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FOREIGN SERVICE DESPATCH

Grand Mufti of Jerusalem
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FROM : AMEMBASSY, BEIRUT

287
DESP. NO.

TO : THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON.

December 1, 1953
DATE

REF :

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SUBJECT: Machinations of the Mufti. AMMAN-1 Baghdad-1 Beirut-1
CHIRU-1 DAMASCUS-1 Jidda-1

SUMMARY

4-0

Judging by attention accorded him, Mufti Haj Amin el-Husseini is having an unusually successful visit to Lebanon. Arriving at a particularly fortuitous time, he is apparently trying to recoup losses in prestige and finances. He is not happy at Dr. Isbat TANOUS' efforts to steal the refugee show. His connection with South Lebanon-North Israel underground operations is recalled and also his possible connection with the murders in Israel which prompted the Qibya retaliatory action. All in all, despite his limited influence, he seems still to be the same power-hungry trouble-making Mufti.

Haj Amin el-Husseini, former Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, has been visiting Beirut for the past fortnight. Arriving on November 17 from Jidda where he had paid his respects to new King SAUD, the former Palestine leader has been holding court in Lebanon with so much success that it is even annoying the not easily ruffled management of the St. Georges Hotel where he is residing.

Not only has the Mufti been greeted by Lebanese callers of all ranks, but scarcely a day has passed without his being the honored luncheon or dinner guest of some dignitary. Among his hosts have been ex-Prime Minister and GOLI, never a Palestine fanatic; former Foreign Minister Henri Bey HAKIM, a strong anti-Moslem; Magassid officials; Yugoslav Moslems; and Lebanese Socialists. On November 22, President CHAMOUN personally despatched his home town deputy, Naim OGHLEB, E, to escort the Mufti in an official limousine to a seat of honor at the Independence Day military parade.

It is difficult to ascertain the reasons for the Mufti's apparently new-found popularity. It is quite likely that because of the recent flare-up of Christian-Moslem tensions in Lebanon (See Embassy Despatch No. 277, November 27), many leaders, particularly Christians, wished to keep the situation calm,

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are disposed to favor over Moslem personalities and the Mufti luckily arrived at the opportune moment. It is also likely that the Mufti and his henchmen have artificially stimulated much of the attention to revive the Mufti's sadly sagging fame and fortune.

That the Mufti's influence in recent years has been insignificant in Lebanon was confirmed to the reporting officer by Lebanon's own Mufti a year ago. This fact has also been evident in the increasing ineffectuality of the Mufti's Arab Higher Committee branch in Beirut. According to a source close to the Mufti, the latter is irked at the increasing activity of Dr. Ishaq Tanous, his former comrade whose recently organized Arab Palestine Office is tapping sources of funds formerly milked by the Mufti (See Embassy Despatch No. 285, December 1, 1953). Furthermore, Dr. Tanous is increasingly usurping the title of "spokesman for the refugees". To counteract this, the Mufti, according to the source close to him, has given President Chamoun, who professed to be puzzled by the diversity of refugee spokesman, the names of members of a Committee officially blessed by the Mufti as refugee spokesmen. The President of this Committee is a Sheikh Toufiq TIBI and the Secretary is none other than Mohamad WALEH, commonly regarded as a Communist (See Embassy Despatch No. 90, August 11, 1953). Among the eight or ten other names given to President Chamoun by the Mufti is that of Dr. Tanous, but the Mufti expressed some doubt as to whether he would serve.

As to finances, the Mufti is always on the hunt. While George Bey HAIMARI, chief of the President's cabinet, has stated to Counselor BRIDINS that the Mufti came away empty handed from President Chamoun's office, the Mufti has told his close friend that the President restored the £12,000 per month which had been granted the Mufti in Khouri days. He also stated that while the new King Saud gave him no financial handout, it was because the late King had made a 50,000 Egyptian pound donation when the Mufti had made the haj. Furthermore, according to the source close to the Mufti, the latter is on good terms with General NAGUIB in Egypt particularly through the latter's brother, the Egyptian Minister to Syria. Finally, the source states he knows for certain that the Mufti has written a sharply critical letter to his former friend, the present Prime Minister of Iraq Dr. Fadhil Jamali, because the latter is financing Dr. Tanous. The Mufti implied in his letter that Prime Minister Jamali was obtaining the funds from British or American sources rather than the Iraqi treasury.

The source for the foregoing, incidentally, is the same individual who was described as Mr. X in the Embassy's despatch no. 90, August 11, 1953, wherein the existence was revealed of an Arab refugee underground operating out of South Lebanon into northern Israel. It is interesting to note much of the data in that despatch confirmed in subsequent despatches from the Consulate in Haifa. Mr. X states that this underground has been relatively quiet since the Lebanese and Israeli armies stepped up their patrolling of the frontier. Inasmuch as the underground activity the last time followed a Mufti visit to Lebanon, it will be interesting to see if history will repeat itself this time.

Also of interest is another report by Mr. X, that the murder of the Israeli woman and two children which precipitated Israel's retaliatory action

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at Qibya was perpetrated by three individuals known to be followers of the Mufti. In defense of the Jordan Government, Mr. X states that some 70 or 80 police were despatched, some wearing uniforms others in native Arab dress, to mingle in refugee camps and elsewhere in an all-out effort to apprehend the three criminals. In general, Mr. X states, the Jordanian Government has made a Herculean effort to curtail Arab infiltration to Israel so as to give Israel a minimum of pretext for aggressive action.

What the Mufti's next move will be not even Mr. X will predict for he says the Mufti is always extremely cagey as to future plans. The Beirut press indicates a meeting with Iran's Mulla KASHAMI is in the offing prior to an Islamic conference in Jerusalem.

Before leaving Beirut, however, the Mufti, according to Mr. X, plans to release to the press, whom he has thus far refused comment, a series of self-composed questions and answers expounding his views on questions of the day. It's a safe guess this request to the Lebanese reading public will reveal the same old Mufti -- a wolf lusting for personal power in the sheep's clothing of fluffy patriotism.



Raymond A. Hare

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