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Riskiansyah Ramadhan
Universitas Indonesia, riskiansyah.ramadhan@ui.ac.id

Syaiful Rohman
Universitas Indonesia, syaifulrohman71@gmail.com

Imam Khomaeni Hayatullah
Universitas Indonesia, Imam.khomaeni@ui.ac.id

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DEVIDE ET IMPERA: THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES' STRATEGIC POLICY IN YEMEN

Riskiansyah Ramadhan¹, Syaiful Rohman², Imam Khomaeni Hayatullah³

¹²³School of Strategic and Global Studies, Universitas Indonesia

Email: riskiansyah.ramadhan@ui.ac.id, syaifulrohman71@gmail.com, Imam.khomaeni@ui.ac.id

ABSTRACT

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) may have withdrawn its troops from Yemen, but its influence remains substantial and significant. From the first stage of the war, Saudi Arabia focused on the north of Yemen, while the UAE actively engaged in the north's south and coastal areas. Not only trains fighters, but the UAE also provides them with financial and political support. This is a descriptive-analytical article, using qualitative methods with data and works of literature, collected various books, journals, and online resources related to the topic. Furthermore, the author uses the "devide et impera" theory to elaborate, examine, and investigate the UAE's policy, as well as its strategy, in Yemen. This article found that UAE's divide and rule strategy is applied to achieve several interests in Yemen, such as countering terrorism, extremism, and Houthi. Nevertheless, the UAE is also ambitious to dispel al-Islah, a group affiliated to the Islamic Brotherhood.

Keywords: *Divide and Rule, Policy, United Arab Emirates, Yemen*

ABSTRAK

Meski Unie Emirat Arab (UEA) telah menarik pasukannya dari Yaman, pengaruhnya masih tetap tetap besar dan signifikan. Hal itu terlihat dari upaya UEA dalam melakukan indirect engagement melalui kebijakan divide and rule dengan mendukung beberapa milisi kesukuan. Tidak hanya melatih para milisi, UEA juga memberikan dukungan berupa bantuan finansial dan juga politik. Dengan menggunakan metode deskriptis analitis, artikel ini menyimpulkan bahwa kebijakan divide and rule UEA dilakukan untuk meraih beberapa tujuannya di Yaman, di antaranya adalah sebagai upaya menanggulangi terorisme, ekstremisme, dan Houthi. Di samping itu, UEA juga sangat berambisi untuk menyingkirkan Partai Islah yang terafiliasi dengan Ikhwanul Muslimin. Tidak hanya itu, Yaman yang terletak pada posisi yang sangat strategis juga menjadi salah satu alasan UEA untuk terus terlibat dalam konflik Yaman, meski tidak secara langsung.

Kata Kunci: *Divide and Rule, Kebijakan, Uni Emirat Arab, Yaman*

INTRODUCTION

Yemen's prolonged conflict can be traced when President Ali Abdullah Saleh was forced to resign in June 2011. This conflict worsened when the Saudi-led

intervention in Yemen was launched by Saudi Arabia in 2015, leading a coalition of nine countries to call from the internationally recognized President Hadi for the military support. Hadi was the only candidate in the

2012 elections. However, his election as president received resistance from several opposition groups, such as separatist movements in southern Yemen and Houthi rebels (Salmoni, 2010). They argued that the election was only a tactic by Saudi and the United States to maintain their allies' power. On the other hand, separatist groups in southern Yemen also expressed their rejection of the vote. This group plans to revive the socialist state united by Saleh (Finn, 2012).

Saudi is a leader in this coalition, however, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) role in contemporary conflicts is quite significant. In addition to supporting President Hadi's government as a legitimate government in removing the Houthi threat, the UAE also plays a role in dispelling the threat of extremism and terrorism in Yemen. In 2016, the UAE sought to dispel al-Qaeda's influence in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) in Mukalla, southern Yemen. Besides, the UAE also trained combatants from local groups in counterterrorism efforts in the Abyan region in 2017 (Jalal, 2020).

