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INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

SYRIA'S ALLIES AND ASSETS IN LEBANON

KEY POINTS

Since its intervention in Lebanon in June 1976, Syria has aggressively sought to develop a network of allies and assets. Although Damascus has been unable to build a unified broad front of Lebanese factions dedicated to supporting Syria's position in Lebanon, the Syrians have forged strong ties with several Lebanese groups.

Syria's allies in Lebanon include representatives of almost every religious community. Among the Lebanese Christians, Syria's strongest ties are with Maronite former-President Sulayman Franjiyah and Greek Catholic leader Joseph Skaff. They provide Syria with influence in the regions they control--Franjiyah in the Zgharta area and Skaff in the Bekaa Valley around the town of Zahlah.

Among Lebanon's Muslims, the Syrians have carefully nurtured ties with Druze leader Walid Jumblatt. Although Jumblatt still suspects the Syrians assassinated his father Kamal, Walid has been willing to accept Syrian political and military support. Jumblatt's relationship with Damascus is a marriage of convenience, but one that gives the Syrians an ally in the Shuf region of central Lebanon.

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Among the Sunni and Shia Muslims the Syrians have several puppets on whom they can count to provide consistent and loyal backing. Assam Qansu, leader of the pro-Syrian wing of the Lebanese Baath Party; Kamil Shatila, head of the Nasirite Union of Working Peoples Forces; and Talal Marabi, chief of the Confrontation Front, all have close and old ties to Damascus. While none is a major figure, together they provide the Syrians with allies in areas important to Syria--Qansu and Shatila in West Beirut and Marabi in the Akkar region of northern Lebanon. 25X1

Syria's greatest potential asset in Lebanon is the Palestinians. Although the Palestinians and Syrians remain mutually suspicious of each other and have not forgotten the bitter battles of "Black June" in 1976, the Syrians can count on the mainline Palestinians in Fatah to generally support Syria's position in Lebanon. Moreover, Syria's puppets in the Palestinian movement--Saiqa and the Palestine Liberation Army--provide Damascus with the means to influence developments both in Lebanon and inside the Palestinian community.

While these groups are occasionally mutually antagonistic and many are tied to Syria only by tactical need, taken together Syria's allies and assets amount to a significant source of support for Damascus' efforts to maintain its role in Lebanon. If the Syrians decide to pull their forces out of the country, President Assad could count on these surrogates to defend Syrian interests.

INTRODUCTION

For most of their history, Syria and Lebanon were part of a larger political entity.* Much of Lebanon, as created in 1919 by France, was added to the Maronite Christian heartland of Mount Lebanon--a province of the pre-World War I Ottoman Empire--from territory traditionally considered a part of Syria--the Bekaa Valley, Akkar and Tripoli, Sidon and Tyre. Syria has always had close relations with many Lebanese political figures and parties. Kinship and family ties between the two countries are numerous.

Since the movement into Lebanon of 30,000 Syrian troops in June 1976, Syria has tried to strengthen old alliances and establish new ties with various Lebanese political factions. We do not believe these Syrian moves presage an attempt to annex Lebanon, although from time to time in the past years there have been proposals to create a "Greater Syria." Syria's goal in Lebanon is to reestablish stability and ensure Syria's preeminent influence in Lebanese politics. Damascus will not tolerate the creation of a regime in all or part of the country linked to Israel.

The Christians

Syria's best known and most vocal supporter in Lebanon in recent months has been former President Sulayman Franjiyah. The 68-year old Franjiyah's ties to Syria go back to the 1950's, despite differences from time to time. Nonetheless, Franjiyah's link with the Syrians--like most such alliances--is a marriage of convenience. The Syrians do not control Franjiyah's actions.

