

# Narratives of Global Order and Re-Ordering from the Global South

## Narrativas de ordem global e reordenação do Sul Global

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**Abstract:** The global order is shifting from a unipolar world dominated by the West to a multipolar one with Asia emerging as a major centre of gravity. Narratives of order and re-ordering are powerful tools that shape policy agendas and enable local, national, and global actors to make sense of contemporary or historical orders or changes in those orders. Such narratives emanating from the Global North have dominated Social Science fields such as International Relations (IR). Global South narratives of order have received much less scholarly attention. This article contributes to filling this gap by examining narratives of global order and re-ordering from state and non-state actors in the Mashreq, India, the Maghreb (focusing on Morocco), and Iran. The cases provide a diverse array of narratives for interdisciplinary analysis, highlighting the importance of understanding global narratives from non-Western perspectives. Taking stock of such perspectives in policy and academic analyses is essential for methodological, conceptual, and theoretical pluralism in Social Sciences in general and for the task of globalizing the field of IR in particular. **Keywords:** narratives; order; re-ordering; global south; global IR.

**Resumo:** A ordem global está mudando de um mundo unipolar dominado pelo Ocidente para um mundo multipolar, com a Ásia emergindo como um importante centro de gravidade. As narrativas de ordem e reordenação são ferramentas poderosas que moldam as agendas políticas e permitem que os atores locais, nacionais e globais considerem as ordens contemporâneas ou históricas ou as mudanças nessas ordens. Essas narrativas, provenientes do Norte Global, dominaram os campos das ciências sociais, como as Relações Internacionais (RI). As narrativas de ordem do Sul Global têm recebido muito menos atenção acadêmica. Este artigo contribui para preencher essa lacuna ao examinar as narrativas de ordem global e



reordenação de atores estatais e não estatais no Mashreq, na Índia, no Magrebe (com foco no Marrocos) e no Irã. Os casos estudados oferecem uma gama diversificada de narrativas para análise interdisciplinar, destacando a importância de compreender as narrativas globais a partir de perspectivas não ocidentais. Fazer um balanço de tais perspectivas em análises políticas e acadêmicas é essencial para o pluralismo metodológico, conceitual e teórico nas Ciências Sociais, em geral, e para a tarefa de globalizar o campo das RI, em particular. **Palavras-chave:** narrativas; ordem; reordenação; sul global; RI global.

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## Introduction

The global order is undergoing significant systemic shifts, both geo-economically and geopolitically. The unipolar moment is now all but over; a multipolar world order is steadily emerging. While the centre of geopolitical military power remains in the West, particularly the United States, (geo-) economic power and growth are slowly but steadily moving to Asia – thanks to the rise of actors such as China, India and ASEAN. This global bifurcation – whereby the centre of geopolitical power is in the West while economic power is in Asia – is a distinct characteristic of the current historical moment, one unique in the annals of capitalist history (ARRIGHI, 1994).

Narratives are a powerful and common means through which local and global actors express their collective experiences, communicate and make sense of the ongoing global re-ordering. These narratives undergird policy agendas and enable policymakers and domestic audiences to perceive and accept such agendas. Various hegemonic and imperial actors have historically ordered the social world, including that of international politics, through these narratives. The latter emanate from both the “Global North” and “Global South”.

Recent examples of such narratives include the European Union’s “strategic autonomy” one, which seeks to reduce its dependence on the US for security, on China for trade and geo-economics, and on Russia for energy. The Donald Trump administration advanced, meanwhile, “America First” and “China threat” narratives, which resulted in the US’s trade war with the latter. The Joe Biden administration narrates a decisive global battle of “democracy versus authoritarianism” (read, good versus evil), in which the US and its allies stand for democracy and China, Iran and Russia for authoritarianism.

The Global South also produces such narratives. Geo-economically oriented Silk Roads narratives have contributed to the rise of the geography of overlapping Afro-Eurasian worlds (FISHER-ONAR; KAVALSKI, 2022). Such narratives started to emerge in the aftermath of the Soviet Union’s collapse in the geo-economic discourses of actors such as the Central Asian countries, Iran and Turkey (CORDIER, 1996). The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) was a significant boost here, as it seeks to “reconfigure” not only the US-dominated world order but also the overarching narrative associated with it (FOROUGH, 2019). With the advent of the Indo-Pacific geographic imaginary in the foreign policy discourse of Australia, India, Japan and the US in the late 2010s, the South Asian country particularly has increasingly come to view itself as a fulcrum in



a purported “new Cold War” (SAREEN, 2020) between the US and China. With the rise of Asia, countries such as Iran and Turkey are redefining themselves as a bridge or crossroads between East and West, seeking their roots in Asia. The Mashreq – the eastern part of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region – has produced various narratives of order, reflecting both regional actors’ desires to define their region and great powers’ efforts to shape the latter’s history and geography.

Despite the abundance and global significance of such narratives emanating from the Global South, International Relations scholarship – especially in its mainstream iterations – remains predominantly West-centric and focusses mostly on Global North narratives of order and re-ordering. Scholarly literature on the Global South’s narratives is sparse. This article seeks, then, to dissect some of the interlinked narratives of global order produced by both state and non-state actors in the MENA region as well as Asia. It examines narratives of order produced by actors in the Mashreq, India, Morocco, and Iran. The Mashreq section explores how the adoption of the Westphalian concept of “sovereignty” in postcolonial nationalist struggles and the weight of supranational ideologies would lead to peculiar forms of ordering in a “penetrated system” beset by the overlapping influence of local, national and international actors. The India section highlights how self-perceptions of the country’s rich civilisational tradition and its harsh colonial experiences have shaped world-order narratives promoting co-existence, sovereignty and an aversion to alliance politics. This has remained broadly consistent despite shifts away from non-alignment towards more active notions of multi-alignment since the end of the Cold War. The part on Morocco introduces the perspective of non-state actors, namely the Moroccan Marxist-Leninist Movement (MMLM), illustrating the connections between their production and adoption of alternative (counter)narratives on global order and both global/regional developments as well as path-dependent intra-actor dynamics. Finally, the Iran section discusses narratives of national, regional and global order by the current (1979–present) and previous (1925–1979) political systems ruling the country.

The selected cases provide a diverse array of narratives for the purposes of this interdisciplinary analysis. India and Iran are familiar state-centric cases, while the Mashreq study examines regional dynamics and processes. The Maghreb/Morocco case highlights how non-state actors, particularly radical-left movements, address and contest the dominant narratives vis-à-vis national and global processes of ordering – a topic that remains woefully understudied



in IR. Before delving into the cases, some conceptual clarity is needed.

