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Central Intelligence Agency

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DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

Lebanon-Syria: Awn Challenges Assad (U)

7 April 1989

Summary

Lebanon's Christian Prime Minister General Awn is locked in a battle of wills with the Syrians and their Lebanese allies from which no party appears willing to compromise, and from which Awn seems unlikely to escape. Awn's naval blockade of independently operated, unofficial Muslim ports sparked the current fighting and remains the main issue of the dispute. But Awn's subsequent crusade against Syrian President Assad and Syria's military presence in Lebanon has deepened the conflict and substantially reduced Awn's chances of winning.

[REDACTED] even in the unlikely event Awn survives the current crisis, the Syrians no longer consider him a viable partner with whom they can discuss Lebanon's longer-term political future.

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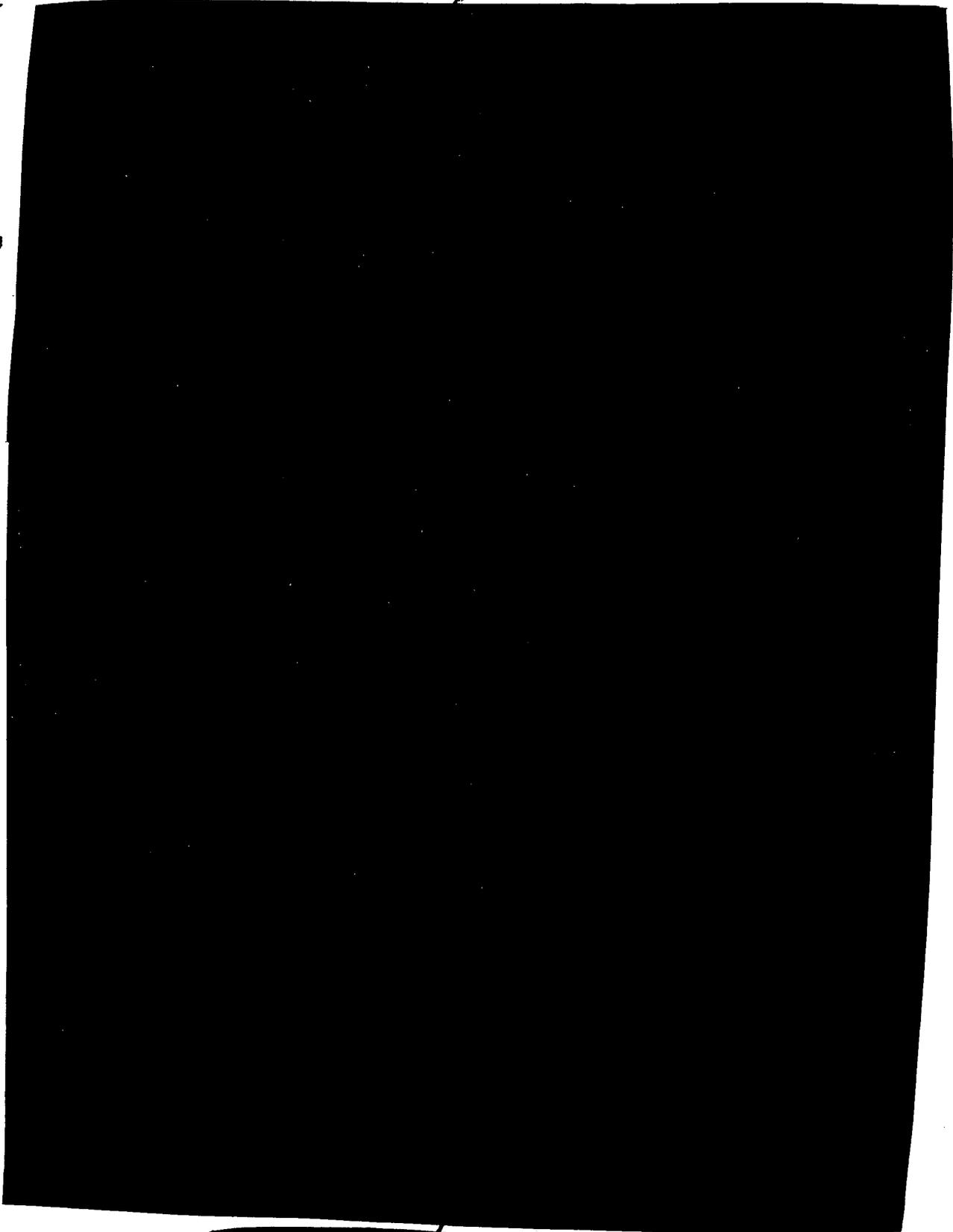
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### Intractable Disagreements