Franjiyah, leader of the northern Maronites is, in effect, a modern feudal baron whose power base centers around kinship ties. Politics in the Lebanese mountains too often resembles gangland vendettas. Franjiyah's tough image is enhanced by his direct involvement in interfamily warfare dating back many years. His home territory around Zgharta is infamous for its feuds. There has been frequent gunplay between the Franjiyahs and the three or four other powerful Maronite clans in the area over the years.

**Syria has never recognized that Lebanon is a foreign country--there is no Syrian Ambassador in Beirut nor a Lebanese Ambassador in Damascus.*

In 1957, for example, Franjiyah was personally involved in the massacre of thirty people in a Zgharti church. After the incident Franjiyah found refuge in Syria where he remained in exile for about a year. Inter-family feuding in the north became so serious in 1965 that the Lebanese army had to intervene.

Franjiyah's term as President (1970-1976) was marked by growing tension among Lebanon's confessional groups and Maronite alarm over the Palestinian presence, ultimately leading to the Lebanese civil war. Franjiyah was unable to hold the country together. During the civil war Franjiyah's followers joined with the other Maronite groups--the Phalange and the National Liberal Party--in their battles against the Palestinians. This reversed Franjiyah's policy in the 1958 civil war when he fought against the NLP and the Phalange.

Franjiyah began to distance himself from the other Maronite leaders in early 1978. He became disenchanged with their plans to confront the Syrians and try to force them out of Lebanon. He was particularly unhappy with the close ties the Phalange and NLP Leader Camille Shamun were developing with Israel--Franjiyah had consistently refused to work with the Israelis. Franjiyah has never been close to Shamun--a rival for the Presidency and Israel's biggest backer in Lebanon. Franjiyah in early June 1978 initiated discussions with moderate Muslim leaders like former Prime Minister Rashid Karami--the chief Sunni politician in Tripoli--aimed at brokering a reconciliation between Christians and Muslims. Franjiyah has advocated a more equitable division of power between Christians and Muslims. Syria almost certainly was witting of these moves and perhaps even sponsored them.

It was the murder of Franjiyah's son Tony and thirty other people on 13 June in Ihdin that propelled Franjiyah firmly into the Syrian camp. The decision by the Phalange Party to kill Tony Franjiyah resulted from several factors including their disapproval of his ties with Syria. The major factor, however, was the struggle for profit and power between the Phalange and the Franjiyahs in northern Lebanon. The two Maronite factions were rivals for control of smuggling and extortion rackets in the north as well as for the support of local Maronites.

Since the death of his son, daughter-in-law and granddaughter in June, Franjiyah has tied himself very closely to the Syrians. Although some of his fellow Maronites have been appalled to see their leader supporting the Syrians as they bombarded Maronite East Beirut, Franjiyah is still the most important political figure in northern Lebanon. With Syrian help he has extended his area of influence into Batrun and Bsharri--former strongholds of the Phalange.

The Syrians have provided advisers to train Franjiyah's militia called the Giants' (Marada) Brigade--estimated to be 2,000 strong. The Syrians have provided 2,000 AK-47 assault rifles to the Giants and have also provided Franjiyah with a guard force to protect his stronghold at Zgharta. Tony's successor as head of the Giants, his younger brother Robert, is also said to be very pro-Syrian.

The Franjiyah-Syrian relationship is also a business relationship. Tony Franjiyah was personally close to President Assad's brother Rifaat. The two were partners in illicit businesses in the north and these ties continue under Robert.

Since June, the Syrians have consulted closely with Franjiyah on many occasions. He has visited Damascus and Foreign Minister Khaddam, Rifaat, and other key Syrian officials often have traveled to Zgharta. The Syrians have encouraged Franjiyah to build a broad national front of Lebanese factions to balance the Phalange and NLP. These efforts have met with little success because the factions have little in common and distrust each other almost as much as they dislike the Phalange. Nonetheless, Franjiyah has formed an informal alliance with Karami and Druze leader Walid Jumblatt.

