

## His Finest Hour?

### Eisenhower, Lebanon, and the 1958 Middle East Crisis

Just ninety minutes after the sleek gray silhouettes of the Sixth Fleet glided into view out where the brilliant blue of the Mediterranean met the cloudless summer sky, the first seventeen hundred U.S. Marines waded ashore at Beirut amid friendly crowds of late afternoon beach-goers and throngs of peddlers hawking everything from hummus to Coca Cola. Much to the relief of President Dwight D. Eisenhower and his top advisers halfway around the world in Washington, Operation Blue Bat—the largest U.S. amphibious maneuver since Inchon eight years earlier—unfolded like clockwork on 15 July 1958. Before the week was out, fourteen thousand Marines stood guard at Beirut, symbols of the United States's commitment to friends like Lebanon's president Camille Chamoun, who had appealed for U.S. troops after a bloody Bastille Day coup in Baghdad had toppled the pro-Western government of Iraq. Meanwhile, the U.S. Air Force was ferrying tons of food and fuel to the thirty-seven hundred British Tommies that Whitehall had airlifted into Amman on 17 July after Jordan's King Hussein followed Chamoun's lead and urgently requested Western military help. By the end of the month, warships of the U.S. Seventh Fleet, having steamed full speed from their base at Okinawa, lurked just outside the Straits of Hormuz with orders to defend the Persian Gulf oilfields.

For many contemporary observers and for some diplomatic historians, President Eisenhower's handling of the 1958 crisis in the Middle East constituted his finest hour. Pro-Western regimes in Beirut and Amman were shored up, America's special relationship with Britain was consolidated, and oil continued to flow from the Persian Gulf without interruption. Equally important, not a shot was fired in anger, not a single American died in combat. Ike even saw to it that the troops were home by Christmas.<sup>1</sup>

1. See, for example, Robert Stookey, *America and the Arab States: An Uneasy Encounter* (New York, 1975), 156–57; William Quandt, "Lebanon, 1958, and Jordan, 1970," in *Force without War: U.S. Armed Forces as a Political Instrument*, ed. Barry M. Blechman and Stephen S. Kaplan (Washington, 1978), 225–57; William Bragg Ewald, Jr., *Eisenhower the President: Crucial Days, 1957–1960* (Englewood Cliffs, 1981), 241–42; Robert A. Divine, *Eisenhower and the Cold War* (New York, 1981), 101–4; Stephen E. Ambrose, *Eisenhower*, Vol. 2, *The President* (New York, 1984), 470–73; H. W. Brands, *Cold Warriors: Eisenhower's Generation and American Foreign Policy* (New York, 1988), 100–13; and idem, *The Specter of Neutralism: The United States and the Emergence of the Third World, 1947–1960* (New York, 1990), 293–96.

Having relied on a small group of tough-minded national security managers and his own legendary tactical instincts, Eisenhower himself became convinced that "the operation in Lebanon demonstrated the ability of the United States to react swiftly with conventional armed forces to meet small-scale, or 'brush fire' situations" in the Third World.<sup>2</sup>

Eisenhower could claim in his memoirs that Operation Blue Bat had achieved important objectives while remaining quick, clean, and cheap, but a more careful look at his gunboat diplomacy in Lebanon suggests that both the short-term risks and the long-term costs were far higher than he was willing to acknowledge.<sup>3</sup> Personal connections and Cold War convictions, for example, drew Eisenhower and other high-ranking U.S. officials inexorably into the Lebanese political labyrinth, where they would offer pro-Western leaders military commitments that proved almost impossible to repudiate. Complicating matters still further, U.S. officials tried to mislead both Congress and the U.S. people by publicly attributing Lebanon's political instability to Communist subversion while privately acknowledging that the real cause was Arab nationalism. And once Eisenhower made the decision to send troops to Beirut, he faced the frightening possibility of having to make even more fateful decisions about U.S. intervention in Jordan, Iraq, or Kuwait. Moreover, Ike's actions during July 1958 also held critical implications for U.S. foreign policy far beyond the Middle East. By emphasizing the importance of the United States's credibility as a guarantor, by misrepresenting Third World nationalism as Soviet inspired, and by waging what amounted to a limited but undeclared presidential war, Dwight Eisenhower set some dangerous precedents in Lebanon that his successors would utilize far less successfully in Vietnam.

For the millions of Americans who thumbed through the forty-page pictorial on Lebanon in the April 1958 issue of *National Geographic Magazine*, the tiny Arab republic probably seemed like a political and cultural oxymo-

2. Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Waging Peace, 1956-1961* (Garden City, 1965), 290. For a sympathetic appraisal of Ike's decision making and an examination of the "operational code" employed by his national security advisers see Alan Dowty, *Middle East Crisis: U.S. Decision-Making in 1958, 1970, and 1973* (Berkeley, 1984), 23-108.

3. For accounts critical of various aspects of Ike's handling of the Lebanese crisis see especially Richard J. Barnett, *Intervention and Revolution: The United States in the Third World* (New York, 1968), 140-51; Malcolm Kerr, "The Lebanese Civil War," in *International Regulation of Civil Wars*, ed. Evan Luard (New York, 1972), 65-90; D. Cameron Watt, *Succeeding John Bull: America in Britain's Place, 1900-1975* (New York, 1984), 134-35; Piers Brendon, *Ike: His Life and Times* (New York, 1986), 356-60; Robert J. McMahon, "Eisenhower and Third World Nationalism: A Critique of the Revisionists," *Political Science Quarterly* 101:3 (1986): 465-66; Thomas G. Paterson, *Meeting the Communist Threat: Truman to Reagan* (New York, 1988), 186-90; Michael Bishku, "The 1958 American Intervention in Lebanon: A Historical Assessment," *American-Arab Affairs* 31 (Winter 1989/1990): 106-19; Irene Gendzier, "The Declassified Lebanon, 1948-1958: Elements of Continuity and Contrast in US Policy toward Lebanon," in *The Middle East and North Africa: Essays in Honor of J. C. Hurewitz*, ed. Reeve S. Simon (New York, 1990), 187-209; and Erika Alin, *The United States and the 1958 Lebanon Crisis: American Intervention in the Middle East* (Lanham, MD, 1994), passim.

ron, as familiar as Miami Beach and yet as exotic as Shangri-La.<sup>4</sup> A mountainous enclave, half Christian and half Muslim, wrested from unsteady Ottoman hands during World War I by French empire builders seeking a beachhead in the Middle East, Lebanon had by 1939 become a commercial center and transport hub whose thriving capital, Beirut, boasted a culture as cosmopolitan and a climate as clement as anything found on the Riviera. Before Paris could consolidate its grip on the Levant, however, World War II unleashed forces that brought humiliating defeat to France and exhilarating independence to Lebanon. With an assist from the British, who expelled the Vichy French in 1941, and also from the Americans, who helped keep the Free French at bay two years later, in November 1943 Lebanese nationalists proclaimed a republic. Its cornerstone was to be a carefully engineered political mechanism designed to preserve the delicate confessional balance reflected in the most recent census, which showed that Lebanese Christians outnumbered Lebanese Muslims by a ratio of six to five. Under the terms of the so-called National Pact of 1943, the president of Lebanon must be a Christian, the prime minister must be a Sunni Muslim, the speaker of the parliament must be a Shi'ite Muslim, and all three must work together to ensure sectarian peace at home and a nonaligned policy abroad.<sup>5</sup>

Lebanese leaders and American diplomats agreed that a set of common principles—democracy, free enterprise, and Christianity—seemed likely to ensure friendly relations between their two nations. Bishara Khoury, the Christian strongman who served as independent Lebanon's first president, was quick to express his "heartfelt thanks for American support" in the wake of his November 1943 showdown with France. "Even when things looked blackest," he told U.S. ambassador George Wadsworth, "we never lost faith that democratic principles would prevail."<sup>6</sup> Eighteen months later, Wadsworth touted Khoury's Lebanon as the centerpiece of postwar U.S. policy in the region. "This little country can, as living standards rise in Arab lands," he prophesied on 11 July 1945, "become not simply the Adirondacks of the Near East but also, as American cultural and material investment increases, as it seems bound to do, a vital focus of American influence."<sup>7</sup> Khoury's eagerness to cooperate fully with the Arabian-American Oil Company's (ARAMCO) plans to build a refinery and pipeline terminus in Lebanon won praise from Wadsworth's successor, Lowell

4. Thomas J. Abercrombie, "Young-old Lebanon Lives by Trade," *National Geographic Magazine* 113 (April 1958): 479–523.

5. Fahim I. Qubain, *Crisis in Lebanon* (Washington, 1961), 16–22; Leila M. T. Meo, *Lebanon, Improbable Nation: A Study in Political Development* (Bloomington, 1965), 82–85; Kamal Salibi, *A House of Many Mansions: The History of Lebanon Reconsidered* (Berkeley, 1988), 182–87.

6. Wadsworth tel. to Department of State, 24 November 1943, U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1943* (Washington, 1964), 4:1046–47 (hereafter *FRUS*, with year and volume).

7. Wadsworth to Loy Henderson (NEA), 11 July 1945, General Records of the Department of State, Record Group 59, file: 890E.00/7-1145, National Archives, Washington, DC (hereafter RG 59, with filing information).

