutions), proximity – which is understood as the interconnectedness of very different, spatially distant events – and amplification (of existing phenomena and of their consequences). While less attention is given to the multipolar nature of the international arena, French strategic documents still point out that the world is more unstable than in the past. Multipolarity is simply acknowledged as a fact that carries positive and negative features: what is deemed worrisome is the international arena fragmentation. The menaces to its (precarious) stability are defined as *hybrid*, implying that their nature does not belong perfectly to any category, but it is better understood as a mix of factors, levels and even actors.

### ***The competition between states***

French and Italian strategic documents indeed give considerable attention to states' competition. Both France and Italy agree on the fact that geostrategic competition between states is increasing. In particular, they identify the threats represented by Russian expansionism (this is true even for the documents published prior to 2014), and China's bid for global hegemony. The other two domains of competition shared by Italian and French documents are those of natural resources and space. With regard to the former, the two countries' white papers underline how modern technologies, and the development of communication infrastructures require more resources and energy, thus increasing competition among states to secure them. Again both Italian and French documents agree that the effects of climate change amplify this type of competition, making the risk of resources-driven conflicts more likely than ever. With respect to states' competition outside Earth's atmosphere Italian and French strategic thinkers

consider space as a public good subject to various threats given the presence of critical infrastructures such as satellites. The most notable discrepancy between Italian and French strategic documents lies in France's focus on certain actors' active contestation of the global order. In practice, France seems to consider political revisionisms as a product of states' competition. The erosion of the global order is therefore understood as a threat potentially leading to major crises. Interestingly this analysis is not explicit in Italian documents, although it is indeed partly comprised under the reflection that the multipolar order is more unstable.

### ***Phenomena***

Strategic documents identify a wide array of phenomena that threaten national interests. A thorough analysis of all the threats we listed for heuristic purposes under the broad category of phenomena is beyond the scope of the present research. We thus only briefly look at the most important threats identified in the documents selected to subsequently look for differences between the two countries' strategic documents. We found a strong consensus around certain perceived threats. Namely, the risks represented by terrorism, organized crime, malicious cyber activities, Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear (NCBR) attacks, the use of new disruptive technologies, the transnational spread of diseases and epidemics and the arms race are mentioned in almost all the documents considered. The 2018 parliamentary audit of the Italian Ministry of Defense (Ministero della difesa, 2018) also highlights illegal migrations as a phenomenon potentially threatening the country's cohesion. While this reflection is absent in French strategic documents, the role played by non-state actors is scrutinized both in the 2008 white book and in the 2017 National strategic review. Non-state actors are believed to represent a potential threat under two main perspectives. One is that of the privatization of violence, the other pertains to their capacity to wield a significant influence in global affairs. The former mainly refers to the growing capacity of certain non-state actors to acquire advanced weapon systems. The latter brings together terrorist and armed groups, multinational companies and other private entities that are believed to be able to threaten national interests at the domestic and international level in various domains ranging from cyberspace and information to battlefields. More in general French documents seem to attach greater importance to asymmetric and hybrid threats. The notion of asymmetry points to uneven – and adversarial –



relations between states and other, smaller and less organized entities. Such entities are perceived as threatening because of their malleability and capacity to adapt, to engage in hostile operations before blending into the population. The concept of hybridity seems to focus on the means employed by states or other *asymmetric* actors. Hybrid actions range from active warfighting to information manipulation, mixing different means in order to achieve specific aims. Although the notion of hybridity as an analytical concept appears to be highly problematic (Renz, 2016), an evaluation of its heuristic capacity is beyond the scope of our research. For our purposes, it suffices to say that while Italian strategic documents seem to overlook the role of asymmetric menaces and hybrid threats, the recurrent use of those terms in French strategic papers signals a peculiar interest in these issues. Unsurprisingly hybrid threats and non-state actors' ability to wield influence have a central role in the 2022 National Strategic review: it indeed echoes recent events in Mali and the Sahel area where the French presence has been actively countered by Russian proxies such as the infamous Wagner group private military contractor and other non-state actors (Audinet & Dreyfus, 2022)