### **Concepts: Narratives and Order**

The function of narratives, as briefly discussed earlier, is to provide a specific sense, logic or sequence to events and processes through recounting them. The sequence could be logical, chronological, thematic or follow other specific patterns. Narratives either “describe” events or “emplot” them based on a storyline, according to Harmon (2012). In a narrative plot, the priority is not the chronological order but the logical or principle-based order that lies at the core of the plot. The sequence may follow a variety of patterns, including ones logical, chronological or thematic in nature. It is conventionally argued that narration deals with time, and description with space (ibid.). In international politics, however, described “spaces” (i.e. global “geographies”) are often integrated in broader narratives of “time”, order or re-ordering (i.e. regional or global “histories”). In narratives of global order, therefore, geography and history are equally indispensable. Some Constructivists in IR have paid attention to the role of (intern)national narratives that are rooted in ideas, identities, and history (LEIRA; CARVALHO, 2016), but this scholarship remains largely Euro- and state-centric.

There are several ways in which narratives can function in international politics. On the one hand, they help state and non-state actors to perceive and explain causal relations. In this sense, “narrative as explanation” (SUGANAMI, 2008) can serve as a means of relaying how an event (e.g., the 2003 US invasion of Iraq) came to be by addressing the causal processes and relations behind it (e.g., the alleged Weapons of Mass Destruction, WMDs). Small states can use narratives tactically as part of their negotiation strategy with great powers (NARLIKAR, 2020). Silk Roads narratives can be mobilised to construct a civilisational sense of origin, destiny, and even “soul”, through the use of both history and infrastructure (FOROUGH, 2022). Narratives can also be used to create a sense of (inter)national opportunity, dream, or threat (e.g. the 'China threat' narrative for the US), or to create a cause for action (e.g., against global injustice, imperialism, interventionism). Sometimes narratives are used to hide an actor's true hegemonic or imperial intentions by providing a facade of value for policies (e.g., the case of Iran discussed below or the narrative of the US bringing democracy to Iraq in 2003).

The relationship between narratives and policies is dialectical, that is, policies and narratives construct and constrain each other. Sometimes, policies



come first, meaning, a particular policy is formulated and then narratives are constructed to justify that policy. This is because policy-making is the practice of deciding in the face of the undecidable and contingent nature of life and an unknown future. Because the future (and in many cases even the past and present) is difficult to fathom, policy-makers produce narratives to justify their policies. For example, when the US realised that the WMD narrative was not working, it re-narrated its 2003 invasion in terms of bringing democracy to Iraq. This narrative did not stand the test of time, so the US elites under Obama changed the narrative to one of turning away from the Middle East and its wars and pivoting to Asia. This move was based on the larger narrative of the threat posed by China to the US-led global order.

Conversely, sometimes narratives come first and then policies are developed out of them. For example, the many instances of anti-colonial and anti-imperialist narratives in the twentieth century around the world led slowly to the international policy of setting up the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) with its anti-imperialist agenda. Another example is the slow convergence of the specific China-related security narratives of India, the US, Japan and Australia into the international policy of establishing the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD). The QUAD, as a policy-oriented organisation, is in turn propagating narratives about how China poses a threat to the US-led global order. That is what we mean by this dialectical relation.

Both narratives and policies are intimately interlinked with various conceptions of national, regional, and global order or reordering. The word “order” can be defined in terms of how different units – people or things – relate to one another based on a particular placement, sequence, pattern or method. The opposite of order, in its basic sense, is “disorder”, which implies “chaos”. Etymologically meaning “emptiness” or “abyss”, “chaos” was used in Greek mythology to describe the void state that preceded the creation of the universe. From “chaos”, in this mythology, appears the “cosmos”. “Disorder”, therefore, is not etymologically the synonym of chaos (emptiness) but makes sense only when there is a certain order being disrupted. Despite their etymological differences, disorder and chaos are nowadays considered synonyms. Weil (2003) defines order as a “texture of social relationships”. Without this texture, we cannot properly understand the world. An order is therefore defined relationally. No individual can define themselves without implicitly or explicitly referencing the texture of their relationships. Nor can any family, neighbourhood, city – or, for that matter, any country or (nation-)state in global politics.



In IR scholarship, “order” becomes a different conceptual beast. In mainstream realist IR theory, Hobbes’s (1969) pre-social “State of Nature” is often assumed to be “anarchy” and “the war of all against all”. “Anarchy”, per Hobbes, is similar to both chaos (pre-social void) and disorder (disruption of order). One could argue that IR has its own creation myth vis-à-vis the international order. Crudely, it goes like this: in the beginning there was nothing, until the treaties of Westphalia were signed in 1648, which brought into being “states” and the “international” world. This Euro-centric myth at the core of IR is deeply flawed for two main reasons: First, non-European actors such as China, India and Iran had had histories of statehood for centuries, even millennia, before the notions of “the West” or “Westphalia” were even conceived. Second, the Westphalian treaties, as scholars such as Osiander (2001) have noted, were primarily focussed on issues pertaining to the Holy Roman Empire, and thus the “Westphalian myth” was created in the late 19th and early 20th centuries by political elites fixated on the concept of “sovereignty”. This Westphalian narrative, which is at the core of Social Sciences in general and the field of IR in particular, leads to what can be termed “methodological nationalism” (WIMMER ; SCHILLER, 2002).

It is important to note that this broad understanding of global order based on sovereignty is, in itself, an academic-political narrative largely Western in origin. Similarly, other international orders, such as the bipolar global one of the last century, can be viewed as narratives advocated by both Eastern and Western blocs, as well as by non-aligned actors. Therefore, in the specific cases explored in this article, we aim to move beyond the Westphalian myth and avoid methodological nationalism by focussing on both state and non-state actors (such as radical-left movements) as well as by incorporating the pre-Westphalian geographies and histories of the actors at stake, such as India and Iran, as part of their narratives of global re-ordering. This approach also enables us to circumvent the problem of state-centrism in IR by examining the civilisational dynamics (in the case of India and Iran) and non-state actors (in that of Morocco) that indirectly influence, or at least contest, global and regional orders and institutions.

The importance of the institutional dimension in narratives of global order cannot be exaggerated. An international order, according to Mearsheimer (2019, p. 9), is “an organized group of international institutions that help govern the interactions among the member states.” For the purposes of this article, we define the “global order” as the both formal and informal rules and





arrangements outlining how international actors should and should not relate to each other, as well as actually do. Beyond institutional frameworks, order is also based on and structured by legal and normative principles.