Pinkerton, who called the Lebanese "survivors of a race who really practice capitalism and mean to continue."<sup>8</sup> And although Lebanon, like other Arab states, voted against the American-backed UN plan to partition Palestine in November 1947, Lebanese Christian leaders struck a more conciliatory note in their dealings with U.S. officials than the Muslim diplomats who represented Syria and Saudi Arabia.<sup>9</sup>

If Lebanon's relative moderation on Palestine was welcome news in Washington on the eve of the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, its strident anticommunism was more welcome still as the United States's Cold War with the Soviet Union spilled over into the Middle East later that year. Worried by "irresponsible" talk among Lebanese Muslims about "overtures to Russia," the Khoury regime imposed "severe measures" against Lebanon's tiny Communist party in early 1948, closing its offices and disrupting its gatherings.<sup>10</sup> Terming Lebanon "one of the most progressive countries in the Near East," the State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee (SWNCC), the precursor to the National Security Council (NSC), recommended stepping up Washington's \$5 million economic aid program in Beirut to help counteract "the emergent interest of the Soviet Union" in the Arab states. The mountainous Arab republic, SWNCC pointed out on 8 June, was "the sole country in the Near East having a Christian majority, a feature which has characterized Lebanon as a sort of occidental bridgehead in the Moslem world."<sup>11</sup> A year later the CIA described the Lebanese as "far more cosmopolitan and far less xenophobic" than other Arabs, and also far more anti-Communist. Because "Lebanon's basic alignment is toward the West," the CIA explained, it "has an active distrust of the USSR and keeps a close watch over Soviet-sponsored activities in the Levant."<sup>12</sup> After war erupted in Korea in 1950, Ambassador Pinkerton confirmed that Lebanon's attitude toward communism had "hardened" still further and that the Khoury regime had begun "to track down and arrest Party members."<sup>13</sup>

Bishara Khoury, however, was proving far more popular in Cold War America than in his fractured homeland. During its first decade of independence, Khoury's Lebanon more closely resembled an unstable confederation of fifteenth-century city-states divided by clan and cult than a twentieth-

8. On ARAMCO in Lebanon see Douglas Little, "Pipeline Politics: America, TAP-LINE, and the Arabs," *Business History Review* 64 (Summer 1990): 267-68. Pinkerton is quoted in Irene Gendzier, "No Forum for the Lebanese People: US Perceptions from Lebanon, 1945-1947," *Middle East Report* 20 (January/February 1990): 35.

9. See, for example, Warren Austin (USUN) tel. to Department of State, 1 December 1947, *FRUS, 1947* (Washington, 1971), 5:1293-94; and Pinkerton to Department of State, 12 December 1947, RG 59, 890E.00/12-1247.

10. Pinkerton tels. to Department of State, 12 January and 3 March 1948, RG 59, 890E.00B/1-1248 and 890E.00/3-348.

11. SWNCC, "Long-Range Assistance to Lebanon," 8 June 1948, RG 59, 890E.00/6-848.

12. CIA, SR-13, "Arab States," 27 September 1949, CIA Office of Information and Privacy Coordination, Washington, DC.

13. Pinkerton to Department of State, 11 October 1950, RG 59, 611.83A/10-1150.

century nation-state united by abstract concepts like democracy and national identity. The Lebanese Shi'ites who farmed the lush Bekaa valley along the Syrian frontier, for example, had long felt closer to Damascus than to Beirut. The Druze, a mysterious sect on the fringes of Islam led by Kamal Jumblatt, a "feudal socialist" who preached a blend of French marxism and Indian pacifism, fiercely defended their autonomy in the snow-capped Shouf Mountains that towered over the capital. Dismissing both the Shi'ites and the Druze as hopelessly provincial, the Sunnis along the Mediterranean coast and the Christians from Mount Lebanon continued to joust with each other, as they had for centuries, over who would control the seat of power in Beirut.<sup>14</sup>

The one matter that could bring these warring clans together by the early 1950s was the conviction that Bishara Khoury must go. His rank nepotism, his reputation for rigging elections, and his penchant for martial law alienated not only all the Muslim groups but also fellow Christians like the Chamouns and the Frangiehs. All seemed to agree that Khoury's autocratic style, symbolized by the constitutional amendment he had extracted from parliament in 1948 in order to secure an unprecedented second term as president, was undermining the fragile compromise laid out by the National Pact. Worried that their country was drifting toward sectarian strife, Muslim and Christian moderates, supported by high-ranking Lebanese army officers, forced Khoury to step down in a "bloodless coup" on 17 September 1952.<sup>15</sup>

Although State Department officials were surprised by the sudden demise of Bishara Khoury, whose "pro-western and anti-Soviet orientation" had made him a popular figure in Washington, they were delighted to learn that his successor would be Camille Chamoun.<sup>16</sup> The U.S. embassy in Beirut regarded Lebanon's new president as "definitely our friend" and as someone likely to "undertake significant reforms."<sup>17</sup> As early as February 1947, a Foggy Bottom biographical profile had pointed out that Chamoun had "a reputation for honesty," that he was "quite openly anti-Communist," and that he advocated closer ties between Lebanon and the United States.<sup>18</sup> A year later, while serving as Lebanon's representative at the United Nations, Chamoun impressed U.S. negotiators as someone "willing to suggest possible solutions to the Palestine Question which . . . go further than any

14. Michael C. Hudson, *The Precarious Republic: Political Modernization in Lebanon* (New York, 1968), 105-8, 135-53.

15. Eyal Zisser, "The Downfall of the Khuri Administration: A Dubious Revolution," *Middle Eastern Studies* 30 (July 1994): 486-511.

16. Department of State, "Policy Statement: Lebanon," 29 January 1951, RG 59, 611.83A/1-2951.

17. Chargé James Lobenstine (Beirut) tel. to Department of State, 23 September 1952, *FRUS, 1952-1954* (Washington, 1986), 9:1008-9.

18. Department of State, OIR Report #4308, "Biographies of the Lebanese Cabinet," 5 February 1947, *OSS/State Department Intelligence & Research Reports, Part 7: The Middle East*, microfilm edition (Frederick, MD, 1977), reel 2, item 14.

previous position taken by the Arab states.”<sup>19</sup> Like most other Lebanese, Chamoun became quite frustrated by what he regarded as the excessively pro-Israel Middle Eastern policies adopted by the Truman administration. But in the wake of Dwight Eisenhower’s landslide victory in the November 1952 elections, State Department Middle East experts reported that the Lebanese leader “shares the Arab hope for a ‘New Deal’ from the new administration in Washington.”<sup>20</sup>

John Foster Dulles, the new administration’s secretary of state, got a first-hand glimpse of rising Arab frustrations and expectations during a two-week visit to the Middle East in May 1953 that included a meeting with Camille Chamoun in Beirut. Noting that “democratic government has a broader base in Lebanon than elsewhere in the Arab world,” State Department briefers had reminded Dulles that there were few Middle Eastern leaders more favorably disposed toward American plans for a regional defense organization than President Chamoun. “If it ever came to war with the Soviets,” Chamoun had told U.S. diplomats shortly after taking office, “Lebanon would be 100 per cent on the side of the West, our harbors would be open to your ships, our airfields to your planes.”<sup>21</sup> Chamoun did not disappoint. “People here are well aware of the communist danger,” he assured Dulles on 16 May, and they were “entirely in accord with the idea of a defense pact” designed to shield Lebanon and its neighbors from possible Soviet aggression. But there was also “a feeling of bitter disappointment as a result of Palestine,” something that Chamoun hoped that the Eisenhower administration could reverse.<sup>22</sup>

Chamoun’s views coincided with those of Charles Malik, Lebanon’s long-time ambassador to the United States, whom Dulles had come to know and respect while serving as an American diplomatic troubleshooter during the Truman years. A Lebanese Christian with a Ph.D. in philosophy from Harvard University, Malik was a vehement anti-Communist whose pragmatic negotiating style had helped the future secretary of state win Arab support for the UN Palestine Conciliation Commission in 1948 and for the Japanese Peace Treaty three years later. Six days after Dulles took over at Foggy Bottom, Malik assured his old friend that Lebanon would remain “a most important asset . . . to Western stability in the area,” provided that the Eisenhower administration followed through on its plans to distance itself from Israel. Dulles replied that Ike had no intention of repeating Truman’s mistakes. By early April, Malik was telling Dulles that the Mid-

19. Samuel Kopper (USUN) to Austin, 14 March 1948, *FRUS, 1948* (Washington, 1975), 5:723-24.

20. Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and African Affairs Henry Byroade to John Foster Dulles, 26 January 1953, RG 59, 611.83A/1-2653.

21. Department of State briefing paper, “Lebanon,” 5 May 1953, *FRUS, 1952-1954* 9:1211-13.

22. Department of State memorandum of conversation, 16 May 1953, *FRUS, 1952-1954* 9:64-67.

dle East was “‘psychologically ready’ for leadership from the United States” and that the Chamoun regime was eager to serve as “a cultural and political bridge between the East and the West.”<sup>23</sup> But when Dulles arrived in Beirut in mid-May, Lebanese Muslim leaders rejected his personal assurances that the United States intended to pursue a more balanced policy toward the Arab-Israeli conflict as mere window dressing. An angry Dulles retorted that they were playing into the Kremlin’s hands and suggested that they pay closer attention to Ambassador Malik, “who has a very profound understanding of Soviet Doctrine.”<sup>24</sup>

Dulles and Eisenhower certainly paid a great deal of attention to both Malik and Chamoun during the next five years. Hoping to dispel the widespread belief that the United States’s Middle East policy was reflexively pro-Israel, the Eisenhower administration periodically punished the Jewish state by withholding U.S. economic aid while quietly rewarding Lebanon and other moderate Arab governments with modest amounts of technical and financial assistance. Eager to foster an anti-Soviet strategic consensus in the region, top U.S. officials worked closely during the mid-1950s with the Chamoun regime, which proved far more cooperative than Egypt’s Gamal Abdel Nasser, whose neutralist rhetoric and Russian connections were already undermining U.S. objectives and whose pan-Arab agenda seemed likely to undermine Lebanese independence. By late 1955, the Eisenhower administration was pouring almost \$25 million into Lebanese infrastructural projects like the expansion of the Beirut airport while assuring Chamoun that the “US has come to have great confidence in his judgment, and believes that his conception of [the] best interests of Lebanon and [the] Near East coincide with ours.”<sup>25</sup>

Further evidence of Washington’s faith in Lebanon would come in early 1956. In the wake of Nasser’s \$100 million arms deal with the Soviet bloc and in the midst of a fresh round of Israeli retaliatory raids against its Arab neighbors, the Lebanese asked Washington for twenty-five 106 mm. recoilless rifles and ammunition in April. Despite its determination to avoid sparking a regional arms race, the Pentagon nevertheless concluded that “Lebanon has a valid requirement for the weapons requested to provide for her self-defense.”<sup>26</sup> Not only would the proposed arms sale demonstrate U.S. willingness “to assist nations in the Near East which are oriented to the West,” Admiral Arthur Radford, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

23. Department of State, “Malik-Dulles Conversations,” 3 April 1953, *FRUS, 1952-1954: Memoranda of the Conversations of the Secretary of State* (microfiche supplement) (Washington, 1992), item 98.

