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Maritime Geopolitics and Strategic Vulnerabilities: A Security Analysis of the Muslim World's Geographical Position

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Abstract

The Muslim world is geostrategically positioned in a strategically sensitive region between the Western and Eastern hemispheres through some of the most sensitive maritime chokepoints globally. The marine crossroads like the Strait of Hormuz, Strait of Malacca, Bab el-Mandeb, Suez Canal, Bosporus, and Strait of Gibraltar open up to a disproportionate amount of worldwide energy and trade streams. Dominion or intervention in these chokepoints immediately affects global security, financial stability, and political autonomy, particularly of the Muslim nations surrounding them. This research article elucidates the security implications of sea geography to the Muslim world according to historical and contemporary geopolitical thought such as Mahan's sea power theory, Mackinder's Heartland approach, and Spykman's Rimland theory. It analyzes the strategic significance of each chokepoint, the navy weaknesses and strengths of Muslim nations, and determines the role of foreign powers to formulate maritime policies and presence within the region. This is a qualitative study which utilizes qualitative content analysis technique. The research is more descriptive than empirical and does not involve primary fieldwork or classified naval intelligence. However, it provides a strategic in-depth analysis of maritime geography and security issues within the Muslim world. Considering the analysis of maritime security threats, regional energy transit dynamics and competition, this article is directed towards cooperative maritime policies, more robust naval defense mechanisms, and more integrated economic approaches to construct sovereignty. The study concludes with policy recommendations for strategic naval collaboration and capacity development in the Muslim world to counteract external pressure and ensure regional stability.

Keywords: *Maritime Chokepoints, Sea Power, Muslim World, Geopolitical Strategy, Maritime Security.*

1. Introduction

Geography has always been the force behind power in empires, states, and civilizations. For Muslim Asia, Africa, and half of Europe, geography is not always a passive stage, it is an active ingredient in its security dilemmas, economic determinisms, and global standing. With over 1.9 billion Muslims spread across over 50 countries, the vast majority of whom border important sea

lanes, the Muslim world has unmatched geostrategic power. At the same time, though, it remains vulnerable to external manipulation, fragmentation within the Muslim world, and strategic underdevelopment, particularly regarding naval defense and sea power. It is only by comprehending the security dynamics of the geography of the sea that there can be built sound geopolitical solutions for the Muslim world of the 21st century and beyond.

There are a number of strategic maritime chokepoints within or off Muslim states, including the Strait of Hormuz, Bab el-Mandeb, the Strait of Malacca, the Suez Canal, the Bosporus, and the Strait of Gibraltar. These corridors are not merely hallways, these are geopolitical centers of power that govern energy flow, military lines of supply, and commerce within the world. As of the U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA, 2022), nearly 21% of the world's petroleum flows through the Strait of Hormuz alone, and thus it is a focal point for possible war and economic instability. Malacca Strait, where over 94,000 ships travel every year, is another crucial vein of global commerce, and approximately 80% of Chinese oil imports utilize this channel (Barton, 2021).

Irrespective of the strategic significance of such locations, the majority of Muslim countries possess limited naval power, and the geopolitical fragmentation has reduced their bargaining leverage in attempting to safeguard their seas. Such a deficiency is also being solved through direct intervention by extra-regional powers i.e., the United States, China, and European powers, having significant naval presences close to these chokepoints in an effort to ensure free passage as well as to tackle piracy attacks. As altruistic or neutral such interventions may seem to be, they always guarantee diminished sovereignty and greater strategic dependence on host nations (Chan et al., 2023).

This article seeks to explore the following broad research questions: In what way is Muslim world’s maritime geography affecting its security standing, and what are strategic options likely to be in response in order to minimize vulnerabilities and maximize control over key sea lanes? In addition to answering these queries, the research draws on an interdisciplinary analysis that combines geopolitical theory, naval strategy, and contemporary international relations.

This analysis draws from the conceptual frameworks of historians of the sea like Alfred Thayer Mahan, who developed the sea power as the standard of national greatness, and Halford Mackinder, who developed the Heartland Theory, a land pivot of power but whose thesis was subsequently supplemented by Nicholas Spykman's Rimland Theory, who centered his thesis on control over the maritime rim of Eurasia. These theories, even though ancient, are still wonderfully relevant to the modern-day phenomena between the Muslim world seascapes (Gray, 2015).

