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AN ANALYSIS OF THE EMPLOYMENT OF
UNITED STATES TROOPS IN LEBANON IN 1958

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12 November 1971

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STUDENT ESSAY

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BY

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(Thesis)

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Events in Lebanon during the middle 1950's created a very unstable situation in that country. Internal, regional, and international forces were at work which culminated in President Chamoun of Lebanon asking for military assistance from the United States. President Eisenhower replied in a show of force by sending American troops to Lebanon for about 3 1/2 months during 1958. The resulting impact that this action has had both in international relations and United States foreign policy was extensive. Such a move restored peace and tranquility to a trouble nation, drew praise from American allies, restrained the growth of communism in that geographic region, assisted in retaining the independence of Israel, and showed the rest of the world that the United States was determined to protect its self-interests and to honor its commitments. The Soviet Union and others of the East bitterly condemned America's "illegal intervention." In spite of these denunciations by the communists, United States status and influence were enhanced as the nation continues to be the leader of the Free World.

An Analysis of the Employment of United States

Troops in Lebanon in 1958

The United States has always been noted as a nation that has great compassion, honor, and leadership. These qualities were manifestly displayed in 1958 when at the request of President Chamoun of Lebanon, American troops landed in that country in a show of force to deter the fall of his government to communism. Reaction to this American involvement in the affairs of a sovereign nation was immediate, divisive, and both favorable and unfavorable. This paper presents a background of factors leading up to the 1958 crisis, a narrative description of that critical time, and an analysis of the impact these events have had on American prestige, strategy, and policy in the international community of nations.

Lebanon, because of its strategic location at the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea in the region where history was first recorded, dates back to those ancient times when it was occupied by the Canaanites.¹ From that time, the area which was to become the state of Lebanon was a part of history and developed with varied rulers, inhabitants, and benefactors.

¹Phillip K. Hitti, *A Short History of Lebanon*, (1965) p. 15.

Between 1516 and 1918, this territory was a part of the Ottoman Empire.² Following World War I, France was given a mandate, at the Conference at San Remo, Italy, in April, 1920, over and established the State of Greater Lebanon. The mandate was later formalized under the League of Nations. On 23 May 1926, Lebanon became a republic and received a constitution at which time it began functioning in a political sense as an independent country, electing its own government officials and operating autonomously, but still under the French mandate. In 1939, with the clouds of World War II ominously gathering, the French High Commissioner suspended the constitution and declared martial law. Later with the fall of France, British and Free French units occupied Lebanon.

On 26 November 1941, France terminated the mandate and declared Lebanon independent. Constitutional life returned in 1943 with the election of a chamber of deputies which chose Bishara al-Khuri as the president. The evacuation of the last French troops under the mandate was completed on 31 December 1946.³

²K. S. Salibi, *The Modern History of Lebanon*, (1965) p. XI.

³Hitti, pp. 217 - 223.

Under the constitution of Lebanon, the president is elected for a six-year term by the Chamber of Deputies and he may not succeed himself. Fraudulent elections in 1947 brought into the Chamber puppets who amended the constitution so that al-Khuri could succeed himself in 1949. Such political chicanery together with the increase in graft and corruption in his administration brought about his downfall. He was forced to resign in 1952 whereupon the Chamber chose Camille Chamoun as his successor.⁴

During the term of office of President Chamoun, US troops arrived and for this reason a closer examination must be made of the events and the causes leading up to his request for US involvement. The first few years of his office were marked by progressive, prosperous, and peaceful existence.

Beginning in 1955, several events started emerging which culminated in and inexorably led to the crisis of 1958. The three major causes were: internal, regional, and international.⁵ All are intertwined and inter-related but are sectionalized for ease of study.

⁴Fahim I. Qubain, *Crisis in Lebanon*, (1961) p. 22.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 65.

Internal

The four internal causes were:

- (1) general dissatisfaction among the Muslims who felt they were being treated as second-class citizens;
- (2) rumors and accusations of dishonesty and unfair dealing in the Chamoun Administration;
- (3) public discontent with Chamoun because he antagonized and attempted to liquidate many of the respected leaders in Lebanon; and
- (4) fear that President Chamoun was planning to amend the constitution to succeed himself.