### ***Fragilities***

Fragilities or weaknesses represent a crucial issue in strategic thinking. The first weakness perceived as threatening by France and Italy is that of states. States that can no longer control parts of their territory and their boundaries, or that cannot provide basic services to their population are believed to constitute enabling factors for terrorism and other transnational threats. Another weakness recognized by the two countries as a potential threat is that of multilateral institutions. Such entities, are seen as progressively delegitimised by unscrupulous international actors, thus adding instability to the international arena. The 2017 and 2022 French strategic reviews also underline how the weaknesses of multilateral institutions are amplified by state actions' that actively undermine international law. The 2022 RNS uses the term *lawfare* to characterize the "strategic use of the law" by states to advance self-interested objectives (Secrétariat général de la défense et de la sécurité nationale, 2022 p. 11). French documents also mention the weak capacity of the EU as a regional security provider. The fact that such a lack of capacity is identified as a potential threat is partly explained by Russia's aggression on Ukraine, and partly by France's desire for an independent and strategically autonomous EU (on this issue see in particular RNS, 2022).

### ***Same threats, different policies?***

What clearly emerges from this brief analysis of the perceived threats identified in Italian and French strategic documents is that the two countries seem to generally agree on what constitutes a threat to their national interests. Apart from some minor differences, such as France's insistence on the hybrid nature of current threats or Italy's focus on migrations, the perceived threats and risks are essentially the same. This comes with little surprise, as both countries are located in the same region and are deeply integrated in the European Union and other international organizations such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Before analyzing the use of the term resilience in the above-mentioned documents, we will try to understand its nature and the characteristics that allowed the extension of the concept to the field of strategic studies.

### **3. Resilience, a contested and attractive concept**

Building on Sartori's (2011) reflections on the scientific use of meanings, the authors argue in favor of the need to explore how the concept of resilience is treated within a particular specialised vocabulary, in our case that of strategic studies. The aim of the research is not to offer a particular definition of the concept, but to explore its use. We will thus try to understand how the extension of the concept of resilience to strategic studies takes place; focusing specifically on whether the concept is clear, in an attempt to reduce its current ambiguity.

The concept of resilience has acquired a significant colloquial and policy appeal, probably because it foresees a focus on positive and transformative processes (Miller et al., 2010). Others have connected its recent success to its coherence with neoliberal discourse and governmentality (Anderson, 2015; Joseph, 2013; Tickell & Peck, 2003). Resilience managing actions are also believed to be functional to development processes in unpredictable and changing contexts (Adger et al., 2005, Walker et al. 2004). According to Christopherson and colleagues (2010), a widespread feeling of insecurity and uncertainty among the population at the global level plays a fundamental role in the concept affirmation. Martin (2012) argues that ecological challenges, environmental threats, social-economic instability, and the necessity of adopting interdisciplinarity and sustainability approaches to resource management while dealing with a multiplicity of actors have made the fortune of the term. Resilience has thus been described

as *traveling concept* (Bal, 2002), a *buzzword* (Davoudi, 2012) and a “opaque, polysemic and largely metaphoric term” (Fracart, 2010 p. 21).

While Brand and Jax (2007) argument that the lack of ontological coherence puts the resilience concept at stake is interesting, this perspective does not consider that its conceptual fluidity opens the way for uses outside the first field of implementation, offering opportunities for multidisciplinary and multi-scale perspectives from different fields (Giovannetti et al., 2015; Martini, 2015; Tozzi, 2021). In this regard, Coste and colleagues contend that resilience is a multifactorial process, borne out of the interplay between individuals and their environment, and therefore comprehends variables related to the internal, individual level (such as personality, psychic structure, coping mechanisms ...) and external variables (environment, socialization ...). In their view it is therefore difficult to generalize methods to reinforce resilience, since it is a highly context-specific concept (Coste et al., 2011).

Historically, engineering resilience has been defined as the ability of a system to return to an equilibrium or steady state upon the occurrence of disturbance (Holling, 1973). Given its first conceptualisation in hard sciences, this definition is not fully adequate in the context of socio-political phenomena analyses because it overlooks the aspects of renewal and re-organization resilience entails (Folke, 2006). This is even more evident in the strategic studies sub-field. Mostly because the process described insofar occurs only in linear systems and societies are not linear. A stable steady state does not comply with social environments Therefore the transfer of the resilience concept from natural to social sciences cannot be done uncritically (Adger, 2000), since several *resilience(s)* exist in different contexts (Rogers & al., 2020).

