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Lebanon: Warlord Contacts With Israel [redacted] b3

A Research Paper

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Lebanon: Warlord Contacts With Israel [redacted] b3

A Research Paper

This paper was prepared by [redacted] Office of Near Eastern and South Asian Analysis, with a contribution by [redacted] Office of Leadership Analysis. It was coordinated with the Directorate of Operations. [redacted] b-3 b3

Comments and queries are welcome and may be directed to the Chief, [redacted] b-3

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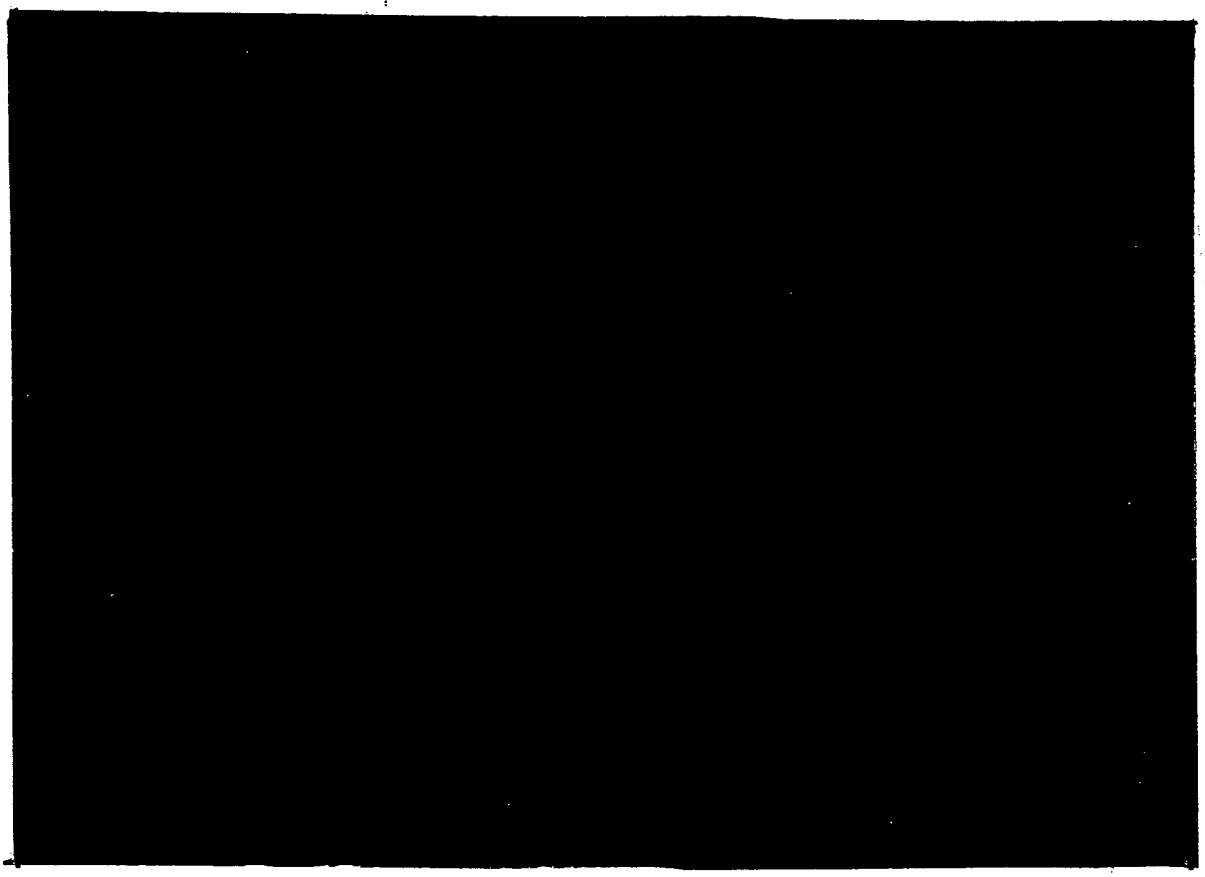

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Israeli political influence in Lebanon, north of the security zone, will remain marginal and mainly covert. The growing Syrian, Palestinian, and Iranian influence in Lebanon encourages Lebanese militias to contact Israel, but it is also the major constraint on the development of deeper ties. Except for the ASL and, to a lesser extent, the LF, major Lebanese militias eschew an overt relationship with Israel for fear of stimulating strong opposition among Lebanese Muslims and a violent response by both Syrian forces and the radical Shia Hizballah.

