

Coalition Building in ASEAN

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OUTLINE

- Present issues concerning ASEAN (focus on South China Sea issue)
- ASEAN Way – evolution, changes, current mechanisms
- ASEAN Way: a stumbling block to ASEAN coalition building?
- Recommended changes
- Areas where ASEAN coalitions can be built

What is happening at sea?

- **Increased tensions in East China Sea and South China Sea: “flashpoint of global consequence”**



What is happening at sea?

- **Territorial and maritime boundary disputes**
 - Sovereignty over ocean areas
 - Full-fledged islands, but also atolls, sandbanks, reefs
 - Involvement of external powers: US, China, India, Japan, etc.
 - Major shipping routes passing through the disputed areas



What is happening at sea?

- **MILITARIZATION**

- Deployment of heavily armed vessels
- Stand-offs, clashes
- Arms modernization (e.g. submarine acquisition)
- Chinese naval and air force expansion (artificial islands, military bases)



What is happening at sea?



- **Mutual distrust and rising nationalism**
 - **Hard positions, difficulty of compromise**

What has ASEAN done so far?

- **Multilateral institutions (e.g. ASEAN Regional Forum, ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting, Track 2 initiatives, etc.)**
- **Consultation for legally-binding “Code of Conduct”**
- **Legal approach: Philippines’ recent victory in UNCLOS arbitration**

Concrete results?



Why ASEAN?

- US not full-fledged hegemon (not anymore)
- China still a rising powerpower
- Internal and external vulnerabilities (e.g. domestic problems, changing geopolitics)
- Support of the “rest of Asia” is **CRUCIAL**



The importance of the “rest of Asia” and ASEAN

- Many countries with substantial economic, political and military powers in Asia
- Substantial bargaining powers in the “great game”
- Policies of the “rest of Asia” will have impacts on future of Asia
- ASEAN as a critical player

ASEAN as a coalition of “swing states”

