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Middle East conflict 1958 - July 7

Press Release

Presence of UNOGIL slowing down infiltration

L 179: 101

UNITED NATIONS  
Office of Public Information  
Press and Publications Division  
United Nations, N. Y.

(For use of information media -- not an official record)

Press Release LEB/15  
7 July 1958

PRESENCE OF UN OBSERVERS IN LEBANON SLOWING DOWN  
INFILTRATION, CHAIRMAN BELIEVES; NEW REPORT PLANNED

(The following was received here from a UN Information Officer with the UN Observation Group in Lebanon. Although delayed, it is issued for reference purposes.)

Galo Plaza, Chairman of the United Nations Observation Group in Lebanon, told the press on Saturday (5 July) that the presence of the observers in Lebanon was slowing down infiltration.

As an example, he said that traffic by mule train from a village near Saida, in the direction of Chouf territory, had practically stopped since the United Nations began observations in the area.

Regarding the report of the Observation Group to the Security Council (Docs. S/4040 and Add.1), Mr. Plaza said it gave "a good balanced report" and "a good picture" of the situation. He added that the Group would prepare another report in due course, perhaps in another 10 days.

In reply to questions at the press conference, Mr. Plaza said that the inability of the observers to patrol the border areas at the outset had been unexpected. At the time of the adoption of the resolution calling for observation by the United Nations, the Security Council was unaware that only 18 kilometers of the border were under the control of the Lebanese Government, he said. This had complicated the task.

However, he said, the observers were moving into opposition-controlled areas with increasing freedom and were gaining ground every time.

The Chairman of the Observation Group went on to say that the observers were now able to control the entire northern frontier and had gone into the Baalbek area. The difficulties mentioned in the Group's report were slowly being eliminated. But, he added, "We cannot shoot our way in. We have to do it tactfully."

The Observation Group, said Mr. Plaza, would be able to do a more efficient job if at the same time the Lebanese Army were to police the frontier and call attention to the results.

In reply to another question, he asserted that it was practically impossible to seal off completely any border, even with complete cooperation from all sides.

(more)

It would require 10,000 troops "experienced in mountain warfare" to stop any major infiltration, and even that would not provide a complete seal, he said.

Mr. Plaza was asked whether the Lebanese Government had provided information which the Group had not yet been able to investigate but which, if substantiated, would justify its charges. He answered, "We have not had anything from the Lebanese Government which would lead us to say there is massive infiltration. "

Lebanese Government Cooperative

He also told the press that the Group had not been told of the capture of a Syrian officer. Asked about two Syrians who had been interrogated, Mr. Plaza said they had been placed in the hands of the Group so that "they could give information freely." He stressed that the Lebanese Government had been most cooperative in every respect and he said that procedures were now being worked out for interrogating another seven prisoners. The prisoners were being questioned with the aid of a United Nations interpreter from New York.

In reply to another question, Mr. Plaza said that some arms found in Lebanon had been brought in years ago, but that some of them must have been brought in since the trouble started. However, he added, "we are not ready to say where the arms came from, who sent them, and that there is infiltration."

The Chairman told the press that UNOGIL was studying a way to improve night observation. For instance, night watches were posted at out-stations and aircraft were going to make reconnaissance flights at night. But patrolling by jeep at night was rather dangerous, he said.

In reply to another question, Mr. Plaza said that the United Nations was listening to Middle East radio broadcasts and had found a change for the better in broadcasts from the United Arab Republic since 24 June. "The attacks are less virulent," he said.

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