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RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Resilience as a ‘concept at work’ in the war in Ukraine: Exploring its international and domestic significance

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## Abstract

In the context of the ongoing war in Ukraine, it is striking that there have been many references to resilience, including by Western and Ukrainian leaders. This article is precisely about their use of resilience discourse, and it makes two important contributions to existing scholarship on resilience in conflict settings. First, drawing on Ish-Shalom's idea of ‘concepts at work’ and analysing a selection of speeches and policy statements (by Western leaders and President Volodymyr Zelensky) that specifically refer to resilience, it demonstrates that resilience is a significant ‘concept at work’ in the war, making certain forms of international and domestic politics possible. Second, while research on resilience frequently discusses different ways that the concept has been defined and approached in fields such as engineering, ecology, and psychology, this article highlights that diverse framings of resilience have become entangled as the concept is ‘at work’ in the war in Ukraine. More specifically, its analysis makes prominent the fusion of different resiliences at different levels – from the individual to the systemic – discursively working together for particular political ends. In this way, it offers a novel way of thinking multi-systemically about resilience and, by extension, about resilience and complexity.

**Keywords:** concept at work; complexity; discourse analysis; multi-systemic approaches; neoliberalism; resilience; war in Ukraine

## Introduction

The International Organization for Migration recently published an article that includes the photographs and abbreviated stories of Maksym, a doctor from Mariupol, and Oleksandra, an internally displaced woman from Bakhmut.<sup>1</sup> Of particular note is the article's title – ‘Faces of war: Portraits of Ukrainian grit, resilience two years on’. This resonates with a larger trend; many discussions about the war in Ukraine have repeatedly and consistently emphasised the theme of resilience. There are recurring references to it, for example, in media articles and reports on the conflict.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>International Organization for Migration, ‘Faces of war: Portraits of Ukrainian grit, resilience two years on’ (2024), available at: <https://storyteller.iom.int/stories/faces-war-portraits-ukrainian-grit-resilience-two-years>.

<sup>2</sup>See, e.g., Andrew Wilson, ‘Resilient Ukraine’ (7 July 2022), available at: <https://rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/resilient-ukraine>; Andrew Harding, ‘Ukraine War: Resilient civilians return to liberated town of Lyman’ (22 January 2023), available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-64367346>; Jaco Cilliers, ‘From ruins to resilience: The path toward recovery in Ukraine’ (10 October 2023), available at: <https://www.usip.org/publications/2023/10/ruins-resilience-path-toward-recovery-ukraine>; Austin Molloy, ‘Reporter's notebook: Stories of resilience during a return to wartime Ukraine’ (28 October 2023), available at: <https://www.rferl.org/a/ukraine-war-reporter-notebook-hope-resilience/32657685.html>.

There have also been several studies seeking to measure and evaluate Ukrainians' resilience.<sup>3</sup> What has been particularly striking is the frequency with which Western and Ukrainian leaders have evoked resilience.<sup>4</sup> This article is precisely about their use of resilience discourse.

Resilience has been described as 'a notoriously slippery concept',<sup>5</sup> and according to Simon and Randalls, its 'definitive generality makes it amenable to do almost anything'.<sup>6</sup> This research, which draws on Ish-Shalom's idea of 'concepts at work',<sup>7</sup> maintains that in the context of the war in Ukraine, resilience is doing several different things, internationally and domestically. It further underlines that extant scholarship – which is primarily concerned with analysing the concept's conditions of possibility, empirically measuring it, and/or critiquing it – cannot sufficiently capture or explain what resilience is doing in the war. In developing these arguments, the article contributes to resilience research in two main ways.

First, repeatedly shifting between text and context, it analyses a selection of speeches and policy statements that specifically mention Ukrainian resilience and demonstrates that resilience is a 'concept at work' in making certain forms of international and domestic politics possible. It is important to note in this regard that, according to some scholars, resilience is imbricated with neoliberalism.<sup>8</sup> What such critiques effectively highlight, therefore, is that resilience is a 'concept at work' in promoting a particular politics – one that foregrounds 'individual responsabilisation and marketisation'.<sup>9</sup> This research and its novel analysis, in contrast, suggest a broader politics of resilience. The article posits that recurring references to Ukrainian resilience by Western leaders, and the framing of the concept as an existing quality rather than as something that needs to be fostered, are helping to drive and sustain a policy (albeit one that is under increasing strain) of continued military support to Ukraine. This policy is linked, in turn, to wider security objectives. Focusing on some of President Volodymyr Zelensky's own speeches, the article further argues that the concept of resilience is very much 'at work' in Ukraine. It is helping to boost public morale but also to strengthen the case for increased military support, thereby intermeshing with what resilience is doing at the international level.

<sup>3</sup> See, e.g., Robin Goodwin, Yaira Hamama-Raz, Elazar Leshem, and Menachem Ben-Ezra, 'National resilience in Ukraine following the 2022 Russian invasion', *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction*, 85 (2023), p. 103487; Shaul Kimhi, Yohanan Eshel, Hadas Marciano, and Bruria Adini, 'Impact of the war in Ukraine on resilience, protective and vulnerability factors', *Frontiers in Public Health*, 11 (2023), p. 1053940; Anton Kurapov, Valentyna Pavlenko, Alexander Drozdov, et al., 'Toward an understanding of the Russian–Ukrainian war impact on university students and personnel', *Journal of Loss and Trauma*, 28:2 (2023), pp. 167–74; Francesca Giordano, Shannon Lipscomb, Philip Jefferies, Kyong-Ah Kwon, and Marianna Giammarci, 'Resilience processes among Ukrainian youth preparing to build resilience with peers during the Ukraine–Russian war', *Frontiers in Psychology*, 15 (2024), available at: <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2024.1331886>.

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office and James Kariuki, 'Ukraine's resilience and the support of its international partners will remain strong: UK statement at the UN Security Council' (21 November 2023), available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/ukraines-resilience-and-support-of-its-international-partners-will-remain-strong-uk-statement-at-the-un-security-council>; Council of Europe, 'The resilience of the Ukrainian people stands as a testament to the indomitable spirit of freedom' (7 December 2023), available at: <https://www.coe.int/es/web/commissioner/-/the-resilience-of-the-ukrainian-people-stands-as-a-testament-to-the-indomitable-spirit-of-freedom>; President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy, 'Resilience and efficiency of actions at the front in general depend on resilience and efficiency of actions at each point of the front: Address by the President of Ukraine' (8 January 2024), available at: <https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/vid-stijkosti-ta-efektivnosti-dij-u-kozhnij-tochci-frontu-za-80281>.

<sup>5</sup> Kevin Grove, *Resilience* (London: Routledge, 2018), p. 5.

<sup>6</sup> Stephanie Simon and Samuel Randalls, 'Geography, ontological politics and the resilient future', *Dialogues in Human Geography*, 6:1 (2016), pp. 3–18 (p. 5). Emphasis in the original.

<sup>7</sup> Piki Ish-Shalom (ed.), *Concepts at Work: On the Linguistic Infrastructure of World Politics* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2021).

<sup>8</sup> See, e.g., Liberty Chee, "'Supermaids': Hyper-resilient subjects in neoliberal migration governance', *International Political Sociology*, 14:4 (2020), pp. 366–81; Anthony McKeown, Dang Hai Bui, and John Glenn, 'A social theory of resilience: The governance of vulnerability in crisis-era neoliberalism', *European Journal of Cultural and Political Sociology*, 9:1 (2022), pp. 112–32.

<sup>9</sup> Peter Finkenbusch, 'Resilience as the policing of critique: A pragmatist way forward', *Review of International Studies*, 49:1 (2023), pp. 143–60 (p. 154).

Second, research on resilience frequently highlights different ways that the concept has been defined and approached in fields such as engineering, ecology, and psychology.<sup>10</sup> Presenting a genealogy of resilience, Bourbeau proposes that ‘understanding the multiple and multidisciplinary paths through which resilience has percolated into world politics is an essential first step to conducting an analysis of the application of resilience in international politics’.<sup>11</sup> What this article demonstrates, however, is that diverse framings of resilience have become entangled as the concept is ‘at work’ in the war in Ukraine. More specifically, its analysis makes prominent the fusion of different resiliences at different levels – from the individual to the systemic – discursively working together for particular political ends. This is especially significant in the context of a growing emphasis within resilience research on the importance of multi-systemic approaches. Such approaches underline, *inter alia*, how ‘ongoing multisystem interactions’<sup>12</sup> fundamentally shape and contour resilience. This article brings something new in this regard by exploring how intersecting resilience discourses reflect different systems and their cross-scale dynamics, which, as will be discussed, is also a different way of thinking about resilience and complexity.<sup>13</sup>

## Contextualising this research within existing resilience scholarship

### *Scholarship on resilience and war*

The sheer volume of research on resilience, coupled with its cross-disciplinary nature, means that the concept has been defined in a variety of ways. As Cretney underlines, it is ‘a word with numerous meanings’.<sup>14</sup> An important constant, however, is the idea of adaptive response to disturbance, and resilience can be broadly understood as ‘a dynamic process encompassing positive adaptation within the context of significant adversity’.<sup>15</sup> War is a potent adversity in this regard; it is one of the major stressors that individuals (and the wider systems with which their lives are entangled, including families, communities, and ecosystems) can experience.<sup>16</sup> Unsurprisingly, therefore, there are many studies of resilience in conflict and post-conflict settings. They variously explore ways of measuring resilience,<sup>17</sup> people’s coping mechanisms and adaptive responses,<sup>18</sup> and cultural and contextual factors shaping expressions and sources of resilience in conflict-affected environments.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>10</sup>See, e.g., Fridolin Simon Brand and Kurt Jax, ‘Focusing the meaning(s) of resilience: Resilience as a descriptive concept and a boundary object’, *Ecology and Society*, 12:1 (2007), p. 23; Richard Reid and Linda Courtenay Botterill, ‘The multiple meanings of “resilience”: An overview of the literature’, *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, 72:1 (2013), pp. 31–40; Raven Cretney, ‘Resilience for whom? Emerging critical geographies of socio-ecological resilience’, *Geography Compass*, 8:9 (2014), pp. 627–40.

<sup>11</sup>Philippe Bourbeau, ‘A genealogy of resilience’, *International Political Sociology*, 12:1 (2018), pp. 19–35 (p. 20).

<sup>12</sup>Ann S. Masten, ‘Emergence and evolution of developmental resilience science over half a century’, *Development and Psychopathology* (2024), available at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954579424000154>.

<sup>13</sup>Elena A. Korosteleva and Irina Petrova, ‘What makes communities resilient in times of complexity and change?’, *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 35:2 (2022), pp. 137–57.

<sup>14</sup>Cretney, ‘Resilience for whom?’, p. 637.

<sup>15</sup>Suniya S. Luthar, Dante Cicchetti, and Bronwyn Becker, ‘The construct of resilience: A critical evaluation and guidelines for future work’, *Child Development*, 71:3 (2000), pp. 543–62 (p. 543).

<sup>16</sup>George R. Mastroianni, Thomas R. Mabry, David M. Benedek, and Robert J. Bersano, ‘The stresses of modern war’, in Brian J. Lukey and Victoria Tepe (eds), *Biobehavioral Resilience to Stress* (Boca Raton, FL: CPC Press, 2008), pp. 43–56.