Some of the other key Christian leaders in northern and central Lebanon also have close ties to the Syrians. Parliamentary Deputy Rene Muawwad--also from Zgharta--is close to the Syrians and has often been mentioned as a possible Syrian candidate for the presidency after Sarkis' term.

Greek Catholic leader and parliamentary Deputy Joseph Skaff is another pro-Syrian Christian. Skaff's power base is in the Bekaa valley town of Zahlah. The Bekaa is viewed

by the Syrians as crucial to their military position in Lebanon and their presence there is deeply rooted. Skaff has traveled to Damascus frequently this year and has participated with Franjiyah and Jumblatt in talks with the Syrians.

The Syrians provided Skaff with one thousand small arms in July and his small militia force has cooperated with them and Franjiyah in several operations against the Phalange in the Bsharri area.

The Syrians also have successfully wooed other Christian leaders in the Bekaa Valley including religious figures like Greek Catholic Patriarch Maximos Hakim and Greek Orthodox Patriarch Elias IV as well as many of the Bekaa deputies to the Lebanese parliament. The pro-Syrian public comments of these figures received much media attention inside Syria and are pointed to by Syrian diplomats in defending President Assad's role in Lebanon.

Damascus has also developed some ties with the Syrian Social Nationalist Party (Parti Populaire Syrien--PPS) a multiconfessional Lebanese group founded in the 1930s by Antun Saadah, a Greek Orthodox. The party, which in its early days favored the creation of a Greater Syria to include Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Palestine, Iraq and even Cyprus, twice tried to overthrow the Lebanese government. Both efforts--in 1949 and 1961--failed disasterously. The orientation of the party was transformed in the 1960s from fascist to leftist.

The PPS is currently headed by two Greek Orthodox Lebanese, Inam Raad and Abdallah Saadah. They worked closely with the Palestinians and Lebanese leftists during the civil war but began to distance themselves from the Lebanese leftists after the Syrian invasion in June 1976. Raad was the first member of the leftist National Movement--an umbrella organization founded by the late Kamal Jumblatt--to visit Damascus after the Syrian intervention and by early 1977 he was publicly praising Syria's role in Lebanon.

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Syria's Christian allies represent a minority of the Lebanese Christians. Despite Syrian claims, most Christians--especially most Maronites--are opposed to the Syrian presence in Lebanon. The Phalange can field a 15,000-man militia against the Franjiyah's 2,000. Nonetheless, with Syrian backing the Franjiyah and Skaff factions have consolidated their hold over significant parts of northern Lebanon and provide some basis of support for Syria.

The Muslims-Jumblatt

Lebanese Druze leader Walid Jumblatt, who--like Franjiyah--is the traditional leader of an almost feudal constituency, has been courted by the Syrians. Although only comprising about six percent of Lebanon's population, the Druze--a schismatic Muslim sect--have played a major role in the country's politics and history. The Druze homeland is the Shuf region of central Lebanon.

Syria's relationship with the Jumblatts has been a stormy one. The Syrians traditionally favored the efforts of Kamal Jumblatt--Walid's father--to reform the Lebanese political system which is based on the 1943 National Pact. The 1943 agreement divided political power in Lebanon on the basis of religion. The Christians--then a slim majority of the Lebanese population--were given the President's office and a 6 to 5 majority ratio in the Chamber of Deputies. Sunni Muslims got the Prime Minister's office and the Shia Muslims the position of Speaker of the parliament. The attempt to strike a confessional balance reached to the bureaucracy and the military.

The Muslims now regard this system as archaic and unfair since they are now a majority of the population. Kamal Jumblatt--supported by the Palestinians--led the Muslim and leftist campaign to overthrow the confessional system in the 1975-1976 civil war. The Syrians reversed their traditional alliances and intervened to defend the Maronites in 1976 because President Assad was worried that a Palestinian-Jumblatt victory would lead to a dangerously radical state on his border that might involve Syria in a war with Israel for which Damascus was unprepared.

