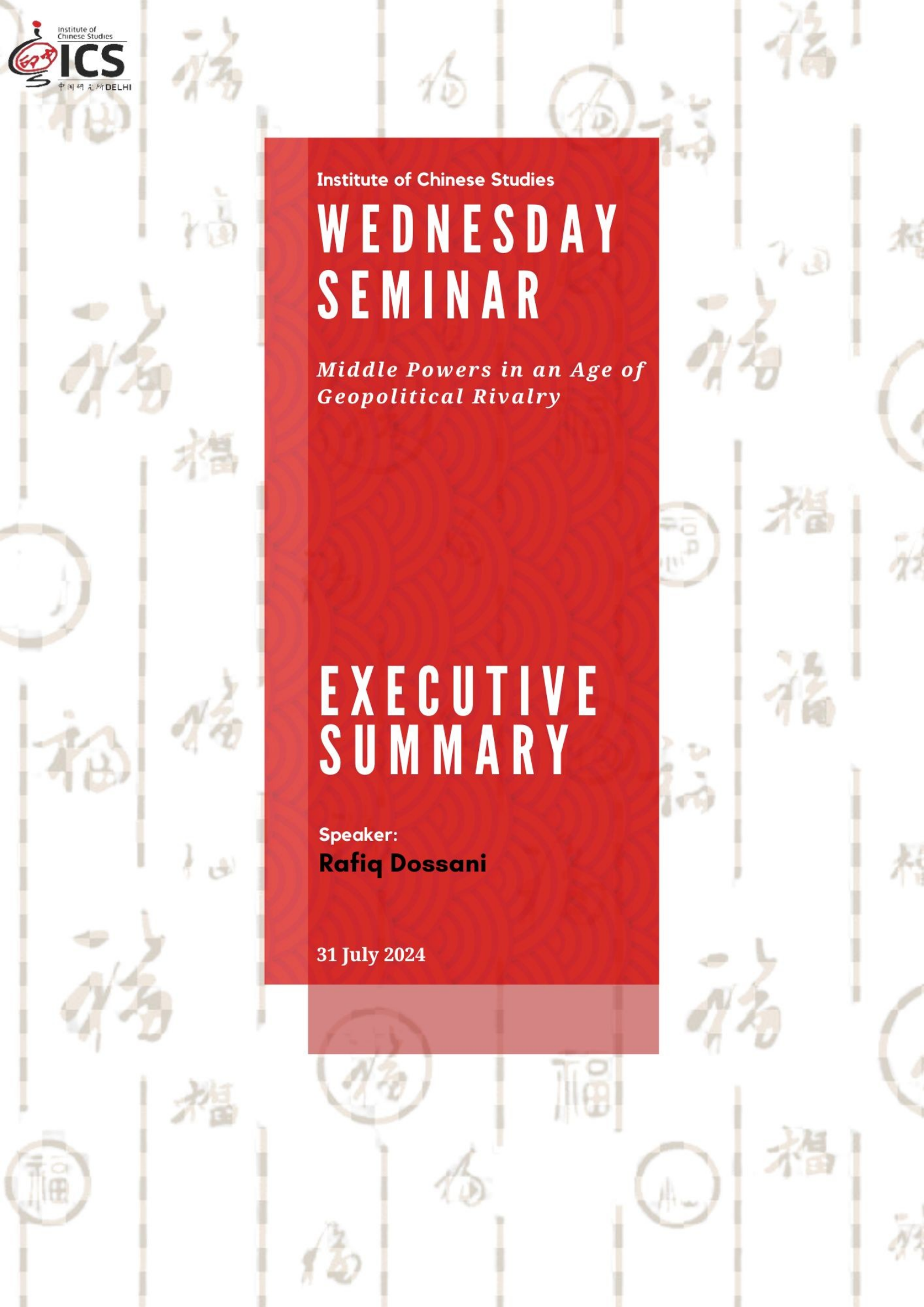




Institute of Chinese Studies

WEDNESDAY SEMINAR

*Middle Powers in an Age of
Geopolitical Rivalry*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Speaker:
Rafiq Dossani

31 July 2024

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Speaker: Prof. Rafiq Dossani, Senior Economist, RAND Corporation; and Professor, Policy Analysis, Pardee RAND Graduate School, California.

Chair: Prof. Sandip Kumar Mishra, Professor, Centre for East Asian Studies, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi; and, Honorary Fellow, Institute of Chinese Studies, New Delhi.

Venue: Zoom Webinar

- The seminar addressed the evolving geopolitical role of middle powers in a world increasingly characterised by rivalry between major powers, particularly the US and China. Prof. Rafiq Dossani traced how middle powers have historically shaped global stability and how their role is transforming contemporary geopolitics.
- The Chair, Prof. Sandip Mishra, underscored the importance of understanding the Indo-Pacific as a contested space, especially with regard to China's assertiveness and the ambivalent stance of US allies on contentious issues such as Taiwan.
- Prof. Dossani categorised states using Keohane's taxonomy: system-determining (e.g., US), system-influencing (e.g., UK), system-affecting (e.g., Kazakhstan), and system-ineffectual (small states), while also proposing "system-disrupting" powers like India that can unsettle global systems without redefining them.
- The speaker highlighted how middle powers such as India, Turkey, and Brazil are increasingly asserting strategic autonomy, pursuing regional leadership, and acting outside traditional alliance structures. He discussed the nature of power as being shaped by autonomy, material resources, and ideological conviction, which, when combined with diplomatic and military tools, create real influence. The speaker applied an Inputs–Processes–Outputs–Outcomes model to explain how power is converted into impact.
- Prof. Dossani maintained that China seeks not global hegemony but the prevention of US dominance. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) exemplifies China's approach to soft power projection and economic diplomacy.

- The session concluded with a discussion on ASEAN's role as a potential middle power and the relevance of track 1.5 diplomacy as a means to mitigate tensions and avoid escalation between the US and China. The speaker called for middle powers to adopt a more proactive role in fostering stability and multilateralism, especially as great powers retreat into strategic competition.

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