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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
National Foreign Assessment Center

7 November 1978

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

SYRIA WITHOUT ASSAD: SUCCESSION POLITICS

KEY JUDGMENTS

- The stability of post-Assad Syria will depend primarily on the ability of Assad's Alawite inner-circle to maintain its cohesion and pick a successor skillful enough to hold the regime together.
- An Alawite successor must devise a means by which the Sunni majority feels it shares power.
- President Assad's brother Rifaat is well placed to acquire greater power in the event of Assad's removal by assassination or illness. Rifaat would encounter significant opposition if he tried to claim the Presidency itself, however, and he may settle for a behind-the-scenes role or temporary collegial rule.
- The prime candidates to serve as figurehead President are Sunni Prime Minister Muhammad Halabi and Sunni Defense Minister Talas.

This memorandum was coordinated within the Central Intelligence Agency. Comments and queries are welcome and may be addressed to the author, [redacted] Middle East Division, Office of Regional and Political Analysis.

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--We expect much continuity on key issues like Lebanon, the Arab-Israeli dispute and inter-Arab relations if Assad were replaced by his brother or one of Assad's Alawite loyalists.

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President Hafiz al-Assad has ruled Syria longer than anyone else since independence was achieved in 1946. He has brought an unprecedented degree of stability to Syria since he seized power in 1970, and he is the first Syrian leader to participate in the Middle East peace process.

Syria traditionally has been a deeply divided and unstable country. Like many Middle Eastern states, its borders were drawn by Britain and France following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and have never been accepted by Syrian and Arab nationalists. Internally Syria is divided by a host of regional, sectarian, ideological and class differences. Before Assad, according to one count, there were 21 coups or attempted coups between 1946 and 1970.

Assad is the first Syrian leader to publicly commit Syria to peace with Israel, albeit on hard and uncompromising terms. Assad has accepted the deployment of a UN peace-keeping force on the Golan Heights and despite his rejection of the Camp David framework for peace, he has committed Syria to a comprehensive settlement based on UN resolution 242 and 338.

Causes for Concern

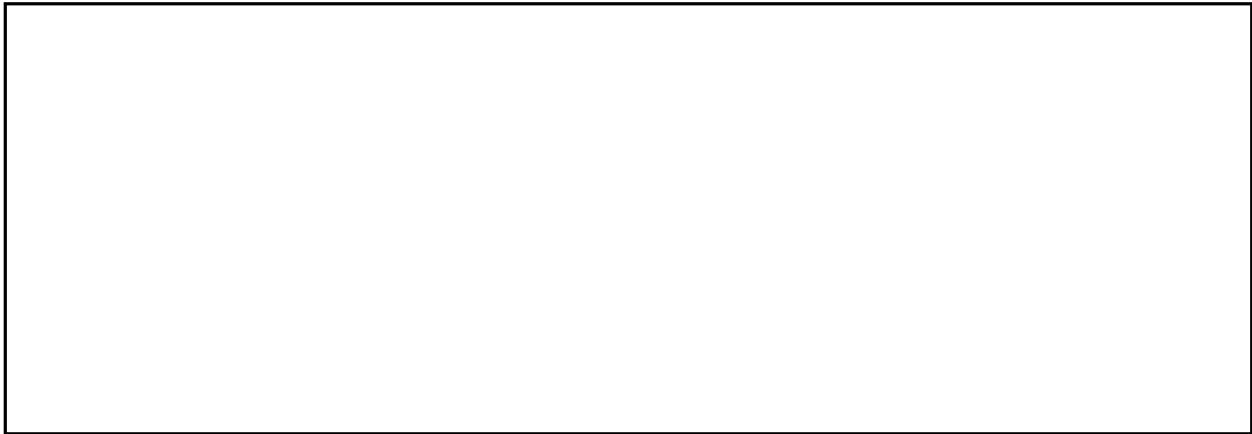
Assad's hold on power is firm but there are causes for concern about the long term stability of the regime. Syria's 30-month long intervention in Lebanon has never been popular at home and many Syrians see it as an unending drain on their country--a quagmire with no solution in sight. A stream of casualties has added to the unease, as has the danger of a direct clash with Israel. Reports of unhappiness in the military with Assad's approach to the Lebanese problem have surfaced; their discontent with Assad's unwillingness to go all out against the Maronites or to pull out does not appear to pose a threat to Assad.