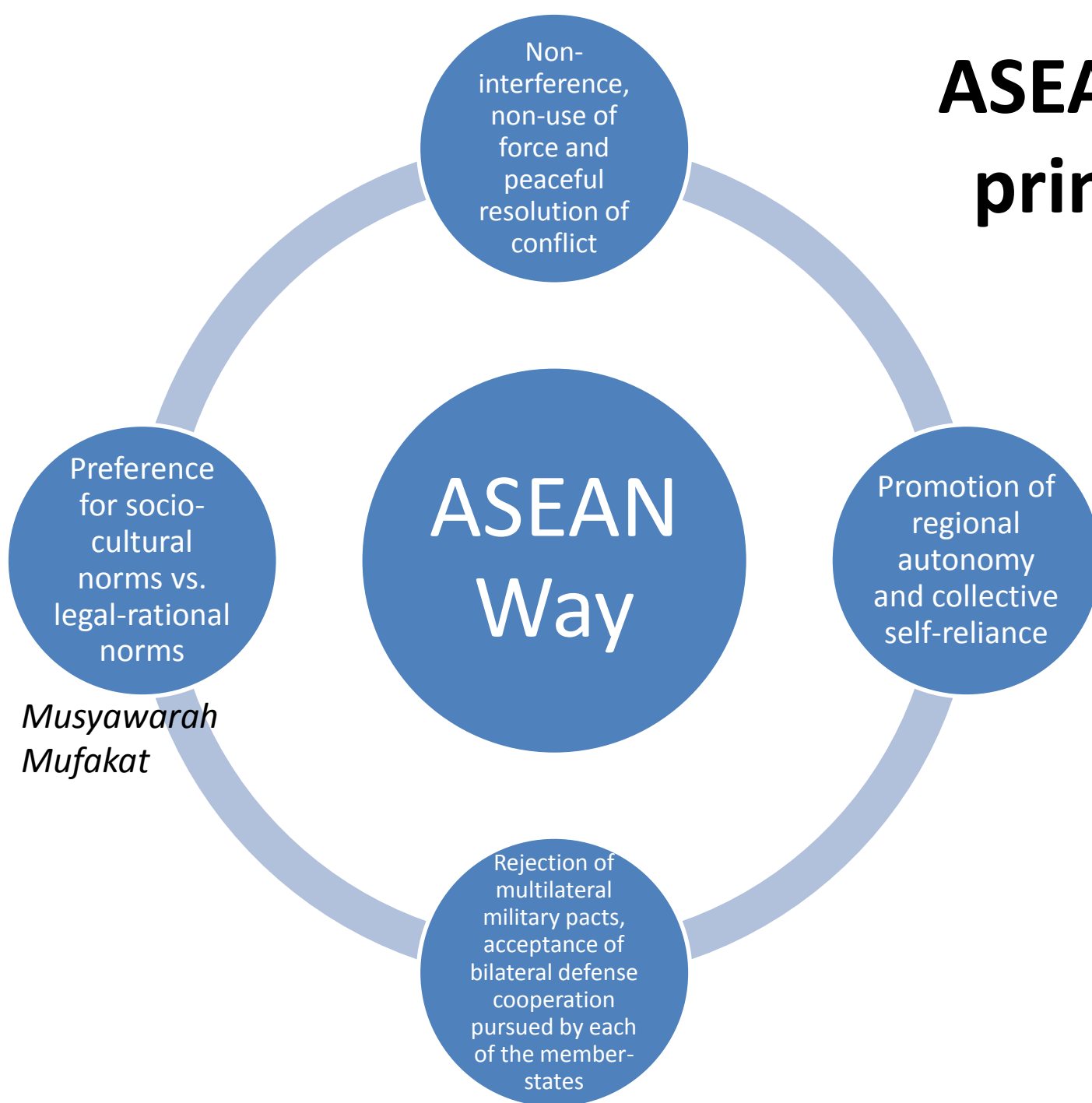


'It seems nobody is taking me seriously... I need a personal assistant, a fitness program and a PR consultant.'

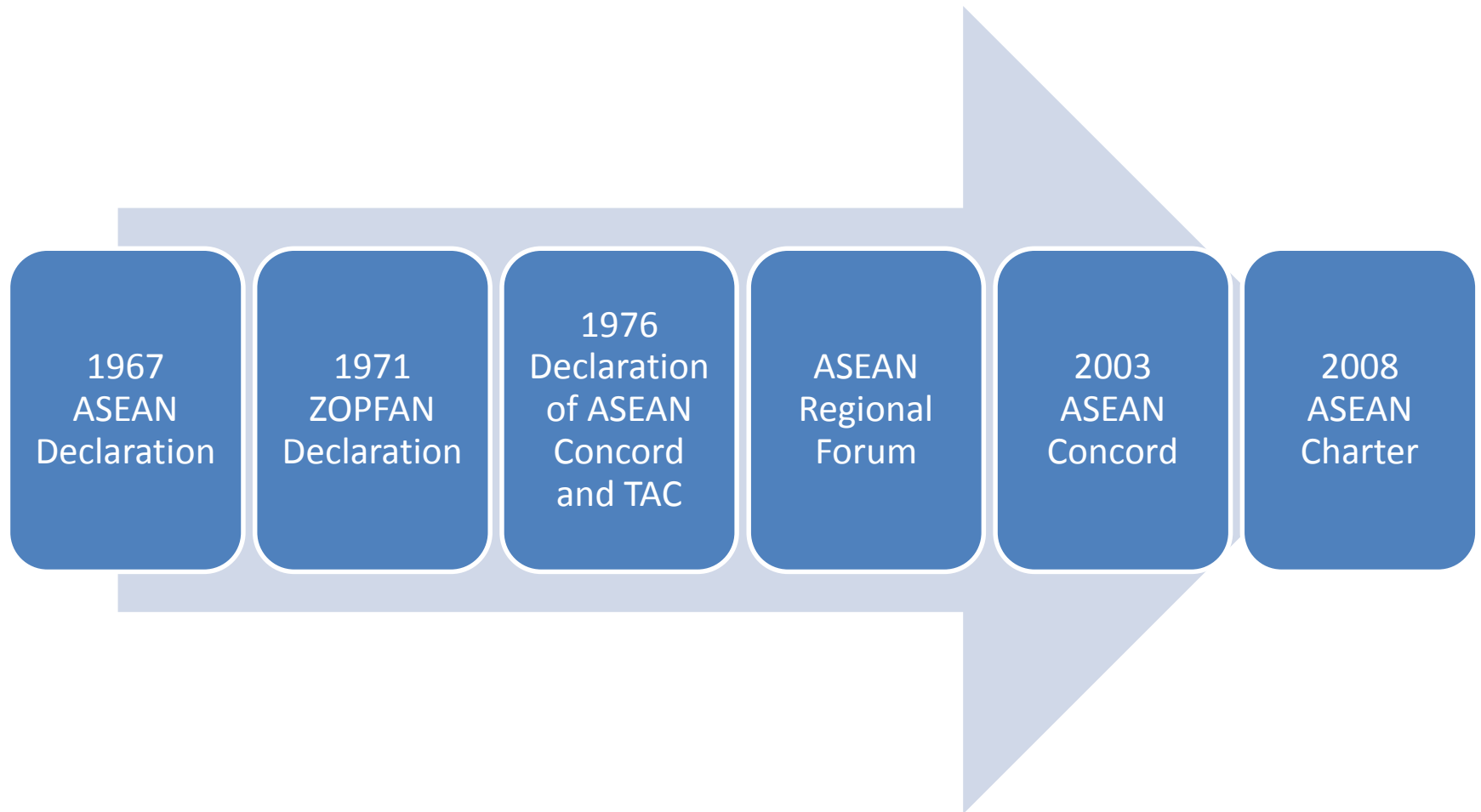
ASEAN Way:



ASEAN Way principles



Evolution of ASEAN Way



ASEAN dilemmas, so far. . .