<sup>17</sup>Christina M. Sheerin, Kelcey J. Stratton, and Ananda B. Amstadter, ‘Exploring resilience models in a sample of combat-exposed military service members and veterans: A comparison and commentary’, *European Journal of Psychotraumatology*, 9:1 (2018), p. 1486121; Sergiy Bogdanov, Andriy Girnyk, Vira Chernobrovkina, et al., ‘Developing a culturally relevant measure of resilience for war-affected adolescents in Eastern Ukraine’, *Journal on Education in Emergencies*, 7:2 (2021), pp. 311–34.

<sup>18</sup>Armina Pilav, ‘Before the war, war, after the war: Urban imageries for urban resilience’, *International Journal of Disaster Risk Science*, 3 (2012), pp. 23–37; Jeyda Hammad and Rachel Tribe, ‘Adaptive coping during protracted political conflict, war and military blockade in Gaza’, *International Review of Psychiatry*, 33:1–2 (2021), pp. 56–63.

<sup>19</sup>Eliana Barrios Suarez and Carla Suarez, ‘The memorialisation of narratives and sites among Indigenous women in Ayacucho: Resilience in the aftermath of mass violence and atrocities’, *Resilience*, 4:2 (2015), pp. 98–115; Maggie Zraly and

Some scholars have stressed that incorporating a resilience lens into conflict analyses can offer new insights into individuals' war experiences, in particular the experiences of women.<sup>20</sup> Other scholars, however, have expressed concerns about resilience-focused studies reaching very generalised conclusions about war-affected populations and neglecting intersectional identities. According to Keelan and Brown, for example, 'findings from limited studies of Palestinian children and young males in Gaza have been applied uncritically to homogenise Palestinian resilience at large, reinforcing the problematic Western notion that Palestinians are a homogeneous group.'<sup>21</sup> Moreover, characterisations of populations as 'resilient' may not resonate with local communities themselves.<sup>22</sup>

Some of the most recent studies of resilience and war have focused specifically on Ukraine. Kurapov et al.'s research, for example, aims to assess the impact of the war on university students and personnel who have remained in the country,<sup>23</sup> and Oviedo et al. examine the resilience of Ukrainian refugees.<sup>24</sup> In another study, Giordano et al. identify and explore the principal protective factors, including close personal relationships and family support, that are helping Ukrainian youth to positively adapt to the conflict,<sup>25</sup> and Kokun's work analyses key psychological resources that protect Ukrainians' mental health from the impact of the war.<sup>26</sup> This article, although similarly focused on the war in Ukraine, is distinctive from existing studies on the conflict – and also from scholarship on resilience and war more broadly.

### *Resilience as a 'concept at work' in the war in Ukraine*

Resilience has been a recurring and prominent theme in many discussions – and in particular policy discussions – about the war in Ukraine, and this is the wider context in which the idea for this article took shape. Rather than adopt an ontological approach to resilience in the sense of looking for evidence of it, this research is concerned with the important question of what resilience is *doing* in the war politically, both internationally and domestically. Significant in this regard is the aforementioned notion of 'concepts of work', which Ish-Shalom links to the issue of meaningfulness. According to him, concepts are meaningful in two ways: '(1) as expressively mental representations of phenomena and (2) because of their social and, no less importantly, political significance and function.'<sup>27</sup> This article frames resilience as a 'concept at work' in the war in Ukraine and uses Ish-Shalom's reflections on the meaningfulness of concepts – and in particular his argument that 'an expressively mental representation of a phenomenon can serve as a roadmap for political action'<sup>28</sup> – as a useful starting point for thinking about the 'work' that resilience is doing in the conflict.

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Marie Grâce Kagoyire, 'Resilience and ethics in post-conflict settings: *Kwihangana*, living after genocide rape, and intergenerational resilience in post-genocide Rwanda', in Allen R. Dyer, Brandon A. Kohrt and Philip J. Candilis (eds), *Global Mental Health Ethics* (Cham: Springer, 2021), pp. 207–24.

<sup>20</sup> Caitin Ryan, 'Everyday resilience as resistance: Palestinian women practicing *sumud*', *International Political Sociology*, 9:4 (2015), pp. 299–315; Medina Haeri and Nadine Puichguirbal, 'From helplessness to agency: Examining the plurality of women's experiences in armed conflict', *International Review of the Red Cross*, 92:877 (2018), pp. 103–22.

<sup>21</sup> Emma Patricia Keelan and Brendan Ciarán Browne, 'Problematising resilience: Development practice and the case of Palestine', *Development in Practice*, 30:4 (2020), pp. 459–71 (p. 463).

<sup>22</sup> Patrick Naef, 'Resilience as a city brand: The cases of the Comuna 13 and Moravia in Medellín, Colombia', *Sustainability*, 12:2 (2020), p. 8469.

<sup>23</sup> Kurapov et al., 'Toward an understanding of the Russian–Ukrainian war impact on university students and personnel'.

<sup>24</sup> Lluís Oviedo, Berenika Serczynska, Josefa Torralba, et al., 'Coping and resilience strategies among Ukraine war refugees', *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19:20 (2022), p. 13094.

<sup>25</sup> Giordano et al., 'Resilience processes among Ukrainian youth'.

<sup>26</sup> Oleg Kokun, 'The stability of mental health during war: Survey data from Ukraine', *Journal of Loss and Trauma* (2024), available at: {<https://doi.org/10.1080/15325024.2024.2328649>}.

<sup>27</sup> Piki Ish-Shalom, 'Introduction', in Piki Ish-Shalom (ed.), *Concepts at Work: On the Linguistic Infrastructure of World Politics* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2021), pp. 1–23 (p. 1).

<sup>28</sup> Ish-Shalom, 'Introduction', p. 1.

A common critique of resilience – and one that is especially relevant to this article given its policy focus – is that its practical implementation is deeply entangled with neoliberalism. As Bowles asserts, ‘the resilient individual is a neoliberal individual ... obligated to adapt to a harsh environment of failures and threats.’<sup>29</sup> Although such arguments were first articulated more than a decade ago<sup>30</sup> and have been widely criticised,<sup>31</sup> they remain significant in resilience research, as Smirnova et al.’s bibliometric analysis illustrates.<sup>32</sup> They are also relevant to thinking about resilience in terms of what it *does*; they demonstrate how it is ‘at work’ in fostering a particular political agenda.

What they offer, thus, is ‘an expressively mental representation’ of resilience as something that needs to be externally fostered and enabled. Jaspars, for example, points to a critical shift in aid practices from earlier efforts aimed at saving lives to, more recently, policies that seek to promote resilience among local communities and populations.<sup>33</sup> Focused on the UK’s approach to resilience, Chmutina et al.’s work accentuates the ‘implementation of resilience’, linked to a process that is both heavily centralised and ‘dominated by prescriptive policies’;<sup>34</sup> and Bargués-Pedreny reflects, more broadly, on ‘interventions to enhance resilience’ – and on ‘deficit’ framings of resilience as something that is always lacking and has no defined end state.<sup>35</sup> In other words, there is a strong correlation between what Ish-Shalom terms ‘the conceptions of concepts’<sup>36</sup> – in this case resilience – and actions.

Arguments about resilience and neoliberalism, however, are of limited use in explaining the repeated policy references to resilience in the context of the war in Ukraine. What this article’s discourse analysis demonstrates is that the concept is ‘at work’ in far more complex and multilayered ways. The first point to highlight is that when Western and Ukrainian leaders invoke resilience, it is represented not as something that needs to be actively encouraged and stimulated but as an existing quality among Ukrainians. Resilience is also frequently accentuated alongside concepts such as bravery and courage, and part of this article’s analysis involves unpacking what this conceptual entanglement is ‘doing’ both internationally and domestically. Joseph and Juncos have explored the political functions of resilience within the European Union (EU), framing it as a ‘concept at work’ that was primarily ‘trying to hide differences between member states and different EU interests’.<sup>37</sup> Something similar is arguably happening in Ukraine. More specifically, what we are seeing discursively is resilience ‘at work’ with other concepts in creating and sustaining a strong narrative around the need for continued military support for the country, which is helping, in turn, to deflect from some of the deeper policy differences between Western countries with respect to the war.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Benjamin O. L. Bowles, ‘Resilience, infrastructure and the anti-social contract in neoliberal Britain’, *Critique of Anthropology*, 42:3 (2022), pp. 270–85 (p. 271).

<sup>30</sup> See, e.g., Mark Duffield, ‘Challenging environments: Danger, resilience and the aid industry’, *Security Dialogue*, 43:5 (2012), pp. 475–92; Danny MacKinnon and Kate Driscoll Derickson, ‘From resilience to resourcefulness: A critique of resilience policy and activism’, *Progress in Human Geography*, 37:2 (2012), pp. 253–70; Jonathan Joseph, ‘Resilience as embedded neoliberalism: A governmentality approach’, *Resilience*, 1:1 (2013), pp. 38–52; Julian Reid, ‘Interrogating the neoliberal biopolitics of the sustainable development–resilience nexus’, *International Political Sociology*, 7:4 (2013), pp. 353–67.

<sup>31</sup> Philippe Bourbeau, ‘Resilience and international politics: Premises, debates, agenda’, *International Studies Review*, 17:3 (2015), pp. 374–95 (p. 375); Peter Rogers, Jim J. Bohland, and Jennifer Lawrence, ‘Resilience and values: Global perspectives on the values and worldviews underpinning the resilience concept’, *Political Geography*, 83 (2020), p. 102280.

<sup>32</sup> Vera Smirnova, Jennifer L. Lawrence, and James Bohland, ‘The critical turn of resilience: Mapping thematic communities and modes of critical scholarship’, *The Geographical Journal*, 187:1 (2021), pp. 16–27 (p. 17).

<sup>33</sup> Susanne Jaspars, ‘Protracted crisis, food security and the fantasy of resilience in Sudan’, *Security Dialogue*, 52:3 (2021), pp. 195–212 (p. 197).

<sup>34</sup> Ksenia Chmutina, Gonzalo Lizarralde, Andrew Dainty, and Lee Boshier, ‘Unpacking resilience policy discourse’, *Cities*, 58 (2016), pp. 70–9 (p. 78).

<sup>35</sup> Pol Bargués-Pedreny, ‘Resilience is “always more” than our practices: Limits, critiques, and skepticism about international intervention’, *Contemporary Security Policy*, 41:2 (2020), pp. 263–86 (p. 274).

<sup>36</sup> Ish-Shalom, ‘Introduction’, p. 1.

<sup>37</sup> Jonathan Joseph and Ana E. Juncos, ‘Conceptual politics and resilience-at-work in the European Union’, *Review of International Studies*, 50:2 (2024), pp. 373–92 (p. 385).

<sup>38</sup> See, e.g., Al Jazeera, ‘Leaders of Germany, France, Poland meet to mend rifts over Ukraine war’ (15 March 2024), available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/15/leaders-of-germany-france-poland-meet-to-mend-rifts-over-ukraine-war>.



President Zelensky's own frequent use of resilience discourse further contributes to this narrative and also does important work domestically, boosting morale and keeping people united behind the war effort – and his leadership.

The second crucial point to underline is that in the context of the war in Ukraine, resilience is not just 'at work' with other concepts. There are also different *resiliences* at work. Significant in this regard are some of the discussions within extant scholarship accentuating the 'ontological multiplicity of resilience'.<sup>39</sup> In his article entitled 'What kind of thing is resilience?', for example, Anderson emphasises that 'no one policy or programme or articulation can exemplify "resilience" and claims about resilience in the singular and in general miss the particular consequences and implications of this or that variety of resilience'.<sup>40</sup> For their part, Simon and Randalls underline the importance of 'thinking through what resilience multiple does or can do'.<sup>41</sup> This article's analysis demonstrates 'the practice of resilience multiple'<sup>42</sup> in the war in Ukraine, unpacking how different conceptualisations of resilience – in particular psychological and systemic – are 'hanging'<sup>43</sup> and working together.