Shortly before Assad's initial intervention in Lebanon in June 1976 a series of assassinations began in Syria. The targets have been members of Assad's minority Alawite sect that dominates the regime--especially the military and security services--and constitutes Assads power base (see Annex--The Alawites). Over a dozen prominent Alawites have

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25X1 been killed--the latest was in August. The regime has been unable to identify the assassins although suspicion centers on extremist elements of the Sunni majority probably backed by Iraq. There have also been periodic outbreaks of unrest in the Sunni strongholds of Aleppo, Hamah, and Hims. The sectarian murders have clearly alarmed the regime's security services and [redacted] they have taken great pains to improve Assad's personal security.



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Scenarios

There are two broad scenarios with which this paper will deal in analyzing the succession problem in Syria. The first, posits that Assad alone leaves office either through assassination or illness but that the regime remains in power. The alternative--which is far less likely at this juncture--is a coup d'etat in which both Assad and his government are overthrown.

SCENARIO ONE

Constitutional Procedures

The precedents for an orderly transfer of power in Syria are few. The constitutional procedures for succession are untested.

According to article 88 of the Syrian constitution, the Vice President is the interim successor in the event the President is incapacitated. Assad has never named a Vice

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President, however. Next in line, according to the constitution is the Prime Minister--a post now filled by Muhammad Halabi. Under Assad, Syrian Prime Ministers--including Halabi--have been Sunni figureheads with little real power. Their task is to execute what Assad decides. New elections are mandated in the constitution to fill the Presidency within 90 days after the office is vacated. The Peoples Council nominates the candidate selected by the ruling Baath Party (Article 84). We suspect this procedure would be followed but several key constituencies and power brokers would affect the smoothness of its execution.

Key Constituencies

Clearly much would depend on the circumstances in which Assad left office. If Assad is seriously ill he may make succession arrangements in advance--perhaps by naming a Vice President. Rumors that Assad is contemplating this step are current in Damascus. Assad's sudden removal would prevent a carefully planned transfer of power.

If Assad were removed from office by an assassin's bullet or a sudden fatal illness, we believe the future stability of a post-Assad Syria will depend primarily on the ability of Assad's inner circle of Alawite supporters to maintain cohesion and pick a successor skillful enough to hold the regime together. A major struggle within this clique--known as the Jamaa (company)--would undermine the prospects for a stable transition. Assad's lieutenants recognize this and will seek to minimize the danger. Nonetheless, some jockeying for power is inevitable.

The Alawites dominate the Syrian military establishment and thus have a major voice in the choice of a successor. Political power in Syria since independence has consistently depended on how many divisions one can command not on votes. We know very little about division and brigade commanders in the army or their preferences on succession. These men--especially those who command armored units--are certain to be involved in the transfer of power. Presumably the key figures in Assad's inner circle have close ties to these officers.

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The Baath Party would influence the choice of a successor to Assad but it is dominated by Assad's Alawite lieutenants and would probably do little more than rubber stamp their decision. The Baath Party apparatus plays little role in decisionmaking in Syria today. (see Annex-The Baath)

The Alawites are aware that Assad's removal could spark a surge of Sunni animosity toward the Alawite minority. The Alawite Jamaa must devise a means by which the Sunnis feel they have a voice in the political process. Assad has been reasonably successful at this. If his successors are not similarly adroit, major sectarian violence is possible. While the Alawites hold top military positions, the Sunnis can mobilize the streets and mount large scale civil unrest. In 1973, for example, the Sunnis rioted in Hims and Hamah for several days to protest a draft constitution that failed to specify that the President must be a Muslim. Assad backed down and changed the text.

Contenders, Power Brokers and Figureheads

Most Syrians believe Assad's younger brother Rifaat will succeed to power if Assad dies; there is considerable opposition to his inheriting the Presidency, however. Rifaat is a key adviser to the President and a major figure in assuring the regime's survival. Rifaat commands the 20,000-member Defense Companies, an Alawite-dominated elite force based primarily in Damascus. Rifaat is thus well placed to influence events in the capital when his brother is gone. He also controls an extensive intelligence network that permeates Syrian society to guard the Assad family's hold on power.

