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DEFENSE
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Syria: Muslim Brotherhood
Pressure Intensifies (U)

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SYRIA: MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD PRESSURE INTENSIFIES (U)

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PREFACE

~~(S/NOFORN)~~ Syria is a crucial player in the Middle East equation because of its involvement in the Arab-Israeli problem, its presence in Lebanon, and its unique relationship with the Soviet Union. The stability of the Assad government is an area of extreme concern since it could have a direct impact not only on the Middle East peace process and regional stability, but on US-Soviet relations as well. In 1979, the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, a Sunni Muslim Islamic fundamentalist organization, began a concerted effort to oust President Assad. Although the Brotherhood attempt of 1979-80 was successfully thwarted by Assad, a new venture began to be planned in late 1980 and by early 1982 the Hama rebellion broke out. While the Brotherhood suffered a second military defeat, the Hama episode reflected a new sophistication in Muslim Brotherhood planning and operations.

(U) Each classified title and heading in this report has been properly marked; all those unmarked are unclassified.

(U) The following list of appraisals may serve as useful references: Syria: The Strategy of the Communist Party of Syria for Survival, DIAIAPPR 94-81, dated 30 June 1981; Syria: Assad and the Politics of Political Survival, DIAIAPPR 97-81, dated 9 July 1981; Syria: The Muslim Brotherhood Challenge that Failed, DIAIAPPR 112-81, dated 30 July 1981 and; Egypt: Muslim Brotherhood Threat, DIAIAPPR 16-82, dated 9 February 1982.

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SUMMARY

(S//NOFORN) The Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, a Sunni Muslim Fundamentalist Organization, began to develop into an opposition party after the secularist Baath Party came to power in 1963. Brotherhood opposition intensified after the 23 February 1966 seizure of power by Alawite elements of the Baath Party, a group the Brotherhood does not consider Muslim. Their fears concerning the secularist path the Baathists were following were confirmed when the Assad government adopted a new constitution in March 1973, which deleted any reference to Islam as the religion of the state.

(S//NOFORN) In early 1979, encouraged by the Islamic Revolution in Iran, the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood developed a plan to trigger a similar popular revolution in Syria to oust Assad. The massacre of 50 Alawite cadets, on 16 June 1979 at the Artillery School in Aleppo, signaled the start of the Muslim Brotherhood offensive. However, by the summer of 1980, after months of bloody fighting between government forces and Brotherhood militants, President Assad had broken the back of the Muslim Brotherhood challenge.

(S//NOFORN) The major setback suffered by the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria in 1980 led to the demise of its leader, Issam Attar, who had led the organization since 1961. By early 1981, the new exiled Muslim Brotherhood leadership had developed a complex strategy to overthrow the Assad government built on a Brotherhood-led countrywide rebellion, which would apparently be linked to an anti-Assad Alawite coup. In early 1982, however, Syrian security uncovered the coup plot and began to intensify their operations against dissidents within the country. As a result, the Muslim Brotherhood felt pressured into initiating the uprising in Hama, which began on 2 February 1982. Although President Assad was successful in squelching the Hama uprising, he is clearly on the defensive and finds his regime increasingly isolated both in Syria and in the Arab world. Nonetheless, the Syrians are pragmatists who do not want a Muslim Brotherhood government, although they undoubtedly would prefer one dominated by a Sunni Muslim president.

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1. DISCUSSION

a. Background

(S) Although the Muslim Brotherhood had existed in Syria since about 1937, it was not until 1963 that it began to develop into an opposition party. At that time the Syrian Baath Party, in coalition with the Army, seized political power in Syria. Although the Baath were Arab Nationalist in their political orientation, they were also secularist, a position that was totally rejected by the Islamic fundamentalist Muslim Brotherhood. In February 1964, riots instigated by the Brotherhood against the Baath rule erupted, and by April the fundamentalist stronghold at Hama was in full rebellion. In the face of spreading disorders, Syrian strong man Amin Hafez sealed off Hama and moved army units into the city to crush the Muslim Brotherhood-led rebellion.