Besides Houthi, AQAP, or Islamic State (IS), Al-Islah Party, which has a connection with the Muslim Brotherhood, might be a threat to the UAE. When Lt. Gen. Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar who is leading Al-

Islah appointed as vice president, the UAE began to reconsider its policies in Yemen. In the broader reach, the UAE also considers Qatar as a threat. In some countries, the UAE and Qatar are often involved in providing financial and political support to local groups, as happened in Libya (Cafiero & Wagner, 2015).

However, the UAE's efforts to eliminate Yemen's threat seemed to have stalled with the gradual withdrawal of UAE troops from Yemen in mid-late 2019. In October 2019, the UAE finally announced that it was altogether withdrawing its troops from Yemen. Even though the troops have withdrawn, it seems that the UAE's influence is still influential in the South. This phenomenon then raises the question of why the UAE is withdrawing its troops from Yemen, but its influence remains strong in the South? How does the UAE maintains its policy in Yemen? This article seeks to know the UAE's considerations to focus on the Southern region from the above questions. Apart from that, this article also seeks to analyze the UAE's divide and rule policy in maintaining influence and achieving interests in Yemen.

There were not many studies that specifically discussed the UAE's role or policies in Yemen. Most of the research

focuses on the policies of Saudi Arabia, where the kingdom is the leader of an intervention coalition in Yemen. However, the UAE plays a significant role in the coalition in which Saudi and the UAE are two countries that are more prominent than other coalition members. Clausen (2018) concluded that the Yemen conflict is better understood as a competition over who controls the state. However, external actors such as Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE have significantly impacted the civil war's worsening in Yemen. Nußberger (2017) emphasizes that the intervention carried out by the Saudi-led coalition complies with Article 2 (4) of the UN Charter. Darwich (2020) builds on the emerging literature on status in International Relations to unravel the escalation of commitment to a failed war. Moreover, Darwich argues that interventions persist in failed military intervention to salvage Saudi and the UAE's status.

Dogan-Akkas (2020) conducted research related to the UAE foreign policy and strategy in Yemen, which tends to change from bandwagoning to buck-passing. The research also examines the UAE's motivations in engaging in a buck-passing strategy towards Qatar and Saudi Arabia. Brehony (2020) specifically discussed how the UAE's role in Yemen in which he argues

that the UAE was consistent in its determination to prevent a Houthi-dominated regime that could be used by Iran and to eliminate the threat of AQAP. However, the above studies are less focused on the UAE's policy and tend to discuss the broader role of Saudi Arabia compared to the UAE. There are hardly any specific articles that discuss the UAE policy in Yemen. This may be due to the role of Saudi, which is more prominent than the UAE in the coalition.

Alexandra Lewis (2015) reviews the divide and rule in Yemen from a different perspective. In this research, Lewis interpreted the divide and rule as a phenomenon of division between North Yemen and South Yemen due to unification, which was considered "too rushed" by several clans and tribal groups in Yemen who have ideological and political differences from one another. Not only that, but this fragmentation is also ultimately exploited by radical terrorist groups such as AQAP and IS.

METHODOLOGY

This is a descriptive-analytical article, using qualitative methods with data and works of literature, collected various books, journals, and online resources related to the topic. To get an overview of the UAE

policy in Yemen, the researcher first describes the historical involvement of the UAE in the Saudi coalition, which then withdraws its troops and tends to focus on the South. The researcher then analyzed the UAE policy by using the divide and rule theory as the tool of analysis.

Due to limited access to primary data in official government documents, the author analyzed the UAE's policy conducted in Yemen using secondary data obtained from scientific journals, books, and other relevant sources. This data is considered sufficient to describe and analyze the UAE policy in Yemen.

THEORY

Since the research previously mentioned did not specifically discuss the UAE divide and rule policy in Yemen, Lewis' work (2020) might be the only literature that explicitly mentions divide and rule in Yemen. However, the point of view used is very different from the research conducted by the author. Therefore, this article attempts to fill the literature gap regarding the UAE's policy and role in Yemen.

Moreover, the author uses the theory of divide and rule to analyze the UAE's policy in Yemen. The divide and rule

strategy basically cannot be attributed to one particular discipline. This strategy can be applied across many fields, including law, history, and the social sciences. However, this strategy is better known as a political strategy closely related to dominance and efficiency. This strategy is used to seize power by breaking the resistance of large groups into small groups. The trick is to contrast one group with another by exploiting differences between groups ranging in race, language, religion, and others.