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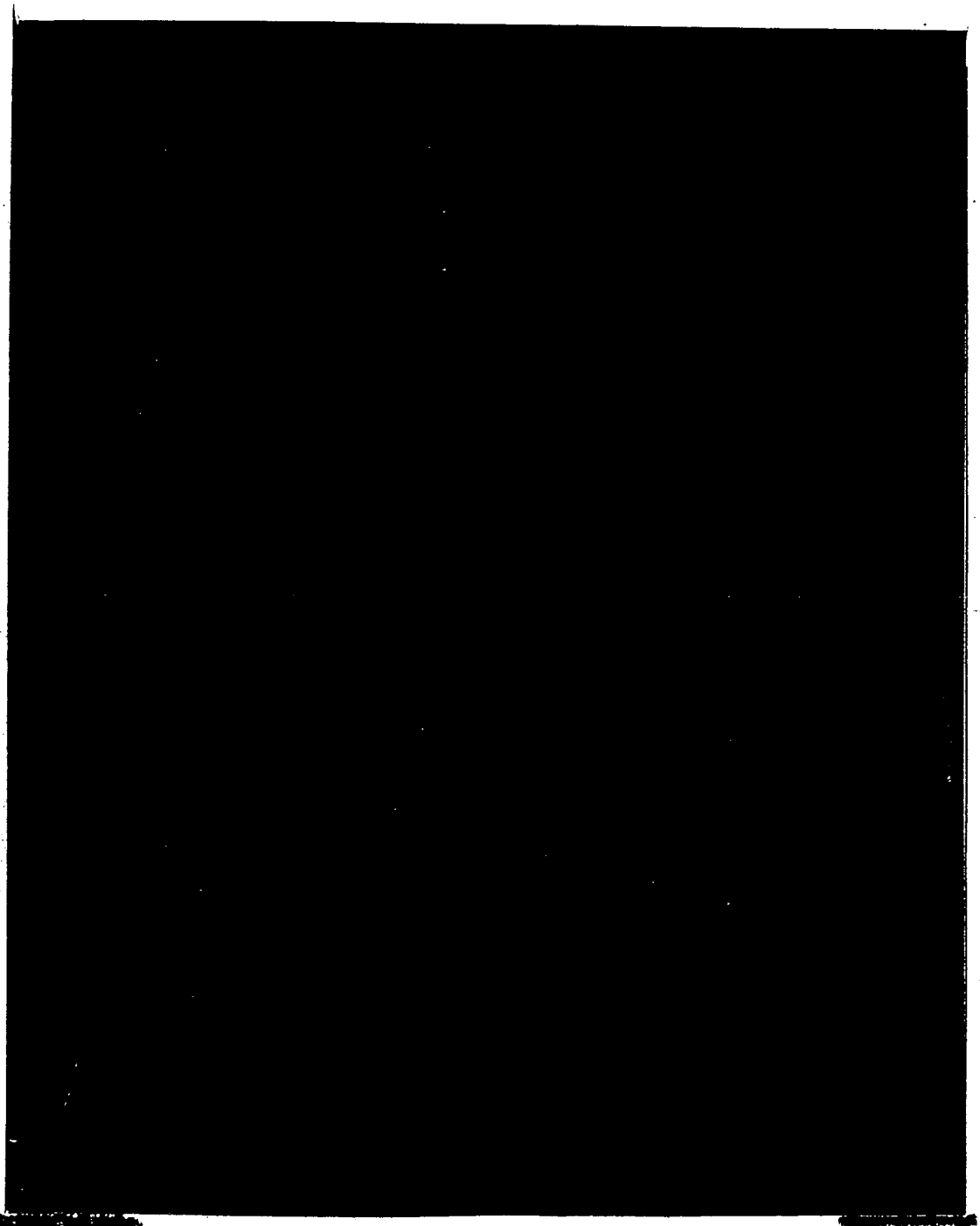

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Impetus for Lebanese Militias' Ties to Israel

Although each Lebanese militia has its own reasons for maintaining ties to Tel Aviv, we believe that fear of growing Syrian, Palestinian, and Iranian influence in Lebanon compels most key militias to seek out Israeli liaisons.[1] We believe the deep sense of uncertainty about the future among all Lebanese factions, coupled with the pragmatism of many Lebanese politicians, will ensure that Lebanese groups continue these associations with Israel as a counterweight to dangerous opponents within and outside Lebanon:

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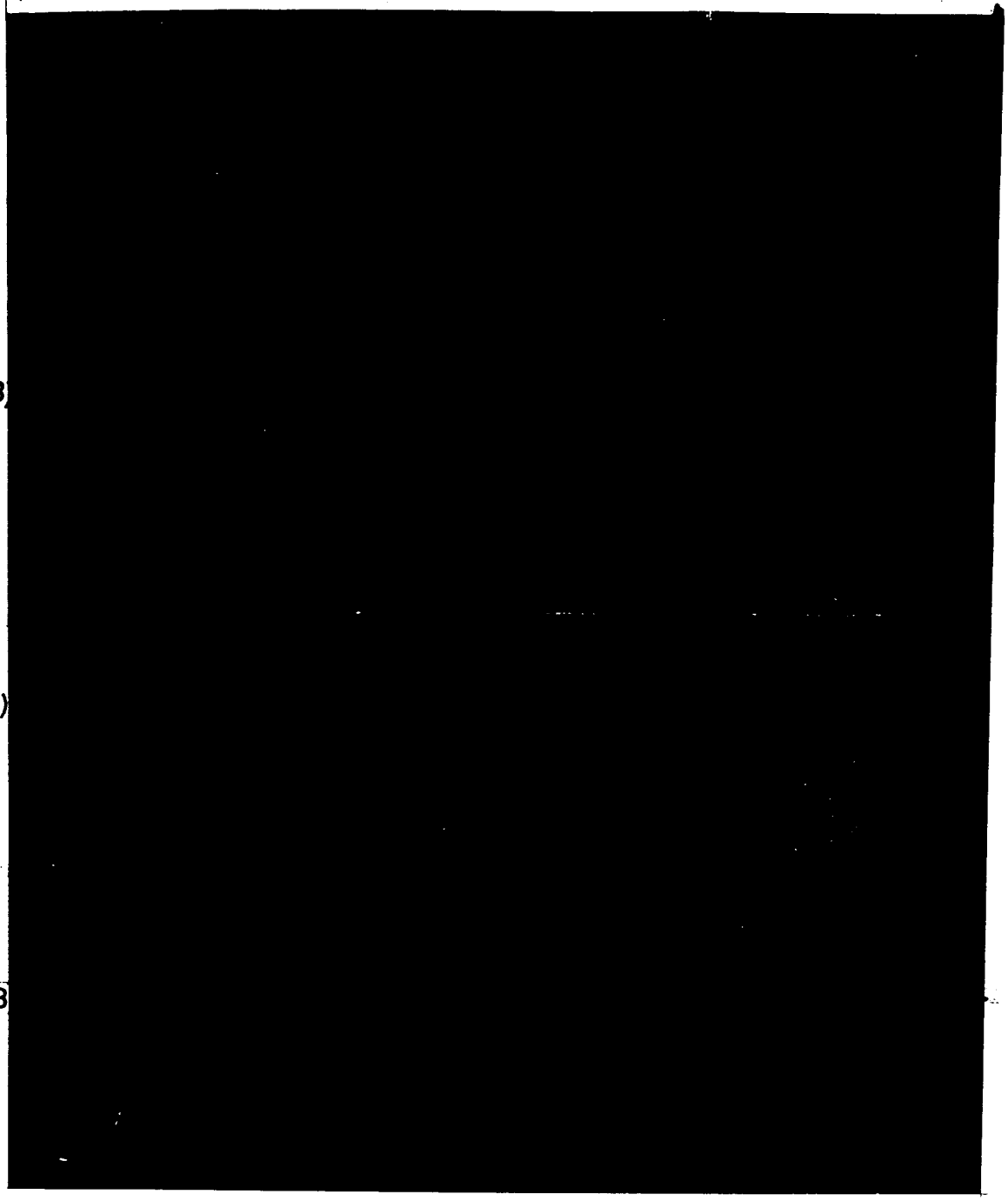

