

## WAR STRATEGY OF ACEHNESE AND DUTCH IN THE ACEH WAR 1873-1912

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### Abstract

*Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam in the history of the struggle of the Indonesian nation is the most difficult area to conquer by the Dutch. This area was once a Sultanate area that was crowded with international traders because of its strategic location. The war began when the Dutch tried to control the Aceh region so it received fierce resistance from the sultanate and the people of Aceh. The war between the Acehnese and Dutch people lasted between 1873 and 1912 which was the largest war during colonialism in the archipelago. The Acehnese and Dutch people in this long war implemented strategies with the aim of weakening the opponent's defenses. This paper aims to explain the strategies of both sides in the Aceh War. The author uses qualitative methods with library study as well as documentation to collect historical information with historiographic techniques. The result of this research was that the strategy of the Acehnese people with the spirit of *fiabilillah* war, deceitful tactics, and guerrilla was able to make the Dutch with higher-tech troops overwhelmed to deal with it. Meanwhile, the Dutch used war diplomacy to gain support from regional leaders with the politics of fighting and analyze the socio-cultural aspects of the Acehnese people to weaken the opponent's defenses.*

*Keywords: War strategy; Defense strategy; War history; Aceh war.*

### INTRODUCTION

Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam is one of the territories of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia which was formerly a work called the Aceh Darussalam Sultanate. Almost the entire population of Aceh is Muslim (Arifin & Hambali, 2016). Aceh Darussalam Sultanate is an Islamic kingdom located in Sumatera which is directly bordered by the Indian Ocean to the west and the Strait of Malacca to the east and north. The Strait of Malacca which is directly adjacent to the Aceh Darussalam Sultanate is a very crowded trade route traversed by foreign traders such as China and India. Ships from abroad lean around the Malaka Strait to take supplies or just dock here. The location of Aceh around the coast makes this kingdom grow rapidly because of its maritime economy (Muhzinat, 2020). The Sultanate of Aceh Darussalam also has commodities in the form of pepper, silk, gold, kerosene, and camphor traded in its territory considering the strategic location of this kingdom so that trade transactions are easily carried out.

In 1607-1607 was the golden age of the Aceh Darussalam Sultanate, which was led by Sultan Iskandar Muda with a very wide territory and a strong military (Anwar, 2021). The Sultanate of Aceh Darussalam has a systematic government and good education and has a strong commitment to oppose western culture. The Sultanate of Aceh Darussalam during the time of Sultan Iskandar Muda was also a center of religious education so as to support the glory and prosperity of the kingdom (Hadi, 2014). The dispute between the Aceh Sultanate and the Dutch began with the signing of the Sumatra Treaty which stated that the Netherlands could expand the territory controlled in Sumatra including Aceh (Fauzan, 2020). The Sultan firmly rejected the contents of the Treaty and fought the Dutch. This war is also called the Sabil war because the people of Aceh have the spirit of defending their land with the spirit of "*jihad fisabillah*" (Fight in the Name of God) and many of the scholars who became leaders of the war (Munir, 2019).

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The Aceh War lasted for approximately 4 decades and was the largest war in Dutch Olympic history in Indonesia which was the biggest war during the era of colonialism in the archipelago. The war between the Acehnese and the Dutch was based on the Sumatran treaty between Britain and the Netherlands in which the British gave freedom to expand their territory in Sumatra including Aceh. The Sultan firmly rejected Dutch sovereignty so that fighting was inevitable. The palace of the Aceh Darussalam sultanate could be conquered in the second Dutch military aggression but the struggle of the Acehnese people did not stop. The people of Aceh with a fighting spirit led by ulama and Uleebalang continue to move against colonialism.