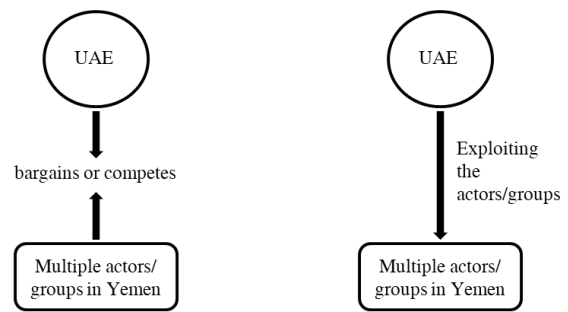
Morrock (1973) found four basic tactics of divide and rule that the Western colonialist often practiced. The first is the creation of differences within the conquered population. This can come about in three ways: throwing neighboring ethnic groups in the same colonial territory, mass migration from one colonial territory to another, and religious conversion. The second is the augmentation of existing differences, which are often carried out by religious proselytization and unequal access to education. The third is the exploitation of these differences for the benefit of colonial power—finally, the politicization of ethnic differences within the colonized population (Morrock, 1973, pp. 129-133).

Many scholars have examined and commented on, "devide et impera" policy. In this article, however, the author will explore a definition of the "divide and rule" from Posner and his colleagues' work (2009) to derive the aspects and concepts. According to Posner, there are two necessary conditions to divide and rule mechanism. First, a unitary actor bargains with or competes against a set of multiple actors. The second condition suggests that a unitary actor follows an intentional strategy of exploiting coordination or collective action problems among multiple actors (Posner, Spier, & Vermeule, 2010, pp. 419-420).

British imperialism that takes advantage of the emerging hostility between the native population communities would be the best example to demonstrate the divide and rule policy. Xypolia (2016) found that the divide and rule policy can be applied in two different ways. The first is to divide vertically by separating the local population into distinct communities, usually based on language, race, and religious affiliation. The horizontal dimension occurs when foreign rule divides the population along class lines, separating elites from the masses (Xypolia, 2016, pp. 228-229). In the context of UAE's policy in Yemen, the government supports

several groups based on tribal affiliation to demolish Houthi and Al-Islah.

Figure 1. Two possible conditions of the UAE's divide and rule policy in Yemen



(a) Condition 1

(b) Condition 2

Source: edited and modified by the author from the work of Posner, Spier, and Vermeule (2010).

The mechanism and strategy of divide and rule, as suggested by Posner, to thoroughly define the phenomena of UAE's interference in Yemen is that a single actor exploits coordination problems among conflicting groups by making discriminatory offers (Posner, Spier, & Vermeule, 2010, p. 428). Two possible conditions that occur in the divide and rule policy, as reviewed by Posner, were then elaborated by the author to describe how the UAE applies the divide and rule policy in Yemen.

If we refer to the framework above and based on the facts that happened in Yemen, the most appropriate condition to

describe the UAE's divide and rule policy in Yemen is the second condition, in which the UAE exploits groups in Yemen. These groups are used as proxies to remove threats to the interests of the UAE, especially the Houthis, al-Islah, and AQAP, and to ensure the existence of the UAE in Yemen.

The strategy pursued by the UAE to control and secure southern Yemen is by selecting local military leaders, activists, tribal groups, and anyone who has the same vision and mission as the UAE. Having secured suitable alliances, the UAE then trains, funds, and equips them all. The UAE began the strategy by identifying the sparks of resistance in the southern region and organizing the many militias affiliated to the Security Belt, which initially focused on fighting AQAP and IS.

Furthermore, the UAE also replicated the same policy model in building alliances with resistance groups in the Hadramawt and Shabwa regions by establishing the Hadrami Elite Forces and the Shabwa Elite Forces. These resistance groups consist of tribal groups, with whom they have ties to the Southern Transitional Council (STC), which was born out of a popular movement in the southern region of Yemen that demands independence and secession from North Yemen.

It should be noted that these resistance groups are not under the control or orders of the STC. However, the close relationship between the STC and the members of those resistance groups - to a broader extent with the UAE - ultimately creates a common goal and interest (Perkins, 2019). Details about how the relations between the UAE and the groups will be discussed in the following sections.

