"A Historic Tragic Mistake":
Transnational Dissent and the U.S. Intervention in the Lebanese Civil War of 1958"

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The summer of 1958 was an intense time in U.S-Middle East relations. Amid a tumultuous round of unions, revolutions, and conspiracies, the United States conducted its first, open military intervention in the area, plunging itself into the midst of a two-month long civil war in Lebanon. Responding to a dire appeal for help from Lebanese president, Camille Chamoun, U.S. president Dwight Eisenhower ordered what amounted to roughly 14,000 U.S. forces to intervene in “tiny Lebanon.” Many Lebanese peoples quickly conveyed their frustrations—either directly or indirectly—to U.S. society, voicing their disappointment in the U.S. government for intervening in their internal affairs, supporting an unpopular head of state, and prolonging an unwanted conflict. As U.S. boots set foot on Lebanese soil, many Lebanese projected U.S. intervention as an unwanted, “new age of empire.” These mounting local protests against U.S. “empire” rapidly found their way into the U.S. public sphere, as national newspapers and television stations eagerly covered the U.S. intervention and Lebanese political developments. While Americans consumed information from Lebanon and processed Lebanese dissent, many formed a common cause with the latter in questioning the U.S. government’s motives for intervention and demanding an immediate withdrawal. Rather than being on separate sides of the political spectrum, Lebanese and American peoples, within the first two weeks of the U.S. intervention in the Lebanese civil war of 1958, formed an informal, transnational socio-political network that shaped the course of a national and international conflict. This paper argues that, together, Americans and Lebanese played an important—yet ignored—role in ending the first U.S. armed intervention in the Middle East and the Lebanese civil war of 1958.