Bruce O. Riedel. *Beirut 1958: How America's Wars in the Middle East Began.* Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2020. 136 pp. $24.99, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8157-3729-2.

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The deployment of US Marines to Lebanon in 1958 is an important and understudied chapter in the history of American foreign policy in the Middle East. Bruce Riedel, a former Middle Eastern analyst at the CIA and now a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, was a child in Beirut at the time, where his father was serving with the United Nations. In his book *Beirut 1958,* Riedel provides an admirably concise account of the events that precipitated the crisis of July 1958 and the Eisenhower administration's decision to deploy US troops to Beirut to protect a friendly regime. Drawing mainly on published and secondary sources, he argues that the Lebanon deployment was a major turning point for US policy in the Middle East and that policymakers can learn important lessons from these events.

Riedel's first two chapters survey the political situation in the Middle East from the rise of Gamal Abdel Nasser in Egypt in late 1952 to the Suez Crisis of October 1956 and the creation of the United Arab Republic (UAR) in February 1958. While Nasser emerged as a dominant figure in Arab politics and a strong critic of the West during this period, the Arab world remained deeply divided between Nasser allies like Syria, and more pro-Western Arab states like Saudi Arabia. Chapters 1 and 2 also discuss the United States' view of events in the region during the presidency of Dwight Eisenhower. Following the disruption of the Suez Crisis in 1957, Eisenhower announced in January 1957 that the United States would significantly increase its involvement in the Middle East. This initiative, which became known as the Eisenhower Doctrine, was a "crucial milestone in America's engagement with the Middle East" and set the stage for what came next (p. 32).

In chapter 3 Riedel turns his attention to Lebanon, a country that in 1958 was at a precarious moment in its history. During the 1950s and 1960s the city of Beirut was a cosmopolitan center of tourism, business, and diplomacy, but tensions simmered below the surface among Lebanon's mixed Christian and Muslim population. The crisis of 1958 arose when Christian and pro-Western president Camille Chamoun sought a second term as president. After Chamoun claimed victory in a disputed presidential election, fighting broke out between Lebanon's sectarian factions that threatened to draw the entire country into civil war. Riedel stresses that this was more than a political crisis—it was a "complex struggle over the identity of the nation" (p. 60).

Chapter 4 details how US officials responded to the crisis in Lebanon and ultimately concluded that military intervention was necessary to prevent

the region from falling into chaos. As Riedel notes, the situation in Lebanon was not the Eisenhower administration's only concern in the Middle East in early 1958. After witnessing the growth of Nasser's influence in the region, instability in neighboring Jordan, and a July 14 coup in Iraq (which caught US officials completely by surprise), Eisenhower and his advisers decided that they had to act quickly, and that the best response was to send in US troops.

Chapter 5 recounts the deployment of US forces to Lebanon, from their initial landing on July 15 to their eventual withdrawal three months later. According to Riedel, this first US combat mission to the Middle East "began with a combination of farce, comedy, and grave danger" (p. 92). Ultimately it was American diplomats, including Ambassador Robert McClintock and special envoy Robert Murphy, who helped resolve the Lebanon crisis through negotiations with Lebanese officials. These talks led to a peaceful transfer of power and prevented a civil war.

In his epilogue, Riedel outlines four lessons that policymakers should take away from the 1958 Beirut deployment. Briefly summarized, they are to avoid panic, not mislead the American people or Congress, be wary of listening to regional allies, and listen to diplomats and spies on the ground.

Beirut 1958 is a valuable reminder that US military intervention in the Middle East is not a solely recent phenomenon.[1] While Riedel does readers a great service by telling a complicated story in highly readable prose and fewer than 150 pages, he makes no major new discoveries or revelations.[2] But there is still more to say about US intervention in Beirut in 1958. One perspective that is still missing is that of the US servicemen who deployed to Beirut. It is notable that both US peacekeeping deployments to Beirut during the twentieth century (1958 and 1982-83) involved US Marines, and their perspective on what US military intervention in the Middle East looked like from the ground level calls out for further study.

Notes

[1]. Andrew Bacevich, *America's War for the Greater Middle East: A Military History* (New York: Random House, 2016), for instance, argues that US military involvement in the Middle East began in the late 1970s.

[2]. For three studies based on extensive archival research, see Irene L. Gendzier, *Notes from the Minefield: United States Intervention in Lebanon and the Middle East, 1945-1958* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); Peter L. Hahn, *Caught in the Middle East: U.S. Policy toward the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1945-1961* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); and Salim Yaqub, *Containing Arab Nationalism: The Eisenhower Doctrine and the Middle East* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

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