It is important to avoid conflating normative ideals of order with the realities of it. As such, we steer clear of reinforcing the Westphalian myth as well as false dichotomies between global order on the one hand and chaos, war and disorder on the other. Mearsheimer reminds us, importantly, that in global politics “order does not mean peace and stability. In other words, it is not the opposite of disorder, a term that conveys chaos and conflict” (MEARSHEIMER, 2019, p. 9). While concepts such as “war”, “peace”, “stability”, “balance of power” and “legitimacy” relate to and can serve as components of international order, they are not synonyms or antonyms for it.

Global narratives emerge in relation to these orders and try to make sense of the past (history), present (status quo), and future (ideals). Such narratives include geographical descriptions and historical plots, and outline how local, national and international actors should or should not relate to each other and what actions they should or should not take. In this sense, world-order narratives themselves have an ordering capacity or function. If they gain enough traction, they can alter policy behaviours (HAMPSON; NARLIKAR, 2022; NARLIKAR, 2021), contribute to shifting norms and reshape the power relations underpinning the global order (KREBS, 2015).

### **The Mashreq**

The Mashreq, the eastern part of the MENA region, was a hotbed of contested order in the post-WWII decades and a crucible of related narratives against the backdrop of the emerging Cold War and its effect on the developing world (HALLIDAY, 2005). The demise of the Ottoman Empire had led to the establishment of territorial states under the mandate system, a tutelage of the British and French Empires. The region’s emerging states have been described by Brown (1984) as a “penetrated system” beset by the overlapping influence of local, national and international actors: too weak to fend off external influence and muster full sovereignty over pockets of local autonomy while challenged by supranational ideologies such as pan-Arabism and pan-Islamism yet strong enough to prevent full control by foreign powers, hold them at bay and even manipulate them to one’s own advantage at times. The Mashreq is thus a case study par excellence for the tactical use of narratives by small states



in negotiations with great powers and for the role of civilisational dynamics and “soul” creation (FOROUGH, 2022) in ordering – one that mainstream IR scholarship has not sufficiently taken on board to date, as discussed above.

The interwar period had seen the rising influence of Western ideologies such as nationalism, socialism and fascism through their adaptation by local ideologues and nascent movements (TIBI, 1990; NORDBRUCH, 2011). This included the Muslim Brotherhood, which formulated a modern Islamic response to the challenges of secular ideologies by adapting the organisational principles of contemporary mass movements in Europe (MITCHELL, 1993). Decolonisation after WWII brought the widespread adoption of the import substitution industrialisation (ISI) approaches that had become prevalent in the developing world at that time. National revolutions swept away the old regimes of the landed classes that had grown rich via the quasi-colonial export trade of tropical commodities such as cotton, silk and tobacco since the late Ottoman Empire (ISSAWI, 1982). The political form that replaced them was populist authoritarianism mobilising people via ISI and land reform and legitimising itself via the ideology of “Arab nationalism” and a narrative of resistance against the State of Israel founded in 1948 (WATERBURY, 1983).

Agriculture, concentration of land ownership and lack of industrialisation were a powerful fulcrum for social grievances and political change. Another factor herein emerged with the change of the global energy mix from coal to oil in the post-WW2 decades (YERGIN, 2011). The royalty agreements that had been concluded with international oil companies were questioned, while debates about the outright nationalisation of oil resources gained pace with the related attempts of Mossadegh in Iran and the agitation of the exiled Saudi oil executive Tariki that contributed to the foundation of OPEC in 1960 (DIETRICH, 2017; VITALIS, 2007; WOLFE-HUNNICUTT, 2021). If “sovereignty” was originally a Euro-centric Westphalian notion, it had found eager adopters in the postcolonial struggles of the Mashreq – where resource nationalism imbued the concept with local agency, albeit only to be simultaneously challenged by supranational narratives.

In this heady mix of circumstances, Gamal Abd Al Nasser managed to establish Egypt as a leading power both in the region and beyond by drawing on narratives of anti-colonialism, Arab nationalism and of socialism. His political victory in the Suez crisis of 1956 greatly enhanced his status. US intervention forced the British, French and Israelis to withdraw their troops from the Suez Canal, which Nasser had nationalised in that year. The ISI development model



delivered high growth rates and saw the emergence of a bureaucratic middle class in the 1950s and 1960s, before it later came crashing down under the weight of debt and macro-economic imbalances. Nasser developed into the leading figure of Arab nationalism, even engendering a short-lived union with Syria between 1958 and 1961: the United Arab Republic. In the region, he adopted a belligerent stance against Israel and the Gulf monarchies. With Saudi Arabia, he even engaged in a proxy war in Yemen in the early 1960s.

Beyond the Arab world, he was a major figure in the NAM after the Bandung Conference of 1955. His three-circle theory of an Arab, African and Islamic sphere of Egyptian influence formulated leadership aspirations beyond the immediate MENA region. It constituted a prominent example of a locally generated narrative of order. If there ever was a country that came close to some sort of regional hegemony in the MENA, it was Egypt between 1956 and 1967. However, in the region's penetrated system it was difficult if not impossible to achieve the signums of a hegemon – the ability to muster overwhelming military force if necessary yet setting accepted rules via soft power to make such an outcome as unlikely as possible (GAUSE, 2020). Alternative power centres not only existed with the conservative monarchies in the Gulf, Jordan and Morocco; the Baath regimes in Iraq and Syria formed powerful both political and ideological competition, while rivalling each other too (KERR, 1971; KIENLE, 1990).

Nasserism declined with defeat in the Six-Day War against Israel in 1967 and the failure of the ISI development model that ultimately led to the debt crisis in the developing world of the 1980s. Nasser was succeeded by Sadat; Arab socialism now gave way to the economic liberalisation of the *infitah* (“opening of the door” to private investment in Egypt). Populist authoritarianism was gradually replaced by a bureaucratic version that sought to demobilise the population, implement economic reform and relied on a smaller regime coalition (HINNEBUSCH, 2015). Internationally, Sadat expelled Soviet military advisors and switched his allegiance to the US and the Western camp, demonstrating with dexterity the tactical use of narratives by a small state. His rapprochement with Israel via the Camp David Accords allowed for a peace dividend and increased inflows of external rents and aid. Meanwhile, the plight of Nasserism and the social grievances brought about by neoliberal reform caused a dialectical rise of Islamist movements in both Egypt and beyond (KEPEL, 2002), showing the powerful weight of civilisational dynamics and “soul”-making in regional-order construction that would persist in the decades that followed.