In the last year Rifaat has succeeded in improving his power base in Syria. In March 1978 he helped engineer the downfall of his longtime rival Air Force commander Naji Jamil and replaced him with a Rifaat loyalist, Subhi Haddad. Rifaat also helped place a friend, Muhammad Halabi, as Prime Minister, removing General Abd al-Rahman Khulayfawi, who had criticized Rifaat for corruption. In July Rifaat benefited from a major shakeup in the army high command that placed many of Rifaat's Alawite allies in key positions. Rifaat also seems to be improving his position in the Baath Party and will probably strengthen his position in upcoming elections.

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Despite this formidable power base, Rifaat will face strong opposition if he tries to assume outright the Presidency. To Syrian Sunnis he is the symbol of Alawite arrogance and abuse of power.



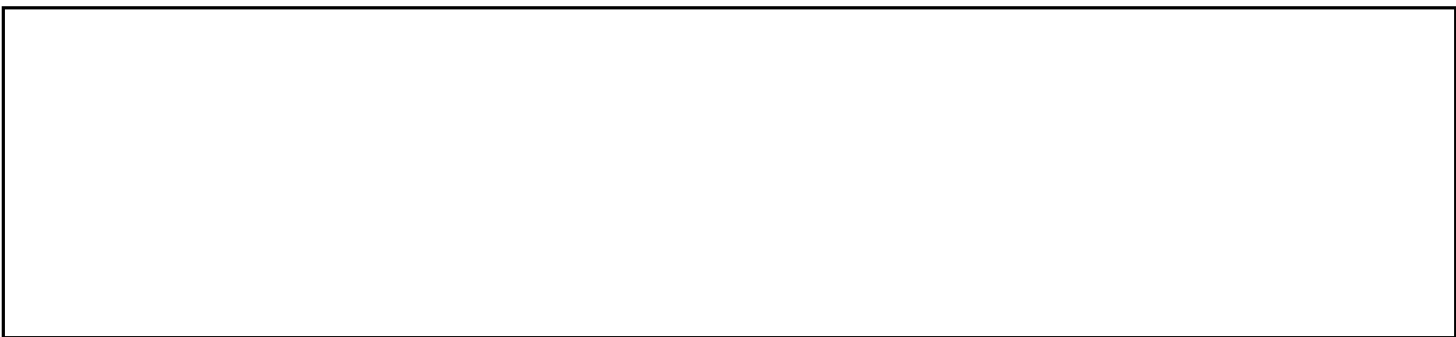
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It is possible, therefore, that Rifaat could be forced or induced by the other power brokers in Damascus to accept the role of behind-the-scenes strongman in post-Assad Syria. If he tried to become President, a civil war could be ignited.

Another possibility is that Rifaat may participate in a collegial ruling group made up of the members of the Jamaa. Such a collegial approach to decisionmaking is likely in the days immediately after Assad leaves the scene but it is doubtful that such a system would last long. Rifaat or another contender would probably emerge as the major power broker.

Rifaat's power base is to a great extent a function of the fact that his brother rules Syria. How much of his power Rifaat could hold on to once Hafiz is gone from the scene is unclear. Rifaat is well aware of this and is likely to make his move early while his assets are still well placed to give him control of the situation and before his enemies can mobilize against him.

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If Rifaat should falter, there are several key Alawite military officers in President Assad's inner circle. A major power broker is military intelligence chief Ali Duba. Duba's intelligence apparatus--primarily Alawite and Baathi in composition--maintains a close watch on any sign of dissidence in the army. A grey eminence in the regime, Ali Duba has adopted a low profile but is widely reputed to be a cunning and ruthless man.

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Ali Duba reportedly has quarreled in the past with other members of the Jamaa including Rifaat, Naji Jamil and Air Force Intelligence Chief Muhammad Khuli but we know little about the interplay between these figures.

Air Force Intelligence Chief Muhammad Khuli enjoys a very close and trusted relationship with Assad--he is the President's security adviser, has been an emissary in Lebanon, is from the same village, and is an Alawite. He often performs special projects for Assad and is said to be efficient, hardworking, self assured and very ambitious. His subordinates claim Khuli is the number two man in Syria.

Khuli has a strong power base in Air Force intelligence. Moreover, he is reportedly related by marriage to Alawite Air Force Chief of Staff Ibrahim Hasan--the man who runs the Air Force on a day-to-day basis.