The third and related point is that these different resiliences are working together at different levels, which, in turn, highlights the important issue of complexity. Complex systems consist of multiple subsystems nesting within larger subsystems.<sup>44</sup> Cross-scale interactions and dynamics are thus an integral part of these systems and how they behave.<sup>45</sup> Research on resilience and complexity has challenged the 'hierarchical causal structure and assumptions of socially determined interactive outcomes'<sup>46</sup> associated with neoliberalism – and in so doing it has accentuated local capacities and resources.<sup>47</sup> Relatedly, there has been a recent growth of multi-systemic research on resilience.<sup>48</sup> Scholars are increasingly interested in how multiple systems at different scales, and the interactions and dynamics between these systems, shape resilience. As Ungar articulates, 'the science of resilience requires that multiple systems (and scales of systems) are accounted for as no single variable can be wholly responsible for the complexity of the processes associated with resilience and the outcomes that result'.<sup>49</sup> This article speaks directly to such arguments. By demonstrating that

<sup>39</sup> Karen Fischer, 'Coordinating and situating resilience multiple', *Dialogues in Human Geography*, 6:1 (2015), pp. 32–6 (p. 32).

<sup>40</sup> Anderson, 'What kind of thing is resilience?', *Politics*, 35:1 (2015), pp. 60–6 (p. 64).

<sup>41</sup> Simon and Randalls, 'Geography, ontological politics and the resilient future', p. 8.

<sup>42</sup> Simon and Randalls, 'Geography, ontological politics and the resilient future', p. 5.

<sup>43</sup> Simon and Randalls, 'Geography, ontological politics and the resilient future', p. 4.

<sup>44</sup> According to Folke, 'theories of complex systems portray systems not as deterministic, predictable and mechanistic, but as process-dependent organic ones with feedbacks among multiple scales that allow these systems to self-organize'. Carl Folke, 'Resilience: The emergence of a perspective for social–ecological systems analyses', *Global Environmental Change*, 16 (2006), pp. 253–67 (p. 257).

<sup>45</sup> Graeme S. Cumming and Jon Norberg, 'Scale and complex systems', in Jon Norberg and Graeme S. Cumming (eds), *Complexity Theory for a Sustainable Future* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), pp. 246–76 (p. 246).

<sup>46</sup> David Chandler, 'Beyond neoliberalism: Resilience, the new art of governing complexity', *Resilience*, 2:1 (2014), pp. 47–63 (p. 48).

<sup>47</sup> Ana E. Juncos, 'Resilience as the new EU foreign policy paradigm: A pragmatist turn?', *European Security*, 26:1 (2019), pp. 1–18 (p. 8). See also Elena A. Korosteleva, 'Reclaiming resilience back: A local turn in EU external governance', *Contemporary Security Policy*, 41:2 (2020), pp. 241–62 (p. 244); Nathalie Tocci, 'Resilience and the role of the European Union in the world', *Contemporary Security Policy*, 41:2 (2020), pp. 176–94 (p. 178); Korosteleva and Petrova, 'What makes communities resilient in times of complexity and change?', p. 143.

<sup>48</sup> See, e.g., Michael Ungar and Linda Theron, 'Resilience and mental health: How multisystemic processes contribute to positive outcomes', *Lancet Psychiatry*, 7 (2020), pp. 441–8; Ann S. Masten, Cara M. Lucke, Kayla M. Nelson, and Isabella C. Stallworthy, 'Resilience in development and psychopathology: Multisystem perspectives', *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology*, 17 (2021), pp. 521–49; Michael Ungar, *Multisystemic Resilience: Adaptation and Transformation in Contexts of Change* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021); Catherine Panter-Brick, 'Pathways to resilience and pathways to flourishing: Examining the added-value of multisystem research and intervention in contexts of war and forced displacement', *Development and Psychopathology*, 35:5 (2023), pp. 2214–25.

<sup>49</sup> Michael Ungar, 'Modeling multisystemic resilience: Connecting biological, psychological, social and ecological adaptation in contexts of adversity', in Ungar, *Multisystemic Resilience*, pp. 7–8.

recurring references to Ukrainian resilience – as an (assumed) local quality – have shaped international and domestic policies relating to the ongoing war in the country, it also thus foregrounds interactions between different systems. This illustrates, more broadly, that ‘the international system in which we sit can be usefully described as complex.’<sup>50</sup> Additionally, the article makes its own contribution to multi-systemic approaches to resilience by emphasising how different conceptualisations of resilience, reflective of different systems and scales, are working together in the war in Ukraine.<sup>51</sup> This has ‘implications for a more integrated [resilience] science’<sup>52</sup> but also for complexity itself. In short, complexity is not just about cross-scale interactions but also about cross-scale ontologies of resilience, and this is another dimension of ‘resilience multiple.’<sup>53</sup>

## Method

Within IR, there is extensive discussion about and engagement with discourse analysis (DA).<sup>54</sup> What also stands out is the diverseness of IR’s ‘encounters’<sup>55</sup> with, and approaches to thinking about/doing, DA.<sup>56</sup> Hence, this type of analysis can be described as encompassing ‘a highly varied collection of conceptual frameworks and analytical lenses.’<sup>57</sup> Lundborg and Vaughan-Williams, for example, discuss the significance of new materialism for thinking about DA, underlining in this regard the ‘inseparability of language and matter.’<sup>58</sup> Alejandro has developed an approach that she calls reflexive discourse analysis. According to her, DA is a way of implementing reflexivity, and she directly encourages researchers ‘to conceive themselves as social agents engaged in the world via their discursive activity.’<sup>59</sup> MacKenzie, for her part, adopts a visual approach to DA, exploring soldier-produced illicit images as ‘a visual vernacular’<sup>60</sup> that can provide important insights into internal military culture. Some of the studies of resilience that use DA similarly reflect a diversity of approaches.<sup>61</sup>

This article, to be clear, does not offer a novel approach to DA or break new ground methodologically. Proceeding from the starting point that ‘the rise and fall of discourses helps to shape

<sup>50</sup> Carla Winston, ‘International norms as emergent properties of complex adaptive systems’, *International Studies Quarterly*, 67:3 (2023), p. sqad063.

<sup>51</sup> In their own research, in contrast, Tschakert et al. highlight ‘mismatches of scales, such as local empowerment processes competing with project-driven governmentality’; these occur ‘when what is deemed as being resilient at a particular scale creates exclusions at the same or another scale’. Petra Tschakert, Meg Parsons, Ed Atkins, et al., ‘Methodological lessons for negotiating power, political capabilities, and resilience in research on climate change responses’, *World Development*, 167 (2023), p. 106247.

<sup>52</sup> Ann S. Masten, ‘Resilience in developing systems: The promise of integrated approaches’, *European Journal of Developmental Psychology*, 13:3 (2016), pp. 297–312 (p. 298).

<sup>53</sup> Simon and Randalls, ‘Geography, ontological politics and the resilient future’, p. 4.

<sup>54</sup> Caterina Carta and Elisa Narminio, ‘The human factor: Accounting for texts and contexts in the analysis of foreign policy and international relations’, *International Studies Perspectives*, 22:3 (2021), pp. 340–60 (p. 341).

<sup>55</sup> Dillon Stone Tatum, ‘Discourse, genealogy and methods of text selection in International Relations’, *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 31:3–4 (2018), pp. 344–64 (p. 344).

<sup>56</sup> Jennifer Milliken, ‘The study of discourse in International Relations’, *European Journal of International Relations*, 5:2 (1999), pp. 225–54 (p. 250). See also Caterina Carta, ‘“A rose by any other name”: On ways of approaching discourse analysis’, *International Studies Review*, 21:1 (2019), pp. 81–106.

<sup>57</sup> Anna Holzscheiter, ‘Between communicative interaction and structures of signification: Discourse theory and analysis in International Relations’, *International Studies Perspectives*, 15:2 (2014), pp. 142–62 (p. 142).

<sup>58</sup> Tom Lundborg and Nick Vaughan-Williams, ‘New materialisms, discourse analysis, and International Relations: A radical intertextual approach’, *Review of International Studies*, 41:1 (2015), pp. 3–25 (p. 25).

<sup>59</sup> Audrey Alejandro, ‘Reflexive discourse analysis: A methodology for the practice of reflexivity’, *European Journal of International Relations*, 27:1 (2021), pp. 150–74 (p. 155).

<sup>60</sup> Megan MacKenzie, ‘Why do soldiers swap illicit pictures? How a visual discourse analysis illuminates military band of brother culture’, *Security & Dialogue*, 51:4 (2020), pp. 340–57 (p. 352).

<sup>61</sup> See, e.g., Anne M. Leitch and Erin L. Bohensky, ‘Return to “a new normal”: Discourses of resilience to natural disasters in Australian newspapers 2006–2010’, *Global Environmental Change*, 26 (2014), pp. 14–26; Peter Ferguson and Linda Wollersheim, ‘From sustainable development to resilience? (Dis)continuities in climate and development policy governance discourse’, *Sustainable Development*, 31:1 (2023), pp. 67–77.



the parameters of what is politically possible<sup>62</sup> – an illustrative example of which is Hansen’s post-structuralist analysis of discourse relating to the 1992–5 Bosnian war<sup>63</sup> – the article’s aim is to demonstrate the importance of DA in helping to elucidate resilience as a ‘concept at work’ in the war in Ukraine. It broadly understands DA as ‘a careful, close reading that moves between text and context to examine the content, organization and functions of discourse.’<sup>64</sup> It also accentuates intertextuality, a key concept in DA.<sup>65</sup> According to Fairclough, ‘intertextual analysis has an important mediating role in linking text to context.’<sup>66</sup> In this research, intertextuality is especially useful in illuminating commonalities in how Western leaders invoke and discuss resilience, linked to the article’s argument that the concept is ‘at work’ in helping to overcome (or paper over) Western divisions relating to the war in Ukraine.

It is important to emphasise that doing DA in the context of a ‘live’ and active conflict presents challenges. The first challenge is that, contrary to Alejandro’s argument that discourse ‘is empirically assessable material,’<sup>67</sup> not all discourses are empirically accessible in war settings, for political and security reasons. It would be extremely interesting to undertake a DA of public and ‘hidden’ transcripts relating to the war in Ukraine. According to Scott, ‘the hidden transcript is ... derivative in the sense that it consists of those offstage speeches, gestures, and practices that confirm, contradict, or inflect what appears in the public transcript.’<sup>68</sup> Hidden transcripts can also expose the full range of ‘discursive nodal points’<sup>69</sup> in policy discussions about the war in Ukraine. This article’s analysis, however, is necessarily confined to publicly available materials and transcripts.

The second challenge relates to the fact that it was not possible to identify a priori a defined number of texts to analyse. Similarly, the ongoing nature of the conflict also limited the scope for decisions about what Hansen terms ‘*the choice of Selves* – or how many states, nations, or other foreign policy subjects one wishes to examine.’<sup>70</sup> This article, thus, has had to take the more open approach of actively searching, throughout the writing process, for relevant policy statements and speeches about the war in Ukraine. Because it is tracing a ‘concept at work’, it has selected on the dependent variable, focusing on a selection of international and Ukrainian statements and speeches about the war that specifically refer to resilience.