Furthermore, the "String of Pearls" hypothesis of China's strategic port expansion in the South China Sea to the Horn of Africa reflects the larger competitive oceanic context upon which Muslim states are acting (Pehrson, 2006). Growing militarization and monitoring of these corridors similarly reflect the necessity for the Muslim world to position maritime security at the top of its geo-political agenda.

Safety and welfare of the Islamic world are forever locked in seas that surround it. As naval threats are growing more asymmetric, and global competition for strategic presence along sea lanes is becoming fiercer, Muslim nations have to recognize and balance the security effects of their geographical uniqueness. This article is an answer to a bold, aggregated maritime geopolitics one that values strategic autonomy, technology investment, and regional naval cooperation to achieve sovereignty and forge a secure future.

This study applies qualitative, analytical approaches grounded in geopolitical and sea strategic theories like Mahan's Sea Power Theory, Mackinder's Heartland Theory, and Spykman's Rimland theory. This study is founded on secondary data derived from books by specialists, think tank publications, academic articles, and international agencies (e.g., World Shipping Council, EIA). They were analyzed in thematic content analysis terms along substantive concepts including chokepoints, naval power, distant influence, and maritime cooperation among Muslim nations. Conceptual geostrategic mapping was also used to ascertain vulnerability at strategic maritime locations. This research is descriptive and does not involve primary fieldwork or classified naval intelligence. However, it provides a strategic in-depth analysis of maritime geography and security issues within the Muslim world.

2. Geopolitical Theories and the Foundations of Maritime Strategy

It includes an anchor in traditional and contemporary geopolitical thought to conceptualize the security implications of the Muslim world's maritime geography. Theories like these provide a conceptual apparatus from which to approach the interaction between geography, power, and national interest. Polarizing theorists like Alfred Thayer Mahan, Halford Mackinder, and Nicholas Spykman have traditionally shaped maritime and geopolitical thinking. Their theory presumes sea lanes and control of coasts to be the long-term strategic choice.

2.1. Alfred Thayer Mahan and the Doctrine of Sea Power

Alfred Thayer Mahan (1840–1914) was a United States naval historian and officer who is generally regarded as the father of modern naval theory. His book, The Influence of Sea Power upon History, 1660–1783 (1890), argued that sea power was the foundation of national wealth, security, and health. According to Mahan, the greatest world powers, such as Britain, had reached their zenith by having control over commerce on the seas and maintaining strong navies (Mahan, 1890).

The central axioms of sea power by Mahan are:

- Being close to major sea lanes and sea chokepoints is desirable.
- Blue-water navy is the indicator of power projection and protection of trade.
- Prosperity depends on facilitating the unhindered flow of commodities via sea commerce.
- Overseas force multipliers are overseas bases and coaling stations.

Carried over into the Islamic world, Mahan's ideas offer that countries such as Egypt (Suez Canal), Iran (Strait of Hormuz), Indonesia (Strait of Malacca), and Turkey (Bosporus) are

positioned geographically well. Unless this geography is regained, however, it does not happen without naval power and comprehensive maritime policy. Muslim nations occupy the position and not the location of such routes, as naval patrol and strategic control are typically exercised by foreign powers like America, NATO, and China (Till, 2013).

2.2. Halford Mackinder and the Heartland Theory

British geographer Halford Mackinder's Heartland Theory was presented in his 1904 paper, The Geographical Pivot of History. In his theory, a state would dominate the world island (Africa and Eurasia) and thereby the world by dominating the "Heartland," a Eurasian heartland reaching from Eastern Europe to Siberia. His famous maxim is:

"Who rules Eastern Europe commands the Heartland;

Who rules the Heartland commands the World-Island;

He who rules over the World-Island becomes master of the world" (Mackinder, 1904).

While Mackinder's theory had focused on land power, strategic ramifications of such can be applied to Muslim countries like Turkey, Iran, and Pakistan on the edge of this Heartland. These countries are bridges and buffers between the Heartland and sea powers. Mackinder's theory didn't handle the geography of sea chokepoints very well, which are increasingly important in the geopolitics of today as maritime trade and naval projection of power increase.