The resistance of the Acehnese people and the military aggression launched by the Dutch had strategies in it. The social, cultural, and religious aspects of the Acehnese people broke the Dutch calculation that Aceh would be conquered easily with the heavily armed forces they had. The persistence of the Acehnese people with the spirit of Prang Sabil overwhelmed the Dutch in the face of the resistance of the Acehnese people. However, in 1904, the Aceh Short Treaty was issued by the Dutch to be signed by the Sultan of Aceh, namely Sultan Muhammad Daud Shah which indicated that the Aceh Darussalam Sultanate recognized Dutch rule. But the people's struggle has not stopped, the people continue to fight until the last drop of blood. The focus of the study in this study is to identify the war strategy carried out by the Dutch in conquering the land of Aceh and the universal war strategy based on "jihad fisabilillah" by the Acehnese people in the Aceh War.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

In the fierce war between the people of Aceh and the Netherlands used defense strategies and military strategies according to the level of strength of each side. The author of this article aims to identify the strategies used by the Acehnese and Dutch people in the Aceh War that lasted from 1873 to 1912. The author uses qualitative methods with a bibliography study approach and documentation to collect information in accordance with the topic being discussed. The author also applies historical or historical research methods with historiographic techniques, namely compiling the results of analyses and presented in the form of an interesting and communicative style.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Defense Strategy and War Strategy**

Strategy is a rational process (Baylis, Wirtz, Gray, & Cohen, 2007) and the art of applying military force to achieve those established by political policy to win wars (Beaufre, 1965). Clausewitz said that "The behavior of each nation and its capacity to wage war depends on three groups of factors that is the people, the military, and the government". Political, comparative, cost calculations, profit and benefit analysis are used to convince enemies if they cannot achieve victory. Strategy is faced with limited resources, so its effective and efficient utilization becomes a strategy. The concept of defense is adapted to the fundamental principle of national defense from the values of struggle in the past (Indonesia, 2014).

(Freedman, 2008), explains the approach to strategy in his article entitled Strategic Studies and The Problem of Power, "The strategy approach is one which takes account of the part played by a force or the threat of force in the international system. It is descriptive in so far as it analyses the extent to which political units have the capacity to use, or to threaten the use of armed force to impose their will on other units; whether to compel them to do some things to deter them from doing others or if need be to destroy them as independent communities altogether. It is prescriptive in so far as it recommends policies which will enable such units to operate in an international system which is subject to such conditions and constraints". Strategy is the art of war on maps and encompasses the entire theater of operations (Supriyatno, 2021). The art in question is to organize, arm, and utilize the military power of a nation for an interest. In addition, strategy is an art as well as a science in developing and using psychological, political, economic, and military forces to provide support to policies so as to reduce the chances of defeat. According to Basil Liddell Hart

(Liddell Hart, 2008) "Dislocation is the aim of the strategy, its sequel may be either the enemy's dissolution or his easier disruption in battle. Dissolution may involve some partial measure of fighting but this has not the character of a battle". Ideologies, norms and values, technologies, threats, territories, and national interests are factors that shape strategy. National interests become the basic level of strategy. Furthermore, the development and use of all resources owned is a level of strategy which is used to achieve the objectives that have been set by both military and non-military forces. The level of military strategy is the art and science of using military force. The level of operations strategy is used to plan, integrate and control military battles, and the level of battlefield strategy discusses the use of military force in battle.

The art of war consists of five branches of pure military namely strategy, grand tactics, logistics, engineering, and tactics. In addition, there is an important but unrecognized sixth caban commonly called diplomacy in relation to war (Supriyatno, 2021). Strategy formulation is related to the accuracy and intelligence for designing and selecting the best strategy to be implemented and ending with the evaluation of the strategy that has been implemented is a management process in the use of strategy.

Freedman (Freedman, 2008) explains "The view that strategy is bound up with the role of force in international life must be qualified, because if force is but one form of power the strategy must address the relationship between this form and others including authority". War should always be conducted with the principle of great discretion to be conducted in the nature of the operation to be carried out which depends on the circumstances of the case. The justest wars are those that are based on undoubted rights and which in addition promise state benefits commensurate with the necessary sacrifices and dangers that arise (Supriyatno, 2021). Strategy formulation requires a strategic environmental analysis to adjust the steps to be taken. The external environment has a role to ensure the main area, so the implementation of all formulated strategies will be carried out after careful consideration.