(S) Subsequently, Baath security activities against the Brotherhood intensified, driving many of its leaders into exile in Lebanon, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and the Arab Gulf States. As a result of internal Baath party rivalries, the military wing of the party, whose leadership included Hafez Assad, seized power on 23 February 1966 in one of Syria's bloodiest coups. The coup not only forced Amin Hafez, a Sunni Muslim, from power but signaled an end to Sunni Muslim domination of the Syrian Baath Party. The new leadership represented the Alawites, a secretive religious community comprising about 11 percent of the Syrian population.

(S) The rise to power of the Alawite faction of the Baath spurred the Muslim Brotherhood to intensify their covert efforts to ouster them from power since they did not believe that Alawites were Muslim, as they officially professed to be. In March 1973, the Assad government introduced a new constitution for Syria, which deleted any reference to Islam as the religion of the state. This action was seen by the Brotherhood as further evidence that not only were the Alawite-Baathist secularist, they were also anti-Islam. Additionally, the Brotherhood felt having an Alawite, Hafez Assad, as President was a violation of Article 3 of the constitution which states, "The religion of the President of the Republic shall be Islam."

(S/NOFORN) Although Muslim Brotherhood opposition to the Baathist had been limited, they began to expand their covert arm for nonattributable political violence, the Secret Apparatus, in about 1964, following Amin Hafez's suppression of their activities. This covert arm, which was known as The Youth of Mohammad, Soldiers of Allah, Faithful Youth, Islamic Vanguard, and a number of other noms de guerre, was led by Dr. Adnan al Masri. After Masri's execution by the government in 1965, Shaykh Marwan Haddad took over the Secret Apparatus until his own death in 1976 when Shaykh Adnan Aqlah took over the leadership. However, it was not until 1979 that the Muslim Brotherhood felt they had the strength and the political support to challenge the ruling Alawite-Baathist regime.

(S/NOFORN) The massacre of 50 Alawite cadets on 16 June 1979, at the artillery school in Aleppo, was apparently designed to signal the beginning of the Muslim Brotherhood offensive to create a popular uprising similar to that in Iran.

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Unlike the Shah, Syrian President Assad moved carefully to consolidate his control of both the Baath Party and the Alawite community before moving against his opposition. By the summer of 1980, after months of bloody fighting between government forces and the Brotherhood's Secret Apparatus, Assad had broken the back of the Muslim Brotherhood challenge. The political cost had been intense, since the methods the government felt compelled to use alienated much of the majority Sunni Muslim population. Nonetheless, the Syrians are pragmatists and while Assad may not be popular it is generally recognized that he has given Syria greater stability than at any time since it became independent in 1946.

b. A New Leadership, a New Challenge

~~(S//NOFORN)~~ The major setback in 1980 led to the removal of Issam Attar as Supreme Guide of the Syrian organization. Attar had held that position since 1961 when he replaced the aging Dr. Mustafa al Sibai. Although Issam Attar was only 53, he was in poor health. Many felt he lacked the vigor and appreciation of the problems facing the Brotherhood within Syria to provide the dynamic leadership the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood needed. The new leadership consisted of Adnan Said al Din the new Supreme Guide; Controller-General Said Hawi; Deputy Controller General Ali Sadr al Din Bayluni and; Adnan Uqlah Commander of the Secret Apparatus.

~~(S//NOFORN)~~ Adnan Said al Din has been a member of the Muslim Brotherhood since 1943 and had acquired considerable experience with the Militant Secret Apparatus. His deputy, Said Hawi had served as an assistant to Shaykh Marwan Haddad, Commander of the Secret Apparatus from 1965 until his death in 1976. Hawi was apparently arrested in 1976, along with Haddad, but was released in 1977. He went into exile in Jordan until 1980 when he appears to have moved to Europe. Said Hawi is a noted Islamic scholar who has published numerous books in Arabic on Islamic laws and its interpretation.

~~(S//NOFORN)~~ Ali Sadr al Din Bayluni, the number three man in the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood chain of command, is a 45-year-old lawyer from Aleppo who had joined the fundamentalist group in 1943. He, like Din and Hawi, was convinced that armed struggle was the only course which should be followed by the Brotherhood in its fight against the Alawite-Baathist rule in Syria. The fourth man who made up the senior leadership ranks was Adnan Uqlah, the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood military commander, who directed and controlled operations in Syria. Uqlah, a former Syrian Army Lieutenant, is also from Aleppo.