Regional

The three regional causes were:

- (1) the instigation by Syria of high tariffs, of restrictions on imports, and of nationalization of all foreign business;
- (2) Lebanon's refusal to break diplomatic relations with Britain over the Suez dispute; and
- (3) the splitting of the Arab world into two factions - one headed by Iraq and the other by Egypt.

International

The three international causes were:

- (1) the triumvirate of the US, the Arab states, and Russia with the US backing Iraq and Lebanon and Russia siding with Egypt and Syria;
- (2) the elevation of Charles Malik, an outspoken pro-American and pro-Western leader, to be foreign minister; and
- (3) the embracement by Lebanon of the Eisenhower

Doctrine which stated in part,

...It would, in the third place, authorize such assistance and cooperation to include the employment of armed forces of the United States to secure and protect the territorial integrity and political independence of such nations, requesting such aid, against overt armed aggression from any nation controlled by International Communism.⁶

The internal opposition to President Chamoun headed by Saib Salam in association with many powerful leaders formerly compatriots of Chamoun became so forceful that, aided and abetted by the incessant propaganda from Syria and Egypt, things were reaching a fever pitch during the first few months of 1958. Tremendous forces were at work attacking President Chamoun and his administration for their pro-American and pro-Western leanings,

⁶Congressional Record, 85th Congress, First Session, 5 January 1957, p. 226.

and hence their anti-Arab feelings, for their consideration of amending the constitution, for their failure to solve the Muslim problem, and for the turbulent foreign relations policies.

On 8 May 1958, Nassib al-Matni, publisher and owner of a newspaper that consistently opposed Chamoun and his policies, was brutally murdered as he came out of his office.⁷ No system could withstand such pressures and a bloody and violent civil war erupted in Lebanon.

Chamoun was accused of being the architect of the assassination. Saib Salam and the well organized opposition wrought havoc in the land. Ultimatums were given Chamoun to institute reforms, demands that he resign were made, and threats were given unless he would retract and not attempt to amend the constitution.

Meanwhile, the United Arab Republic and Russia seizing upon the situation increased its propaganda effort and even began to infiltrate military equipment and Syrian aggressors across the border into Lebanon.

On 21 and 22 May, Lebanon appealed to the Arab League and to the Security Council of the United Nations. Eventually the Security Council acted and authorized the organization of the

⁷Desmond Stewart, *Turmoil in Beirut*, (1958), p. 23.

United Nations Observation Group in Lebanon (UNOGIL) which began functioning in June 1958.

The Nasser-communist conspiracy had not concentrated on Lebanon alone. It had reached into Jordan, where a plot was uncovered in mid July 1958, to overthrow the King Hussein government. British paratroops had arrived in Jordan on 17 July 1958, at the urgent request of King Hussein to sustain his government.⁸ On 14 July, a revolt had broken out in Iraq which was the West's only major ally in the Arab world. The coup resulted in the brutal murder of Premier Nuri es-Said and his royal family and the overthrow of the government.⁹

It was apparent that UNOGIL was unable to maintain security and with knowledge of the Iraq revolt, President Chamoun, on 14 July, summoned the ambassadors of the US, Britain, and France individually to request aid. He further stated that unless it were forthcoming within the next 24 hours, he would be dead and Lebanon would become a satellite of Egypt.¹⁰

⁸ Keesings Contemporary Archives, (July 26 - August 2, 1958) p. 16308 and (August 2 - 9, 1958) p. 16319.

⁹ John C. Campbell, *Defense of the Middle East - Problems of American Policy*, (1960) p. 146.

¹⁰ Charles W. Thayer, *Diplomat*, (1959) p. 28.