In military operations, it is important to know the terrain. The terrain should be assessed in terms of distance, difficulty or ease of travel, dimensions, and safety. Military operations do not have a standard form, so they involve deception or deception to be able to execute a strategy so that the opponent can be controlled. Combat requires strategic judgments such as determining plans and equipment. When a war it costs a lot of money on military operations then the budget will not be enough to continue the war. In military operations, the aspect assessed is thwarting the opponent's strategy, rather than fierce battles. The rule of military use is that if you are over the number of opponents ten to stau then surround them, five to one then attack, and two to one then divide. According to Freedman (Freedman, 2008), "The definition of power is the capacity to produce effects that are more advantageous than would otherwise have been the case". Strategy implementation refers to the implementation of strategies that have been formulated to realize goals that require strength to achieve.

### **Dutch strategy in the Aceh War**

The Dutch undertook several political and economic measures to strengthen their hegemony, power, and sovereignty in Aceh with a strategy of diplomacy, blockade, and military aggression. The Dutch sent an envoy to conduct diplomacy to uleebalang to communicate about the sovereignty of the Dutch government. The edict was called the "Van Swieten Edict". The blockade was carried out by placing troops and fleets of warships in the Strait of Malacca to block Acehnese warships and blocking export-import traffic in the strait area which affected the economy of the Acehnese people. In addition, military aggression is carried out as a last step because diplomacy and blockade efforts carried out have not obtained optimal results. Dutch efforts with diplomacy and blockades succeeded in subduing the uleebalang of East Aceh to recognize Dutch sovereignty and was legalized as an administrative area of the Dutch government (Muhajir, 2018).

The first Dutch expedition to Aceh failed due to poorly planned execution and equipment (Veer, 19985). In 1873, the Dutch prepared in Aceh waters to attack with 6 warships, 2 naval ships, 8 patrol ships, 1 command ship, and many knitters. The troops carried by J.H.R Kohler were about 3000 troops and 168 officers, as well as 1000 forced laborers and 50 foremen (Kartodirdjo, 1975).

However, in this first military aggression, the Dutch suffered defeat and Major General J.H.R Kohler was killed in battle on April 19, 1873 (Fauzan, 2020).

In the second military aggression, the Dutch prepared a large army consisting of 8500 soldiers, 4,300 coolies, and 1,500 reservists gathered from Dutch mercenaries and vagrants (Reid, 2005). Jan van Swieten attacked the grand mosque but due to fierce fighting, the Dutch suffered heavy losses. The attack was carried out by 1,400 members of a well-equipped brigade but after the battle about 200 soldiers and 14 officers were seriously wounded. Furthermore, to attack the palace, Van Swieten made more thorough preparations by conducting reconnaissance and gunfire. Furthermore, the Dutch troops surrounded the palace and dug trenches for protection, and then prepared the cannons to be used. January 24, 1874, when the order to storm, it turned out that the palace was empty. The battle of the palace fell in the hands of the Dutch and was considered a great achievement in the expedition (Veer, 19985).

The Dutch tried to diplomacy with the clerics to recognize its sovereignty by promising to repair the Sultan Mosque which had been destroyed. The Dutch used Uleebalang who sided with him to seize areas in Aceh which eventually succeeded in controlling along the coast of Aceh such as Meulaboh, Pase, and Perlak which successfully blockaded the Aceh sea. After the occupation, the Dutch offered kindness so that the people would recognize Dutch sovereignty without fighting. As a result, for a year the war did not occur in Aceh (Reid, 2005).