Having regard to the breadth of the fields of application and the possible definitions of the concept, the authors consider necessary to focus at least on the conceptual distinction between *general* and *specified* resilience (Folke et al. 2010). General resilience, according to the Resilience Alliance (2009), concerns the entirety of the elements of a system to unspecified disturbances; specified resilience concerns a specific part of a system to a specific disturbance, a resilience of “*what to what*” (Carpenter et al., 2001). This second meaning of resilience therefore needs to be understood as highly context and issue specific: it concerns the property (resilience) of one element to face a peculiar disturbance that directly affects it. The authors argue that the concept of resilience, when applied in the field of strategic studies, needs to be considered as *specified*, in the sense of a concept that includes reflections on these four main issues: *resilience to what?*; *resilience of what?*; *resilience by which means and with what outcomes?* (Ibid.).



In summary, the literature agrees that resilience in human contexts concerns to a variable extent these core elements: vulnerability, resistance, robustness, and capacity of recovering through adaptation, renewal and re-organisation. Recognising them in a specific field, such as strategic studies, represents a necessary process for two main reasons: (1) it offers the possibility to understand if the term resilience is adopted correctly, (2) it offers insights of what the concept of resilience means in that specific context, reducing its ambiguity; (3) finally, it may provide the necessary information for a possible re-conceptualisation of resilience according to field of study analyzed. In conclusion, the authors agreed with Swanstrom's view that resilience is more than a metaphor but less than a theory. It has thus to be conceived more as a conceptual framework than as a theory or a set of testable hypotheses (Swanstrom, 2008). Moreover, as underlined by Keck & Sakdapolark (2012, p. 14), «social resilience is not only a dynamic and relational concept, but also a deeply political one».

If the common element between the different characterizations of resilience is the existence of a trauma or a crisis (Fracart, 2010) we advance a first hypothesis:

*H1: Since the characterization of threats to countries' national interests is fundamentally shared between France and Italy, the term resilience is used in the same context and in reference to the same concepts in both Italian and French strategic documents.*

If however several *resilience(s)* exist in different contexts (Rogers et al., 2020), although the threats perceived by French and Italian documents correspond, the term resilience could be employed in different contexts and in reference to heterogeneous concepts. This does not imply that the term resilience takes radically different forms in Italian and French strategic documents. It simply suggests that the concept, being particularly malleable, is used in a wide array of contexts according to national priorities, existing policies and long-lasting cultures. While the perception of threats corresponds, policies adopted to counter, minimize or prepare for such threats indeed differ from one country to another. We therefore advance a second hypothesis:

*H2: Since resilience is a context-specific concept and given the differences in the policies implemented to counter threats to states' national interests, the term resilience can be used in heterogeneous contexts and in reference to different, country-specific and/or policy-driven concepts.*

In order to test these two hypotheses we trace the use of resilience in the documents selected. Along with Carpenter and colleagues, for each document, we highlight the most significant uses of the term resilience and

ask three basic questions that help us contextualize the term: *resilience to what?*; *resilience of what?*; *resilience by which means and with what outcomes?* (Carpenter et al., 2001). H1 is thus verified if the majority of the answers correspond in Italian as well as in French strategic documents. On the opposite, H2 is verified if we notice that the answers to these simple questions vary greatly from one country to another.

