Analysis of Saudi Arabia Intervention in Decisive Storm Operations in Yemen

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Abstract
This research analyses the factor that influenced Saudi Arabia's decision to intervene in Yemen's civil conflict through military intervention known as Operation Decisive Storm in 2015. Before 2014, Saudi Arabia always avoided intervening in Yemen's civil conflict. However, there was a behavioral change in Saudi Arabia's policy when they decided to do military intervention in Yemen. Answer this Explanatory research using strategic theory and qualitative research methods. In the analysis of this research, the researcher found that the reason why Saudi Arabia's sudden change to intervene the conflict is influenced by a geographical factor in which there is a potential threat from Houthi rebels to Saudi nearest region that directly borders Yemen and the participation of Saudi Arabia's Political Rival in Regions, Iran, for the battle of hegemony.

Key Words: Intervention, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Operation Decisive Storm

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INTRODUCTION

Yemen’s civil conflict started in 2004 and was triggered by anti-government demonstrations led by Husein bin Badruddin Al-Houthi. This demonstration aims to oppose the Yemeni government, which is considered to have discriminated against the people of North Yemen (Boucek, 2010). After the death of Husein, the demonstration turned into a rebellion continued by Abdul Malik Al-Houthi, who raised the name of the Houthis as a significant rebel organization in Yemen (Finn, 2015).

In the course of the conflict, the Houthi group put enormous pressure on the Yemeni government. Since 2004, the Houthi insurgency has fueled tensions in various parts of Yemen. This was preceded by an incident on June 20, 2004, in which the Houthis attacked a military post that provoked tribal conflicts in the Maran and Sa'adah areas (Peterson, 2008). Departing from this incident, the insurgency movement has flared up in various parts of Yemen (Peterson, 2008). As of October 29, 2017, approximately 5,159 civilians were killed, and 8,761 people were injured (OCHA, 2017).

In its operations, the Houthi group is supported by various civilian groups to foreign governments (Boucek, 2010). Based on an investigation conducted by the Yemeni government, Iran is a country supporting the Hout movement (Boucek, 2010). Due to this, the Yemenis withdrew their ambassador from Tehran. In 2009, the Yemeni government accused Iran of facilitating and providing military training to Houthi rebels to overthrow the legitimate government.

On the other hand, Saudi Arabia is a country that has sympathy for the regime of Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi (Cordesman, 2015). According to Anthony H. Cordesman, for Saudi Arabia, Yemen is a vital neighbor because the geographical proximity of the two countries can affect the economic and political situation (Schnitts, 2017). To show its sympathy, Saudi Arabia has made many non-intervention efforts to support the Yemeni government. According to Scott A Silverton, intervention can be an action taken by a country in interfering in the territorial or domestic affairs of another country, using force media to influence the power of a foreign government over its territory and population (Silverton, 2011).

Apart from that, in the political field, Saudi Arabia also shows their sympathy for the Yemeni government by printing various news stories that propagate that the Houthis are a terrorist group and that the Yemeni government is an actor that should be supported in the course of the conflict (Abdi, 2016). This fact is evidenced through various news headlines produced by Saudi Arabian media, which always
use the keywords Rebels, Terrorists, Human Rights Violators, and others to describe the Houthi group, and the keywords protect, stabilize, and peace to describe the Yemeni government (Abdi, 2016).

From the beginning of the conflict until 2014, Saudi Arabia never intervened in the Yemen conflict, but this changed when Sanaa city fell to the Houthis on September 21, 2014. Saudi Arabia decided to intervene in the domestic conflict in Yemen (Saudi Arabia). Embassy, 2017). After the city of Sanaa was captured by the Houthi rebels in 2014, the Saudi Arabian government intervened militarily to support the stronghold of Abd Rabbu Mansur Hadi until the civil war finally broke out in 2015 (Nunlis, 2015). Military intervention is a form of intervention that uses military resources as its implementation instrument (Dawood, 2014). Together with its coalition, Saudi Arabia formed a Houthi clearance operation known as Operation Decisive Storm (ODS) (Shabaneh, 2015). This operation began on March 26, 2015, involving several Saudi Arabian coalition countries such as Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Pakistan, and Sudan (Shabaneh, 2015). This operation was carried out by carrying out a large-scale aerial bombing in areas indicated as Houthi defense bases and deploying armed forces into Yemeni territorial areas (Stenlie, 2015)