The Dutch strategy in weakening the army and the people of Aceh was with the approach taken by Snouck Hurgronje who disguised himself with the name Abdul Ghafur to deceive the Acehnese people (Fauzan, 2020). Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje was a Dutch indigenous affairs advisor with expertise in Islam and Arabic, approaching clerics and using tactics to attack from within (Siahaan, Hendra, & Midhio, 2021). With this strategy, officials such as Cik Di Tiro, Muhammad Syaman, and the Uleebalang fell into the hands of the Dutch. The Dutch succeeded in instigating uleebalang to sign a short agreement in which the content of the agreement was recognition of Dutch sovereignty, the Dutch flag as the only legitimate flag in Aceh did not help the Acehnese fighters, and the Dutch enemy was the enemy of Uleebalang (Burhanudin, 2012). Before that, the Dutch infiltrated secret spies disguised as traders who entered from Lhoseumawe and sought detailed information about Acehnese culture for war needs. This strategy succeeded in making the Dutch able to control the Aceh Darussalam Sultanate Palace in their second aggression, the Dutch also used fighting tactics to divide Acehnese officials which resulted in many riots in Aceh and Uleebalang became pro-Dutch (Fauzan, 2020).

Hurgronje argues that it will not be finished if there are still people who fight then all people must be destroyed. In addition, Snouck Hurgronje suggested appointing Colonel van Heutsz as the leader of the troops in the Aceh War. recommendations from Snouck Hurgronje for the Dutch in political and military policy in the Aceh War, among others: (1) Stop approaching the Sultan because it was not the right solution, (2) Do not negotiate with the enemy because their beliefs are strong so it is the bullet that must answer, (3) Take Aceh Besar, and (4) Improve agriculture, crafts, and trade to gain the sympathy of the people. In late 1878, General Van der Heyden carried out many cleanups by destroying benten-and mosques in Aceh. The Dutch are considered to have fully controlled Aceh. In 1885, Teuku Umar, who carried out a scheme, surrendered to the Dutch by bringing weapons, equipment, and money. To overcome this, the Dutch made an announcement of a competition for the arrest of Teuku Umar who would be given a reward of 25,000 dollars but did not produce results (Fauzan, 2020).

Snouck Hurgronje advised continuing to pursue the resistance of the Acehnese people without rest. The battle between the Dutch and the Acehnese people raged again, and the recapture of posts controlled by the people was carried out with great force and based on information from Acehnese natives who sided with the Dutch such as Cut Lam Tengh and Sultan Ali (Fauzan, 2020). As a result of continuous attacks from the Dutch, Teuku Umar's troops were repelled and conquered several areas. In 1892, Van Heutsz as the New Governor of Aceh made several policies to conquer Aceh, including: (Reid, 2005)

1. Greater Aceh must be occupied by troops who can move quickly
2. Folk and *Uleebalang* should always be observed
3. Teuku Umar will continue to be chased without rest
4. Prohibition of carrying firearms for the People of Greater Aceh
5. Sultans and *Uleebalang* who did not surrender to the Dutch would be conquered

Teuku Umar, who was targeted by the Dutch, moved around so that it was difficult to detect his whereabouts. In response to Teuku Umar's tactics, Van Heutsz planned to attack Teuku Umar's gathering place in Pidie with 8000 troops. However, this movement was noticed by Teuku Umar, and managed to avoid the Dutch ambush (Alfian, 2005). In 1899, the Dutch managed to trap Teuku Umar in Meulaboh by placing spies in the Acehnese army which eventually killed Teuku Umar and his troops (Mirnawati, 2012).

### **Acehnese People's Resistance Strategy in the Aceh War**

The Aceh Darussalam Sultanate's rejection of Dutch demands to submit in accordance with the Sumatra treaty was answered by a declaration of war on March 26, 1873. The Sultanate of Aceh Darussalam fought the Dutch troops with the spirit of jihad *fisabilillah* so this war was also called the Sabil War. The Dutch led by Maj. Gen. J.H. Kohler deployed more than 3000 troops in the Ceuremen pante (Siahaan et al., 2021). Meanwhile, the people of Aceh prepared for war by preparing troops, 15,000 rifles, and 5000 tons of gunpowder, all of which were secretly prepared (Lulofs & Nurdiarsih, 2007).

