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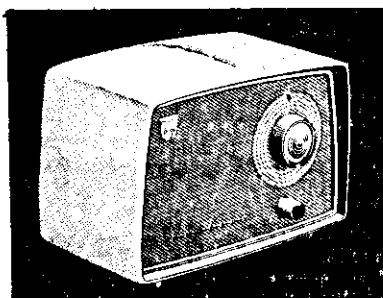
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AUGUST 1, 1958

After the Interventions

WHEN the President of Lebanon and the King of Jordan asked for military aid, and received it, no aggression was committed—a fact which seems to have been ignored by leader-writers who found close parallels between the interventions at Suez and Beirut. But the American and British forces have taken up positions which will place legality under heavy strains. And for a critical period they will be acting outside United Nations, though admittedly in conformity with the Charter. The revolt in Lebanon had already been brought to the notice of the Security Council, and a team of observers—94 officers from 11 nations, with transport and administrative staff—was in the country. On July 3 the Secretary-General of UN, Mr Hammarskjöld, told a press conference that there had been no mass infiltration of men and materials into Lebanon. In less than two weeks the position might have changed; but the real impetus to direct action came from the *coup d'état* in Iraq. American and British interests in the Middle East, especially the oil fields, were threatened, and it seemed probable that only prompt action could save them. The action may be restricted, and for the present successful; but how far it will serve the wider interests of peace must remain a difficult and anxious question.

It may be true that Arab nationalism has been encouraged by Russia (who hastened to recognise the new regime in Iraq almost before the smoke had cleared from the streets of Baghdad), and that the United Arab Republic is a monument to the dangerous ambitions of Nasser. Yet there is no doubt that much genuine sentiment is behind the Arab resurgence. Family divisions keep the Arabs turbulent, and union may still be superficial; but every move in the Middle East by a western Power which can be made to look like interference will make the union stronger. Whatever the Suez crisis may have done to Western unity, its effect east of the Canal was to draw the Arab nations closer together. A stage has now been reached where

nationalism cannot be checked by any political action which fails to place Arab interests above those of all outsiders. Its effects can be restrained, or postponed, by keeping large military forces at strategic points within the Arab zone. This means in fact a return—under less favourable conditions—to the policy abandoned by Britain when she surrendered her bases in Egypt. And how far can this policy be sustained without the risk of graver involvement?

If control of the troubled region is necessary—and it clearly is—the only form it can take which will help to preserve peace is international. The argument used against such action is that it is too slow and ineffectual. Some leader-writers still speak of United Nations as if it were a super-government, badly put together, and afflicted with palsy. It is instead an instrument for negotiation. Policy must be decided by the member states, who thereby commit themselves to collective action. President Eisenhower's advisers were convinced that action in Lebanon should not be delayed while the issues were placed before the Security Council. Their moral case would have been stronger if the risk had been taken, whatever the result; but their strategic position could have been weaker: they were obviously alarmed by the speed of events in Iraq. Yet the leaders of the United States and Britain have both given pledges that their troops will be withdrawn from Lebanon and Jordan as soon as the Security Council has taken effective measures. It may be said that the Council will be frustrated by Russia. But Russia did not veto the sending of observers to Lebanon; and unless her leaders want war (which is unlikely, in spite of warlike gestures near the frontiers of Turkey and Persia), they may see as clearly as western statesmen the need for a controlled or neutral zone in the Middle East. There will of course be disagreement over the method of control, and already the Security Council has had tense debates. But the risk of fatal action is lessened while the debates continue.

If the immediate danger is averted, and the area is placed under international supervision, it will be possible to bring the more acrid disputes to negotiation. There are formidable problems: the protection of Israel, the disposal of the hard core of Palestinian refugees, and social reform in sheikdoms where wealth from the oil wells is grossly maldistributed. None of these problems can be settled while the area remains almost in a state of war; and unless they are settled, war will be inevitable. The forces of east and west are now in dangerous proximity. It may seem late in the day to be seeking legal and international remedies; but the alternative is a continued friction between mighty opposites which could produce a conflagration.

—M.H.H.

N.Z. LISTENER, AUGUST 1, 1958.