2.3. Nicholas Spykman and the Rimland Theory

American political scientist Nicholas Spykman reacted to Mackinder with the presentation of the Rimland Theory in the mid-20th century. Spykman contradicted Mackinder that the Heartland area was a more vital place for world power than the Eurasian coast, the Rimland. To Spykman:

"Who controls the Rimland rules Eurasia;

Who rules Eurasia controls the destinies of the world" (Spykman, 1944).

The Rimland encompasses regions such as the Middle East, South Asia, Southeast Asia, and East Africa. Spykman's hypothesis comes particularly in handy as much as providing an explanation of the reason why states and foreign powers change directions in trying to obtain naval bases and military alignments of the Indian Ocean and Red Sea basins. Dominion of the Rimland is dominion of trade routes, oil transit routes, and sea gates to the world's great oceans.

The Islamic world has conventionally stretched across the Rimland, bordering or encompassing all the world's great maritime chokepoints:

- The Suez Canal connects the Red and Mediterranean Seas.
- The Strait of Hormuz connects the Persian Gulf and Arabian Sea.
- The Bab el-Mandeb connects the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden.

- The Strait of Malacca connects the Indian Ocean and Pacific Ocean.
- The Bosporus and Dardanelles connect the Mediterranean with the Black Sea.
- The Strait of Gibraltar is the west entrance to the Mediterranean.

Spykman's emphasis on sea control can be best illustrated in Muslim world's security concerns. The buildup of military bases, naval forces, and spy stations across such regions by dominant powers like the U.S., France, India, and China shows the relevance of Rimland rivalry till date (Kaplan, 2012).

2.3.1. The String of Pearls and Strategic Competition Today

In the context of contemporary strategy, "String of Pearls" is used to describe China's rising string of ports and naval bases along sea lanes from China's mainland to the Middle East and Africa. The "pearls" are the ports of Gwadar (Pakistan), Chittagong (Bangladesh), Hambantota (Sri Lanka), and Djibouti (Horn of Africa) that are situated in or near Muslim nations (Erickson & Collins, 2010).

String of Pearls theory is a description of novel geopolitics offshore, where the construction of infrastructure has double goals: economic facilitation and strategic location. The Gwadar Port, for example, is technically a commercial enterprise but also grants the Arabian Sea to China's navy. Djibouti hosts China's first overseas military facility, off the Bab el-Mandeb Strait through which almost 10% of all the oil exports of anywhere on the planet take place (World Bank, 2023).

This is a strategic step that increases the vulnerability of Muslim nations to external intervention and emphasized the necessity of naval independence and inter-Muslim state strategic collaboration.

2.3.2. Maritime Chokepoints as Global Strategic Nodes

The vulnerability of naval chokepoints is reflected in the fact that they are prone to war, blockade, and geopolitical competition. The limited sea lanes are important for shipping oil, liquefied natural gas (LNG), grains, and manufactured goods. Diversion of these narrow sea lanes 'short-term or long-term' has the potential to shift world supply chains and create economic crises.

United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD, 2023) mentions that over 80% of world trade by volume and over 70% by value are carried by sea. Security of these sea lines is not quite a matter of International Law to the majority of the Muslim world, particularly hydrocarbon-producer nations like Saudi Arabia, Iran, Algeria, and Nigeria but one of economic survival.

Still, although they geopolitically dominate these sea lanes, Muslim nations are not usually provided with the naval capability, over-the-horizon surveillance capability, and maritime

coordination capability necessary to sufficiently defend them. Regional competitions such as the Iran-Saudi competition also complicate collective maritime defense (Cordesman, 2021).

3. Strategic Analysis of Major Maritime Chokepoints in the Muslim World

Following is a strategic in-depth analysis of the most important Muslim-dominated or Muslim-held chokepoints, their weaknesses and implications. The Muslim world is strategically located on key seaborne chokepoints, which constitute the lifeline of global sea commerce and oil transport. Every single one of these chokepoints has its geographical, economic, and strategic features that decide regional and global security trends.

3.1.The Strait of Hormuz: The World's Energy Lifeline

The Strait of Hormuz is the world's most strategically significant naval chokepoint. Located between Iran and Oman, it links the Persian Gulf to the Arabian Sea and then the Indian Ocean. Narrowed to a width of hardly 21 miles at its tightest point, it is the sole sea lane connecting the Persian Gulf to the free ocean.