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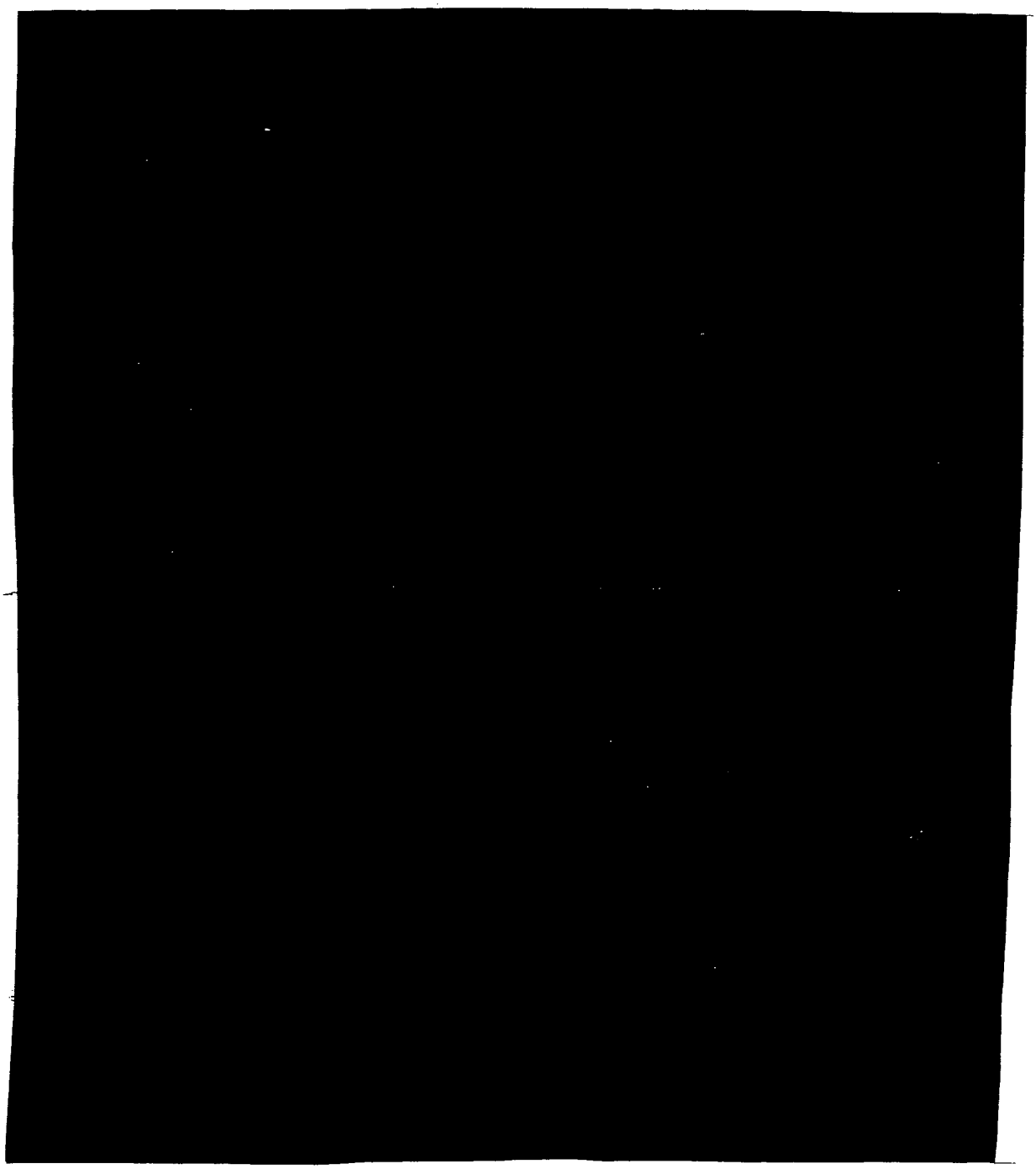

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The Israeli commitment to the ASL stems from Tel Aviv's belief that the security zone is essential for the protection of Israel's northern settlements against radical Palestinian and Hizballah attacks.

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The ASL units sustain most of the casualties and bear the brunt of the fighting in the zone, which minimizes Israeli losses—a politically sensitive issue in Israel.

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IDF units are not stationed in Jazzin because it lies outside the security zone. Nonetheless, when Jazzin was threatened by Hizballah forces in May 1987 [redacted] Israel's Ministry of Defense Coordinator for Lebanese Affairs, Uri Lubrani, joined several IDF officers visiting Jazzin publicly in April 1988, a move many Lebanese interpreted as showing support for Lahad and his political ambitions. [redacted]