ANALYSES

UAE's Strategic Consideration in Yemen

At the end of June 2019, the UAE, as one of the leading players in Saudi-led intervention, decided to withdraw its troops from Yemen and focus on counterterrorism efforts (Uqba, 2019). After obtaining approval from Saudi, the UAE withdrew its troops but remained committed to President Hadi's government (Yaakoubi, 2019). However, the UAE's decision to withdraw troops from Yemen is not without sufficient consideration. The UAE began to reconsider its policies in Yemen after the al-Islah Party, which has ties to the Muslim Brotherhood, joined the government. The UAE certainly does not want the assistance provided to be utilized by al-Islah. It will also be counterproductive to the UAE's policies that are anti-Islamism.

Despite having decided to withdraw troops at the end of June 2019, the UAE continues to engage in Yemen through indirect engagement. Within five years, the UAE controlled several armed groups estimated at 90,000 fighters in several regions. Not only given direct training, but they also get capacity building services, logistical assistance, and even salaries. Thus, the focus of the coalition is not only fighting Houthis but also al-Islah. Intervention through indirect engagement is carried out to achieve some of the UAE's national interests in Yemen. First is the concern for democratic values in the region. The issue of democracy has been a threat to Saudi and all the monarchic gulf states. It can be seen from Saudi military intervention in Yemen's 1960s by supporting the Royalists against Republicans supported by Egypt (Vincent, 2008, p. 36).

Saleh's success in uniting Yemen also posed a threat to regional security stability. The Arab Gulf states never welcomed the unification of South and North Yemen in 1990. Gamal Gasim, a Yemeni professor of political science at the Grand Valley State University in Michigan, said that a united and a democratic Yemen is a severe threat to the Gulf monarchies because it would serve as a model for the local

populations due to its historical social and tribal ties with the Gulf (Younes, 2019). A series of Saudi efforts to overthrow Saleh were carried out, including supporting the South Yemenis to rebel against Saleh in 1994. Until finally, in 2011, Saudi found the right momentum to bring down Saleh.

Secondly, Houthi has been the primary concern of the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen. Houthi was initially only a religious movement founded in the 1990s by Husein Badr al-Din al-Houthi. The Houthis are a Shiite Zaidiyah group, which is theologically different from the Shiite Imamiyah and Ismailiyyah. Some opinions state that the Shiite Zaidiyah teachings tend to be closer to the Sunnis than the Shiites. Yemen's unification that took place in 1990 produced a new constitution that guaranteed and protected the rights of speech and organization (Winter, 2010, pp. 395-400). This policy certainly played an essential role in the development and transformation of the Houthis.

The conflict between the Yemeni government and the Houthis was remarked by Houthi's confrontation in the early 2000s. At that time, Houthis, originally called Believing Youth, voiced anti-US and anti-Israel actions in all mosques in Sa'adah (Berman & Smith, 2014). At that time, Saleh

was making collaborative efforts with the U.S. to combat terrorism in the Middle East in connection with the World Trade Center (WTC) bombing on September 11, 2001. This effort was considered Saleh's initiative to ensure the Western countries continue to support his regime, given the threats posed by rebellions in the north and south are more dangerous than al-Qaeda.

Thirdly, after 9/11, the war campaign against terrorism was intensely echoed, especially in the Middle East. Yemen is also not spared from one of the focuses of terrorism handling by the U.S. with AQAP. AQAP has increasingly shown threats in Yemen after vowing to subvert the Saud and Saleh families. This group's establishment is the result of a fusion between the Yemen branch of al-Qaeda and al-Qaeda's Saudi branch. Nevertheless, al-Qaeda's footprint has existed in Yemen since the 1990s. Al-Qaeda supports Islamic groups fighting socialist groups in southern Yemen after returning from Afghanistan (Zimmerman, 2016, p. 25). The success of Saudi in the 2000s in dealing with the problem of terrorism forced members of the Saudi branch of al-Qaeda to flee to Yemen (Fattah, 2014, p. 211). Besides, AQAP also has links to al-Shabab militias in Somalia. AQAP is

the most deadly branch of al-Qaeda among the other branches.