The closure of the illegal Muslim ports is the primary issue standing in the way of a ceasefire in Beirut. Awn is stubbornly refusing to lift the blockade as he has staked most or all of his political capital on the issue. Awn's tiny navy--a handful of aging patrol boats--and his few helicopters and aircraft have been surprisingly effective enforcing the ports' closure. They have intercepted at least five ships, venturing as far north as Tripoli to interdict a Syrian and possibly a Soviet freighter. [REDACTED] b3

#### Lebanon's "Illegal" Ports

*The emergence of several unofficial and militia-controlled official ports has reshaped Lebanon's economy over the years. The fees charged by these militia-operated ports are 60-70 percent below Lebanon's official port fees, and no customs duties are paid on goods entering these ports. The unofficial ports have deprived the state of its principal source of revenue. Among the major illegally-operated ports that Awn wishes to close are:*

*Fifth Basin, Beirut. This Lebanese Forces-controlled portion of Beirut port is Lebanon's main illegal port. Its closure was one of Awn's primary goals in confronting the militia in February.*

*Ad Dubayyah. Also under Lebanese Forces control, this port is under expansion [REDACTED]*

*Juniyah. This small, shallow Lebanese Forces port serves as a transit point to Cyprus for travelers who avoid the Beirut Airport.*

*Khaldah. This Druze port is the most active non-Christian illegal port. It cannot handle large ships, however, which required the militia to construct Al Jiyah.*

*Al Jiyah. The Druze built this container port and petroleum offloading facility. Both Druze ports have been affected by Awn's blockade.*

*An Nabi al Awzai. This port is controlled by Amal and can handle container traffic. It has been shelled by the Christians and is also a key target of the blockade. [REDACTED] b3*

Lebanon's Muslim leaders--particularly Druze leader Walid Junblatt and Amal Chief Nabih Berri are as adamant in their opposition to Awn's blockade as Awn is to continue it. Hizballah has remained on the sidelines of the disagreement but strongly supports the Syrian position. The blockade deprives the Druze and Amal of important revenue and cuts them off from the outside world. Damascus and its Muslim allies are demanding that the blockade be lifted as part of a ceasefire. [REDACTED] b3

Awn has complicated the crisis by casting the current confrontation as a Syrian-Lebanese conflict, putting Damascus's regional prestige on the line. In addition to calling for the removal of Syrian troops from Lebanon he has accused Syria of supporting terrorists and trafficking in narcotics. Awn has angered Syrian leaders and eroded prospects for accommodation by publicly calling for the ouster of President Assad and-praising Iraq's role in Lebanon. [REDACTED] b3

