

Southeast Asian History Preliminary Examinations (2016) – Suggested Approach (SBQ)

To what extent do sources A-E show that ASEAN’s lack of success as an organization was a matter beyond its control?

Interpretation of hypothesis: ASEAN’s failure to achieve regional stability and economic growth was due to factors beyond its own structures and initiatives. This hypothesis therefore posits that ASEAN was dependent on these external factors to deliver success in the form of regional stability and economic growth.

Sources	Challenge /Support	Main Theme of Source	Contextual Knowledge & Tone	Provenance
A	Limited Support	It highlighted how ASEAN’s success was ultimately dependent on an individual’s country willingness to compromise their own national interest	<p>In 1995, ministers endorsed an ‘ASEAN Cooperation Plan on Trans-boundary Pollution’ which was based on the assumption that Indonesia would improve its domestic environment which would subsequently improve the regional problem of haze. However, Indonesia failed to do so as the haze in 1997 reached disastrous proportions. This highlighted how the success of ASEAN was dependent on countries aligning its agenda to their own national agendas.</p> <p>Objectivity is questionable through the use of emotive language “drag their feet”, “lamenting” and “much vaunted ‘ASEAN Way’”.</p>	Article was published in a Singaporean newspaper whose country is one of the states directly impacted by the haze and Indonesia’s lackadaisical attitude and would thus be less objective as further proven by its emotive tone.
C	Strong Support	It highlighted how ASEAN’s success ultimately hinged on the direction set by superpower states	Ignoring ASEAN’s 1992 South China Sea Declaration, a Chinese military base was discovered at Mischief Reef in 1995 which was demarcated by the Philippines as part of its territory. This highlighted how even a united ASEAN was helpless to resolve conflicts	An academic source which displays comprehensive analysis along with a strong advantage of hindsight.

			unless China itself deems it necessary to do so.	
D	Limited Support	It showcased how ASEAN's ability to function as a cohesive unit was dependent on the outbreak of events rather than the existing structures it had within itself.	Throughout the Cambodian conflict between 1978-1991, ASEAN were only successful at making unitary decisions at the start of the conflict as seen in the joint statement issued to the UN Security Council in 1979 to take immediate steps to end the conflict. However, when left to mediate the conflict on their own, ASEAN struggles to be cohesive as seen in the breakdown of the 1985 'Proximity Talks' and the Jakarta Informal Meeting (JIM 2) in 1989.	While the source is an academic source, its usefulness is limited as it is focused on ASEAN's perspectives and thus offers lesser focus on the perspectives of other players in the Cambodian conflict. Its perspectives will also be limited as it is written in 1990 when the conflict was yet to be resolved.
B	Weak challenge	While source might seemingly look like ASEAN's success was dependent on an individual country pushing forth its agenda, it actually highlighted how the success of ASEAN was due to the initiatives it proposed which provided the necessary platform for ASEAN to excel.	Contextual knowledge challenges the claim made by the Sultan primarily because the importance of the High Council has continuously been undermined by even ASEAN members who chose to resolve conflicts using more established mechanisms as seen in the dispute over Pedra Branca which saw Malaysia and Singapore agreeing to resolve it via the International Court of Justice (ICJ) instead of utilizing the High Council.	The usefulness of this source is limited as well as the Sultan was mentioning about High Council's potential and also his hopes for it to work. The nature of the source is thus more optimism rather than one which is based on established fact on the effectiveness of ASEAN and the High Council. The objectivity of this source is questionable because Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah of Brunei, is himself the 6 th member of ASEAN and addressing the 5 th ASEAN summit and thus

				glowed the occasion with more optimism rather than criticism.
E	Limited challenge	It highlighted how ASEAN's success was a result of the structures within itself.	APEC's establishment in 1989 saw average trade barriers in the region at 16.9% which saw a 70% reduction to 5.5% by 2004 to highlight heightened cooperation and progress between APEC and ASEAN itself.	<p>While the tone of the letter by the then President of the United States of America to Mahathir sounded objective, it came from a member of APEC who is as eager to benefit from the initiatives Ramos came up with.</p> <p>Like source D, the usefulness of the source is limited as the letter expressed Clinton's optimism with the initiatives rather than the outcomes which would be a better gauge of ASEAN's success.</p>

Logical L6 in 3 steps: (firstly determine the stronger source and briefly state why) Support group is generally stronger than the challenge sources primarily because of the wealth of contextual knowledge supporting the sources in the group and also the strength of its provenance. **(secondly, provide the evidencing)** This is especially seen in source C which is rich in objectivity as seen in its appreciation of the trade relations between ASEAN and China while at the same time having to deal with the same country's disregard of Southeast Asian interest. In contrast, the challenge group's strength is undermined by the limited perspectives and contextual knowledge which even challenges the credibility of claims being made. This was most evident in source B when the occasion of the ASEAN summit actually overwhelmed the usefulness and even validity of the source especially in debunking the credibility of the High Council. **(lastly, modify the hypothesis)** As such, while the spirit of the hypothesis remains unchanged, the hypothesis should be more detailed to highlight that ASEAN's lack of success at attaining organizational cohesion and regional political stability was due to the dismissive attitudes of Superpowers, the higher priorities states gave to their national agenda and also the need for particular events to provide the platform for subsequent cohesiveness.