Special Forces commander Ali Haydar, another Alawite, commands the elite paratrooper and commando units of the Army. Many are currently in Lebanon, a factor that may have reduced Haydar's influence in Damascus where they are usually stationed as a counterweight to Rifaat's Defense Companies. Haydar has long been a loyal Assad adviser and an ally of the other power brokers in Assad's inner circle, although he has quarreled with Rifaat.

Among the civilians who would figure in succession politics several Baath Party officials are worth mentioning. Alawite Baathi leader Muhammad Haydar has been a confidant of Assad for years. He has played a major role in the Party since the mid-1960s and has been a proponent of liberalizing the economy.

Two Sunnis are major figures in the Baath Party apparatus--Deputy Secretary Generals Abdallah Ahmar and Muhammad Jabir Bajbuj. Neither has an effective political base, however, capable of moving against the military. Like many Sunni Baathis, Ahmar and Bajbuj favor closer relations with Iraq and Moscow and they take a very hardline on Israel. They are not likely to do more than rubber stamp any succession procedure. Bajbuj has long been an enemy of Rifaat.

Several Sunnis are strong candidates to emerge as figurehead President, however. Prime Minister Muhammad Halabi would by law succeed temporarily to the Presidency if Assad were incapacitated or died in office. Halabi is reportedly a Rifaat loyalist and is probably a strong contender for Rifaat's backing if Rifaat wants to rule behind the scenes through a Sunni. Before becoming Prime Minister last March, Halabi served as Speaker of the People's Council (parliament) where he established a good reputation as a deliberate and efficient administrator. In neither position has Halabi exercised any real power.

Defense Minister Mustapha Talas, another Sunni, has been widely mentioned in Damascus as a potential successor to Assad. Talas has been a major figure in government and the Baath Party since the mid-1960s; he is a longtime ally of Assad. The ambitious Talas is an eloquent and colorful speechmaker who is much in the public eye. He plays a minor role in day-to-day military affairs. Talas is popular in the military and especially with the Sunnis.

In sum, Talas is perfect for the role of a Sunni figurehead President behind whom Rifaat or other Alawites would rule. Talas' relationship with Rifaat is uncertain, however. the two men are rivals and enemies. Some recent evidence indicates that this enmity may have abated. In general, whatever Talas past difficulties with Rifaat, he could probably switch patrons in the Assad family if Hafiz was gone. Moreover, once installed in the Presidency Talas may exercise more power than he has in the past.

Army Chief of Staff Hikmat Shihabi may be an alternative to Talas. Shihabi is an apparently honest and hardworking technician who has played a key role in Lebanon. Although influential with Assad, he has no independent power base.

Former Air Force commander Naji Jamil is another Sunni contender although his removal from command last March makes him a long shot. Like Talas, Jamil is popular with his fellow Sunnis. He has played a relatively significant decisionmaking role in the past. Jamil and Rifaat are longtime enemies, however, and we doubt Rifaat would welcome Jamil's return to a position of power.

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Foreign Minister Abd al-Halim Khaddam, Speaker of the People's Council Mahmud Hadid, and former Prime Ministers Abd al-Rahman al-Khulayfayi and Mahmud ibn Salih al-Ayyubi are other possible Sunni contenders for a figurehead Presidency.

There are two Sunni figures who play an important role in the security and intelligence field who would play a role in succession politics. Minister of the Interior Adnan Dabbagh and his intelligence deputy Ali Madani seem to be trusted advisers to the President and figures of some influence. Madani and Rifaat are reportedly strong enemies-- Madani was close to Naji Jamil before Jamil's fall from power.

Policy Implications

The most immediate impact of the removal of Hafiz Assad from office and his replacement by any of the men discussed above would result in a turning inward as the new leadership sought to consolidate power. The new rulers in Damascus would probably be unable to propose or respond effectively to major overtures until they felt confident about their hold on power. Once the new regime felt secure, we believe it would probably make few if any major departures from Assad's policies on these key issues:

- (A) The Peace Process--Assad's Alawite lieutenants have had a hand in formulating Syria's cautious approach to Middle East negotiations. In general, the officer corps takes a pragmatic approach to the Arab-Israeli dispute and is inclined toward coexistence with Israel--albeit on Syria's tough terms.