~~(S//NOFORN)~~ In 1980, Syrian President Assad was successful in disrupting Muslim Brotherhood activities and neutralizing popular Sunni Muslim support. Arrest and increased Syrian security measures undermined the Brotherhood's ability to take effective action against the government. Nevertheless, the Brotherhood's basic organizational structure remained intact. This included an estimated 10,000 members of the Muslim Brotherhood and an additional 1,000 members of the Secret Apparatus. The first priority for the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood leadership was to regroup its Syrian organization for a new round of fighting with the Alawite-Baathists.

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(S//NOFORN) In December 1980, shortly after the replacement of Issam Attar as Supreme Guide, Said Hawi and Ali Sadr al Din Bayluni announced the formation of an Islamic Front. The announcement in a Die Welt interview, was primarily a propaganda gesture, which also signaled the beginning of increased contacts between the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood and the Iraqi Government. Although the Iraqi Government was secularist it was Sunni Muslim and diametrically opposed to the political leadership of Hafez Assad in Syria. During the 1979-80 fighting, Iraq had provided covert support to the Brotherhood, particularly in Aleppo. Baghdad had also acted as a middle man between the Brotherhood and Riyad al Turk's splinter faction fo the Syrian Communist Party, which had participated in the fighting against the Government in early 1980. The Brotherhood appears to have sought Iraq's Baathist credentials and covert links with dissident Syrian Baathists to gain support in overthrowing the Assad government.

c. Tactics to Topple the Assad Regime

(S//NOFORN) The new effort by the Brotherhood appears to have aimed at gaining support from the Alawite dissident supporters of ousted Syrian strong man Salah Jadid. Jadid, who comes from a larger and more prominent Alawite tribal group than President Assad, has been in prison since his overthrow in 1970. The fact Jadid is still alive indicates his stature within the Alawite community, since Assad would certainly have killed him long ago if he could have done so politically. Jadid's supporters, many of whom are probably from his Haddadun tribe, have operated against the Assad government, under the nom de guerre 23 February, in remembrance of the date in 1966 when Jadid led the Alawite-Baathists to power. Iraq probably played a middle-man role in coordinating dissident Syrian Baathist opposition with the Muslim Brotherhood plan to oust President Assad.

(S//NOFORN) The new strategy, which the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood appears to have developed, was considerably more complex than their 1979-80 effort. At that time the Brotherhood had attempted, almost singlehandedly, to trigger a popular uprising to topple the Assad regime. President Assad, however, exploited the Muslim Brotherhood's anti-Alawite and anti-Baathist stance to rally those elements behind him. He also unleashed a massive security effort to arrest, intimidate, or otherwise neutralize opposition elements within the Alawite community, Baath Party, and Syrian society in general.

(S//NOFORN) The new tact adopted by the Brotherhood was apparently designed to divide the Alawite community by exploiting some of the animosity that Assad incurred in his crackdown on opponents. Since he came to power Issam Attar, in a number of statements made in late 1979 and early 1980 attempted to play down the Muslim Brotherhood's position rejecting the Alawites as Muslims, but the new leadership appears to have actively sought to gain dissident Alawites support in toppling Assad.

(S//NOFORN) The plan, apparently developed by the leadership of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood and probably coordinated with Iraq, centered on two complementary actions. The first was a full-scale revolt by the city of Hama, a traditional Brotherhood stronghold and the location of its covert headquarters in Syria. Once this rebellion was unleashed, similar uprisings were to take place in Aleppo, Damascus, and other major cities, accompanied by a general strike designed

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to paralyze Syria. In the midst of these disorders Alawite dissidents, spearheaded by Salah Jadid's followers within the military, apparently were to launch a coup to oust President Assad from power.