Most observers believe that Syria was involved in the assassination of Kamal Jumblatt in mid-March 1977. His son Walid succeeded to leadership of the Druze and Jumblatt's leftist Progressive Socialist Party. Walid Jumblatt almost certainly believes the Syrians were responsible for his father's death.

Despite this, Walid has been willing to renew the traditional alliance with Syria. Walid told a Lebanese magazine in November 1977 that "I didn't approve of his (Kamal's) confrontation with Syria. I thought Syria had an important role to play and could not be left out."

The Syrians have tried unsuccessfully to get Walid to join a broad front of pro-Syrian Muslims in late 1977 and have encouraged him to work with Franjiyah this year. Jumblatt has resisted any formal alliance with the Syrians, but recent reporting indicates that he is working closely with them. 25X1

The Druze-Syrian alliance is a tactical move on Walid's part but we believe it is likely to endure. Both sides have an interest in keeping close ties. Walid has kept open his ties to other Arabs, including the Palestinians and Iraqis, but he recognizes that without Syrian support the Druze and PSP are a poor match for the Maronites.

Walid was not eager to succeed to power when his father died and was generally characterized as a nervous young man who would be unable to fill his father's shoes. He does not have the charismatic appeal of Kamal nor has he been able to achieve his stature as leader-spokesman of the Lebanese left. He does command a significant power base among the Druze, however; his PSP militia is said to have bout 2,000 fighters and can be supplemented by several thousand more in any major struggle.

The Muslims--Syria's Puppets

Syria has several close supporters among the leadership of Lebanon's Sunni and Shia Muslim population. These figures faithfully adhere to the Syrian line on all major issues. They are not widely respected by the Lebanese but do have some political influence. Because of their ties to Damascus, patronage and other political benefits flow to them and they attract followers. The Syrians have repeatedly tried to get their puppets into the Lebanese cabinet and may ultimately succeed in doing so despite the opposition of the Phalange and Shamun.

The best known Syrian puppet is Assam Qansu, leader of the pro-Syrian wing of the Lebanese Baath Party (there is also a pro-Iraqi Baath faction in Lebanon). Qansu, a Shia Muslim, is a relatively moderate leftist. He favors greater Lebanese support for the Palestinians and greater involvement in Arab-Israeli issues. He espouses the Syrian line of an equal division of political power in Lebanon between Muslims and Christians, although the Maronites would still hold on to the Presidency.

Qansu joined the Baath in 1955 and has been closely tied to the Syrians ever since. After Assad came to power in Damascus in November 1970 he placed Qansu in charge of the Lebanese Baath organization. While Qansu is loyal to Assad he does not appear to have much influence on Syrian decisionmaking about Lebanon. Qansu is said to have good personal relations with Phalange leader Pierre Jumayyil, and he served as a contact point between Assad and the Phalange in the past.

Kamal Shatila, who heads the Nasirite Union of Working People's Forces, is completely subservient to Syria with which he has had close ties since the early 1970s. He also works closely with Qansu's Baath.

Shatila, a Sunni, espouses "the highest degree of coordination with Syria" and argues that Lebanon's "Arab identity" must be strengthened. Shatila, an advocate of strengthening the Muslims' political role in Lebanon, told a recent visitor that the Muslims felt they were "strangers in their own land."

Qansu and Shatila have their power base in Muslim West Beirut where they each have a small armed following. Together their militias probably do not exceed 1,000 men but they are receiving arms and money from Syria. These forces are totally under Syrian control. Qansu told US officials that he had wanted to send some fighters to the south in March 1978 to fight the Israelis but the Syrians refused permission.

Talal Marabi is a less well known Syrian puppet who heads the Confrontation Front, a small organization based in the Akkar region in northernmost Lebanon. The Akkar is an area where the Syrians have long had close ties and which they regard as crucial to their security. The Akkar has a significant Alawite population--the religious sect to which Assad belongs.