The change in Saudi Arabia's behavior in launching military intervention is a question mark. The reason is that when viewed from the behavior of Saudi Arabia in other conflicted countries so far, Saudi Arabia is a country that tends to avoid intervention, let alone military intervention. This is in line with the commitment that Saudi Arabia has to prioritize peaceful ways in achieving conflict resolution, as they have conveyed in a joint statement represented by the King and Prime Minister of Saudi Arabia, King Fahd Bin Abdel Aziz, together with the Head of the National Security Agency, Prince Abdullah bin Abdel Aziz responded to resolving the conflict in Palestine in 2003 (Kuna, 2003).

Saudi Arabia was originally a country that played a role in providing development financial assistance to strengthen the Yemeni government, but this changed when the city of Sanaa fell into the hands of the Houthis until Saudi Arabia finally decided to intervene in the form of the military with Operation Decisive Storm in 2015. In this study, the author will analyze changes in the behavior of Saudi Arabia from a country that did not intervene directly in the Yemen conflict to a country that intervened in the form of a military operation known as Operation Decisive Storm (ODS).
Until 2014, Saudi Arabia had never intervened in the conflict in Yemen. The reason is that since the beginning of the conflict between the Houthis and the Yemeni government, Saudi Arabia has only acted as a state assisting in the form of development financial assistance. After the city of Sanaa fell into the hands of the Houthis and the unilateral declaration of the Houthis as the holder of power in Yemen, Saudi Arabia intervened by gathering military forces by forming a military operation known as Operation Decisive Storm in 2015. Based on this, the thing to be investigated in this study is the change in behavior of Saudi Arabia from a country providing aid to a country that intervened military through Operation Decisive Storm in Yemen.

**METHOD**

This study uses a qualitative research method with a descriptive-analytical approach. According to Alan Bryman, *qualitative research* can be defined as a type of research that emphasizes an inductive approach to finding the relationship between theory and what is being studied. The purpose of this type of research is to make a systematic, factual, and accurate description of the facts, nature, and relationships between the phenomena being analyzed and the concepts used. To obtain data in this study, the authors used data collection techniques through Documentary Research, namely the data collection by tracing (Tracing) documents. According to Alan Bryman, Documents can be used as a source in conducting research as long as the documents used are relevant to the research (Nassaji, 2015). In this study, the authors performed a qualitative analysis technique consisting of three stages: data reduction, data presentation, conclusion drawing, and verification (Adams et al. 2007).

**RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

**Yemen civil conflict**

In historical context, North Yemen and South Yemen have very different characteristics. Before 1962, North Yemen was ruled by the Zaidi Islam group, a Shia Islam sect. Southern Yemen is an area dominated by Sunni Islamist groups. In 1977, South Yemen was under British rule until finally, thanks to various nationalist movements, Britain was forced to hand over power to the nationalists until the Republic of South Yemen was formed (Dresch, 2000).

Although ideologically different, the two countries desire to carry out unification based on the similarity of historical factors among the Yemeni people. This wish
was finally realized in 1990 when both parties signed the unification constitution with a multi-party political system (TEIMUN, 2017). The union of North Yemen and South Yemen did not last long. In 1994, there was an upheaval in the body of the Yemeni government. This upheaval stems from the discontent of former South Yemeni socialist groups who feel North Yemenis have dominated them. This upheaval culminated in a civil war between the South Yemen separatist group and the Yemeni government at the time.

In general, there are two main periods in the civil conflict in Yemen, the first period occurred from 2004 to 2010, and the second period occurred from 2011 to 2015. In the first period, from early 2004 to 2010, the group movement The Houthis in Yemen had its ups and downs, the escalation of the conflict between the Houthi rebel group and the Yemeni government is quite long (Boucek, 2010). The second round of civil conflict in Yemen occurred from 2011 to 2015, which began with events of the Yemeni revolution that made the government weak. The reason is that less than a year after the Houthis carried out the ceasefire with the Yemeni government, the wave of protests and demonstrations made the chaos continue. This democratic action aims to bring down the regime of President Saleh, who has led for 33 years (Faqih, 2011).

