# International Relations · GS - II

**Assess the relevance of ASEAN Centrality in preserving strategic autonomy and regional stability amid intensifying US–China geopolitical competition. What constraints limit ASEAN's effectiveness?**

| EXAM YEAR | PAPER | SUBJECT |
|---|---|---|
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| MARKS | WORD LIMIT |
|---|---|
| 15 | ~250 words |

## Answer Hint

**ASEAN Centrality, US–China rivalry, strategic autonomy, Indo-Pacific architecture, consensus-based decision-making, South China Sea, economic interdependence, regional stability.**

## Model Answer

### Introduction

ASEAN occupies a central position in the Indo-Pacific's diplomatic and institutional architecture. Its approach of engagement with multiple powers provides Southeast Asian states with space to pursue strategic autonomy amid intensifying US–China competition.

### Relevance of ASEAN Centrality

1. **Strategic autonomy:** ASEAN provides a collective platform for member states to engage major powers without becoming exclusively aligned with either.

2. **Regional stability:** Forums such as the East Asia Summit and ASEAN Regional Forum facilitate dialogue, confidence-building and peaceful dispute management.

3. **Economic resilience:** Diversified trade, investment and supply-chain partnerships reduce excessive dependence on any single major power.

4. **Maritime cooperation:** ASEAN-led engagement supports freedom of navigation, international law and regional maritime security.

5. **Inclusive multilateralism:** ASEAN provides opportunities for India and other partners to participate in regional institution-building.

**Constraints on Effectiveness**

- Divergent strategic interests among member states.
- Consensus-based decision-making can delay collective responses.
- Economic dependence on major powers may limit policy flexibility.
- South China Sea disputes create internal divisions.
- Limited military and institutional capabilities constrain enforcement.

**Way Forward**

ASEAN should strengthen internal cohesion, improve implementation of regional agreements and promote international law-based maritime cooperation. India should support ASEAN-led institutions through connectivity, trade, capacity-building and maritime partnerships.

**Conclusion**

ASEAN Centrality remains an important framework for inclusive regional cooperation. Its effectiveness, however, depends on internal unity, institutional credibility and the ability to maintain constructive engagement with competing major powers.

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