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The Director of Central Intelligence  
Washington, D.C. 20505

C/NIC Chrono

National Intelligence Council

NIC 03877-85  
2 July 1985

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence  
Deputy Director of Central Intelligence

FROM: Graham E. Fuller  
National Intelligence Officer for NESA

SUBJECT: Aftermath of the Hostage Crisis

1. The hostage crisis came out better than most of us had reason to expect. It seems that Nabih Barri's calculated gamble to insert the moderates into the hijacking crisis has paid off. The odds were high against him, but he seems to have succeeded. Ironically, the major reason for his success springs from the unusual coalescence of anti-US forces--the USSR, Syria, Iran--which had concluded that getting out from under this crisis was in the radical states' best interests.

-- It is important that we analyze and understand the dynamics behind which these radical forces acted in the way they did. In a nutshell, the USSR, Syria, Iran, and the Hizballah--probably in that order--probably came to realize the full risks of the game as it was unfolding.

2. The USSR. The Soviets spoke with Assad at some length in Moscow and have indicated both publicly and privately their disapproval of the hijacking. The USSR can obviously profit from American discomfort, apparent impotence, and preoccupation produced by the crisis, but seemed to have grown uncomfortable at the prospect that the US might undertake serious military action to free the hostages or otherwise pose military challenge. Such military action could have spilled over in a way that could damage Moscow's radical allies in the Middle East. It is furthermore difficult for Moscow to publicly uphold such a flagrant act of international piracy.

3. Syria. Syria on its own probably would have reached many of the same conclusions as Moscow but was probably pushed further along by Moscow's position. Syria must have recognized Moscow's unwillingness to support Syria in a major international adventure of this kind where the risks were high.

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- Assad himself--harsh and uncompromising in the pursuit of greater Syrian national interests--never shrinks from acts of murder, assassination and violence. He prefers unattributable violence, however, and rarely enjoys gratuitous confrontation with the US on grounds where the US is strong.
- Assad had another major reason in moving to bolster Barri. He unquestionably sensed, as we did, that Barri by himself was probably on the way to defeat at the hands of the radicals in the evolving dynamics of the crisis. Assad does not like a powerful Amal movement, but he likes a powerful Hizballah even less. He moved to ensure a Barri victory. Assad also wants a strong Amal in the south against the Israelis.
- Assad has other important strategic business to get on with in the Middle East--not the least of which is blocking the US-sponsored peace process. Although this hijacking incident helps delay such a process, it is not Assad's instrument of choice at this time. I would not rule out, however, Syrian support for some such incident in the future if the US peace process is clearly moving toward success.
- Syria always wishes to demonstrate its own power and presence as essential to anything happening in the area.

4. Iran. The Iranians had a great deal more to gain from the incident. It was clear they moved to exploit and complicate the issue early on--despite apparent lack of initial involvement. Iran must keep its eyes on several simultaneous goals in Lebanon however:

- Above all, maintenance of Iran's own position in Syria and Lebanon. Without access to Syria and Lebanon--at Syrian sufferance--Iran is unable to pursue its strategic interests within Lebanon. It cannot afford to cross Syria to the extent that this access is threatened.
- Support for the Shia movement as a whole within Lebanon. Amal is not Iran's favorite vehicle but it is nonetheless a Shia vehicle. Iran cannot afford to go to war with Amal as long as Amal remains a powerful determinant of the future of the Shia community. Iran will always want a powerful Shia community even if that community has not yet adopted Khomeini's own cherished philosophy of Islamic government.
- Iran wishes to support the existence of Hizballah within the Shia community as the ultimately preferred politico-religious movement in the country. Iran was in the process of assisting a Hizballah win over Amal when Assad interrupted the process.

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When faced with growing Syrian discomfort over the hijacking, Rafsanjani--in personal conversations with Assad--had to accede to Assad's wishes if Iran wished to remain in the Lebanon game. Unquestionably Iran would have liked to have played it tougher but its influence was limited.

- This development does represent a significant tactical victory of Amal's not-so-radical secular forces in Lebanon as supported by Assad, as opposed to religious fundamentalist forces as supported by Iran. This was an important battle in a war that is far from over.

5. The Shia Movement in Lebanon. Nabih Barri seemingly has emerged more powerful in the internal Shia struggle. It might not have happened this way had Syria not decided to intervene. We do not yet understand enough about the dynamics of the struggle between Barri and Hizballah to understand what gains Hizballah may have made--if any.

- Syria obviously prefers a victorious Amal over Hizballah but probably will not seek to destroy Hizballah power entirely. Syria will pay some deference to Iranian feelings about Hizballah, and Hizballah may be of some use to Syria down the road in keeping Amal whittled down to size. Above all, Assad wishes to prevent any single faction in Lebanon from becoming so strong as to challenge Syrian power.
- We cannot tell yet how Hizballah may come to feel about Syria. They must be angered that Syria helped to conspire in snatching potentially dominant control of the hostage crisis from their hands. Will hostility between Hizballah and Syria intensify in the months ahead or will there be a pragmatic modus vivendi?

6. The Peace Process. The press is filled with suggestions that something may now have changed in the US-Syrian relationship. I don't believe it. Still, as formidable an opponent as Syria is, we must remember Syria is not essentially ideological in outlook. Syria's use of violence and terror and its cooperation with Iran and Libya is based on a calculated goal of Syrian geopolitical interests. It will not be gratuitously and vociferously anti-American. Hence Assad emerges as the "pragmatic humanitarian" in this crisis in the eyes of the world.

- Despite occasional tactical accommodations such as we have witnessed, the US nonetheless remains on a collision course with Syrian strategic interests. Syria cannot allow the US peace process to succeed because it strikes at the very heart of Syrian ambitions in the region:
- Maintenance of an anti-Israeli coalition under Syrian control.

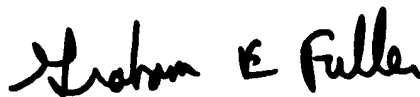
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- Syrian strategic domination of Lebanon.
- Syrian domination of the Palestinian movement.
- Syrian unwillingness to accept Jordanian dominance over the West Bank.
- Syrian determination to foil formulation of a moderate Arab bloc.

The Syrians will soon return to very hard ball indeed on all of these issues. However much the US may wish to accommodate Syria, our interests are contradictory.

7. Violence and the Peace Process. Syria will devote maximum resources to blocking the US strategic challenge. It will enlist Iran and Libya and radical Palestinians to this end. It will seek to radicalize anti-peace elements in Israel. It will seek and get Soviet support--although the Soviets will not give Assad a blank check of support. Moscow will probably limit itself to defense of Syria proper and provision of weapons.

- The peace process itself may not be able to succeed if the radical states of the Middle East are able to operate unchallenged in the months and years ahead. The US may have to decide between strategically weakening this radical coalition, or abandoning the peace process as too difficult and risky in the face of radical challenge to the US, Israel, Jordan, Egypt, the Arafat PLO, and other pro-Western Arab states.
- To the extent that the peace process may founder on its own, Syria at least will somewhat relax the intensity of opposition to the US in the region.



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