CHAPTER III

THE DECISION MAKERS
Adeed Dawisha, in his influential study of Middle East foreign policymaking, has suggested that examination of the decision-making elite should involve three categories, corresponding to the scale of their descending importance and influence in the decision-making process. The first category refers to the hegemony over the decision-making structure of one person, usually the head of state. The second is the ruling elite, which comprises a small group of people who are regularly consulted by the principal decision-maker in either their individual capacity or as representatives of institutions. The third category, the political elite, consists of individuals and institutions who participate in the decision-making process without necessarily being allocated any decision-making powers. This proposition is particularly relevant in the case being studied because it provides a useful basis for examining the different levels of participation in the Yemeni decision-making process. For reasons explained in the first chapter, the emphasis in the Yemeni case is on the role of individuals rather than that of institutions. With this in mind, the following section will briefly describe the Yemeni decision-making elite on the basis suggested by Dawisha. In this case, the decision-maker refers to the head of state and the second deals with members of the Republican Council (after 1967), the prime minister as well as the foreign minister. The third category includes representatives of the various political forces, namely tribal shaykhs and military officers, as well as representatives of the various political groups.
The Principal Decision Makers

The situation in the YAR is not very different from that of other Arab countries where the decision-making system is dominated by a principal decision-maker, namely the head of state. Except for the Second Interim Constitution (1965), all Yemeni constitutions so far have given the president a central role in the policy-making mechanism of the state. Although the government system was a combination of both parliamentary and presidential systems, the head of state was accorded substantial authority. The first Permanent Constitution issued on 27 April, 1964 had, for instance, made the president responsible for a wide range of functions. In addition to being the head of state, the President was also the head of both the Political Bureau and National Security Council as well as the Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces. He shared with the cabinet the formulation of the state's policies, nomination of the Prime Minister and members of cabinet, and had the right to dismiss them. With the concurrence of the Consultative Assembly, he could declare war, approve treaties, and also accept the accreditation of foreign diplomatic representations in Yemen. During the pre-1967 period however, the role of President al-Sallal in the policy-making of the YAR was in reality severely limited. His long and recurrent visits abroad, the pressures from the opposition and the interference of the UAR made his role mostly irrelevant. Only after the elimination of the opposition in September 1966 and the waning of the UAR's interest in Yemen following the June 1967 war did President al-Sallal exercise effective control of YAR policies.

The changes which took place in 1967 meant that the government came to be based on a parliamentary system where the executive authority was
divided between the Republican Council (*al-Madjlis al-Djumhuri*) and the Council of Ministers (*Madjlis al-Wuzara*). According to the Third Provisional Constitution (November 1967) the office of the presidency was transferred to a three-man presidential council whose chairmanship was to be rotated among its members every eight months. The authority of the council's chairman was, according to this constitution, reduced to mostly ceremonial duties. The Consultative Assembly (*Madjlis al-Shura*) was given powers formerly under the president's jurisdiction.

However, the Assembly did not actually come into existence until after the national reconciliation of May 1970. The National Council which was established in March 1969 as a temporary replacement for the Consultative Assembly was given only limited authority and the real authority continued as before to rest with the executive, dominated by the chairman of the Republican Council Kadi al-Iryani.

These legal provisions only partly explain the dominant role played by the two heads of state and are less relevant in explaining their long occupancy of the office. The explanation lies in two inter-related factors: the personal qualities of the two leaders and the pressures of war.

Colonel al-Sallal was chosen to be the leader of the Revolution by the Free Officers on the night of the September 1962 coup because, as Chief of Staff of the Imam's guards, his support was vital and also because a high-ranking officer was needed to lead the Revolution. There were some who considered him unsuitable because of his humble social background while the moderate Republicans to a man objected to his confrontational policies. However, his popularity was lasting among many Yemenis who identified with his views, especially the leftist elements who still remained part of his cabinet in October.
1967. Like most of the Yemeni officers, he was an enthusiastic supporter of Djamal Abd al-Nasir's revolutionary Arabism but was less diplomatic in expressing his views. A Yemeni writer described him as a "revolutionary who put on the costume of a politician." His open and candid support of UAR policies in Yemen led many inside and outside Yemen to accuse him of being an Egyptian puppet. Undoubtedly, al-Sallal owed his five-year tenure of the presidency (from October 1962 to November 1967) mainly to Egyptian support. The latter supported him partly because of their desire to maintain stability in the higher echelons of the YAR power structure.