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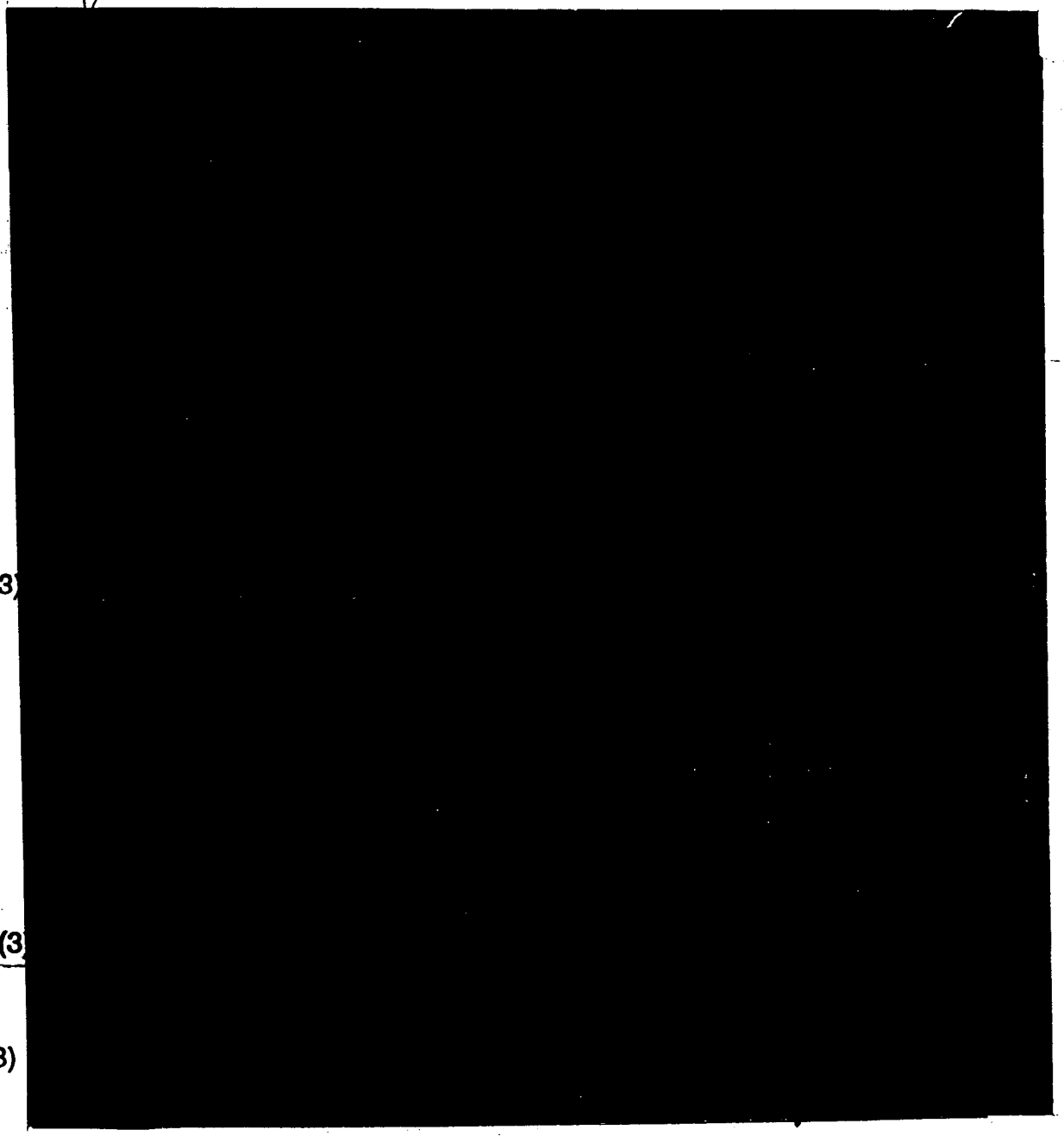

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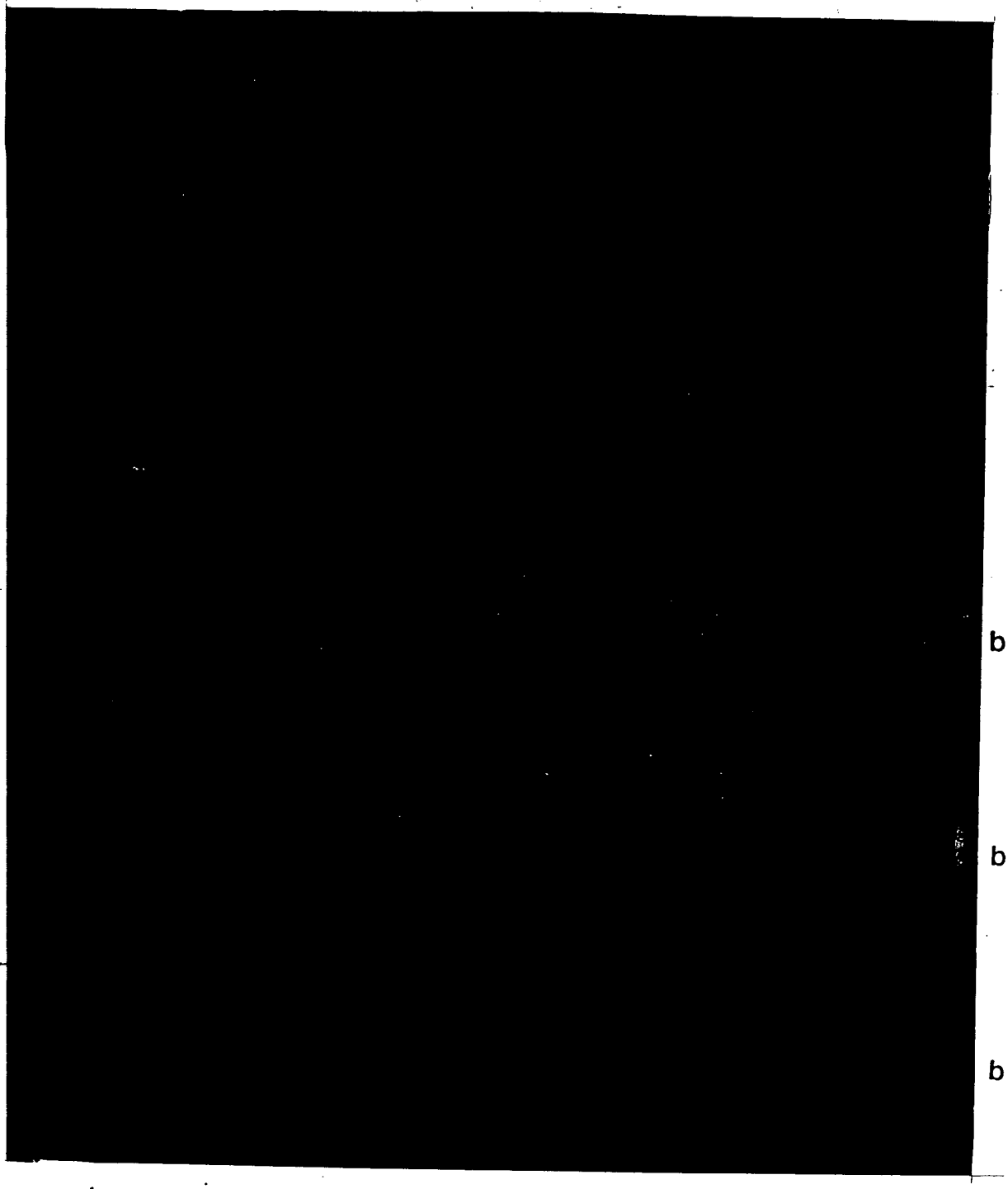

