

U.S. Intervention in Lebanon (1958)

“The Secretary [Foster Dulles] stated that while to send forces into Lebanon is the lesser of two evils even this course is still an evil.”

White House meeting, June 9, 1958

What was the core conflict in Lebanon in 1958 that led to the crisis?

In **May 1958**, Lebanon slid toward civil war between **President Camille Chamoun**—a pro-Western **Maronite** embracing the **Eisenhower Doctrine** and hinting at an unconstitutional second term—and an opposition of **Muslims** and **Arab nationalists** backed by **Gamal Abdel Nasser** and the **United Arab Republic (UAR)**. Clashes partitioned cities and regions. A compromise seemed possible once Chamoun signaled he wouldn’t run again. Then the **July 14, 1958** coup in **Iraq** toppled the pro-Western monarchy, electrified Nasserism, and convinced Chamoun Lebanon might be next. He formally invoked the Eisenhower Doctrine and requested **U.S.** military assistance to stabilize **Beirut**.

What was the Eisenhower Doctrine, and how did it relate to the Lebanese government’s appeal for aid?

The **Eisenhower Doctrine (1957)** pledged **U.S. economic and military aid** to Middle Eastern states threatened by **international communism**. **President Chamoun** was one of the few Arab leaders to align openly with it. After the Iraqi coup, he cited the doctrine to request **immediate help**. For **President Dwight D. Eisenhower** and **Secretary of State John Foster Dulles**, answering Lebanon’s call tested **U.S. credibility**: would Washington protect a friendly government, vital **oil routes**, and regional balance against a perceived blend of **Soviet** influence and **pan-Arab** activism? Upholding the doctrine—preferably via **limited, stabilizing** measures—framed the U.S. response.

What diplomatic and alternative solutions did the U.S. explore before deciding on military intervention?

Before troops, Washington tried diplomacy. In **June 1958** it backed the **UN Observation Group in Lebanon (UNOGIL)** to monitor alleged arms flows from **Syria**. **UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld** found no “massive infiltration,” implying the revolt was mainly indigenous. **Dulles** pressed a Beirut formula: de-escalation, an orderly presidential election, and **Chamoun’s** exit—the “third way out.” By early July, Chamoun signaled he would not seek re-election, easing tensions. The **July 14 Iraqi coup** upended calculations: leaders feared surging Nasserism and judged that **UN pressure plus compromise** might not suffice without a visible **U.S.** security backstop.

What were the main arguments in favor of U.S. military intervention in Lebanon?

Advocates stressed four points. **Prevent collapse/dominoes:** losing Lebanon to Nasser's orbit could topple other pro-Western regimes and discredit U.S. power. **Credibility/commitments:** the **Eisenhower Doctrine** and Chamoun's formal request required action to protect allies and **oil lifelines**. **Deterrence:** a firm move would warn the **USSR** and signal Nasser to ease off, reducing risks elsewhere. **Protect Americans:** about **2,500** U.S. citizens were in **Beirut**. A limited, time-bound landing near the airport, backed by the **Sixth Fleet**, could stabilize key nodes without "taking sides," buying space for a Lebanese compromise and reassuring partners like **Jordan**.

What were the significant concerns or arguments against U.S. military intervention?

Skeptics warned of escalation and blowback. **Superpower risk:** U.S. troops might provoke **Soviet** countermoves or crises elsewhere. **Civil-war optics:** intervening in an internal fight could ignite anti-Americanism, threaten **pipelines** and **Suez** traffic, and validate propaganda about imperialism. **No clear exit:** a landing might become open-ended policing. **Legitimacy:** absent careful **UN** cover, legality and world opinion were problematic. Critics urged exhausting mediation, reinforcing **UNOGIL**, and pushing a **Chehab**-style compromise, cautioning that a hasty show of force might solve little, entangle Washington in sectarian fissures, and distract from broader **Cold War** priorities.

How was the decision to intervene, known as "Operation Blue Bat," implemented?

President Eisenhower made a contingent decision on **July 14**, after consulting bipartisan leaders and coordinating with **Prime Minister Harold Macmillan** (Britain backed **Jordan**). **Operation Blue Bat** began **July 15**: the U.S. **Sixth Fleet** signaled offshore, then about **1,700 Marines** landed near **Beirut Airport**; total U.S. strength later exceeded **14,000**. Rules of engagement stressed restraint—secure the airport, port, and approaches; avoid large-unit combat; support but not supplant Lebanese forces. Commanders emphasized visibility and discipline to deter spoilers, while diplomats sought a political landing zone: an agreed successor to **Chamoun** and conditions for an early U.S. withdrawal.

What was the outcome of the U.S. intervention in Lebanon in 1958?

The intervention lasted roughly **three months**, with **minimal combat** and **one** U.S. fatality. U.S. presence underwrote a political deal: **Chamoun** stepped down; **General Fuad Chehab**—acceptable to both camps—won the presidency, easing communal tensions. As stability returned, U.S. forces redeployed and were gone by **late October 1958**. In Washington it was hailed as a **qualified success** and the first practical test of the **Eisenhower Doctrine**. In the **Arab world** and the **Soviet bloc**, it drew sharp condemnation as imperial intrusion. Practically, it bought time for a Lebanese accommodation while signaling U.S. readiness to act—briefly, and with limits.

Timeline

- **May 1958:** Political crisis and near-civil war: pro-Western President **Camille Chamoun** vs. Nasser-aligned opposition; clashes produce de facto partition.

- **June 1958:** UNOGIL deployed; **Hammar skjöld** visits; reports find **no massive infiltration**; U.S. nudges Chamoun toward a reconciliation formula and successor.
- **Early July 1958:** Chamoun signals he **won't seek re-election**; **Gen. Fuad Chehab** emerges as consensus candidate.
- **July 14, 1958:** **Iraq coup** shocks region; Chamoun **appeals for U.S.–UK help**; Eisenhower secures bipartisan backing, coordinates with **Macmillan**, and **tentatively decides to intervene**.
- **July 15, 1958:** **Operation Blue Bat**—U.S. Sixth Fleet off Beirut; **1,700 Marines land** at the airport by noon; Eisenhower addresses Congress/nation citing defense against “indirect aggression.”
- **July–August 1958:** U.S. forces build to **~14,000** under strict stabilization rules; envoy **Robert Murphy** mediates; Chamoun confirms **step-down**; parliament elects **Chehab**; fighting subsides.
- **Late October 1958:** **U.S. withdrawal completed** (~3 months total); minimal combat, **one U.S. fatality**; short, limited intervention achieves political stabilization.



Lebanese president Camille Chamoun

**Special Message from President Dwight D. Eisenhower
to the Congress on the Situation in the Middle East (excerpt)
January 5, 1957¹**

[Delivered in person before a joint session]

To the Congress of the United States:

....The Middle East has abruptly reached a new and critical stage in its long and important history. In past decades many of the countries in that area were not fully self-governing. Other nations exercised considerable authority in the area and the security of the region was largely built around their power. But since the First World War there has been a steady evolution toward self-government and independence. This development the United States has welcomed and has encouraged. Our country supports without reservation the full sovereignty and independence of each and every nation of the Middle East.²

The evolution to independence has in the main been a peaceful process. But the area has been often troubled. Persistent crosscurrents of distrust and fear with raids back and forth across national boundaries have brought about a high degree of instability in much of the Mid East. Just recently there have been hostilities involving Western European nations that once exercised much influence in the area.³ Also the relatively large attack by Israel in October has intensified the basic differences between that nation and its Arab neighbors.⁴ All this instability has been heightened and, at times, manipulated by International Communism.⁵

Russia's rulers have long sought to dominate the Middle East. That was true of the Czars and it is true of the Bolsheviks. The reasons are not hard to find. They do not affect Russia's security, for no one plans to use the Middle East as a base for aggression against Russia. Never for a moment has the United States entertained such a thought.

The Soviet Union has nothing whatsoever to fear from the United States in the Middle East, or anywhere else in the world, so long as its rulers do not themselves first resort to aggression.

That statement I make solemnly and emphatically.

Neither does Russia's desire to dominate the Middle East spring from its own economic interest in the area. Russia does not appreciably use or depend upon the Suez Canal. In 1955 Soviet traffic through the Canal represented only about three fourths of 1% of the total.⁶ The Soviets have no need for, and could provide no market for, the petroleum resources which constitute the principal natural wealth of the area. Indeed, the Soviet Union is a substantial exporter of petroleum products.⁷

The reason for Russia's interest in the Middle East is solely that of power politics. Considering her announced purpose of Communizing the world, it is easy to understand her hope of dominating the Middle East.

This region has always been the crossroads of the continents of the Eastern Hemisphere. The Suez Canal enables the nations of Asia and Europe to carry on the commerce that is essential if these countries are to maintain well-rounded and prosperous economies. The Middle East provides a gateway between Eurasia and Africa.⁸

It contains about two thirds of the presently known oil deposits of the world and it normally supplies the petroleum needs of many nations of Europe, Asia and Africa.⁹ The nations of Europe are peculiarly dependent upon this supply, and this dependency relates to transportation as well as to production! This has been vividly demonstrated since the closing of the Suez Canal and some of the pipelines.¹⁰ Alternate ways of transportation and, indeed, alternate sources of power can, if necessary, be developed. But these cannot be considered as early prospects.

These things stress the immense importance of the Middle East. If the nations of that area should lose their independence, if they were dominated by alien forces hostile to freedom, that would be both a tragedy for the area and for many other free nations whose economic life would be subject to near strangulation. Western Europe would be endangered just as though there had been no Marshall Plan, no North Atlantic Treaty Organization.¹¹ The free nations of Asia and Africa, too, would be placed in serious jeopardy. And the countries of the Middle East would lose the markets upon which their economies depend. All this would have the most adverse, if not disastrous, effect upon our own nation's economic life and political prospects.

Then there are other factors which transcend the material. The Middle East is the birthplace of three great religions—Moslem, Christian and Hebrew. Mecca and Jerusalem are more than places on the map. They symbolize religions which teach that the spirit has supremacy over matter and that the individual has a dignity and rights of which no despotic government can rightfully deprive him. It would be intolerable if the holy places of the Middle East should be subjected to a rule that glorifies atheistic materialism.¹²

International Communism, of course, seeks to mask its purposes of domination by expressions of good will and by superficially attractive offers of political, economic and military aid. But any free nation, which is the subject of Soviet enticement, ought, in elementary wisdom, to look behind the mask....

We have these simple and indisputable facts:

1. The Middle East, which has always been coveted by Russia, would today be prized more than ever by International Communism.

2. The Soviet rulers continue to show that they do not scruple to use any means to gain their ends.
3. The free nations of the Mid East need, and for the most part want, added strength to assure their continued independence.

Our thoughts naturally turn to the United Nations as a protector of small nations. Its Charter gives it primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. Our country has given the United Nations its full support in relation to the hostilities in Hungary and in Egypt.¹³ The United Nations was able to bring about a cease-fire and withdrawal of hostile forces from Egypt because it was dealing with governments and peoples who had a decent respect for the opinions of mankind as reflected in the United Nations General Assembly.¹⁴ But in the case of Hungary, the situation was different. The Soviet Union vetoed action by the Security Council to require the withdrawal of Soviet armed forces from Hungary. And it has shown callous indifference to the recommendations, even the censure, of the General Assembly. The United Nations can always be helpful, but it cannot be a wholly dependable protector of freedom when the ambitions of the Soviet Union are involved.¹⁵

Under all the circumstances I have laid before you, a greater responsibility now devolves upon the United States. We have shown, so that none can doubt, our dedication to the principle that force shall not be used internationally for any aggressive purpose and that the integrity and independence of the nations of the Middle East should be inviolate. Seldom in history has a nation's dedication to principle been tested as severely as ours during recent weeks.¹⁶

There is general recognition in the Middle East, as elsewhere, that the United States does not seek either political or economic domination over any other people. Our desire is a world environment of freedom, not servitude. On the other hand many, if not all, of the nations of the Middle East are aware of the danger that stems from International Communism and welcome closer cooperation with the United States to realize for themselves the United Nations goals of independence, economic well-being and spiritual growth.