#### **4. The use of resilience in France and Italy strategic documents**

The term resilience, although widely used in countries such as the United Kingdom (UK), the United States (US) and Israel, has only recently been adopted in European security and defence discourses (Canin, 2015; Malvaux, 2017 et a.). Its introduction however has caused many perplexities: while some have criticized it, others hope the term resilience will bring about a nationwide shared understanding of defence as a collective endeavour (Gassiloud, 2023). We thus look at French and Italian strategic documents in order to explore the reasons behind its recurrent use. France and Italy, taken together, constitute interesting case studies: both countries are founding members of the European Union and are considered to be two important security providers. The adoption of the term resilience in their strategic documents might therefore have important practical implications in their security and defence policies. However, we also expect to find some notable differences in how the two countries have adopted the term. First whilst France has a strong, long-lasting republican tradition that emphasizes such principles as universalism, solidarity, civic involvement, and public service (Joseph, 2013b), Italy is indeed a much younger republic. We thus expect these principles to have less impact on how resilience is understood. Second, whilst France's desire for independence, prestige, and influence in the international arena is almost stereotypical (Noël & Thérien, 1995), multilateralism is a crucial element in the cultural-ideological code of the post-1945 Italian political élite (Ignazi et al., 2012). Third, Italy and France have very different military (and thus presumably also strategic) cultures. While France has an established military tradition, Italy has come to view its military primarily as an instrument to “affirm national credibility and reliability abroad” (Ignazi et al., 2012 p. 47). Whereas contemporary French military culture is one of controlled assertiveness, the Italian one is based on the belief in being good humanitarian soldiers (Ruffa, 2017 p. 394). These differences might therefore result in a diverging understanding and use of the term resilience.

### ***Italy and France definitions of resilience***

France and Italy do not share the same definition of resilience. France defines it as:

«[...] *The willingness and ability of a country, its society and the political authority to resist the consequences of an aggression or a major catastrophe and to quickly reestablish their capacity to function normally, or at least in a socially acceptable way. It concerns not only public authorities, but also economic agents and the society as a whole. [... Resilience] entails an organization of political authorities already at times of peace in order to take into account the hypotheses of a time of crises and to establish priorities in intelligence, analysis and decision-making. Resilience also implies organizing the cooperation between central and local authorities, given the complementary of their means, and between the state and private companies operating in strategic sectors (energy, communication, health, food production)*» (République Française, 2008 p. 64).

Italian strategic documents present two different - and somehow competing - definitions. According to the 2008 document *Come pianifica la difesa* it is the capacity to absorb traumas (Camporini, 2008, p. 8).

Alternatively, it is defined as: «[...] *the capacity to adapt to change, more specifically to the changing nature of the menaces our country has to face. [...resilience is] the adaptive capacity of the whole state, so to resist and react to everything that upsets its security, internal stability and governability through the coordinated activities that fall under the competencies of different ministries [...]*» (Ministero della Difesa, 2018, p. 2).

At a quick glance it is already possible to note several important differences between Italy and France documents. In the French definition, resilience is the capacity to resist and re-establish. In the first Italian definition it is a generic *capacity to absorb* (Camporini, 2008), whereas in the second it is the capacity to adapt, resist and react (Ministero della Difesa, 2018). Another striking aspect is that the different definitions of resilience also comprehend public authorities' modes of organization, that are in fact policies that inform the working of the state in times of crises. Another element that is worth stressing is that while the French definition of resilience is "enshrined" in the 2008 national white paper, the 2015 Italian white paper does not attempt to define resilience, leaving it to readers' interpretation. Its use therefore seems more naïf in Italian documents than in their French counterparts, which circumscribe its characteristics and entailments.

### ***The use of resilience in Italian documents***

The term resilience first appears in the 2008 document entitled *Come pianifica la difesa*. The term is used in reference to the capacity of a state to withstand the effects of the international arena *disequilibrium* and points to states' differential capacity to absorb traumas (Camporini, 2008 p. 8). The means to achieve such a form of resilience are not mentioned, apart from some generic observations on the necessity to develop new capacities. In the 2015 Italian defence white book, the term appears three times. In one case the term refers to information networks' capacity to quickly restore normal functioning after disastrous events or cyberattacks. Here resilience appears to have a "technical" meaning, in that it corresponds to the engineering definition of the term (Coste, Nexon et al., 2011). The means to achieve resilience are thus eminently "technical" and correspond to an increase in safety and precaution measures. The outcome is that of an uninterrupted provision of service. The term resilience is also found in the context of climate change. Large-scale disasters are believed to weaken society's capacity to recover. The means identified to strengthen the ability of Italian society to recover pertain mainly to risk preparedness and management. Resilience is then used with reference to the governance structure of the military. The army structure – according to the 2015 white paper – needs to be more flexible and lighter but should also be able to resist shocks and crises. The means are thus administrative in nature whereas the outcome should be an army that weighs less in the state budget but still retains its capacity to intervene in diverse situations (Ministero della Difesa, 2015). In the 2018 parliamentary audit of the Ministry of Defense, the term is used to a greater extent. Due to the economy of the research, we cannot analyze all the uses of resilience and we thus limit our analysis to the new and most meaningful ones. Resilience here consists of a whole-of-government approach. The subject of resilience is the Nation as a collective entity formed by the state and its population, that is supposed to be able to face shocks. The means to do so are closer forms of cooperation between state ministries and agencies, private actors, academia, industries and the research sector. The outcome is a cohesive nation where different actors and entities actively cooperate. Resilience is also employed in reference to energy production. The energy sector ought to be able to face attacks or calamitous events, through a diversification of its sources and an increased attention to its sustainability (Ministero della difesa, 2018). The 2021 Multi-year defense program document for 2021-2023 uses resilience