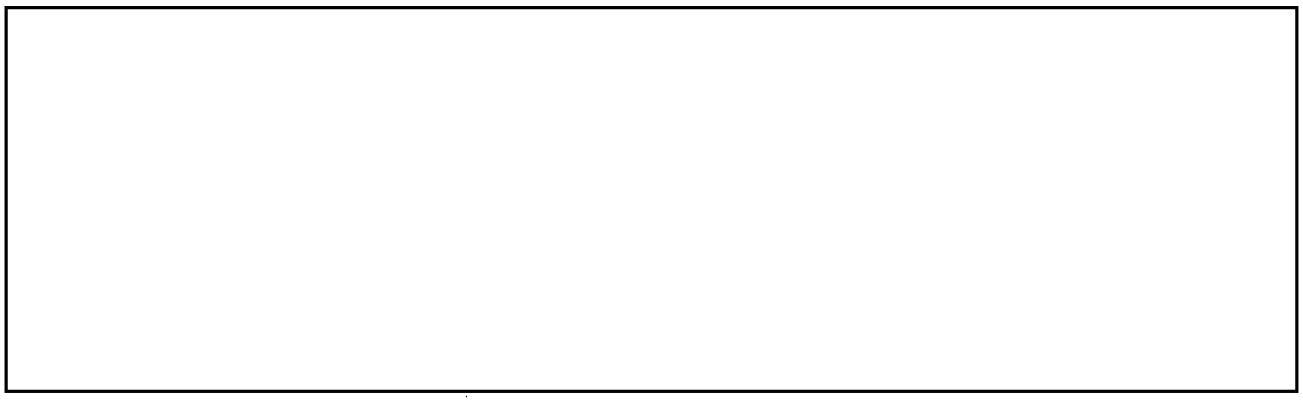
Marabi, a Sunni Muslim, is a deputy to the parliament from the Akkar and has supported Syrian efforts in the past to build a national front with Qansu and Shatila. We know very little about his activities but he has a small militia trained and armed by Syria.

The Syrians have also tried to improve their relationship with other Lebanese Muslim groups. Recent reporting indicates that the Syrians have offered arms to leftist groups like Ibrahim Qulaylat's Murabitun. Nonetheless, most of the leftists remain deeply suspicious of Syria's designs in Lebanon and they have not forgotten the defeat inflicted on them and the Palestinians in June 1976 by the Syrians.

The Syrians also have been unable to attract much support from the old-line Muslim political leaders. Only Tripoli Sunni leader Rashid Karami has worked with the Syrians to build a coalition of groups opposed to the Phalange and Shamunists.

The Muslims, in general, support Syria's continued presence in Lebanon primarily because they fear the Phalange and NLP will dominate the country if the Syrians pull out in the near term. In early October, for example, leaders of almost every Muslim party in Lebanon visited Damascus to urge President Assad to keep his forces in Lebanon.

The Syrians did not ask their Muslim allies--even puppets like Qansu and Shatila--to join in the fighting against the Maronite militias this summer. The Syrians fear that such a move would undermine Damascus' claim to being an impartial peacekeeping force in Lebanon. For their part, most of the Muslims and their Palestinian allies do not want to be drawn into the struggle. 25X1



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The Palestinians

Syria's greatest potential asset in Lebanon is the Palestinian fedayeen. Despite a residue of suspicion of both sides left over from the 1976 clashes, the Syrians and Palestinians have reformed their traditional alliance to work together in Lebanon. Although the Syrians have generally poor relations with the radical wing of the Palestinian movement--the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, the Front for the Liberation of Palestine, Black June, and the Arab Liberation Front--Damascus does have a fairly good working relationship with Fatah, the largest commando group.

The Syrians have resumed training and arming Fatah and have reopened some Fatah facilities inside Syria. Fatah, in turn, supports the Syrian presence in Lebanon. Fatah has been willing to accede to Syrian requests to support and train other Syrian allies in Lebanon.

