Increasingly, the State Department viewpoint has been that 'other nations' means the United Nations, and U.S. initiatives on Arab-Israel issues have accordingly been expressed through that agency. But even activity within this modified circle of influence has been so restrained at times as to be imperceptible. A significant case in point is afforded by the recent Egyptian Suez Canal blockade of Israel cargo. The President's televised promise (in February, 1957) that any interference "should be dealt with firmly by the society of nations" has not been wholly fulfilled in the reliance on the Secretary General. The U.N. possesses other instrumentalities and in the past the U.S. has not failed to use these -- e.g., helping to introduce the Security Council resolution of 1951 calling upon Egypt to permit free use of the Canal.

To sum up, whether because the Arabs and Israelis view the probable losses as outweighing gains, or merely consider that the 'moment of truth' has been postponed, the chances of war in the immediate future have been reduced. Prolongation of the troubled peace will not in itself dissolve the issues in dispute or create the psychological conditions essential to a negotiated settlement. Time has not been a solvent of the area's hatreds and fears. Obviously, to look for 'normal relations' (whatever these may be) between the Arabs and Israelis in the 1960's would thus be a foolish hope. But, for Americans, not to expect greater U.S. efforts to bring about at least better relations would be cheap despair.

Not With a Bang, But a Whimper?

In predicting "comparative stability" for the Middle East in the 1960's, we have not gone so very far out on a limb. The sole basis for comparison, after all, was this past decade, allowing a wide margin against error, and we have outlived (less cautiously) a coming flow of crises into new centers. Stability, Americans should also perhaps be reminded, has a doubled-edged aspect whose sharp side may yet turn against the U.S. Decline of Western influence in the area need not be precipitous, or be accompanied by an avalanche of toppling governments and policies. A gradual slide will do as well.

Eventual East-West accommodation, while appropriately confirming the shared horror of nuclear war, may dangerously relieve us of the felt responsibilities of Great Power status. The U.S. must still summon all its resources of national leadership, wealth, and public understanding to meet quieter but no less compelling foreign affairs problems -- of nationalist conflicts, civil turmoil, economic and social hardships. Some of these have seemed to bear little relationship to the conduct of the cold war and energies that should have been directed to their solution have instead been frozen in the confrontation with the Soviet Union. Now these problems, more alive than ever, threaten the prestige and influence of the U.S., and particularly in the under-developed areas. Paradoxical as it may seem, an eventual U.S. victory against international communism may therefore depend on the extent to which the challenge, not of the Soviet Union, but of friendly and neutral powers (and of our own society) is successfully met.