In total, the article has analysed more than 40 statements and speeches. For its interpretative analysis of what resilience is ‘doing’ domestically, it has used a selection of President Zelensky’s speeches, relying on the English translations (the author is not a Ukrainian speaker). These English translations, however, were taken from official sources, notably the website of the President of Ukraine, and some of the speeches analysed are published in English in Zelensky’s book *A Message from Ukraine*.<sup>71</sup>

<sup>62</sup> Jason Ralph, Jack Holland, and Kalina Zhekova, ‘Before the vote: UK foreign policy discourse on Syria 2011–13’, *Review of International Studies*, 43:5 (2017), pp. 875–97 (p. 878).

<sup>63</sup> Lene Hansen, *Security as Practice: Discourse Analysis and the Bosnian War* (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 5.

<sup>64</sup> Rosalind Gill, ‘Discourse analysis’, in Martin W. Bauer and George Gaskell (eds), *Qualitative Researching with Text, Image and Sound: A Practical Handbook for Social Research* (London: SAGE, 2000), pp. 172–90 (p. 188).

<sup>65</sup> See, e.g., Julia Kristeva, in Suzanne Clark and Kathleen Hulley, ‘An interview with Julia Kristeva: Cultural strangeness and the subject in crisis’, *Discourse*, 13:1 (1990–1), pp. 149–80 (pp. 175–6); Lundborg and Vaughan-Williams, ‘New materialisms, discourse analysis, and International Relations’.

<sup>66</sup> Norman Fairclough, ‘Discourse and text: Linguistic and intertextual analysis within discourse analysis’, *Discourse and Society*, 3:2 (1992), pp. 193–217 (p. 213).

<sup>67</sup> Alejandro, ‘Reflexive discourse analysis’, p. 153.

<sup>68</sup> James C. Scott, *Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), pp. 4–5.

<sup>69</sup> Thomas Diez, ‘Europe as a discursive battleground: Discourse analysis and European integration studies’, *Cooperation and Conflict*, 36:1 (2001), pp. 5–38 (p. 16).

<sup>70</sup> Hansen, *Security as Practice*, p. 67. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>71</sup> Volodymyr Zelensky, *A Message from Ukraine: Speeches, 2019–2022* (London: Hutchinson Heinemann, 2022).

## The discourse of 'Ukrainian resilience' and its significance at the international level

On 24 February 2022, Russian forces unlawfully invaded the sovereign state of Ukraine from several directions (although acts of aggression by the Russian military against Ukraine's territorial integrity commenced eight years earlier, as highlighted by the illegal annexation of Crimea in March 2014 and Russia's involvement in the Donbas conflict that began in April 2014). This so-called special military operation was supposed to be over within a few days; President Vladimir Putin 'was expecting a quick and decisive victory that would cement his place in Russian history'.<sup>72</sup> More than two years on, however, there is no end to the conflict in sight. Intense fighting continues along the front lines, with both sides making very limited gains, and some Western leaders – including NATO's secretary general, Jens Stoltenberg, and the UK prime minister Rishi Sunak – have underlined the need to be prepared for a 'long war'.<sup>73</sup>

From the outset, the war in Ukraine has exposed flaws within the Russian military and its command structure, as well as critical operational failures and shortcomings.<sup>74</sup> The reliance on mercenaries, like the late Yevgeny Prigozhin's Wagner Group – which played a crucial part in the fighting in the eastern city of Bakhmut – is itself an important indicator of these weaknesses. The Kremlin, moreover, had not counted on the fierce resistance mounted by both the Ukrainian army and the Ukrainian people, further derailing expectations of a swift and decisive victory. Indeed, both within and beyond the borders of the Russian Federation, 'few imagined that Ukrainian forces could hold out for very long against the Russian steamroller'.<sup>75</sup>

Against this backdrop, reports and commentary about the war have frequently highlighted Ukraine's resilience. The *Financial Times* newspaper, for example, has described President Volodymyr Zelensky – whom it named as 'Person of the Year' in 2022 – as embodying 'the courage and resilience of the Ukrainian people in their fight against Russian aggression'.<sup>76</sup> UN Women has paid tribute 'to the exceptional dignity, resilience, leadership and courage of Ukrainian women and girls who continue to pay an enormous price for this severe violation of international human rights and humanitarian law'.<sup>77</sup> For his part, Manfred Profazi, the regional director of the International Organization for Migration, has noted that during a visit to Ukraine in March 2023, he was 'lucky enough to be able to hear first-person accounts of survival, of resilience, and even optimism from young and old alike'.<sup>78</sup>

It is important to note that discussions about resilience in and with respect to Ukraine pre-date the February 2022 invasion and resultant full-scale war. In 2015, for instance, the EU adopted the revised European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), one of the aims of which is to support resilience in Eastern Partnership<sup>79</sup> countries, including Ukraine. Lavrelashvili points out in this regard that the

<sup>72</sup>Peter Dickinson, '2022 Review: Why has Vladimir Putin's Ukraine invasion gone so badly wrong?' (19 December 2022), available at: <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/2022-review-why-has-vladimir-putins-ukraine-invasion-gone-so-badly-wrong/>.

<sup>73</sup>Sophie Tanno, 'NATO chief warns there will be no quick ending to the war in Ukraine' (17 September 2023), available at: <https://edition.cnn.com/2023/09/17/europe/nato-jens-stoltenberg-ukraine-war-intl/index.html>; Prime Minister's Office, 'Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's address to the Ukrainian Parliament: 12 January 2024' (12 January 2024), available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/prime-minister-rishi-sunaks-address-to-the-ukrainian-parliament-12-january-2024>.

<sup>74</sup>Robert Dalsjö, Michael Jonsson, and Johan Norberg, 'A brutal examination: Russian military capability in light of the Ukraine war', *Survival*, 64:3 (2022), pp. 7–28.

<sup>75</sup>Lawrence Freedman, 'Why war fails: Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the limits of military power', *Foreign Affairs*, 101:4 (2022), pp. 10–23 (p. 10).

<sup>76</sup>Roula Khalaf, Christopher Miller, and Ben Hall, 'FT Person of the Year: Volodymyr Zelensky. "I am more responsible than brave"' (5 December 2022), available at: <https://www.ft.com/content/9599247f-c3cb-4d3c-a0b6-771f0aac8699>.

<sup>77</sup>UN Women, 'Statement on Ukraine by Sima Bahous, UN Under-Secretary General and UN Women Executive Director' (27 February 2023), available at: <https://eca.unwomen.org/en/stories/statement/2023/02/statement-on-ukraine-by-sima-bahous-un-under-secretary-general-and-un-women-executive-director>.

<sup>78</sup>UN, 'First person: Journeys of resilience in Ukraine' (31 March 2023), available at: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/03/1135247>.

<sup>79</sup>The Eastern Partnership 'is a joint initiative of the European Union, its Member States and Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine ("the partner countries")': European Commission, 'Joint communication to the

ENP ‘was one of the first documents to introduce resilience-building as a foreign-policy goal’.<sup>80</sup> Five years later, the European Commission released a document, linked to the larger Eastern Partnership, entitled ‘Reinforcing resilience – An Eastern Partnership that delivers for all’.<sup>81</sup> Such policies themselves can be viewed as examples of resilience ‘at work’,<sup>82</sup> illustrating how the concept is ‘mobilised politically by specific actors for specific functions in specific contexts’.<sup>83</sup> This reinforces, in turn, the importance and novelty of analysing what resilience is doing politically in the particular context of the war in Ukraine. This section focuses on what it is doing at the international level and explores how Western leaders have discursively used the concept to help mobilise and sustain military support for Ukraine, linked to wider security objectives.

### *Resilience and continued support for Ukraine*

In relation to the war in Ukraine, resilience has been invoked in a variety of ways. There have been references, *inter alia*, to the country’s resilience in dealing with repeated Russian attacks on its energy infrastructure,<sup>84</sup> and to the resilience of its economy<sup>85</sup> and primary health-care system.<sup>86</sup> It is also striking, however, that international discourse on the war strongly accentuates the resilience of the Ukrainian people, framing resilience as a psychological concept linked to qualities such as bravery.

Speaking just a few days after Russian forces invaded the country, for example, Ursula von der Leyen, the president of the European Commission, insisted that ‘President Zelensky’s leadership and his bravery and the resilience of the Ukrainian people are outstanding and impressive’.<sup>87</sup> In a statement in June 2022, US president Joe Biden remarked on the ‘bravery, resilience, and determination of the Ukrainian people’,<sup>88</sup> and in August 2023, the chairman of the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Senator Bob Menendez, asserted that ‘the Ukrainian people have given new meaning to the words bravery and resilience’.<sup>89</sup> In a similar vein, Rishi Sunak, the UK prime

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European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, Eastern Partnership Policy beyond 2020: Reinforcing resilience – An eastern partnership that delivers for all (18 March 2020), available at: [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/1\\_en\\_act\\_part1\\_v6.pdf](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/1_en_act_part1_v6.pdf).

<sup>80</sup>Teona Lavrelashvili, ‘Resilience-building in Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine: Towards a tailored regional approach from the EU’, *European View*, 17:2 (2018), pp. 189–96 (p. 190).

<sup>81</sup>European Commission, ‘Joint communication to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, Eastern Partnership Policy beyond 2020’, p. 4.

<sup>82</sup>According to Nitiou and Simionov, for example, ‘by offering a series of tools and templates for states in the neighbourhood to deal with geopolitical risks and challenges (and hence to enhance their resilience) the EU is externalising its failure, without really developing or implementing new policy ideas and practices’. Cristian Nitiou and Loredana Simionov, ‘A new business as usual? The impact of the “resilience turn” on the EU’s foreign policy and approach towards the eastern neighbourhood’, *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, 31:4 (2023), pp. 1073–85 (p. 1078).

<sup>83</sup>Nicholas Michelsen and Pablo De Orellana, ‘Discourses of resilience in the US alt-right’, *Resilience*, 7:3 (2019), pp. 271–87 (p. 274).

<sup>84</sup>Ministry of Defence, ‘Defence Secretary oral statement on war in Ukraine’ (20 December 2022), available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/defence-secretary-oral-statement-on-war-in-ukraine>.

<sup>85</sup>Economic Governance and EMU Scrutiny Unit (European Parliament), ‘Multilateral financial assistance to Ukraine’ (January 2024), p. 2, available at: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2023/733763/IPOL\\_IDA\(2023\)733763\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2023/733763/IPOL_IDA(2023)733763_EN.pdf).

<sup>86</sup>World Health Organization, ‘New WHO assessment reveals resilience of Ukraine’s primary health-care system amid the war’ (12 October 2023), available at: <https://www.who.int/europe/news/item/12-10-2023-new-who-assessment-reveals-resilience-of-ukraine-s-primary-health-care-system-amid-the-war>.

<sup>87</sup>European Commission, ‘Statement by President von der Leyen on further measures to respond to the Russian invasion of Ukraine’ (27 February 2022), available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/it/statement\\_22\\_1441](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/it/statement_22_1441).

<sup>88</sup>The White House, ‘Statement by President Joe Biden on support for Ukraine and call with President Zelenskyy of Ukraine’ (15 June 2022), available at: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/06/15/statement-by-president-joe-biden-on-support-for-ukraine-and-call-with-president-zelenskyy-of-ukraine/>.

