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SUBJECT Reasons for Closing Three Syrian Provinces to Foreigners  
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SUPPLEMENT

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1. Sa'dallah al-Jabri, (former) Premier and Foreign Minister of Syria, is reported to have given the Lebanese government the following explanation of the decree of the Syrian government of November 1946, closing the provinces of Latakia, Euphrates and Jazira to foreigners:
  - (a) Some time ago, Solod, the Soviet Minister, called on al-Jabri to ask him if he were aware of the espionage activities of the British Colonel Frank Sterling among the tribes. Solod specifically referred to a recent trip of Sterling, and asked for information about it.
  - (b) Al-Jabri thereupon sent for Colonel Sterling, told him what Solod had said, and asked, "What shall I tell Solod?" Sterling replied, "Tell Solod that it is none of his business." Al-Jabri then said, "I can't tell him that," to which Sterling reported, "Tell him that I was sightseeing."
  - (c) Solod, upon being given this answer, said, "Nonsense," and then gave the Premier an account of Sterling's alleged movements. On the following day, the Soviet Legation sent the Syrian Foreign Office a sharply worded protest against the activities of Colonel Sterling.
  - (d) Al-Jabri, now aware of the extent of the Soviet information, responded with the order closing the disturbed regions to all foreigners.
2. According to source, Sterling confirmed part of this story when he stated that Solod had protested a recent trip of his to the desert, and that he, Sterling, had said in reply that he had merely gone to show a friend the remains of the irrigation works built by the Umayyad Caliph Hisham Abd-al-Malik at Qasr al-Hair, and that Soviet charges were without foundation.
3. Syrian officials in Damascus have assured Americans that the ban is not aimed against them, but against the British, the Russians and the French.
4. The Damascus newspaper, al-Nasr, quoting a Syrian Foreign Office source who laid the responsibility on foreign agents, concluded with the statement: "This area (Jazira) is rich in natural resources and the government and nation can turn it into the richest agricultural area in the whole world. When the foreigners started to contemplate the exploitation of the area, which would result in a terrible economic colonization of the country, the government imposed this ban and saved the country from the danger of colonization."

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ADSO	X A DEP.	X FBT	SPDF	NO	OCL:
DADSO	FBK	X FBV	X SPDS	NO	ORNE: Sw:
EXEC.	FBL	FBX	SPDT	NO	G
CONTROL	FRM	FBZ	SCQ	NO	
PLANS	FBT	FBY	CTR	NO	

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5. The First Secretary of the British Legation in Damascus, C.A.F. Dundas, is said to have made the following statements concerning the above mentioned story:
  - (a) Colonel Sterling had left Hama with a British civil engineer, in order to act as guide during a trip to study irrigation proposals. The two men had gone east from Hama and then north, almost as far as Rusafa. The aim of the trip was purely commercial, and concerned the development of desert land by irrigation.
  - (b) Shortly thereafter, the Hama newspaper al-Duha came out with scare headlines, accusing Sterling of stirring up tribal affairs. Subsequently, Solod saw Sa'dallah al-Jabri, produced a copy of al-Duha, and asked al-Jabri if he had read the article, if the statements made in it were correct, and demanded an explanation. Al-Jabri later saw Colonel Sterling, as reported in paragraph 1, and Sterling told him the story of the irrigation study trip. Al-Jabri told this to Solod, who refused to accept Sterling's explanation.
6. When Dundas was told that Solod had written a letter to the Foreign Office in protest of the incident, he said that he was inclined to doubt it.
7. Dundas said that he thought the trouble had begun earlier, during the events accompanying the arrest of Sulayman Murshid (September 1946) in Latakia. At this time, Dundas pointed out, there was no prohibition against foreigners going to the Alawite province. Solod had mentioned to al-Jabri that he intended to take a trip to Latakia, and al-Jabri had immediately forbidden him to go, in view of the circumstances. Solod was indignant, as a consequence, and was at present looking for opportunities to charge discrimination, according to Dundas. It was this circumstance, Dundas thought, that had led the Syrian government to escape from embarrassment by passing the decree which closed the northern areas to foreigners.

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