24. Department of State memorandum of conversation, 17 May 1953, *FRUS, 1952-1954* 9:77.

25. Chargé John Emmerson (Beirut) tel. to Department of State, 11 October 1955, and Department of State tel. to Emmerson, 28 October 1955, *FRUS, 1955-1957* (Washington, 1988), 13:177-78.

26. JCS 2090/261, 8 May 1956, *FRUS, 1955-1957* 13:188-91.

(JCS) explained on 23 May, it would also "improve US-Lebanese relations and facilitate the acquisition by the United States of base rights in Lebanon."<sup>27</sup> The State Department agreed, and two days later Chamoun was informed that Lebanon could purchase the recoilless rifles on a priority basis.<sup>28</sup> This small arms sale helped Washington reap big dividends before the year was out. During the Suez crisis of late 1956, Lebanon, unlike its radical Arab neighbors, refused to sever relations with Great Britain and France. And when pro-Nasser cabinet members blasted Chamoun as a traitor to the Arab cause, he replaced them with "pro-West" appointees, including Charles Malik, who took over the foreign ministry on 18 November. Impressed by the new cabinet's tough stand against anti-Western radicals, U.S. ambassador Donald Heath reportedly termed it the "strongest Lebanese Government in years."<sup>29</sup>

The new year would bring even bigger Lebanese dividends. Scrambling to shore up sagging Western interests in the Middle East in the aftermath of the Suez debacle, the White House unveiled plans for an "Eisenhower Doctrine" in January 1957. Claiming that American inaction would open the door to further Soviet gains in the region, Ike won congressional authorization in early March to spend up to \$200 million in economic aid and, if necessary, to send U.S. troops to defend any Middle Eastern nation threatened by aggression, whether direct or indirect, "from any country controlled by international communism."<sup>30</sup> Most Arabs privately regarded the Eisenhower Doctrine as a transparent ploy to promote Western influence in the Middle East by restraining Nasser's brand of nationalism, and some, like the Syrians, publicly denounced the initiative as an insidious example of U.S. "imperialism."<sup>31</sup> The only Arab state openly to endorse Ike's new policy without reservation was Lebanon, where, as early as 13 January, President Chamoun had told Ambassador Heath that "he supported [the] 'Eisenhower plan one hundred percent.'"<sup>32</sup>

With parliamentary elections scheduled for late June, however, more and more Lebanese were making it clear that they did not support the Eisenhower plan or Camille Chamoun at all. From the Bekaa Valley to the Basta, Beirut's Casbah, most Muslims idolized Nasser and applauded the increasingly anti-American broadsides that he broadcast over Radio Cairo. Further-

27. Radford to Secretary of Defense Charles Wilson, 23 May 1956, *FRUS*, 1955-1957 13:191n.8.

28. Department of State tel. to Ambassador Donald Heath (Beirut), 25 May 1956, *FRUS*, 1955-1957 13:191-92.

29. Heath tel. to Department of State, 20 November 1956, quoted in editorial note 129, *FRUS*, 1955-1957 13:192.

30. On the origins of the Eisenhower Doctrine see Thomas G. Paterson, *Meeting the Communist Threat: Truman to Reagan* (New York, 1988), 177-83; and Brands, *Specter of Neutralism*, 282-89.

31. For the Syrian reaction see Ambassador James Moose tel. to Department of State, 11 January 1957, *FRUS*, 1955-1957 13:609-10.

32. Heath tel. to Department of State, 13 January 1957, *FRUS*, 1955-1957 13:196-97.

more, Druze chieftain Kamal Jumblatt and Sunni overlord Rashid Karame charged that Chamoun's endorsement of the Eisenhower Doctrine violated the 1943 National Pact, which had prescribed strict neutrality for Lebanon in foreign affairs. When James Richards, Ike's new roving ambassador to the Middle East, arrived in Beirut in mid-March to discuss U.S. economic assistance for Lebanon, Chamoun and Malik presented a distorted picture of their critics as crypto-Communists and Nasserite stooges. "Real fear [was] evident," Richards cabled Foggy Bottom, "over [the] growing intensity [of] subversive activities in [the] country by Communists supported by Syria and Egypt." Chamoun "feared Communist infiltration" and "was interested in building up forces for internal security," as was Malik, who emphasized the need "to nip Communist designs in the bud." Pointing out that the "pro-Western policies of [the] present government will be very much on the block" during the upcoming election campaign, Richards secured Washington's swift approval for a \$12.7 million military and financial aid package so that the Chamoun regime would be "in [a] position to show tangible results from cooperation with the West."<sup>33</sup>

As election day approached, the Eisenhower administration evidently provided other more intangible signs of its support for the Chamoun regime as well. Sometime in early 1957, David Atlee Phillips, a CIA political action specialist who had helped overthrow Jacobo Arbenz in Guatemala three years earlier, had arrived in Beirut, where he "felt like James Bond at the barricades."<sup>34</sup> Phillips and other CIA operatives like Miles Copeland and Wilbur Eveland were soon distributing "campaign contributions" to pro-Western Lebanese politicians to help defeat anti-American candidates backed by Nasser.<sup>35</sup> "News from Lebanon is very encouraging," CIA director Allen Dulles informed the NSC on 11 April, "with the Egyptians apparently giving up hope of exercising much influence over the forthcoming Lebanese elections."<sup>36</sup> But the atmosphere turned ugly in late May after troops loyal to Chamoun fired on pro-Nasser protesters in Beirut, killing seven and wounding seventy-three. By early June, Chamoun's foes charged that he had bought so many votes and gerrymandered so many districts that the balloting would be meaningless. Lest opposition leaders somehow derail U.S. plans for "a 99.9 percent-pure pro-US parliament," however, Wilbur Eveland began to make frequent late-night visits to the presidential palace, where he handed Chamoun briefcases full of cash earmarked for candidates

33. Richards tel. to Department of State, 15 and 16 March 1957, *FRUS, 1955-1957* 13:208-11.

34. David Atlee Phillips, *The Night Watch: 25 Years of Peculiar Service* (New York, 1977), 67-73.

35. Miles Copeland, *The Game of Nations: The Amoralty of Power Politics* (New York, 1969), 226-27; Wilbur Crane Eveland, *Ropes of Sand: America's Failure in the Middle East* (New York, 1980), 248. See also William Blum, *The CIA, a Forgotten History: US Global Interventions since World War 2* (London, 1986), 103-7.

36. Minutes of the 319th NSC Meeting, 11 April 1957, *FRUS, 1955-1957* 13:212.

friendly to the West.<sup>37</sup> Although Lebanon's new parliament may not have been as pure as U.S. officials had hoped, fifty-three of the sixty-six deputies elected at the end of June were staunch supporters of Camille Chamoun.<sup>38</sup>

Having swept to victory with a little help from their friends in the CIA, Chamoun and Malik redoubled their efforts to persuade the United States that Lebanon was a lonely pro-Western island in a sea of Arab nationalism and Soviet subversion. Eisenhower's Operations Coordinating Board (OCB), an interagency group that monitored policy in the Middle East, needed little persuading. Praising the Chamoun regime for its anticommunism and its opposition to "irresponsible and emotional ideas emanating from within the Arab world," on 31 July the OCB recommended showcasing Lebanon as "an example of U.S.-Arab cooperation" in order to "stimulate more favorable attitudes toward the U.S." throughout the region.<sup>39</sup> When the Syrians and the Soviets announced a major arms deal in early August, jittery Lebanese officials urged American covert action across the mountains in Damascus. "Unless the U.S. took some decisive action and means were found to overthrow the present regime in Syria," Charles Malik told a *New York Times* reporter, "the Lebanese regime could not last a year."<sup>40</sup> After a CIA plot to topple the left-leaning regime in Damascus backfired late that summer, top U.S. officials expected some serious fallout in Beirut, where "Syrian, Soviet, and Egyptian agents will increase their subversive activities against the pro-western Lebanese Government."<sup>41</sup> Hoping to boost Lebanese morale, Washington dispatched an additional \$2 million worth of military hardware "on a crash basis" in mid-September to help the Chamoun regime maintain internal security.<sup>42</sup>

Many Lebanese and American observers suspected, however, that Lebanon's internal security problems stemmed less from Syrian or Soviet subversion than from domestic opposition to Chamoun's increasingly autocratic rule. Outraged by what they regarded as massive fraud during the June elections, Chamoun's critics charged that he had packed parliament with his cronies in order to amend the constitution so that he could serve a second term as president. Rashid Karame and other Muslim leaders insisted that

37. Eveland, *Ropes of Sand*, 250.

38. *Middle East Journal* 11 (Summer 1957): 300. Richard Parker, who manned the State Department's operations center during the July 1958 crisis in Lebanon, confirmed long afterward that the CIA had helped precipitate the political upheaval in Beirut by encouraging Chamoun to "rig the election the previous year [1957] in a scandalous way." Richard Parker Oral History Interview, Foreign Service Oral History Project, Georgetown University, Washington, DC.

39. OCB, "Operations Plan for Lebanon," 31 July 1957, *FRUS*, 1955-1957 13:213-16.

40. Sam Pope Brewer Diary, 31 August 1957, Sam Pope Brewer Papers, box 24, Wisconsin State Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin.

