TV: Spotlight on Crisis
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New York Times (1857-Current file); Jun 7, 1967; ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times (1851 - 2002)
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3 Networks Cancel Shows to Cover the Security Council Session on War

By JACK GOULD

ALL regular entertainment programs and commercial announcements were canceled last night by the three national television networks to carry the debate in the United Nations Security Council on the war in the Middle East.

The sustained coverage was a notable public service by the American Broadcasting Company, the Columbia Broadcasting System and the National Broadcasting Company. The viewer had an arresting front-row seat as the delegates unanimously adopted a resolution urging a ceasefire, then separately gave their reasons for their votes and finally invited representatives of the combatants to state their positions.

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The pooled telecast, handled by the skilled staff of the radio and visual services division of the United Nations, had the absorbing yet chilling appeal common to the deliberations of the international body in moments of overriding crisis. The home screen afforded simultaneously enormous educational lessons on the complexity of the world, the drama of different personalities engaging in the nuances of debate and oratory, an insight into the shifting tides of political alliances and the numbing spectacle of mankind torn apart.

The telecast, beginning shortly after the start of the 7 o'clock newscasts of N.B.C. and C.B.S., started in relatively low key as each Council member explained his vote. The point of initial interest was that the Soviet Union, while condemning Israel, nonetheless joined in support of the resolution.

The tension was to mount when Adkan Pachachi, Foreign Minister of Iraq and the first Arab to speak, immediately launched into an attack on the United States. Arthur J. Goldberg, this country's representative, was to respond heatedly and at length, a procedure that he repeated after George J. Tomeh of Syria advanced the same Arab contention that the United States and Britain had aided Israel's military campaign.

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Abba Eban, the Oxford-educated Foreign Minister of Israel, took honors for mastery of phrase-making and drew applause from the gallery. To the viewer, a primary feature was Mr. Eban's composure compared with the indignation of the Arab representatives over a ceasefire that would cost them the territory already won by the Israelis.

The coverage, which ran past the close of television's prime-time period at 11 P.M., contained the usual profusion of fascinating cameos, such as the impassive face of U Thant, the Secretary General, when Mr. Eban criticized the abrupt withdrawal of the United Nations peace force from Egypt.

The total cost to the networks in the cancellation of an entire evening's schedule ran into the millions of dollars ,though some of the revenue may later be recaptured. But the telecast constituted one of television's finest achievements. If a viewer was not aware of the dimensions of the Middle East situation at the end of the evening, it was his own fault, not television's.

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