The Yemen conflict has affected the surrounding countries. The conflict in Yemen has harmed Saudi Arabia and the region. The most significant impact caused by the civil conflict in Yemen is on Saudi Arabia's national security issues. With the civil conflict in Yemen, the Houthis are actively carrying out armed attacks targeting military camps belonging to Saudi Arabia to steal weapons supplies that they will use to rebel, especially in Saudi Arabia's border area with North Yemen. The security threat is also felt directly by Saudi Arabian villages near the northern Yemen border. The Houthis attack these villages in search of food supplies and seek temporary shelter (Worth, 2009).

The civil conflict in Yemen is suspected of having a potential threat in the field of regional security. The reason is that the civil conflict in Yemen has invited the development of a terrorist movement in the Middle East. This terrorism movement is allegedly an extension of the Al Qaeda group that wants to form a base of operations in the Gulf area, called the Al Qaeda in Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) movement. Due to the ongoing conflict, many terrorist groups have fled to Yemen to seek asylum and recruit new members (Knoll, 2017).
**Saudi Arabia Intervention Analysis**

The military intervention carried out by Saudi Arabia in Operation Decisive Storm in Yemen in 2015 became an exciting matter. Based on the course of history, since the end of the gulf war, Saudi Arabia is not a country that likes to intervene directly in other countries' internal conflicts, especially in military disputes.

According to strategic theory, the purpose of a country in intervening in civil conflict is not limited to material problems but also non-material interests such as the influence of the state on other countries (Yarnger, 2006). In the civil conflict in Yemen, strategic theory explains that a drastic change has given Saudi Arabia a dilemma. To determine what changes are the factors that create the dilemma, one of the things we can do is to analyze the significant events that occurred sometime before the Saudi Arabia-led Military Intervention was formed in March 2015. Based on the data obtained, two critical events occurred. Made significant changes in Saudi Arabia's strategic environment in Yemen, namely the conquest of the city of Sanaa by the Houthis on September 21, 2014, and the end of the vacuum of power in Yemen after the Houthis declared themselves the new government of Yemen on February 6, 2015.

In this chapter, the author will analyze research using Strategic Theory with four elements of the Strategic Environment, namely Physical environment, National Character, State and War Mechanisms, and Balance of Power Mechanisms, to analyze the change in behavior of Saudi Arabia.

According to the Strategic Environment, geography is one of the crucial factors influencing the state's actions. In this case, the strategic environment understands that every actor involved in a conflict will always be influenced by the physical reality they are located in. This physical environment is not only limited to things such as the shape of land, sea, or weather but also to spatial problems, natural resources, and communication lines arranged based on the political, social, and economic conditions that make up a country.

In the civil conflict in Yemen, the geographical proximity of Saudi Arabia and Yemen, which directly borders, became one of the crucial factors that prompted Saudi Arabia's decision to intervene militarily. According to the strategic environment, countries with borders will have different relations with countries that are separated by land or sea (U.S Marine Corps, 2007). In the case of Saudi Arabia and Yemen, the two countries are directly adjacent. Northern Yemen is bordered by approximately 1,458 KM, with the provinces of Jizan and Najran in Southwest Saudi Arabia (Library of Congress, 2008). Jizan and Najran are directly
adjacent to the Houthi operation area in Yemen, with details of the distance from the city center to the Houthi operation area being around 50-65 KM to Jizan and less than 10 KM to downtown Najran.

In the Jazan Economic Community, Saudi Arabia plans a large-scale development with a total investment value of 27 trillion US dollars with a development focus on three sectors, namely agriculture, manufacturing, and energy. In agriculture, the government of Saudi Arabia plans that 2/3 of the 100 million hectares of Jizan area will be used in manufacturing industry development. In industrial development, Jizan has a total investment asset of 26.71 billion dollars, with an industrial focus centered on the steel, oil, and shipping industries (Saudi Aramci, n.d.).