41. William Rountree (NEA) to Dulles, 12 September 1957, *FRUS*, 1955-1957 13:216-17.

42. Department of State to Heath, 13 September 1957, *FRUS*, 1955-1957 13:217-18; White House Staff Note #195, 19 September 1957, Ann Whitman Files, Dwight D. Eisenhower Diary Series, box 27, folder: "Sept. 1957 Toner Notes," Dwight D. Eisenhower Library, Abilene, Kansas.

new elections were required to preserve Lebanon's fragile National Pact. Kamal Jumblatt, who lost the parliamentary seat he had held for more than a decade, blamed the United States, which, he claimed, intended to employ Chamoun as a pawn of "American imperialism" for the foreseeable future.<sup>43</sup>

The Chamoun regime responded by tarring its opponents with the brush of communism. Neutralists like Jumblatt, Foreign Minister Malik warned John Foster Dulles in mid-October, were insisting that Lebanon "alter its adherence to the Eisenhower Doctrine," a sure sign that they were playing the Kremlin's game.<sup>44</sup> But a State Department staff study completed later that month minimized the Red threat and suggested instead that the tide of anti-Americanism surging through Lebanon "may well arise from a desire to prevent Chamoun from obtaining a further term of office." Although Foggy Bottom's Middle East experts still favored modest amounts of economic and military aid to consolidate "Lebanon's position as a 'show case' of close relations with the West," they were also becoming wary of being manipulated by the Lebanese.<sup>45</sup> "The Arabs do not take to the idea of being taught to do things for themselves," one U.S. official stationed in southern Lebanon remarked privately in late November. "They want the Americans to do things for them."<sup>46</sup>

Among the most important things that Camille Chamoun wanted the Americans to do in 1958 was to support his bid for another term in the presidential palace over the objections of pro-Nasser Lebanese Muslims. The new year began with the ominous news that Egypt and Syria would merge to create a single United Arab Republic (UAR). The State Department worried that Nasser would use the UAR "to threaten Lebanon" and other pro-Western regimes in the Arab world, and "perhaps engulf them one by one."<sup>47</sup> So did Chamoun and Malik, both of whom believed that "the peril of subversion in Lebanon was immediate" and hinted that "it would be comforting if some elements of the Sixth Fleet might be moved to [the] eastern Mediterranean."<sup>48</sup> Robert McClintock, an unflappable and

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43. Hudson, *Precarious Republic*, 156–57; Helena Cobban, *The Making of Modern Lebanon* (Boulder, 1985), 87; Alin, *United States and the 1958 Lebanon Crisis*, 57–59. Chamoun, on the other hand, termed his critics "sore losers" who "cried scandal" and "dismissed the success of the government by pretending that the 1957 elections had been stolen," when in reality the "secret of the government's success" had been a Lebanese backlash against "Nasserite acts of terrorism." Camille Chamoun, *Crise au Moyen-Orient* (Paris, 1963), 383–85 (my translation).

44. Department of State memorandum of conversation, 17 October 1957, *FRUS*, 1955–1957 13:219–20.

45. Department of State Staff Study, "United States Objectives & Policies with Respect to the Near East," 31 October 1957, *FRUS*, 1955–1957 (Washington, 1991), 12:640–41.

46. Stephen Dorsey (U.S. coordinator for the Litani River irrigation project), quoted in Sam Pope Brewer Diary, 23 November 1957, Brewer Papers, Wisconsin State Historical Society.

47. Department of State, "Staff Study on NSC 5801," 16 January 1958, "NSC Policy Papers," Office of the Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (hereafter OSANSA), Eisenhower Library.

48. Ambassador Robert McClintock (Beirut) tel. to Department of State, 30 January 1958, *FRUS*, 1958–1960 (Washington, 1992), 11:8–9.

acid-tongued Cold Warrior who had served in Saigon during and after the Dien Bien Phu crisis before replacing Donald Heath as U.S. ambassador in Beirut in early 1958, wondered whether the Lebanese might be overreacting. Indeed, when Foreign Minister Malik repeatedly raised the specter of Syrian, Egyptian, and Soviet subversion in Lebanon and "reiterated his complaint [that the] US had no policy in [the] Middle East," an apoplectic McClintock cabled Washington that "if these Pirandello characters are in search of a policy we should give them one." Far from having done too little for its friends in Beirut, the new ambassador thought that the United States might already have done too much. With this in mind, McClintock recommended telling Lebanese leaders that "the Lord helps those who help themselves."<sup>49</sup>

Nevertheless, as the situation in Beirut deteriorated, U.S. officials realized that in the absence of divine intervention, they would probably have to help Chamoun achieve a happy ending to a story that seemed drawn straight from the theater of the political absurd. By late winter, few Americans doubted that Chamoun was angling for a second term, and fewer still doubted that such action would trigger civil strife in Lebanon, where pressure was mounting for political reform among many Muslims who believed that recent demographic shifts had reversed the narrow 6-to-5 Christian majority enshrined in the National Pact fifteen years earlier. The "chances are great," McClintock warned on 21 February, "that an anti-Chamoun campaign would turn into a fanatic anti-Chamoun-cum-anti-US drive on [the] part of certain elements of [the] Moslem population." Yet the Christian most likely to succeed Chamoun as president was army chief of staff Fuad Chehab, whose sporadic anti-Western diatribes prompted McClintock to dismiss him as "a neutral legume who would require careful pruning to grow in the right direction."<sup>50</sup> As Chehab's star waned in Washington, Chamoun and Malik depicted themselves as indispensable men and wrapped themselves ever more tightly in the cloak of the Eisenhower Doctrine, confident that "they could whistle up [the] Sixth Fleet any time they found themselves in trouble."<sup>51</sup> The Chamoun regime seemed hellbent, McClintock complained in late March, on converting Lebanon into "a sort of Christian Israel beleaguered by its neighbors and incapable of sustaining itself except under guns of foreign warships."<sup>52</sup>

Some at Foggy Bottom shared McClintock's mounting frustration. Official U.S. policy was to remain "aloof" from Chamoun's ill-advised bid for a second term and to "avoid any indication for [the] present that we are

49. McClintock tel. to Department of State, 9 January 1958, RG 59, 611.80/1-958; McClintock tel. to Department of State, 16 January 1958, *FRUS, 1958-1960* 11:3-5.

50. Edward Waggoner (NEA) to Stuart Rockwell (NEA), 17 January 1958, and McClintock tel. to Department of State, 21 February 1958, *FRUS, 1958-1960* 11:5-7, 10-13.

51. McClintock tel. to Department of State, 5 March 1958, *FRUS, 1958-1960* 11:14-16.

52. McClintock to Department of State, 20 March 1958, *FRUS, 1958-1960* 11:18-19.

prepared [to] support him."<sup>53</sup> To do otherwise, Hugh Cumming, chief of the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research, cautioned John Foster Dulles on 15 April, might "pull the keystone completely out of the delicate structure which has enabled Lebanon's Christians and Moslems to live peacefully together."<sup>54</sup> But after the CIA confirmed that Nasser was beaming violent anti-Chamoun radio diatribes into Lebanon and after Chamoun hinted that he might have to repudiate the Eisenhower Doctrine to placate pro-Nasser Lebanese Muslims, the focus of Washington's concern began to shift rapidly.<sup>55</sup> Once anti-Chamoun militants heeded Nasser's call and took to the streets of Beirut in early May, Dulles and Eisenhower agreed that "we should not look too closely into the local disaster" but should concentrate instead on the regional and global implications.<sup>56</sup> These implications were certainly not lost on Camille Chamoun, who believed that growing unrest in Lebanon actually strengthened his bid for a second term. Indeed, Chamoun smugly informed McClintock on 4 May that "once he has announced his intentions Western failure to support him will have repercussions among all [the] most moderate and responsible friends and allies of [the] West in [the] ME area."<sup>57</sup>

The Lebanese crisis escalated four days later when pro-Chamoun gunmen assassinated a leading anti-Chamoun journalist. Bloody street fighting erupted in Beirut, where a mob of angry Muslims stormed the U.S. Information Service library and burned it to the ground. According to American missionaries, the situation thirty miles up the coast in the Sunni stronghold of Tripoli was also "very, very bad," so bad, in fact, that McClintock feared that foreign nationals living there might soon have to be evacuated. And to the east in the Bekaa Valley, anti-Chamoun Shi'ite militiamen began to receive crates of guns and ammunition from Syrian officials working for Nasser's new UAR. By early May, even Lebanese Christians like Fuad Chehab were now telling U.S. officials that the "sole cause of [the] present revolutionary crisis in Lebanon is Chamoun's selfish determination to succeed himself in office." But true to form, Chamoun and Malik trotted out the shopworn Communist shibboleth, insisting that "both [the] Soviet and UAR embassies were working on a 24-hour basis to destroy [the] integrity of Lebanon" and urging the Americans to begin "forward planning" for military intervention.<sup>58</sup> "Have no doubt whatever," McClintock cabled Washington on 12 May, that Chamoun "has [the] fullest intention of request-

53. Department of State tel. to McClintock, 18 March 1958, *FRUS, 1958-1960* 11:17.

54. Cumming to Dulles, 15 April 1958, *FRUS, 1958-1960* 11 (microfiche supplement) (Washington, 1992), item 11.

55. CIA, "Assessment of the Political Situation in Lebanon," 4 April 1958, quoted in Alin, *United States & the 1958 Lebanon Crisis*, 73-74; McClintock tel. to Department of State, 25 April 1958, *FRUS, 1958-1960*, 11 (microfiche supplement), item 19.