One could argue that the three-circles theory and the adaptation of national and socialist narratives during the Nasser era conveniently served to justify traditional ambitions of Egyptian power projections in the region. In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century the Egyptian ruler Mohamed Ali challenged his Ottoman patrons in Syria, helped them to quell a Wahhabi rebellion on the Arabian Peninsula and had independent power designs of his own in the Sudan from where the vital water supplies of the Nile reached Egypt. All three sub-regional spaces were also the target of Nasserist policies. Yet order narratives were more than supporting camouflage for pre-existing national interests. Narratives and policies have been in a dialectical relationship, constructing and constraining each other as we have argued the introduction. Pan-Arabism in particular developed a gravitational force that rulers could not ignore and that pushed them to optimistically overreach at times. The short-lived United Arab Republic with Syria was with a country that Nasser only knew from books and third parties. Later the oil boycott of Arab oil producers in the wake of the Yom Kippur War 1973 was not just a sovereign decision of the respective producer countries. They clearly had to heed pan-Arab sensitivities in their decision-making process and conveyed as much to their Western interlocutors when those pressed them to end the embargo (WOERTZ, 2013). When transitioning away from Nasserism to a more Western leaning course with a liberalized economy Sadat used Islamic narratives to push back the leftist forces within the ruling party, the Arab Socialist Union and allowed the Muslim Brotherhood to operate again within narrowly defined parameters. He also adapted the changing reform narratives of the Bretton Woods institutions and adapted them to local audiences. However, once again new order narratives and the growing attraction of pan-Islamism since the 1970s were not mere ideological tools, but also exerted an influence over Egyptian governments and their policies as subsequent events would show.

### **India: The Intersection of Civilisational, Postcolonial and Global Narratives**

The independence of the Indian subcontinent in 1947 marked the beginning of one of the great world-order shifts of the 20th century, “acting as a signpost for the new liberal post-Second World War global order that rallied against colonialism and racism” (THAKUR, 2019, p. xii). The coming to power of the Indian nationalist movement heralded the beginning of decolonisation and



brought new narratives of world order to the fore. This positioned India as a critical player in forging the world-order narratives underpinning the NAM during the Cold War (HARSHE, 1990, p. 399). Although New Delhi's interpretation of world order clearly evolved throughout the course of Cold War bipolarity and particularly into the post-Cold War 'unipolar moment' and emerging multipolar system, enduring features remain with regards to how India positions itself vis-à-vis emerging forms of great power competition and how its policymakers interpret and respond to specific crises such as the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

India's world-order narratives were perhaps most clearly articulated by its first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, but drew on a longer-term understanding of the country's civilisational identity while combining elements of Buddhism, Marxism and the writings of Mohandas Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore. India's rich civilisational heritage and tradition of non-violence shaped its self-understanding as an ethical power (CHACKO, 2012, p. 4–12), blending with its colonial experience and perceptions of the emerging bipolar world order. Its narratives of world order and approach to the latter would thus be underpinned by anti-imperialism, anti-racism and non-alignment (CHACKO, 2012).

These narratives drew in particular on notions central to the "idea of India" as a civilisation state. These included "unity in diversity", which as Wojczewski (2019) notes, is central to that idea of India, and refers primarily to the country's status as a secular yet highly pluralistic federal state in which diverse communities retain their unique identities while simultaneously co-existing and thriving (KHILNANI, 1999, p. 167–178) – having done so for centuries, indeed. This extends outwards into a vision of global order in which non-violence, non-discrimination and polycentrism create possibilities for peace without resorting to the traditional power politics of alliances and formal blocs (ABRAHAM, 2008, p. 208–209; WOJCZEWSKI, 2019, p. 186). This linkage is highlighted in Nehru's writings:

It was India's way in the past to welcome and absorb other cultures. That is much more necessary today, for we march to the one world of tomorrow where national cultures will be intermingled with the international culture of the human race [...]. Thus we shall remain true Indians and Asiatics, and become at the same time good internationalists and world citizens. (CHACKO, 2012, p. 51)



This narrative thus held that India, in drawing on its civilisational history, was uniquely positioned to drive forwards a polycentric world order based on the amelioration of fear and friendship and the attainment of freedom and social justice (CHACKO, 2012; UPADHYAYA, 1987, p. 3). The 1954 “Sino-Indian Panchsheel Agreement”, for instance, leveraged India’s and China’s shared Buddhist traditions to articulate a vision of peaceful co-existence (INDIA, 2004), one extending beyond their bilateral relations to articulate a wider vision of world order based on trust, friendship and goodwill (CHACKO, 2012, p. 46). These narratives, combined with broader appeals to Afro-Asianism, resonated with the leaders of newly independent states who saw the emerging threat the Cold War posed to their hard-fought independence. India, in consequence, established a position of moral leadership within the NAM during its early years, and indeed by 1956 the country “had won widespread respect and goodwill for her attitudes and achievements” (SPEAR, 1978, p. 420).

India’s non-alignment narratives were nonetheless forced to adapt to major international re-orderings throughout the course of the Cold War. Beginning with the 1962 Sino-Indian War, when India received American and Soviet aid, its narratives began to shift away from notions of distance from the superpowers towards those advocating for “equal proximity” and engagement with the possibility of fluctuations. Indira Gandhi’s tenure as prime minister brought India closer to the Soviet bloc, as did the country’s intervention in the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War – coming amid criticism from members of the broader nonaligned movement (UPADHYAYA, 1987). This forced a more explicit incorporation of “enlightened self-interest” henceforth (KEENLEYSIDE, 1980, p. 461–463; WOJCZEWSKI, 2019).

The end of bipolarity disrupted many of India’s assumptions about the global order and the country’s place within it. The Russian Federation could not fulfil the strategic role played by its Soviet predecessor; the opening up of the Indian economy and the brief emergence of a unipolar world order furthermore forced a rethinking of relations with the West – and the US in particular (GANGULY, 2014, p. 87). This has led many to suggest that India was forced to discard the ideological baggage of non-alignment and adopt a pragmatic understanding of world order that would enable it to more effectively engage with the international system (GANGULY, 2003; MOHAN, 2004). The end of the “unipolar moment” and rise of a multipolar world order have created opportunities for India to increasingly pursue the polycentricity it called for during the earlier non-alignment period, with it manoeuvring between the international system’s



diverse poles (MUKHERJEE, 2020; TELLIS, 2022) by more actively seeking out bilateral and multilateral strategic partnerships.

In 2020, External Affairs Minister Jaishankar described non-alignment as “a term of a particular era and geopolitical landscape” (INDIA..., 2020), with the contemporary international system compelling India to now take more risks and proactive positions on issues such as connectivity, terrorism, climate change and maritime security. More recently, this has translated into increasingly assertive calls for India to act as the fulcrum in the emerging great power competition between the US and China. Such calls advocate growing alignment with the US, while warning against neutrality in a new Cold War setting that positions the Indian subcontinent “at the heart of the struggle” (SAREEN, 2020).

