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FROM REPORTING TO RESISTING: HOW THE GLOBAL SOUTH NAVIGATES THE BATTLE OF NARRATIVES

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THE BATTLE OF NARRATIVES

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The year 2025 marks a critical juncture in the evolving global balance of power. A discernible shift toward multipolarity has placed the Global South at the centre of international politics. The region is increasingly distancing itself from rigid Cold War style alignments and instead opting for flexible, issue-based partnerships that safeguard autonomy while reducing dependency on external powers. The diplomatic activism of ASEAN with the Gulf Cooperation Council, the strategic outreach of leaders across Asia, Europe and the Pacific, and the defence-heavy tone of forums such as the Shangri-La Dialogue exemplify this trend of recalibrated engagement.

While the term 'Global South' is used to highlight shared experiences of colonialism, neo-imperialism and the demand for equitable global governance, it risks flattening diverse realities and obscuring inequalities both between and within states. Scholars caution against reducing it to a singular narrative, noting that it is as much a dynamic process of political consciousness as it is a geographical or cultural categorisation. Countries like India, Brazil and China have emerged as leading voices in this sphere, pushing for greater representation and fairness in international institutions, yet asymmetries with the North persist, revealing the unfinished nature of this reordering.

Attention to the Global South today is multidimensional. On climate change, legal actions and transnational litigation have begun to gather pace, though power imbalances still restrict their effectiveness. In the field of gender, global feminist discourses often fail to capture the lived experiences of Southern women, even as digital spaces generate new challenges in the form of online violence. Migration flows demonstrate the unique vulnerabilities of South–South movement, with most forced displacement occurring within the region itself. Economically, the Global South continues to grapple with unequal exchanges that drain wealth, but at the same time, regional integration, renewable energy innovations and sovereignty in financial governance are becoming more pronounced as pathways to resilience.

Security cooperation has equally undergone transformation. Nations in the Global South are forging their own alliances, training regimes and discourses often drawing from models such as China's party-army system adopted in parts of Africa. Social media has emerged as a double-edged tool, deployed defensively against disinformation and offensively to push national narratives. The resulting "battle of narratives" is central to the struggle for legitimacy, where states and non-state actors alike compete to define problems, assign blame, and shape futures.

China's role in this contest is particularly striking. Its vast digital footprint, extending from telecommunications to satellite systems, has created a formidable alternative to the liberal order, often couched in the language of South–South solidarity. Huawei's global 5G projects, the BeiDou navigation system and media penetration through CGTN and Xinhua illustrate this expansion. The COVID-19 pandemic further exposed the sharp narrative contest between China and the US, producing reactive nationalisms that squeezed out rational dialogue and gave space to conspiracy theories. In this sense, crises have become both a test and a springboard for narrative dominance.

The Global North, meanwhile, continues to exert influence through digital colonialism, where technology giants headquartered in the US dominate infrastructures of connectivity, big data and surveillance. Historical legacies of colonisation also remain alive, as seen in the enduring inequalities facing Indigenous communities in Australia or the imperial entanglements of the Vietnam War, which blended overseas intervention with domestic racial politics in the United States. Such legacies demonstrate that the narrative contest is not confined to contemporary events but is deeply rooted in historical injustices that still shape present realities.

Several trends are becoming clear. Crises are increasingly used as opportunities to craft legitimacy, whether in the form of vaccine diplomacy or climate justice activism. Narratives anchored in local idioms and histories carry greater legitimacy than those imposed from outside, while frames invoking shared memories of decolonisation resonate widely across the South. Stories often travel faster than policies, shaping public opinion and diplomatic positions even before concrete action materialises.

What emerges is a picture of the Global South as an active shaper of world politics, no longer confined to the margins of global discourse. By resisting imposed stories and advancing indigenous perspectives, it asserts its agency in the making of a multipolar order. Yet the persistence of historical inequalities, digital authoritarianism, and structural asymmetries ensures that the contest over narratives will remain central to international politics in the years to come.