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Declassified and Approved for Release
by the Central Intelligence Agency

Date: 2/1/2012

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Syria is no longer the erratic, coup-prone cockpit of inter-Arab politics that it was in the 1950s and early 1960s. Multiple upheavals have helped to produce, and to mask, a thoroughgoing revolution in national institutions and attitudes. The new pattern that has developed in the past decade appears to have a number of durable elements.

— The military establishment is certain to remain the principal element of political power, promoting limited socialism, secularization, and strong central government through the mechanism of the Baath Party.

— Syria will retain the ability to create serious difficulties for its Arab neighbors. It will exercise that ability on occasion in pursuit of Syrian interests but not gratuitously and not as the agent of any other nation.

— It will remain hostile to Israel but incapable of serious military challenge and extremely wary of provoking Israeli attack.

— It will remain sympathetic to the Palestinian cause, simultaneously supporting various fedayeen groups and seeking to increase Syrian influence over the fedayeen movement.

— It will offer little in the way of vulnerabilities or weaknesses exploitable by outsiders—Arab countries, the Western Powers, or the USSR. But the exception to this generalization—dependence on the Soviets for military supplies—will persist.

— The recent record of economic progress—made possible by a combination of good weather and a stable government following pragmatic economic policies that encourage private as well as public enterprises—is likely to continue for some time.

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There are, nonetheless, uncertainties. Some aspects of current Syrian policy are reflections of the President, Hafiz al-Asad, rather than of the new order.

- Asad is notable for his caution and pragmatism; a successor might be more of an ideologue or more inclined to risk-taking.
- Improvement of relations with Egypt and establishment of a National Progressive Front which includes both Nasserists and Communists in the government are Asad policies and would not necessarily be followed by a successor.
- Asad appears to have a good grip on power at present, but factionalism continues within the Army.

Syria's political system is acceptable to the Soviets; so are its attitudes on many international issues. The Syrians value Soviet military and economic aid and diplomatic support. But they would react negatively if the Soviets should press for military access more extensive than the use of facilities in Latakiah and Tartus. Nor would Soviet pressure induce the Syrians to establish cordial relations with the Baghdad government—which Syria considers a rival and an upstart.

The Syrians are not in a position to harm the US seriously, but they are sure to take actions in respect of their immediate neighbors that affect the US. They will be willing to put strong political and economic pressure on Beirut to insure that the fedayeen continue to have a presence in Lebanon. Harassments of Jordan—including border closings, propaganda, and denial of overflights to and from Amman intended to weaken the Jordanian regime or to force changes in Jordanian international policies, are likely from time to time. Such acts are not likely to go to extremes—e.g., another military intervention in Jordan—under Asad, but a successor might prove less cautious.

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