After President Saleh's overthrow in early 2012, AQAP exploited an unstable political situation by carrying out an uprising in Yemen's southern region. In fact, since the transformation of Yemen's situation into a civil war in 2015, AQAP has taken advantage of the political vacuum by trying to develop a false state in the south. The civil war also impacted the strengthening of AQAP because the U.S., together with the Saudi-led coalition, focused on destroying the Houthis in the north. Such patterns, the exploitation of political instability, are often used by other terrorist groups in various countries, such as in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya.

In addition to AQAP, this condition was also utilized by ISIS in Yemen (ISIS-Y) to expand control by building branches in Yemen. The leading figure is a Saudi national, Bilal al-Harbi, who vowed to work with ISIS-Y led by Abu Bakar al-Baghdadi (Zimmerman, 2016, p. 25). The presence of ISIS-Y in 2014 in Yemen as if forming a new pattern in the conflict, which was initially only competition for a power struggle, turned into an issue of sectarianism. This can be seen from the actions of ISIS-Y, which carry a big Sunni name in every attack

on Houthis, who are adherents of Zaidiyah, especially the attack on two Houthi-owned mosques in Sana'a.

Qatar has always been accused of being a state supporting terrorism in the context of the extremism movement. As a climax, Saudi and several other gulf country members blockaded Qatar in 2017. Al-Islah's dominance in Yemen would be a threat for UAE, both for national security and its image on the international level as a warrior against terrorism. However, the Houthis were perceived as a more significant threat to UAE interests than Islah (Brehony, 2020, p. 135). Efforts to eliminate Qatar's influence by accusing Qatar of giving support to terrorist groups in Yemen (Turak, 2018). In several reports, it was also found that the UAE provided financial assistance to one of the commanders on the list of terrorists by the United States of USD 12 million (Michael, Wilson, & Keath, 2018).

UAE's efforts to get rid of Qatar also occurred in Libya, where both countries were actively involved in the country after the fall of Muammar Gaddafi. On the one hand, the UAE is actively involved in providing support in military support to Haftar. On the other hand, Qatar continues to offer political and financial assistance to the Government National Assembly (GNA),

which according to the UAE, consists of Islamist groups and affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood, even though no evidence can confirm that Qatar supports terrorist groups in Libya such as al-Qaeda, Ansar Sharia, and ISIS-Y (El-Gamaty, 2017). UAE's attitude toward Qatar is a concern to what the UAE argues: Qatar's support for Islamist groups in Libya will be a threat to the UAE. From the perspective of national security, terrorism is a threat to the UAE, both for regional security and UAE national security. So it would not be surprising if the UAE is aggressively fighting terrorism and extremism in Yemen. Besides, the issue of terrorism is also exploited by the UAE for the legitimacy of intervening in Yemen.

Indeed, the security factor, which is currently one of the leading causes of instability in Yemen, is of particular concern to the Gulf countries, as reviewed by Lewis (2015). Apart from Saudi, the UAE is a country in the Gulf that will have an impact on this political instability and security. Therefore, the UAE will not hesitate to make every effort to defend and protect its national security. (Lewis, 2015)

Besides that, apart from being related to politics and national security, the UAE's involvement in Yemen's conflict is also

influenced by economic motives. Since the beginning of the war, the UAE's attention has been more focused and concentrated on securing the southern and eastern regions of Yemen, which includes from Aden to Hadramawt. Furthermore, the UAE also focuses on controlling the island of Socotra, located in the Arabian Sea, and Perim island in the middle of the Bab al-Mandab. Although militias and local forces practically control these areas, they are more loyal to the UAE than Yemen's legitimate government. This is because the local forces get assistance and support from the UAE (Al-Qassab, 2018).

Confirming the work of Dogan-Akkas (2020), becoming the status quo in Yemen, especially the Southern region, is not something the UAE wants to achieve in Yemen. However, the region is an essential region for the UAE, especially for its economic interests (Dogan-Akkas, 2020, p. 5). South Yemen is located in a very strategic location for the interests of the UAE. Before Yemen's political changes in 2011, the UAE has started having consortiums in various sectors, especially in Southern Yemen, including construction, mining gold, and the Port of Aden project. Several giant UAE-owned companies operate in several locations in Yemen, with

annual revenues reaching USD 5.6 billion (Dogan-Akkas, 2020, p. 10).