If the Middle East is to continue its geographic role of uniting rather than separating East and West; if its vast economic resources are to serve the well-being of the peoples there, as well as that of others; and if its cultures and religions and their shrines are to be preserved for the uplifting of the spirits of the peoples, then the United States must make more evident its willingness to support the independence of the freedom-loving nations of the area.

Under these circumstances I deem it necessary to seek the cooperation of the Congress. Only with that cooperation can we give the reassurance needed to deter aggression, to give courage and confidence to those who are dedicated to freedom and thus prevent a chain of events which would gravely endanger all of the free world.

There have been several Executive declarations made by the United States in relation to the

Middle East.... Nevertheless, weaknesses in the present situation and the increased danger from International Communism, convince me that basic United States policy should now find expression in joint action by the Congress and the Executive. Furthermore, our joint resolve should be so couched as to make it apparent that if need be our words will be backed by action....

The action which I propose would have the following features.

It would, first of all, authorize the United States to cooperate with and assist any nation or group of nations in the general area of the Middle East in the development of economic strength dedicated to the maintenance of national independence.¹⁷

It would, in the second place, authorize the Executive to undertake in the same region programs of military assistance and cooperation with any nation or group of nations which desires such aid.¹⁸

It would, in the third place, authorize such assistance and cooperation to include the employment of the 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.¹⁹

These measures would have to be consonant with the treaty obligations of the United States, including the Charter of the United Nations and with any action or recommendations of the United Nations. They would also, if armed attack occurs, be subject to the overriding authority of the United Nations Security Council in accordance with the Charter.²⁰

The present proposal would, in the fourth place, authorize the President to employ, for economic and defensive military purposes, sums available under the Mutual Security Act of 1954, as amended, without regard to existing limitations.²¹

The legislation now requested should not include the authorization or appropriation of funds because I believe that, under the conditions I suggest, presently appropriated funds will be adequate for the balance of the present fiscal year ending June 30. I shall, however, seek in subsequent legislation the authorization of \$200,000,000 to be available during each of the fiscal years 1958 and 1959 for discretionary use in the area, in addition to the other mutual security programs for the area hereafter provided for by the Congress.²²

This program will not solve all the problems of the Middle East. Neither does it represent the totality of our policies for the area. There are the problems of Palestine and relations between Israel and the Arab States, and the future of the Arab refugees. There is the problem of the future status of the Suez Canal. These difficulties are aggravated by International Communism, but they would exist quite apart from that threat. It is not the purpose of the legislation I propose to deal directly with these problems. The United Nations is actively concerning itself with all these

matters, and we are supporting the United Nations. The United States has made clear, notably by Secretary Dulles' address of August 26, 1955, that we are willing to do much to assist the United Nations in solving the basic problems of Palestine.²³

The proposed legislation is primarily designed to deal with the possibility of Communist aggression, direct and indirect. There is imperative need that any lack of power in the area should be made good, not by external or alien force, but by the increased vigor and security of the independent nations of the area.²⁴

Experience shows that indirect aggression rarely if ever succeeds where there is reasonable security against direct aggression; where the government disposes of loyal security forces, and where economic conditions are such as not to make Communism seem an attractive alternative. The program I suggest deals with all three aspects of this matter and thus with the problem of indirect aggression.

It is my hope and belief that if our purpose be proclaimed, as proposed by the requested legislation, that very fact will serve to halt any contemplated aggression. We shall have heartened the patriots who are dedicated to the independence of their nations. They will not feel that they stand alone, under the menace of great power. And I should add that patriotism is, throughout this area, a powerful sentiment.²⁵ It is true that fear sometimes perverts true patriotism into fanaticism and to the acceptance of dangerous enticements from without. But if that fear can be allayed, then the climate will be more favorable to the attainment of worthy national ambitions.

And as I have indicated, it will also be necessary for us to contribute economically to strengthen those countries, or groups of countries, which have governments manifestly dedicated to the preservation of independence and resistance to subversion. Such measures will provide the greatest insurance against Communist inroads. Words alone are not enough.

Let me refer again to the requested authority to employ the armed forces of the United States to assist to defend the territorial integrity and the political independence of any nation in the area against Communist armed aggression. Such authority would not be exercised except at the desire of the nation attacked. Beyond this it is my profound hope that this authority would never have to be exercised at all....

If, contrary to my hope and expectation, a situation arose which called for the military application of the policy which I ask the Congress to join me in proclaiming, I would of course maintain hour-by-hour contact with the Congress if it were in session. And if the Congress were not in session, and if the situation had grave implications, I would, of course, at once call the Congress into special session.

In the situation now existing, the greatest risk, as is often the case, is that ambitious despots may miscalculate. If power-hungry Communists should either falsely or correctly estimate that the Middle East is inadequately defended, they might be tempted to use open measures of armed

attack. If so, that would start a chain of circumstances which would almost surely involve the United States in military action. I am convinced that the best insurance against this dangerous contingency is to make clear now our readiness to cooperate fully and freely with our friends of the Middle East in ways consonant with the purposes and principles of the United Nations. I intend promptly to send a special mission to the Middle East to explain the cooperation we are prepared to give.²⁶

The policy which I outline involves certain burdens and indeed risks for the United States. Those who covet the area will not like what is proposed. Already, they are grossly distorting our purpose. However, before this Americans have seen our nation's vital interests and human freedom in jeopardy, and their fortitude and resolution have been equal to the crisis, regardless of hostile distortion of our words, motives and actions....

Notes

1. **“Eisenhower Doctrine”**: This message proposed what became the **Middle East Resolution** (Public Law 85-7), passed March 9, 1957; it pledged U.S. economic/military aid—and possible use of U.S. forces—against **Communist-controlled** aggression in the region.
2. **Decolonization arc**: From the mandates system after WWI to post-WWII independence of **Syria/Lebanon (1946), Jordan (1946), Libya (1951), Egypt’s evolving sovereignty**, etc.
3. **“Hostilities... Western European nations”**: The **Suez Crisis (Oct–Nov 1956)**, when Britain, France, and Israel attacked Egypt following **Nasser’s nationalization** of the Suez Canal (July 26, 1956).
4. **“Large attack by Israel in October”**: **Operation Kadesh** (Oct 29, 1956) into Sinai; part of the Suez episode.
5. **Frame of the era**: “International Communism” is the standard **Cold War** rubric for Soviet strategy and allied parties/movements.
6. **Soviet use of Suez**: The USSR’s trade patterns made it a marginal user of the Canal in the mid-1950s.
7. **Oil exporter**: The USSR was a net **oil exporter** and did not depend on Middle Eastern crude, strengthening the speech’s power-politics argument.
8. **Geostrategic hinge**: The Canal’s closure in late 1956 highlighted the Middle East as a **trade chokepoint** between **Europe–Asia–Africa**.
9. **“Two thirds of oil”**: Contemporary U.S. estimates emphasized Middle Eastern reserves and European dependence on them.
10. **Pipelines**: Shorthand for the **Iraq Petroleum Company** lines (e.g., to Haifa/Tripoli) and others repeatedly disrupted in 1956; Suez closure forced costly rerouting.

11. **“As though no Marshall Plan, no NATO”:** Evokes the potential undoing of the **European Recovery Program (1948–52)** and **NATO (founded 1949)** if oil flow collapsed.
12. **Holy places:** The religious argument—**Mecca, Jerusalem**—bolstered the case against **atheistic** Soviet influence in a region sacred to **Islam, Christianity, Judaism**.
13. **Hungary & Egypt, 1956:** The UN deployed **UNEF** to Egypt after Suez but was **stymied by a Soviet veto** on Hungary (Oct–Nov 1956 uprising, crushed by Soviet troops).
14. **UN cease-fire in Egypt:** The General Assembly’s **Emergency Special Session** created **UNEF** and secured withdrawal; contrasted here with UN impotence in **Hungary**.
15. **UN limits:** The **Security Council veto** and Soviet non-compliance with the **General Assembly** illustrate the doctrine’s claim that the UN alone couldn’t deter Moscow.
16. **U.S. restraint in Suez:** Eisenhower underscores U.S. **opposition to Anglo-French-Israeli action**, pressing for withdrawal—central to his moral claim.
17. **Economic cooperation clause:** Authorizes **development aid** to strengthen independence—part one of the doctrine’s triad (economic, military, declaratory).
18. **Military programs:** Continuation/expansion of **MAP/mutual security** aid to regional states seeking assistance.
19. **Use of U.S. forces:** The doctrine’s most controversial element: possible **U.S. troop employment** upon request against **“Communist-controlled”** aggression (interpreted as direct/indirect).
20. **UN compatibility:** A legal hedge—U.S. action declared consonant with the **UN Charter**, and subject to **Security Council** authority in case of armed attack.
21. **Mutual Security Act funds:** Allows drawing on already-appropriated **mutual security** monies without standard geographic caps to meet emergencies.
22. **\$200 million request:** A discretionary **regional fund** sought for FY **1958–59** (separate from country programs).
23. **Dulles’s Aug 26, 1955 speech:** Major policy address offering **U.S. support** for a UN-led Arab–Israeli settlement framework (Armistice lines, refugees, security, development).
24. **Direct vs. indirect aggression:** U.S. concern about **subversion, coups, internal insurgency** backed by the USSR; the doctrine aimed to bolster **internal security** as deterrent.
25. **“Patriotism” and fear:** A nod to **Arab nationalism**—to be channeled toward independence, not Communism, if external threat is credibly deterred.
26. **Special mission:** Eisenhower dispatched **James P. Richards** (former House Foreign Affairs Chair) in early 1957 to solicit regional acceptance of the doctrine; the doctrine’s first major test came with the **U.S. Marines’ landing in Lebanon (July 1958)** at President Chamoun’s request.

Memorandum of a Conversation, White House, Washington, May 13, 1958¹

SUBJECT – Lebanese Crisis

PARTICIPANTS – The President [Dwight D. Eisenhower], the Secretary of State [John Foster Dulles], Governor [Christian A.] Herter [Under Secretary of State], Mr. Allen Dulles [Director of Central Intelligence], General [Nathan F.] Twining [Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff], General [Alfred M.] Gruenther [President, American Red Cross], General [Andrew J.] Goodpaster [White House Staff Secretary and Defense Liaison], Mr. John Irwin [Department of Defense, International Security Affairs], Mr. William M. Rountree [Assistant Secretary of State, NEA].

The Secretary read to the President telegram number 38262 from Beirut.² He added his own comments concerning the gravity of the situation....