<sup>89</sup>Foreign Relations Committee, ‘Chairman Menendez pledges unwavering support for Ukraine on 32nd independence day’ (24 August 2023), available at: <https://www.foreign.senate.gov/press/dem/release/chairman-menendez-pledges-unwavering-support-for-ukraine-on-32nd-independence-day>.

minister, underscored during a speech in February 2023 that ‘as we approach the anniversary of Russia’s barbaric and deplorable invasion of Ukraine, as a nation we pay tribute to the incredible bravery and resilience of the Ukrainian people.’<sup>90</sup>

On one hand, the frequent contiguous positioning of these concepts – an example of intertextuality – is reductionist, diluting the richness and complexity of resilience. Additionally, words like ‘incredible bravery’ detract from the quintessential ‘ordinariness’ of resilience<sup>91</sup> – and from some of the myriad everyday ways that ordinary people may express it. People like Julia Hermanovska, a 79-year-old widow with stage four cancer living in Kyiv. Describing her passion for picking mushrooms, she explained: ‘When my husband died, I took a year to “resurrect”, so to say. But then I got cancer. And since then, I haven’t gone mushroom picking.’ She continued: ‘I dream of them. When I can’t fall asleep, I picture those meadows, those moments when I found mushrooms.’<sup>92</sup> The key point is that for people living through war and armed conflict, resilience is often a necessity, in the sense that they have to get on with life as best they can and, in the words of the Ukrainian politician Lesiya Vasylenko, find a new ‘normal’ in the abnormal.<sup>93</sup> What is significant is how they do so and what they use (material resources, relationships, memories, dreams) to help them in this regard.

On the other hand, repeated references to Ukraine’s resilience and bravery have an important political function and utility, even more so the longer the war continues. Western powers have provided Ukraine with indispensable military support since the conflict began. In March 2023, for example, Poland and Slovakia agreed to send MiG-29 fighter jets to Ukraine;<sup>94</sup> Germany revealed plans in November 2023 to increase its military aid to Ukraine from €4 billion to €8 billion;<sup>95</sup> and the following month, the USA announced an additional military assistance package (its 54th drawdown package) worth \$250 million – including air defence system components and medical equipment – to aid Ukraine in meeting its urgent security needs.<sup>96</sup> For its part, the UK has announced that it will provide Ukraine with a £2.5 billion military aid package over the next year,<sup>97</sup> and France has signed a security pact with Ukraine that includes a pledge for up to €3 billion in additional military aid in 2024.<sup>98</sup>

However, some significant divisions have also emerged. Germany’s hesitance – which it subsequently overcame – to send Leopard tanks to Ukraine provoked considerable frustration in some quarters, including the Baltic states and Poland.<sup>99</sup> More recently, Chancellor Olaf Scholz has called on EU member states to do more to aid Ukraine, insisting that ‘the planned weapons

<sup>90</sup>Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, the Rt Hon Lucy Frazer and the Rt Hon Rishi Sunak, ‘National moment of silence to mark one year of Russian invasion of Ukraine’ (14 February 2023), available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/national-moment-of-silence-to-mark-one-year-of-russian-invasion-of-ukraine>.

<sup>91</sup>Ann S. Masten, ‘Ordinary magic: Resilience processes in development’, *American Psychologist*, 56:3 (2001), pp. 227–38 (p. 227).

<sup>92</sup>Ivana Kottasová, Yulia Kesaieva, and the Visuals Team, “I just hope to live until our victory”: Ukraine’s older women share stories of heartbreak and resilience’ (14 March 2023), available at: <https://edition.cnn.com/interactive/2023/03/world/ukraine-older-women-resilience-as-equals-cnnphotos/>.

<sup>93</sup>Gideon Rachman, ‘Ukraine resilience: Life in a war zone’ (9 February 2023), available at: <https://www.ft.com/content/920c868b-5ccd-4196-9b1e-d6f2ae2c488b>.

<sup>94</sup>Raphael Minder, Felicia Schwartz, Polina Ivanova, and Ben Hall, ‘Slovakia joins Poland in sending Soviet-era jets to Ukraine’ (17 March 2023), available at: <https://www.ft.com/content/4be5f777-9a3a-4b00-837a-91077d0f4e5b>.

<sup>95</sup>David Rich, ‘Germany hikes Ukraine military support, but is its defence-spending tilt tenable?’ (16 November 2023), available at: <https://www.france24.com/en/europe/20231116-germany-hikes-ukraine-military-support-but-is-its-defence-spending-tilt-tenable>.

<sup>96</sup>US Department of Defense, ‘Austin urges continued support for Ukraine’ (24 January 2024), available at: <https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/3653214/austin-urges-continued-support-for-ukraine/>.

<sup>97</sup>Prime Minister’s Office, ‘PM in Kyiv: UK support will not falter’ (12 January 2024), available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-in-kyiv-uk-support-will-not-falter>.

<sup>98</sup>France 24, ‘France signs security pact with Ukraine, pledges “up to €3 billion” in additional military aid’ (16 February 2024), available at: <https://www.france24.com/en/france/20240216-zelensky-arrives-in-paris-to-sign-bilateral-security-deal-with-macron>.

<sup>99</sup>Agence France-Presse, ‘Germany faces backlash over reluctance to send tanks to Ukraine’ (21 January 2023), available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/21/germany-backlash-reluctance-tanks-ukraine-leopard>.

deliveries to Ukraine of most EU member states are not enough',<sup>100</sup> but he is also facing pressure from Western allies on the issue of providing Ukraine with long-range Taurus missiles.<sup>101</sup> Elsewhere in the EU, Slovakia's former populist prime minister, Robert Fico, returned to power in October 2023 pledging to halt all further military aid to Ukraine,<sup>102</sup> although he delivered a very different message during his first trip to Kyiv in January 2024.<sup>103</sup> There are other disagreements too. For example, while Nordic and eastern European states adhere to the view that the Russian Federation must be militarily and decisively defeated in Ukraine, France, Germany, and southern European states have sought to 'avoid escalation in the belief that a Putin cornered and in decline could lead to uncontrollable developments'.<sup>104</sup> President Emmanuel Macron, for instance, has insisted that Russia should be defeated but 'not crushed'.<sup>105</sup> However, he has also refused to rule out the possibility of sending ground troops to Ukraine, maintaining that 'nothing should be excluded'.<sup>106</sup> This stance has contributed to further fuelling divides among NATO countries.<sup>107</sup>

It is against this political backdrop that we can think about resilience as a 'concept at work' in the war and probe what it is doing (its 'meaningfulness', to use Ish-Shalom's term).<sup>108</sup> The first point to underline in this regard is that the concept is being put to work, in part, in an affective sense. Specifically, a recurring thematic within international policy discourse on the war in Ukraine – and one that offers an interesting variation on studies exploring the relationship between resilience and positive emotions<sup>109</sup> – is that Ukrainians' resilience and bravery/courage engage and evoke emotions. As one illustration, the UK ambassador Neil Bush has emphasised that 'our support for Ukraine – a free, sovereign and democratic Ukraine – remains steadfast as ever. Our admiration of the incredible courage and resilience of the Ukrainian people grows daily'.<sup>110</sup> In a similar vein, the Dutch ambassador to Ukraine, Jenness de Mol, has expressed that 'I've come to deeply admire the resilience of the Ukrainians. I feel truly invested in these people and what happens to them'.<sup>111</sup>

<sup>100</sup> Reuters, 'Scholz berates EU allies over "insufficient" military support for Ukraine' (9 January 2024), available at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/scholz-berates-eu-allies-over-insufficient-military-support-ukraine-2024-01-08/>.

<sup>101</sup> Paul Taylor, 'Send missiles to Ukraine or stand accused of appeasing Russia? Olaf Scholz must choose' (3 April 2024), available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2024/apr/03/send-missiles-to-ukraine-or-stand-accused-of-appeasing-russia-olaf-scholz-must-choose>.

<sup>102</sup> Sam Hancock, 'Slovakia elections: Populist winner signs deal to form coalition government' (11 October 2023), available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-67085070>.

<sup>103</sup> Raphael Minder and Roman Olearchuk, 'Slovakia's prime minister U-turns on Ukraine support during visit' (24 January 2024), available at: <https://www.ft.com/content/d033d429-d6d5-4c45-ae17-8169356d51dc>.

<sup>104</sup> Eric Adamson, 'What's behind the Western divide over arming Ukraine' (24 January 2023), available at: <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/whats-behind-the-western-divide-over-arming-ukraine/>.

<sup>105</sup> Phelan Chatterjee and Matt Murphy, 'Ukraine war: Russia must be defeated but not crushed, Macron says' (19 February 2023), available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-64693691>.

<sup>106</sup> Patrick Wintour, 'Macron refuses to rule out putting troops on ground in Ukraine in call to galvanise Europe' (27 February 2024), available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/feb/27/french-president-emmanuel-macron-ukraine-french-ground-troops>.

<sup>107</sup> Lipika Pelham and Lou Newton, 'Nato allies reject Emmanuel Macron idea of troops to Ukraine' (27 February 2024), available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-68417223>.

<sup>108</sup> Ish-Shalom, 'Introduction', p. 17.

<sup>109</sup> See, e.g., Frederick L. Philippe, Serge Lecours, and Genevieve Beaulieu-Pelletier, 'Resilience and positive emotions: Examining the role of emotional memories', *Journal of Personality*, 77:1 (2009), pp. 139–76; Christian T. Gloria and Mary A. Steinhart, 'Relationships among positive emotions, coping, resilience and mental health', *Stress & Health*, 32:2 (2016), pp. 145–56.

<sup>110</sup> Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office and Neil Bush, 'Russia's illegal and inhumane assault against Ukraine's civilian population continues: UK statement to the OSCE' (13 January 2023), available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/russias-illegal-and-inhumane-assault-against-ukraines-civilian-population-continues-uk-statement-to-the-osce>.

<sup>111</sup> Government of The Netherlands, 'Ambassador Jenness de Mol: 'The scale of human suffering in Ukraine is almost beyond comprehension' (13 March 2023), available at: <https://www.government.nl/latest/weblogs/meet-the-ambassadors/2023/one-year-war-in-ukraine-dutch-ambassador-in-kyiv>.



The field of International Relations (IR) has traditionally given little attention to emotions.<sup>112</sup> This, however, is starting to change, and it is instructive to think about the war in Ukraine and the repeated use of resilience discourse in relation to a wider ‘emotional turn in IR.’<sup>113</sup> The argument being made here is that by being put to work emotionally, resilience is also doing something important strategically, by shifting the focus from disagreements within the NATO alliance and EU and making prominent positive affective responses (admiration, inspiration) that both reinforce the necessity of that support and create a basis for forging solidarity. This emotional-strategic interplay is especially salient when references to Ukrainian resilience and courage, and the emotions they stir, are placed directly alongside the themes of Western support and unity. For example, the US secretary of state, Anthony Blinken – according to whom support for Ukraine within NATO ‘remains rock solid’<sup>114</sup> – has declared that ‘Ukraine’s resilience, courage, and determination have inspired the world and galvanized U.S. and global efforts to help it defend itself and secure its future.’<sup>115</sup> In a particularly illustrative statement (to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe [OSCE]), the UK’s military adviser, Ian Stubbs, remarked that:

Ukraine has regained territory and liberated thousands of Ukrainian people thanks to the awe-inspiring bravery of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, the resilience of the Ukrainian people and the overwhelming international support. Together, the UK and partners are ensuring that Ukraine will win. Our united approach of providing Ukraine with the support it needs to defend itself and push Russia out of Ukraine’s sovereign territory is the swiftest, and only, path to a just and lasting peace.<sup>116</sup>

The second and related point to highlight is that while some resilience scholars increasingly de-emphasise personal and psychological traits,<sup>117</sup> international policy discourse relating to the war in Ukraine frequently accentuates them. This is important, in turn, because it demonstrates how imputed individual (and national) characteristics function in a larger international context, as an illustration of complexity, and brings together psychological and systemic framings of resilience in a novel way. In effect, what we are seeing in the war in Ukraine is the use of a heavily psychological discourse that has a wider macro-systemic relevance and significance – as the remainder of this section discusses – and lends empirical weight to Ungar’s argument that ‘the resilience of one system [is] potentially a catalyst for the resilience of other cooccurring systems.’<sup>118</sup>

<sup>112</sup>Emma Hutchison and Roland Bleiker, ‘Theorizing emotions in world politics’, *International Theory*, 6:3 (2014), pp. 491–594 (p. 507).