~~(S//NOFORN)~~ Simultaneously, a sophisticated worldwide propaganda campaign was to be launched supporting the rebellion and emphasizing its victories and the wholesale desertion of Army units to the rebel side. Press releases were to be made in Europe and the US, while propaganda broadcasts against Syria were to be carried by the Phalange-controlled Voice of Lebanon and the Iraqi-controlled Voice of Arab Syria. Iraq began its preliminary effort in early 1981 through its publication, Al Minbar, which discussed human rights violations in Syria under the Assad Regime and subsequently addressed atrocities against the Muslim Brotherhood prisoners and the brutal repression of Hama during 1980. The Baghdad-based Voice of Arab Syria aired Al Minbar's articles and focused on the themes of Assad's repression and his isolation within Syria and the Arab world.

~~(S//NOFORN)~~ By about July 1981, the Muslim Brotherhood was preparing to infiltrate members of its elite Secret Apparatus, who had fled Syria after the brutal summer 1980 government crackdown, back into Syria (see figure). At least 100 militants were transported from Jordan, where they had taken refuge, into Iraq where they probably received training prior to their movement into Syria. In late September or early October the Muslim Brotherhood, in anticipation of the buildup of the Secret Apparatus in Hama, attacked a government office in Hama and seized several hundred blank identification cards to be used by the Secret Apparatus. Sometime after this, the infiltration of Secret Apparatus militants began from staging areas in Iraq, and to a lesser degree from Turkey, where others had fled. During the interim period, a number of terrorist bombings and shootings took place in Syria to demonstrate the Brotherhood/dissident Alawites ability to strike at the government.

d. Premature Discovery

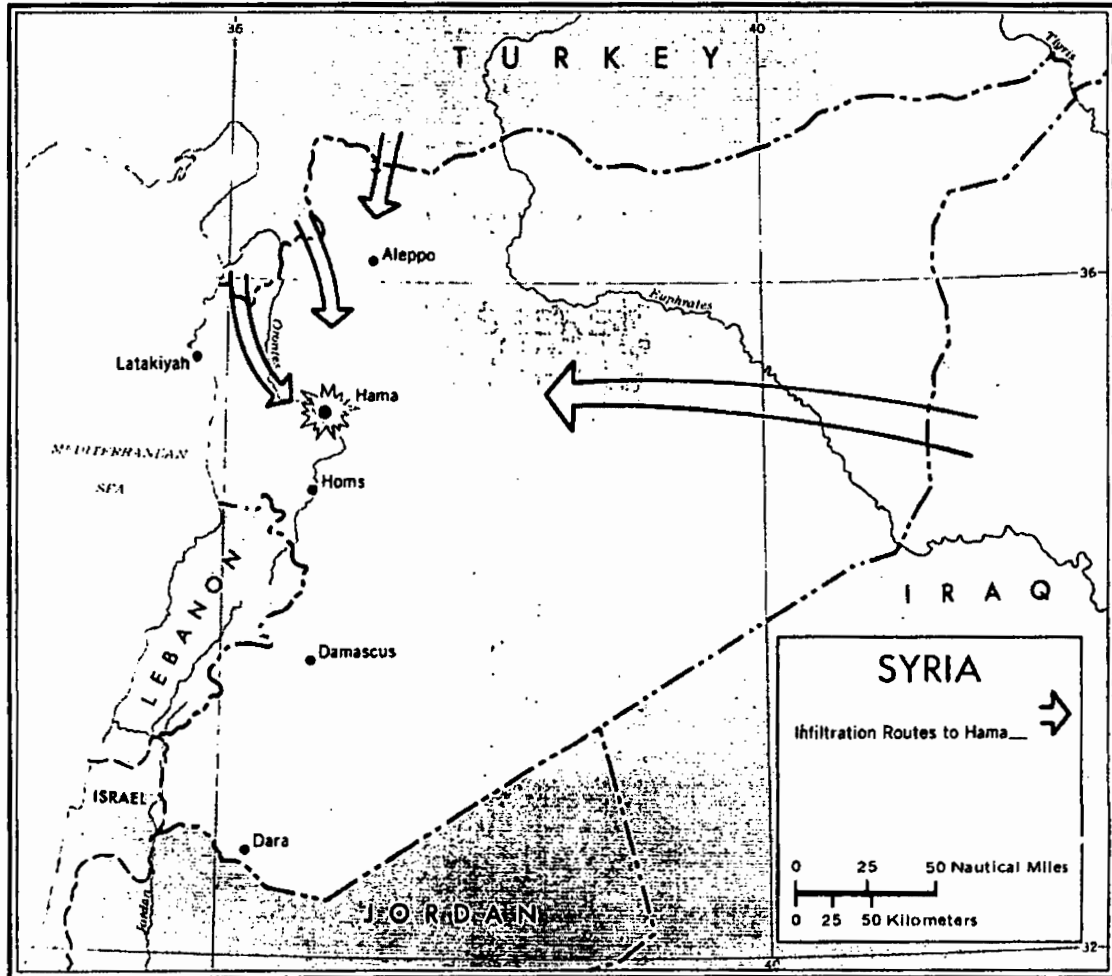
~~(S//NOFORN)~~ Despite the meticulous planning, however, Syrian security discovered the dissident Alawite part of the plot in early January 1982. While Assad's security organizations moved against confirmed and suspected dissident Alawites in the military, efforts were intensified to uproot the Muslim Brotherhood's covert infrastructure. In the Syrian-Jordanian border city of Dara house-to-house search efforts were initiated as security measures were strengthened throughout Syria. By late January 1982, there were indications that the Government intended to conduct house-to-house searches in Hama, which undoubtedly would have uncovered caches and discovered at least some of the 200 Brotherhood militants who had been infiltrated into the city.