in reference to states' capacity to control or mitigate the spread of communicable diseases. The means to achieve it are identified in a wide array of measures related to risk prevention and management that include different actors such as the military, civilian protection services and the healthcare system. Resilience in the context of pandemics takes mainly two forms: risk prevention and risk management. While prevention entails specific tools such as information gathering, surveillance and control measures, sanitary training and strategic stocks of medical equipment; risk management presupposes different means and is more about coordination between relevant actors, the use of the military in civilian contexts and contingency/emergency planning. Whilst the outcomes are similar (a state capable of withstanding the spread of communicable diseases), the means differ from risk management to risk prevention. It is worth noting that resilience is also used in the context of long-term planning. In this case, resilience is thus the state's capacity to be prepared for future shocks through long-term planning. In this case, the mean to achieve such a form of resilience is long-term planning *per sé*, identified as a whole-of-government tool of resilience (Ministero della Difesa, 2021). The 2022 Strategic Concept of the Chief of Defense Staff does not mention the word resilience. While it identifies threats and challenges to Italy and enumerates policies that need to be, the word is absent (Stato Maggiore della Difesa, 2022). This notable absence raises some questions: can the absence of the word resilience be considered an implicit critique of the concept? What are the words used to “replace” resilience? Does it mean that this concept is not necessary even in the face of multi-layered and multifaceted threats? Although the answers to these questions are beyond the scope of the present research, the absence of the term resilience in this document shows that such a concept is not yet enshrined in Italian strategic thinking.

### ***The use of resilience in French documents***

The 2008 French White contends that the state's capacity to resist the consequences of shocks and crises depends on the public authorities' modes of organization, and in particular on the ability of the central government to cooperate effectively with local governments. The means to achieve this resilience are thus those of a whole-of-government approach that also includes civil society and private actors. Resilience is also understood as a result of careful information gathering: risk analysis and foresight activities are believed to reinforce national resilience increasing its risk prevention



and management capacities. On the same line also military personnel and civil servants' formation, training and preparedness enhancing activities are believed to be tools of national resilience. This expectation is also extended to other sectors of society, including private companies. The importance of crisis communication and media for the resilience of the country is also stressed. Public communication in times of crises plays a crucial role in the resilience of the Nation on the ground that «*a vulnerability in social or economic life that is known to everybody can be better acknowledged*» (République française, 2008 p. 190). The term resilience is also employed in reference to forms of civilian participation. With regard to this aspect, society's capacity to face crises is believed to be dependent on civilian participation in military, police and civil protection corps as reservists with the aim of creating national cohesion. Consequently resilience is also understood as a form of culture: public discussions and participation in the definition of the country's defense orientation, defined as a “democratic ownership” of the country's security policies (République française, 2008 p. 312), are believed to constitute a specific form of resilience. Three uses of resilience however stand out in the 2013 French white paper. First National resilience is understood as deriving from French citizens' participation and contributing to its perceived legitimacy. Resilience, therefore, entails the legitimization of France's security policies. Second, the term resilience is associated with external threats and is characterized as their persistence over time, despite state efforts to eradicate it. The means of such resilience are to be found in the protean nature of current threats. Third resilience is also understood as a flexible and reactive mode of action: state policies need to be highly adaptive in a constantly changing environment (République française, 2013). The 2022 National Strategic Review enshrines the concept of resilience, making it a strategic function. The strategic objective number two, according to the document, is that of a “united and resilient France” (Secrétariat général de la défense et de la sécurité nationale, 2022 p. 33). This strategic objective is here interpreted as constituting a “moral force” (ibid., p.8). This characterization highlights the growing role of the resilience concept in French strategic thinking. As argued by Brand and Jax, resilience appears to have become a perspective (Brand & Jax, 2007) through which the French government understands not only its capacity to face external risks, but also its relationship with citizens. Resilience has thus been deemed a moral force because it is believed to be a mean to achieve national cohesion.

