YEMENI HOUTHI' BLOCKADE OF ISRAELI MERCHANT SHIPS IN THE RED SEA AND ITS IMPACT ON REGIONAL AND GLOBAL STABILITY

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Abstract

The Red Sea is a strategic region that connects the Middle East, Africa, and Asia, and is a vital trade and transportation route for the world. However, it has also witnessed conflicts and tensions between various actors, including Israel and the Yemeni Houthi. This research aims to analyze why the Yemeni Houthi blockade Israeli-bound merchant ships in the Red Sea, and how it impacts regional and global stability. This research uses a qualitative method with literature study techniques to obtain data from various sources, such as books, journals, reports, media, and official documents. The results showed that the blockade of Israeli merchant ships by the Yemeni Houthi in the Red Sea was motivated by political, economic, military, and ideological factors, relating to the conflict between Israel and the Yemeni Houthi, the Yemeni civil war, the Saudi-Iranian rivalry, and the United States' support for Israel. The blockade negatively impacts regional and global stability, as it creates insecurity, economic losses, humanitarian crises, and diplomatic obstacles between the actors involved.

Keywords: *Ship Blockade, Houthi, Yemen, Red Sea, Israel*

Introduction

The Houthi rebel group in Yemen has taken steps to disrupt and prevent ship traffic bound for or originating from Israel through the Red Sea. (BBC, 2023). The Houthi claimed that they had seized and targeted several ships linked to Israel, including the cargo ship Galaxy Leader (Anshori, 2023). The Houthi have also threatened to attack all ships traveling through Yemeni territorial waters bound for the Israeli port of Eilat, which is a major source of revenue for the Zionist state (Lili Lestari, 2023). The Houthi stated that their actions were a form of resistance against the Zionist Israeli aggressors who continue to carry out genocidal wars and massacres against all components of the Palestinian people's lives (Verelladevanka et al., 2023).The blockade could put economic and political pressure on Israel, significantly altering the world's maritime routes (Hashmi et al., 2023). The blockade can also cause security tensions both regionally and globally.

Up to now, many studies have discussed the Houthi and the state of the Red Sea region with two main focuses. First, the Houthi are considered a serious threat to the Red Sea region (Baabood, 2023; Sadek, 2020; Zimmerman, 2022). Second, the Red Sea region is critical to regional and global stability (Getahun, 2023; Guiziou, 2024; Lons & Petrini, 2023; Lott, 2021). The Red Sea region is a strategic global trade route so many countries have an interest in maintaining the security of this region. These studies show how Houthi presence and activities can destabilize regional and global security.

Previous studies have discussed the presence of the Houthi and the security situation in the Red Sea region. However, these studies have not discussed the ability of the Yemeni Houthi to attack merchant ships bound for Israel and its impact on regional and global stability. Since November 2023, the Houthi have declared war on Israel and targeted all ships traveling

through the Red Sea to Israel. These attacks have disrupted maritime traffic in the Red Sea, which is an important route for world trade and oil supply. Therefore, this research will discuss the impact of the ship blockade by Yemen's Houthi on regional and global security stability. This research aims to analyze how the Houthi blockade affects the interests and relationships between countries in the Red Sea region, specifically Israel, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Iran. It will also identify the factors that motivate the Houthi to carry out the blockade and the impact of the blockade. This research is expected to provide a deeper understanding of the dynamics and security challenges in the Red Sea region, as well as recommendations for addressing these issues.

This research seeks to answer two main questions: why do the Houthi blockade Israeli ships? What is its impact on regional and global stability? This research assumes that the blockade by the Houthi in Yemen can cause security instability both regionally and globally. This is because the Red Sea trade route is an important route for countries in the world. This blockade effort will cause countries with interests in the region to try to re-secure the Red Sea region.