<sup>113</sup>Simon Koschut, ‘Introduction to discourse and emotions in International Relations’, in Simon Koschut, Todd H. Hall, Reinhard Wolf, et al., ‘Discourse and emotions in International Relations’, *International Studies Review*, 19:3 (2017), pp. 481–508 (p. 482).

<sup>114</sup>US Department of State, ‘Secretary Anthony J. Blinken and Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba before their meeting’ (4 April 2024), available at: <https://www.state.gov/secretary-antony-j-blinken-and-ukrainian-foreign-minister-dmytro-kuleba-before-their-meeting-10/>.

<sup>115</sup>US Department of State, ‘Additional U.S. security assistance for Ukraine: Press statement, Anthony J. Blinken, Secretary of State’ (21 September 2023), available at: <https://www.state.gov/additional-u-s-security-assistance-for-ukraine-10/>.

<sup>116</sup>Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office and Ian Stubbs, ‘Ukraine will win. Russia is denying the reality of its horrific war of choice: UK statement to the OSCE’ (24 May 2023), available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/ukraine-will-win-russia-is-denying-the-reality-of-its-horrific-war-of-choice-uk-statement-to-the-osce>.

<sup>117</sup>According to Masten, for example, ‘many personality traits may play a role in resilience but there is little evidence that there is a singular trait of resilience. Worse, the idea of a resilience trait inevitably suggests that individuals who flounder are deficient, when it is far more likely that many systems external to the individual have “failed” to provide sufficient support or protection.’ Masten, ‘Resilience in developing systems’, pp. 305–6. See also Michael Ungar, ‘Resilience across cultures’, *British Journal of Social Work*, 38:2 (2008), pp. 218–35 (pp. 220–1); Adrian D. Van Breda, ‘Journey towards independent living: A grounded theory investigation of leaving the care of Girls & Boys Town, South Africa’, *Journal of Youth Studies*, 18:3 (2020), pp. 322–37 (p. 325).

<sup>118</sup>Michael Ungar, ‘Systemic resilience’, *Ecology and Society*, 23:4 (2018), p. 34.

### *Resilience and the bigger international picture*

References to resilience help to reinforce and promote the narrative – which is also integral to sustaining political unity among Western allies – that supporting Ukraine is about something much bigger than just Ukraine. Apposite in this regard is Coaffee and Fussey’s concept of “security-driven resilience” to capture multi-directional processes in which resilience policy becomes increasingly driven by security concerns and, at the same time, security policy adopts the language of resilience.<sup>119</sup> Thinking about this in relation to the war in Ukraine, this article submits that the use of resilience discourse is driven by deeper concerns about international security and the stability of the international order.

Stability is a salient theme in resilience research, particularly in studies that analyse the resilience of interlinked social-ecological systems (SES).<sup>120</sup> These systems – which reflect and accent the ‘integrated concept of humans-in-nature’<sup>121</sup> and are frequently associated with complexity<sup>122</sup> – are not static and unchanging. Resilience, as Walker et al. define it, is about systems’ capacity ‘to absorb disturbance and reorganize while undergoing change so as to still retain essentially the same function, structure, identity, and feedbacks – in other words, stay in the same basin of attraction.’<sup>123</sup> If these systems move into an entirely different basin of attraction, however, something much more radical occurs, namely a transformation that entails ‘fundamentally altering the nature of a system.’<sup>124</sup>

Applying this to Ukraine, the pivotal point is that the war constitutes a major shock to the international system, exposing its vulnerabilities – including with respect to food and energy security – and challenging its stability. In the language of SES theory, the war has contributed to moving the international system ever closer to the edge of its current basin of attraction and to critical ‘tipping points.’<sup>125</sup> Building resilience within the multiple subsystems that comprise it is therefore a necessity and a priority. The security of the liberal international order – which some would argue was already in crisis long before Russia’s invasion of Ukraine<sup>126</sup> – is dependent on the ability of these systems to respond and adapt to multiple threats and stressors.

In a joint press conference with Ursula von der Leyen, for example, NATO’s secretary general spotlighted the ‘bravery of Ukrainian forces’, which, he argued, ‘also shows how vital it is that we step up our support, our military support to Ukraine’. He further stressed, commenting on an agreement between the EU and NATO to set up a taskforce on resilience and critical infrastructure protection, the imperative of making ‘our critical infrastructure, technology and supply chains more resilient to potential threats and to take action to mitigate potential vulnerabilities’. According to him, ‘this will be an important step in making our societies safer and stronger.’<sup>127</sup> In a statement

<sup>119</sup>Jon Coaffee and Pete Fussey, ‘Constructing resilience through security and surveillance: The politics, practices and tensions of security-driven resilience’, *Security Dialogue*, 46:1 (2016), pp. 86–105 (p. 87).

<sup>120</sup>See, e.g., Carl Folke, Stephen R. Carpenter, Brian Walker, Martin Scheffer, Terry Chapin, and Johan Rockström, ‘Resilience thinking: Integrating resilience, adaptability and transformability’, *Ecology and Society*, 15:4 (2010), p. 20; Brian C. Chaffin and Lance H. Gunderson, ‘Emergence, institutionalization and renewal: Rhythms of adaptive governance in complex social-ecological systems’, *Journal of Environmental Management*, 165 (2016), pp. 81–7.

<sup>121</sup>Fikret Berkes, Johan Colding, and Carl Folke, ‘Introduction’, in Fikret Berkes, Johan Colding, and Carl Folke (eds), *Navigating Social-Ecological Systems: Building Resilience for Complexity and Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 1–29 (p. 3).

<sup>122</sup>Rika Preiser, Reinette Biggs, Alta De Vos, and Carl Folke, ‘Social-ecological systems as complex adaptive systems: Organizing principles for advancing research methods and approaches’, *Ecology and Society*, 23:4 (2018), p. 46.

<sup>123</sup>Brian Walker, C. S. Holling, Stephen R. Carpenter, and Ann Kinzig, ‘Resilience, adaptability and transformability in social-ecological systems’, *Ecology and Society*, 9:2 (2004), p. 5.

<sup>124</sup>Walker et al., ‘Resilience, adaptability and transformability in social-ecological systems’.

<sup>125</sup>Else Grete Broderstad and Einar Eythósson, ‘Resilient communities? Collapse and recovery of a social-ecological system in Arctic Norway’, *Ecology and Society*, 19:3 (2014), p. 1.

<sup>126</sup>Trine Flockhart, ‘Is this the end? Resilience, ontological security, and the crisis of the liberal international order’, *Contemporary Security Policy*, 41:2 (2020), pp. 215–40 (p. 216).

<sup>127</sup>NATO, ‘Press statement by the NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg together with President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen ahead of the meeting at the College of European Commissioners’ (11 January 2023), available at: {[https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions\\_210614.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_210614.htm)}.

to the UN Security Council, the UK's deputy permanent representative to the UN, Ambassador James Kariuki, underlined that 'Ukraine's resilience and the support of its international partners will remain strong'. He also remarked on the 'staggering' cost of the war to global food supplies and insisted on the need for action 'to tackle the causes of food insecurity and malnutrition and unlock our diverse resources for a more resilient, food-secure future'.<sup>128</sup> More recently, in a speech to the Kyiv Security Forum, the chair of the NATO Military Committee, Admiral Rob Bauer, variously referred to Ukrainians' strength, courage, bravery, and resilience and maintained that NATO and Ukraine have never been closer. He continued: 'With every day that passes, we become closer. More interoperable. More intertwined ... Why? Because we all believe in the power of democracy. That is what is at stake here.'<sup>129</sup>

What this section has demonstrated, thus, is that resilience is a 'concept at work' at different levels, moving and shifting between them and fusing together different resiliences. Ultimately, it is helping to foster a sense of common purpose among Western powers, by reinforcing and reiterating what is actually at stake and, by extension, aiding a larger political and security agenda aimed at safeguarding and protecting the resilience of the liberal international order. As Way argues, 'more than sixty years after the horrors of World War II inspired the creation of the European Union, the invasion has again reminded the world of the brutal human cost brought about by the rejection of liberal values.'<sup>130</sup>

To some extent, therefore, resilience is 'at work' in the war in Ukraine in a way that lends support to previously mentioned critiques of resilience as a neoliberal form of governmentality.<sup>131</sup> Yet it also illuminates the narrowness of these critiques. What the war makes salient is that resilience and associated responsabilisation discourses 'are not always, or indeed, inherently, individualistic',<sup>132</sup> even when they strongly accentuate psychological and personal traits. They also work upwards (to the international level) and outwards (to multiple actors) – an interesting example in a political context of cross-scale effects and interactions associated with complex SES.<sup>133</sup>

### The discourse of 'Ukrainian resilience' within President Zelensky's speeches

This section explores the frequent use of resilience discourse within Ukraine itself and focuses on President Zelensky's speeches. Its analysis demonstrates that, once again, resilience is 'at work' in more than one way. Fundamentally, when Zelensky invokes resilience, the concept is doing important work not just domestically but also internationally.

#### *Resilience discourse as a morale booster*

There are various examples, from very different contexts, of resilience discourse being utilised (and instrumentalised) in ways that contribute to supporting and uplifting popular morale during periods of significant turbulence and uncertainty,<sup>134</sup> and President Zelensky himself frequently uses

<sup>128</sup>Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office and Kariuki, 'Ukraine's resilience and the support of its international partners will remain strong'.

<sup>129</sup>NATO, 'Speech by the Chair of the NATO Military Committee, Admiral Rob Bauer, Kyiv Security Forum' (21 March 2024), available at: [[https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions\\_223931.htm?selectedLocale=en](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_223931.htm?selectedLocale=en)].

<sup>130</sup>Lucan Ahmad Way, 'The rebirth of the liberal world order?', *Journal of Democracy*, 33:2 (2022), pp. 5–17 (p. 15).

<sup>131</sup>Joseph, 'Resilience as embedded neoliberalism'; Anthony Mckeown and John Glenn, 'The rise of resilience after the financial crises: A case of liberalism rebooted?', *Review of International Studies*, 44:2 (2018), pp. 193–214.

<sup>132</sup>Hannah King, Stephen Crossley, and Roger Smith, 'Responsibility, resilience and symbolic power', *The Sociological Review*, 69:5 (2021), pp. 920–36 (p. 923).

<sup>133</sup>See, e.g., Brian Walker, Stephen Carpenter, John Anderies, et al., 'Resilience management in social-ecological systems: A working hypothesis for a participatory approach', *Conservation Ecology*, 6:1 (2002), p. 14.