At the same time, the dominance of the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) domestically since 2014 has led to growing claims that world order narratives emanating from New Delhi are evolving to reflect this domestic political reality and project a more assertive stance. For instance, (SRIVASTAVA, 2023, p. 458-461) suggests that the BJP’s dominance since 2014 has created ‘a departure from the existing civilizational claims of Nehruvian India,’ replaced by a more muscular domestic narrative (CHATTERJEE; DAS, 2023, p. 492). In this view, the homogenising tendencies of the ruling party’s *Hindutva* ideology is shaping an ambivalence towards upholding inclusive values (SRIVASTAVA, 2023, p. 459), while representations of a greater *Akhand Bharat* (undivided India) such as that displayed in the new Indian Parliament building inject ‘religious and cultural overtones’ into India’s interactions with its neighbours (CHATTERJEE; DAS, 2023, p. 490). Indeed, as (HALL, 2019, p. 148) notes, the Modi government sought to ‘recast[.] Indian foreign policy in Hindu nationalist language,’ particularly by articulating India as a *vishwaguru* (world teacher) and framing Indian foreign policy through terms such as *samman* (dignity and honour), *samvad* (engagement and dialogue), *samriddhi* (mutual prosperity), *suraksha* (regional and international security) and *sanskriti evam sabhyata* (meaning cultural and civilisational ties) (HALL, 2019, p. 149). In doing so these concepts similarly draw on civilisational symbols in the context of India’s ambitions of being a ‘strong and respected world power’ (HALL, 2019, p. 9).

At the same time, the BJP’s efforts to reshape the language surrounding how India sees itself in the wider world do not appear to have had a transformative impact either on Indian foreign policy (HALL, 2019), or indeed the narratives underpinning key components of foreign policy. As Amrita (NARLIKAR, 2022)



highlights, the Modi government's narratives in trade negotiations have displayed long-term continuities with previous administrations in terms of its scepticism towards trade and general defensiveness, drawing on notions of powerlessness and poverty to advocate reforming international trade rules. Indeed, as (HALL, 2019, p. 148) argues, the BJP's attempts to modify the language of foreign policy appear to reflect domestic political considerations, particularly in 'consolidating the idea of Modi as the embodiment of resurgent national pride.' As Basrur (2017) suggests, this has not translated into a more muscular BJP foreign policy as has been widely predicted, with India following similar approaches to strategic partnerships and to its rivals China and Pakistan as compared to Modi's predecessors. This suggests that while components of Indian world order narratives have witnessed incremental shifts, the fundamental pillars driving how Indian policymakers make sense of and interact with world order retain important continuities.

Indeed, rather than representing a clean break or transformative shift from the past, contemporary Indian policy circles see elements of continuity in the enduring "essence and logic" of concepts such as non-alignment, though qualifying that their principles "have to be applied in a vastly transformed international landscape" (WOJCZEWSKI, 2019, p. 185). Indeed, during the same 2020 speech in which Jaishankar described non-alignment as "of a particular era", he at the same time re-affirmed the core principles that underpinned those erstwhile world-order narratives – such as independence and an aversion to alliances (INDIA..., 2020). India continues to value a multipolar world order characterised by mutual respect and the peaceful resolution of disputes, with the country safeguarding its own interests through multi-alignment (JACOB, 2022).

India's "strategic ambivalence" to the Russian invasion of Ukraine is illustrative of this point. Its refusal to condemn Russian aggression and decision to buy discounted Russian oil, all while simultaneously making veiled calls for peace, have kept India firmly outside of either "camp". Sceptical of Western "moral outrage", which it deems hypocritical given colonial legacies (INDIA'S..., 2022), India has responded acerbically to calls for it to condemn Russia's behaviour (JACOB, 2022); meanwhile, it has simultaneously engaged with the US to balance China (TELLIS, 2022). In this sense, the ideals encapsulated within its world-order narratives retain a degree of stickiness, with core tenets that are significantly shaped by India's domestic and historical experiences. While India is increasingly able to articulate these narratives from a position





of strength given its own rise within the context of an emerging world order that better enables the country to operate according to these ideals, the BJP's recent attempts to reinvigorate world order narratives and reinvent foreign policy appear to have run up against the stickiness of underlying Indian world order narratives.

To conclude, Indian narratives of the ideas and realities of international order have to some extent evolved from the largely ethical, Afro-Asianism-informed non-alignment thinking of the Nehru period to the more assertive post-Cold War favouring of multi-alignment, with a gradual shift towards a framing couched in national interests and changes to the specific civilisational tropes deployed towards those more commonly associated with *Hindutva*. However, the core tenets of India's world-order narratives – its privileging of independence as a postcolonial state, its aversion to power blocs and its preference for polycentricity or multipolarity – have remained remarkably consistent since 1947 despite global and recent domestic shifts.

### **Morocco / The Maghreb: Radical-Left Narratives**

The western part of the MENA, the Maghreb, was not immune to the reverberation of events and narratives stemming from the eastern ones of the region. One major development here was the rise of Nasserist pan-Arabist ideologies, which influenced politics throughout the region. The ensuing disillusionment caused by the Arab defeat in 1967 created an ideological vacuum that was keenly felt in the Maghreb countries, where the political optimism of the post-independence years would be dispelled by the harsh realities of authoritarian politics.

These new circumstances, combined with the French protests of 1968, created the perfect breeding ground for the emergence of radical-left movements throughout the Maghreb. Composed mostly of younger intellectuals and students, and influenced by the radical Maoist discourses produced after May 1968, a number of such groups emerged throughout the region. They were opposed to what they saw as the reformist and conciliatory positions of the traditional socialist and communist parties. In a clandestine manner, these organisations published a large number of pamphlets and magazines in favour of radical revolutionary change. Quickly establishing themselves as a potential political threat through their domination of campuses and student unions, further to their attempts at organising the working class, these organisations



were soon subject to the repressive wrath of the state.