Research Framework

This research uses constructivism theory as an analytical tool to explain the Houthi blockade action in the Red Sea. One of the basic assumptions of constructivism theory, as stated by (Wendt, 1999), is that global politics is guided by ideas, norms and values shared by actors. Thus, social reality is not objective and fixed, but subjective and dynamic, depending on how actors interpret and interact with their environment. Thus, behavior and relationships between actors can change along with changes in the underlying ideas, norms, and values. This assumption differs from realist or liberalist theories, which assume that global politics is determined by

anarchic structures and fixed, universal material interests (Sørensen et al., 2022; Wendt, 1999).

The purpose of the research using constructivism theory is to examine how identity and norms can influence the blockade behavior carried out by the Houthi in the Red Sea region. Constructivism theory assumes that social reality is shaped by ideas, norms and values shared by actors. The Houthi blockade is the result of the construction of the Houthi group's identity and interests that are different from the Yemeni government and coalition countries. The Houthi blockade also affects the construction of the identities and interests of the countries involved or affected, either directly or indirectly.

Research Methodology

This research uses a qualitative approach and is a form of descriptive research. Information collection in this research uses data obtained from secondary resources, both in the form of print and digital media, such as books, journals, reports, newspapers and the like. The data obtained is then processed and presented in descriptive form to explain the formulation of the problems raised in this study. This paper seeks to explain the phenomenon raised by using the surgical tools of constructivist theory as explained above.

Findings and Discussion

Israel and Palestine Conflict

The conflict between Israel and Palestine is one of the longest and most complex conflicts in the world. The conflict stems from historic and religious claims to the same land, known as Palestine by Arabs and Israel

by Jews (Caplan, 2019). The conflict also involves political, economic, social, and humanitarian issues that affect both sides and the region (Taghdisi-Rad, 2010). One of the main causes of this conflict was the emergence of the Zionist movement, a Jewish nationalist ideology that wanted to establish a Jewish state in their ancestral lands (Muslih, 1988). The movement received support from the British, who controlled Palestine after World War I. However, the movement drew objections from the Palestinian Arab population, who felt their rights and identity were threatened by Jewish immigration (Quandt et al., 1973). Tensions between the two groups increased with the UN partition of the territory in 1947, which was not accepted by the Arab side. This triggered a war in 1948, which ended with Israel's victory and the creation of the state (Tal, 2004). Since then, Israel and Palestine have engaged in a series of armed conflicts, wars and uprisings, which have cost many lives and caused a humanitarian crisis.

Israel's attack on the Gaza Strip in 2023 was an unprecedented escalation of the conflict between Israel and Hamas. This attack was triggered by a massive invasion and attack by Hamas against Israel from the Gaza Strip on October 7, 2023 (Verelladevanka et al., 2023). This attack was Hamas' response to Israel's policy of blocking Gaza's access to the outside world, including humanitarian aid, and conducting routine attacks on infrastructure and military targets in Gaza. Israel responded to Hamas' attacks by launching a military operation called Operation Iron Wall, which aimed to destroy Hamas' ability to launch rocket and terror attacks, as well as free hostages held by Hamas (Cahyadi, 2023). The operation involved airstrikes, artillery and ground invasions targetig Hamas bases, tunnels and weapons depots, as well as settlements and civilian facilities suspected of harboring or launching Hamas rockets.

Israel's attacks on Gaza have had a huge impact on Palestinian civilians, who are living in a severe humanitarian crisis. It is estimated that more than

35,000 people have been killed in Gaza due to the Israeli attacks. Many homes, schools, hospitals, mosques and other infrastructure have been destroyed or severely damaged (Adhi, 2024). Gazans are also experiencing shortages of food, water, electricity, fuel and other basic necessities, and are exposed to the risk of disease and psychological trauma. Israel's attacks have also drawn condemnation and protests from the international community, which has demanded an end to the violence and protection for civilians.