Aceh Darussalam Sultanate troops defeated Dutch troops in the first military aggression in 18 days carried out by the Dutch which killed its commander, Maj. Gen. J.H Kohler (Siahaan et al., 2021). The Aceh War involved all the people initially mobilized by the sultanate, but when the sultanate had been subdued the people's struggle was diverted by the leadership of the ulama who spread throughout Aceh. Furthermore, the community then destroyed the posts built by the Dutch, thus weakening the Dutch military power.

Dutch military aggression against the Aceh Darussalam Sultanate was continued by General Jan van Swieten who managed to take control of the palace but the Aceh Sultanate troops had left the palace and fought guerrillas (Siahaan et al., 2021). After the palace was controlled by the Dutch, Panglima Polim gathered scattered troops and managed to reconcile the Uleebalang conflict caused by Dutch fighting politics. The Dutch blockaded the sea lanes by controlling areas along the coast of Aceh which made it difficult to distribute food and ship weapons to Aceh Besar. In response to this, the people of Aceh sent food supplies and weapons through mountain routes even though it was more difficult to pass, the people worked together to help with the delivery (Puspongoro & Notosusanto, 1984).

Religion and custom merge into a strong foundation in the lives of people in Aceh, evidenced by the motto "Hukom ngon ada han jeunet cre, lagee adat ngon sifeuet" which means that sharia law and custom are inseparable like God's substance and nature. Leaders such as Cik Ditiro, Cut Nyak Dien, Teuku Umar, and Panglima Polim succeeded in mobilizing the Acehnese people to fight the Dutch to defend their land with the fighting spirit of jihad *fisabilillah* (Siahaan et al., 2021). The position of respected scholars has been entrenched in people's lives so that when scholars call for war, the people of Aceh will be mobilized. The Aceh Darussalam Sultanate which is an Islamic-based kingdom placed ulama to accompany the king (Pratiwi, 2007). The war against foreign nations was believed by the Acehnese people to be a holy war (jihad) and the call for jihad throughout Aceh so that the Dutch were overwhelmed by guerrillas carried out by the Acehnese people (Hardiansyah, 2010). The ideology of the sabil war became a source of courage for the Acehnese people to fight the Dutch because of the belief that those who died were martyrs (*syahid*) (Siahaan et al., 2021). The jihad element in the Aceh War was used as a legal ideological basis in the war against the Dutch and can be called an anticolonial ideology that was able to mobilize the power of the Acehnese people to oppose colonialism.

Imeum Lueng Bata and Teuku Lamnga led the oath of "compulsory sabel war" to expel the Dutch which was attended by 500 prominent figures and agreed on seven provisions for the people

of Aceh, namely: (1) Voluntary war with Jihad attitude, (2) Mutual aid repairing mosques damaged by war, (3). Mutual aid in overcoming the impact of war, (4) Not holding meetings that are not related to religion, (5) Assisting in lodging and hiding fighters, (6) Mutual aid making forts (kuta), and (7) Ulama helping and receiving complaints of people who are in difficulty (Pratiwi, 2007).

The writing of "Hikayat Prang Sabi" by Chik di Tiro can arouse the spirit of struggle and patriotism of the Acehnese people, the lyrics of this poem are "Tatkala negeri direbut kafir, semua kita wajib berperang tidak boleh berdiam diri, dalam negeri bersenang-senang wajib bagi semua kita, apapun kedudukan tidak dipandang wajib ke atas semua umat, kafir laknat harus ditentang karena sekarang jadi fardlu'ain, kita yakin seperti sembahyang wajib dikerjakan setiap waktu, jika tak begitu dosalah abang catatan pahala sembahyang puasa, jika tak hala ke medan perang" (Alfian, 2005) which means When the country is taken by infidels, all of us are obliged to fight Not to stand idly by, in the country to have fun Obligatory for all of us, whatever position is not considered Obligatory upon all people, kafir anathema must be opposed Because now it is obligation, we believe like prayer Must be done at all times, if not so dear brother Note the reward of fasting prayer, otherwise it goes to the battlefield". Hikayat Prang Sabi is usually read before the war, besides that this saga is also hummed by children to instill the spirit of patriotism in the next generation (Hardiansyah, 2010).