~~(S//NOFORN)~~ As a result of Syrian security actions, the Muslim Brotherhood was forced to prematurely unleash the Hama rebellion with the hope that it might spark widespread fighting in other cities. If a general strike had been created, and the propaganda barrage directed against Syria from Iraq and Lebanon was effective, wide-scale desertions might have been triggered within the Syrian Armed Forces. The possibility existed, therefore, that the Assad Regime might have been forced from power, despite the discovery of the dissident Alawite coup plot. Even if the plan were not successful the Hama rebellion could

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become a symbolic rallying point for future antigovernment activities. The rebellion would also force the Damascus government to become even more oppressive. The Brotherhood leadership believed this would, in turn, cause greater alienation of the Assad government from the Sunni Muslim majority and within the Alawite community.

~~(S/NOFORN)~~ During late January or early February 1982 the top three leaders of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, the Supreme Guide Adnan Said al Din, Said Hawi, and Ali Sadr al Din Bayluni left their clandestine headquarters in Brussels, to dispersed locations where they could direct the operations in Syria. On 2 February, following a clash between the Muslim Brotherhood and Syrian security forces, the loudspeakers atop the mosque minarets in Hama called on the people to begin a Jihad (Holy Struggle) against the government. The appeal also told the people that arms were available at specified mosques. At about the same time, teams of the Muslim Brotherhood's Secret Apparatus, some in army uniforms, moved to attack preselected government targets in the city.

~~(S/NOFORN)~~ One of the teams attacked the Office of Civil Registry and destroyed residency records for the city of Hama and the surrounding province. These records were a primary tool of Syrian intelligence in maintaining population control. At the same time, other elements attacked police stations, security offices, Baath Party Headquarters, and army units, forcing them to withdraw from the city after several days of intense fighting. Muslim Brotherhood blocking forces moved to the outskirts of Hama to warn and block any attempts by government forces to reenter the city. Although the Secret Apparatus numbered only about 400 when fighting broke out on 2 February, its ranks had probably grown to almost 1,000 by 5 February through the addition of regular Muslim Brotherhood members and citizens of Hama.

~~(S)~~ On 9 February the leadership of the Islamic Revolution in Syria, a nom de guerre for the Muslim Brotherhood, reported about the fighting in Hama over the Iraqi-controlled Voice of Arab Syria. The news commentary described the rebels' seizure of the city and the execution of some 50 "spies and informers." They also stated that major elements of the 47th Army Brigade, sent to recapture Hama, had defected and joined the people of Hama, while Syrian Air Force pilots refused to carry out orders to bomb the city. The news bulletin pointed out that mutinies against the government had spread to naval units at Latakiah and the air base at Palmyra, and new clashes were erupting in Aleppo. About 3,000 government forces had been killed or wounded, according to the communique.