Houthi Attacks on Several Ships in the Red Sea

These attacks began in November 2023, when the Houthi claimed to have sunk ships bound for Israel in solidarity with Hamas, the Palestinian militant group at war with Israel in Gaza. The attacks are also the Houthi' response to the coalition's blockade and airstrikes on Houthi-held areas in Yemen (BBC, 2023). Houthi attacks use various types of weapons, such as drones, missiles, sea mines and suicide boats, aimed at commercial, military and humanitarian aid vessels traveling through the Red Sea, especially around the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, a strategic shipping lane connecting the Red Sea with the Gulf of Aden (Adhi, 2024). The Houthi have carried out numerous attacks on ships in the Red Sea, resulting in damage, loss of life and disruption of maritime traffic. Some of the ships targeted by the Houthi include Iranian oil tankers, US cargo ships, and British warships.

Houthi attacks on ships in the Red Sea have significant implications for global trade, regional security and the humanitarian crisis in Yemen. The Houthi attacks have caused the world's largest shipping companies to divert routes from the Red Sea, increasing the cost and time of shipping goods. Houthi attacks have also increased tensions and confrontation between Iran and its allies and the US, UK, Saudi Arabia and Israel, which support the legitimate Yemeni government. The Houthi attacks also threaten much-needed humanitarian aid to millions of Yemenis suffering from hunger, disease and violence as a result of the protracted civil war.

Iran's Aid to Hamas and Houthi

Iran has been one of the main backers of the Palestinian militant group Hamas and the Yemeni rebel group, both of which are in conflict with Israel and Saudi Arabia, allies of the United States in the Middle East (Katzman, 2017). Iran has provided financial, military, political and ideological assistance to both groups, as part of its strategy to expand its influence in the region and challenge the dominance of the US and its allies. Iran's assistance to Hamas includes the provision of weapons, training, technology and funds. Iran is estimated to have donated around USD 30 million per year to Palestinian militant groups, including Hamas (Juneau, 2013). Meanwhile, Iran's assistance to the Houthi also includes the provision of weapons, training, technology and funds. Iran has been arming, training and funding the Houthi since 2014, when they gained control of Yemen's capital, Sana'a, and large parts of the country (Juneau, 2016). Iran has provided advanced drones, anti-ship cruise missiles, precision ballistic missiles, and medium-range missiles to the Houthi, who began targeting commercial vessels crossing the Red Sea in November 2023 in solidarity with Hamas and the Palestinians (Katzman, 2017).

Discussion

In this research, the author uses constructivist theory to analyze the reasons for the blockade of Israeli merchant ships by Yemeni Houthi in the Red Sea as well as its impact on regional and global stability. Constructivist theory emphasizes that knowledge is the result of the construction or formation of individuals or groups based on their experiences, interactions, and contexts (Finnemore & Sikkink, 2001). This theory can be used to understand how the blockade of Israeli merchant ships by Yemeni Houthi in the Red Sea affects the perceptions, identities, and interests of actors involved in regional and global conflicts, and how it impacts regional and global stability.

The results show that the blockade of Israeli merchant ships by Yemeni Houthi in the Red Sea is a form of conflict escalation between Israel and Yemeni Houthi, which also involves Saudi Arabia, Iran, the United States, and other countries with interests in the region. This blockade was carried out by the Yemeni Houthi as a form of protest against Israel's support for Saudi Arabia in the Yemeni civil war, as well as a form of resistance to Israeli hegemony in the Middle East (Zimmerman, 2022). The blockade began in October 2023, when Israel launched a military offensive against Hamas in the Gaza Strip, triggering a backlash from pro-Iranian groups, including Yemen's Houthi (Yudono Yanuar, 2024). The Yemeni Houthi claim that they are carrying out this blockade in solidarity with the Palestinian people oppressed by Israel, and in retaliation for Israel's war against Hamas. The Yemeni Houthi have also threatened to attack undersea internet cables in the Red Sea, which connect Yemen to other continents, if Israel does not stop its aggression (Verelladevanka et al., 2023).