3.1.1. Strategic Importance

The Straits' strategic importance can be witnessed from the fact that it transited 21 million barrels of oil per day (bpd) which was approximately 21% of world's demand in 2022 (EIA, 2023). Furthermore, it supplied around 33% of world's LNG to different destinations in the world in the same year. Overall, different commodities of worth 2.5 trillion US$ are shipped annually through this strait which is reflective of its immense strategic significance.

3.1.2. Security Dynamics

Iran has threatened to blockade the strait to Western military or economic intervention on a number of occasions. International economic sanctions cannot close it completely, but short-term closure, i.e. drone or mine action, would have humongous effects on world petroleum prices (Cordesman, 2021).

3.1.3. Strategic Consequences of the Muslim World

Despite one-sided domination of Iran, the region is still at the eye of the global storm. The collapse of regional cooperation on security in the Gulf further contributes to the weakening of regional institutions. Initiatives such as Iran's Hormuz Peace Endeavor (HOPE) collapsed because of regional mistrust, again between Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE (Barzegar, 2020).

3.2. Bab-el-Mandeb Strait: Gate to the Red Sea

Bab el-Mandeb Strait is an outlet that separates the Red Sea from Arabian Sea and Gulf of Aden. It surrounds Yemen of the Arabian Peninsula and Djibouti and Eritrea of the Horn of Africa. It is a critical shipping hub connecting Europe, the Middle East, and Asia.

3.2.1. Strategic Importance

Its strategic significance is hard to deny as it plays a crucial role in transiting energy and other valuable items. In 2021, around 4.8 million barrels of oil transshipped through this strait on daily basis (EIA, 2022). One forth of global seaborne trade is done through this channel. Almost 72,000 ships cross this strait annually.

3.2.2. Security Challenges

Because Bab el-Mandeb is situated geographically near politically unstable nations such as Yemen and Somalia, hence, it is extremely susceptible to war, piracy, and terrorism. The war in Yemen has already witnessed missile strikes and drone on commerce shipping, and Houthi rebels declared they would intercept traffic to force Saudi Arabia and the UAE to yield (International Crisis Group, 2022). The players involved in the geopolitical competition in this strait include the US, China, Japan, UAE, and Saudi Arabia. Socotra and some other islands in this strait are occupied by UAE. Saudi Arabia, on the other hand, is busy in developing naval capabilities for the Red Sea (Abbas et al., 2024).

3.2.3. Muslim World Implications

Despite being all located within the Muslim world, the Bab el-Mandeb is perceived to be largely under the control of the outside powers. There is no local naval accord between the Gulf, East African, and Horn of Africa nations. This would mean that Muslim nations could be held accountable for a strategic part of their geography as a whole.

3.3. The Suez Canal: Egypt's Maritime Artery

Commissioned in 1869 and completely nationalized by Egypt in 1956, the Suez Canal is a large artificial waterway on our globe. It connects the Mediterranean Sea to the Red Sea, shortening the sea connection between Europe and Asia by some 7,000 kilometers.

3.3.1. Strategic Importance

This strait, undoubtedly, holds immense strategic significance as almost 21% of world's seaborne trade is managed through this channel. It has been recently managing maritime traffic between 17,000 to 20,000 annually. The products worth more than 7 trillion US$ passed through this strait in 2023 and only Egypt collected around 10 billion US$ toll in 2023 (Lessi, 2024).

3.3.2. Security Problems

Narrowness of the Suez Canal renders it extremely vulnerable to blockade. The 2021 Ever Given incident, when a behemoth container ship grounded and closed the canal for six days, brought close to $10 billion in trade daily to a stop and revealed the dependence of the world economy on this artery (UNCTAD, 2022).

3.3.3. Strategic Value to the Muslim World

Egypt's single possession of the canal is both its greatest strength and weakest point. While it earns a lot of money for, the importance of the canal to international commerce makes it too tempting an object for any conflict in the region. World powers want the canal open, but only usually on the basis of Egyptian relinquishing control of its assets.

3.4. The Strait of Malacca: Southeast Asia's Strategic Funnel

Malacca Strait is the globe's busiest and most strategic shipping route. The strait divides the Malay Peninsula and Indonesian island of Sumatra, linking the Indian Ocean to the South China Sea and Pacific Ocean.