- **Regional stability vs. individual strategic needs**
- **Internal cohesion vs. external cohesion**
- **ASEAN way as contributor vs. ASEAN way as barrier**

Arguments in favor of ASEAN Way

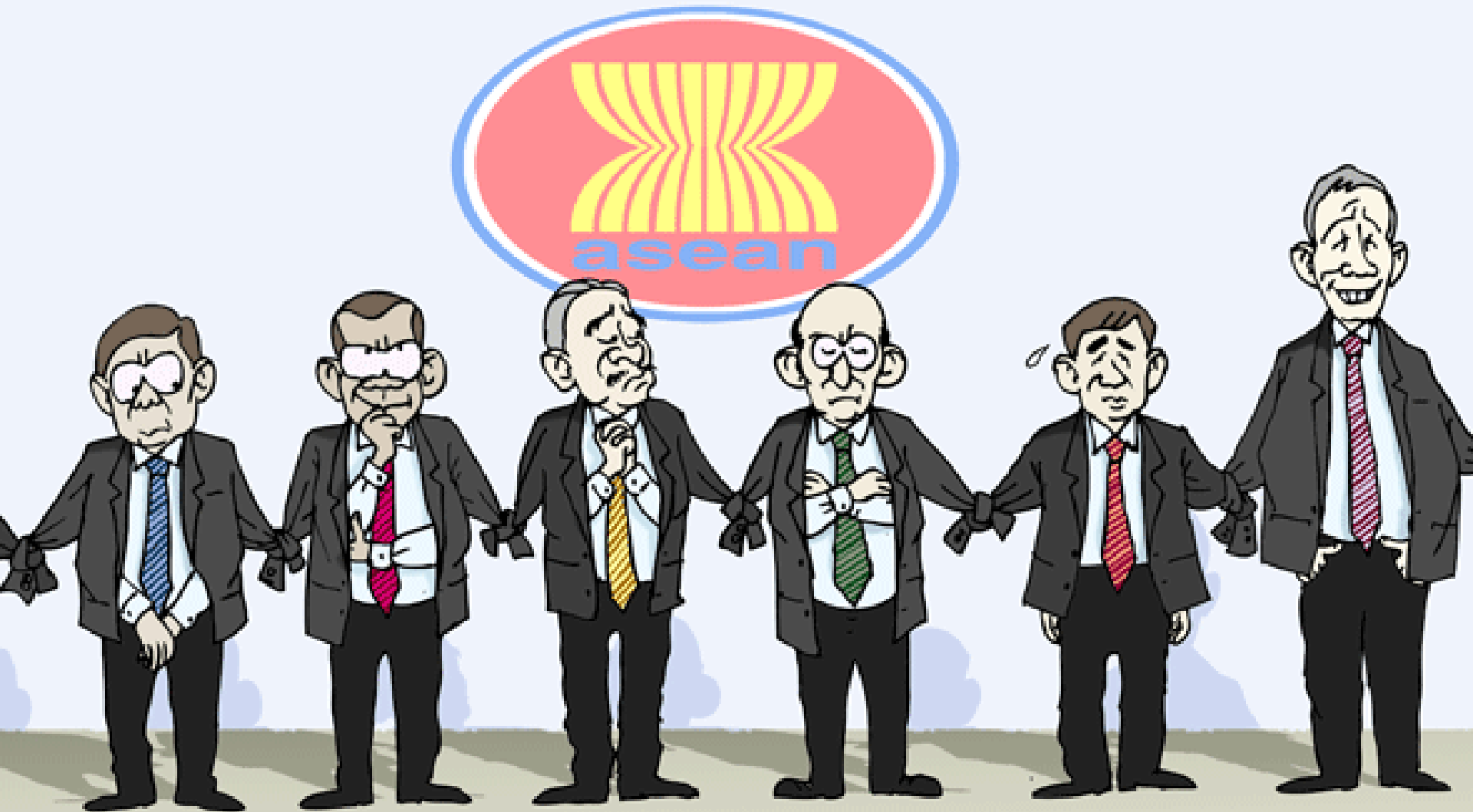
- Drew boundaries of Southeast Asia
- Bolstered legitimacy and relevance of ASEAN as default mechanism for regional cooperation
- Stabilized the region, kept wars from breaking out → boost foreign investments, economic growth
- Compatibility with pre-existing norms adopted by Asian powers (China, Japan, India) and other external powers (US)

Limitations

- Meant to manage/control conflicts, not resolve them (“turning a blind eye”)
- Consensus impedes efforts to establish compliance, enforcement
- Problem of relative interest (regional stability vs. strategic needs)
- Decision-making at the pace of the least-willing member-state , settling with “lowest common denominator”

Is ASEAN Coalition building possible with ASEAN Way?