56. Dulles memorandum of conversation, 2 May 1958, *FRUS, 1958-1960* 11:27-28.

57. McClintock tel. to Department of State, 4 May 1958, *FRUS, 1958-1960* 11:28-30.

58. McClintock tels. (2) to Department of State, 11 May 1958, *FRUS, 1958-1960* 11:35-38.

ing [the] landing of Marines by direct message to President Eisenhower" in the near future. The principal problem, the ambassador hastened to add, was that the Eisenhower Doctrine "probably does not apply in view of [the] absence of overt Communist aggression."<sup>59</sup>

When Chamoun asked McClintock the next day whether the United States would in fact honor a request to send troops to Lebanon, the Eisenhower administration was forced to sort through a rapidly shrinking set of options. Neither Ike nor the top aides he invited to the Oval Office on 13 May were eager to intervene in what they regarded as a Lebanese sectarian dispute, particularly when, as Secretary of State Dulles reminded them, strictly speaking, the Eisenhower Doctrine might not be applicable. Resorting to a "gun boat policy" in the Middle East like the one that the United States had long employed in Latin America, Dulles added, "no longer represented an acceptable practice" and would unleash "a wave of feeling against us throughout the Arab world." Although Eisenhower acknowledged that "there are difficulties and dangers in taking action," he insisted 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." Well aware that, from Venezuela to Indonesia, "the Communists" were "stirring up trouble in area after area," Dulles had to agree that if the United States ignored Chamoun's request for help, "we would have to accept heavy losses not only in Lebanon but elsewhere."<sup>60</sup> With this in mind, the Eisenhower administration informed Chamoun later that same day that it was prepared to honor his request for U.S. troops under three conditions: that he accept UN help in resolving the crisis, that he obtain support from at least one other Arab state, and that he renounce his own candidacy for a second term.<sup>61</sup>

Having issued Chamoun what he regarded as an ironclad pledge on 13 May, U.S. policymakers worked hard during the following two months to avoid having to fulfill it. American diplomats were instructed to remind Chamoun "that he does not have a blank check re [the] sending of Western forces" and to press him to accept a political compromise whereby he would support the election of his Christian rival, General Chehab, in exchange for Nasser's pledge "to use his influence to try to end dissidence within Lebanon."<sup>62</sup> Moreover, although the documentary record is still extremely sketchy, the CIA seems once again to have been channeling funds into Lebanon, this time to ensure that, one way or the other, Chamoun would

59. McClintock tel. to Department of State, 12 May 1958, *FRUS, 1958-1960* 11:40-41.

60. Department of State memorandum of conversation, "Lebanese Crisis," 13 May 1958, *FRUS, 1958-1960* 11:45-48; Andrew Goodpaster memorandum of conversation, 15 May 1958, Ann Whitman Files, DDE Diary Series, box 33, folder: "Staff Notes (2)-May 1958."

61. Department of State tel. to McClintock, 13 May 1958, *FRUS, 1958-1960* 11:49-50.

62. Department of State tel. to McClintock, 10 June 1958, Ann Whitman Files, International Series, folder: "Lebanon (2)"; Department of State to McClintock, 15 June 1958, *FRUS, 1958-1960* 11:128-29.

leave the presidential palace as scheduled later that summer. "We were progressing well on the covert side," Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs William Rountree told Eisenhower and Dulles on 9 June, "where greater flexibility is required in the use of money."<sup>63</sup> Ten days later, Lebanese junior officers contacted the U.S. embassy in Beirut to ask: "Will there or will there not be intervention if their coup against President Chamoun takes place, and/or if it succeeds?"<sup>64</sup> Meanwhile, UN Secretary General Dag Hammarskjold, with behind-the-scenes U.S. help, established a United Nations Observers Group in Lebanon (UNOGIL) in late June to curb the flow of arms across the Syro-Lebanese frontier and then pressured Chamoun to commence truce talks with his Muslim opponents.<sup>65</sup>

But the cagey Chamoun had been working hard since mid-May to meet the letter, if not the spirit, of the three conditions Ike and Dulles had laid out for U.S. intervention. He was grudgingly cooperating with UNOGIL and was talking with Hammarskjold, he had persuaded two other Arab states—Iraq and Jordan—to corroborate his charges of UAR subversion, and he had privately assured U.S. diplomats that he would step down as president on schedule in late September, provided there was a suitable successor. None of this, however, was terribly reassuring either to Lebanese Muslims, who redoubled their efforts in mid-June to unseat the Christian strongman, or to U.S. policymakers like John Foster Dulles, who growled that "there is a pretty fair chance that Chamoun may call on us to come in there, perhaps not because his own forces cannot hold the situation, but because they are not willing to try adequately."<sup>66</sup>

Eisenhower convened an emergency meeting at the White House on Sunday, 15 June, to review the crisis in Lebanon. Everyone agreed that "the long-term prospects remained gloomy" and placed much of the blame on Chamoun, who seemed determined to retain power even at the point of U.S. bayonets. "How can you save a country from its own leaders?" Eisenhower fumed as he contemplated the prospect of sending U.S. troops to Beirut. "We would be intervening to save a nation; and yet the nation is the people, and the people don't want our intervention." Worse still, the absence of "external aggression" in Lebanon would make it hard to sell U.S. intervention on Capitol Hill and Main Street. Yet nonintervention could prove even more costly. "If Chamoun calls on us and we do not respond," John Foster Dulles prophesied, "that will be the end of every pro-Western government in the area." Eisenhower agreed. "In such circumstances," he observed, "we would have to fulfill our commitments," even if it meant, as

63. Rountree quoted in Department of State memorandum of conversation, "Situation in Lebanon," 9 June 1958, *FRUS, 1958-1960* 11:104-6.

64. U.S. Embassy Beirut to Department of State, 20 June 1958, *FRUS, 1958-1960* 11:163n.4.

65. Meo, *Lebanon, Improbable Nation*, 179-80; editorial note 66, *FRUS, 1958-1960* 11:107-8.

66. Dulles phone call to Deputy Secretary of Defense Donald Quarles, 14 June 1958, *FRUS, 1958-1960* 11:116-17.

William Rountree predicted it would, "in all probability a pro-Western dictatorship, since there is not sufficient popular support in Lebanon for Western intervention."<sup>67</sup>

Throughout late June and into early July, the Eisenhower administration held out some hope that the United Nations might broker a last-minute settlement in the Lebanese civil war that would avert U.S. intervention. Dulles, for example, instructed McClintock to remind Chamoun that "it is almost a sine qua non that Lebanon have . . . full recourse to [the] orderly processes of [the] UN before finally requesting and receiving friendly assistance."<sup>68</sup> Eisenhower likewise believed that "unless the United Nations can be effective in the matter," the United States would soon face a Hobson's choice in Lebanon. "Under certain circumstances, to avoid intervention might be fatal," he explained to a friend on 23 June. "On the other hand, to intervene would increase, in the Arab world, antagonism toward the West."<sup>69</sup> When Senate leaders called on Dulles later that same day to voice their concerns about Lebanon, the secretary of state replied: "We are hoping that a combined United Nations effort on the borders and the government effort within the country can bring the situation under control."<sup>70</sup>

But Dulles was far from confident that UN mediators could secure a settlement before Chamoun requested U.S. troops. "In effect," he informed his visitors, "President Chamoun has a check on his desk which was given to him about 5 weeks ago, and this check is that any time he wants to call on help from the United States . . . , he would be able to do that," provided he went to the United Nations first. Having sought UN help, Chamoun now seemed certain to turn once again to the United States. And "if we did not supply troops if Chamoun tries to cash the check," Dulles believed "it would raise throughout the world the question of whether the United States was willing to perform on its promises when the chips were down." To be sure, U.S. intervention might well spark an anti-American backlash throughout the Arab world. But "Iran, Turkey, Pakistan, Thailand, Viet-Nam, and the Republic of China," Dulles insisted, "would all view our failure to act as an indication of [a] lack of willingness to support our friends when they are in trouble." In short, should UN efforts to end the Lebanese civil war fail, the Eisenhower administration would probably soon be compelled to intervene in order to preserve U.S. credibility.<sup>71</sup>

67. Department of State memorandum of conversation, "Lebanon," 15 June 1958, *FRUS*, 1958-1960 11:133-37.

68. Dulles to McClintock, 16 June 1958, *FRUS*, 1958-1960 11:142.

69. Eisenhower to Paul Hoffman, 23 June 1958, Ann Whitman Files, DDE Diary Series, box 33, folder: "Staff Notes (2)-June 1958."

70. Department of State memorandum of conversation, "The Situation in Lebanon," 23 June 1958, *FRUS*, 1958-1960 11:171-75.

71. Dulles's remarks of 23 June, as quoted by Carl Marcy, chief counsel of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, on 26 June 1958, in U.S. Senate, *Executive Sessions of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (Historical Series)* (Washington, 1975-93), 10:475-78.

For a brief moment in early July, it seemed that Dag Hammarskjöld had achieved an eleventh-hour breakthrough. After shuttling between Beirut and Cairo for a week, the secretary general flew to Washington, where he met with John Foster Dulles on 7 July to report that both Chamoun and his pro-Nasser opponents had agreed to “a cooling off period during which a compromise might be prepared.” The meeting evidently went quite well, for Hammarskjöld remarked privately shortly afterward that “Dulles has swung around, and American policy has become almost parallel” to that of the United Nations.<sup>72</sup> By 10 July, the word from UN and U.S. officials stationed in Beirut was that Chamoun was finally prepared to step down and was willing to turn power over to General Fuad Chehab at the end of the month.<sup>73</sup>

Four days later, however, left-wing officers overthrew the pro-Western regime in Iraq, sending shock waves from Baghdad to Beirut, where Camille Chamoun decided that the moment had finally arrived to cash his check. Just before noon on 14 July, Chamoun summoned Ambassador McClintock and his British colleague, George Middleton, to the presidential palace. “I explained to them that the Lebanese government had until this date refrained from requesting intervention by their respective countries in the hope that it would reestablish order and security without their military assistance,” Chamoun recalled in his memoirs. “But the revolution in Iraq, endorsed by the communists and Nasserites, constituted a new development of exceptional gravity that endangered not only Lebanon but the entire Middle East.” Pointing to the guarantees embodied in the Eisenhower Doctrine, Chamoun “called for an affirmative response within forty-eight hours, not by words but by positive actions.”<sup>74</sup>

The president of Lebanon would have his affirmative response in just half that time. Word of Chamoun’s melodramatic appeal for U.S. and U.K. troops and of his vow “to go down fighting” had arrived in Washington at daybreak on 14 July. Although Ambassador McClintock insisted that “so far as Lebanon alone is concerned, we cannot . . . discern [a] need for so portentous a step,” he realized that the Eisenhower administration must weigh broader “political and strategic considerations affecting the entire Middle East.”<sup>75</sup> Indeed, Ike and Dulles were already very well aware that the political upheavals in Baghdad and Beirut threatened Western interests throughout the region. Badly shaken by the Iraqi revolution, Turkey, Iran, and Pakistan were pressing hard for U.S. military intervention to contain the tide of radical nationalism sweeping the Arab world. So were the Saudis, who warned that if Britain and the United States failed to respond,

72. Dulles memorandum of conversation, 7 July 1958, *FRUS, 1958-1960* 11:200-201; diary entry for 9 July 1958, in Cyrus R. Sulzberger, *The Last of the Giants* (New York, 1970), 492.