3.4.1. Strategic Importance

This strait is one of the busiest straits in the world as it helps passing around 0.1 million ships every year. The vulnerability of this strait is, perhaps, the biggest worry of China as majority of Chinese oil imports passes through this channel. It is responsible for over 30% of total seaborne trade (World Shipping Council, 2023).

3.4.2. Security Threats

Malacca Strait is beset with piracy, smuggling, and possible geopolitical tensions between China, the US, India, and ASEAN nations. Constricted portions of the strait, especially around and within Singapore are susceptible to accidents, congestions, and sabotage (Dastjerdi & Nasrabady, 2020).

3.4.3. Relevance to Muslim World

Malaysia and Indonesia, the two Muslim states, jointly control the strait with Singapore. Strategically, even though dominated geographically by the three Muslim states, extra-regional powers' naval domination constrains strategic influence (Nincic, 2005). The strait has a Muslim-controlled cooperative naval patrol regime but limited and with no political authority.

3.5. The Bosporus and Dardanelles: Turkey's Twin Maritime Locks

The Bosporus Strait connects the Sea of Marmara to the Black Sea, and the Dardanelles connects the Mediterranean and Aegean Sea with the Sea of Marmara. Both are regulated by the Turkish authorities under the Montreux Convention (1936). It limits naval ship transit (Gokcicek, 2009).

3.5.1. Strategic Importance

This strait is responsible for carrying around 50,000 ships pass through this channel annually. It is the only maritime outlet for exit from Black Sea landlocked countries. Its economic value is more than 200 billion US$ every year (Kantere Christoforidou, 2019).

3.5.2. Geopolitical Dynamics

The war between Russia and Ukraine has once more placed the Bosporus at center stage. Turkey has used the Montreux Convention to restrict naval transit, thereby balancing local diplomacy and alliance commitments to NATO. Turkish ambitions in the plans to build an Istanbul Canal, an alternative waterway beyond the Montreux regime, have interested the world.

3.5.3. Muslim World Implications

Turkish control over the chokepoint gives it a unique leverage in Eurasian and European politics. It enforces duties as well as diplomatic nicety, especially during Black Sea hostilities.

3.6. Strait of Gibraltar

The Strait of Gibraltar is utilized to link the Mediterranean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean and is an important sea trade route. It is navigated by over 120,000 ships every year, thus being important for international trade as well as energy shipping, mainly oil and gas imports from North Africa to Europe (Rodriguez-Diaz et al., 2024).

3.6.1. Security Challenges

The region is vulnerable to illegal migration, cocaine smuggling, and potential terrorist transit. Its terrain is narrow in character with dense traffic, and this carries the threat of sea catastrophe as well as environmental degradation (Rodriguez-Diaz et al., 2024).

3.6.2. Geopolitical Actors

The immediate surroundings are bordered by Spain, Morocco, and the United Kingdom (via Gibraltar), while NATO and EU member states have strategic sea interests and therefore conduct normal cruise patrols and surveillance operations.

3.6.3. Muslim World Implications

To the Islamic states of Morocco and Algeria, the strait is an important entry to seas, Europe, and world markets. Internal competition and weak navy strength, however, discredit cooperation and dominance over seas.

4. Maritime Security Challenges Facing the Muslim World

In spite of a geographically privileged position on the world's most critical maritime chokepoints, Muslim countries continue to be plagued by extremely dangerous maritime security threats. These dangers undermine the ability of Muslim countries to project power, protect economic interests, and maintain national sovereignty. This section identifies and discusses the main maritime security threats to Muslim countries, both indigenous and external, and examines their consequences for regional stability.

Piracy is a continued and chronic threat to much of Muslim maritime space, namely areas such as Somali Coast, Gulf of Aden, and parts of Southeast Asia. Somali piracy was busiest in the early 2010s with over a hundred cases on the world's shipping routes. Global naval patrols have plunged piracy operations to a record low, although the root causes state failure, poverty, and anarchy persist (Robertson, 2023). The areas remain vulnerable to revamp, especially after increased instability in Somalia and the Horn of Africa. While Indonesia and Malaysia have increased their patrol numbers, Malacca Strait remains a piracy hotspot, human trafficking point, and smuggling route. High-use waters and narrowed shipping channels present ships as exposed targets to low-tech seafaring pirates (Kraska, 2011). Consequently, piracy increases shipping insurance costs, puts commercial mariners' safety at risk, and impacts commerce. Piracy also uncovers the weakness of the majority of Muslim states to patrol and control their sea boundary in good faith due to a lack of naval assets and regional coordination.