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Amal. Lebanon's largest Muslim militia, Amal, is caught between its close ties to Syria and its goal of stabilizing southern Lebanon—which makes contact with Israel a virtual necessity. Amal, which traces its origins to Imam Musa Sadr in 1975, transformed the once politically quiescent Lebanese Shias into both a political force and a powerful militia. More secular and pragmatic than the radical fundamentalist group Hizballah, Amal strives to increase the Shia political role in Lebanon without necessarily destroying the present political system. Amal leader Nabih Barri, although criticized by more radical members for his close political and military links to Damascus, cannot afford to weaken his ties to Syria. In our view, Syrian backing has helped Barri maintain Amal's position in Lebanese politics despite Amal's severe internal fragmentation. [redacted]

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Barri nonetheless is hard pressed in his efforts to preserve Amal's role as representative of the Lebanese Shias in the face of stiff challenges from the Iranian-backed Hizballah. [redacted]

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Barri spent over 100 days in Damascus in the winter of 1987 and returned to Beirut only after the Syrian Arab Army entered the city. In our view, radical Shias believe that Amal has lost its legitimacy to Hizballah. Afraid of being viewed as an Israeli sympathizer, Barri does not hesitate to criticize Israel publicly to fend off Hizballah criticism and promote his activist image among the southern Shias—Amal's traditional constituency.

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Israeli Perception of Amal and the Security Zone

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[redacted] *Israel faces tough dilemmas in southern Lebanon. The Israelis recognize that bolstering Amal is essential to stabilizing the area, but they will not take the steps that Amal believes are necessary for the Shia moderates to overcome the dangerous influence of their rival, Hizballah. Amal has long demanded Israel's full withdrawal from the security zone and the disbanding of the predominantly Christian Army of South Lebanon (ASL).* [redacted]

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[redacted] *Tel Aviv has long stated that its troops would leave Lebanon if the security situation stabilized. Because Israeli Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin has made withdrawal contingent on at least six months of calm on the northern border—which the Israelis are convinced Amal cannot achieve—we do not foresee an Israeli withdrawal from the security zone or a lessening in Tel Aviv's support for ASL forces.* [redacted]

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Since Israel's withdrawal to the security zone in 1985, Amal has conducted only a few token attacks in the area. Israel's airstrikes in Lebanon have been targeted against Palestinian or Hizballah positions, not those of Amal. In military sweeps north of the zone, the Israelis have avoided engaging Amal forces.

