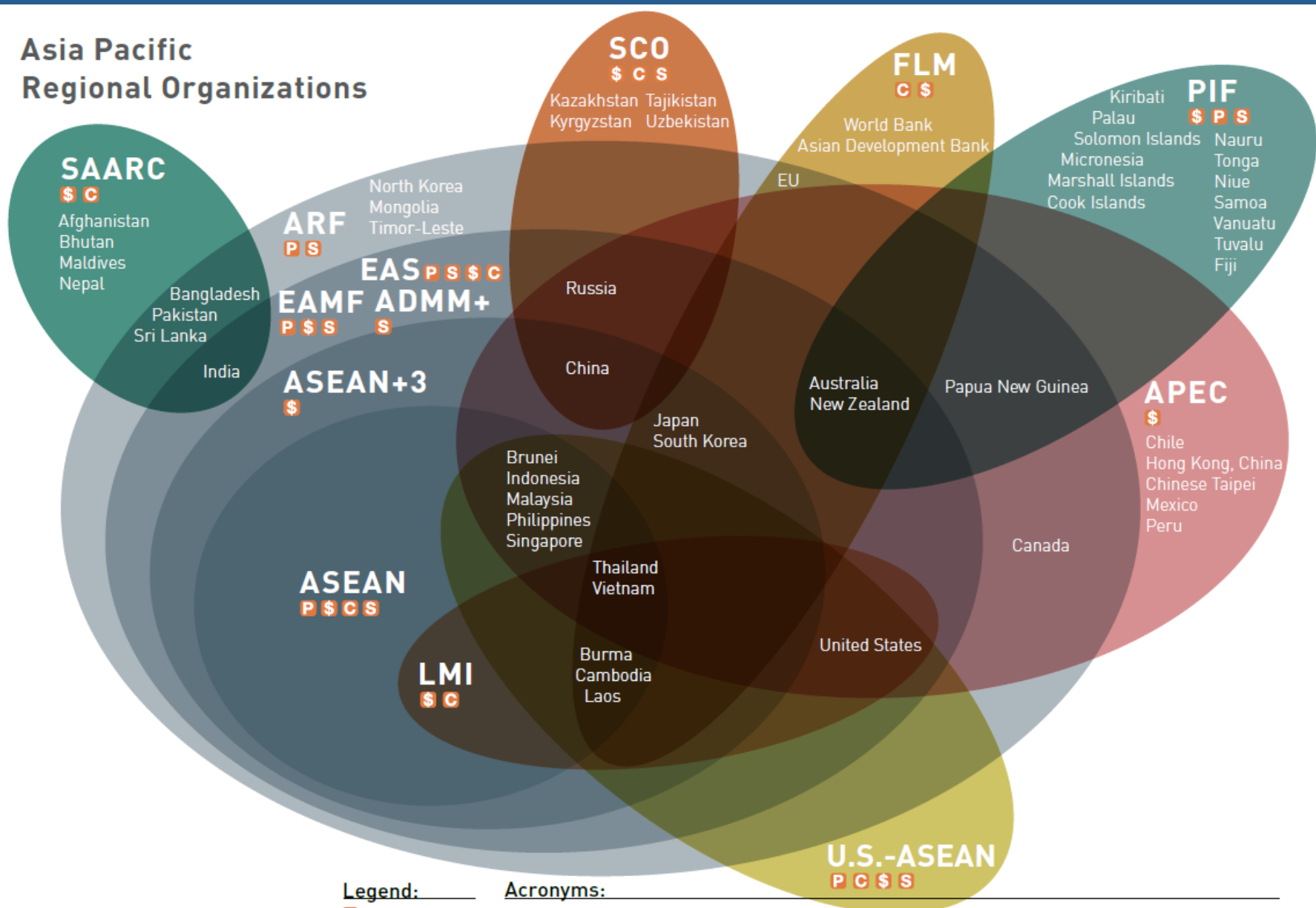


What Explains ASEAN's Centrality, and Will Disunity Derail ASEAN's Success?