The UAE also massively attacked the island of Socotra. This clearly illustrates how ambitious the UAE is to control the Gulf of Aden. Why is that? Of course, so that the UAE can take advantage of free trade flow through the gulf. Not only can the island allow the UAE to be able to build a military base to repel enemies, but the strategic location of Socotra in the Arabian Sea also allows the UAE to benefit from the free flow of trade through the Gulf of Aden (McEniry, 2018). If this mission successful, the UAE will be able to maintain its national security and indirectly reap economic benefits in Yemen.

UAE's Divide and Rule Policy

To achieve the goals mentioned earlier, the UAE implements a divide and rule policy by supporting some militia and tribal groups. This policy is a form of UAE's indirect engagement in Yemen. Among the armed groups formed and funded by the UAE is *al-Hizam al-Amni* or Security Belt Forces (SBC), institutionalized and organized by the UAE in mid-2015. Since its inception, the UAE's involvement in the Saudi-led coalition has focused on the southern region of Yemen. This was done by

concentrating on building a security infrastructure so that the UAE's forces could operate (Heras, 2018).

The UAE is well aware and confident that militias and tribal groups can become local partners that the UAE can use to achieve its Yemen goals. The UAE finances and manages the SBF, which mainly operates in Aden, Lahjh, Abyan, and several other areas in southern Yemen. These groups have long fought against AQAP and IS-Y in Yemen. Also, they fought against the Muslim Brotherhood, to which the Islah Party was affiliated (Brehony, 2020). If we look at the object being fought by these militia groups, they would be the perfect alliance to be used as a proxy to achieve the goals to be achieved by the UAE. Apart from being a proxy, the UAE policy, which is quite pragmatic, according to the author, is also an embodiment of the UAE divide and rule policy.

In addition, *Hama al-Aqida* (Creed of Hama), a Salafi militia, was formed in response to Taiz's Houthi attack in 2015. *Hama al-Aqida* later transformed into *Kata'ib Abu al-Abbas* (Father of al-Abbas Brigades) under the leadership of Adil Abduh Fari Uthman al-Dhubhani, also known as Abu al-Abbas. Al-Abbas has a track record that is not good enough. By the

US and Saudi, al-Abbas was designated as a terrorist in October 2017. However, despite his designation as a terrorist, it is believed that al-Abbas has relations with the Saudis and the UAE, where he convinced the two countries that his troops could be used to eliminate extremist groups such as AQAP and IS-Y (Heras, 2018). Besides, al-Abbas' relationship with the Islah Party is also not good enough, where the latter is al-Abbas's competitor in Yemeni politics. Having the same vision with *Kata'ib Abu al-Abbas* in eradicating terrorism, which can become a national threat, the UAE also appears pragmatic by exploiting the feud between al-Abbas and the Islah Party. Not only the UAE can eliminate the threat of AQAP, but it can eliminate the influence of the Muslim Brotherhood at once. Therefore, *Kata'ib Abu al-Abbas* continues to receive military and financial support from the UAE.

Long before working with the UAE, al-Abbas worked for Saudi to eliminate the Houthis. When the revolution against President Saleh occurred in 2011, the Houthis managed to control several key areas in North Yemen, including Dammaj, which led to clashes between local tribal groups and the Houthis. Al-Abbas later became the leader of the local group and led the Salafi armed group to fight the Houthis.

Apart from leading a local group, al-Abbas also mobilized the mass of Darul Hadith students, Dammaj. Apart from playing the role of leader, al-Abbas is also subject to Saudi for overseeing the distribution of funds and weapons used to mobilize the Salafi masses in Dammaj (Heras, 2018).

Quwwat al-Nakhba al-Hadramiyya or Hadrami Elite Forces are part of UAE and Saudi's effort to rebuild security forces in southern Yemen. The Saudi-led coalition created the forces with funding from Saudi and trainers from Jordan, Saudi, and UAE. All the recruits are local Hadramis; they retook Mukalla from AQAP in April 2016 with support from the UAE and a small contingent of American forces (Schmitz & Burrowes, 2018, p. 201). On 16 October 2018, the Hadrami Elite Forces were deployed to Mesini Valley as part of Operation Faisal led by the UAE. The operation aims to secure Hadramawt, which borders Shabwa, where Balhalf, Yemen's only liquified natural gas (LNG) terminal, operates. Since 2015, Balhalf has stopped export activities for security reasons. The threat came from local groups around Balhalf, some of which are affiliated with AQAP. Responding to this, the UAE then trained and armed the Hadrami Elite Forces to protect Balhalf (Ardemagni, 2018).