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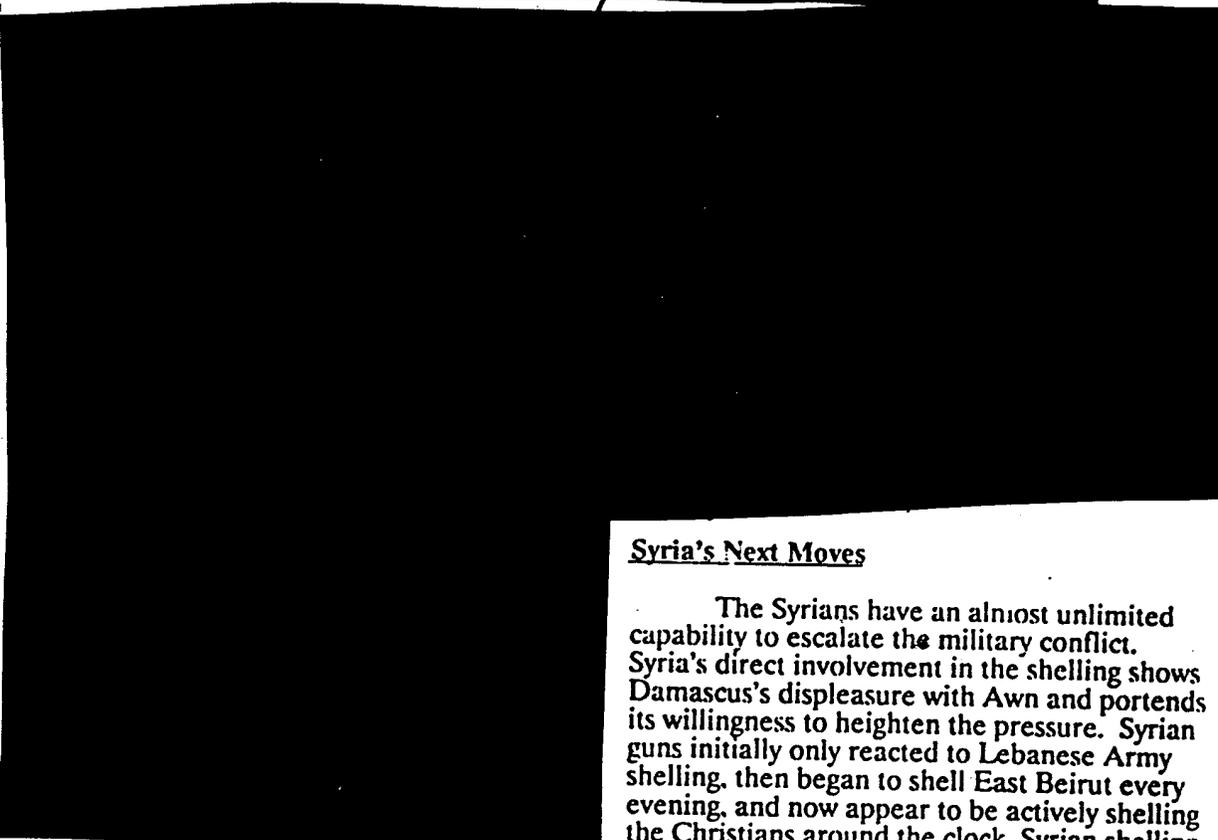
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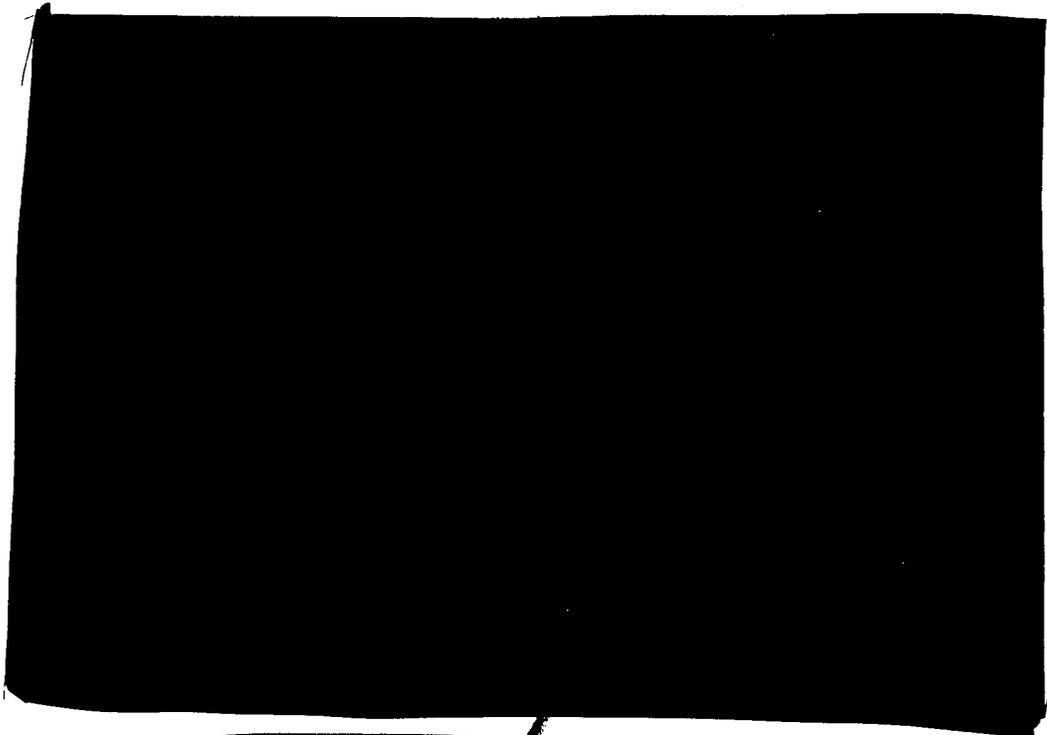
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Syria's Next Moves