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There are no indications of substantial differences within the Jamaa toward Syria's opposition to the Egyptian peace initiative and the Camp David

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accords. We doubt that Assad's successors would alter that policy. There appears to be an almost universal consensus in Syria against the agreements because they do not mention the Golan Heights and fail to address the political rights of pre-1967 Palestinian refugees.

- (B) Lebanon--We believe that an Assad successor would stay in Lebanon at least in the short run but would find it difficult to sustain Assad's careful and adroit policy. Rifaat, Khuli, Shihabi and Khaddam have all been backers of Syria's two-year-old intervention in Lebanon. Rifaat has generally appeared to favor a tougher line toward the Maronite militias than his brother but recent evidence indicates that Rifaat is willing to support a political compromise, involvement in Lebanon has never been popular at home, however, and a successor regime would probably try to find a way to reduce the Syrian presence.
- (C) Inter-Arab relations--There is no evidence to indicate that Assad's Alawite supporters favor any major changes in Syria's relations with its Arab neighbors. The Alawites are distrustful of Iraq, but appear to favor a continuation of Syria's relationship with the Saudis.

Some Sunni figures in Assad's regime favor changes in Syria-Arab relations. Baathi leaders Ahmar and Bajbuj reportedly want close relations with Iraq while Naji Jamil would like to improve ties with Saudi Arabia.

- (D) Big powers--A new Syrian regime would probably adhere to Assad's policy of keeping some balance in Syria's relations with the superpowers. The Syrians recognize the advantages of a relationship with the US and many believe these ties have restrained Israel in Lebanon.

Nevertheless, recent strains in US-Syrian bilateral ties over Camp David, Lebanon and economic aid could prompt a post-Assad leadership to underestimate the US desire for strong bilateral ties. In that case the Soviets are certain to improve their position in Damascus relative to the US.

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The Soviets have been close to Rifaat over the years and would probably welcome his succession to power. Whether Rifaat would actually give them more than his brother, however, seems doubtful.

- (E) Domestic politics--Assad has made tentative moves in the last few years to improve human rights in Syria and liberalize the economy. Rifaat might publicly adhere to his brother's position on human rights but would probably be a much more brutal ruler in practice. We doubt that any successor to Assad would be able to alter substantially the economic process in the short term given the strong Baathist opposition to increasing the size of the private sector.

SCENARIO TWO

A Coup D'Etat

A successful coup would be very hard to mount in Syria at present. The overlapping intelligence apparatus and the many praetorian guards surrounding Damascus make it unlikely that Assad could be removed by force. The regime is--by Syrian standards--popular. Assad is well thought of by the population which appreciates the benefits stability has brought.

There are several possible scenarios for a coup attempt that is associated with the confusion surrounding the transmission of power from Assad:

- some officers, perhaps lead by a member of the Jamaa, might launch a coup if they came to believe that Assad was grooming a successor that was unacceptable to the plotters;
- one of Assad's lieutenants might make a grab for power in advance of Assad's demise if he concluded that Assad was terminally ill;
- anti-Rifaat officers might try to move against him once his brother died to forestall Rifaat's succession to the Presidency.

We know very little about the attitudes of the major figures in the military outside of the Jamaa. We believe a successful coup in the near future is unlikely, barring a major disaster in Assad's Lebanese adventure.

Nonetheless Assad has enemies, and they will probably keep trying to remove him. They would probably try to exploit the confusion surrounding Assad's death to mount a challenge to his successors. There are two broad categories of opponents of the Assad government that might mount a coup--Alawites and Sunnis.

The Alawites

Assad's most dangerous opposition comes from within the Alawite community. Since the Alawites form the backbone of Assad's hold on power, a serious factional split within the community could threaten him. We know of two groups of Alawites who have been unhappy with Assad in the past and might try to move against him in the opportune conditions.

Supporters of Assad's predecessor Salah Jadid--he is now imprisoned in Damascus--have tried to restore Jadid to power on at least two occasions since 1970--in November 1972 and December 1976. Assad has repeatedly purged the officer corps of Jadidists but some secret sympathizers undoubtedly remain. Jadid probably also has supporters within the Baath particularly among the extreme left.