The Secretary and the President discussed generally the problems involved in United States intervention.³ The President observed that it was well to consider such problems, but that we also had to take into account the apparently much larger problems which would arise if the Lebanese needed our intervention and we did not respond.⁴ The Secretary agreed, and said he had been giving thought to the mission of any forces which might be sent in. Perhaps our dispatch should be on the basis of protecting, at the request of the Lebanese Government, lives and property of United States citizens, and of assisting the Lebanese Government in connection with its military program.⁵

In response to the President's question, the Secretary pointed out that he did not see how we could invoke the provisions of the Middle East [Eisenhower] Doctrine relating to the use of United States forces specifically, since that would entail a finding that the United Arab Republic had attacked Lebanon and that the UAR was under the control of international communism.⁶ The mission of the United States forces could be brought into context with the Middle East Doctrine at least to some extent, however, because of the Mansfield Amendment, which stated that the preservation of the independence and integrity of the nations of the Middle East was vital to the national interests and world peace.⁷ Nevertheless there was a question of constitutional authority to send in combat troops for a stated mission of fighting for Lebanese independence.⁸

The President recalled our former so-called "gun boat policy" and asked by what authority we had sent such missions to South American countries.⁹ The Secretary responded that this policy in the world today no longer represented an acceptable practice, unless the forces went in at the invitation of the host government.¹⁰ Such an invitation, of course, was not a condition to the introduction of American forces at the time referred to by the President.

The President was aware of considerable Congressional excitement over the Lebanese issue and

what the United States proposed to do to help its friends in the Middle East. Senator Knowland in particular had raised this matter with him.¹¹ He felt that resolute action should be taken as necessary to preserve the situation.

In outlining the implications of the introduction of American forces, the Secretary mentioned the following: once our forces were in, it would not be easy to establish a basis upon which they could retire and leave behind an acceptable situation; the move might create a wave of anti-Western feeling in the Arab world comparable to that associated with the British and French military operation against Egypt, even though the circumstances were quite different;¹² it was probable that oil pipelines would be cut in Syria;¹³ action by Egypt in connection with the Suez Canal was not predictable, but at least there was a strong possibility that the Canal would be closed to American and British shipping; the action might result in a new and major oil crisis.¹⁴

Another important consideration, the Secretary said, was that while we might get support initially from the Iraqi and Jordanian Governments, such support might lead to pressure upon them which could result in their collapse.¹⁵

The President thought that if it became necessary to move forces in, we should have our Ambassadors call on the various governments and explain that we had no intent other than helping a friendly government to maintain its sovereignty and independence; that the move was not in any way directed toward legitimate interests of other nations. The Secretary said that most of the Arab governments to which such representation might be [made?] had in fact asked us to give all necessary support to Chamoun.¹⁶ However, there was a problem in this case, that often arose in such matters, that the governments were prepared to say helpful things privately but not publicly. The President thought there would be a great advantage in having the Arab states join Chamoun in asking for our help.¹⁷

The Secretary expressed the view that any communication to Chamoun informing him of our willingness to intervene should make it clear that our purpose was not to back him for a second term as President. The President agreed, saying that we must know exactly what Chamoun was asking help for....¹⁸

In commenting upon the President's observation that it was difficult to see how we could afford not to respond to a properly worded request by President Chamoun and the Lebanese Government if circumstances clearly showed that our aid was essential for the preservation of Lebanese independence, the Secretary reviewed current Communist methods of warfare throughout the world. He mentioned their tactics in Venezuela, Burma, Indonesia, Lebanon, etc., where they employed techniques of inciting rioting, which were techniques extremely difficult to combat.¹⁹ At least in the case of Lebanon, however, there might be an instance in which we could comply with a legitimate request and, operating "in accordance with rules of the game as set forth in the Charter of the United Nations," do something constructive.²⁰ If we did nothing, we

would have to accept heavy losses not only in Lebanon but elsewhere.

The President speculated upon the desirability of sending some sort of message to Congress setting forth an evaluation of the situation and asking specifically for authority to move in United States forces if they should be required. The Secretary recalled that even at the time the Middle East Resolution was being considered in Congress many members had said that the President already had authority to take military action to protect United States interests.²¹

The President said that at some stage we might give a report to the Congress of what we do. In it Congressional action would not be requested, that Congress would be given a full account of an important development affecting our security.

The President concluded by saying that he thought it was right to let the Lebanese know that we would help them in case it should become necessary. He thought the military should immediately issue a warning order to our forces and put them on the alert.²²

Notes

1. **Crisis onset:** The **Lebanese Crisis of 1958** began May 8–10 with armed unrest against President **Camille Chamoun**, amid intra-confessional tensions and regional pressures linked to **Nasser's** pan-Arabism.
2. **Beirut cable:** Telegrams from Embassy Beirut in mid-May reported strikes, street fighting, and army deployments as the situation escalated in **Tripoli, Beirut, and the Bekaa**.
3. **Intervention question:** U.S. deliberations concerned possible landing of Marines from the **U.S. Sixth Fleet** (ultimately **Operation Blue Bat**, July 15, 1958).
4. **Credibility concern:** Eisenhower weighed **deterrence/credibility** against risks of intervention; he had recently enunciated the **Eisenhower Doctrine** (1957) for the region.
5. **Legal/political cover:** The Administration consistently emphasized a **request by the recognized government** and protection of **U.S. nationals** as immediate mission rationales.
6. **Eisenhower Doctrine limits:** The 1957 **Middle East Resolution** (Public Law 85-7) allowed aid and possible use of force **against overt aggression by "International Communism."** The **UAR** (Egypt-Syria union, Feb 1958) posed a political, not clearly "Communist-controlled," threat.
7. **Mansfield Amendment:** Senate Majority Leader **Mike Mansfield** added affirming language during the doctrine's passage: Middle East independence is **vital to U.S. interests**, providing broader political justification even if the "overt Communist aggression" clause weren't met.
8. **Constitutional authority:** Before the **1973 War Powers Resolution**, Presidents relied on Article II powers, treaty/UN obligations, and prior joint resolutions; the precise **domestic legal basis** for combat deployments remained debated.

9. **“Gunboat diplomacy”:** Reference to early 20th-century **Caribbean and Latin American interventions** (e.g., **Nicaragua, Haiti, Dominican Republic**) without host-state invitation; Eisenhower acknowledges its anachronism post-UN Charter.
10. **Host-state consent:** Post-1945 practice favored **consent** or **UN mandate**; the Administration sought **Chamoun’s formal request** and later **UN observation** to frame any U.S. move as legitimate.
11. **Senator Knowland: William F. Knowland** (R-CA), Senate GOP leader (until 1959), was a strong advocate of robust anti-Communist action; he pressed the White House on **Lebanon**.
12. **Suez shadow:** The Secretary feared any U.S. landing could be **equated with the 1956 Suez intervention** by Britain/France/Israel, inflaming regional opinion despite differing circumstances.
13. **Pipelines at risk:** The **Iraq Petroleum Company (IPC)** lines crossed **Syria**; in prior crises (e.g., 1956–57) they were **cut or shut**, disrupting European supply.
14. **Oil vulnerability:** The Administration remembered the **1956–57 oil shock** (Suez closure); feared new supply/transport disruption via **Canal or pipelines**.
15. **Hashemite fragility:** **Jordan** and **Iraq** (then linked in a short-lived **Arab Union**, Feb–Aug 1958) were supportive but vulnerable; indeed, the **Iraqi monarchy fell on July 14, 1958**.
16. **Arab states’ private support:** Several governments quietly urged Washington to aid **Chamoun**, while hesitating to do so **publicly** due to domestic opinion and **Nasser’s** prestige.
17. **Multilateral request:** A **regional appeal** would blunt charges of unilateralism; ultimately, the **Lebanese Government** formally requested U.S. troops on **July 14, 1958**.
18. **No second term:** The **Lebanese constitution** barred **consecutive presidential terms**; Chamoun’s perceived effort to extend his term helped spark the crisis; Washington wanted to avoid appearing to **install him**.
19. **Indirect aggression lens:** Dulles referenced **“wars of subversion”**—rioting, propaganda, arms infiltration—citing cases (not all strictly Communist-directed) in **Venezuela, Burma, Indonesia**, and **Lebanon**.
20. **UN Charter “rules of the game”:** Framing any action as **collective self-defense / invitation** (Article 51) and under **UN oversight**; the **UNOGIL** observer group was later deployed in Lebanon.
21. **Existing authority:** During the 1957 debate many Members asserted the President had **ample authority** to protect **U.S. interests** without new, case-specific authorization.
22. **Forces on alert:** The **Sixth Fleet** was proximate and ready; after the **Iraqi coup** (July 14), **U.S. Marines landed in Beirut** (July 15) at Lebanon’s request—**Operation Blue Bat**—stabilizing the situation under a **UN umbrella**.

Special National Intelligence Estimate

SNIE 36.4-58¹

Washington, June 5, 1958.

CONSEQUENCES OF POSSIBLE US COURSES OF ACTION RESPECTING LEBANON

The Problem

To assess the situation in Lebanon, its implications in the area, and the likely consequences, in Lebanon and elsewhere, of possible US courses of action.²

The Estimate

I. The Situation in Lebanon

1. The situation in Lebanon, as in the rest of the Arab world, has been profoundly influenced by the rise of radical Arab nationalism and the expansionist objectives and subversive activities of the UAR.³ Underlying the present conflict in Lebanon is a condition of increasing tension between forces favoring open alignment with the West and those favoring the “positive neutralism” of the radical pan-Arab movement led by Nasser and reflected in the UAR.⁴ There is a rough correspondence between these contradictory tendencies and the Lebanese Christian and Moslem communities; the sharpening of the issue tends to break down the modus vivendi whereby those communities have hitherto combined to form the Lebanese state.⁵
2. The present conflict was touched off by indications that Christian President Chamoun intended to amend the constitution in order to succeed himself.⁶ This has antagonized some pro-Western elements as well as the neutralist elements, and provided Nasser with an opportunity which he has exploited. The situation is complicated by personal and political rivalries within the Christian and Moslem communities as well as between them. The opposition, which includes Christians as well as Moslems, has no common objective other than forcing Chamoun from office and as yet has no common leader. Many of its most militant elements have been stimulated by the rise of radical pan-Arab nationalism to challenge the status quo in Lebanon. They have also received from UAR policy guidance, propaganda support, and weapons, supplies, and “volunteers,” which have greatly increased the difficulties facing the Lebanese government security forces in their efforts to cope with the uprising.⁷

[Here follow paragraphs 3–6 containing general information on the situation in Lebanon.]

II. Consequences of a Collapse of a Pro-Western Government Without US Intervention

7. Most politically conscious elements in the Middle East identify Chamoun with the US. They probably believe that the US is committed to the preservation of a Western-oriented regime in Lebanon if not to the continuation of Chamoun himself in office. In these circumstances, if Chamoun's government or a pro-Western successor government collapsed under the onslaught of anti-Western opposition elements, friends and enemies of the West alike would believe—irrespective of whether any formal request for help had in fact been made—that the US had proved itself unwilling to come to the aid of its declared ally and friend, and that it had capitulated to Nasser.⁸ The governments of Middle East countries disposed toward cooperation with the West would be strongly influenced to revise their policies.
8. The reaction to a US failure to intervene would be strongest and most harmful to the US if there had been a publicized request for US assistance prior to the collapse of a pro-Western government in Lebanon.⁹
9. We believe that the disorders in Lebanon have already cost the US some prestige in the area, since they are widely interpreted as evidence of deep-seated and powerful opposition to a chosen instrument and client of the US. Any political compromise in Lebanon will cause some further loss of prestige, and the overthrow of Chamoun by clearly anti-Western forces would be construed as a drastic weakening of US resolve to maintain its interests in the area.
10. Moreover, collapse of a pro-Western government, with no US action, would almost certainly accelerate the activities of the UAR and its supporters in seeking to undermine anti-Nasser regimes. Popular sentiment would be more inclined to view the UAR as the wave of the future, and there would be some increase in the danger of collapse of anti-Nasser regimes.¹⁰

III. Probable Consequences of US Intervention

11. Lebanese generally are probably fearful of the consequences of intervention by Western troops. Reactions would be conditioned, however, by the circumstances in which intervention took place. In a situation in which the Lebanese believe that domestic conflict was primarily the result of internal differences, most would tend to oppose intervention; many would accept intervention if they believed that the UAR sought to dominate and absorb Lebanon; but most Moslems would probably prefer domination by the UAR to Western occupation.¹¹
12. If the US were to intervene at the request of President Chamoun under present

circumstances, the reaction of the Christian community would be divided and a majority of Moslems would be strongly opposed. If Chamoun were to gain a larger measure of control of the internal political situation and if the integrity of Lebanon appeared to be threatened by Lebanese extremists and the UAR, most of the Christians would probably rally behind him and accept intervention, but only a small part of the Moslems would do so. If Chamoun were to yield to a successor government committed to maintaining Lebanon's integrity and tacitly friendly to the West and if the integrity of Lebanon under that government were in turn jeopardized by Lebanese extremists aided by the UAR, such a government could probably get most Christians and some Moslems to support it if it asked for US intervention.