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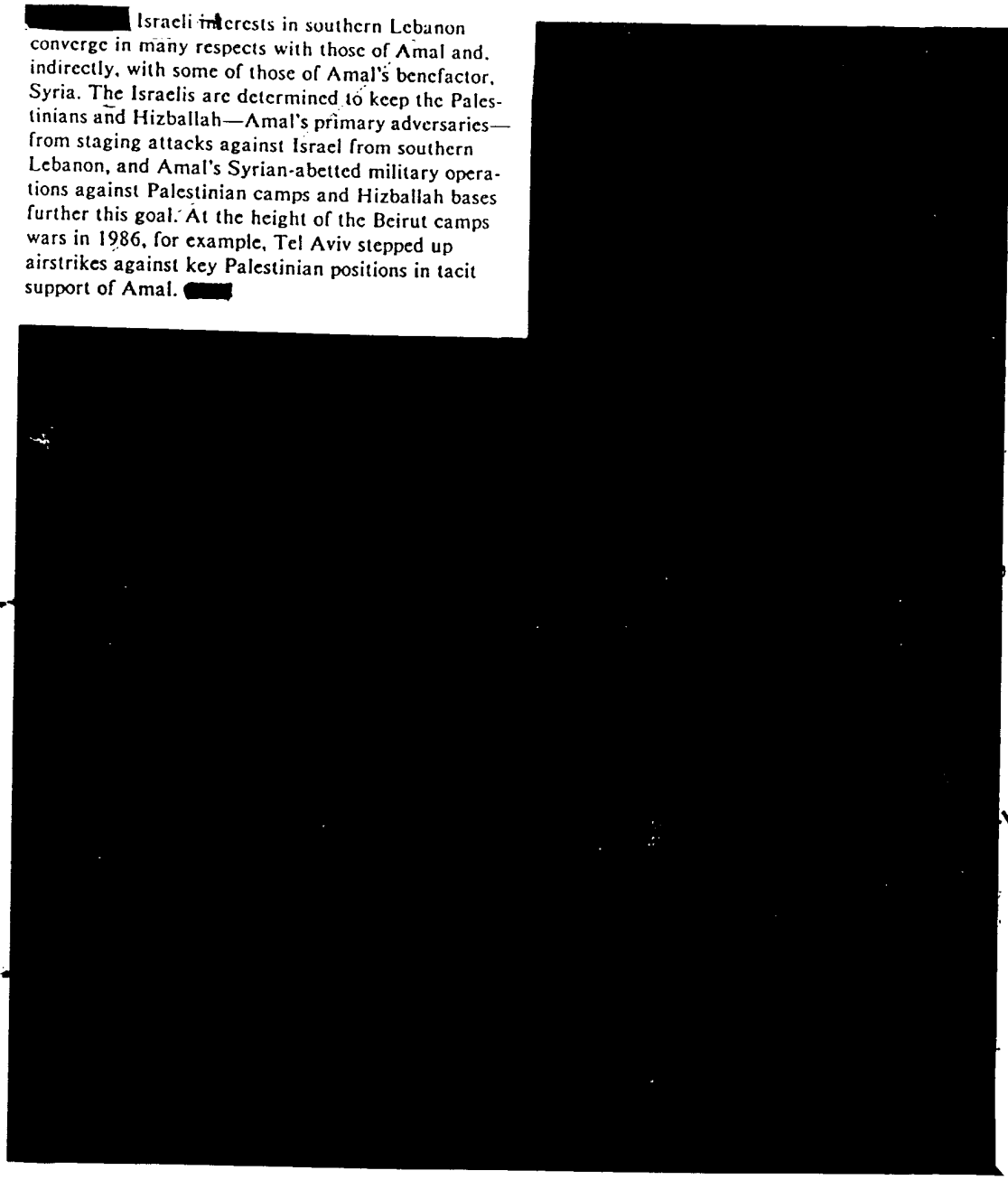
[redacted] Israeli interests in southern Lebanon converge in many respects with those of Amal and, indirectly, with some of those of Amal's benefactor, Syria. The Israelis are determined to keep the Palestinians and Hizballah—Amal's primary adversaries—from staging attacks against Israel from southern Lebanon, and Amal's Syrian-abetted military operations against Palestinian camps and Hizballah bases further this goal. At the height of the Beirut camps wars in 1986, for example, Tel Aviv stepped up airstrikes against key Palestinian positions in tacit support of Amal. [redacted]



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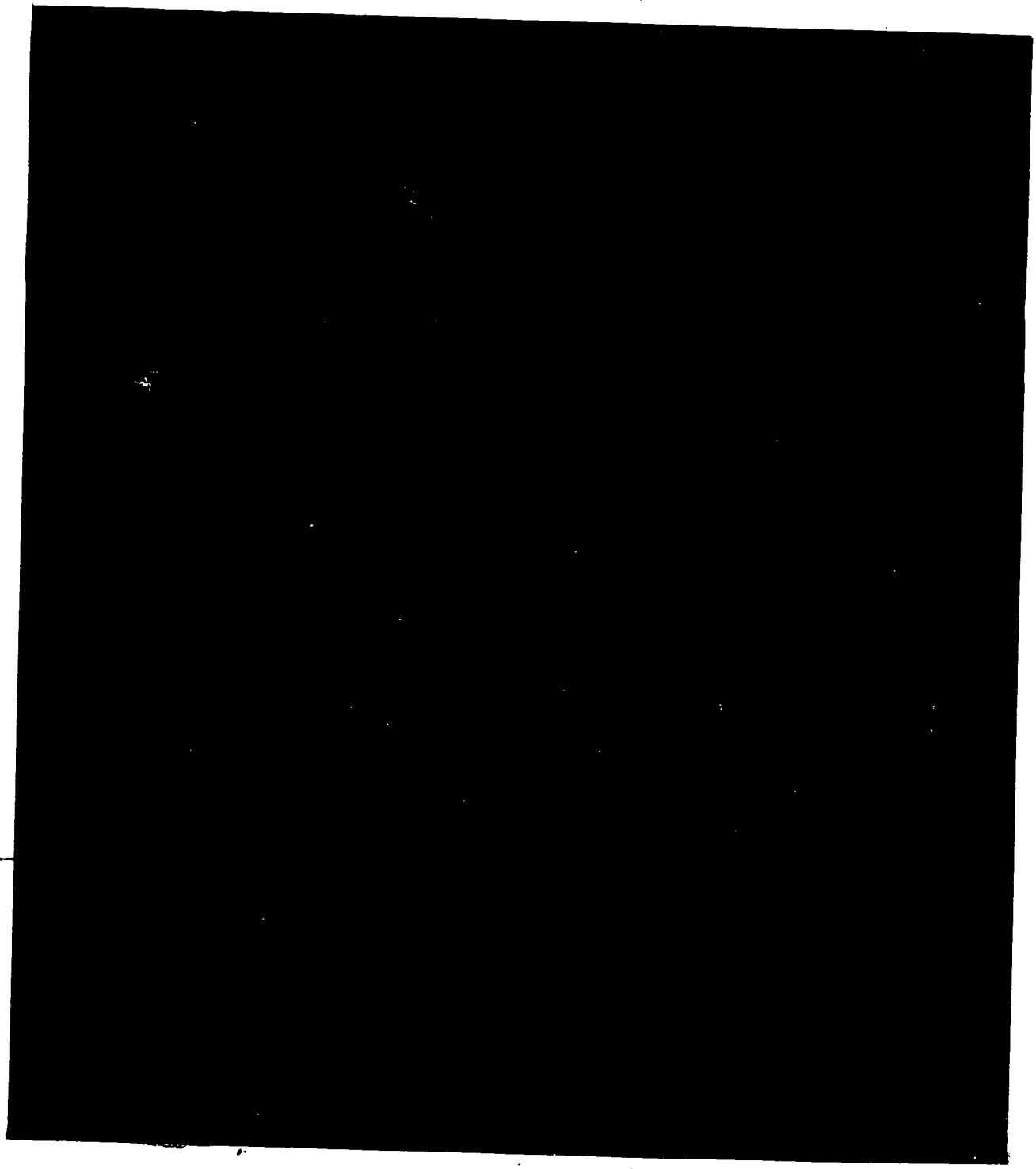