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Asia Pacific Regional Organizations



Legend:

- C** socio-cultural
- S** economic
- P** political
- S** security

Acronyms:

- | | |
|---|--|
| ASEAN: Association of South East Asian Nations | PIF: Pacific Islands Forum |
| ADMM+: ASEAN Defense Ministers Mechanism Plus | SCO: Shanghai Cooperation Organisation |
| EAS: East Asia Summit | APEC: Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation |
| ARF: ASEAN Regional Forum | LMI: Lower Mekong Initiative |
| SAARC: South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation | FLM: Friends of the Lower Mekong |
| EAMF: Expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum | |

ASEAN-Centered Mechanisms

- ASEAN Regional Forum (1994)
 - The premier multilateral forum on security issues in Asia-Pacific
 - The only pan-regional meeting of foreign ministers
- ASEAN Plus Three (1997)
 - Facilitated creation of Trilateral Cooperation (Japan, S Korea, China)
- East Asia Summit (2005, 2011)
 - The only regional summit that includes all major powers in the Asia-Pacific (U.S., China, Japan, Russia, India)
- ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus (2010)
 - The premier multilateral forum of defense ministers in the Asia-Pacific region

Everyone Supports ASEAN's Centrality

- “We view ASEAN as a fulcrum for the region’s emerging regional architecture. And we see it as indispensable on a host of political, economic, and strategic matters.”
- “China will continue to support ASEAN in growing its strength, building ASEAN community and playing a central role in regional cooperation.”

*U.S. Secretary of State
Hillary Clinton, 28 Oct 2010*

*Chinese President Xi
Jinping, 2 Oct 2013*

Why Can ASEAN Punch Above Its Weight?

- “Benignity”
 - Autonomous but inoffensive
 - Open regionalism
 - ASEAN Way
- “Bridge”
 - Between the Pacific and the Indian Oceans
 - Between Northeast Asia, South Asia, and Oceania
 - Between rival powers (China, U.S., Japan, India, Russia)



ASEAN's "Benignity" Makes Its Forums Comfortable and Inclusive

Benign character and cooperative norms:

- Autonomous but inoffensive
- Open regionalism
 - ASEAN Regional Forum has 27 members with 17 outside Southeast Asia
 - ASEAN+3 facilitated creation of Trilateral Cooperation among Japan, S Korea and China
- ASEAN Way



The “ASEAN Way”

- **Non-interference** in the internal affairs of others
- **Peaceful** resolution of disputes
- Decision-making based on **consultation** and **consensus**
- **Non-hegemonic** regional leadership

ASEAN's “Bridging” Position Makes It Relevant and Useful



- **Geographic location: Pivot and Crossroads**
 - Geographic center of Asia-Pacific, between 2 oceans and 3 sub-regions; SLOC, Asia’s lifeline
 - Focus of India’s “Look East” and “Act East,” China’s “Periphery Diplomacy,” U.S. “Rebalance,” Japan’s “Strategic Diplomacy”
 - EAS has India, APEC does not; ARF includes all major powers and major players in 4 sub-regions of Asia-Pacific + EU
- **Geopolitical position: Buffer and Bridge**
 - Between rival major powers (China-U.S., China-Japan, China-India, U.S.-Russia)
 - Useful for managing uncertainty associated with power shifts

Is ASEAN Unity Essential for ASEAN's Centrality?

- ASEAN unity does **not correlate** with ASEAN's centrality
 - The period when there are large cracks in ASEAN unity coincides with the rise in ASEAN's centrality
 - Since 2011, ASEAN more divided over the South China Sea issue, but also more external support for ASEAN's centrality in regional architecture
- ASEAN unity is **not critical** to ASEAN's centrality
 - Necessary conditions for ASEAN's centrality include “benignity,” “bridging,” and a minimum “unity in diversity”

Implications for Regional Cooperation

ASEAN will continue to play a central role in regional cooperation.

This central role is not a leadership role, but rather a facilitating and bridging one

amidst a fractured landscape of regional cooperation.

Implications for ASEAN

ASEAN unity is not critical to ASEAN's centrality.

ASEAN will not be effective in dealing with the South China Sea dispute,

but it will be effective in building regional architecture and enhancing its members' international status.