13. In the complex Lebanese situation, one immediate problem confronting the intervening forces would be that US forces would probably find themselves in hostile contact not only with UAR-controlled subversive elements, but with a wide variety of local elements not presently hostile to the West but acting either in opposition to Chamoun or to foreign intervention in principle. Even if General Chehab were willing to cooperate fully, some of the Moslem elements in the army might desert.¹² In any event, clashes with opposition forces and expanded opposition activities probably would force the US to commit large forces to deal with large areas of Lebanon. For instance, it probably would prove necessary to conduct operations in areas other than the principal coastal cities in order to cope with guerrilla or terrorist activities and to block logistical support being sent to opposition forces from Syria. This would increase the risk of clashes with UAR forces and of inadvertent violations of UAR territory.
14. US military intervention would keep any pro-Western government in office. If it took place in behalf of a pro-Western government which had succeeded Chamoun, most of the Christian population would unite behind it. In any event, US intervention would be widely regarded as a move to perpetuate Christian dominance.¹³ The government's capability to govern the Moslem portion of the population would be drastically reduced. The local Moslem-Christian conflict would not only be intensified but would also be more closely identified with the broader issues between pan-Arab nationalism and the West.
15. Thus, it would be extremely difficult to create a stable situation not clearly dependent on US forces. In the longer run, any regime so dependent would probably be held in widespread contempt, not only by anti-Western but also by most moderate elements. It probably would not long survive the withdrawal of Western forces. Thus, the US might find itself faced with the onerous choices of a prolonged stay in Lebanon or a withdrawal while the situation was still unstabilized.¹⁴
16. UAR Reaction: Nasser and the UAR leaders have assiduously exploited the Lebanese crisis to promote the cause of radical pan-Arab unity. They would treat US military intervention as a direct challenge to their long-range objectives, but would also regard it as

presenting substantial opportunities for exploitation in the area. Their reaction would be sharp:

- a. They would be certain to step up their propaganda campaign against the US, the Baghdad Pact, and the anti-UAR governments, notably those of Jordan and Iraq. They would take vigorous action in the UN, almost certainly with Soviet support.¹⁵
 - b. They would probably continue and possibly increase covert assistance to opposition forces in Lebanon, including support for terrorist actions against US troops and civilians. However, Nasser would try to avoid direct clashes between regular UAR forces and those of the US.
 - c. They would probably take sabotage action, directly or by proxy, against Western oil interests in Lebanon and possibly by closing down or sabotaging the Syrian pipelines. They might also attempt sabotage against oil operations in Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Kuwait, Bahrein, and Aden.¹⁶
17. Elsewhere in the Area: The governments of Jordan and Iraq would probably welcome US intervention as a blow against Nasser and as an encouraging demonstration of US determination to support its friends in the area. However, there would be strong adverse popular reaction in these countries against the US move. This popular reaction would limit the freedom of action of the governments. In these circumstances, effective Iraqi and Jordanian cooperation in the intervention cannot be assumed.¹⁷
 18. To the extent that the intervention succeeded in restoring a stable pro-Western government in Lebanon, Arab popular reaction would become colored by respect for US firmness. There might be some decline in belief in the UAR as the wave of the future and the pace and scope of UAR expansion might be reduced for a time. This would not, however, seriously weaken the long-term trends in the area toward radical pan-Arab unity. If the US were forced to maintain its forces in Lebanon for a protracted period, the popular reaction would become increasingly adverse, since the occupation would be played up and probably accepted as evidence that the US intended to re-establish Western imperialist control in the area.¹⁴
 19. Israel would view intervention by the US as a favorable precedent. However, realizing that its open cooperation would be unwelcome to the West and would probably serve mainly to unite the Arabs, Israel would probably avoid direct involvement in the situation as long as the conflict remained confined within Lebanon.¹⁸
 20. Soviet Reaction: The nature of the Soviet reaction to US intervention with military force would vary according to circumstances and the Soviet assessment of opportunities to damage the US position. If the US were to intervene in Lebanon in order to assist the government to cope with a UAR-supported uprising, the Soviet reaction would probably be

confined to vigorous diplomatic and propaganda action. If, in the course of this intervention, the US became involved in military action on UAR territory, the Soviets would react more strongly, possibly increasing military assistance and providing “volunteers.” Although the latter course of action would increase the chance of a Soviet-US conflict through miscalculation, we believe it unlikely that the USSR would take action which it estimated would involve serious risk of general war.¹⁹

21. Effect of UK Participation: We believe that adverse reaction to intervention would be intensified if the UK participated, but the considerations set down above would not be significantly altered.²⁰

Outlook

[2 paragraphs (21½ lines of source text) not declassified]

24. Whatever the outcome of the present crisis, we do not believe that the present political-religious balance, with its slight edge in favor of the Christians, can long be maintained in Lebanon as presently constituted. The UAR will almost certainly continue to exert formidable pressures upon Lebanon, encouraging the Moslem element to reach for greater power, to contest the Christians’ Western orientation, and to move in the direction of neutralism and pan-Arabism. Thus, the long range tendency appears likely to be in the direction of increased instability, with the possibility of fragmentation or some accommodation with the UAR.

Notes

1. Title/series: **Special National Intelligence Estimate 36.4–58**, coordinated by the U.S. Intelligence Community for senior policymakers during the **1958 Lebanese Crisis**.
2. Scope: Evaluates risks/benefits of **U.S. intervention vs. non-intervention** and area-wide repercussions.
3. **UAR: The United Arab Republic** (union of **Egypt and Syria**, Feb 1958–Sep 1961), institutional vehicle for **Nasser’s** pan-Arab ambitions.
4. **Positive neutralism**: Nasser’s brand of **non-alignment**, leveraging both superpowers while rejecting formal bloc affiliation.
5. **Lebanese confessional system**: The **National Pact (1943)** allocated top offices by confession (e.g., Maronite president, Sunni PM, Shi’a speaker), sustaining a delicate Christian-Muslim balance.
6. **Chamoun succession issue**: President **Camille Chamoun** (1952–58) was widely seen as seeking constitutional change to permit consecutive terms—one spark of the 1958 unrest.

7. **UAR support:** Covert flows (arms, propaganda, volunteers) were reported from **Syria** into Lebanon; a key U.S./Lebanese grievance.
8. **U.S. credibility risk:** Non-response would be read as capitulation to **Nasser**, weakening pro-Western regimes region-wide.
9. **Public request:** A formal or leaked **appeal by Beirut** would raise the reputational stakes of **non-intervention**.
10. **“Wave of the future”:** The estimate anticipates momentum shifts toward **UAR-style pan-Arabism** if Lebanon falls without U.S. action.
11. **Absorption fears:** Many Lebanese **Muslims** preferred Arab unity to foreign troops; many **Christians** feared **UAR absorption** more than Western intervention.
12. **General Fuad Chehab:** Army commander (later president, Sept 1958–64) who tried to preserve army cohesion/neutrality; his stance would shape outcomes.
13. **Christian dominance perception:** U.S. backing of a pro-Western cabinet risked being read as entrenching **Maronite primacy**, inflaming the confessional divide.
14. **Prolonged presence hazard:** The SNIE warns that any regime dependent on U.S. troops would lack legitimacy and likely collapse post-withdrawal; in reality **Operation Blue Bat** (U.S. landing July 15, 1958) was **time-limited** under a **UN umbrella**.
15. **Baghdad Pact / UN / Soviets:** The **Baghdad Pact** (1955; later **CENTO**) was a prime Nasser target; the SNIE expects **UN battles** and **Soviet support** for UAR positions.
16. **Oil leverage:** Vulnerabilities included the **IPC pipelines** through **Syria** and sabotage risks across **Gulf** operations and **Aden**.
17. **Jordan & Iraq:** Hashemite partners wary of **Nasserism** (they briefly formed the **Arab Union**, Feb–Aug 1958); both faced volatile public opinion.
18. **Israel’s posture:** Likely to remain **publicly detached** to avoid unifying Arab opinion, while quietly favoring a show of **U.S. resolve**.
19. **Soviet “volunteers”:** A Korea-style proxy signal; SNIE judges **direct superpower war unlikely** absent U.S. strikes on UAR territory.
20. **UK participation:** Suez memories meant British participation would **magnify Arab backlash**, complicating any joint operation’s reception.

**Memorandum of a Conference With the President, White House, Washington,
July 14, 1958, 10:50 a.m.¹**

OTHERS PRESENT

The Vice President²; Secretary Dulles³; Assistant Secretary Macomber⁴; Assistant Secretary Gerard Smith⁵; Mr. Rockwell⁶; Mr. Berry⁶; General Persons⁷; General Cutler⁸; Mr. Gordon Gray⁹; Secretary Anderson¹⁰; Mr. Allen Dulles¹¹; Secretary Quarles¹²; General Twining¹³; Assistant Secretary Sprague¹⁴; General Goodpaster¹⁵.

Mr. Allen Dulles¹¹ opened with a summary on the situation in Iraq. According to reports received thus far (mostly from the rebel-seized Baghdad radio), the Crown Prince¹⁶ has been killed, and perhaps Nuri¹⁷ also. The King's¹⁸ situation is unknown. A Leftist government has taken over. Secretary Dulles³ commented that there has been no report regarding Iraqi forces outside of Baghdad. Allen Dulles continued that Hussein's¹⁹ situation is extremely critical in Jordan. Hussein has assumed power as head of the Arab Union²⁰ and supreme commander of the Arab Union armed forces. The Israelis will be extremely alarmed; they are likely to take over Transjordan²¹ if disorder occurs in Jordan. Chamoun²² has asked for U.S. intervention within forty-eight hours, and has indicated he has already asked for U.K. intervention and will ask for French. The fate of Kuwait²³ is presently in the balance. Two messages have come from Saudi Arabia.²⁴ King Saud²⁵ demands action at once, stating that if the United States and United Kingdom do not act now they are finished as powers in the Mid-East.²⁶

The President²⁷ commented that this is probably our last chance to do something in the area. While this rebellion continues, we still have a basis for going in, but once it succeeds the situation will be different. He did not think we could ignore the situation, but that we must move.

Secretary Dulles³ then gave a political analysis. The situation must be judged in a most serious way, going back to what is fundamental—what will the Russians do. If we go in we must expect very threatening gestures, particularly affecting Turkey and Iran. What the Russians will do depends upon what they judge to be the balance of power for a general war. We are better off now, according to General Twining¹³, than three or four years from now. At the present time the Soviets do not have long-range missiles, at least in any quantity. Nor do they have a substantial long-range air capability. If we do not accept the risk now, they will probably decide that we will never accept risk and will push harder than ever, and border countries will submit to them. If we do not respond to the call from Chamoun, we will suffer the decline and indeed the elimination of our influence—from Indonesia to Morocco. Pakistan may stand with us because of India; Iran would gradually go down; Turkey would probably stand firm but with increasing anxieties. In Africa Nasser²⁸ is already making gains in Sudan; Libya is in the balance; and Tunis and Morocco are already unfriendly.

