

## The Loss of Islamic Maritime Vision Makes Muslim Countries Only be Spectators of the South China Sea Conflict

### News:

In recent months amid the coronavirus outbreak, China's naval forces are reported to have carried out intense maneuvers in the South China Sea, the scene for several overlapping and disputed territorial claims. The Haiyang Dizhi 8, a Chinese government research ship, conducted a survey near the Malaysia's Petronas-operated West Capella, creating tension with the Malaysian government. In another incident, a Vietnamese fishing vessel was sunk by a Chinese maritime surveillance vessel in disputed waters. Although Indonesia and China have not had any recent maritime dispute, Indonesia did have a sharp exchange with China in December and January over patrols in the North Natuna Sea, before the scale of the coronavirus outbreak became clear.

However, the Covid-19 outbreak has hit hard for Southeast Asian economies. Covid-19 has seen Southeast Asian countries cut defense budgets just as maritime threats look to be growing dire as reported by *the Interpreter*. Indonesia, for example, has announced it will slash its defense budget this year by nearly US\$588 million. Thailand has likewise reduced its defense allocation by \$555 million. Malaysia, Vietnam, and the Philippines all face similar pressure. Less defense spending will invariably mean less patrols at sea.

*Asia Times* reported while China may have recently stolen a Covid-19 march in the contested South China Sea, the United States is pushing back with a countervailing show of force to underscore its commitment to the maritime region's security. In late April, the Pentagon deployed the USS Bunker Hill, the USS America and USS Barry warships to the South China Sea, an exceptional show of force, according to strategic analysts. They were accompanied by the Royal Australian Navy's HMAS Parramatta frigate. The US upped the ante on May 15 by deploying the USS Rafael Peralta Arleigh-Burke-class destroyer some 116 nautical miles off China's coast near Shanghai, the second US destroyer to be seen in the more northerly Yellow Sea in less than a month. Significantly, the ships are geared for anti-aircraft and strike operations.

### Comment:

The South China Sea is a very strategic geopolitical locus today. The sea has become a battleground for the great maritime powers, i.e. the United States and China, as well as a location that unites the axis of power of the East and Southeast Asian countries. The South China Sea is one of the hottest issues in the last two decades which is dominated by the maritime boundaries disputes and territorial claims by surrounding countries.

Both China and the United States have been ignoring international maritime law, but strangely they are acting superior in upholding maritime security in the region. Meanwhile Malaysia, Indonesia, and Brunei Darussalam, as representatives of Muslim countries around the South China Sea, could not do anything in response to Chinese aggression and the United States reactivity. These three countries are still grappling with maritime boundary technical issues, economic weakness, and political submission to the superiority of China and the United States, with maritime defense postures that are far behind those two.

This Ramadhan month should bring us to contemplation: why does weakness always surround the Muslim countries? Why are we only able to be spectators to the show of power of the superpower Kuffr countries which has a black mark on historical records of fighting

against Muslims and oppressing them? This is even though history has recorded many of the brilliant maritime achievements of the Muslims. One of the earliest achievements occurred in the month of Ramadan 53 H in the era of Father of the Islamic Maritime (Founder of Islamic Navy) – Khalifah Mu'awiyah –, namely the conquest of Rhodes Island in the Mediterranean Sea. Rhodes Island is the largest island of the Dodecanese archipelago and the easternmost main island of Greece [currently] in the Aegean Sea.

In fact, the position of the South China Sea bears a resemblance to the position of the Mediterranean Sea in the Middle Ages. Both of them are vital arenas of contestation of the great powers of their time. In the Mediterranean Sea during the Middle Ages, the great powers were Islam, Byzantine, and Latin. So, what's the difference between that and the situation today in the South China Sea? It is obviously very different. At that time, the Muslims were under the leadership of the Islamic Khilafah (Caliphate) wherein the Islamic maritime vision was strongly present to control and dominate the Mediterranean Sea, while today, weakness is covering all over the Islamic world. This is along with the absence of the core authority of the state in Islam which was caused by the abolition of the Ottoman Khilafah in 1924 and followed by the disunity of this Ummah into many nation-states due to nationalism, as well as the hegemony of democratic capitalism that has become the world order today.

The Islamic maritime vision in the Mediterranean Sea subsequently continued to adopt under the principle of Islamic foreign policy – which is based on the principles of Da'wah and Jihad. The strength of the Islamic fleet of Muslims became one of the great and victorious forces at that time. The climax was during the Ottoman Empire. There were maritime *mujahed* icons for Muslims whose names only were frightening the enemies of Islam. They are Heyreddin Barbarosa, Hasan Khairuddin, Kilij Ali, Piri Reis, Hasan Ath Thusi, Zaganos Pasha, and Turgut Reis. Under the banner of Islamic jihad practically, the Da'wah of Islam spread effectively across the Mediterranean Sea. This strategy has even been seriously prepared since the era of Mu'awiyah bin Abu Sofyan. The pioneering of the Mu'awiyah fleet had a great influence on the Mediterranean Sea, which made the Islamic navy as a real threat to the Eastern Roman empire. During the Mu'awiyah period, for the first time the Islamic forces carried out an expedition to conquer Constantinople. Mu'awiyah managed to position himself as one of the prominent maritime players, not just a spectator like the Muslim rulers today. Masha Allah.

It is time for Muslim rulers around the South China Sea to re-adopt the Islamic maritime vision which will liberate their lands and seas from the submission to the Kuffr, with the supremacy of Islamic laws. It is a vision that makes the encouragement of faith, jihad, and Taqwa as the foundation, not greed and economic colonialism like what happen today. Remember the virtues of jihad in the ocean from the words of the Prophet sallallaahu 'alayhi wa salam: «عَزُوةٌ فِي الْبَحْرِ خَيْرٌ مِنْ عَشْرِ عَزَوَاتٍ فِي الْبَرِّ، وَمَنْ أَجَارَ الْبَحْرَ فَكَأَنَّمَا أَجَارَ الْأُودِيَةَ كُلَّهَا، وَالْمَانِدُ فِيهِ كَالْمَتَشَحِّطِ» **“A Ghazwah (maritime expedition) is better than ten Ghazawaat (expedition of battles) upon lands. And whoever permits the sea, it is as though he permitted all the valleys. And the one who suffers seasickness is like the injured who is pouring his blood in the path of Allah.”** (Al-Hakim no. 2634 and Al-Tabrani in Al-Mu'jam Al-Kabir)

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