Jadid's years in power--1966 to 1970--were marked by a strong attachment to pan-Arabist and leftist ideology. Syria was very close to the USSR and pursued a policy of total rejection of any peace with Israel. If Jadid or his supporters returned to power, we would expect a return to these policies.

The second group of Alawites unhappy with Assad are supporters of former Defense Minister Muhammad Umran--one of Assad's rivals in the 1960s who while in exile in Lebanon in 1972 was assassinated on Assad's orders. We do not know of any attempts by Umranists to oust Assad, in fact the Umran faction has participated as a junior partner in ruling Syria since 1972.

The Umran faction has maneuvered cautiously in the past to disassociate itself from unpopular policies without actually breaking with Assad. They have consistently refused to cooperate with the Jadidists--a division that obviously benefits Assad.

The Sunnis

We are not aware of any significant anti-Assad Sunni cabals in the officer corps although some kind of Sunni-organized opposition cannot be ruled out. The Sunnis are probably deeply divided over what kind of regime they would like to see if Assad could be ousted.

A significant Sunni opposition in Syria looks to extremist rightwing groups like the Muslim Brotherhood for leadership. These Sunnis are probably responsible for at least some of the assassinations of Alawites in the last two years. They do not appear capable of mounting a serious threat against the regime.

It is difficult to judge the impact of a Sunni led coup that removed Assad given our lack of reporting on Sunni dissident views. A Sunni regime might be more strongly attached to fellow Sunnis in the PLO, Lebanon and Iraq.

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ANNEX A--The Alawites

The Alawites have played a preeminent role in Syrian politics since the mid-1960s despite comprising only 13 percent of the country's population. Traditionally, the Alawites have been one of Syria's poorest communities, despised by the orthodox majority Sunnis. Many Sunnis do not regard Alawites as true Muslims.

The Alawite heartland is in the northwestern part of the country in the Nusayri Mountains along the Mediterranean Sea. These mountains have provided the Alawites with safehaven for centuries. They are named after the ninth century founder of the Alawite sect, the Islamic mystic Ibn Nusayr. The Assad family home is in the Nusayri Mountains at Qardaha, although Assad spends much of his time in the port city of Latakia. Alawites are also found in Turkey around the city of Iskenderun and in northern Lebanon.

During the French mandate the Alawite region had a great deal of autonomy; after independence the Alawite political identity declined. During the early 1960s a number of Alawites who had come up through the only channel of upward mobility available--the army and air force--emerged as key figures in the military wing of the Baath Party. Three figures were particularly prominent--Salah Jadid, Hafiz Assad, and Muhammad Umran.

These Alawite officers have emphasized rural development and social change since taking power--a reflection of their social background and Baathist ideology. Widespread land reforms have broken the hold of the traditional Sunni landlord and merchant class that dominated Syria before the 1960s.

Today the key units of the military--Rifaat Assad's Defense Companies, Ali Haydar's Special Forces, the armored units and the Air Force fighting units--are primarily Alawite-controlled and the Alawites are heavily overrepresented in their composition. The Defense Companies in fact may be as high as 90 percent Alawite. Other minorities such as the Christians and Druze are also heavily overrepresented in the military.

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The Alawite community contains several tribal confederations. The two largest are the Haddadin and the Khayyatin. Jadid comes from the Haddadin and Umran from the Khayyatin. Assad is a member of the smaller Kalbiyah tribe. We suspect these tribal ties play a part in Alawite politics. Kinship and family ties are also influential.

Little is known of the internal workings of the Alawite community. Religious values and practices are hidden from outsiders--a common practice in heterodox Islamic sects who adopted this tactic to protect themselves from the Sunnis. The structure and influence of the sect's religious leadership is a well guarded secret and a mystery both to the outside world and most Syrians.

Syria's other sects include the majority Sunnis who are predominant in the urban areas especially Hims, Hamah, Aleppo and Damascus; as well as in most of the 13 provinces. Several Christian groups including Greek Orthodox, Armenians, and Maronites make up about 10 percent of the population. Other heterodox Islamic groups include about 150,000 Druze, located primarily in the As Suwayda region in the south and a few Shia. Ethnically Syria is 90 percent Arab. There is a Kurdish minority in the Al Hasakah province in the northeast.