If, on the other hand, we do respond to the request, we must expect a very bad reaction through

most of the Arab countries—a cutting off of the pipeline, stoppage of transit through the Suez, and hostile activity throughout the area. The British will have to move into Kuwait. Saud seems to want us to move in, but it is questionable if we can control the situation in his country. It must be noted that there is an appreciable chance that Nasser may have overplayed his hand and that if we are firm, he may withdraw from what he is doing if the Soviets do not come in.

If we were to move in we would have to take simultaneous moves in the United Nations and in other international forums. The difficulty is that we do not have hard evidence in this case as in the case of Lebanon. It must be noted that a meeting of the Baghdad Pact powers at Istanbul has been called off, with the representatives other than Iraq going on to meet in Ankara. There is good chance that, whatever we do, the Turks will move.

On balance, the Secretary was inclined to feel that the losses from doing nothing would be worse than the losses from action—and that consequently we should send our troops into Lebanon. Regarding Iraq, he was not certain as to what we should do. This is primarily a U.K. responsibility. He made the further point that if we do not act quickly, we are unlikely to act at all—if we don't act today, we never will and the situation will be lost to us. In this connection, the world expects that, if we have a strong case we will act promptly, rather than delay. In his opinion, by acting we make general war less likely than if we don't, because in the latter case we will lose our allies. What we must decide upon is the lesser of two great evils. We thought we had a third way out in Lebanon but with the events in Iraq, that is no longer available to us.

The President said it was clear in his mind that we must act, or get out of the Middle East entirely. He thought that the action of Hussein makes it easier for the U.K. to intervene. What concerns him more than the Russian question is the temper or the attitudes of the people throughout the area. He cannot foresee a way of bringing the matter to a settlement.

Secretary Anderson¹⁰ asked what Israel would do if we were to move into Jordan and Iraq. Mr. Dulles thought that, if we go in, Israel will probably stay out. In Saudi Arabia, Secretary Anderson commented that the power rests with the tribes which are loyal to the King.

The Vice President² felt that we will undergo an adverse reaction around the world in this case, as we gained a favorable reaction at Suez. Mr. Dulles felt that the world will divide on this question, not on intellectual grounds but according to instinctive lines. Western Europe will support us, although the Scandinavians will be reserved. Most of the Latin American countries will probably do so, given persuasion. Most of Asia will be against us, including India, Ceylon and probably Burma, and most of Africa wherever it is vocal will also. In many areas the leaders will privately applaud.

Mr. Quarles¹² said that in the Defense Department, all is in readiness to move. It is unfortunate we do not have a better international aura to move under, especially in the United Nations. He

recommended placing greater emphasis on the UN aspect—getting as much of a UN umbrella as we can. He did feel, though, that if we are going to act we should act at once and not wait in hopes of the UN finding a solution to the problem.

Secretary Dulles said he thought it was clear that we should act immediately to call an emergency meeting of the UN Security Council.

General Twining said that the plans and preparations we have made are enough to protect American lives and property. Two battalions of Marines and two Army battle groups from Germany are ready to go. When these go into Lebanon, we would load up two divisions in the United States.

General Persons asked as to whether The President would make a decision without holding a bipartisan meeting. The President said he would not but that he would like to have the bipartisan leaders down right away. He would simply tell them that we cannot subject ourselves to the blackmail Nasser would be able to enforce should Lebanon and Iraq follow. Mr. Macomber⁴ said we would not find much enthusiasm among the Democratic Congressional leaders. The Vice President suggested that, while this had been true concerning intervention in Lebanon prior to the Iraq coup, it is likely that it is not so true today. Mr. Macomber acknowledged this.

Secretary Anderson asked whether we could go into Lebanon without giving some assurance to Jordan, since Faisal²⁹ was so close to Hussein. Mr. Dulles said it is preferable for us to go to Lebanon, and for the U.K. to go into Iraq and Kuwait. The Vice President said the major point to consider is whether this action will succeed, and how long the situation will continue. Secretary Dulles said this is a situation where it will be easy to get ourselves involved, and very hard to get out. However, there exists in Lebanon a very strong community having an interest in stability, commerce and ties with the West. The Vice President asked what public reason will be given for our intervention, and Mr. Dulles said it would be to protect American lives and property at the request of Lebanon. The President added as a further reason, because of the increasing danger to the West from these developments.

The Vice President said there may be mob violence against American embassies and Americans throughout the whole Middle East. In a way this is our greatest risk—as to what the mobs will do.

The President said that the situation is clear to him—to lose this area by inaction would be far worse than the loss in China, because of the strategic position and resources of the Middle East. In further discussion The President commented that the most strategic move would be to attack Cairo in the present circumstances, but of course this cannot be done. Mr. Dulles commented many will say we are simply doing what we stopped the British and the French from doing at the time of the Suez crisis. Although there are differences, they will be hard to put across.

The Vice President raised again the matter of consulting Congress. He strongly advised that this be done and that The President chair the meeting. Mr. Dulles commented that we should bring out that we can never foresee what will happen beyond the initial line of action, but that action is required. The Vice President said we should not assume that the Democratic members of Congress will oppose The President's action, at least at this time. Some may. Others will probably be silent, so that they can later oppose it if they think it helpful to them to do so.

Notes

1. **Document context:** White House conference on morning **July 14, 1958**, the day of the **Iraqi coup**, immediately preceding U.S. landings in **Lebanon (Operation Blue Bat)** later that day.
2. **The Vice President: Richard M. Nixon**, Vice President of the United States.
3. **Secretary Dulles: John Foster Dulles**, Secretary of State.
4. **Assistant Secretary Macomber: William B. Macomber, Jr.**, Assistant Secretary of State (Congressional Relations).
5. **Assistant Secretary Gerard Smith: Gerard C. Smith**, Assistant Secretary of State (Policy Planning).
6. **Mr. Rockwell; Mr. Berry:** State Department NEA (Near Eastern Affairs) officers present for the briefing (identities not specified in the memorandum).
7. **General Persons: Wilton B. "Jerry" Persons**, White House Chief of Staff.
8. **General Cutler: Robert Cutler**, Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs (National Security Advisor).
9. **Mr. Gordon Gray:** Then head of the **Office of Defense Mobilization**; later National Security Advisor (1958–61).
10. **Secretary Anderson: Robert B. Anderson**, Secretary of the Treasury.
11. **Mr. Allen Dulles: Allen W. Dulles**, Director of Central Intelligence.
12. **Secretary Quarles: Donald A. Quarles**, Deputy Secretary of Defense.
13. **General Twining: Nathan F. Twining**, Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff.
14. **Assistant Secretary Sprague:** Senior Defense Department assistant secretary (DoD portfolio), present for contingency planning.
15. **General Goodpaster: Andrew J. Goodpaster**, White House Staff Secretary and Defense Liaison.

16. **Iraq's Crown Prince:** 'Abd al-Ilah, regent and crown prince, killed during the **14 July 1958** revolution.
17. **Nuri:** **Nuri al-Sa'id**, long-serving Iraqi prime minister, killed in the coup's aftermath.
18. **King:** **Faisal II** of Iraq, also killed on **July 14, 1958**.
19. **Hussein:** **King Hussein** of Jordan.
20. **Arab Union:** Short-lived federation of **Jordan and Iraq** (Feb–Aug 1958) under Hashemite leadership; Hussein became its head upon news of the coup.
21. **Transjordan:** Historical name (pre-1949) for the Hashemite Kingdom; used here to denote the **Jordanian** territory east of the Jordan River.
22. **Chamoun:** **Camille Chamoun**, President of **Lebanon** (1952–58), who formally requested U.S. assistance in July 1958.
23. **Kuwait:** Newly independent (June 19, 1958); British protection considered likely in crisis.
24. **Saudi Arabia:** U.S.-aligned monarchy; strategic aviation and oil transit considerations affected by regional upheaval.
25. **King Saud:** **Saud bin Abdulaziz Al Saud**, King of Saudi Arabia, urging swift Anglo-American response.
26. **Two messages:** Refers to urgent **Saudi communications** signaling the perceived collapse of Western influence absent action.
27. **The President:** **Dwight D. Eisenhower**.
28. **Nasser:** **Gamal Abdel Nasser**, President of Egypt and leader of the **UAR**, advancing **pan-Arab** aims.
29. **Faisal (Jordan):** Here, **Crown Prince (later King) Faisal** in Jordanian context—used colloquially for closeness to Hussein; not to be confused with **Iraq's Faisal II** referenced above.

**Memorandum of a Conference With the President, White House, Washington,
July 14, 1958, 2:35 p.m. (excerpts)¹**

OTHERS PRESENT

Congressional leaders²; The Vice President³; Secretary Dulles⁴; Assistant Secretary Macomber⁵; Secretary Anderson⁶; Mr. Allen Dulles⁷; Governor Adams⁸; General Persons⁹; Mr. Hagerty¹⁰; Mr. Harlow¹¹; Mr. Martin¹²; Secretary Quarles¹³; and General Twining¹⁴ (after first ten minutes)

The President¹⁵ began by thanking the Congressional group for coming up.... At the President's request Mr. Allen Dulles⁷ gave an intelligence review, paralleling his report to the President earlier in the day, and giving information concerning the situations in Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Israel in particular.¹⁶

At the President's request Secretary Dulles⁴ next reviewed the political situation....

The President then asked Speaker Rayburn¹⁷ if he had any comments. Mr. Rayburn asked if we go in and intervene and our operation does not succeed, what do we do then. He thought the Russians would threaten general war. The President said it is not possible to prophesy the exact course of events. If we do or if we don't go in, the consequences will be bad. He thought it was better if we took a strong position rather than a Munich-type position, if we are to avoid the crumbling of our whole security structure. Mr. Rayburn thought that intervention would intensify resentment against us throughout the area. The President agreed that, at least on the popular level, that would be likely to be true.

Senator Knowland¹⁸ said he thought we must respond to the appeal from Chamoun¹⁹ or see the whole area go down the drain piece by piece. Throughout the world a failure on our part to act would be a tremendous victory for Nasser²⁰. In his opinion we are in fact at a turning point in history. The President pointed out we would be going into Lebanon at the request of Chamoun, and that our action would be a symbol of American fortitude and readiness to take risks to defend the values of the free world. If Iraq and Jordan ask the British to come in, we would have to consider what our own action should be. Senator Knowland suggested calling the UN Security Council into session. He thought a token force from Iran and Turkey would also be needed.²¹

Speaker Rayburn asked if these are not civil wars. The President said that they have that appearance, but in fact they are being fomented by Nasser. He stressed the danger there would be to the West to be cut off from Middle Eastern oil. Mr. McCormack²² asked what agreements

expressed or implied we have with Lebanon that would require us to come to their support. Secretary Dulles said that they received at the benefit of the Middle East Resolution²³ in three respects—first, economic and military assistance to those that desire it to preserve their independence; the declaration that the integrity and independence of the countries of the area are vital to the security of the United States; and third, the President's authority to intervene to oppose an armed attack by a country dominated by international communism. He added that we are not planning to act under the third category above. It is our thought that the presence of our troops will stabilize the situation. In addition, the Tripartite Declaration of 1950²⁴ extends to the countries of the area. He recalled that he had said that we wouldn't send in forces if the United Nations could handle the situation. Today the new situation is such that it could whip through the entire Middle East if left unchecked.