The case of Morocco is illustrative in this regard. While the emergence of the radical left there took place against the backdrop of the abovementioned regional and global developments, this growing influence would be mediated through national circumstances. Most importantly, the political situation was marked by the bloody repression of the March 1965 Casablanca protests and the kidnapping and disappearance of leftist opposition leader Mehdi Benbarka. In that tense context, which would come to be known as the “Years of lead” (1963–1989), the first radical organisations emerged from the country’s two historical left-wing political parties: the Union Nationale des Forces Populaires and the Parti de la Liberation et du Socialisme (BOUAZIZ, 1993). The newly formed secretive organisations of the MMLM, 23 Mars and Ila al-Amam, focussed a lot of their efforts on the production of innovative narratives critiquing the dominant ones produced by both the Moroccan monarchy and its historic opposition (The Mouvement National parties, especially the UNFP). These dominant narratives took Moroccan independence as a foundational achievement that each side tried to claim for itself. The traditional opposition parties argued publicly for an end to the monarchy’s domination over the political field and demanded a more democratic constitution. The monarchy’s dominant narrative, meanwhile, claimed that the country was already enjoying its own kind of democracy – one that was compatible with its fundamental values (monarchism and Islam) and was gradual enough to not cause social upheaval (EL AYADI, 2015, p. 28–29).

Against this background, Morocco’s radical-left organisations questioned the reality of the country’s independence, sustaining that scepticism through the production of causal narratives that highlighted what they viewed as the “compradorial” nature of the regime and Morocco’s position within the imperialist world order of the Cold War era as well as the reformism of the existing political opposition (ILA AL-AMAM, 1974). Similarly, they also critiqued and rejected the vision that both the monarchy and the opposition parties shared at the time about Morocco’s geographic size. These radical-left groups instead advocated for self-determination and independence for the Sahara, which they thought would form a revolutionary epicentre later leading to radical transformation both in Morocco and the wider Maghreb region (ILA AL-AMAM, 1971). Known as the “revolutionary epicentre for the Arab revolution”, this narrative advocated for armed struggle in the Sahara, as a path towards the formation of the revolutionary proletarian party that the MMLM



was aiming for. This differed from the prevalent pre-existing perspective within the organisation, which viewed the creation of a proletarian party, in line with Leninist conceptions, as a precondition for armed struggle.

For a movement rooted in Marxist-Leninist ideology, narratives about the two main states ruled by communist parties at the time, the USSR and People's Republic of China respectively, are significant in more senses than one. On one level, they helped shape the general world-order vision that radical-left actors in Morocco still hold to this day. Whether they portrayed either of those countries as a valid representative of a revolutionary proletarian political project or as a fallen revisionist bureaucratic state, and even though the MMLM was not tied to any form of material or symbolic support from either of the two, such narratives had significant implications regardless for the ideological and strategic orientation of these new oppositional actors. Arguments about the correctness of each experience were central to some key debates within the movement, such as those regarding the priority to be placed on adopting a Leninist party structure (ILA AL-AMAM, 1973) and on whether that form would be useful to advancing their aims in relation to the fluctuations within the Moroccan political landscape over the years.

On its inception, the MMLM had originally held a generally negative view of both the USSR and the PRC, viewing the respective post-Stalin and post-Mao states as plagued by revisionism and lacking in legitimacy (HILALI, 2016). The movement would, within the space of a few years, come to hold a more positive position on the USSR, considering it to be “a tactical ally to national liberation movements”, a shift reportedly influenced by Soviet support for the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) (HILALI, 2016). The PFLP had gained significant prestige within the Arab Left through the figure of the *feda'i* fighter and its association with armed struggle. That symbolism gave the PFLP's leadership a significant aura of revolutionary legitimacy, which shaped the broader view of radical-left movements in the MENA region as far afield as Morocco. While not Nasserist, their narratives often adopted a pan-Arabist position that differed from earlier ones in emphasising the idea of unity through the revolutionary overthrowing of the region's regimes. The Palestinian struggle was an important part of their world-order narratives.

There were also failed narrative shifts attempted within the MMLM. A notable one was in relation to China. A faction within Ila-al-Amam published an anonymous pamphlet advocating for the adoption of the “Three Worlds Theory” promoted under Deng Xiaoping (HILALI, 2016). In line with that



theory, the document argued that both superpowers, the US and the USSR, were equally exploitative imperialisms. It described the USSR as a “socialist imperialist power”, and the PRC as the Third World’s only true ally against the two global superpowers. This narrative was not able to gain prominence. The organisation’s original position viewed the rise of Deng as a revisionist overthrowing of the Maoist line, not unlike its earlier negative stance on the USSR’s post-Stalin leadership. One difference here was that this unsuccessful pro-China narrative lacked entanglement with other influential narratives that might support its diffusion within the movement.

These cases highlight the importance of considering the interaction between narratives emanating from, and aimed at, different analytical levels (local, regional, global). Global order narratives can have significant implications not just for states, but also for oppositional actors. For the latter, these narratives are crafted with a dual purpose: to challenge state-centric visions of order and as building blocks deployed within internal discussions and debates regarding organizational issues and strategic direction. For radical-left actors contesting state narratives, the world-order visions that they produce are central for determining their identity and shaping their political orientation.

In a sense, the trajectory of the MMLM, its view on organisational forms and on armed struggle during the initial years of its existence were all shaped by the narratives that the movement adopted regarding the main actors in the socialist camp – as well as by their potential implications for the political and social developments occurring both in Morocco and the MENA region. The narratives internally produced regarding past revolutionary experiences and their world-order implications were not just a way for the MMLM to situate itself in the world and in history, they were also key elements in shaping and adjusting its ideological and strategic orientations on very concrete issues (organisational form, political violence, etc). These narratives were interpreted and re-interpreted through the prism of the movement’s own trajectory and the real or perceived hurdles and opportunities then faced. Once adopted, such narratives became a core part of its organisational identity, and thus tended to be quite hard to contest or modify without significant exogenous shocks. In this sense, narratives of global order produced beyond the state by movements challenging its hegemony, even when unsuccessful in their challenge, can still be impactful. By affecting the trajectory of the movement and its organisational choices, these non-state narratives are also impacting the dialectic of its confrontation with the state, shaping it through the responses that it produces



to counter their challenge.

### **Iran: The Intersection of Narrative, Empire and Order**

With at least 26 centuries of centralised statehood and imperial expansions and contractions, Iran has a long history that deeply informs its sense of what constitutes (or should constitute) its domestic, regional and global “textures of social relationships”. The Iranian concept of “civilisation” is often shorthand for a romanticised iteration of its past empires, a narrative tradition that Iran shares with other actors from both the Global South and Global North. Its political elites, past and present, continuously re-invent the “idea of Iran” (GNOLI, 1989) based on these civilisational-imperial narratives. Idealised narratives of past Iranian empires as providers of global and regional security would be mobilised by both the current and former political systems to legitimise the country’s contemporary geopolitical claims as a security powerhouse in the region or to celebrate its role in the world of ancient Silk Roads – therewith helping formulate and justify contemporary geo-economic policies.

