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SUBJECT: H/W NID CABLE 021702 FOR 26 JANUARY 2002

REF: NONE.

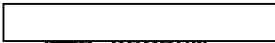
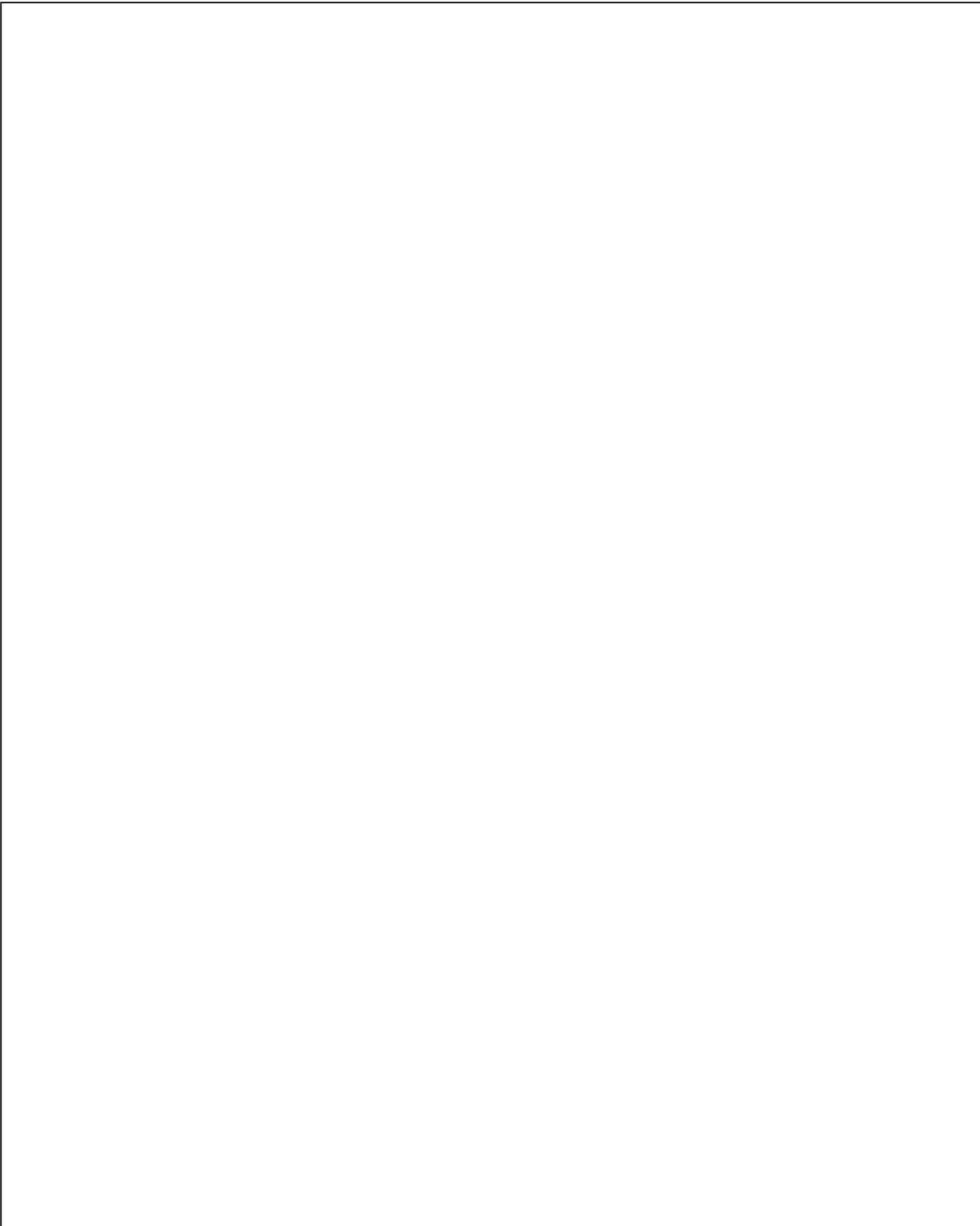
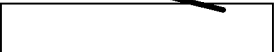
THE NID DOCUMENT IS FOR THE PURPOSE OF INFORMING SENIOR US OFFICIALS.

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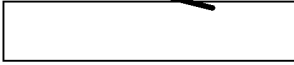
4. LEBANON: MANY SUSPECTS IN ASSASSINATION [Redacted]

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APPROVED FOR RELEASE
DATE: APR 2004



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4. LEBANON: MANY SUSPECTS IN ASSASSINATION [REDACTED]

//FORMER LEBANESE FORCES (LF) COMMANDER ELIE HOBEIKA, MURDERED THIS WEEK, HAD MANY ENEMIES.// POSSIBLE CULPRITS INCLUDE FELLOW CHRISTIANS, OTHER MEMBERS OF THE LEBANESE ELITE, PALESTINIANS, AND ISRAELIS. [REDACTED]