Senator Russell²⁵ asked what we plan to do in Iraq. Secretary Dulles said he had no present plans because we do not know enough. We must find out the thinking of the United Kingdom, Turkey and Iran. Senator Russell said he had no doubt that our troops will be engaged in hostilities if we go into Lebanon. However, he said he was prepared to see us go if our security requires it. Secretary Dulles said we must certainly expect some sniping, but we have some grounds to hope that full-scale opposition will not develop. However, he felt that if the world comes to believe that we will not take risks we are heading for a series of disasters. He recognized that going in has many liabilities. Hostilities may spread, and we may take a heavy beating in propaganda. Senator Russell said that the Soviet prestige is also committed. Mr. Dulles pointed out it has not yet been committed, and that this is why we must act quickly. Senator Russell said he had hoped that, if we had to intervene, we could intervene on a basis in which world opinion would be with us.

Mr. Martin¹² said that there is not much of a choice in his view. If we do not go in we are likely to lose our whole position in the Middle East. He thought that the British should put at least a small force into Lebanon with us.

Secretary Dulles commented that Lebanon is the one country that joined the Middle East Resolution. They feel that for that reason they have undergone extra pressure. They feel that we are morally bound to help them.

Senator Mansfield²⁶ said that he did not think the Tripartite agreement would hold because this is a civil disturbance. He considered that we would be getting into a civil war, and hoped that before American troops go in we would put the matter before the United Nations.

Congressman Vorys²⁷ asked what our forces would do. General Twining¹⁴ said that three battalions and two battle groups would be landed in Beirut to protect lives and property and support the Lebanese government. They would be under the command of Admiral Holloway²⁸. He did not think there would be heavy fighting and did not anticipate they would have to fight

their way ashore.

Senator Saltonstall²⁹ asked whether reasonable men would think we have broken our word to Lebanon if we do not go in. Secretary Dulles said that governments will feel that we have reneged on an agreement. World opinion will be divided. Generally our friends will think that we did the right thing if we go in, and the wrong thing if we do not. Our foes will take just the opposite view.

Senator Saltonstall thought that we gained world respect at the time of the Suez incident. Secretary Dulles pointed out some of the differences in the situation. In the present case a country is under attack and has invited us in. Because this is a civil war the situation is unclear and therefore more difficult. He recalled, however, that the Soviet had claimed that Korea was a civil war. The key point is as to whether the strife is fomented, inspired and aided from without. We have a great deal of intelligence as to the money, arms and forces that have been sent in from outside. If we were to adopt the doctrine that Nasser can whip up a civil war without our intervention, our friends will go down to defeat. He cited the “Essentials of Peace” resolution in the United Nations which provided that nations should refrain from fomenting civil war.³⁰ It also brought out that we must look to the real source of the impetus for internal strife.

Congressman Albert³¹ asked whether we could not retaliate in kind, and outdo Nasser and Syria in subversion. It was pointed out that we have no successful record in this regard.

Senator Fulbright³² recalled that the United Nations had found that the strife is not being supported from the outside. Secretary Dulles said that this finding was that, at the moment the inspection was made, support was not moving across the border, but was silent as to earlier movement. The United Nations sent observers and the situation was tending to calm down, but had now been greatly stirred up.

Senator Russell asked whether, if the Jordanian and Saudi Arabian governments were to fall, we would have to go in. Secretary Dulles said we have no relation with them comparable to Lebanon. They could, however, seek to invoke the Middle East doctrine. The President commented that Saud has sent us word that if we do not come in we are finished in the Middle East. Senator Bridges³³ said that he believes we have a commitment to go to the aid of Lebanon and that we must keep it. He thought that control of the Middle Eastern oil is of determining effect on the free world's future. If the Middle East goes, all of Africa immediately goes as well.

Congressman Vinson³⁴ stated that we must make up our minds to go the distance—that he thought we must envisage deeper involvement. The President said he believes that when we decided to resort to force we must be ready to use whatever force is necessary. The whole group knew how repugnant to him the resort to force would be. He did believe, however, that free government is on trial. While this could be a terrible thing he would welcome suggestions if

anyone could tell him a better line of action. Really we are standing for just what we have stood for since 1947 and the attack on Greece. Mr. Vorys recalled that the Soviets had claimed that the Greek affair was a civil war and Secretary Dulles agreed.

Senator Saltonstall asked when, if our operation succeeds, we will be able to get out. The President said there is one thing about war he would stress—we must expect it to be different from what was initially anticipated. The free world is going to have to make sacrifices if it is going to win through. He recognized that even this group, with all its wisdom, would find this a terribly difficult decision to make. However, we are faced with war-like struggle, and we must accept the burdens of defense.

The President asked how soon an emergency session of the United Nations could be called. Mr. Dulles said it could be done within minutes after a decision was taken. He commented that by the following day it should be possible to see the situation more clearly in Iraq.

Mr. McCormack asked whether it would not be better to send our troops in before calling the emergency session. Secretary Dulles said that it would be—thus we would put our prestige on the line before the Soviets do. Accordingly, we cannot allow much time to pass before acting. Mr. McCormack asked whether the President would act by legislation or under his powers as Commander in Chief. The President said he thought legislation would be needed before too long, but that if he tried to act after a debate the Soviets would be able to forestall us. He therefore thought he would be obliged to take action, were he to decide on this course, and then put the matter before Congress. Secretary Dulles said that we would not be sending our troops in to fight, but on a basis more like that by which they are now in some twenty-five other nations in which we station troops.

Senator Fulbright said that it is not clear that this crisis is Soviet- or Communist-inspired. He said that perhaps Nasser is playing his own game. The President commented that there is not enough hard intelligence to be completely sure. It is clear, however, that whatever Nasser may think he is doing, the Soviets have a tremendous interest in this. Mr. Allen Dulles recalled that Nasser had recently visited Moscow and that his presence at the present time in Yugoslavia is the result of long-standing arrangements. Senator Fulbright asked whether CIA had had notice of the coup in Iraq. [1 line of source text not declassified] Senator Green³⁵ commented that we do not know the full facts of the matter as yet. He said there is much that we could lose in war, but more that we could lose if we don't make good on our agreements.

Senator Wiley³⁶ asked whether we have consulted our allies—specifically the British and the Turks. Secretary Dulles said the Turks have been pressing us hard to take this action. The British believe the action should be taken. Also the Israelis, the French and the Iranians have been pressing us. Senator Wiley said he had two further questions—is it necessary in the interest of America that this should be done, and what will public opinion be throughout the world.

Secretary Dulles recalled his earlier statement that reaction will follow existing division. The West will applaud us and probably Latin America also. In Asia, India and Burma will oppose. There is not much vocal expression in Africa. He did feel it is clear that the backbones of our friends will dissolve if we do not go in. Senator Wiley asked as to the strength of Egyptian forces and Mr. Allen Dulles said that they are not in a high status of military capability. The principal problems facing our forces would be the people of the area and its great spaces.

Mr. Morgan³⁷ asked whether, if we do go into Lebanon, the Soviets are likely to go into Iraq. Secretary Dulles said that they might send in volunteers but he would not see it as likely unless the British, Turks or Iranians send in their forces. Mr. Morgan said the North Koreans are demanding the removal of our troops from South Korea and asked if there is any connection between this and the Middle Eastern events. Secretary Dulles did not think so.

Congressman Chipfield³⁸ thought that we had no possible choice but to send our troops into Lebanon. Senator Fulbright asked whether, if the Soviets were not involved, this would make any difference to us. For example, if we felt that Nasser is independent and not subject to direction by the Soviet Union, could we not then hope that he would collapse of his own weight. But with a close working arrangement between him and the Soviets, a victory for him is a victory for Soviet communism. The President commented that one crucial question is what the victims believe. Chamoun believes it is Soviet communism that is causing him his trouble.

Senator Russell asked whether, if we send in forces, we would have to mobilize and strengthen our own forces. The President did not think it would be necessary immediately, but said that two divisions would be alerted and made ready to move. Mr. McCormack asked what the NSC had thought of this. The President said that he had met with the statutory members of the NSC in his office and that they had laid out alternatives and had seemed to feel that the alternative of doing nothing was worse than the other. He did want to stress, however, that this is not a matter of a decision already taken—that he wanted to hear the full views of the group and then try to reach a decision. General Twining commented that if we do not go in we must expect to lose the Middle East and Africa and encourage Communist expansion in the Far East. We must recognize, however, that the situation might spread if we do go in. In that case our forces are ready.

Senator Mansfield said that there are questions of prestige and policy involved and suggested consideration of the possibility of requesting a United Nations emergency session and going in on a multilateral basis. Secretary Dulles said that in his talk with Hammarskjöld³⁹ they had discussed the need for some way to make Lebanon a ward of the United Nations. He did expect to have a meeting of the United Nations Security Council tomorrow morning. He recalled that under Article 51⁴⁰ member states are allowed to act until the United Nations can itself take action. Anything that we do will be in the nature of an initial reaction to the situation, until an adequate UN force replaces us. We cannot, however, wait to see what they will do. The President asked what we will do, supposing we went in and the UN were to condemn us. Mr. Dulles said

he thought we would have to pull out. Speaker Rayburn said he felt that if we are going to do this we should not wait for the United Nations. Senator Knowland asked concerning statements to the press, referring to the question of leakage before the President and the government take action. He hoped the discussion within the meeting could be kept secure and simply say that it was a briefing on the Middle East. The President said he knew that everyone was conscious of the need to avoid even inadvertent disclosures and suggested that there had simply been an examination of alternatives. Mr. Rayburn said he would say simply that there was discussion on the situation in the Middle East. Senator Russell suggested that the President should make a statement at once. The President said we would be working on one, and in addition studying our probable needs for money for which we would have to make a request to the Congress.

Mr. Rayburn concluded by saying that only one person should make a statement on the matter, and that should be the President.

Notes

1. **Document context:** White House meeting, **July 14, 1958 (2:35 p.m.)**, with Congressional leaders, hours after the **Iraqi coup** and on the eve of **U.S. landings in Lebanon (Operation Blue Bat)**.
2. **Congressional leaders present:** Bipartisan group including **Speaker Sam Rayburn, House Majority Leader John W. McCormack, House Minority Leader Joseph W. Martin, Jr., Senate Armed Services Chair Richard B. Russell, Jr., Senate GOP Leader William F. Knowland, Senate Democratic Whip Mike Mansfield, Senators Leverett Saltonstall, J. William Fulbright, Theodore F. Green, Alexander Wiley, Reps. John M. Vorys, Thomas E. Morgan, Carl Vinson, William E. Chiperfield, Sen. Styles Bridges**, among others.
3. **The Vice President:** **Richard M. Nixon**, Vice President of the United States.
4. **Secretary Dulles:** **John Foster Dulles**, Secretary of State.
5. **Assistant Secretary Macomber:** **William B. Macomber, Jr.**, Assistant Secretary of State for Congressional Relations.
6. **Secretary Anderson:** **Robert B. Anderson**, Secretary of the Treasury.
7. **Mr. Allen Dulles:** **Allen W. Dulles**, Director of Central Intelligence.
8. **Governor Adams:** **Sherman Adams**, Assistant to the President (Chief of Staff).
9. **General Persons:** **Wilton B. "Jerry" Persons**, White House Chief of Staff (succeeding Adams later in 1958).
10. **Mr. Hagerty:** **James C. Hagerty**, White House Press Secretary.
11. **Mr. Harlow:** **Bryce N. Harlow**, White House congressional liaison.