These blockades affect the perceptions, identities and interests of actors involved in regional and global conflicts, either directly or indirectly. Here are some examples: *Perception*: The blockade shows how Iran and Israel view each other as the main enemy, who do not hesitate to use violence to achieve their goals. It also shows how Yemen's Houthi view themselves as Islamic warriors and defenders of Palestine, who dare to stand up to Israel and its allies. The blockade also affects how the international community views the conflict in the Middle East, which is increasingly complicated and dangerous, and requires an immediate and comprehensive diplomatic solution. *Identity*: The blockade reinforces the religious and ideological identities of Iran and Israel, who regard each other as opponents who must be destroyed. It also reinforces the national and ethnic identity of Yemen's Houthi, who feel isolated and persecuted by the Yemeni government backed by Saudi Arabia and an international coalition. It also reinforces the political and humanitarian identity of the Palestinians, who receive support from pro-Iranian groups, such as the Yemeni Houthi, Hezbollah and Syria.

Interests: The blockade affects the economic and security interests of Israel and countries that trade with Israel through the Red Sea, which suffer losses and disruptions due to Yemeni Houthi attacks.

The blockade also affects the strategic and geopolitical interests of Iran and its allies, who want to reduce Israel's influence and power in the region, and increase their own influence and power. It also affects the social and cultural interests of the Palestinians, who want to gain recognition and independence from Israel, and gain support and solidarity from the Islamic world and the international community. Based on the results of data collection, it was found that the blockade of Israeli merchant ships by Yemeni Houthi in the Red Sea affected the perceptions, identities and interests of the actors involved in regional and global conflicts as follows:

Yemeni Houthi: Yemen's Houthi perceive themselves as a rebel group fighting against a corrupt and unjust regime, which is backed by Saudi Arabia, Israel, and the United States (Zimmerman, 2022). Yemen's Houthi identify themselves as part of the Shia, which is a persecuted minority in Yemen and the Middle East (Juneau, 2016). Yemen's Houthi have an interest in controlling Yemen, repelling foreign influence, and supporting the Palestinian struggle against Israel.

Israel: Israel perceives itself as a democracy entitled to the land promised by God, surrounded by enemies who want to destroy it (Sand, 2012). Israelis identify themselves as part of the Jewish people, the chosen people and victims of the Holocaust (Shapira, 1998). Israel has an interest in maintaining its security, sovereignty and existence, as well as expanding its territory and influence in the Middle East.

Saudi Arabia: Saudi Arabia perceives itself as a rich and powerful country that is the leader and protector of the Islamic world, facing threats from Iran and its allies, including Yemen's Houthi (Chen, 2017). Saudi

Arabia identifies itself as part of the Sunnis, who are the majority and orthodox in Islam (Mouline, 2014). Saudi Arabia has an interest in maintaining stability, security, and their economic interests, as well as to suppress Iranian and Shia influence in the region.

Iran: Iran perceives itself as a revolutionary state opposed to Western and Zionist domination, subject to international sanctions and isolation (Katzman, 2015). Iranians identify themselves as part of the Shia, which is an alternative and opposition to the Sunnis. (Blanchard, 2009). Iran has an interest in expanding their influence and power in the Middle East, as well as to support Shia and anti-Israel groups, including the Yemeni Houthi.

United States: The United States perceives itself as a superpower that is the leader and guardian of world peace and democracy, facing challenges from countries that are hostile or competing with them, such as Iran, Russia and China (Wright, 2017). The United States has a vested interest in safeguarding their national, security and economic interests, and in supporting their allies, including Israel and Saudi Arabia.