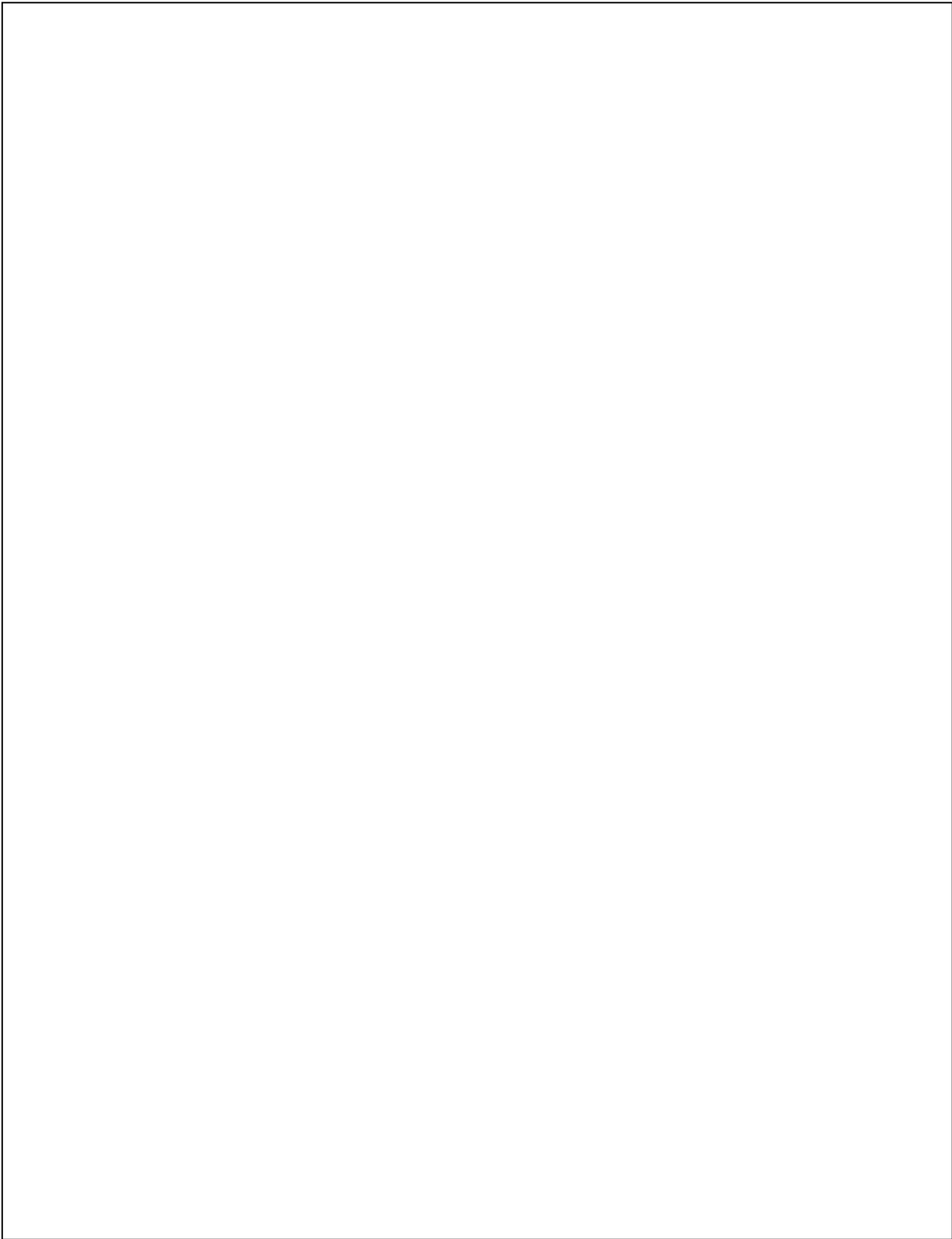
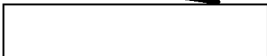
ACCORDING TO A WESTERN NEWS AGENCY, A PREVIOUSLY UNKNOWN ANTI-SYRIAN GROUP, "LEBANESE FOR A FREE AND INDEPENDENT LEBANON," HAS CLAIMED RESPONSIBILITY. THE CLAIM MAY BE ASSOCIATED WITH RIGHTWING MARONITE CHRISTIANS, WHO BORE A GRUDGE AGAINST HOBEIKA BECAUSE HE BETRAYED THE LF AND THE ISRAELIS BY SWITCHING ALLEGIANCE TO THE SYRIANS IN THE MID-1980S. HOBEIKA ALSO WAS ACTIVE IN CHRISTIAN INFIGHTING DURING LEBANON'S CIVIL WAR.