4.1. Foreign Naval Bases and External Maritime Presence

Among the more critical and emerging maritime security concerns is the wider presence of foreign navies in Muslim sea-space. Several international powers maintain bases or make recurrent deployments across these seas under the guise of securing trade or ending piracy. The US presence is maintained through Fifth Fleet in Bahrain and air/naval bases in Qatar and Djibouti. France and UK have their bases in Djibouti and the Gulf. China has built its first overseas naval base in Djibouti in 2017 which represents its need to secure energy transit routes and project global power (Tarapore, 2020).

Although such bases provide some naval security, it comes at the expense of Muslim sovereignty and freedom of action. They become catalysts for great-power rivalry, drawing Muslim states into increased conflict. Second, these types of arrangements are bilateral and out of the reach of greater Muslim cooperation.

4.2. Naval Power Deficit and Technological Backwardness

Most of the Muslim nations lag considerably in naval capability, in both numbers and quality. Pakistan, Iran, and Turkey alone wish to develop blue-water navies that possess the capability to project beyond their respective hemispheres. No expenditure on missile defense, stealth capacity, and cyber-marine capabilities reflect on their technological deficiencies. They lack in surveillance capabilities as they do not have satellite, drones, and sonar capabilities to degrade maritime domain awareness.

Unlike the non-Muslim regional powers such as Israel, China, or India, Muslim naval forces possess outdated fleets, insufficient training, and underdeveloped logistics (Cordesman, 2018). This limits deterrence and creates insecure maritime borders.

4.3. Fragmentation and Lack of Collective Maritime Doctrine

Despite a common geography and interest, Muslim countries lack a shared maritime strategy. There are regional institutions such as the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) which did not exploit political unity to attain meaningful maritime security cooperation. Even in the

GCC, a relatively integrated club, naval cooperation is not strong. Each state controls its navy independently and aligns with extra-regional powers rather than sharing a regional navy. No Islamic MARCOM equivalent to NATO or Operation Atalanta equivalent to the EU exists. In the absence of institutions, information sharing, combined exercises, and maritime administration are in chaos.

4.4. Geopolitical Tensions and Domestic Conflicts

Inter-Muslim rivalries are likely to undermine maritime brotherhood and security. The decades long rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran for leadership in the region, occasionally by proxy in Yemen and elsewhere is a glaring example. Similar sort of conflict exists between Egypt and Turkey in the Eastern Mediterranean over claims over EEZs and gas fields. These competitions erode confidence and cooperation, leading to outside powers stepping in as guarantors of security and further reliance on non-Muslim countries for maritime security (Özel, 2024).

4.5. Climate Change and Environmental Challenges

Climate change is one of the major causes of maritime security threats, which are aimed mainly at Muslim countries with large coastal populations or island countries with low coasts. The rise in sea level threatens coastal infrastructure of many Muslim countries including Bangladesh, Maldives, Indonesia, and Egypt. Competition for resources, particularly fisheries is likely to cause conflicts among the states over economic waters and maritime borders. As far as disaster relief mechanisms are concerned, the majority of Muslim nations lack adequate naval logistics to provide humanitarian aid and relief in post-cyclone or post-tsunami conditions.

4.6. Maritime Terrorism and Non-State Actors

Maritime terrorism is always looming on the horizon, particularly in unstable regions such as Yemen, Syria, and Southeast Asia. Terror groups Al-Shabaab, ISIS, and Houthis have mounted or carried out maritime attacks. Major incidents include: bombing of USS Cole (2000) in Yemen, Houthi attacks in the Red Sea on Saudi and Emirati tankers (2018–2023) and Abu Sayyaf SEA-MAR operations in the Sulu Sea, involving kidnappings and smuggling.

4.7. Economic Dependency and Maritime Chokepoint Vulnerability

Economies of most Muslim countries are similarly dependent on sea trade and oil exports, and therefore, vulnerable to interference through chokepoints. None of them possess the naval infrastructure or diplomatic influence to obtain unilateral access to chokepoints. For instance, Qatar relies upon the Strait of Hormuz for LNG export, Malaysia and Indonesia rely upon the Strait of Malacca, and Billions of dollars are being earned by Egypt on the Suez Canal. This dependency leads to economic exposure and opens the door to coercive diplomacy from more powerful external actors during difficult times.