Another force is Shabwani Elite Forces, a military unit operating in Shabwa. Between 2015 and 2017, Shabwa was one of the conflict centers between Houthi-Saleh forces and President Hadi's loyalists. In addition to its role in the civil war, Shabwa has been home to a prolonged insurgent campaign by AQAP. In 2016, AQAP militants succeeded in taking control of Habban and Azzan, cities in southern Yemen. In the same year, The United States and the UAE-trained Shabwani Elite Forces then conducted several counter-terrorism operations (Radman, 2019). Nevertheless, besides fighting against terrorism, UAE also focuses on its strategic interests, notably oil fields in Shabwa, the country's only gas liquefaction plant in Balhaf, the al-Shihr oil terminal, and seaports in southern Yemen (Perkins, 2019, p. 5).

This troop is a combination of three troops: the Giants Brigade, the Guardians of the Republic, and the Tihama Resistance. The Giants Brigade is a unit of elite forces that used to be part of the Yemeni military unit, which was later reconstituted with the UAE's assistance. The Giants Brigade had a sizeable troop number, reaching around 28000 soldiers. Their soldiers come from southern Yemen, mostly Salafists, including those driven from Dammaj when the Houthi

uprising took place in 2015. The Giants Brigade received training from the UAE and received financial and weaponry support since 2015 (d'Hauthuille, 2018). The Guardian of the Republic is a force commanded by Tareq Saleh, former president Saleh's nephew. Their number is estimated at 4000 troops, including special forces and anti-terrorism brigades. Also, there are another 5,000 troops, which are believed to be trained by the UAE in Eritrea. Based on reports, they have been active since April 2018 and are currently operating in Mukha city (Browne, 2018).

The Tihama Resistance is a troop whose name is taken from an area in the Red Sea coastal in which Hodeidah lies. The number of these troops is estimated at around 4000 troops consisting of local fighters led by Ahmed al-Kawkabani and Abdulrahman Hajri. Compared to the Giants Brigade and the Guardian of the Republic, the UAE support provided to the Tihama resistance was more limited, especially military support (Browne, 2018).

The UAE formed the Southern Transitional Council (STC) in May 2017 as a counterbalancing effort against Al-Islah and the Muslim Brotherhood in Yemen. It is al-Zubaidi, the former Governor of Aden appointed by President Hadi, and Hani bin

Breik, former minister of state, who formed the STC in May 2017 after being sacked by Hadi himself for openly challenging his authority. STC then received full support from the UAE (Brehony, 2020, p. 139). STC was a separatist movement in southern Yemen called the Southern Movement (SM), commonly known as *al-Hirak*. Over time, this movement underwent a fairly radical transformation. This movement began to show its seeds in the early 2000s until it finally surfaced in Yemen in 2007. Their demands and requests were relatively moderate at the time, including equality with the north, employment, the right to determine policy, and control of economic resources in the south, including oil resources in al-Maseela located in Hadramawt province (Day, 2010, p. 61). However, SM's current demands are no longer about equal rights and economics but demand to separate from Yemen and establish an independent South Yemen country (Aljazeera, 2020).

SM considered that the unification that had been carried out by Saleh in 1990 had failed in resolving fundamental problems related to national identity, economic development, and government politics. They considered that Saleh and his family had discriminated against this group

by exploiting natural resources in the south for personal gain. In acting, SM was suspected of having a relationship and received support from AQAP. If so, then SM is considered a movement worthy of consideration in the Yemen conflict. The territory of Yemen, both north and south, is a unity. Regarding the historical aspect, the division between north and south was set in agreement between Britain and the Ottomans in 1904. After World War I, Imams from the Zaidiyah group replaced Ottoman rule in the north, while the Sunni majority population rejected the Imam's leadership, and more chose to strengthen the alliance with Britain in the south (Day, 2010, p. 62).

