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Kurt WALDHEIM
(Phonetic: VAHLThime)

AUSTRIA

President (since July 1986)

Kurt Waldheim's controversial past--specifically his alleged involvement in Nazi war crimes--has become a source of friction within the Socialist Party - People's Party (OVP) grand coalition government. Socialist Chancellor Franz Vranitzky and his party have distanced themselves from the embattled Waldheim, while OVP leaders have staunchly defended the President. (Waldheim is not a member of any political party, but was elected to the largely ceremonial post of president in 1986 with the outspoken support of the OVP, whose conservative views he shares.) A variety of sources indicate, however, that many rank-and-file OVP members have come to view him as a political liability, and many Austrian political observers have stated that his resignation is inevitable. (C NF)

Waldheim will probably remain in his position as long as the public supports him. Vienna's sense of political isolation from the West on the issue will probably diminish that support--the President has received only one Western invitation for an official visit, a controversial trip on 25 June to the Vatican, including a meeting with Pope John Paul II. We believe that public dissatisfaction with Austria's tarnished international reputation will force Waldheim, who still enjoys considerable domestic support, to eventually step down. (C NF)

Waldheim's reaction to the US Government decision to place him on the visa watchlist was one of shock and outraged innocence. He has publicly claimed to have a clear conscience and has said that he should not be persecuted for having been forced to serve under the Nazi regime. He has also stated that he will establish his innocence by publishing a "white book" detailing his wartime activities, by convening a panel of historians to investigate his past, and by filing lawsuits against his defamers. US diplomats report that Waldheim has been greatly shaken by the watchlist decision and that his recent public statements reflect desperate attempts to deflect his opponents and hold on to his office. (C NF)

Waldheim was born on 21 December 1918. Drafted into the German Army during World War II, he was wounded on the Russian front and later served in the Balkans. He earned a doctorate in law in 1944 and joined the Foreign Service the following year. Waldheim served as Ambassador to Canada and as director of the Foreign Ministry Department of Political

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Affairs before becoming Permanent Representative to the UN in 1964. He was Foreign Minister from 1968 until 1970, when he resigned to run as the OVP presidential candidate. Unsuccessful, he returned to the UN and served again as Permanent Representative until his election as Secretary General in 1972. After leaving the UN in 1982, Waldheim lectured on international issues at several US and European universities. (U)

Waldheim speaks fluent but heavily accented English. Cautious, he tends to make decisions by compromise and consensus. He is also very protocol conscious. ☐

☐ He has written several books on the UN and international politics and an autobiography. His interests include classical music, skiing, fishing, and collecting antiques. Married, he has three children. (C NF)

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