The blockade of Israeli merchant ships by Yemeni Houthi in the Red Sea impacts regional and global stability. Regional and global stability is a condition that reflects the level of order, prosperity, and cooperation between countries in the Middle East region and the world (Hettne & Söderbaum, 2006). Based on the results of the data analysis, the author found that the blockade of Israeli merchant ships by Yemeni Houthi in the Red Sea has an impact on regional and global stability as follows:

First, the blockade could disrupt vital trade and transportation routes for countries in the region and the world. The Houthi blockade of merchant ships in the Red Sea also negatively impacts the global economy, particularly in terms of energy prices and supplies and international trade. If we look at the energy supply issue, the Houthi blockade could threaten strategic

shipping lanes for oil and liquefied natural gas (LNG) supplies from the Middle East to Europe, Asia and Africa. This is because many ships transporting energy pass through the Red Sea (Gladstone et al., 1999). Of course, these conditions can cause price increases and energy scarcity in the global market, as well as increase production and transportation costs for various economic sectors. In terms of international trade, the Houthi blockade could disrupt world shipping traffic transiting the Suez Canal, which is an important channel for trade between Europe and Asia. (Lott, 2021). This can cause delays and losses for shippers and consignees, as well as increase risks and insurance costs for shipping companies. Reported from Sindonew.com (2024) Several global shipping companies and energy companies have stopped or rerouted their voyages away from the Red Sea, which can increase distance and travel time, and reduce their efficiency and profitability.

Second, the blockade of Israeli merchant ships by Yemeni Houthi in the Red Sea exacerbates the already existing conflicts and crises in the Middle East, such as the Yemeni civil war, the Arab-Israeli conflict, the Saudi-Iranian rivalry, and foreign intervention. Reported by nuonline (2024) This blockade adds to the suffering and distress of civilians affected by the conflict and crisis, such as casualties, refugees, hunger, and disease. Quoted from Liputan6.com (2023) The United States and Britain struck at least 30 Houthi targets in Yemen on Saturday, January 3, 2024, in a new wave of strikes aimed at further crippling the Iran-backed groups. The Yemeni people have also been affected by the prolonged conflict that has made the country the poorest in the Arab region (Setiawati et al., 2023). This blockade makes it difficult to access humanitarian aid, food, water and medicine for millions of civilians trapped in Yemen's Houthi-controlled territory. It also increases the risk of disease spread, starvation and death in Yemen, already one of the poorest and most miserable countries in the world.

Third, the blockade of Israeli merchant ships by the Yemeni Houthi in the Red Sea hampers the peace and diplomacy efforts and processes undertaken by international countries and organizations, such as the UN, EU, Arab League, and OIC (Kardaş & Aras, 2023). This blockade shows distrust and disagreement between the actors involved in the conflict and crisis, and reduces the space and opportunities for dialog and negotiation. From the results and discussion of this research, the author assesses that the blockade of Israeli merchant ships by Yemeni Houthi in the Red Sea has a negative impact on regional and global stability, which is influenced by the perceptions, identities and interests of the actors involved in regional and global conflicts, shaped by constructivist theory. This research also contributes new knowledge about the dynamics and implications of regional and global conflicts, as well as the challenges and opportunities for peace and diplomacy.

Conclusion

The Yemeni Houthi attack on an Israeli merchant ship in the Red Sea has exacerbated an already complicated conflict, dragging countries into a maelstrom of tensions that affects regional and global stability. The conflict goes beyond the direct fight between Israel and the Yemeni Houthi, reflecting a deeper geopolitical rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran and highlighting the role of the United States as a key supporter of Israel. The involvement of these countries adds a layer of complexity to the conflict, with each side seeking to strengthen its influence in the Middle East. The blockade has become a symbol of rising tensions and a reminder of how quickly instability can spread in an already vulnerable region.

The impact of this blockade on regional and global stability is significant. The disruption of the vital Red Sea trade route has caused extensive economic losses, affecting countries not directly involved in the conflict. The humanitarian crisis caused by the blockade has drawn

worldwide attention, limiting access to aid and basic necessities for affected populations. In addition, the blockade has become an obstacle to diplomacy, complicating conflict resolution through dialogue and negotiation. In this context, it is imperative for the international community to come together to find solutions that will ease tensions, restore stability, and advance peace in the region.

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