In agriculture, Jizan is also a strategic area for Saudi Arabia in agricultural development. This is based on the geographical advantages of Jizan, which is rich in underground water sources, which is essential for Middle Eastern countries, most of which are dominated by deserts and unsuitable for growing crops. Since 2002, Saudi Arabia's government has allocated 7 billion dollars to agriculture in Jizan to reduce imports and increase national income from the oil and gas sector (Khan, 2002).

The neighboring province of Najran, which is also directly bordered by North Yemen and northern Yemen, has important assets for Saudi Arabia. This is because this area is one of the vital areas in Saudi Arabia's industrial development, such as food, dairy, clean water, chemical, and the iron industry. In 2011 Saudi Arabia established approximately 32 large-scale factories with total assets reaching 1686 billion Saudi Riyals in Najran (Monaha, 2016). Total investment in Najran is increasing from year to year, and Saudi Arabia is given special treatment in the field of assistance, where investors are given the right to borrow funds of up to 75% of the industrial development capital, which shows Saudi Arabia's seriousness in turning this area into an industrial area (Monaha, 2016).

The importance of the two regions to Saudi Arabia is also evident in agriculture. The position of Jizan and Najran as the most productive producing areas of agricultural goods is supported by the geographical position of Jizan, which has the largest water source in Southwest Saudi Arabia. The importance of this area to Saudi Arabia is also reinforced by Jizan's role as a regular food supplier for Saudi Arabian people in the Southwest region for the last few decades (Embassy of Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, n.d.). Suppose the two regions are successfully controlled or disturbed by the Houthi group. In that case, Saudi Arabia will lose one of its national income sources, agriculture, which until 2010, contributed approximately 4.6% of Saudi Arabia's GDP (WTO, 2012).
Based on the Physical Environment, Saudi Arabia’s decision to intervene militarily in Yemen was driven by the potential threat posed by the Houthi group due to the geographical proximity between Saudi Arabia and Yemen. The geographic proximity of the conflict zone to the provinces of Jizan and Najran would jeopardize security and slow progress on Saudi Arabia’s significant strategic investments in manufacturing, energy, and agriculture. If it continues to drag on, then the conflict can be detrimental to Saudi Arabia due to the many efforts of the Houthi group to seek or expand operations and carry out attacks and terror acts in the border area. Another threat posed by the Yemeni civil conflict is the threat in the field of Saudi Arabia’s National security. Geographical proximity to areas controlled by the Houthis can be used by a group that can endanger Saudi Arabia’s national security, Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). The activities of the Houthi rebellion distract the Yemeni government and makes the Yemeni government unable to prevent outside parties such as Al-Qaeda from seeking asylum in Yemen or entry into Saudi Arabia from conflict-prone border areas.

In the strategic environment, a country’s national character is one of the things that underlies the reason for the country to intervene in other countries. National character is vital because this character will form an idea or norm that signifies the identity of a country. The strategic environment assumes that the actions of a country in using military force will be influenced by the comprehensive psychological profile equation possessed by each conflicting party (U.S Marine Corps, 2007).

In the civil conflict in Yemen, the first thing we have to do is find out what values are the dogma underlying Saudi Arabia’s decision to intervene militarily in Yemen. The dogmatic ideology for Saudi Arabia is Religion. This is evidenced by the prominent role of religious values in regulating all areas of life in Saudi Arabia. As proof, Saudi Arabia is one country that implements Islamic law, known as Sharia law. Sharia law itself is a legal provision that a Muslim must obey in all aspects of life sourced from the legal sources of the Qur’an and Hadith.

The conflict in Yemen strongly connected Saudi Arabia’s character as a Sunni Islamic state. The dynamics of the conflict are motivated by competition between rebel groups from the Shia group and pro-government groups dominated by the Sunni sect. Based on the consensus, Yemen’s population is not too far between adherents of Sunni and Shia sects. Consensus shows that the Sunni sects comprise 56% of the total Yemeni population, mostly occupying areas of South Yemen, and the Shia population comprises 44%, mostly occupying North Yemen (Index Mundi, 2017).
Based on the explanation in National Character, the similarity in character between Saudi Arabia and the majority of Yemen's population who have a Sunni background encourages Saudi Arabia to intervene militarily to help other countries that have the same national character. With Saudi Arabia, Dogmatic Sunni values influence Saudi Arabia's decision to intervene. This can be proven from the magnitude of the influence exerted by the Wahhabism movement in Saudi Arabia.