73. McClintock to Department of State, 10 July 1958, *FRUS, 1958-1960* 11:204-5.

74. Chamoun, *Crise au Moyen-Orient*, 423-24 (my translation).

75. McClintock to Department of State, 14 July 1958, *FRUS, 1958-1960* 11:207-8, 215-16.

"they are finished as powers in the Middle East."<sup>76</sup> With pro-Western leaders nervously marking time from Riyadh to Karachi, Eisenhower convened key aides later that morning to decide whether to send troops into Lebanon. Before heading for the White House, top State Department, Pentagon, and CIA officials met briefly and concluded that unless Ike honored Chamoun's request, the United States would "lose influence not only in the Arab states of the Middle East but in the area more generally." As a result, "the dependability of United States commitments for assistance in the event of need would be brought into question throughout the world."<sup>77</sup>

As his advisers quietly filed into the Oval Office, Dwight Eisenhower could not have agreed more. Sitting "sprawled back in the chair behind his desk," Ike struck one participant as "the most relaxed man in the room," as someone who "knew exactly what he was going to do."<sup>78</sup> After listening to CIA director Allen Dulles catalog a daunting list of troubles almost certain to erupt from Saudi Arabia and Kuwait to Jordan and Morocco should the United States ignore Chamoun's plea for help, "the President said that the situation is clear to him—to lose this area by inaction would be far worse than the loss of China, because of the strategic position and resources of the Middle East." Although Secretary of State Dulles expected "a very bad reaction through most of the Arab states," he agreed that "the losses of doing nothing would be worse than the losses from action—and that consequently we should send our troops into Lebanon."<sup>79</sup> Convinced that "we couldn't sit around and see the Near East lost," Ike worried that "if there were any delay there probably wouldn't be any Lebanon to go into." Noting that "his mind had been made up long ago," Eisenhower snapped that "we had to act or get out of the Middle East" and ordered General Nathan Twining, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, to prepare the U.S. Sixth Fleet for action in the eastern Mediterranean.<sup>80</sup>

In an effort to limit the damage on Capitol Hill, Ike went through the motions of consulting Congress a few hours later. Insisting that "this is not a matter of a decision already taken," the president asked John Foster Dulles to lay out the rationale for U.S. intervention in Lebanon to the thirty senators and congressmen who had gathered in the Cabinet Room. Insisting that Lebanon's woes were the result of Soviet-inspired UAR subversion, Dulles described the present crisis as a symbolic test of U.S. credibility, not

76. Allen W. Dulles, "Briefing Notes," 14 July 1958, *CIA Research Reports: The Middle East, 1946-1976*, microfilm edition, ed. Paul Kesaris (Frederick, MD, 1981), reel 1. Ironically, most of the Saudi warning has been excised from the version of this document published in 1993. See *FRUS, 1958-1960* (Washington, 1993), 12:308-11.

77. "Meeting re Iraq," 9:30 A.M., 14 July 1958, *FRUS, 1958-1960* 11:209-11.

78. Robert Cutler, *No Time for Rest* (Boston, 1966), 362-63. Cutler served as Eisenhower's special assistant for national security affairs during the 1958 crisis.

79. Goodpaster memorandum of conversation, 10:50 A.M., 14 July 1958, *FRUS, 1958-1960* 11:211-15.

80. Department of State memorandum of conversation, "United States Military Intervention in Lebanon," 14 July 1958, RG 59, 783A.00/7-1458.

merely in the Middle East but throughout the Third World. "Turkey, Iran and Pakistan would feel—if we do not act—that our inaction is because we are afraid of the Soviet Union," he explained. "Elsewhere, the impact of not going in—from Morocco to Indo-China—would be very harmful to us."

Unmoved by Dulles's arguments, several senators feared that, as Montana's Mike Mansfield put it, "we would be getting into a civil war." Was the crisis in the Middle East really "Soviet- or Communist-inspired," William Fulbright, the Arkansas Democrat who would soon chair the Foreign Relations Committee, wondered. Or was Nasser perhaps "playing his own game?" Bridling at Fulbright's suggestion that, strictly speaking, the Eisenhower Doctrine might not be applicable in Lebanon, John Foster Dulles retorted that "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." Echoing his secretary of state, Eisenhower insisted that in cases like Lebanon, "the crucial question is what the victims believe." And Chamoun, Ike pointed out, "believes it is Soviet Communism that is causing him his trouble."<sup>81</sup>

Camille Chamoun was not the only foreign leader whose beliefs were crucial in Eisenhower's decision to intervene in Lebanon. Just a little over an hour after Fulbright and his friends filed back to Capitol Hill, Ike was on the telephone with British prime minister Harold Macmillan, who believed that the grave crisis in the Middle East required far broader action than American policymakers were contemplating. Eight months earlier, Macmillan and Eisenhower had agreed to begin contingency planning "for possible combined U.S.-U.K. military intervention in the event of an imminent or actual coup d'état in Jordan and/or Lebanon."<sup>82</sup> After Lebanon's chronic political unrest flared into full-blown civil war during the spring of 1958, Whitehall and the White House had decided to convene an Anglo-American "working group" in Washington in mid-May to put the finishing touches on "Operation Blue Bat," which called for U.K. troops to be airlifted from Cyprus to assist U.S. Marines in securing the Beirut area.<sup>83</sup> The working group met again in London in early June, where both sides agreed that once there was a decision to intervene, "U.S.-British operations will continue until stability within Lebanon is established under a viable pro-Western government."<sup>84</sup>

81. Goodpaster memorandum of conversation, 2:35 P.M., 14 July 1958, *FRUS*, 1958-1960 11:218-26.

82. Assistant Secretary of Defense John Irwin to Deputy Undersecretary of State Robert Murphy, 6 February 1958, *FRUS*, 1958-1960 11:9-10.

83. E. M. Rose (Eastern Department), "Lebanon," 9 May 1958, General Records of the Foreign Office, Record Class FO 371, 134156, Public Record Office, Kew, England (hereafter FO 371, with volume number); JCS 2293/1, "Review of Actions Related to U.S. Military Intervention in Lebanon (U)," 23 October 1958, *Declassified Documents Reference System*, 1983 (microfiche edition) (Washington, 1983), item 2324.

84. Rountree to Dulles, 17 June 1958, *FRUS*, 1958-1960 11:150-52.

The sudden overthrow of the pro-British regime in Baghdad on 14 July, however, prompted some second thoughts in London. Convinced that the Arab backlash against Operation Blue Bat would "destroy the oil fields and the pipelines and all the rest of it," Prime Minister Macmillan telephoned the White House to propose "a much larger operation" ranging far beyond what he termed "this 1/2 d. [half-penny] place" in Lebanon. In short, he told Ike, Britain and the United States must be ready to "carry this thing on to the Persian Gulf." Stressing that any Anglo-American agreement to mount "a big operation running all the way through Syria and Iraq" would require "decisions which are far far beyond anything which I have the power to do constitutionally," Eisenhower insisted that U.S. intervention must be limited to Lebanon. Meanwhile, British troops would be held in reserve on Cyprus for possible deployment to Beirut or to other Middle Eastern hot spots. Even these steps, Ike admitted, meant that "we are opening Pandora's box" without really knowing "what's at the bottom of it." Macmillan quite agreed. After all, he pointed out, the Jordanians had already asked whether Whitehall was willing to send paratroopers to Amman in an emergency. "The old box," Macmillan warned Ike as the two men said their goodbyes, "may do us a lot of harm."<sup>85</sup>

Although U.S. soldiers and diplomats were able, for the most part, to hold Pandora's mischief to a minimum in the weeks that followed, the success of Eisenhower's experiment with "limited war" in Lebanon owed as much to good luck as to wise crisis management. Even before their boots were dry, the U.S. Marines had very nearly stumbled into a D-Day shootout with Chamoun's opponents. By 15 July, Ike's principal worry was that U.S. troops might encounter hostile fire from pro-Nasser and anti-Chamoun mobs in Beirut. "The trouble is that we have a campaign of hatred against us, not by the governments but by the people," he confided to Vice President Richard M. Nixon that morning, and "the people are on Nasser's side."<sup>86</sup> In the event, however, the real danger came not from the Lebanese people, who made no move whatsoever to oppose Operation Blue Bat, but rather from Lebanon's armed forces, which, according to Ambassador McClintock, were threatening to "disintegrate on confessional lines." As the clock ticked down toward H-Hour, General Fuad Chehab warned U.S. officials that Muslim contingents of the Lebanese army might actually attack U.S. forces. With the United States and Lebanon teetering "on the brink of catastrophe," McClintock tried desperately to persuade Washington to delay the landings at the last minute.<sup>87</sup> Failing that, he raced to the

85. "Conversation between the President and Prime Minister," 10:30 P.M., 14 July 1958, FO 371, 134159. For the White House version of the conversation, which also contains the reference to Pandora's box, see *FRUS, 1958-1960* 11:231-34.