The Syrians have an almost unlimited capability to escalate the military conflict. Syria's direct involvement in the shelling shows Damascus's displeasure with Awn and portends its willingness to heighten the pressure. Syrian guns initially only reacted to Lebanese Army shelling, then began to shell East Beirut every evening, and now appear to be actively shelling the Christians around the clock. Syrian shelling thus far has caused relatively few casualties--step probably will be to raise the civilian and



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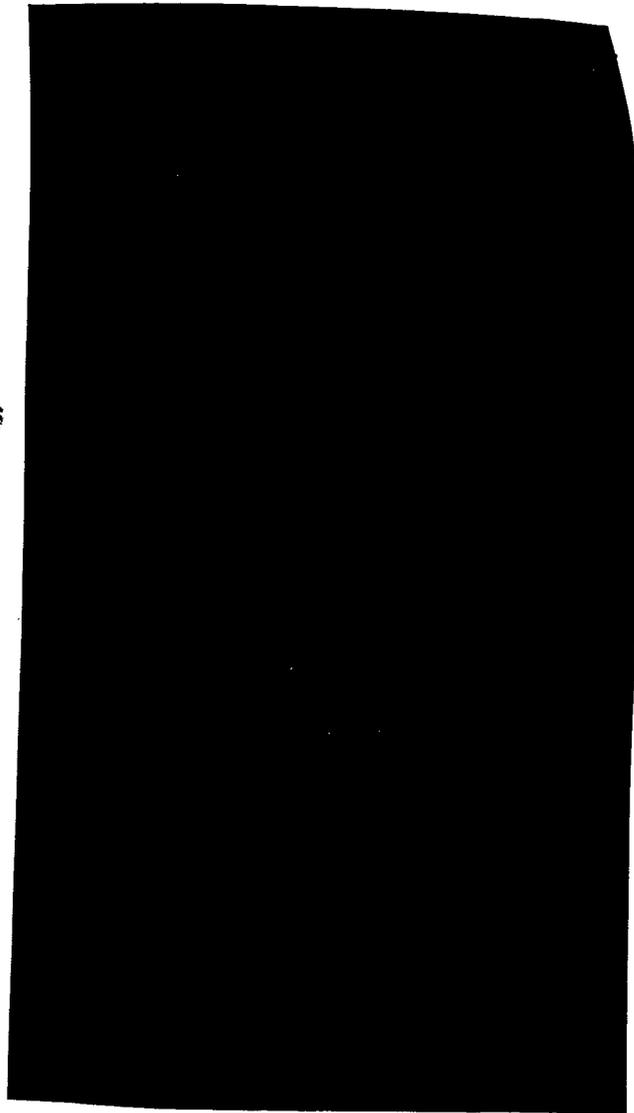
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b3 economic cost of the conflict to the Christians.

Outlook

Awn's and Syria's demands are irreconcilable and neither is ready or willing to compromise. Awn has few options to combat Syria's continued military pressure. His forces are obviously no match for Syria's, the international support he was counting on has not materialized, and support from his own Christian constituency may be eroding. Syria, on the other hand, has little to lose by keeping the pressure on Awn.

