

Abstract

Neutrality-Plus Agency across the Global South: Inclusive and Adaptive Statecraft of Middle States during Trump 2.0

While neutrality is occasionally associated with passive, isolated, and static acts among two or more competing big powers, this need not necessarily be so. From Southeast Asia to Central Asia, Latin America, and beyond, the Global South states have displayed a “neutrality-plus” agency that has been variously termed “equidistant” diplomacy, “multi-vector” foreign policy, “active non-alignment” doctrine, and so on. The agency is “neutral” in that it is about *not taking sides* (but “not taking sides” differs from “not taking positions”); and it is “plus” in that the middle states have persistently displayed an active tendency to navigate complex and fluid geopolitical landscapes by exercising their autonomy in an *inclusive* and *adaptive* manner. Focusing on the evidence in Southeast Asia, Professor Kuik Cheng-Chwee unpacks how and why middle states have sought to exert such neutrality-plus agency amid intensifying U.S.-China rivalry and increasing uncertainties especially during the Trump 2.0 era.