The Pahlavi Monarchy, which governed from 1925 to 1979, selectively drew upon the zeniths of the pre-Islamic imperial eras of Iran, such as the Achaemenid Empire (550 BCE–330 BCE), at the expense of the long Islamic history of the country and the numerous periods in which it was occupied and dntrodden by other imperial powers like the Mongol, Greek, Turkic and Uzbek Empires. Mohammad Reza Shah, who ruled Iran from 1941 to 1979, thus aimed to represent himself an idealized Persian emperor and sought to create an imperial and powerful image of the country by throwing lavish international empire-themed parties (STEELE, 2020) and buying extensive amounts of weaponry from the US. This national sense of order had implications for the wider region, too. The Shah promoted Iran as the “region’s sheriff” and “policeman of the Gulf”, responsible for maintaining the regional order and its stability. As Iran found itself drawn into the Cold War’s bipolar world, the Shah aligned with the West and brutally cracked down on leftist movements at home and even abroad. He thus conducted military operations in the region against leftist rebellions, such as the 1973 intervention in Oman. Not unlike his own situation, the Sultan of Oman had been installed through a British coup and was now in danger. The leftist rebellion was crushed. The Shah's regional hegemonic policies was thus given a façade of value, namely, anti-Communism, to ingratiate himself with the US.



The 1979 Revolution dethroned the Pahlavis. The Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) came to power and revolutionised both the internal and external dynamics of Iranian politics and its sense of order. Domestically, the new elites began to emphasise the Islamic dimensions of Iran’s history and denigrated empires both domestically and globally. The very idea of empire became taboo: it symbolised, in the new IRI official discourse, exploitation, hegemony and disenfranchisement. This view would affect the country’s foreign policy henceforth.

The most resonant foreign policy slogan that the 1979 Revolution produced was “Neither West, Nor East, [but] the Islamic Republic”. The contemporary empires that represented such hegemony and exploitation, in the view of the country’s new political elites, were the two Cold War blocs. The US was officially portrayed in a more negative light as it had been a staunch supporter of the Shah and brought him to power via the 1953 coup, which had served to bring down the only democratically elected government in the history of the country. Tensions with both empires hence grew, but especially the US.

To institutionalise this foreign policy, Iran joined the NAM in 1979. The country became one of its most outspoken supporters. Soon after the Revolution, Iraq invaded Iran and started a brutal war that would last eight years. Both the West and the USSR (directly and indirectly) would support Saddam Hussein with weapons and intelligence, a fact that only further solidified the IRI’s antagonism towards the two empires. With the eventual collapse of the USSR and the start of the unipolar moment of American hegemony, US–Iran relations became even more contentious.

The US now did not have its major arch-rival and could engage the Middle East more freely and easily – or such was the idea. Democratisation and the War on Terror became the US’s new foreign policy narratives under the Bush administration. The events of 9/11 plus the invasions of Afghanistan in 2001 and of Iraq in 2003 in the name of bringing democracy to the two countries were critical moments having serious consequences for the ensuing regional and global reordering, including the IRI–US relations. The IRI felt that it could be next on the US’s list of countries to invade. This perception was further solidified after the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Being surrounded by the North American country in the south (US bases in Persian Gulf), east (US military in Afghanistan and Pakistan), and west (US military in Iraq), IRI officials felt they had to take the initiative – especially after the US rejected the Iranians’ offer of direct negotiations to settle their differences (KESSLER, 2021).



Overconfident after the quick takeover of both Afghanistan and Iraq, and optimistic that those wars would end quickly, the US believed Iran to be surrounded and weak. Iran took the initiative by solidifying its power in Iraq and Lebanon (and later on, Syria and Yemen), especially among the Shia segments of the populations. It also created other proxy forces and partnerships in the region and began to reconfigure the regional geopolitical order by devising and leading of the so-called “axis of resistance” (FOROUGH, 2021a). According to the IRI’s official narrative, this comprises state and non-state actors aiming to resist US and Israeli imperialism in the wider Middle East region. In this case, we see a certain set of events and policies in real life being explained through an anti-imperialist narrative.

In the meantime, China, India, Brazil and other Global South actors had (geo-)economically arisen while Russia had geopolitically returned as a great power. With the comprehensive power of the US declining, Iranian officials began to celebrate the birth of a new multipolar and “post-Western” (ZARIF, 2016) world order and increase their strategic proximity to these Global South actors. This narrative of global re-ordering was institutionalised in Iran’s “Look East” or “Pivot to Asia” policy (FOROUGH, 2021b), which has both geopolitical and geo-economic dimensions to it. Here, one can see the emergence of a global narrative – the rise of the Global South – produced by Iranian elites, among others, to make sense of the dynamics of the global reordering.

Geopolitically, as described above, Iran has been busy constructing the axis of resistance in its immediate neighbourhood in Asia, aiming to increase its own security power. The IRI portrays itself as an anti-imperialist defender of the “downtrodden” (*mostaz’afaan* in Farsi) in the region. However, this is, for all intents and purposes, a cover for Iran’s own regional-imperial ambitions, as indicated previously. It is no wonder that Iran’s current elites, despite their erstwhile anti-imperial slogans, constantly remind regional and global rivals (as did the Pahlavis) that the country has been a dominant regional actor for the last 3,000 years, a thinly veiled reference to the country’s own imperial history. Just as US regional interventions were conducted under the guise of bringing “democracy” and “freedom”, Iran’s geopolitical endeavours are propped up by narratives of “anti-imperialism” and “defending the downtrodden”. Such narratives provide a veneer of legitimacy for policies for power-driven policies.

Geo-economically, IRI elites promote the narrative of their country being a geographic civilisational “crossroads” (FOROUGH, 2021c). This geo-economic agenda also borrows heavily from Iran’s civilisational-imperial history,



particularly its role in the ancient Silk Roads. This has both ideational and material/policy dimensions to it. Ideationally, this narrative is based on the premise that Iran has served – as Rouhani (2018), the former Iranian president, said in his 2018 United Nations speech – as a link between East and West as well as North and South. Materially, Iran has been developing policies to make itself an integral part of major infrastructure initiatives, such as China’s BRI for East-West connectivity as well as the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) – an initiative led by Iran, Russia and India – for South-North connectivity.

Iran’s narratives of domestic, regional and global order are in one way or another premised upon the notion of empire – and more recently “civilisation” as a short hand for empire. Even Iran’s imperial ambitions are framed in anti-imperial discourses. Therefore, the country’s contemporary history can, according to Axworthy (2016), in many ways be explained in terms of “empire of the mind”. Despite the revolutionary and anti-imperialist 1979 slogan of “Neither West, Nor East”, Iran strives to be a regional empire in all but name.