ANNEX B--The Baath

The Syrian Baath Party plays little role today in decisionmaking--that has become the exclusive province of President Assad and his clique of Alawite advisors. The Baath remains an important part of Syrian society, however, and Assad uses it to organize civilian support for his regime and provide a measure of legitimacy for his rule. The pan-Arab ideology of the Baath provides a rallying point for Syrians and tends to diminish Sunni discontent with Assad's Alawite power base.

The Baath officially shares power in Syria with several other parties through the National Progressive Front. The Baath dominates the Front; it provides the chairman of the Front (Assad) and controls eight of the sixteen seats on its governing board. Four other parties share the remaining seats--the Communist Party, two Nasirite parties (the Arab Socialist Union and the Socialist Unionists) and the Arab Socialists (followers of Akram Hawrani, a powerful politician of the 1950s). Only the Baath is allowed to conduct political activity in the military, there is an extensive Party apparatus in the military.

The Baath or Resurrection Party was founded in Syria in the 1940s. Its primary ideological commitment is to Arab unity but it also espouses the socialization of the economy and secularization of politics. The Baath has from its start had a multiconfessional character. Its founders included an Alawite, Zaki Arsuzi; a Greek Orthodox Christian, Michel Aflaq; and a Sunni, Salah Bitar.

The Baath Party became the political instrument of the Syrian military in the 1960s. Originally dominated in Syria by civilians, a group of officers--including Assad--clandestinely founded a Baath military organization separate from the main Party apparatus during the period when Syria was united with Nasir's Egypt (1958-1961). This small group of officers masterminded a coup on 8 March 1963. These officers took over the Party and ousted its founders, including Aflaq and Bitar in February 1966. Assad ousted Jadid from power in November 1970.

The officers who came to dominate the army in the 1960s represented a sharp break with Syria's traditional political

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leadership. The latter had come from the landlord-merchant class centered in the big cities and were primarily Sunni. The officer corps, in contrast, contained members from minority groups and often stressed agricultural-rural reform. The minorities were over-represented because they found the military to be the only path for social and economic advancement during the Sunni domination of political life.

Accurate figures on the size of the Baath party are a well-guarded secret. Most sources estimate about 100,000 active members and 200,000 supporters. The basic party unit is the cell, a collection of cells forms a company, two or more companies form a division, and several divisions form a branch. Each of the 13 provinces has a branch, so do the cities of Damascus and Aleppo. There is a separate structure of branches in the military.

The Party leadership is divided into two commands; a Regional Command responsible for the Syrian "region" of the Arab "nation" and a National Command which supervises the Baath Party organization throughout the Arab world. Until 1966 there was one Baath National Command, since then there have been competing commands and indeed competing parties centered in Syria and Iraq. President Assad is Secretary General of both the Regional and National Commands.

The Syrian Baath Party claims to have an organization in every Arab country and even in several non-Arab states with significant Arab populations. The Syrian Baath actually has very little external appeal or organization. Only in Lebanon does the Party have a significant following led by Assam Qansu. Even there, the Syrian Baath plays little role in Lebanese politics. Qansu is widely and accurately regarded as a Syrian puppet.

Inside Syria the Baath is extensively organized at the local level to generate popular support for the Assad regime. Syrian youths for example are inducted into the Baath Van-guards. This organization was created in 1974 and official statistics released in 1976 claim it has over 300,000 members. It has cells throughout the country and is supposed to infuse Syrian youth with the Baathi ideology.