One of Saleh's mistakes in leading was his leadership, which was not exclusive and comprehensive. Not all Yemen areas are under Saleh's control, especially the Sa'adah region in the north. Saleh made a policy of power-sharing with the tribal leaders in Sa'adah to maintain his power's legitimacy. After the outbreak of the civil war in 1994, Saleh sought to implement the policies he implemented in the north to strengthen its influence in the south. However, in Yemen's southern region, a former socialist government has experienced detribalization since the 1970s (Day, 2010, p. 67). Detribalization has impacted the fading of

fanaticism and hierarchy in the tribal structures in the south. Thus, the power-sharing policy that Saleh used to do in the north did not apply in the south.

Unavoidable impacts

The Saudi-led coalition's intervention has impacted social, economic, and political instability in Yemen. The conflict continues to take a heavy toll on Yemeni civilians, making Yemen the world's worst humanitarian crisis. According to the report published by UNHCR, of the total Yemeni population of 28.5 million, around 24 million people in Yemen need assistance. Another 3.6 million are internally displaced, whose trends have been increasing year by year (UNHCR, 2020). This social phenomenon will never end as long as Yemen's conflicting parties do not find a middle ground for peace.

The armed conflict harms the civilian population, which caused a significant death toll. The coalition has conducted indiscriminate and disproportionate airstrikes scores, killing and hitting thousands of civilians, using munitions sold by the United States, United Kingdom, and others, including widely banned cluster munitions. Parties involved in the conflict have exacerbated what the UN has called the

world's most significant humanitarian catastrophe, including unlawfully impeding the desperately needed humanitarian aid (Roth, 2019). Besides, another impact that has had quite a significant negative impact is the vulnerability of Yemen's security system. This is due to the ease with which residents obtain weapons supplied by the Saudis and the UAE. The ownership of weapons positively affects the social system there.

The UAE itself is the dominant partner in the coalition led by Saudi Arabia. The coalition's intervention was an official request of the Yemeni government, which also asked for international help to eliminate the Houthis. At present, the UAE seeks to enhance its role in the southern region by supporting local militias to control South Yemen, specifically Aden and its strategic ports, and prevent the threat of domination of UAE commercial shipping lines in the region (Younes, 2019). On the surface, the UAE is explicitly allied with Saudi. However, its recent actions in the south of Yemen, the Horn of Africa, and the Gulf of Aden illustrate that the UAE is slowly but surely positioning itself to become a formidable regional power independent of Saudi authority.

Conclusion

From the early beginning of the war, the UAE has focused more on Yemen's southern region. After nearly five years of military intervention, the UAE finally announced it would conduct a military drawdown in July 2019. The UAE may have withdrawn from Yemen. However, its influence remains strong. Five years on, the UAE has control over several non-state armed groups, which it supports by providing direct training, capacity building, logistics assistance, and salaries. The pretext is to destroy Houthi as well as counterterrorism efforts in the southern region. However, the goal turned out to be more than that. It is also very ambitious to get rid of the al-Islah Party, which is considered affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood. On the other hand, it also has economic importance with the strategic location of Yemeni waters.

It can be seen from the UAE policy that supports interest groups in Yemen is a form of divide and rule policy to conduct indirect engagement in Yemen. It is evident from the UAE's control over Yemen's Socotra island in the Arabian Sea and Perim island in the middle of the Bab al-Mandab waterway. Not only provides it with an ideal military base, but Socotra's strategic location also enables the UAE to position itself

through investment in the island's ports to ensure it benefits from the free flow of trade through the Gulf of Aden. Nevertheless, its policy in Yemen and other countries harms the country and its population. The policies taken by the UAE show that the country, which is made up of seven emirates, is very ambitious to have a more dominant role in the Middle East, and to a broader extent, in the world.

As already noted, the UAE is not too interested in becoming a status quo in Yemen. The reason behind the divide and rule policy as a medium for indirect engagement in the UAE is prioritized for security purposes that could threaten the UAE. In addition, the UAE's economic interests in South Yemen are quite large. Thus, the UAE cannot only let go of South Yemen, which is located in a strategic position as a potential trade route.

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