4.8. Maritime Infrastructure and Cybersecurity Weaknesses

Maritime business in today's world is growing more and more cyber. Ports, navigation facilities, and logistic centers now entirely rely on cyber networks, and therefore, they are exposed to cyberattacks. Majority of Muslim ports lack proper cyber security and most navies lack cyber capability to protect digital naval assets. However, GPS spoofing or AIS attacks could result in collision or interference with trade routes.

5. Strategic Opportunities and Recommendations for the Muslim World

Even though it has been faced with a humongous maritime security dilemma, the Muslim world has gigantic strategic potential due to its strategic geography, demographic resources, and latent naval capabilities. The current section locates some opportunities, which can be utilized by the Muslim world, to maximize maritime security and geopolitical influence. It develops realist policy prescriptions for regional collaboration, institution-building, and technology enhancement.

5.1. Utilizing Strategic Geographic Advantage

Seven of the globe's most important maritime chokepoints are Muslim, i.e., the Strait of Hormuz, Bab el-Mandeb, the Suez Canal, the Bosporus, the Strait of Gibraltar, the Strait of Malacca, and the Indonesian archipelagic sea lanes. They connect to nearly half of world seaborne trade and energy transfer (Cordesman, 2018; EIA, 2022). For utilizing this strategic geographic advantage, they need to increase negotiating power in international diplomacy, create economic corridors and logistic centers, and maritime defense zones to control naval entry. Muslim nations must create a Unified Chokepoint Defense Doctrine (UCDD) within the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) with an emphasis on collective policy regarding chokepoint monitoring, early warning, and mutual patrol.

5.2. Pan-Islamic Maritime Security Alliance Establishment

One of the strongest imperatives is having a common maritime security framework. Based on the blueprints of EU's Operation Atalanta and NATO's MARCOM, the universal Muslim maritime command can have shared operations, logistics, training, and threat assessment. This arrangement would provide them with potential naval capabilities and training, single procurement process to save costs, and more deterrence against piracy and foreign invasion. However, it is strongly recommended to set up the Islamic Maritime Security Council (IMSC) within the OIC, with temporary facilities, regional task forces, and an Internet-based intelligence-sharing system. IMSC can provide facilities for multilateral naval exercises, codenamed "Operation Ummah Waters," to practice defense operations in chokepoint points.

5.3. Indigenous Naval Industries Development

Most Muslim countries rely on foreign defense manufacturers for naval weapons. To ensure that reliance as minimal as possible and strategic decisions optimal, indigenous defense technology and shipbuilding have to be assigned the top priority. Turkey and Pakistan’s initiatives in this

regard are worth mentioning here. Turkey's MILGEM program is a noteworthy development as it manufactures locally constructed warships of export grade. Likewise, Pakistan's modernization program includes indigenous design of submarines in coordination with China. For that end, it is suggested to form a Pan-Islamic Naval Technology Consortium (PINTC) between universities, naval academies, and industry in Muslim nations. The consortium can be dedicated to unmanned drone and naval vehicles, AI monitoring and cyber defense, and modular naval shipbuilding platforms.

5.4. Maritime Diplomacy and Strategic Partnerships

Muslim nations must utilize active maritime diplomacy to secure alliances, gain sea-lanes, and form multilateral naval agreements with other similar nations. Moreover, it is recommended to organize regional blue economy summits, naval conferences, and maritime cultural diplomacy (Islamic seafaring culture etc.) to build soft power. In addition, it is suggested to establish Maritime Special Envoy diplomatic assignments in significant embassies and establishing special Maritime Strategy Units (MSUs) in foreign ministries to coordinate ocean diplomacy, maritime law, and chokepoint negotiation management.

5.5. The Blue Economy

Ocean-based economic growth along the coast is unexploited in the Muslim world. Seabed mining and offshore renewables aside, shipping and fishing are enormous opportunities. Exploring avenues of blue economy also provide Muslim countries with opportunities to establish Halal aquaculture for the world's Muslim food consumers, solar- and wind-powered green ports, and Islamic heritage-based eco-tourism and cruise tours. Therefore, it is highly recommended to create Blue Economy Master Plans for every Muslim country with a sea component under the umbrella of an Islamic Maritime Economic Development Agency (IMEDA). IMEDA may provide research, micro-enterprises, and public-private finance.