External pressure from the Arab League, the United States, or the Soviet Union, is unlikely to play a major role in Syrian decisionmaking as long as Syria believes its vital interests in Lebanon are in the balance. Until General Awn agrees that Syrian troops must remain in Lebanon, that the naval blockade must end, and that he must retract his anti-Syria rhetoric, Syrian military pressure on the Christians will continue.



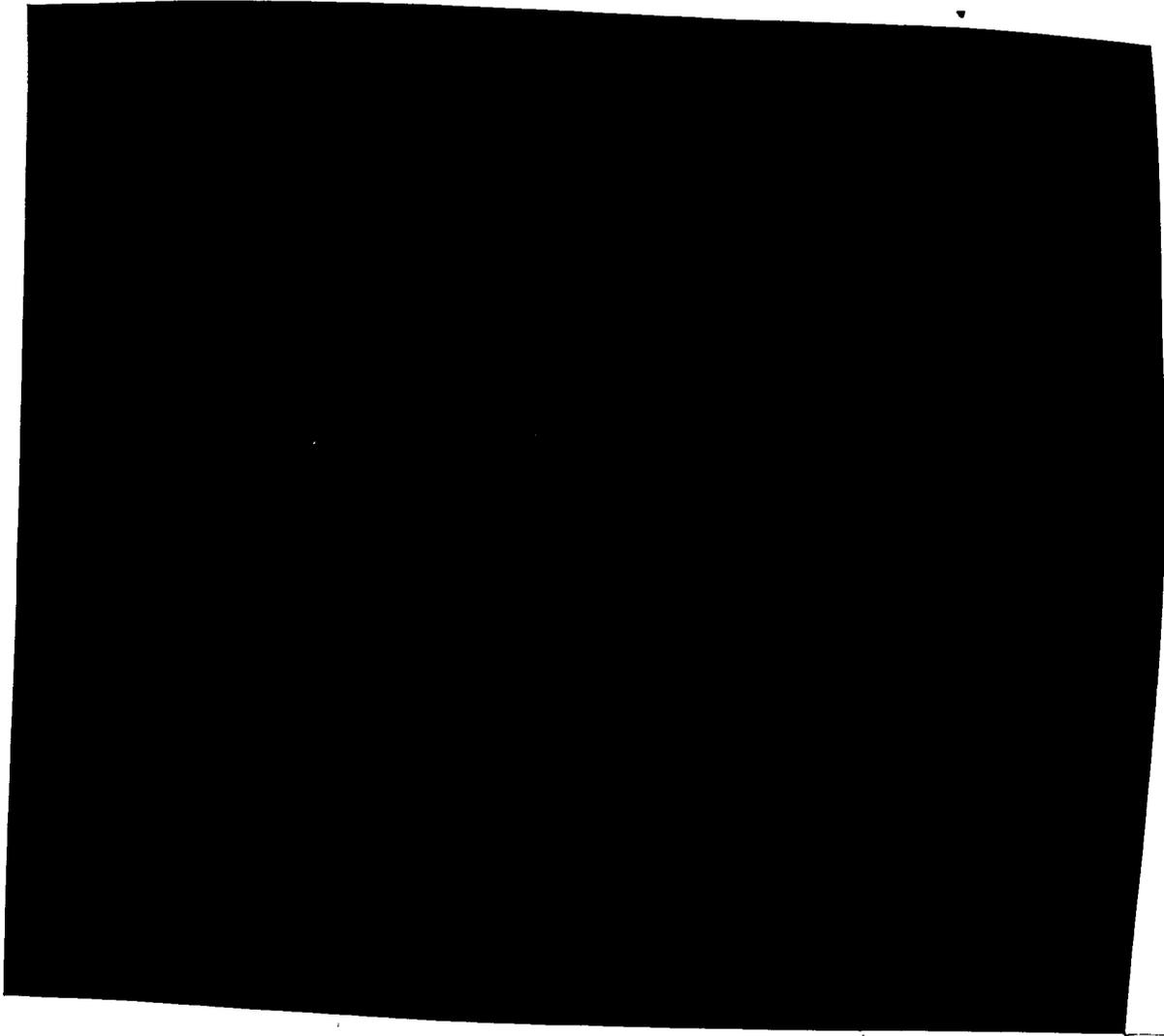
The Syrians almost certainly would use Lebanese partners to legitimize a major push on the enclave and to absorb many of the initial casualties. Druze, Hizballah, and dissident Christian leader Elie Hubaiqa are the most likely candidates, and all would be willing to cooperate alongside the Syrians.