## **5. Conclusions and recommendations**

Comparing the use of resilience in Italian and French documents similarities as well as some significant differences emerge. First of all, it is worth noting that a more “technical” use of resilience appears in almost all documents. This use of resilience is indeed less problematic, as it always identifies the capacity of a system or an infrastructure to absorb shocks and quickly reestablish normal functioning. Whatever the threat might be, this engineering definition always implies a return to the original condition, that is of normal functioning. The role of resilience in the prevention and management of risks is another shared element in French and Italian documents. Resilience is often linked to the preparedness of a broad range of actors (from the military to private businesses), and achieved through flexible and quick responses, especially in the form of policies. This use of resilience is coherent with another shared understanding of resilience: that of a whole-of-government approach. Resilience is to be found not only inside the structures of different entities (the military, civil organizations, economic actors, industries etc), but also among the different components of the state as the product of coordinated action(s).

In order to verify the two hypotheses presented above, it is now worth stressing the differences in the use of resilience between the two states. While almost all the Italian connotations of the word resilience can also be found in French documents, with regard to risk prevention and management, French documents stress the role of “crisis communication”. Attention is given to the media's capacity to communicate and transmit awareness concerning the threats France faces. This aspect is tightly linked to the question of education and training, deemed to be instrumental elements contributing to France's resilience. Taken together these aspects can be explained in the light of the French understanding of resilience as a culture that binds together all the components of the nation. In this regard, Fracart rightly contends that resilience, as it is understood in France, is an invitation to broaden the circle of those that have a responsibility in crisis resolution (Fracart, 2010). In the words of Gassiloud «*[t]he mother of all battles remains to make defense everybody's job, that is the other name of resilience*» (Gassiloud, 2023 p. 23). This interpretation seems to be coherent with resilience characterization as a “moral force” we found in the 2022 national strategic review. Gefen rightly underlines the uniqueness of such an understanding: together with the old concept of sovereignty, the use of resilience in France's strategic documents seems to entail a form of social control, led by the army and followed by a martial narrative against an

invisible – and resilient – enemy that recalls the concept of biopolitics (Gefen, 2020). It thus appears that the second hypothesis is verified: although the threats listed in all the documents considered coincide, resilience appears to be a context-specific concept. Given the differences between France and Italy in the policies implemented to counter threats to their national interests, the term resilience can be used in heterogeneous contexts and in reference to different, country specific and/or policy-driven concepts.

The concept of resilience appears as functional to the legitimisation of certain security policies deemed necessary in the face of a changing and complex scenario. However, it explains neither the causes, nor the consequences and implications of this constantly changing international context. Enhancing resilience with the simple purpose of bouncing back to the “normal” state represents a risk if it does not question what normality means (Pendall et al., 2010). Thus conceived, the concept of resilience merely offers a “mesh” with a rather broad weave into which more or less specific and appropriate responses to complex phenomena can be inserted. These latter would require an in-depth analysis to which a specific declination of the resilience concept would have to correspond, thus narrowing the weave of this “mesh”. Consequently, there is a need to work in three directions: first an operational definition of resilience congruent with the needs of the defense sector need to be formulated; second it is necessary to identify and explain the existing relationships between the elements and the actors in a given strategic context; third attention needs to be given to instruments through which it is possible to realize resilience. In conclusion, this contribution embraces Hull's thesis that advances in concept definition are pivotal to scientific progress (Hull, 1988). Nevertheless, we claim that «to find an agreed definition of resilience is not enough!» (Giovannetti & Semplici, 2015).

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