12. **Mr. Martin: Joseph W. Martin, Jr.** (R-MA), House Minority Leader.
13. **Secretary Quarles: Donald A. Quarles**, Deputy Secretary of Defense.
14. **General Twining: Nathan F. Twining**, Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff.
15. **The President: Dwight D. Eisenhower**.
16. **Regional brief:** The **14 July 1958** military coup in **Iraq** overthrew **King Faisal II**, **Crown Prince ‘Abd al-Ilah**, and **PM Nuri al-Sa‘id**, triggering urgent reassessment of **U.S. commitments in Lebanon**.
17. **Speaker Rayburn: Sam Rayburn** (D-TX), Speaker of the House.
18. **Senator Knowland: William F. Knowland** (R-CA), Senate Republican Leader.
19. **Chamoun: Camille Chamoun**, President of **Lebanon** (1952–58), who formally requested U.S. assistance in July 1958.
20. **Nasser: Gamal Abdel Nasser**, President of **Egypt** and leader of the **United Arab Republic** (union with Syria, Feb 1958–Sep 1961).
21. **UNSC / token forces:** Contemplated diplomatic cover at the **UN Security Council** and symbolic regional troop contributions (e.g., **Iran**, **Turkey** of the **Baghdad Pact**).
22. **Mr. McCormack: John W. McCormack** (D-MA), House Majority Leader.
23. **Middle East Resolution:** The **Eisenhower Doctrine** (Public Law 85-7, 1957), authorizing assistance (and potential U.S. force) to counter **overt armed aggression** by states **controlled by international communism**.
24. **Tripartite Declaration (1950):** U.S.–U.K.–France pledge concerning **Arab-Israeli armistice lines** and regional arms restraint.
25. **Senator Russell: Richard B. Russell, Jr.** (D-GA), Chair, Senate Armed Services Committee.
26. **Senator Mansfield: Mike Mansfield** (D-MT), Senate Democratic Whip; sponsor of language underscoring the **vital U.S. interest** in the Middle East during the 1957 doctrine debate.
27. **Congressman Vorys: John M. Vorys** (R-OH), senior member, House Foreign Affairs Committee.
28. **Admiral Holloway:** U.S. Navy flag officer designated to command the **amphibious landing force** for Lebanon (operational control of the **Sixth Fleet** amphibious elements during **Operation Blue Bat**).
29. **Senator Saltonstall: Leverett Saltonstall** (R-MA), senior member, Senate Armed Services.
30. **“Essentials of Peace” resolution: UN General Assembly Resolution 290 (IV), 1949**, urging states to refrain from **fomenting civil strife** and to settle disputes peacefully.

31. **Congressman Albert: Carl Albert** (D-OK), senior House Democratic leader (later Speaker).
32. **Senator Fulbright: J. William Fulbright** (D-AR), senior member (later Chair) of Senate Foreign Relations Committee.
33. **Senator Bridges: Styles Bridges** (R-NH), Senate GOP leader (floor), Appropriations influence.
34. **Congressman Vinson: Carl Vinson** (D-GA), Chair, House Armed Services Committee.
35. **Senator Green: Theodore Francis Green** (D-RI), Chair, Senate Foreign Relations Committee.
36. **Senator Wiley: Alexander Wiley** (R-WI), senior Foreign Relations Republican.
37. **Mr. Morgan: Thomas E. Morgan** (D-PA), senior member (later Chair) House Foreign Affairs Committee.
38. **Congressman Chipfield: William E. Chipfield** (R-IL), Ranking Member, House Foreign Affairs.
39. **Hammar skjöld: Dag Hammar skjöld**, UN Secretary-General.
40. **Article 51 (UN Charter):** Affirms **inherent right of individual or collective self-defense** until the Security Council has taken measures necessary to maintain international peace and security.



Christian forces after driving “rebel” forces from their village, July 2, 1958

Memorandum of a Telephone Conversation Between President Eisenhower in Washington and Prime Minister Macmillan in London, July 14, 1958, 5:43 p.m.¹

The President said first: “You have all the news and intelligence on Iraq and know how it exacerbates the Lebanon situation. President Chamoun has asked us both to go in. We have decided to implement the plan (for your very secret information). As I understand it, the contingent of yours is about 3,700, and it is apparently in the lift that gets in somewhere toward the rear of the procession.”²

The Prime Minister: Yes, that’s right.

The President: It is just possible that in view of the Jordan situation that I understand has been put in your lap, you may want to hold those people a little bit in reserve as the situation develops in Lebanon.³ I just wanted to say that if there is that much modification in the military plan if you thought it wise to make it you could do that unilaterally.

The Prime Minister: Yes, but the thought is this: if we do this thing with the Lebanese it is only really part of a much larger operation, because we shall be driven to take the thing as a whole, and I want to feel that if we treat it as a whole it looks like a showdown.⁴

The President: Of course, you must understand that so far as we are concerned, as of this moment we can’t talk about anything happening elsewhere. I agree with you that the situation must contemplate more than that.⁵

The Prime Minister: Yes, I agree the situation is going to be hard. It will start off all the row with the pipelines, with the bigger things, but this will stand right up to them. If this thing is done, which I think is very noble, dear friend, it will set off a lot of things throughout the whole area. I’m all for that as long as we regard it as an operation that has got to be carried through.⁶

The President: Now just a minute so that there is no misunderstanding. Are you of the belief that unless we have made up our minds in advance to carry this thing on through to the Persian Gulf, that we had better not go in the first place?⁷

The Prime Minister: I don’t think that, but I think that we have got to see it together, dear friend. There is no good in being in that place and sitting there a few months and the whole rest being in flames. As soon as we start we have to face it—we have probably got to do a lot of things.

The President: Well, now, I will tell you of course I would not want to go further. Today we tried to project in our discussions here and with the legislative leaders the development of the situation, and they could take many forms. If we are now planning the initiation of a big

operation that could run all the way through Syria and Iraq, we are far beyond anything I have the power to do constitutionally. We have had quite some trouble justifying to our own leaders what we intend to do.⁸

The Prime Minister: Yes. What is your time-table?

The President: Right now. It would take—I don't know the exact time that they will get there on account of the orders and hours, but I would not want to give any information over an open wire.⁹

The Prime Minister: Of course. Now, are you going to speak to the country?

The President: Yes. This is very secret. We are calling an emergency session of the Security Council for tomorrow morning. I will broadcast after that Council does something.¹⁰

The Prime Minister: Tomorrow?

The President: Well, probably.

The Prime Minister: Well, now, we have had a request from the two little chaps—the one is gone and the other is there, the king—

The President: We did not know what the final reports were.

The Prime Minister: I know there is little news. The second is going along for the other. We have got a sort of request from him saying that [what?] are we going to do. I feel, my dear friend, that if you set off this great show, which I think is fine, you can't confine it to what you say publicly, but in fact all the trouble will blitz through on destroyers, oil fields, pipelines. Taking on Turks and getting things back. We should be ruined. I am for it. I don't want you to say that now to me, but so long as I understand we are in this together. We are doing this together.¹¹

The President: My own idea would be this. If this situation develops where our whole national interests are abandoned and destroyed, I have to go before the Congress and ask for authority to act. We can understand and agree on that much. And that is exactly what you say, except I have to say it in my guarded terms.¹²

The Prime Minister: You see, we shall have a terrible reaction. Do you want us to come with you or do you want to do it alone?

The President: At this moment, not knowing now under the new situation where your people may be needed, I think they should be alerted and then whatever happens, we will do it that

way.¹³

The Prime Minister: We must support the whole thing in public and all that. It is the whole that matters. That is what we have to deal with.

The President: Of course, as of this moment that has been—we don't know what is going to happen and I think it would be very bad for you and me to talk over an open wire to discuss the great possibilities.

The Prime Minister: What is your timing? Is it now seven o'clock?

The President: No, it is six o'clock here.

The Prime Minister: What have you got to do about speaking?

The President: No, not tonight. This is very secret.

The Prime Minister: I will send you a good message by wire, and you will get it in an hour or two. There are many things I can't say over the wire.¹⁴

The President: Yes, do that. Tell the Ambassador here to get a copy of it instantly to the Secretary of State.¹⁵

The Prime Minister: I will write something out and get it to you in an hour. I will send it to Foster.¹⁶

The President: Now, on the rest of it, we will talk about these possibilities and what we have to be prepared to do. I realize we are opening a Pandora's Box here, but if we don't open it, I think it is disastrous.¹⁷

The Prime Minister: Yes, I quite agree with you. What I mean is the old box when it is opened does a lot of harm. I am all for it.

The President: You'd better send a message laying out your thoughts on it.

The Prime Minister: I will send you a message on those lines where I can speak more clearly.

Then the President turned to the Secretary, at the conclusion of the phone call, and said he talked about destruction of oil lines, then we are really at war, then what do we do? He (Macmillan) says we can't sit down in Lebanon and do nothing, while the British are taking the hard knocks all over the area trying to get this thing straight. (And the President added he agreed with

Macmillan.) But, the President continued, he tried to tell Macmillan that he, the President, cannot make a decision such as this. We have now to justify our immediate action, which is that we did honor commitments. The President repeated that Macmillan would send a cable immediately which he said would be through in an hour.²

Notes

1. **Document context:** Secure/recorded White House–Downing Street call late afternoon **July 14, 1958**, hours after the **Iraqi coup** and on the eve of **U.S. landings in Lebanon (Operation Blue Bat, July 15)**.
2. **“3,700...in the lift”:** Approximate size of the **initial British brigade** earmarked; “lift” refers to the **sea/air transport** sequence of the Anglo-American deployment.
3. **“Jordan situation...in your lap”:** UK responsibility for **Jordan** (Hashemite partner in the **Arab Union**), where **King Hussein** faced acute danger after the fall of **Iraq**.
4. **“Showdown”:** Macmillan’s view that intervention in **Lebanon** could trigger a **region-wide confrontation**, not a limited police action.
5. **“Can’t talk...elsewhere”:** Eisenhower signals **publicly** the U.S. move is confined to **Lebanon**, avoiding advance commitment to broader operations.
6. **Pipelines/“bigger things”:** Vulnerability of **IPC** pipelines across **Syria** to Mediterranean terminals (Tripoli, Baniyas), and knock-on risks to oil shipping, bases, and communications.
7. **“Carry...through to the Persian Gulf”:** Eisenhower tests whether Macmillan sees **Lebanon** as the opening of an **extended campaign** reaching the Gulf oil states.
8. **“Beyond...power to do constitutionally”:** U.S. legal limits; any broader campaign (e.g., into **Syria/Iraq**) would require **Congressional authorization** beyond the **1957 Middle East Resolution**.
9. **“Open wire”:** Acknowledgment that this circuit was **not fully secure** for detailed operational timings.
10. **UNSC emergency session/broadcast:** Plan to seek **UN cover** and have Eisenhower address the nation **after** initial Council action on July 15.
11. **“Two little chaps...one is gone...the king”:** Macmillan’s shorthand for the **Hashemite monarchs: Faisal II of Iraq** (“gone,” slain in the coup) and **Hussein of Jordan** (“the king” still in place) seeking Anglo-American help; references to **destroyers/oil fields/pipelines/Turks** reflect fears of **naval incidents, oil sabotage, and Turkish** moves as a **Baghdad Pact** ally.
12. **Congress and “guarded terms”:** Eisenhower signals he would need to **seek authority from Congress** if events widened; public statements must remain **circumspect**.
13. **British alert posture:** U.K. forces to remain **ready** for Jordan or Kuwait contingencies while the

U.S. enters **Lebanon**.