US Ambassador McClintock relayed the message to Washington immediately. Upon receipt of the request, President Eisenhower responded by sending the Sixth Fleet with accompanying Marines, and issued the following statement,

Yesterday morning, I received from President Chamoun of Lebanon a plea that some United States forces be stationed in Lebanon to help maintain security and to evidence the concern of the United States for the integrity and independence of Lebanon. President Chamoun's appeal was made with the concurrence of all the members of the Lebanese Cabinet. President Chamoun made it clear that he considered an immediate United States response imperative if Lebanon's independence, already menaced from without, were to be preserved....
...the United States has dispatched a contingent of United States forces to Lebanon to protect American lives and by their presence to encourage the Lebanese Government in defense of Lebanese sovereignty and integrity.
...There are in Lebanon about 2,500 Americans....¹¹

President Chamoun, when informed of this action on 15 July, was well pleased, but General Chehab, Head of the Lebanese Army, was disturbed. He had maintained the Army on neutral grounds during the rebellion. His reason was the uprising was internal and he would not shoot Lebanese civilians when his mission was to defend the country from external aggression.

¹¹ Congressional Record, 85th Congress, Second Session, 15 July 1958, pp. 1 - 2.

Within hours the Sixth Fleet appeared on the horizon and preparations were made for landing the Marines. By 3:00 p.m. of 15 July, troops were on shore ready to move into Beirut. General Chehab was wary lest his troops, who were lined along the highway leading from the airport into the city, would resist the Marines advance. Accordingly, after considerable negotiations with the US Marine commander, the U. S. Ambassador, and his own staff, General Chehab was able to convince his troops to withdraw after securing the concession that Lebanese jeeps be interspersed along the column "...so that it doesn't look quite so much like an invading army?"¹² General Chehab then accompanied Ambassador McClintock and Admiral Holloway, senior military officer in charge, at the head of the column into Beirut. The trip into the city was uneventful.

Upon arrival into the city, the troops stationed themselves around the harbor, the embassy and the ambassador's residence. In a matter of days, when order was reassured in the city, the US troops withdrew to the outskirts.¹³

Conduct by the American forces was exemplary. Discipline was outstanding, and the soldiers were soon accepted for their real

¹²Thayer, p. 34.

¹³*Ibid.*

purpose. Initially the troops practiced no fraternization, stayed out of the city except when on duty, took no side in the internal affairs, and did not enter areas which were patrolled by Lebanese troops. Later, four man patrols, made up of two Americans and two Lebanese, were formed and functioned effectively.¹⁴

Eventually, the number of troops reached approximately 15,000 by 20 July. No sooner had they arrived than the question came up as to when do they leave. President Eisenhower had made it abundantly clear that the troops would leave when requested to do so by the legal government of Lebanon, or when the UN could give assurance of peace in the land. Robert Murphy, Undersecretary of State, arrived in Lebanon on 17 July, and began negotiations to assist President Chamoun in restoring peace and tranquility to the Lebanese government. He returned to the US on 5 August.

On 31 July, General Chehab, who was acceptable to the Chamoun administration and the opposition, was elected President and he assumed that office on 23 September, replacing President Chamoun. American forces completed their withdrawal on 25 October 1958.

¹⁴Qubain, pp. 35-36.

Such an episode in American history has had a profound impact on US foreign policy, on American relationships in the family of nations, and on US world-wide strategy. Reaction to American involvement ranged from hearty acceptance, to noncommittal, to outspoken disapproval. Generally this response was divided along non-communist and communist lines.

Mr. Selwyn Lloyd, British Foreign Secretary, said in the House of Commons on 15 July 1958, that the American action "...has Her Majesty's Government's full support."¹⁵

The Shah of Iran, the President of Pakistan, and the President of Turkey cabled President Eisenhower 16 July 1958,

This bold and appropriate decision of the United States will not only ensure the protection of the independence of Lebanon and the support of its legitimate government but will at the same time strengthen the determined position of Iran, Pakistan, and Turkey, and also renew and increased the faith of the free world in the leadership of the United States for the defense of the free nations.¹⁶

Canada, China, and France were other nations that spoke out at the United Nations supporting the American position under Article 51 of the Charter.

¹⁵M. S. Agwani, ed. *The Lebanese Crisis, 1958 - A Documentary Study*, 1965, p. 270.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 232.