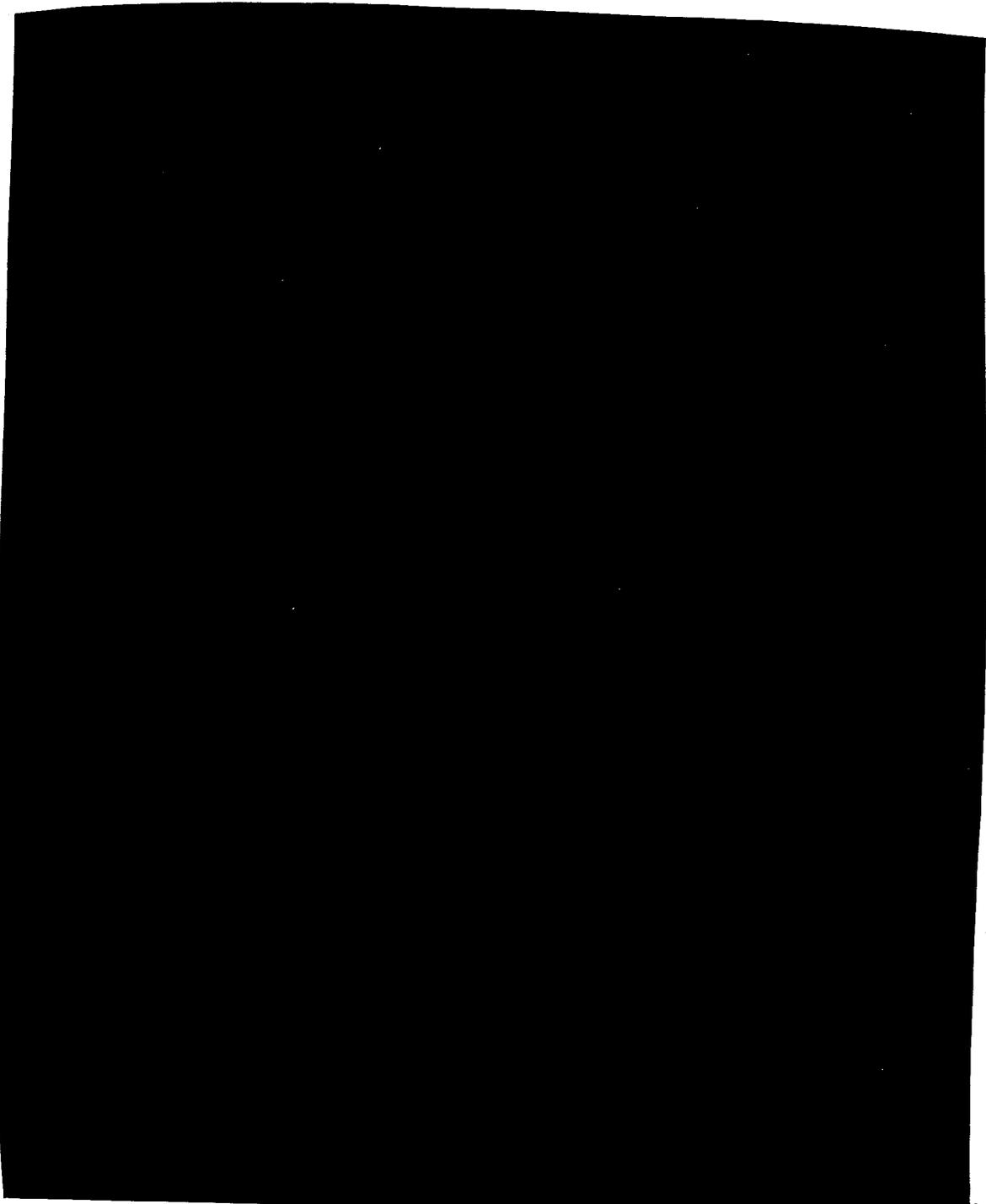




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