14. **“Message by wire”**: Macmillan promises a **formal cable** laying out U.K. thinking and options (to be handled rapidly via diplomatic channels).
15. **“Ambassador...Secretary of State”**: British Ambassador **Sir Harold Caccia** in Washington; U.S. **Secretary of State John Foster Dulles** to receive the text immediately.
16. **“Foster”**: **John Foster Dulles**, on copy for immediate coordination.
17. **“Pandora’s Box”**: Eisenhower’s metaphor for the **unpredictable regional chain-reaction**—pipelines, Suez, Jordan, Gulf states—if intervention proceeds.
18. **Post-call aside**: Eisenhower recounts to **Secretary Dulles** that **Macmillan** insists Britain cannot absorb **oil-sabotage shocks** while the U.S. sits passively in **Lebanon**; Eisenhower concurs **in principle** but stresses U.S. must first **justify** the limited action as **honoring commitments** to **Lebanon**.
19. **Participants identified**: **Dwight D. Eisenhower** (U.S. President) and **Harold Macmillan** (U.K. Prime Minister).



U.S. troops landing in Beirut

**Special Message from the President to the Congress
on the Sending of United States Forces to Lebanon.¹**

July 15, 1958

To the Congress of the United States:

On July 14, 1958, I received an urgent request from the President of the Republic of Lebanon that some United States forces be stationed in Lebanon. President Chamoun² stated that without an immediate showing of United States support, the government of Lebanon would be unable to survive. This request by President Chamoun was made with the concurrence of all the members of the Lebanese cabinet³. I have replied that we would do this and a contingent of United States Marines⁴ has now arrived in Lebanon. This initial dispatch of troops will be augmented as required. U. S. forces will be withdrawn as rapidly as circumstances permit.

Simultaneously, I requested that an urgent meeting of the United Nations Security Council⁵ be held on July 15, 1958. At that meeting, the Permanent Representative of the United States⁶ reported to the Council the action which this Government has taken. He also expressed the hope that the United Nations could soon take further effective measures to meet more fully the situation in Lebanon. We will continue to support the United Nations to this end.

United States forces are being sent to Lebanon to protect American lives⁷ and by their presence to assist the Government of Lebanon in the preservation of Lebanon's territorial integrity and independence⁸, which have been deemed vital to United States national interests and world peace.⁹

About two months ago a violent insurrection broke out in Lebanon, particularly along the border with Syria which, with Egypt, forms the United Arab Republic.¹⁰ This revolt was encouraged and strongly backed by the official Cairo, Damascus, and Soviet radios which broadcast to Lebanon in the Arabic language.¹¹ The insurrection was further supported by sizable amounts of arms, ammunition and money and by personnel infiltrated from Syria to fight against the lawful authorities.¹² The avowed purpose of these activities was to overthrow the legally constituted government of Lebanon and to install by violence a government which would subordinate the independence of Lebanon to the policies of the United Arab Republic.¹³

Lebanon referred this situation to the United Nations Security Council. In view of the international implications of what was occurring in Lebanon, the Security Council on June 11, 1958 decided to send observers into Lebanon for the purpose of insuring that further outside assistance to the insurrection would cease.¹⁴ The Secretary-General of the United Nations¹⁵ subsequently undertook a mission to the area to reinforce the work of the observers.

It was our belief that the efforts of the Secretary General and of the United Nations observers

were helpful in reducing further aid in terms of personnel and military equipment from across the frontiers of Lebanon. There was a basis for hope that the situation might be moving toward a peaceful solution, consonant with the continuing integrity of Lebanon, and that the aspect of indirect aggression from without¹⁶ was being brought under control.

The situation was radically changed, however, on July 14, when there was a violent outbreak in Baghdad, in nearby Iraq.¹⁷ Elements in Iraq strongly sympathetic to the United Arab Republic seem to have murdered or driven from office individuals comprising the lawful government of that country. We do not yet know in detail to what extent they have succeeded. We do have reliable information that important Iraqi leaders have been murdered.¹⁸

We share with the Government of Lebanon the view that these events in Iraq demonstrate a ruthlessness of aggressive purpose which tiny Lebanon cannot combat without further evidence of support from other friendly nations.¹⁹

After the most detailed consideration, I have concluded that, given the developments in Iraq, the measures thus far taken by the United Nations Security Council are not sufficient to preserve the independence and integrity of Lebanon. I have considered, furthermore, the question of our responsibility to protect and safeguard American citizens in Lebanon of whom there are about 2,500.²⁰ Pending the taking of adequate measures by the United Nations, the United States will be acting pursuant to what the United Nations Charter recognizes is an inherent right—the right of all nations to work together and to seek help when necessary to preserve their independence.²¹ I repeat that we wish to withdraw our forces as soon as the United Nations has taken further effective steps designed to safeguard Lebanese independence.²²

It is clear that the events which have been occurring in Lebanon represent indirect aggression from without, and that such aggression endangers the independence and integrity of Lebanon.¹⁶

It is recognized that the step now being taken may have serious consequences. I have, however, come to the considered and sober conclusion that despite the risks involved this action is required to support the principles of justice and international law upon which peace and a stable international order depend.²³

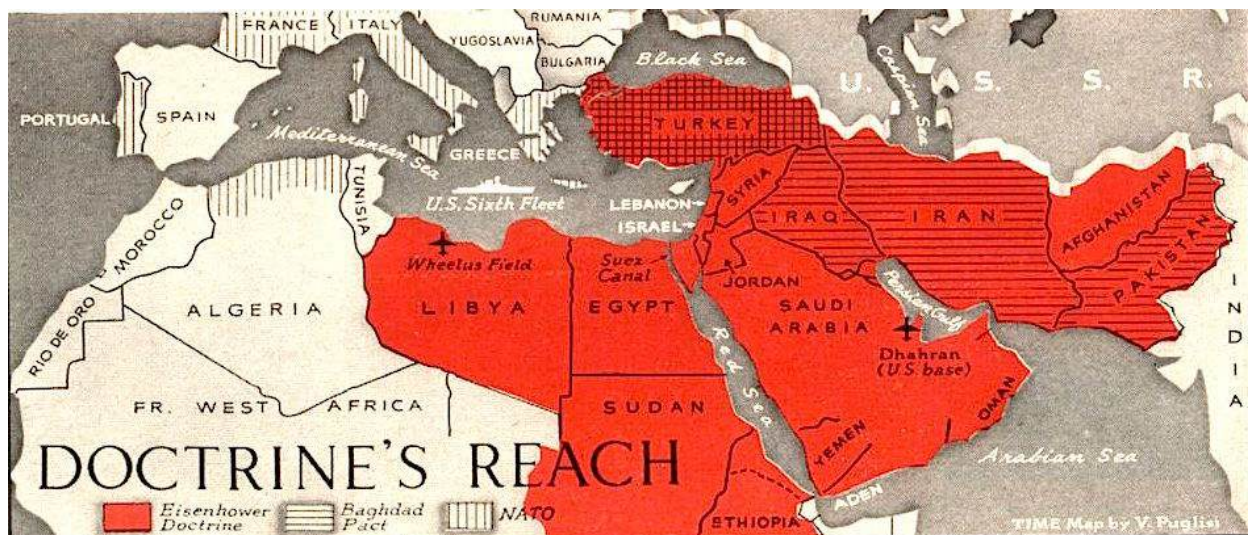
Our Government has acted in response to an appeal for help from a small and peaceful nation which has long had ties of closest friendship with the United States. Readiness to help a friend in need is an admirable characteristic of the American people, and I am, in this message, informing the Congress of the reasons why I believe that the United States could not in honor stand idly by in this hour of Lebanon's grave peril. As we act at the request of a friendly government to help it preserve its independence and to preserve law and order which will protect American lives, we are acting to reaffirm and strengthen principles upon which the safety and security of the United States depend.²⁴

Notes

1. **Document context:** Presidential message the day **U.S. Marines** (Sixth Fleet) commenced **Operation Blue Bat** landings at **Beirut** (July 15, 1958).
2. **President Chamoun:** **Camille Chamoun**, President of Lebanon (1952–58), who formally requested U.S. assistance under crisis provisions.
3. **Lebanese cabinet concurrence:** The invitation was presented as a **unanimous cabinet** decision to bolster legality under international law.
4. **U.S. Marines:** The initial landing force (e.g., **1/2 Marines**) came ashore from the **U.S. Sixth Fleet** to secure Beirut airport and approaches.
5. **UN Security Council meeting (July 15, 1958):** Sought to place the intervention within a **UN process** paralleling the U.S. move.
6. **U.S. Permanent Representative:** **Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr.** (U.S. Ambassador to the UN, 1953–60), who briefed the Council on the landing and U.S. rationale.
7. **American lives:** Reference to protection of U.S. nationals—diplomatic staff, businesspeople, missionaries, and university communities (e.g., **AUB**) in Lebanon.
8. **Territorial integrity and independence:** Echoes U.S. undertakings in the **1957 Middle East Resolution (Eisenhower Doctrine)** that deemed such integrity vital to U.S. security.
9. **Vital interests / world peace:** U.S. strategic calculus linked to **Eastern Mediterranean stability** and access to regional **oil** and sea lanes.
10. **United Arab Republic (UAR):** The **Egypt–Syria** union (Feb 1958–Sep 1961) under **Gamal Abdel Nasser**, viewed in Beirut and Washington as the chief external influence on the revolt.
11. **Cairo/Damascus/Soviet radios:** Arabic-language propaganda broadcasts (e.g., “**Voice of the Arabs**”) supporting anti-Chamoun elements.
12. **Infiltration from Syria:** U.S. and Lebanese claims of cross-border arms, funds, and personnel aiding insurgents—an evidentiary basis for alleging **indirect aggression**.
13. **Subordination to UAR policies:** Washington’s framing that the revolt aimed to align Lebanon with Nasser’s **pan-Arab** project.
14. **UN observers (UNOGIL):** The UNSC on **June 11, 1958** (Resolution **128**) created the **UN Observation Group in Lebanon** to monitor cross-border interference.
15. **Secretary-General:** **Dag Hammarskjöld**, who undertook a shuttle mission to support **UNOGIL** and defuse the crisis.
16. **“Indirect aggression from without”:** Eisenhower’s legal-political characterization of cross-

border subversion; used to justify invited intervention pending UN action.

17. **Iraqi Revolution (July 14, 1958):** Military coup in **Baghdad** overthrowing **King Faisal II**, **Crown Prince ‘Abd al-Ilah**, and **PM Nuri al-Sa‘id**—a shock that accelerated U.S. decisions.
18. **“Important Iraqi leaders have been murdered”:** Public acknowledgment of the liquidation of the Hashemite leadership and Nuri in the coup’s first hours.
19. **“Tiny Lebanon”:** Emphasizes Lebanon’s relative **vulnerability** vis-à-vis larger UAR-backed currents.
20. **“About 2,500” Americans:** Contemporary U.S. government estimate of U.S. citizens in Lebanon in July 1958.
21. **UN Charter / inherent right:** Invokes **Article 51** (self-defense) logic and invited collective measures **pending UN action** to justify temporary deployment.
22. **“Withdraw...as soon as the UN has taken further effective steps”:** Signals deference to UN machinery and Arab regional mediation; U.S. forces departed by **October 1958** after **Fuad Chehab**’s election and stabilization.
23. **“Principles of justice and international law”:** U.S. stance that requested, time-limited assistance in face of **indirect aggression** aligns with the **UN Charter** and past **UNGA** norms against fomenting civil strife.
24. **U.S. security principles:** Continuity with **Truman Doctrine (1947)** and **Eisenhower Doctrine (1957)**—assisting friendly governments under threat to prevent wider strategic collapse.



Map of the Eisenhower Doctrine, Time Magazine, March 18, 1957