Because Chamoun had not notified or prepared the citizens of Lebanon for US intervention, they were somewhat taken aback on the arrival of the troops. It was hoped by the pro-government supporters that American forces would fight to bolster Chamoun and establish peace among the warring factions. The opposition, as led by Saib Salam, also hoped that the civil strife would be terminated but was concerned with the ultimate motive of the troops and the legality of their position.

The average Lebanese observed the landing with curiosity and mixed feelings. Gradually they were won to the American side by the attitude and conduct of the soldiers.

Russia through its United Nations delegate protested vehemently the "illegal" action of the United States. He further accused the United States of using this as a background for military intervention against other Arab peoples. Premier Khrushchev, in a grandstand play, called for a meeting of the Summit, and notified Nasser that Russian "Volunteers" were ready to be flown to the Middle East if he needed them. Prime Minister MacMillan of Great Britain and United States' United Nations Ambassador Lodge denied any wrong doing by stating that it is perfectly lawful and right for any nation in trouble to ask for assistance from another nation. They both continued by saying that to furnish such aid when requested was not meddling in the internal affairs of the recipient nation.

The Soviet delegate to the United Nations stated that there had been no foreign intervention into Lebanon, that this was struggle was strictly an internal affair, and outside nations i.e., the US, should stay out. Mr. Azkoul, the Lebanese delegate, reiterated the charge of interference by the United Arab Republic into the activities of Lebanon and proceeded to list some of the meddlings by Syria and Egypt.

Both the US and the Soviet Union submitted resolutions to the Security Council. The US resolution called for the UNOGIL to continue its work, to make reports, and to seek cooperation in stopping the illegal shipment of arms and materials across the borders of Lebanon by all nations. Russia's resolution called for the withdrawal of US troops from Lebanon and British troops from Jordan.

Communist China issued a statement also condemning the US for its flagrant violation of the UN Charter.

Adil Usayran, Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies of Lebanon, and Saib Salam, opposition leader, made statements bitterly condemning US troop landings. The communist party of Lebanon in tune with the party line reacted like Usayran and Salam.¹⁷

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 241 - 298.

President Eisenhower in a radio-TV address on 15 July 1958, stated that the Lebanon situation saw the same pattern of indirect aggression that was familiar between 1945 and 1950. It was through fomenting civil strife that the communists took over Czechoslovakia in 1948, mainland China in 1949, and attempted to take over Korea and Indochina, starting in 1950. When the League of Nations failed in the late 1930's to be cognizant of such indirect aggression, insidious forces were encouraged and World War II was inevitable. He went on to say that the United States was determined not to have history repeated here.¹⁸

US foreign policy in the 50's was based on a global strategy of massive retaliation resulting from our nuclear superiority. During the 60's our strategy was changed to one of flexible response because we no longer had nuclear superiority. A stalemate had developed resulting in nuclear parity between the US and the Soviet Union.

The immediate result of this United States involvement was that the civil war was ended, peace and tranquility were restored, and the government of Lebanon remained independent. From the long range point of view, however, the implications were much more profound. Nasser had brought Syria into his orbit. Iraq had fallen just one day before and Jordan and Lebanon were next on this communist timetable for conquest. A cry was heard in

¹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 232.

the distance and the United Nations was unable to respond in time. It was incumbent on the United States as leader of the Free World to provide the necessary power and assistance to keep Lebanon free. The United States was determined to stop communism before it extended itself any further. America's alternative was to let another country fall to communism. The domino theory may well have been the outcome with the remaining small states of the Middle East toppling to communism.

From a strategic viewpoint, the Middle East is requisite to the security of the United States. "So far as the sheer value of territory is concerned there is no more strategically important area in the world...." General Eisenhower spoke these words in 1951 with reference to the Middle East.¹⁹ This region of the world is of great strategic value to the defense of the United States because of its vast amount of oil and because of its geographical location. For self-preservation from the aspect of independent action, needing the oil, and maintaining friendly relations with nations in that region in a collective security arrangement, it is advisable for the United States to keep a foothold in that part of the world.

¹⁹Campbell, p. 167.

