

[OPINION] 2019 as the centurion of the First World War: Malaysia Reborn

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1919 was the year when the Versailles Treaty was concluded. It marked the end of World War I. While not perfect, it temporarily forestalled the butchery of the European empires, leading to the demise of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Tsarist Empire in Russia, and finally the beginning of the end of the Prussian Germany.

On the Islamic ledger, 1919 marked the end of the Ottoman Empire in 1923, merely four years after the blood bath in Europe. Conflicts from contiguous regions, obviously, can create chaos and confusion in a civilization that was totally unique and distinct from the West.

On December 18, much to the surprise of the whole world, President Donald Trump tweeted that he would attempt a double withdrawal from the war front in Syria and Afghanistan.

In case anyone is struggling to understand why the United States was involved in both conflicts, the original reason was the brutality of Bashar al-Assad, who remains ensconced in Damascus, based on the support of President Vladimir Putin, and the savageness of the Talibans to shelter Osama Bin Laden and Sheikh Al Zawahiri.

While Osama Bin Laden has been terminated, Al Zawahiri remains at large.

Regardless of the circumstances, a double pull out does not augur well on how the world should step into 2019. Malaysia should be careful with the repercussions of the American's actions in Syria and Afghanistan on East Asia.

First, extremists that had endeavored go to these conflict regions may decide to remain in Southeast Asia — invariably to create their concept of a single Caliphate that extends from Southern Thailand to Southern Philippines.

Not unless the Malaysian economy is purring at top speed, the likelihood of these morbid and depressed extremists venting their spleen on their fellow Malaysians are real. Just across the neighboring country, Thailand, four bombings have occurred in recent weeks in Haadyai.

The chickens have not come to roost yet. But Malaysia should be wary of those extremist

elements who have always wanted to perish in the battle field in Syria and Afghanistan but cannot complete their missions in Malaysia and within the region.

Two, the unrest in Seafeld, which is still simmering, has shown the extent to which Malaysia is on a tinder box. Even though the issue was not on race and ethnicity, the groups that were diametrically opposed to one another appeared to be from two distinct racial groups.

Malaysians may have reclaim the country from the clutches of kleptomaniacs on May 9 2018, one must remember this was achieved on a Malay swing.

Malays, having grown accustomed to UMNO and Pas, may not have acquainted themselves fully with non Chinese or multi racial agenda as yet.

Thus, any suggestion to embrace the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), needs careful scrutiny.

Third, much as the world was celebrating 1919, one must remember that it took barely 30 years later for the European powers at each other's throats again, with Japan soon attacking China in 1937 in the Marco Polo incident that led to the massacre of Nanjing a year later.

Malaysia can grow. If Malaysia dredges all its coastline into a deep port of more than 30 feet at all time, Malaysia can in collaboration with Indonesia create a safe and secure Straits of Malacca for 80 per cent of the world's marine vessels that pass through these waters before leading into the South China Sea.

Malaysia has one of the best relationships with Japan. If needs be, tens of thousands of workers, skilled or semi skilled, can send them to Japan, as Tokyo faces Olympics 2020 and World Expo 2023.

There are areas where Malaysia can gain from. Not all the scenarios are gloomy, even if the Minister of Finance Lim Guan Eng has affirmed that it would take three years to return to good fiscal health.

If Malaysia plays it's cards on South China Sea right, which is to maintain it as an international sea, thus creating much stability and balance, there is no reason why Malaysia cannot benefit from China's Belt and Road Initiative or the Quads formed of the US, Australia, India and Japan. Some US\$5 trillion worth of cargoes need to traverse through this maritime basin anyway.

If Malaysia can have a Look East Policy that all ASEAN countries look up too — not unlike how the original five members of ASEAN were in awe with the reconciliation of Malaysia and Indonesia after their Konfrontasi mid the early 1960s — such strategic

maturity would go a long way towards inspiring other countries to learn from Japan with the goal to adapt to the rapid development of China and South Korea too.

All great things can come from even greater challenges. When Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin was sacked, UMNO thought it has removed a thorn in it's flesh. When Datuk Seri Shafie Apdal soon followed, UMNO rejoiced at removing two splinters at one go.

Little did they know that this was the beginning of their end, especially when Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, ever the fighter, came on board, with Datuk Seri Mukhriz Mahathir and others in tow.

The gloom and doom, as occasioned by the the drop in the prices of oil, per barrel, need not be the end of all a new Malaysia. Cheap credit remains a viable source in Japan. To the degree Tun Dr Mahathir have a strong policy on Japan — not to antagonise China — - Malaysia is not without an assemblage of financial and political solutions to overcome the gaping financial holes that were left by the previous excesses of the last kleptocratic government.

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