86. Goodpaster memorandum of conversation, 9:00 A.M., 15 July 1958, *FRUS, 1958-1960* 11:244-45.

87. McClintock to Department of State, 15 July 1958, and McClintock to CINCNELM, 15 July 1958, *FRUS, 1958-1960* 11:247-49.

beaches in the embassy's Cadillac, where he conferred with U.S. and Lebanese commanders, smoothed ruffled feathers on both sides, and narrowly averted bloodshed.<sup>88</sup>

Having had the good fortune to avoid an ugly incident at Beirut, U.S. policymakers worried that their luck was about to run out 150 miles to the southeast in Amman, where Jordan's King Hussein was pressing hard for British and U.S. military intervention. Since ascending the Hashemite throne at the age of eighteen in 1953, Hussein had faced a daunting array of problems. Nearly half of his two million subjects were Palestinians, who had fled their homeland during the 1948 Arab-Israeli war to brood in the bleak makeshift refugee camps that dotted the West Bank and ringed Amman. Devoid of the oil wealth that enriched its Arab neighbors to the east, Jordan was utterly dependent on British and U.S. financial largesse to make ends meet. Bombarded constantly by threats from Palestinian firebrands at home and from Arab rivals abroad, Hussein held power thanks mainly to the Arab Legion, a crack battalion of fiercely loyal British-trained Bedouins, assisted by an occasional show of force by the U.S. Sixth Fleet over the horizon in the eastern Mediterranean. With U.S. blessing, in March 1958 Hussein agreed to join his cousin, King Feisal of Iraq, in forming an anti-Nasser "Arab Union," a loose confederation with close ties to the West designed more to boost Hashemite morale than to enhance Iraqi and Jordanian military preparedness. The revolution that rocked Iraq four months later not only destroyed the Arab Union but also raised fresh fears in Washington, London, and Tel Aviv that a similar fate lay in store for Jordan.<sup>89</sup>

Upon learning of the bloody coup in Baghdad, King Hussein's first instinct had been to lead the Arab Legion into Iraq to avenge his cousin's murder. Realizing that this would require Western help, Hussein summoned U.S. and U.K. diplomats to the royal palace on 15 July and demanded to know whether Britain and the United States were willing to intervene in Jordan or Iraq, as they had in Lebanon. The British and the Americans must understand that "if Iraq went, the whole Middle East would go, including Jordan and the Persian Gulf," Hussein thundered. "What were we going to do about it?"<sup>90</sup> Within twenty-four hours, the king

88. Charles W. Thayer, *Diplomat* (New York, 1959), 31-34; Robert McClintock, *The Meaning of Limited War* (New York, 1967), 108-10.

89. For the background to the 1958 crisis in Jordan see Uriel Dann, *King Hussein and the Challenge of Arab Radicalism, 1955-1967* (New York, 1989), 78-95; Michael B. Oren, "The Test of Suez: Israel and the Middle East Crisis of 1958," *Studies in Zionism* 12:1 (1991): 55-83; and Ritchie Owendale, "Great Britain and the Anglo-American Invasion of Jordan and Lebanon in 1958," *International History Review* 16 (May 1994): 285-90.

90. Chargé Paul Mason (Amman) to Foreign Office, 15 July 1958, Records of the Prime Minister's Office, Record Class PREM 11, folder 2380, PRO (hereafter PREM 11, with folder); Chargé Thomas Wright (Amman) to Department of State, 15 July 1958, *FRUS, 1958-1960* 11:302-3.

forced the issue by formally requesting U.S. and U.K. military intervention in Jordan.<sup>91</sup>

Eager to prevent events from spiraling out of control, Eisenhower and Macmillan agreed that Foreign Secretary Selwyn Lloyd should fly to Washington on 16 July to confer with top U.S. officials. "I was determined to do all I could to help Hussein, . . . but I first had to know what the Americans proposed doing," Macmillan recalled long afterward. "We had burnt our fingers over Suez and I had no intention of doing so for a second time."<sup>92</sup> Lloyd reported that U.S. policymakers were deeply worried about Jordan, not least because they knew that Israel was poised to seize the West Bank, a move that would almost certainly trigger a general Middle East war. Yet according to John Foster Dulles, "at the moment the United States was inhibited" from honoring Hussein's appeal for help, in part because U.S. troops were already overextended in Beirut, in part because Ike had assured Congress "only 2 days ago that there were no plans for sending American forces other than to Lebanon." The best that the United States could offer, Dulles explained, was "logistical assistance" for a British airlift into Amman and diplomatic help in securing permission from Tel Aviv for U.K. transports to overfly Israeli territory on their way from Cyprus to Jordan.<sup>93</sup> Doubtless still rather uneasy over this lukewarm U.S. show of support, Macmillan nevertheless dispatched thirty-seven hundred British paratroopers to Amman, where they landed without incident just before noon on 17 July and proceeded to help the jittery young king stabilize the confused situation in Jordan.<sup>94</sup>

Lloyd and Dulles met later that afternoon to compare notes. They agreed that British intervention in Jordan and U.S. intervention in Lebanon had shored up Western interests in the eastern Mediterranean and averted an Arab-Israeli war. But what about the equally unstable situation in the Persian Gulf, where oil-rich sheikdoms like Kuwait seemed especially vulnerable to Iraqi aggression or Nasserite subversion? "If a coup could be carried out in Baghdad," Lloyd pointed out, "there was an equal danger of one in Kuwait." Dulles agreed, adding that Britain and the United States must be prepared to use force, if necessary, to retain access to Persian Gulf petroleum. "Were Nasser and his friends to get hold of the Saudi and Kuwait oil fields," Dulles feared that "they would demand terms for the supply of oil so stiff as to create the greatest dangers for the economies of the United Kingdom and Europe." So important was the oil of the Persian Gulf, he

91. Chargé Thomas Wright (Amman) to Department of State, 16 July 1958, *FRUS*, 1958-1960 11:312-14.

92. Macmillan quoted in James Lunt, *Hussein of Jordan: Searching for a Just and Lasting Peace* (New York, 1989), 50-51.

93. Lloyd to Macmillan, 16 July 1958, PREM 11, folder 2380; Dulles-Macmillan telephone conversation, 16 July 1958, and Department of State memorandum of conversation, 17 July 1958, *FRUS*, 1958-1960 11:316, 317-18.

94. Ovendale, "Britain and the Anglo-American Invasion of Jordan," 292-98.

concluded, "that we should not exclude the possibility of early military action to secure Kuwait, even if the Kuwaiti authorities were not at this stage willing to invite us in."<sup>95</sup>

Such a scenario did not seem at all far-fetched during the summer of 1958. Britain had, of course, exercised a protectorate over Kuwait since 1922, when U.K. officials carved up the eastern fringes of the defunct Ottoman Empire with an eye to ensuring British control over the oil rumored to lie beneath the desolate sands that stretched south from the Shatt al-Arab. Relations between Whitehall and the Sabah clan, which had ruled Kuwait for nearly two centuries, remained fairly cordial until the mid-1950s, when disputes over how to put the sheikdom's enormous oil wealth to best use produced considerable friction. Nor did it help matters that Kuwait's "Ruler," Sheik Abdullah al-Salim al-Sabah, came under increasing fire from Palestinian oil workers, who charged that he was little more than a British puppet. Nevertheless, down through early 1958 the British continued to work steadfastly to ensure the "preservation of the present Sabah family position" in the face of "pressures from indigenous nationalist sentiment, stimulated by Egyptian propaganda."<sup>96</sup> By June, however, some U.K. officials feared that "the Ruler might feel, in some future crisis, that the threat of Nasserism or the pull of Arab solidarity was so strong that he must place restrictions on our free access to Kuwait oil." And this, in turn, might necessitate a British decision "to intervene without the Ruler's consent."<sup>97</sup>

That future crisis seemed close at hand before the summer was out. Well aware that trouble was brewing in Kuwait, Eisenhower cabled Macmillan on 18 July that "we must, I think, not only try to bolster up both . . . Lebanon and Jordan, we must also, and this seems to me even more important, see that the Persian Gulf area stays within the Western orbit."<sup>98</sup> Macmillan agreed and instructed Lloyd to raise the possibility of joint Anglo-American intervention in Kuwait. "Five British battalions were converging on the Persian Gulf," Lloyd told John Foster Dulles on 19 July. "A decision had to be made within two or three days as to whether these forces should be put into Kuwait against the opposition of the Ruling family." Would the United States support such a British operation? Yes, Dulles replied, because if Arab radicals were to gain control over Kuwaiti oil, "the West would be held to ransom." To signal Washington's growing concern, Ike was moving elements of the U.S. Seventh Fleet from Okinawa to the Indian Ocean with orders to ensure that the Persian Gulf oil fields "did not fall into Nasser's hands."<sup>99</sup>

95. Lloyd to Macmillan, 17 July 1958, PREM 11, folder 2380; Department of State memorandum of conversation, 17 July 1958, *FRUS, 1958-1960* 12:776-78.

96. Foreign Office Levant Department, "Review of Middle East Problems Bearing upon the Supply of Oil to the Free World," 10 May 1957, FO 371, 127757.

97. Donald Riches (Levant Department) minute, 5 June 1958, FO 371, 133789.

98. Eisenhower to Macmillan, 18 July 1958, *FRUS, 1958-1960* 11:330-31.

99. Lloyd memorandum of conversation, 19 July 1958, FO 371, 133823.

Although Dulles hoped it would be possible to avoid intervening in the Persian Gulf, he was far from confident. "The British were concerned over Kuwait, the brightest star in the U.K. oil galaxy," he told Eisenhower on 24 July. "Perhaps Kuwait could be held by force in the event of trouble, but it was not clear what the workers in the oil fields would do."<sup>100</sup> By early August, however, it was clear that the trouble had passed and that the Sabah clan would be "able [to] survive [the] latest ME upheaval for [an] indefinite period" without the help of U.S. or U.K. troops.<sup>101</sup> His resolve stiffened by the quiet show of force by the Royal Navy and the Seventh Fleet, Sheik Abdullah unleashed his ruthless secret police against his critics at home, distanced himself from Arab radicals abroad, and kept Kuwaiti oil flowing to Western Europe without interruption.<sup>102</sup>

The Eisenhower administration was lucky to have avoided U.S. intervention in Kuwait and Jordan and to have avoided bloodshed in Lebanon, because grave doubts were growing on Capitol Hill about the wisdom and the legality of Ike's recent actions. Oregon's Wayne Morse had set the tone during an executive session of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on 15 July, thundering that he was "not going to support the mixing of American blood with Arabian oil in the Middle East today" and demanding "to know what the legal basis for this intervention is." As he would six years later when he cast a lonely vote against Lyndon B. Johnson's Tonkin Gulf Resolution, Morse warned that "we are wrong every time we get mixed up in another country's civil war." Morse's colleagues echoed his concerns in less apocalyptic language. Massachusetts Democrat John F. Kennedy, for example, wondered whether the Eisenhower Doctrine was really applicable in the Lebanese crisis, as did Minnesota's Hubert H. Humphrey, who termed intervention in Lebanon "a sad mistake" that would be "bitterly resented for years to come" throughout the Arab world.<sup>103</sup>