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Fatah, whose 7,000-to 10,000-man militia is the largest Palestinian fighting force, recognizes that it needs Syrian acquiescence to maintain its position in Lebanon. If the Syrians should pull out of Lebanon, Fatah would look to Syria for materiel aid against the Maronites.

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A key Syrian asset within the Palestinian movement that Assad uses in Lebanon are the Syrian-controlled units of the Palestine Liberation Army, most of which is usually stationed inside Syria. Other PLA units are also in Iraq, Jordan and Egypt.

The Syrians have used the PLA as a surrogate in Lebanon for several years--with varying success. The PLA was sent into the country by Assad in early 1976 in an unsuccessful effort to restore calm. The PLA disintegrated during June 1976, when many of its soldiers deserted to the Palestinian fedayeen.

Since 1976, Syria has rebuilt the PLA. Today it consists of two brigades--the Hittin and Qadisiyya. They are controlled through PLA headquarters in Damascus and are completely responsive to Syrian commands. The Hittin Brigade consists of 1,800 soldiers, mostly Palestinian refugees living in Syria. The brigade has three infantry battalions and one antiaircraft battalion. The Qadisiyya Brigade has about 1,200 soldiers organized into two infantry battalions and one antiaircraft battalion. These forces are regular military units, trained

by the Syrian army in infantry and commando tactics, including the use of helicopters.

In early October 1978, the Syrians again moved the Hittin and Qadissyya Brigades to Lebanon where they are deployed in West Beirut. As long as they are not used against the fedayeen the PLA will serve Syrian interests faithfully.

The Syrians can also count on the support of Saiqa, the second largest fedayeen group with a 3,000-member militia in Lebanon. Saiqa was created by the Syrian Baath Party in December 1968 and is controlled through the Syrian Baath Party Command in Damascus. Syria supplies its arms and training and most of its commanders are Syrian rather than Palestinian. Saiqa's leader, Zuhair Muhsin, is loyal to the Assad regime and considered a Syrian puppet by most Palestinians.

Saiqa's regular military forces consist of two battalions--the Abd al-Qadr al-Husaini battalion and the Khaled ibn al-Walid battalion--both stationed in Lebanon. Many of the officers and men in these units are actually Syrian army commandos. Saiqa also has militia forces in all the major Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon. There are camps in Tripoli, Beirut, Sidon, Tyre, Nabatiyah and the northern Bekaa.

ASSESSMENT

En toto, Syria's assets and allies in Lebanon are a significant force in the country's political life. While individually weak, together they are a relatively viable basis of support for the Syrian presence in the country.

The Syrians have been unable so far to form a formal alliance between their various Lebanese allies. Given the enormous differences in outlook among Franjiyah and Jumblatt for example, it is unlikely that the Syrians will be able to form a united front in the future. Damascus can probably continue to use its assets and allies, however, to serve its interests in Lebanon.

Many of Syria's most important alliances in Lebanon--Jumblatt, Franjiyah and Arafat's Fatah--are tactical in nature. In the byzantine world of Lebanese politics such alliances are subject to rapid and unexpected change. Nonetheless, we believe the current Syrian ties with these groups would survive if Syria suddenly had to withdraw from Lebanon if only because Franjiyah, Jumblatt and Fatah would need Syrian support to hold off the Maronite militias.

If the Syrians were to pull out of Lebanon or were forced out by international pressure, Assad's assets and allies would lose some of their influence. Groups like Qansu's Baathis and Marabi's Confrontation Front depend heavily on Syrian support.

Nonetheless, Syria's allies would not fall apart and the Syrians would probably provide them with materiel and financial aid across the border. The long and mountainous border is easy to infiltrate with men and materiel. The Syrian assets--Lebanese and Palestinian--are probably strong enough to hold their own in a renewed civil war with the Maronite militias.

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