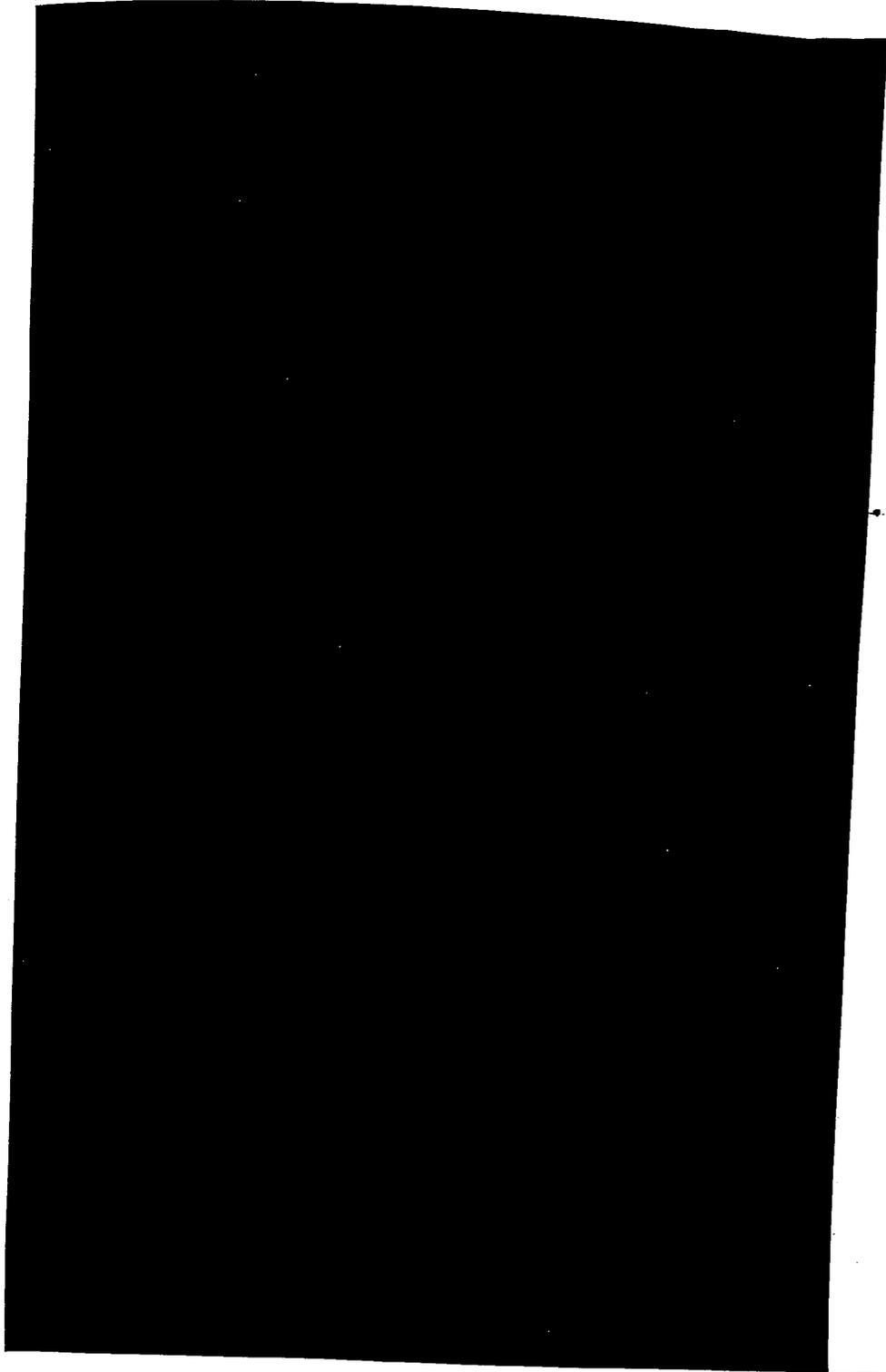
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