The Acehnese people continued to fight the Dutch with their strength guided by the views of the scholars inflamed the spirit of "fiisabilillah". However, Teuku Umar had a different strategy, namely using the tactic of "surrendering" to trick the Dutch so that they could take the weapons owned by the Dutch. At that time the Dutch were weakened due to various attacks from the Acehnese people, so the Dutch were very happy with Teuku Umar's surrender. Teuku Umar was then trusted to train soldiers and teach guerrilla warfare techniques. Teuku Umar was assigned to attack Acehnese territories but when faced with Acehnese people who were really against the Dutch, he would pretend and invite scholars and Uleebalang to use the same tactic of pretense tactics. Teuku Umar's strategy managed to approach the Dutch by successfully bringing troops along with 800 weapons, 25,000 bullets, 500 kg of ammunition, and 18,000 dollars (Soraya, Samingan, & Yosef Tomi Roe, 2021).

Teuku Umar then returned to gather Acehnese troops after finishing his tactical mission. In 1898, Aceh held a meeting that appointed Teuku Umar as a war leader and made war plans such as: (Fauzan, 2020)

1. Avoid a big war
2. Fighting movements throughout Aceh
3. Occupying the place left by the Dutch
4. Guerrilla Warfare

Teuku Umar and his troops moved quickly and always moved so that their position could not be detected by the Dutch. However, Teuku Umar was successfully killed in Meulaboh with a Dutch trap (Alfian, 2005). Teuku Umar's struggle was continued by his wife, Cut Nyak Dien. He and his army also moved around. The people of Aceh had a secret place unknown to the enemy to negotiate and rest. The road to get to this hiding place was made misleading so as not to be detected by the Dutch and not to light a fire during the day. But with his old condition, Cut Nyak Dien's struggle was stopped with the surrender of one of his troops so Cut Nyak Dien was exiled to Sumedang in 1907 (Soraya et al., 2021).

## CONCLUSION

The Aceh War between the people of the Aceh Darussalam Sultanate and the Netherlands which took approximately 4 decades is evidence of the history of the struggle of the Indonesian nation. In the biggest Dutch war in the archipelago, both the Dutch and the Acehnese people applied strategies in battle in order to weaken the opponent's strength and eventually win the battle. The Dutch, who failed in their first military aggression, later returned with more troops and managed to capture the palace. However, the resistance of the people was even fiercer so the Dutch

implemented strategies including; (1) a direct combat strategy by placing more troops, (2) a diplomacy strategy to uleebalang so as to block enemy logistics, (3) a fighting strategy to create conflict in the region, and (4) strategy of placing spies to study the socio-culture of the Acehnese people. In its struggle against colonialism, the Acehnese people as a whole participated in the war which is now known as the universal war strategy. Panglima Polim, Teuku Umar, and Cut Nyak Dien gave a command in the battle by applying strategies considering the opponent's technology is more modern. These strategies are: (1) the strategy of universal war which at that time was called Jihad Fisabilillah which moved all levels of society against the enemy, (2) the strategy of pretending or deceit carried out by Teuku Umar to weaken the opponent succeeded in harming the opponent, (3) guerrilla warfare strategy so that movements were not easily detected by the enemy, and (4) socio-cultural strategy by instilling anti-colonialism to the community from an early age. War strategy is an important consideration in making moves in battle. Fisabilillah's Jihad attitude embedded in the Acehnese people was a form of patriotism and nationalism at that time. Thus, to succeed in Indonesia's universal defense strategy today, it is necessary to form generations who have the spirit of patriotism and nationalism. In order for the research carried out the next time to be more focused and not spread, the committee limits the scope of research on the universal war strategy of the Acehnese people and its relationship with the universal defense strategy of the Indonesian nation.

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