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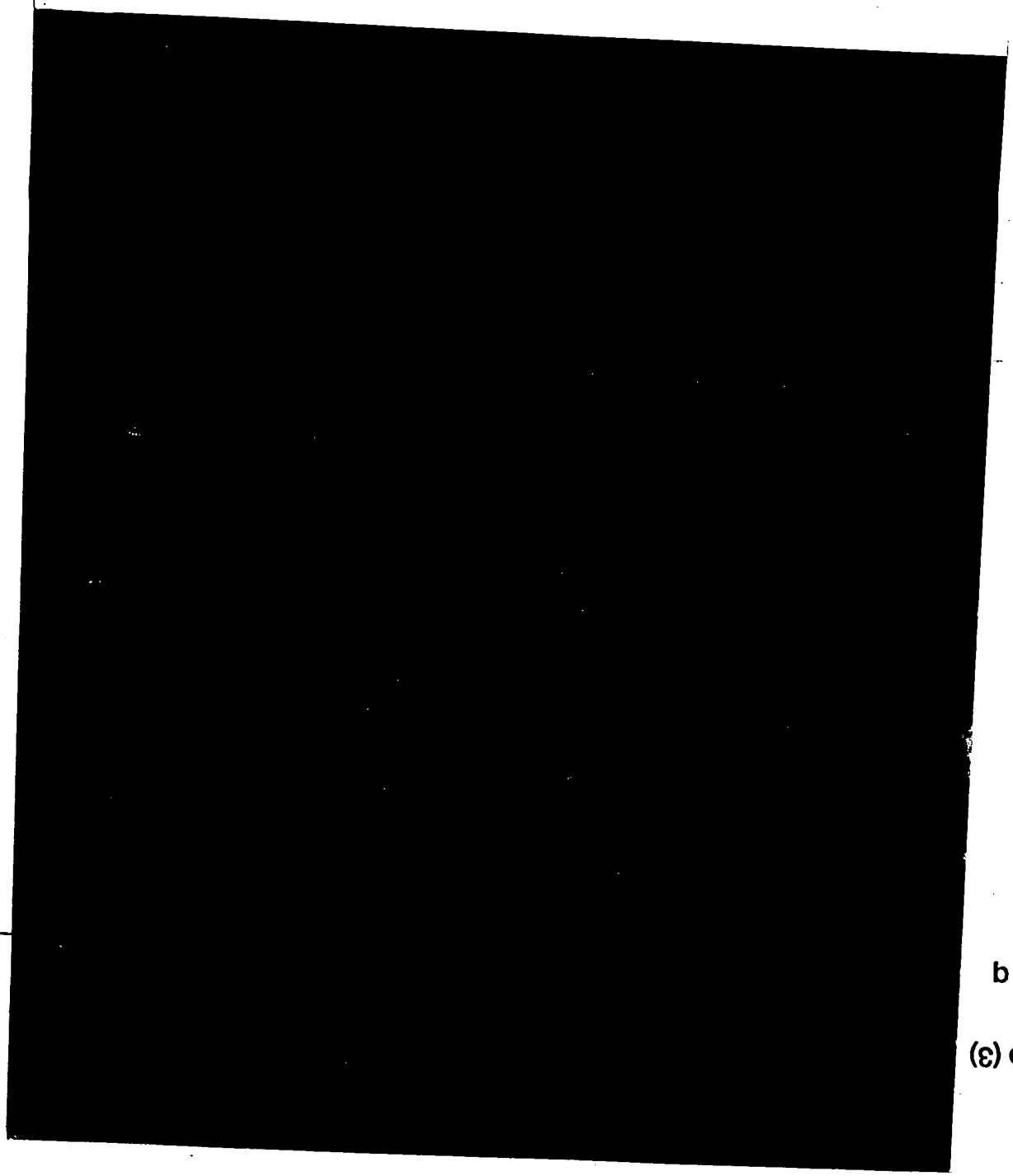