- Greater demand for ASEAN to act as a monolithic, uniform organization (“to keep up with the times”), but. . .
 - Significant disparities among member-states (difficult to reach consensus, consultations may hamper)
 - Lack of effective sanctioning mechanisms, binding policies that would impact ASEAN states (principle of non-interference)



The ASEAN “Coalition”

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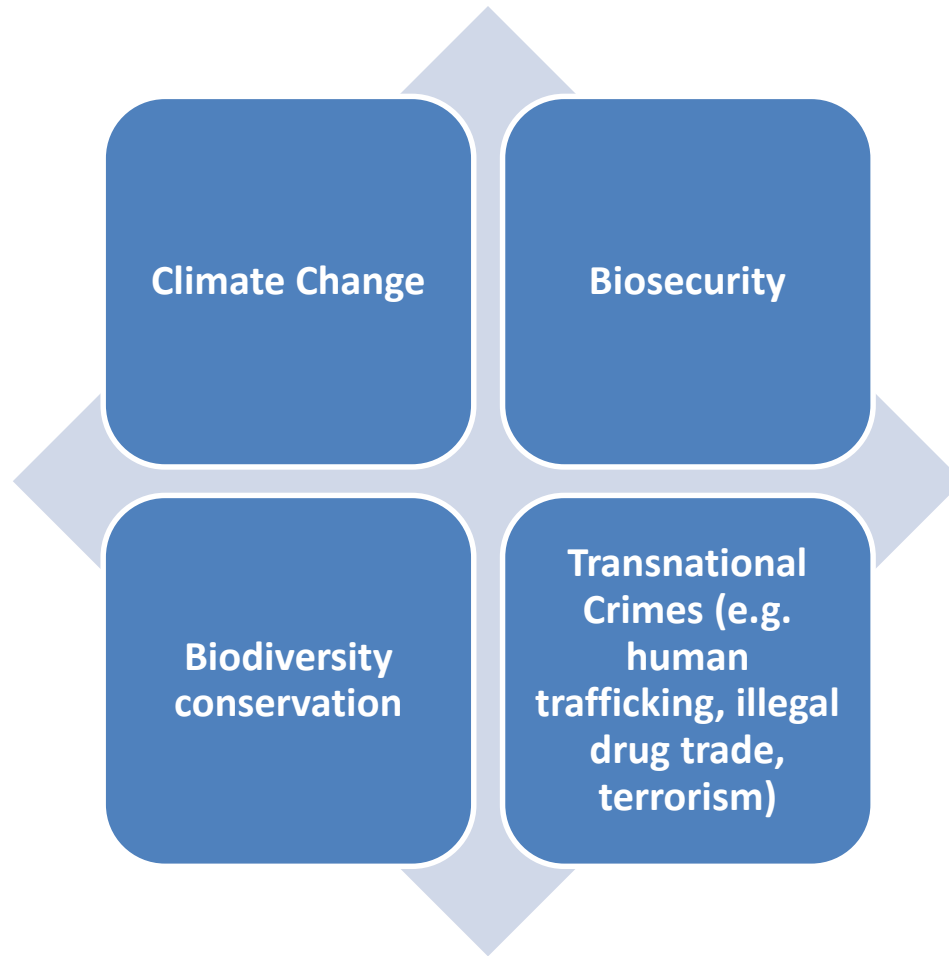
CONCLUSION

- ASEAN mechanisms for ensuring centrality can only be enforced with adequate **political commitment** and **joint cooperation**
- ASEAN was not created to confront conflicts, but this can and **MUST** change
- **Shared sovereignty** approach may be the way to go, but is not an easy process
- ASEAN must break **existing trade-offs in governance** with new decision-making models and mechanisms

How to make it work?

- Revisiting the ASEAN Way (which does not work?)
- “ASEAN minus X” and “2+x” decision-making formulas
- Need for a less “ministerial” and more functional role for ASEAN Chair, Secretary-General, Secretariat
- Going beyond the ASEAN Way: how much sovereignty should ASEAN states give up?

Areas for coalition-building





“You need to form a grand coalition, and you need to put your ideological differences aside and work together to focus on people's basic needs. You can't eat sharia.”

- Mohamed Elbaradei,
Egyptian diplomat and law
scholar