The next element is the War and State mechanism. The strategic theory explains that civil conflicts that occur in other countries will attract the attention of other countries. In the strategic environment assumption, the state is the sole actor with the right to monopolize the use of violence. When a country loses the ability to do this, then another country will intervene in the conflict to take over the monopoly on the use of violence in that country for itself. However, suppose the relationship between the lost state, its monopoly on violence, and the intervening state is an alliance. In that case, the state's goal, in this case, is to return the monopoly of violence to the actors who are its alliance (U.S Marine Corps).

In line with the assumption of the War and State mechanism, in the conflict that occurred in Yemen, Saudi Arabia's decision to intervene was based on the situation in Yemen, which had drastically changed. Prior to 2014, the monopoly on the use of force was always owned by the Yemeni government. After the city of Sanaa fell to the Houthis, the Yemeni government stepped down from power and lost the ability to monopolize the use of violence within Yemen.

Based on the assumptions of the War and State mechanism, Saudi Arabia's decision to intervene militarily in the conflict is to take power or annex parts of the territory that Yemen has for its possession. The loss of the state monopoly on the use of force will be an opportunity for Saudi Arabia to take advantage of the ongoing conflict. However, the assumption about the War and State mechanism is not proven in the aim of taking over power in Yemen's territory. This is evident from the actions of Saudi Arabia in the conflict, which did not take any acts of annexing Yemen's territory or taking over the leadership seat in Yemen's domestic politics. Based on the explanation above, the War and State mechanism does not influence Saudi Arabia's decision to intervene militarily in Yemen. Because Saudi Arabia only helps the Yemeni government in attacking the Houthis and does not prosecute any form of this operation.

Under the assumption of a balance of power mechanism, when a conflict occurs and threatens the distribution of power, the state will act to protect it. For the state, civil conflicts that occur in the state can threaten the balance of power at the regional and international levels. If the party that wins in the war is a party that is not pro-
state, this may weaken the state's influence and make the position of rival countries at the regional or global level stronger. One way the state can achieve this is to stop the continuation of conflict in the conflicting country (U.S Marine Corps, 2007).

In regionalism in the Middle East, the center of political power is hegemony by two major countries, namely Saudi Arabia and Iran. The rivalry between the two countries has started since the two countries were founded. In the early 1950s, the two countries were the spearhead of the United States' foreign policy in preventing the expansion of the Soviet Union's influence into the Middle East, where both countries recognized and constituted the Nixon doctrine in their foreign policy. The Nixon Doctrine is a doctrine that states that the United States will defend its allied countries from threats that disrupt peace. Iran and Saudi Arabia are the two countries that spearhead the implementation of the United States' doctrine in the Middle East.

The existence of Iran’s involvement in Yemen makes Saudi Arabia view the Houthis as one of Iran’s proxy efforts to weaken Saudi Arabia’s influence in Yemen. So far, Yemen has a position as a country with good relations with Saudi Arabia. Over the past decades, Yemen has always prioritized receiving Saudi Arabia’s foreign aid (Salisbury, 2015). Until 2010, Saudi Arabia provided development assistance funds to Yemen, amounting to US$103.9 billion, to support economic stability and development in Yemen (Smith, 2011).

Based on the analysis above, three elements of the Strategic Environment influenced Saudi Arabia’s decision to intervene militarily in Yemen. However, each element has a different magnitude of influence. In this study, the authors found that the War and State mechanism's third element did not significantly influence Saudi Arabia’s intervention policy. The War and State mechanism assumes that the state's actions in military intervention in other countries are to seize the power of the other countries they intervene in. In the case of Saudi Arabia's intervention in Yemen, Saudi Arabia did not commit acts of annexation or power grabs in any field for itself. In the intervention, Saudi Arabia is more likely to assist efforts in restoring the monopoly of violence from the Houthi group to the Yemeni government.