<sup>134</sup>See, e.g., Chris Zebrowski and Daniel Sage, 'Organising community resilience: An examination of the forms of sociality promoted in community resilience programmes', *Resilience*, 5:1 (2017), pp. 44–60; José Brunner and Galia Plotkin Amrami, 'From the therapeutic to the post-therapeutic: The resilient subject, its social imaginary and its practices in the shadow of 9/11', *Theory & Psychology*, 29:2 (2019), pp. 219–39; Vivian L. Vignoles, Zahira Jaser, Frankiebo Taylor, and Evangelos Ntontis,

this discourse. In some cases, he approaches resilience from a normative angle. On 4 December 2022, he insisted – as Russian forces intensified their attacks on the country’s infrastructure in a bid to weaken or break Ukrainian morale<sup>135</sup> – that ‘we have to do everything to endure this winter, no matter how hard it is ... To get through the winter, we have to be even more resilient and even more united than ever.’<sup>136</sup> Relatedly, in an earlier address to the Ukrainian people on 3 April 2022, he stressed that ‘no matter whether we are in a security alliance or stand alone, we understand one thing: we must be strong.’<sup>137</sup> Recently, in a speech to Ukrainians on 18 February 2024, he declared that ‘we must continue to be resilient, we must continue to be determined. We must achieve our Ukrainian goals in this war.’<sup>138</sup>

More commonly, he comments on and celebrates Ukrainian resilience. As fighting raged in Bakhmut in 2023, he paid ‘special tribute to the bravery, strength and resilience of the soldiers fighting in the Donbas.’<sup>139</sup> During intense battles for the city of Avdiivka, which fell to Russian forces in February 2024, he praised the resilience of Ukrainian forces – describing it as ‘the strength of all Ukraine’<sup>140</sup> – and insisted that ‘we are holding our ground. It is Ukrainian courage and unity that will determine how this war will end.’<sup>141</sup> On the first anniversary of Russia’s invasion, he emphasised that ‘it was a year of resilience. A year of care. A year of bravery. A year of pain. A year of hope. A year of endurance. A year of unity.’<sup>142</sup> In November 2023, on the first anniversary of the liberation of Kherson – which he described as ‘the city of hope’ – he stressed that ‘Ukraine always returns – always! When we know our goal. When it’s a shared goal. When we are united.’<sup>143</sup>

As these examples show, Zelensky’s repeated references to resilience and other qualities that he associates with being Ukrainian – notably strength, bravery, and courage – frequently accentuate the need for unity at home. In this way, he draws attention to the relational dynamics of resilience, as something that requires everyone working and pulling together for the greater good. In his words, ‘if we preserve our resilience, we will end the war sooner.’<sup>144</sup> The recurring themes of resilience and unity illuminate, in turn, the ‘solidarity frame’ that Nisch’s research discusses. Based on an analysis of 613 tweets by the Ukrainian president between 24 February 2022 and 24 February 2023, he

‘Harnessing shared identities to mobilize resilient responses to the COVID-19 pandemic’, *Political Psychology*, 42:5 (2021), pp. 817–26.

<sup>135</sup>James Horncastle, ‘Russia is using drones to target Ukrainian electricity and erode morale’ (16 January 2023), available at: <https://theconversation.com/russia-is-using-drones-to-target-ukrainian-electricity-and-erode-morale-197565>.

<sup>136</sup>President of Ukraine, ‘To get through the winter, we have to be even more resilient and even more united: Address by the President of Ukraine’ (4 December 2022), available at: <https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/shob-projti-zimu-mi-mayemo-buti-she-bilsh-stijkimi-i-she-bil-79633>.

<sup>137</sup>Zelensky, *A Message from Ukraine*, p. 93.

<sup>138</sup>President of Ukraine, ‘We must continue to be resilient, determined and achieve Ukrainian goals in this war: Address by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy’ (18 February 2024), available at: <https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/musimo-buti-j-nadali-stijkimi-rishuchimi-j-dosyagti-ukrayins-89089>.

<sup>139</sup>Lucy Skoulding, ‘Ukraine vows to defend “fortress” Bakhmut as Russia claims battle is “close to end”’ (6 March 2023), available at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/ukraine-vows-defend-bakhmut-in-battle-b2294621.html>.

<sup>140</sup>Francesca Ebel and Serhii Korolchuk, ‘Russia and Ukraine intensify fight over Avdiivka, another ruined city’ (28 October 2023), available at: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/10/28/avdiivka-russia-ukraine-war-donetsk/>.

<sup>141</sup>BBC, ‘Ukraine war: Russia attacks Avdiivka stronghold in eastern Ukraine’ (12 October 2023), available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-67095103>.

<sup>142</sup>President of Ukraine, ‘Address by President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy “February. The year of invincibility”’ (24 February 2023), available at: <https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/zvernennya-prezidenta-ukrayini-volodimir-zelenskogo-lyutij-81213>.

<sup>143</sup>President of Ukraine, ‘Ukraine always returns: President Volodymyr Zelenskyy’s address on the occasion of the first anniversary of the liberation of Kherson from Russian occupation’ (11 November 2023), available at: <https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/ukrayina-zavzhdi-povertayetsya-zvernennya-prezidenta-volodim-86953>.

<sup>144</sup>President of Ukraine, ‘Volodymyr Zelenskyy: If we preserve our resilience, our morale, we will end the war sooner’ (19 December 2023), available at: <https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/volodimir-zelenskij-yaksho-mi-ne-vtratimo-nashoyi-stijkosti-87853>.

argues that Zelensky uses this solidarity frame to ‘show how his people stand together during this difficult time’.<sup>145</sup>

Linked to his use of resilience discourse, Zelensky has often described Ukraine and its people as unbreakable. In his aforementioned speech on the first anniversary of the war, for example, he referred to cities such as Mariupol, Kharkiv, Chernihiv, and Kherson as ‘hero cities’ and ‘capitals of invincibility’.<sup>146</sup> In his New Year Address on 31 December 2023, he stressed that ‘no matter how many missiles the enemy fires, no matter how many shellings and attacks ... the enemy carries out in an attempt to break Ukrainians, intimidate them, knock them down, drive them underground, we will still rise’.<sup>147</sup> Speaking at Hostomel airport on the second anniversary of the war, and emphasising ‘730 days of resilience and endurance’, President Zelensky asserted that ‘we will succeed. And here, in this place, you understand best – metal may not withstand, but Ukrainians do. You can destroy the plane, but you cannot destroy the dream.’<sup>148</sup>

Interestingly, this accent on Ukraine’s indomitability has not been confined to the discursive level. So-called invincibility centres (also known as ‘Points of Invincibility’) were first set up in November 2022, in places such as administrative buildings and shopping centres, and have provided Ukrainians with hot meals and opportunities to warm themselves, charge their phones, and so on.<sup>149</sup> The country’s prime minister, Denys Shmyhal, has described these invincibility centres as ‘islands of Ukrainian resilience’.<sup>150</sup> In other words, the centres can be seen as a physical extension of the discursive relationship between resilience and invincibility, evidencing how these two concepts are ‘at work’ together in more than one way.

Domestically, frequent references to resilience and related concepts have an important political function. War fatigue in the country is increasing<sup>151</sup> – in part due to the limited gains that have been made during Ukraine’s much anticipated counter-offensive – and Ukrainian soldiers are understandably exhausted.<sup>152</sup> According to surveys conducted by Gallup in July and August 2023, however, 60 per cent of Ukrainians still want the country to continue fighting until it wins.<sup>153</sup> The data further revealed that ‘President Volodymyr Zelenskyy is a key figure in national support for the war. His personal approval ratings remain sky-high in 2023 (81%)’.<sup>154</sup> Relatedly, a poll conducted by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (KIIS) in early December 2023 revealed that Zelensky is the most trusted Ukrainian politician (although the trust indicator decreased to 77 per cent from 90 per cent in May 2022);<sup>155</sup> and another poll by KIIS in February 2024 found that 69 per cent of Ukrainians believe that Zelensky – whose presidential term is due to end in

<sup>145</sup> Stefan Nisch, ‘Invasion of Ukraine: Frames and sentiments in Zelensky’s Twitter communication’, *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, 32:1 (2024), pp. 110–24 (p. 116).

<sup>146</sup> President of Ukraine, ‘Address by President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy “February. The year of invincibility”’.

<sup>147</sup> President of Ukraine, ‘New Year address by President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy’ (31 December 2023), available at: <https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/novorichne-privitannya-prezidenta-ukrayini-volodimira-zelens-88037>.

<sup>148</sup> President of Ukraine, ‘We are 730 days closer to victory: Address by the President of Ukraine’ (24 February 2024), available at: <https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/mi-stali-na-730-dniv-blizhchi-do-peremogi-zvernennya-prezide-89217>.

<sup>149</sup> Vasilisa Stepanenko and Jamey Keaten, ‘Ukraine’s “invincibility” centers offer refuge, resilience’ (29 November 2022), available at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/ap-ukraine-kyiv-bucha-russia-b2235049.html>.

<sup>150</sup> Ukrainian Government Portal, ‘Statement by Prime Minister of Ukraine Denys Shmyhal at the opening of the International Standing with the Ukrainian People Conference’ (13 December 2022), available at: <https://www.kmu.gov.ua/en/news/promova-premier-ministra-ukrainy-denysa-shmyhalia-na-vidkrytti-konferentsii-na-pidtrymku-hromadianskoj-stiikosti-v-ukraini-u-zymovyi-period>.

<sup>151</sup> Shaun Walker, ‘Shock, anger and war fatigue: Ukraine’s two years of agony’ (18 February 2024), available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/feb/18/shock-anger-and-war-fatigue-ukraines-two-years-of-agony>.

<sup>152</sup> Max Hunder, ‘Ukrainian troops battle exhaustion as war drags into second winter’ (3 November 2023), available at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/ukrainian-troops-battle-exhaustion-war-drags-into-second-winter-2023-11-03/>.

<sup>153</sup> Benedict Vigers, ‘Ukrainians stand behind war effort despite some fatigue’ (9 October 2023), available at: <https://news.gallup.com/poll/512258/ukrainians-stand-behind-war-effort-despite-fatigue.aspx>.

<sup>154</sup> Vigers, ‘Ukrainians stand behind war effort’.

<sup>155</sup> Anton Hrushetski, ‘Direction of affairs in the country and trust in political figures’ (19 December 2023), available at: <https://kiis.com.ua/?lang=eng&cat=reports&id=1336&page=1>.



May 2024 – should continue to serve as president until the cessation of martial law. Zelensky's use of resilience discourse has arguably contributed to maintaining public morale, which, in turn, has helped to keep the country largely united behind him. As discussed, Zelensky often underscores the need for unity, and 'among Ukrainians, there is an unconditional demand for unity and the avoidance of internal strife'.<sup>156</sup> As the final part of this section discusses, however, Zelensky's use of resilience discourse is not just important domestically.

### *Resilience and calls for additional military support*

In Zelensky's speeches, resilience is also doing significant work at the international level, by helping to strengthen Ukraine's requests for further and increased military support. In a speech in January 2023, for example, he underlined that 'Russian aggression can and should be stopped only with adequate weapons ... Weapons on the battlefield. Weapons that protect our skies.' He also expressed his gratitude to 'all our units who demonstrate the resilience Ukraine needs, exhausting the occupier and destroying it'.<sup>157</sup> In another speech just a few days later, he stressed that the situation in eastern Donetsk – in cities such as Bakhmut and Vuhledar – was 'very tough' and that Ukraine needed more weapons and faster deliveries. He additionally drew attention to the resilience of those fighting on the front line, pointing out that 'confronting this [situation] requires extraordinary resilience and a full awareness by our soldiers that in defending Donetsk region they are defending all of Ukraine'.<sup>158</sup> In a recent speech in April 2024, in which he underlined the 'absolute and urgent necessity' of bolstering air defences in the Kharkiv and Sumy regions, he thanked Ukrainian soldiers and commanders, insisting that 'the resilience of each of them is the resilience of our entire Ukraine'.<sup>159</sup>

In other words, by interspersing calls for additional weapons with references to resilience,<sup>160</sup> Zelensky is effectively using the concept to communicate and reinforce the message that Ukraine's soldiers are doing everything they can to secure the country's freedom – and that Western powers need to do the same. Further highlighting this is a speech he gave at the National Defense University of the United States, in which he stated: 'Ukrainians haven't given up and won't give up. We know what to do. You can count on Ukraine, and we hope, just as much, to be able to count on you'.<sup>161</sup>

Interestingly, and relatedly, in some of his speeches, Zelensky himself makes direct reference to what resilience is doing in the war. Exemplifying this is a speech that he delivered on 20 February 2023, on the occasion of US president Biden's visit to Ukraine. In the speech, in which Zelensky mentions resilience five times, he maintains that 'no element of Ukrainian life is fragile anymore and will never be fragile. And our resilience is a powerful contribution to the resilience of all freedom-loving nations in the world.' In this example, thus, resilience is 'at work' in making clear

<sup>156</sup> Anton Hrushetskyi, 'Dynamics between May 2022 and October 2023 of the perception of the appropriateness of criticism of possible erroneous and incorrect actions of the authorities' (2 November 2023), available at: <https://kiis.com.ua/?lang=eng&cat=reports&id=1323&page=1>.