Unlike al-Sallal, Kadi al-Iryani who became Chairman of the Republican Council on November 5 1967, did not provoke wide opposition within the governing élite. He seldom took sides in disputes and was known as "the man who holds the middle of the stick". Throughout the first five years of the Republic, in spite of his moderate views, he was never considered to be one of al-Sallal's enemies and he enjoyed the respect both of the Egyptians and those who were opposed to the Egyptian presence. His background as Kadi (religious judge) and his revolutionary credentials as a veteran leader of the anti-Imam movement accorded him influential social and political status. He became chairman of the Republican Council in 1967 and was re-elected several times, having demonstrated his ability to strike a balance between the opposing Republican factions, especially following the August 1968 clashes, as well as having exhibited the moderate views deemed necessary for eventual reconciliation with the Royalist side.

President al-Sallal's domination of the decision-making system was absolute by mid-1967. Members of the cabinets formed in September 1966 and October 1967 were either individuals loyal to him personally.
or persons supportive of his policies. There is virtually no way of
telling how al-Sallal arrived at his final decisions. In some cases
the Cabinet was only informed afterwards. He relied on a small group
of aides which included his chief of cabinet, to collect information
on foreign policy issues and provide him with advice on foreign policy
matters, but he retained the last say in making the final political
choice. 8

Al-Iryani on the other hand, showed no desire to control the decision-
making although he remained throughout his tenure the centre of the
process. Because of his status and political skills, al-Iryani
invariably had the last word politically, despite the fact that many
of his colleagues were individuals of considerable experience, like
Muhammad Ali Uthman (a permanent member of the Republican Council) and
Ahmad Nu'man - the other influential moderate leader. He tended to
leave matters to be thoroughly debated and only intervened if it
became necessary over controversial issues, although he always had the
decisive say. In all cases, he never took a decision unless he was
absolutely sure it was the right one. 9 He was heard to say on many
occasions that he was "an arbiter, not a ruler". 10

The Ruling Élite

In addition to the two members of the Republican Council, the ruling
élite also included the prime minister and usually the foreign
minister. Notwithstanding the legal prescriptions, the role of the
cabinet in foreign policy formation amounted to no more than rubber
stamping decisions handed down to it from above. However, due to
their position as heads of the government, the three Premiers who
presided over the six cabinets formed after November 1967 were actively involved in the policy-making process and in turn constituted part of the ultimate decision-making elite. Abdallah al-Kurshmi was largely preoccupied with the financial crises which confronted his short-lived cabinet (September 1969 - February 1970) but the other two premiers, General al-Amri and Muhsin al-Ayni, were able to play a more active role in foreign policy. Al-Amri had almost no training or special interest in foreign affairs. He was primarily a military leader who combined the post of premier with that of commanding the army. As a result he devoted most of his energies to military affairs and while heading the cabinet delegated real power in the field of foreign affairs to the foreign minister. The views of both al-Amri and al-Ayni carried special weight, not only by virtue of their formal positions in the government but also because of their own political influence. Al-Amri's record of opposition to the Imamate and his role in the defence of the revolution, especially during the critical siege of Sana'a in 1967/78, accorded him prominent political status. In general, his views were taken to reflect those of the military. Al-Ayni owed his influence to his active role in opposition to the Imamate and also to the fact that he was widely respected among his fellow intellectuals and closely associated with the Ba'athists, inside and outside Yemen, in addition to having family links with influential shaykhs. Of all the prime ministers of the war period, Muhsin al-Ayni was the most involved in foreign affairs. His education at Cairo University and at the Sorbonne during the 1950s and his travels before and after the revolution, in addition to his early experience of foreign affairs as the YAR's first foreign minister, added to his skill and interest. In the two governments he formed in November 1967 and February 1970, he personally took charge of the foreign affairs portfolio.
The foreign affairs portfolio was customarily given to an important member of the cabinet because of its crucial nature. Sometimes, as in the case of al-Sallal's cabinet of October 1967 and al-Ayni's two cabinets, the portfolio was retained by the premier himself. Dr. Hasan Makki, who as a well-known politician and prominent intellectual played an active role in the formulation of both foreign and domestic policy, was the only minister to assume the foreign affairs portfolio three times, in 1964, 1966 and 1967. Because of the complexity of foreign relations, the position was invariably given to those who had some expertise in this area. Except for Shaykh Abdulkawi Hamim, President al-Sallal and Mustafa Yakub, all foreign ministers were graduates of Arab and foreign universities.14