The most articulate Senate critic of Eisenhower's handling of the 1958 crisis in the Middle East, however, was William Fulbright. Throughout the spring, the Arkansas Democrat had insisted that the disorder and instability plaguing the region resulted from Arab nationalism, not from Soviet subversion, a point he had hammered home when he and other congressional leaders met with Ike on the afternoon of 14 July. "This is a curious outgrowth of the Eisenhower Doctrine," Fulbright told his fellow senators once the Marines were ashore at Beirut. Sixteen months earlier, he reminded everyone, Congress had taken pains to authorize military intervention in the Middle East only to repel an "armed attack by any country

100. Minutes of the 373d NSC Meeting, 24 July 1958, Ann Whitman Files, NSC Series.

101. Chargé Talcott Seelye (Kuwait) to Department of State, 3 August 1958, *FRUS*, 1958-1960 12:778-80.

102. Selwyn Lloyd, "Kuwait: International Relations," 4 November 1958, Cabinet Papers, CAB 129/95, PRO.

103. The Morse, Kennedy, and Humphrey remarks are in "Situation in the Middle East," 15 July 1958, *Executive Sessions of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee* 10:506-7.

dominated by international communism," a situation that simply "does not apply" in Lebanon. This being so, Fulbright predicted that the White House would probably try to justify its questionable actions by invoking the so-called Mansfield Amendment, a clause in the March 1957 congressional resolution affirming that "the independence and integrity of the nations of the Middle East" were "vital to the national interests" of the United States. While the Montana Democrat who had authored the clause sat and fumed, Wayne Morse rose to suggest that Ike would be well advised to think twice, since "Senator [Mike] Mansfield himself has on the floor of the Senate on three different occasions in advance rebutted that twisting of his amendment."<sup>104</sup>

When Undersecretary of State Christian Herter tried to use the Mansfield Amendment to rationalize American intervention in Lebanon during a closed-door hearing the next day, he was challenged by angry Senate Democrats. Pointing out that Camille Chamoun's Muslim rivals bitterly opposed Ike's action, Hubert Humphrey wondered "whether or not there was really overt Communist aggression" behind the crisis. Terming Operation Blue Bat "a tragic historic mistake," Wayne Morse insisted that "the principle of self-determination ought to prevail in Lebanon," even if this meant accepting an anti-Western regime in Beirut. And William Fulbright questioned whether the Eisenhower administration really understood "what is going on in the Middle East." Was the president, Fulbright asked Herter, responding to a "Russian-directed move both in Lebanon and Iraq or in either?" Or was he responding instead to "indigenous Arab nationalism which is seeking to bring about the unity of the Arabs regardless of what Russia may want?" In short, did the Eisenhower administration regard the present crisis as "primarily inspired by the Russians," or not? "I just wouldn't know," Herter replied softly.<sup>105</sup>

Actually, of course, Herter knew very well, as did his superiors, that Lebanon's woes, like the wider turmoil then sweeping the Middle East, stemmed from Arab nationalism, not from international communism. A National Intelligence Estimate dated 22 July, for example, confirmed that pro-Nasser pan-Arab radicals, not pro-Soviet subversives, were behind most of the United States's problems in the Muslim world. "The part played by local Communist parties in the area," CIA experts concluded, "is slight."<sup>106</sup> Ike himself admitted as much later that same day, confessing privately that "the basic reason for our Mid East troubles is Nasser's capture of Arab loyalty and enthusiasm throughout the region."<sup>107</sup> For Herter to

104. Fulbright's and Morse's comments are in "The Situation in the Middle East," 15 July 1958, *Executive Sessions of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee* 10:510-11.

105. Humphrey's, Morse's, Fulbright's, and Herter's remarks of 16 July 1958 are all in *Executive Sessions of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee* 10:527, 532-34, 539, 543.

106. SNIE 30-2-58, "The Middle East Crisis," 22 July 1958, *FRUS, 1958-1960* 12:87-93.

107. Eisenhower to George M. Humphrey, 22 July 1958, *FRUS, 1958-1960* 11:365.

have admitted this publicly during his 16 July confrontation with the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, however, would have raised awkward questions about Eisenhower's use of presidential power. It was far simpler, Ike and his advisers believed, to exaggerate the Communist threat in Lebanon and stretch the logic of the Eisenhower Doctrine to the breaking point than to risk defeat on Capitol Hill by seeking congressional approval for the use of U.S. troops to combat anti-Western Arab nationalists.

As it was, Senate Democrats suggested that the president's recent actions in the Middle East went well beyond what Congress had authorized under the Eisenhower Doctrine in March 1957. Congressional leaders, John Kennedy pointed out, expected to be consulted about possible intervention in advance, not merely informed about it after the fact. "We had one other consultation on Indochina" at the time of the Dien Bien Phu crisis, Kennedy recalled, when "the Congressional leadership was given a very clear opportunity to say what they thought, and they said they were opposed to it, and I think that that turned it off." Mike Mansfield raised an even more fundamental issue. In the absence of Communist-inspired aggression in Lebanon, the Montana Democrat asked Herter, was not Ike really relying upon his "residual powers as Commander in Chief," and not upon the congressional authorization whose strict terms were spelled out in the Eisenhower Doctrine, to send U.S. troops to Beirut? Herter tried to hedge, but the disquieting answer to Mansfield's question clearly seemed to be "yes."<sup>108</sup>

Fortunately for Dwight Eisenhower, the U.S. Marines would fare far better in Beirut during the summer of 1958 than they would seven years later after Lyndon Johnson sent them ashore on the South Vietnamese coast at Danang. By late July, U.S. troops were policing an uneasy truce between Lebanese Christians and Muslims, while special presidential emissary Robert Murphy was working behind the scenes to broker a political compromise between Camille Chamoun and his opponents. With Washington's blessing, on 31 July the Lebanese parliament voted that Chamoun should be succeeded as president by General Fuad Chehab, who promised to appoint several of his predecessor's leading critics to posts in the new cabinet. Although lame-duck foreign minister Charles Malik warned his old friend John Foster Dulles in mid-August that U.S. forces might have to remain in Beirut indefinitely to maintain law and order, the last Marines would leave Lebanon without fanfare on 25 October 1958, just one month after Chehab replaced Chamoun in the presidential palace.<sup>109</sup> A week later, King Hussein bid a reluctant farewell to the last British Tommies, who were flown from Jordan back to their base in Cyprus by the U.S. Air Force. And by the end

<sup>108</sup> Kennedy's and Mansfield's remarks of 16 July 1958 are in *Executive Sessions of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee* 10:526-27, 550-51.

<sup>109</sup> McClintock to Department of State, 31 July 1958, Department of State memorandum of conversation, 16 August 1958, and editorial note 357, *FRUS, 1958-1960* 11:415-18, 481-85, 615.

of the year, the Seventh Fleet had departed from a relatively tranquil Persian Gulf in order to patrol the increasingly troubled waters of the Formosa Straits.<sup>110</sup> "It had been the kind of intervention," Ike told Harold Macmillan with a smile during a March 1959 post-mortem on Operation Blue Bat, "which had not left a nasty aftertaste."<sup>111</sup>

Yet what had seemed at the time to be a stunning U.S. success in the Middle East now appears to have been more risky in the short run and more costly in the long run than the Eisenhower administration realized. The entire crisis might actually have been avoided had not key officials at the White House, the State Department, and the CIA developed such close personal ties with pro-Western Lebanese leaders like Camille Chamoun and Charles Malik. Having meddled in the politics of Lebanon for almost five years, the Eisenhower administration really had little choice but to honor Chamoun's request for U.S. troops in 1958. Furthermore, despite the Pentagon's meticulous military planning, events had nearly spiraled out of control, both in Beirut, where U.S. Marines almost blundered into a shooting match with Lebanese militiamen, and in the wider arena as well, where U.K. officials lobbied for Anglo-American armed intervention in the Persian Gulf that foreshadowed Operation Desert Storm a generation later.

If U.S. intervention in Lebanon proved riskier than it looked, it would also prove more costly. Although Eisenhower had couched his actions in the rhetoric of anticommunism and the ritual of collective security, privately he admitted in July 1958 that revolutionary nationalism was the real threat to U.S. interests in the Middle East. In so doing he helped place the United States on a collision course with Egypt's Gamal Abdel Nasser and other Arab radicals during the following quarter century. Moreover, because the absence of Communist subversion in Lebanon prevented him from acting under the auspices of the Eisenhower Doctrine, Ike had to resort instead to his powers as commander-in-chief, a maneuver that some on Capitol Hill regarded as a dangerous step down the road toward what would later be called the imperial presidency.

Why had Eisenhower insisted upon flexing presidential muscle to combat Arab nationalism in 1958? He did so for the same reason that Lyndon Johnson would plunge into the Vietnamese quagmire after 1964: credibility. Like LBJ, Ike believed that failure to support such pro-Western leaders as Camille Chamoun or Ngo Dinh Diem would erode the United States's credibility as a guarantor and invite Soviet adventurism in the Third World. For Eisenhower in the Middle East as for Johnson in Southeast Asia, the U.S. economic and strategic interests at stake seemed at times to loom larger than those in China, where during the late 1940s Harry S. Truman's rejec-

110. Eisenhower, *Waging Peace*, 288-89; Ovendale, "Britain and the Anglo-American Invasion of Jordan," 300-302.

111. Department of State memorandum of conversation, "Middle East," 22 March 1959, *FRUS*, 1958-1960 12:218.

tion of military intervention had produced political and diplomatic catastrophe. Although Ike's cautious instincts and tactical virtuosity helped ensure that the outcome in Lebanon in 1958 was radically different from that in Vietnam in 1968, the Cold War convictions and strategic assumptions that guided Dwight Eisenhower during his finest hour in the Middle East clearly helped start the clock ticking toward the United States's darkest hour in Southeast Asia a decade later.