Not only is history retold to fit this agenda but also (pre-Westphalian) geography re-imagined. To create a geography that would go beyond the current Westphalian borders and could house the IRI’s new hegemonic ambitions, Iranian elites have come up with the idea of “the Greater (cultural) Iran” (FOROUGH, 2022). This they define as areas that were culturally formed or influenced by the former Iranian empires and which the country’s current geopolitical and geo-economic agendas should now focus on. Such a narrative was decreed by Iran’s supreme leader, Ayatollah Khamenei himself, in top-down fashion. The job of the executive branch is to develop policies that help make it a geopolitical and geo-economic reality. Thus, Iranian elites re-imagine and re-narrate their cultural and historical geography as a geopolitical imaginary, leading to specific policies such as the pivot to Asia.

Iranian history under both the Pahlavis and the IRI regime shows remarkable consistency in terms of the struggle for geopolitical power as well as geo-economic relevance and connectivity. Both draw substantially (albeit with different stylistics) from the imperial history of Iran. While the Shah firmly sided with the Western bloc during the Cold War, the IRI began its history by rejecting both bipolar camps. Now, however, it is increasingly celebrating the East geopolitically, while aiming to become a hub for East-West and North-South connectivity geo-economically. The case of Iran, in other words, shows the multiple layers of interlinkage and dialectics that exist between policy and





narratives of (national, regional, and global) order. It also shows how narratives of order draw on both geography and history to justify contemporary policies. Part of this narrative justification is giving a veneer of value (anti-imperialism for IRI or anti-Communism for the Pahlavis) to power-driven policies. A major reason for the emergence of Iran's narratives is the contemporary global reordering, including the relative decline of the US's role in the Middle East, that has left the space open for the IRI to reassert itself in the region.

### Conclusion

This article contributes to the field of IR by examining various under-researched narratives of national, regional and global order/re-ordering that have emerged from the Global South, highlighting their significant influence on politics everywhere. It has challenged West-centric perspectives in the field and emphasised the need to incorporate non-Western narratives into IR research and analysis, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities of global politics. Some analytical observations and tentative conclusions can be made here, especially in terms of shedding light on the dynamic processes through which Global South narratives emerge, intersect with one another, demonstrate the agency of related actors – both state and non-state – and, finally, how they expose also the inadequacy of the Westphalian political imaginary.

The importance of local contexts in the Global South was emphasised through each one of the four cases discussed. Established IR theories making universal generalisations based on Western political circumstances are inadequate to describe non-Western experiences in the political field and the narratives constructed therein. These particular sociopolitical, economic, geographical and historical contexts are critical to how Global South actors construct their respective narratives of national, regional and global order. The Egyptian context under Nasser profoundly changed the regional setting in the case of the Mashreq. Moreover, the Indian and Iranian cases illustrate that historical, cultural and religious dynamics significantly inform processes of ordering. These examples thus highlight the need for a fuller understanding of the local if we are to account for the global.

It was also demonstrated that narratives of order and re-ordering are dialectically interlinked and, more often than not, nurture and constrain each other in multiple terrains, including politics, economics, geography and history.



For example, the rise of radical-left movements in the Maghreb was partly due to the void left by the failure of pan-Arabism narratives in the Mashreq. Additionally, Chinese and Iranian (as well as Central Asian and Turkish) narratives of the ancient Silk Roads and the emergence of new iterations of the latter mutually reinforce or limit one another. The multiple pivots to Asia by Global South actors such as Iran, Turkey and the Arab countries can also be partly attributed to the rise there of powers like China and India, with their own narratives of national, Asian and global order/re-ordering. These narratives are institutionalised in strategic partnerships, such as the one between China and Iran (the 25-year roadmap), or materialise through infrastructure initiatives, such as the INSTC aiming to enhance infrastructural connectivity between Iran, Russia and India. In other words, these narratives have clear policy and material implications.

This dialectical relationality is not limited only to Global South actors. The narratives of the latter are themselves interlinked with the ones of the Global North. It was shown that Western and Soviet narratives of global order intersected with those of Global South actors, who thus took a stand against one bloc or both. For example, the Pahlavis defined their imperial narrative of Iran by aligning with the US and against national or regional leftist movements, while the current IRI establishment started with a slogan positioning it against both blocs but is now firmly entrenched in the “East” or “Asia” camp. India has been defining itself in terms of “independence” since 1947 in relation to imperial actors in the West and East. Furthermore, the various leftist movements in the Global South of the last century defined themselves against Western imperialism while also harbouring a diverse array of narratives and emotions about Eastern imperialism – ranging from intimacy to analytical neutrality to acrimony.

The identified agency of Global South actors at both the state and non-state levels is a further contribution made herewith to the scholarship. Non-state actors have traditionally been sidelined in the field, as has the question of the agency of non-Western actors in global politics. However, it was revealed that Global South actors can exert agency by creating their own narratives of national, regional and global order/re-ordering and by implementing policies, geopolitical strategies and geo-economic infrastructural initiatives that help reinforce them. Non-state actors, particularly leftist movements, have left an indelible mark on the history and contemporary politics of the MENA region and of Asia. Their agency cannot be denied. One personalist dictator,



Nasser, and his narratives about identity and the region changed the dynamics of regional and global politics. Additionally, China and India, through their respective claims over leadership of the NAM and influence within the wider Global South, are both increasingly demonstrating agency in global affairs.

It was also laid bare that IR's Westphalian political imaginary is deeply inadequate when it comes to seeking a comprehensive understanding of international politics in the Global South. This is because it is state-centric, thus marginalising non-state actors, and limited in its historical scope, leaving it unable to fully grasp – let alone comprehend – the civilisational and historical discourses of actors such as China, India and Iran. These countries have a long pre-Westphalian history of statehood and collective identity that influences their contemporary regional and global politics, as was demonstrated in the case of India and Iran. This rich geography and history affect how these actors are reconstituting themselves to adjust to the current global re-ordering underway.

Finally, the article calls for future research to pay more attention to the agency of Global South actors, consider their local contexts and narrative-construction processes and methods, avoid state-centric approaches and adherence to the limited geographic and historical parameters of IR's Westphalian political imaginary, and to focus on the underlying dialectical relations through which such ideas of global order/re-ordering are disseminated across various terrains – namely, among others, those of politics, economics, society, geography and history. Research on the politics and order narratives of the Global South actors should also, importantly, seek to avoid justifying the neo-imperial behaviour of actors in this geography simply because they belong to a non-Western geography. Such critical research should critique and de-naturalise all imperial tendencies, be they from the West or the Global South, even when these imperial tendencies disguise themselves as anti-imperial.

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