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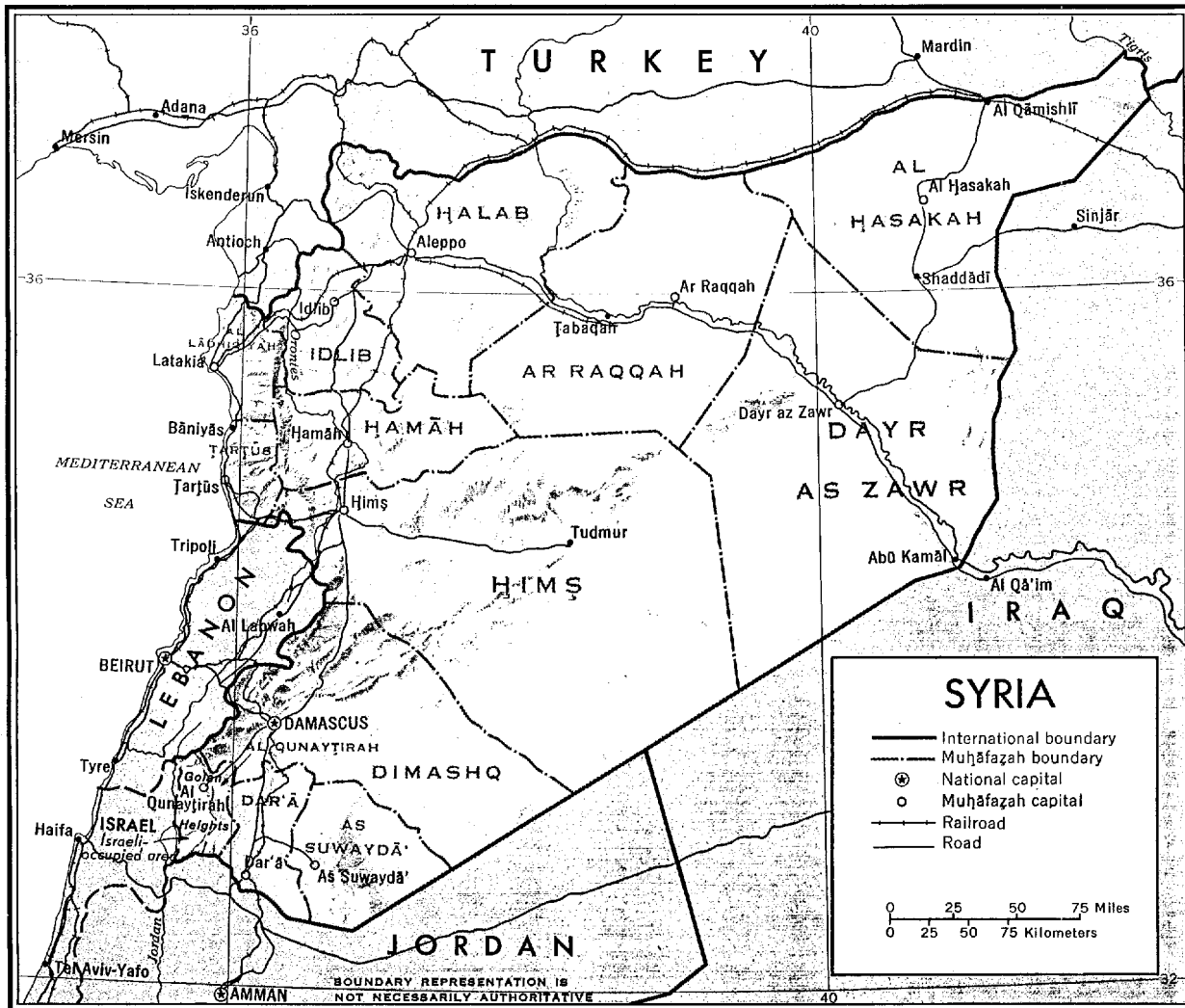
The Higher Institute for Political Science, located near Damascus, is assigned the task of training party cadres for positions of responsibility in Syria and the external branches. Assad has devoted considerable attention to inducting and training cadres to implement his decisions.

The Baath exerts a considerable influence on the Syrian media. The Party's journal, al-Baath, is one of the three leading newspapers in Damascus.

The function of the Baath in Syria today is to educate and organize the society politically. Organizing should not be confused with ruling, however. It is the inner clique of Alawite military and intelligence officials around Assad that rules Syria.

Nonetheless Assad and most of his associates are lifelong members of the Baath and its ideological conceptions help shape their policies. While Assad is basically a pragmatist, he shares the Baath world view. The Baath's deep commitment to the Palestinian cause and anti-Zionism is both reflected in Assad's own perception of Israel and the peace process and acts as a major constraint on Assad. The strong Baathi opposition to the Egyptian peace initiative undoubtedly reinforced Assad's own inclination to break with President Sadat after Sadat went to Jerusalem.

All of the potential successors to Assad within the regime and most of his opponents, like Jadid, are Baathists. Rifaat, Assad and Talas are members of the Regional Command. While the Baath Party apparatus will probably have little role in picking a successor to Assad, it will almost surely continue to be a major force in Syrian politics after Assad is gone.



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