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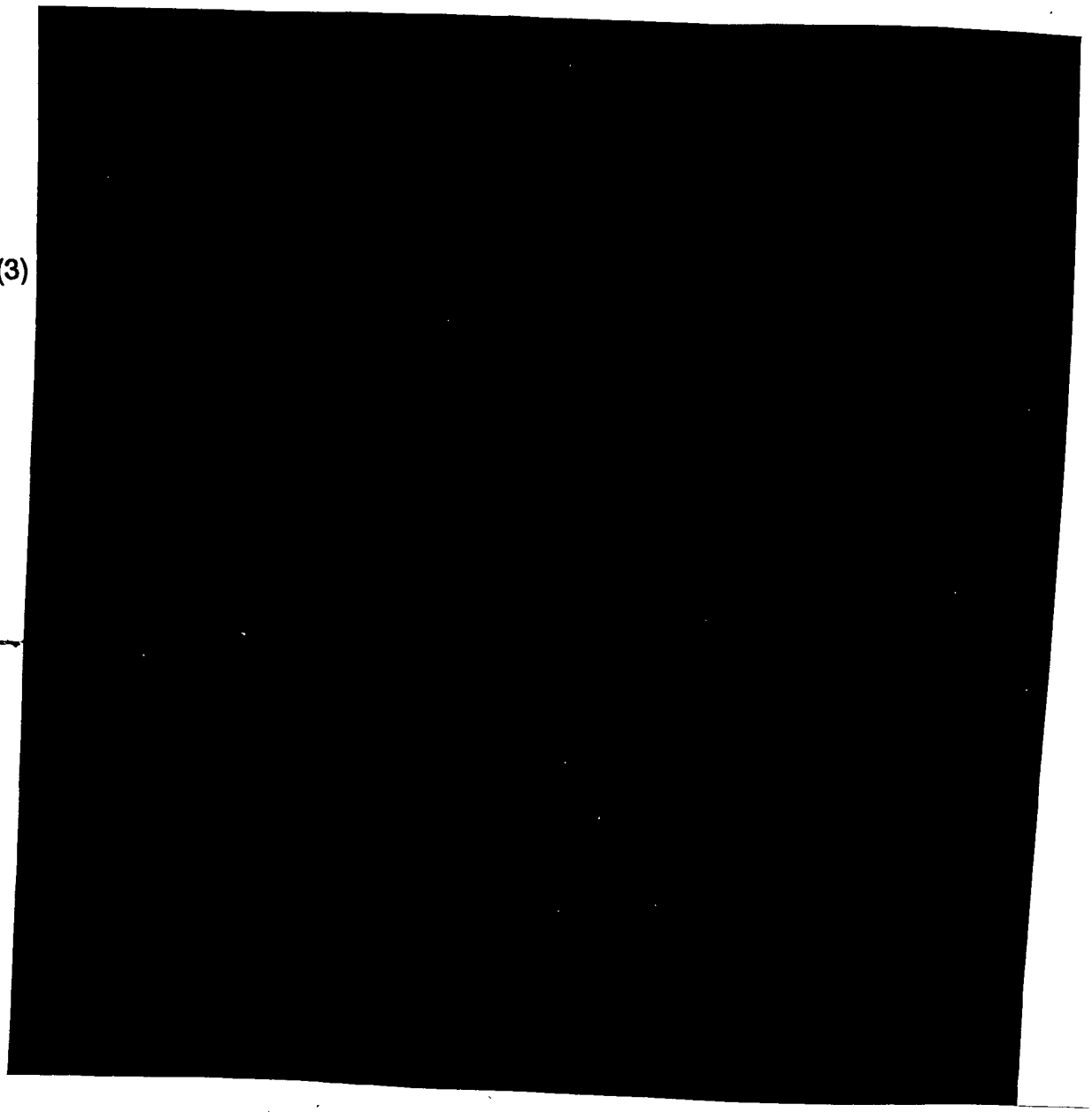
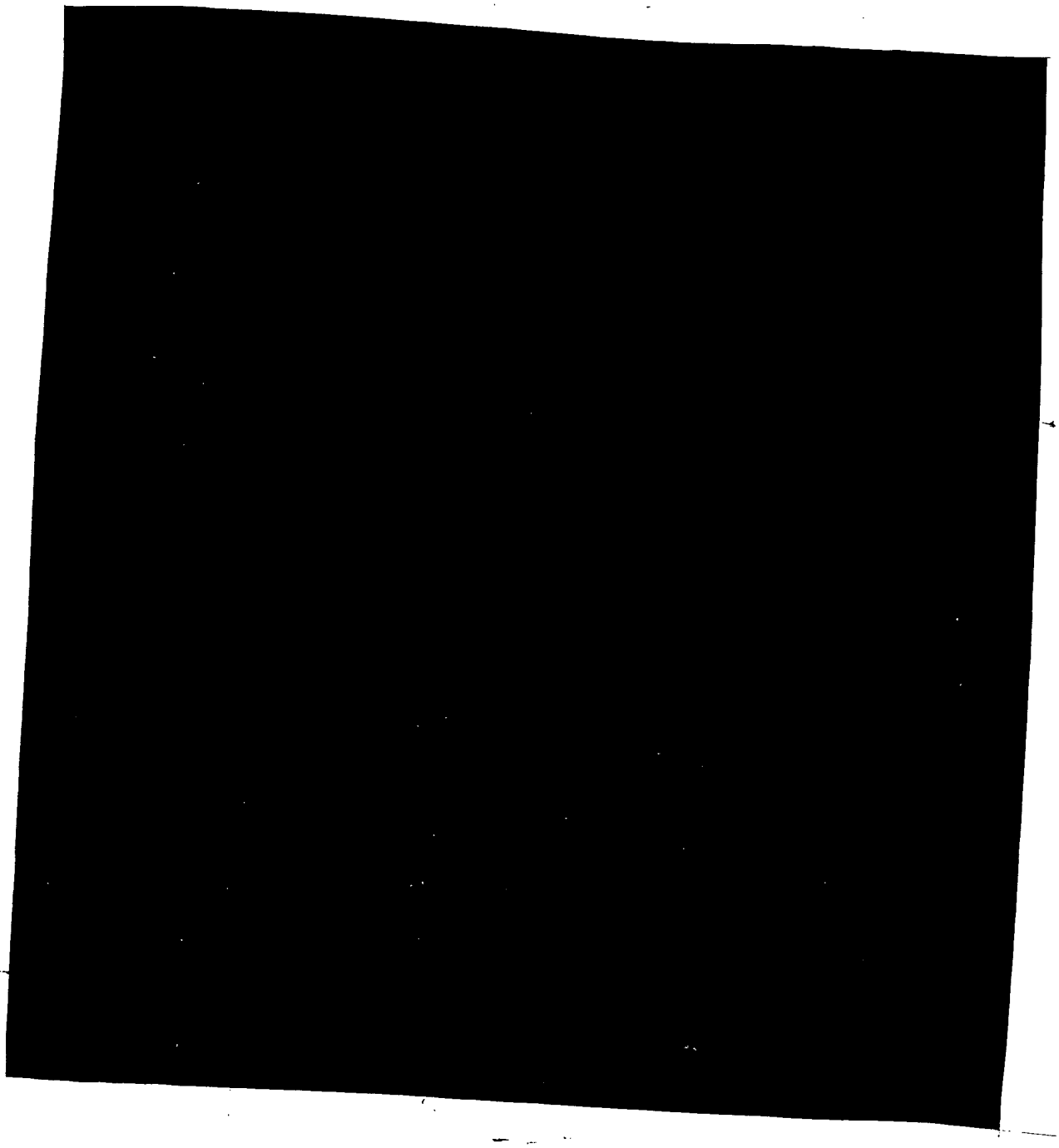
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