-- PALESTINIANS DESPISE HOBEIKA BECAUSE HE ALLEGEDLY DIRECTED THE MASSACRE OF APPROXIMATELY 1,000 PALESTINIANS IN THE REFUGEE CAMPS OF SABRA AND SHATILLA IN 1982. AN ISRAELI COMMISSION IN 1983 ACCUSED HOBEIKA OF CARRYING OUT THE MASSACRE AND HELD THEN DEFENSE MINISTER ARIEL SHARON INDIRECTLY RESPONSIBLE FOR THE ATTACK. [REDACTED]

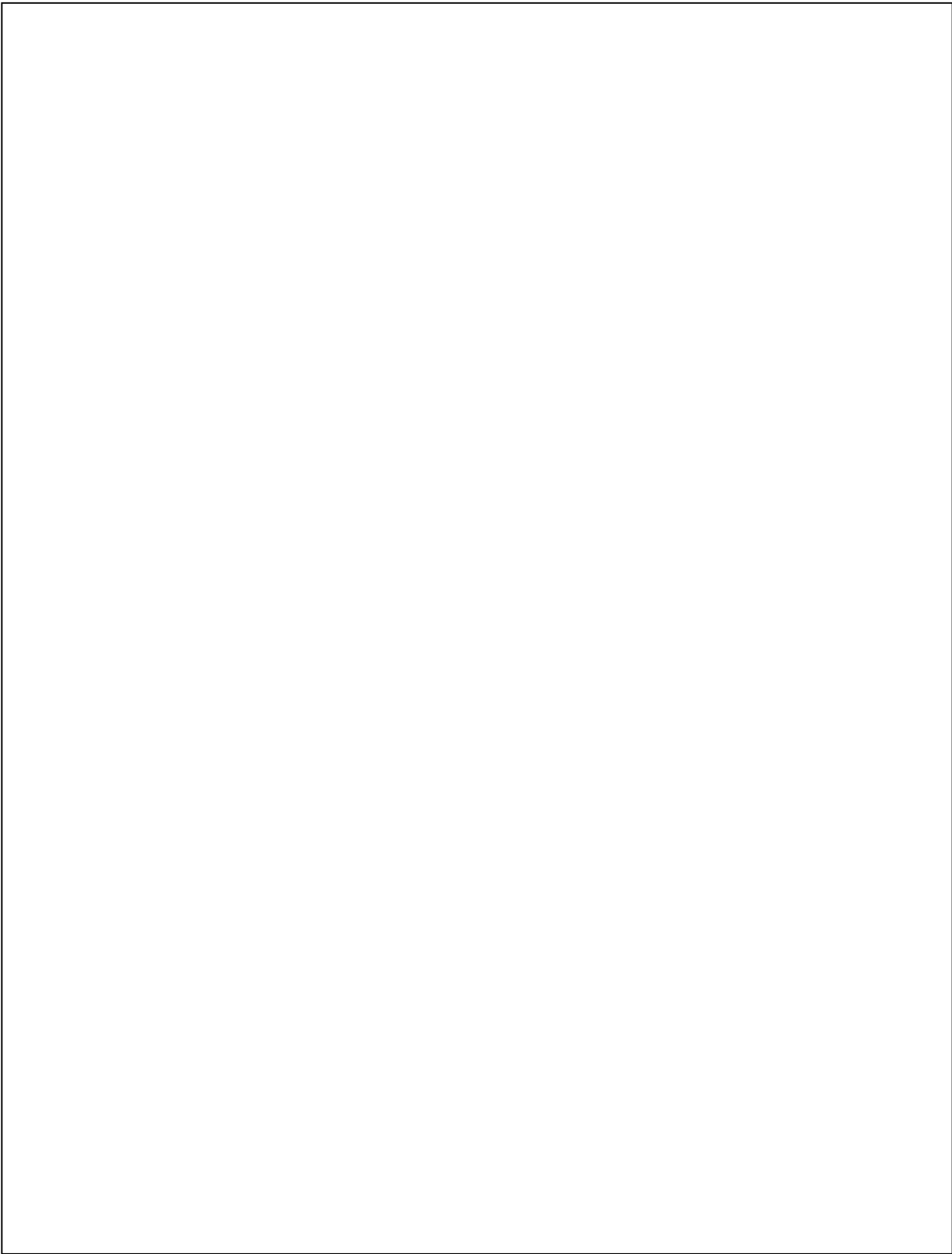
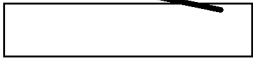
//MANY LEBANESE SUSPECT ISRAELI INVOLVEMENT BECAUSE HOBEIKA HAD SAID HE WOULD TESTIFY AGAINST SHARON IF THE BELGIANS WENT FORWARD WITH A TRIAL ACCUSING SHARON OF GENOCIDE AND CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY FOR HIS ROLE IN SABRA AND SHATILLA.// A BELGIAN COURT NEXT MONTH WILL RULE ON WHETHER A JUDICIAL INVESTIGATION INTO SHARON'S ROLE CAN PROCEED.

-- PRESIDENT LAHUD CLAIMS HOBEIKA WAS KILLED TO STOP HIM FROM TESTIFYING, ACCORDING TO PRESS REPORTS, A SENTIMENT ECHOED BY OTHER GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS.

-- THERE IS NO DIRECT EVIDENCE OF ISRAELI INVOLVEMENT IN THE ASSASSINATION, BUT HIGHLIGHTING AN ISRAELI CONNECTION COULD HELP THE LEBANESE AVOID THE INTERNAL FRICTION THAT WOULD ARISE IF A LEBANESE GROUP WERE BLAMED. [REDACTED]



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