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FRENCH AND SYRIAN COMMENTS ON POPE'S TRIP

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[4-part message complete]

When the Syrians learned that the Sovereign Pontiff had decided to go to Jerusalem, they hastened to express their satisfaction, as they always do every time they note any sign of interest whatsoever shown by foreign countries with regard to the Near East. Then they went on to express the hope that the Pope would not fail to note, during his pilgrimage, the harm which Israel had done to the Arab people of Palestine.

Finally, the tone in which the Israeli radio, which is listened to here more than is acknowledged, praised the event prompted them to formulate a few reservations, and a Damascus newspaper went so far as to wonder whether President KENNEDY's assassination, the attempts made in the Council to reinstate the Jewish people, and finally the pontifical pilgrimage were not all part of a plot instigated by Zionism to facilitate the diversion of the waters of the Jordan.

I did not think it necessary to report these reactions, which were as ridiculous as they were inevitable, to the Department, since I preferred to wait [2 gr G] adopt a position by engaging in conversation first with the Chargé d'Affairs of the Holy See, then with the Apostolic Internuncio, who hurriedly returned last night from Rome. This morning, on leaving the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Monsignor PUNZOLO was good enough to relate to me the conversation which he had had with the Minister. Mr. MURAYID protested in rather moderate terms against the fact that Israel is seeking to exploit the

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pilgrimage, he expressed the hope that the latter, although it is to take place partly in Israel, would not imply recognition of that state by the Holy See. Finally, he stated that the Syrian Government wished to invite PAUL VI to visit Damascus, the city of Saint Paul, during his trip.

The Apostolic Internuncio told me that he had evaded this last point by suggesting that the invitation, which will certainly be refused, be made by the Syrian Embassy at the Holy See. [1 gr G] gave me the impression, with regard to nonrecognition, that he had reassured the Syrian Minister and had given him to understand that the Holy See itself was hardly pleased with the manner in which Israel was seeking to exploit the Pope's pilgrimage. Talking with me on this matter, he was altogether frank, going so far as to say that the Israelis would be well advised not to go too far along the path which they have entered, if they do not want to run the risk of a serious setback and wish to avoid having made "so many (B val noisy preparations) [2 gr G]."

I wonder, since I know a little about Rome, whether the Holy See has addressed Tel Aviv in such plain language, but I confess that I was surprised by that which I heard from the mouth of a prelate who had just received his latest instructions from the Secretariat [1 gr U] the previous day.

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