

Talk of U.S. Oil Invasion

Beirut

Both Arab leaders and Western diplomats are deeply concerned over the possibility of American military intervention to seize Middle East oil fields, despite Pentagon moves to ease the tension.

Asked if the Arabs are needlessly apprehensive on the subject, The American

ambassador to an oil-producing nation said yesterday: "I wish they were."

He acknowledged that some Pentagon hawks have been pressing for just such an invasion. He warned it could lead not only to destruction of a major portion of the world's oil supply but to a holocaust with fallout effects similar to those of an

atomic bomb.

Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, the principal Arab oil-producing nations, have placed explosive charges around their principle oil fields, which can be set off at a moment's notice, according to reports reaching here.

The ambassador said it would be virtually impossible to put out the fires resulting from such explosions. Further, he said, prevailing winds would carry the dense smoke clouds across the Persian Gulf to Iran, where the fallout of sulphur dioxide could result in the deaths of thousands.

The most immediate Arab concern over the possible use of U.S. troops to seize the oil fields arose from a statement Sunday by American Defense Secretary James R. Schlesinger that the Arabs would be risking the use of force against them if they carried their oil embargo too far.

The defense secretary's remarks followed a statement by President Nixon in October in which he compared U.S. policy in the Middle East today to that of 1958 when American Marines landed in Lebanon.

Schlesinger himself said he did not think the oil problem would come to the use of force. The Pentagon also has since tried to soften his statement by pointing out that the defense secretary said on December 15 that he thought the era had largely passed when the United States would resort to force to protect its overseas economic interests.

These qualifications have done nothing to still the uproar in the Arab world over his comments. A Cairo newspaper accused the United States of going back to "gunboat diplomacy" and one in Kuwait said such threats have no place in modern international relations.

Travelers from Saudi Arabia said yesterday that authorities there have wired the Ghawar oil field, largest known reserve in the world, with explosives and have warned Washington that oil minister Ahmed Zaki Yamani was speaking for King Faisal when he said recently use of force by the United States would lead to blowing up of the Saudi oil fields.

Damascus radio also warned that the Arabs will destroy their oil resources if

the United States attempts to seize them.

Arab commentators have expressed the fear that President Nixon, beset by Watergate and economic troubles at home, might welcome a military diversion abroad. They also have noted that the Persian Gulf oil fields are bracketed by U.S. Sixth Fleet units in the Mediterranean and Seventh Fleet units in the Indian Ocean.

Petroleum experts noted

that the high content of sulphur dioxide in smog was responsible for such air pollution disasters as the one in London that took 3500 lives and the one in Donora, Pa., that killed 20.

Dense smoke clouds from direct oil fires could have an even deadlier effect, they said.

Oil experts also noted the extreme difficulty of putting out oil field fires once they start.

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