The Political Élite

One particular feature of decision-making in Yemen was that individuals from outside the decision-making structure indirectly participated in the formulation of the state's policies. These included individuals who either sought to influence decisions or who were "co-opted" into the process by the Government itself. The first category included a number of tribal shaykhs who, because of the indispensable role of their tribes in support of the army during the war, came to exercise direct influence on the decision-making centre. Tribal shaykhs like Abdallah ibn Husayn al-Ahmar and Sinan abu Luhtun, began to hold important positions within the central government, compared with the situation before the September 1962 Revolution when they could only exert influence on the Government policies from outside.15 Their influence was greatly enhanced in the post-November régime as a result of their interference during the 1968 intra-
Republican struggle in support of the Government and its conservative policies. Among these shaykhs Abdallah bin Husayn was the most influential, because of his position as the paramount shaykh of the powerful Hashid tribal federation. These had provided most of the tribal support to the régime and made his opinion indispensable in the country's political decisions. The fact that he had some influence among some elements and tribal factions on the Royalist side added to the significance of his role during the search for reconciliation in the last three years of the war. Following his election to the Chairmanship of the National Assembly (al-Majlis al-Watani) in April 1969, he began to play a more active role in foreign policy matters, and participated in official delegations sent abroad.

Like the tribal shaykhs, the army insisted on playing a role in deciding the country's policies. The differences within the army, and the opposition by some officers to General al-Amri after 1968, led some officers to bypass their high command and express their opinion directly to the Presidential Council. These inclinations were encouraged by the leadership which showed particular interest in ascertaining the various views within the army.16

Among members of the political élite were prominent social figures including Ulama (Islamic clergy), and intellectuals who were "co-opted" to the decision-making process on the Government's own initiative. In important foreign policy issues, consultations were usually widened to include not only members of the decision-making élite but also selected public opinion leaders.17 While such a process was not clearly defined in the pre-1967 era, al-Iryani's government promoted this type of "public participation" in policy-making. Al-
Iryani viewed these consultations as a means of providing him with new perspectives as well as mobilising support for his policies.

Public Pressure

In Yemen, as in many other third world countries, the influence of public opinion on foreign policy is minimal. Usually decisions are reached in the light of discussions and debates which take place at the top of the government's structure and are only later communicated to the public. Lack of political participation by the public during the 1960s was partly due to the unsophisticated nature of the public resulting from the high level of illiteracy. In 1955, literacy among Yemenis was estimated to be as low as 2.5 per cent and by 1972 this figure had risen to no more than 15 per cent. In addition, the public mass media was in its infancy and contributed little to the understanding of foreign policy issues. During the war there were three radio stations, situated in Sana'a, Ta'iz and Hudaydah, but their transmissions reached only half of the main urban centres. The circulation of daily newspapers was limited to 5,000 copies, of which more than two thirds were local rather than national. While the local radio stations paid due attention to foreign news, the press generally gave no coverage to foreign policy issues.

The virtual absence of public pressure was, in short, a reflection of the backward nature of the socio-political organisation of Yemeni society. No political parties or permanent interest groups existed which could aggregate and articulate the interest of the various segments of society. At the beginning of the 1960s branches of pan-Arab parties like the Ba'ath, the Movement of Arab Nationalists
(Harakat Al-Kawmiyyin Al-Arab) and the Communists, sprang up in Yemen, but because of limitations emanating from the socio-political setting their following was restricted, a fact which made them more of political groups than political parties. At the time of the September Revolution their core membership did not exceed 40, and at the end of the 1960s the number was still no more than a few hundred.\textsuperscript{19}

Despite repeated official emphasis on the need to establish a mass political organisation to ensure public participation in the formulation of YAR policies, only one serious attempt was made towards that end. Mainly due to the demands made by the war on the Republican governments, the issue of political organisation was not among its priorities. Indeed, the government adopted the Egyptian method of mobilising the masses only whenever a demonstration of public support was needed.\textsuperscript{20} Under the influence of Egypt's example, al-Sallal's government even passed a law on 23 May, 1963 banning the establishment of political parties. The only political organisation, al-Ittihad al-Thawri al-Sha'abi (the People's Revolutionary Union) was established in January 1967. Being an official creation however, it could not claim to represent the mass of the people and it was abandoned after the overthrow of al-Sallal's government in the November 1967 coup. Its main achievement was the organisation of demonstrations in October 1967 against the Khartoum Agreement. The ban on political parties was upheld after the November 1967 coup. The August 1968 clashes between the followers of Ba'ath and followers of the Movement of Arab Nationalists (MAN) mobilised public opinion against party politics and gave the government the pretext to oppose such political activities. Throughout the post-November 1967 era al-Iryani continued to oppose such activities on the grounds that they would involve incessant friction between parties and open the door to foreign intervention.\textsuperscript{21}
Until 1966, only limited activities by the then pro-Egyptian MAN had been tolerated, and even after the November coup it was only the Ba'athists who were able to exert anything like an influence on government policies, and only then indirectly through selected individuals in the government.\textsuperscript{22}