<sup>157</sup> President of Ukraine, 'Russian aggression can and should be stopped only with adequate weapons' (26 January 2023), available at: <https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/rosijsku-agresiyu-mozhna-j-treba-zupinyati-lishe-adekvatnoyu-80633>.

<sup>158</sup> Reuters, 'Ukraine needs more weapons faster, Zelenskiy says' (30 January 2023), available at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/zelenskiy-ukraine-needs-more-weapons-faster-2023-01-29/>.

<sup>159</sup> President of Ukraine, 'Bolstering air defense for Kharkiv, Sumy and our southern regions is an urgent necessity: Address by the President of Ukraine' (4 April 2024) available at: <https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/posilennya-ppo-dlya-harkivshini-sumshini-pivdennih-regioniv-90057>.

<sup>160</sup> Some other Ukrainian politicians do the same in their own speeches. See, e.g., Ministry of Defence of Ukraine, 'Joint statement by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ukraine Dmytro Kuleba and the Minister of Defence of Ukraine Oleksii Reznikov regarding the urgency of strengthening Ukraine's defence capabilities' (19 January 2023), available at: <https://www.mil.gov.ua/en/news/2023/01/19/joint-statement-by-the-minister-for-foreign-affairs-of-ukraine-dmytro-kuleba-and-the-minister-of-defence-of-ukraine-oleksii-reznikov-regarding-the-urgency-of-strengthening-ukraines-defence-capabilities/>.

<sup>161</sup> President of Ukraine, 'Freedom must always prevail when challenged: Speech by the President of Ukraine at the National Defense University of the United States' (11 December 2023), available at: <https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/svoboda-povinna-peremagati-zavzhd-koli-htos-kidaye-yij-vikl-87673>.

what Ukraine is contributing to the liberal international order and, thus, in reinforcing Ukraine's international significance. Indeed, Zelensky specifically underscores in the speech that President Biden's visit 'is an indicator of how resilient Ukraine is. And how important Ukraine is to the world.'<sup>162</sup>

Finally, just as Western powers are using resilience to deflect from divisions among themselves, as the previous section demonstrated, Zelensky is doing the same. He needs as many governments as possible to stand with Ukraine, in order to maximise military support for his country, and he uses resilience discourse to help minimise existing divides. In particular, he emphasises that Ukraine's resilience and the qualities that he associates with it have brought countries together (which, in reality, is only partly true).<sup>163</sup> In an address on Ukrainian Independence Day on 24 August 2022, he commented that 'the courage of the Ukrainian people has inspired the whole world'. He further insisted, *inter alia*, that 'from now on, every history book will have a new section: "When Ukraine united the world"'.<sup>164</sup> Later, in a speech delivered on the first anniversary of the Russian invasion, he proclaimed that 'Ukraine has surprised the world. Ukraine has inspired the world. Ukraine has united the world. There are thousands of words to prove it, but a few will suffice. HIMARS, Patriot, Abrams, IRIS-T, Challenger, NASAMS, Leopard.'<sup>165</sup> In other words, resilience discourse is helping to make salient the imperative of unity and continued military support for Ukraine.

What these above examples further elucidate, thus, is that resilience is a 'concept at work' in the war in different ways and at different (interconnected) levels. The fact, moreover, that there are common themes in Zelensky's speeches and in the speeches of various Western leaders – including the idea that Ukrainian resilience is inspiring – signals the importance of thinking about intertextuality itself as a cross-scale concept involving different levels.

## Conclusion

According to McGreavy, 'a primary problem with resilience is that it ignores its own discursivity, which constrains how we might come to know and do resilience differently'.<sup>166</sup> This article has focused directly on this discursivity. Analysing the frequent use of resilience discourse in the context of the ongoing war in Ukraine, both internationally and domestically, it has not only made an original contribution to the study of resilience in conflict settings but has also demonstrated how we might indeed come to know resilience differently – as an important 'concept at work' – in terms of what it *does*. It has told a story of different resiliences, reflecting different systems and system dynamics, intersecting and working together at different scales, for specific political ends. Additionally, thus, it has offered a new way of thinking multi-systemically about resilience, and, by extension, about resilience and complexity.

It is important to acknowledge, however, that the frequent use of resilience discourse in relation to the war in Ukraine is not unproblematic. First, as in other contexts, it is essential to ask critical questions, such as 'resilience of what and for whom?'.<sup>167</sup> This article's analysis demonstrates that resilience has been selectively invoked in a way that prioritises Western policy objectives, while neglecting how countries in the Global South have been massively and unevenly affected by the

<sup>162</sup> President of Ukraine, 'The fate of the world order based on rules, humanity and predictability is now being decided in Ukraine: Address by President Volodymyr Zelensky' (20 February 2023), available at: <https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/zaraz-v-ukrayini-virishuyetsya-dolya-svitovogo-poryadku-sho-81125>.

<sup>163</sup> According to Miliband, the UK's former secretary of state for foreign and Commonwealth affairs, 'the war has certainly united the West, but it has left the world divided. And that rift will only widen if Western countries fail to address its root causes.' David Miliband, 'The world beyond Ukraine: The survival of the West and the demands of the rest', *Foreign Affairs*, 102:3 (2023), pp. 36–43 (p. 36).

<sup>164</sup> Zelensky, *A Message from Ukraine*, p. 113.

<sup>165</sup> President of Ukraine, 'Address by President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy "February. The year of invincibility"'.  
<sup>166</sup> Bridie McGreavy, 'Resilience as discourse', *Environmental Communication*, 10:1 (2016), pp. 104–21 (p. 105).

<sup>167</sup> Muriel Cote and Andrea J. Nightingale, 'Resilience thinking meets social theory: Situating social change in socio-ecological systems (SES) research', *Progress in Human Geography*, 36:4 (2012), pp. 475–89 (p. 475).

shocks and stressors of the war.<sup>168</sup> Not only does this lend support to the argument that ‘hierarchies of Whiteness continue to operate globally,’<sup>169</sup> but it also helps to explain why some countries in the Global South have not joined the West in condemning Russian aggression in Ukraine. As one commentator argues, ‘increasingly, the poor are saying to the rich that your priorities won’t mean more to us until ours mean much more to you.’<sup>170</sup> In other words, there are significant issues regarding the inclusiveness of the discourse.

Second, and relatedly, the war in Ukraine makes salient that resilience can easily become a homogenising discourse that dilutes individual experiences and the myriad ways that people deal with and manage adversity. Zelensky’s use of resilience particularly highlights this. In very difficult and challenging situations, including war and armed conflict, resilience – to reiterate an earlier point – is often an imperative rather than a choice,<sup>171</sup> yet this does not mean that individuals necessarily consider themselves to be resilient or feel a sense of resilience.<sup>172</sup> During the Russian assault on Avdiivka, for example, the city’s citizens had to increasingly rely on their local invincibility centre, which, for some of them, became their home.<sup>173</sup> Moreover, those who stay put in a particular area may do so due to lack of alternative options. This was the case for 88-year-old Anatoliy, who refused to leave Bakhmut. He had lost his wife, was all alone, and asked: ‘Where am I going to go? Let them kill me here.’<sup>174</sup> When resilience is presented, however, as being fundamental to the ultimate success of the war and, in Zelensky’s words, ‘the protection of our entire state,’<sup>175</sup> it potentially reduces the possibilities for citizens to *be* – at least outwardly and publicly – anything but strong and resilient. To be clear, this is not to minimise the strength and courage that many Ukrainians have shown. The point, rather, is simply to stress that a meta-narrative of resilience, like all narratives, ‘both illuminates and occludes’<sup>176</sup> – and what it occludes is also an important part of the war in Ukraine and of people’s lived experiences of it.

These issues notwithstanding, the war in Ukraine is now in its third year and the longer the conflict goes on, war fatigue among Ukrainians will almost certainly increase – as will divisions among Western powers over continued military support to the country. Factors such as the US presidential elections in November 2024 and the current war in Gaza will further test Western resolve and unity regarding Ukraine. It seems likely, therefore, that resilience will remain an important ‘concept at work’ in the war, but it remains to be seen whether and to what extent it will continue to work in the same way. Looking ahead, one possible scenario is that as the geopolitical landscape changes, new crises erupt, and Western priorities shift, resilience as a concept will start to do less ‘work’ internationally in relation to the war but take on, in parallel, an increased importance within Ukraine itself.

<sup>168</sup> Timothy Snyder, ‘Ukraine holds the future: The war between democracy and nihilism’, *Foreign Affairs*, 101:5 (2022), pp. 124–41 (p. 137).

<sup>169</sup> Marissa Jackson Sow, ‘Fighting for whiteness in Ukraine’, *Creighton Law Review*, 56:2 (2023), pp. 129–42 (p. 130).

<sup>170</sup> Howard W. French, ‘Why Ukraine is not a priority for the Global South’ (19 September 2023), available at: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/09/19/unga-ukraine-zelensky-speech-russia-global-south-support/>.

<sup>171</sup> See, e.g., Sean A. Kidd and Larry Davidson, ‘“You have to adapt because you have no other choice”: The stories of strength and resilience of 208 homeless youth in New York City and Toronto’, *Journal of Community Psychology*, 35:2 (2007), pp. 219–38; Pilav, ‘Before the war, war, after the war’, p. 34.

<sup>172</sup> Aine Fox, ‘British aid worker praises Ukrainians’ resilience but warns of collective trauma’ (21 February 2023), available at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/british-ukraine-kyiv-british-red-cross-africa-b2286301.html>.

<sup>173</sup> BBC, ‘Ukraine war: Avdiivka civilians cling on amid Russian assault’ (24 October 2023), available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-67196921>.

<sup>174</sup> Serhiy Horbatenko, ‘Water, dumplings, camaraderie: Volunteers help locals with life in Ukraine’s beleaguered Bakhmut’ (25 January 2023), available at: <https://www.rferl.org/a/ukraine-bakhmut-volunteers-help-locals/32239255.html>.

<sup>175</sup> President of Ukraine, ‘Everyone will be held to account for terror: Both those who kill and those who help to kill. Address by the President of Ukraine’ (15 January 2023), available at: <https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/vidpovidalnist-za-terror-bude-dlya-vsih-i-dlya-tih-hto-vbivay-80385?embed=true>.

<sup>176</sup> Susie O’Brien, ‘Resilience stories: Narratives of adaptation, refusal and compromise’, *Resilience*, 4:2–3 (2017), pp. 43–65 (p. 48).

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