Concomitant with this is the position of the United States as the leader of the Free World. Respected, powerful, and capable, America is looked to for guidance, help, and leadership. A situation had developed which necessitated our reacting properly and promptly or losing face, prestige, position, and power. America was resolute in its determination to furnish whatever was required. By answering the call, its prestige was enhanced and international communism was made aware that when a nation opt for freedom the United States would assist it.

America's response called attention to the world that the relentless pursuit of communism vis-a-vis freedom is continual. Never once have the leaders denied that the ultimate goal of international communism is world domination with time of no consequence. Probing, striking, subversive, by fair means or foul, the inexorable march goes on. Where it strikes next, no one can foretell but the world was once again alerted that we can never rest in our fight to maintain freedom.

The willingness of the US to aid a stricken friend was clear evidence that where our self-interests are at stake, we will defend them. Of significance is the fact that where there has been a direct confrontation of US and Russian interests and not through a third party, the Soviet Union has backed down as

witnessed by both the Cuban crisis and the Berlin Blockade. On the other hand, where the US has confronted a satellite of communism willing to fight Russia's battles, there has been no withdrawal. Instead in the cases of both Korea and South Viet Nam, the US has had to fight bloody wars in the defense of freedom without encountering the main enemy directly.

Since this operation took place more than ten years ago, the international situation has changed and several deductions can be made. The United Nations has now been in existence 26 years, and the 1958 Lebanon crisis was another manifestation of certain inherent failings in the Charter, which must be changed to obviate these deficiencies. It was necessary for one freedom-loving country to come to the aid of another to keep it from being subverted. As the United Nations is the principal peace keeping forum, it likewise should have a peace-keeping force at its disposal with which to prevent brush wars from starting.

Through technical, financial, and material aid, the United States has provided these resources to our allies with which many have been able to build viable economies and strong military capabilities. America will remain the superpower, the leader of the Free World but it can not do it alone. The forces opposing us continue to develop weapons of war and have aggressive

expansionist tendencies. Those nations wishing to remain free must be willing to support and assist us in our effort rather than expect the United States to carry the world.

In the light of events that have transpired since 1958, it does not stretch the imagination to realize what would be the situation in the Middle East today had the United States not intervened. Egypt had taken in Syria to form the United Arab Republic as a communist bloc. As related above, these two countries were making definite overt attacks on Lebanon to force it to join and Jordan was to be swallowed up next. Had this occurred, the communists would have had a base of four major countries in a most strategic location from which to launch further acts of aggrandizement in that region. No doubt by this time, the late Premier Nasser, ebullient with his success, would have extended the tenacles of the United Arab Republic to include many more nations in the Middle East. Because the United States took its stand at this particular time and place, however, this served as an example for Great Britain to help Jordan and notified the Soviet Union that the US would live up to the Eisenhower Doctrine and was determined to stop the encroachment of communism on free and independent nations which asked for our assistance.

Undoubtedly, the US move into Lebanon reduced Nasser's domination of the Arab nations in this area. Had Lebanon and Jordan both been drawn into the UAR and thus been under the influence of communist Russia, there is serious doubt that Israel could have survived. Such prompt and decisive action on our part has acted as a deterrent to other incidents of aggression.

It was fortunate that Chamoun invited the US to come in otherwise our entry could not have served its stabilizing purpose and may have precipitated the catastrophe of a general war in the Middle East. Our strategy in going into Lebanon was "quick entry - do the job - quick exit" and it succeeded perfectly. Unfortunately such a strategy could not be employed in both Korea and Viet Nam because the situation in both countries was considerably different from that in Lebanon. Our policy in the future should remain one of flexibility, to do whatever is necessary to resolve the situation, and to continue to meet each communist attempt to subvert our self interest with firm determination, power, and assistance.

Only by remaining strong can we remain free. Ours is a dynamic nation capable of doing anything we want to. The defense of this great experiment in living called democracy is well worth the price. We must not, however, burden the people with an

awesome military establishment that stifles growth and development. By optimizing our allocation of resources among the competing functions of government, we can maximize our continued advancement.

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