Legislative constraints on government policies were almost non-existent. Despite several attempts in the pre-1967 era aimed at establishing a representative body, the Consultative Assembly (Madjlis al-Shura) was never established. On 15 March, 1969, after more than eight years, the National Council was established to function as a temporary representative body. However, since its entire membership (45) was nominated by the Republican Council and because of its limited legislative powers, the Madjlis could have no real influence on policies.\textsuperscript{23}

This does not entail that public opinion did not have any influence at all on the policy-making process. Precisely because of the need for national consensus and cohesion in face of Royalist challenge, and due to continued intra-Republican friction, the decision-makers were even more sensitive to public attitudes, especially the views of the military and the tribes. Al-Sallal and his successor al-Iryani were, to varying degrees, aware of the prevailing socio-political climate, formulating their decisions to suit it on several occasions. For instance, in May 1965, because of popular support for the Khamir Conference, al-Sallal was obliged to approve the resolutions of the conference which included reconsideration of some of his long established policies.\textsuperscript{24} In addition, al-Iryani admitted that it was due to pressure from the military and intellectuals that in November
1967 he rejected the Arab Tripartite Commission, against his own inclination.25

The two effectively organised socio-political institutions, the army and the tribes, were the only pressure groups capable of affecting the policy-making process. The priority given to defence during the Republican-Royalist war effectively put the military in charge of the country's affairs. Army officers held important portfolios in most of the cabinets during that period. In addition al-Sallal and his successor al-Iryani always ensured the support of the military before making any choices relating to major issues. The military did not, however, possess the exclusive power enjoyed by their counterparts in other countries of the Middle East, mainly because it did not have the monopoly on coercion in Yemeni society. As all Yemeni tribes were armed collectively they were much more powerful than the army.26 In the final analysis, the military could not by itself ensure the defence of the revolution which it had initiated and had to rely on Egyptian military support, as well as that of the tribal forces. Its preoccupation with defence, and the inclination of the post-November moderate leadership to curb its role in politics, had made the army's participation in the government rather inconsistent. This was reflected in the fact that whereas the officers occupied 30 per cent of the seats in the pre-November 1967 cabinets, the proportion subsequently fell to 20 percent.27 The army only intervened directly in the decision-making process where the decisions under considerations had a direct bearing on defence.

The other powerful element in Yemen were the tribes who collectively had always played an important role in the political life of the country. During the war, the power of the tribes was further enhanced
by the competition for their support between the Republicans and the Royalists and the money and weapons their shaykhs had received as inducements. The shaykhs' influence traditionally lay in their role as a pressure group influencing policies from outside the government and it was not until after the November 5 coup that they were incorporated into the ruling establishment. However, even after they were given important positions in the al-Iryani government, lack of political experience limited their direct participation in the formulation of the state's policies. In general, the shaykhs had little interest in matters outside their own tribal domains and had little experience in technical matters. Their participation in the formulation of the country's foreign policies was therefore both minimal and indirect.
NOTES ON CHAPTER III


3. See text of the Third Interim Constitution in Musus Yamaniyyah, op. cit., pp.73-80.


5. Personal interviews, see also A. al-Baradduni, al-Yaman al-Djumhuri, op. cit., p.575.

6. ibid., p.584.

7. John Peterson, Yemen: The search for a Modern State, op. cit., p.107; also see The Economist, October 1969.

8. Personal interviews.


11. This conclusion was inferred from an interview with Mustafa Yakub, the YAR foreign minister during al-Amri's cabinet of 1965, Bonn, 1988.


14. Muhsin al-Ayni received a university degree in Law from Cairo University, 1957; Hassan Makki obtained a university degree in Economics and Commerce from the University of Bologna, Italy, 1959-60; Abd al-Rahman al-Baydani held a Ph.D. in Economics and Administration from the University of Bonn, Germany, 1961; Muhsin al-Sirri received a university diploma in Banking and Commerce from Trinity College, Dublin, Ireland, 1961; Muhammad Sallam obtained a B.A. degree in Biology from Temple University, U.S.A., 1958; Yahya Djaghman received a university degree from Boston University, U.S.A., in Political Science, 1962; and Ahmad Barakat received a university diploma in Petroleum Reservoir Engineering from Imperial College, London, 1969.


16. See for example Chapter 7, p.183.


19. Personal interviews.


22. David McLintock, *Foreign Exposure and Attitudinal Change: A Case Study of Foreign Policy Makers In the Yemen Arab Republic*, *ibid.*, p.47.


26. Personal interviews.


28. Robert Stookey concluded that one of the main innovations of the conservative post-November 5 régime was the recruitment of tribal shaykhs into positions of authority (see Stookey, 'Social Structure and Politics in the YAR', part 2, *Middle East Journal*, vol.28, no.4, 1974, p.410).