In the National Character element, the researcher finds that there are indeed similarities in the national character between Saudi Arabia and the Yemeni government in the field of the Sunni Islamic religious sect, who both have negative sentiments towards the Shia sect that is the background of the Houthi rebels. In the analysis, the researcher also found that a Wahhabi doctrine has a desire to purify Islam in one sect, namely Sunni. Although the role of Wahhabism in the government of Saudi Arabia is quite vital, the researchers did not find evidence that
was significant enough to state that the element of National Character was a factor underlying Saudi Arabia's decision to conduct a military intervention in Saudi Arabia.

In contrast to the previous elements, the Physical Environment and the Balance of Power Mechanism strongly influence Saudi Arabia's actions in conducting a military intervention in Yemen. Even so, the author finds that the Physical Environment is the most influential element in underlying Saudi Arabia's decision to intervene militarily in Yemen. In the Balance of Power Mechanism, the researcher finds that there is indeed the involvement of a third party which is the center of political power, which is Saudi Arabia's rival at the regional level, namely Iran. In the civil conflict in Yemen, there are many indications that Iran is the mastermind behind the Houthi financial and arms supply. After the fall of the city of Sanaa, based on reports obtained from various sources, Iranian troops began to enter the city of Sanaa, which the Houthis had controlled. Responding to this, Saudi Arabia stated that Iran's actions constituted Iranian military aggression, and Saudi Arabia had the right to stop such aggression.

Apart from the above, among all the elements contained in the strategic environment, only the Physical Environment directly impacts Saudi Arabia both economically and in the security sector. In the economic field, the activities carried out by the Houthi group in expanding their movement in border areas have the potential to harm investment and industrial and agricultural activities in the Jizan and Najran areas. In line with this, the conflict also threatens the activities of Saudi Arabia's oil industry through the Red Sea, which the Houthi group controls, especially around the Bab-el Mandeb bay, and forces Saudi Arabia to increase the security of oil cargo ships and even suspend oil shipments via the Red Sea. be a path closest to Europe and the United States.

In the field of security, Saudi Arabia's geographical proximity to Yemen also poses national security problems for Saudi Arabia due to the loss of government control over the development of the Al-Qaeda terrorist group. They want to make Yemen a sanctuary to develop themselves in the gulf region and penetrate the Yemeni border area to reach Arabia. Saudi. Saudi Arabia is also afraid that if this group is allowed to continue to grow, it could become a potent and threatening group in the future. The emergence of propaganda by the Al-Qaeda group to create a new base under the name Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), which wants to recruit members in Yemen and Saudi Arabia.
CONCLUSION

Civil conflict in Yemen has occurred since 2004. This conflict is based on the dissatisfaction of the Shia community in North Yemen, who feel the Yemeni government has discriminated against them. During the conflict, Saudi Arabia had a position as a country that supported the Yemeni government. Saudi Arabia does not have a role as a country that intervenes directly in civil conflicts, only as a state providing aid and political support to the Yemeni government. This position changed in 2015 when Saudi Arabia decided to carry out a military operation known as Operation Decisive Storm.

According to Strategic Theory, the state's actions in conducting military intervention are based on the nature of the strategic environment. A strategic environment is all the understanding that the state has of the reality that surrounds it. In the civil conflict in Yemen, the researcher found that Saudi Arabia's decision to intervene militarily was based on the potential threat posed by the Houthis to areas of Saudi Arabia adjacent to conflict areas in Yemen. Since 2014, Saudi Arabia has planned a large-scale development known as the Jazan Economic Community, which is expected to spearhead the manufacturing, energy, and agricultural industries. The activities of the Houthis potentially threaten Saudi Arabia's industrial development in the area. Another factor in Saudi Arabia's military intervention in Yemen is the presence of a third party or center of political power, Iran, a rival country to Saudi Arabia at the regional level. The interventions of the Iranian state evidence this in helping the movement of the Houthi group in Yemen.

Based on this explanation, the military intervention carried out by Saudi Arabia was based on two things: to protect the territory of Saudi Arabia, especially Jizan and Najran, from the potential threat of the Houthis and prevent Yemen from falling into the center. The political power of Saudi Arabia's rival country in the Middle East, namely Iran.
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