5.6. Creating Maritime Human Capital

Maritime and naval power is not conceivable if they do not invest in human capital during their establishment. The majority of Muslim nations do not have maritime universities, veteran mariners, and naval technologists specializing in naval fields. However, to create maritime human capital, Muslim countries are required to educate the future generation of naval engineers, oceanographers, cyber-security specialists for the maritime industry, and merchant navy officers. In order to achieve this objective, it is of immense importance to establish a chain of IMAs that award degrees and certificates with strategic postings, such as Istanbul, Karachi, Alexandria, and Kuala Lumpur. Scholarships shall be offered that will benefit from OIC and IDB assistance.

5.7. Environmental Security and Climate Resilience

The Muslim world should strategically have environmental concern in maritime security. Coastal flooding, coral bleaching, sea-level rise, and marine pollution are economic and human security threats. To contain or address these threats, it is crucial to establish Green Maritime Zones to

promote plastic-free shipping and disposal, climate-resilient naval facilities and deal with disasters through rapid mobilization of naval assets and regional exercises.

5.8. Legal and Institutional Reform

Muslim nations must ensure conformity of their marine laws and regulations to international norms such as UNCLOS without sacrificing their rights over the oceans. For addressing maritime disputes, certain measures are recommended to resolve these disputes including delimitation of Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs), policing foreign warships, and maritime arbitration processes. Moreover, it is highly recommended to establish a Maritime Legal Affairs Council (MLAC) under the OIC to seek legal advice on demarcating maritime boundaries, project collective Muslim presence to international maritime tribunals, and harmonize shipping and environmental law in Muslim waters.

5.9. Technology-Driven Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA)

Maritime Domain Awareness is combining radar, satellite, ship, and drone data to visualize and control sea space. This technology is a prerequisite to monitor ship traffic, identify anomalies, and lock down chokepoints. However, it is suggested to invest in a Unified Maritime Surveillance Network (UMSN) on low-earth orbit satellite constellations, fleets of drones in swarms for patrolling EEZs, and integrated naval command centers for commanding response against threats.

5.10. Common Muslim Maritime Identity

Besides the technological and strategic awareness, there must be the creation of a common maritime awareness among Muslim nations by history, religion, and purpose. To inculcate the sense of pride among Muslim countries about their maritime history, it is imperative to utilize the tools of cultural integration such as naval museums of history (e.g., Islamic sailors such as Ibn Majid or Zheng He), film and educational programs to generate pride in maritime history, and Islamic naval history chairs at universities to promote scholarship. Moreover, it is recommended to initiate the "Ummah Maritime Heritage Project," a project that weaves cultural, historical, and strategic narratives towards advancing unity and purpose among Muslim maritime states.

6. Conclusion

Geopolitical and security importance of sea geography to Muslims is a unique feature of the 21st-century world politics. From the Pacific to the Atlantic, Muslim countries possess disproportionate mastery of key sea chokepoints like the Strait of Malacca, Bosporus, Suez Canal, Bab el-Mandeb, and the Strait of Hormuz. These strategic narrow seas are arteries of global trade and commerce transport and provide the Muslim world historic negotiating leverage in sea geopolitics building.

Even with all of their geostrategic advantages, however, most Muslim states remain vulnerable to threats to their naval security such as piracy, naval imbalance, foreign naval bases, political disunity, and indigenous naval constraints. All of these reduce their capacity to project naval

sovereignty, protect sea lines of communication, and capture the full spectrum of economic and security benefits the seas can provide.

To reverse the tide, the Muslim world must seek and capitalize on its strategic opportunities. It can establish a shared maritime security agreement, build indigenous naval industries, improve maritime human capital, and build blue economy resilience. Convergence of law, creative domain awareness, and strategic maritime diplomacy can be complemented with regional resilience and deterrence.

It is a call to action. In an age of sea lines of strategy, shifting bloc powers, and increased naval competition, the Muslim world cannot afford to foot the bill of maritime fragmentation any longer. With imagination, unity, and vision, it can turn geography into the basis of security and world influence rather than a liability. As Themistocles himself so aptly phrased it, "He who commands the sea commands all." To Islam, this is not a cliché it's a fact of geopolitics.

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