~~(S)~~ As the Brotherhood propaganda campaign intensified, a Muslim Brotherhood spokesman in Bonn, on 10 February, reaffirmed that Hama had been liberated and noted that the government attempts to retake the city had failed. The Bonn announcement also confirmed that government losses numbered about 3,000 killed and wounded and that there had been major defection from the Syrian 47th Armored Brigade. On 11 February a source in Hong Kong reported that the government radio station in Aleppo had been captured and a Paris announcement attributed to a Brotherhood spokesman in Bonn noted that 3,000 - 4,000 government forces from armor and air defense units had joined the Islamic Revolutionary Command in Hama. On the same date, Muslim Brotherhood sources in Vienna claimed 2,000 government forces had been killed and another 3,000 wounded, noting that the fighting had spread to Damascus, Latakiah, Aleppo, and the eastern part of the country.

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~~(S/NOFORN)~~ On 14 February as the propaganda offensive continued, Brotherhood sources in Ankara reported that large portions of the Damascus-Hama-Aleppo Highway were under the control of the Islamic Revolution. (On the 11th the government had reopened this major artery for traffic.) On 15 February, the Phalange-controlled Voice of Lebanon reported the resistance in Hama continuing as a general strike took hold in Homos, Latakiah, and Aleppo. On 15 February, the Voice of Lebanon announced that 5,000 Syrian soldiers had deserted and fled to Lebanon. By this time Syrian forces had retaken much of the city of Hama, although isolated pockets of Muslim Brotherhood militants remained in the old portion of the city.

~~(S)~~ On 16 February Said Hawi, the Controller General of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood in an appeal aired over Baghdad's Voice of Arab Syria, called for a nationwide uprising. "The Jihad (Holy Struggle) in confronting the tyrant is now a duty of all those capable of carrying arms," he said. Shaykh Hawi also called for a general strike to begin immediately and to last until the Assad government fell from power.

~~(S/NOFORN)~~ The propaganda continued on 20 February when the Baghdad Voice of Arab Syria urged the people of Syria to unity against the regime of Hafez Assad and stated that the religious leadership of Syria (the Muslim Brotherhood) has issued a fatwa (Islamic legal decision) which forbade any true Muslim from paying taxes to the government. On 25 February, a Brotherhood release picked up by the Christian Science Monitor stated that a Syrian naval base near Latakiah had been seized and two submarines captured, claiming the Islamic Front controlled the coastline from the Latakiah north to the Turkish border. Despite the propaganda reporting, the uprising in Syria had never spread outside of Hama, although some limited bombings had taken place in Damascus and elsewhere.

2. CONCLUSION

~~(S/NOFORN)~~ The total casualties for the Hama incident probably number about 2,000. This includes an estimated 300-400 members of the Muslim Brotherhood's elite Secret Apparatus or about one third of their total Secret Apparatus strength in Syria. Militarily, the Syrian Government defeated the fundamentalist and it will probably be several years before the Muslim Brotherhood will be able to directly challenge the Alawite-Baathists again. The revolt, however, gave President Assad the excuse he needed to move against Hama, which has long been a hot bed of Muslim Brotherhood activity. Nonetheless, the Muslim Brotherhood demonstrated, in this latest challenge to the ruling Alawite-Baathists, a new sophistication in its ability to use propaganda and garner support from dissident Alawites. At the same time, the Brotherhood has been successful in widening the gap between the Assad regime and the Syrian population, at least for the short term.

~~(S/NOFORN)~~ The Muslim Brotherhood leadership was fully aware that they had the Assad regime in a "no win" situation over Hama. If Assad had not acted forcefully against Hama, the rebellion might have spread to other cities which in turn might have led to a full-scale rebellion. Assad's liberal use of artillery in breaking the resistance in Hama served notice to other cities that he has both the will and the means to retain power. By the same token, however, the Government's actions have appalled and sickened a wide spectrum of Syrian society.

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~~(S/NOFORN)~~ Nonetheless, Assad's strategy continues to be based on the realization that most Syrians, regardless of their differences with the present government, do not want the Muslim Brotherhood in power, although they would undoubtedly prefer one dominated by Sunni Muslims. Furthermore, the Syrians are pragmatic and realize that Assad has given Syria greater stability during his rule than it has had at any other time since achieving independence in 1946. This is not to say that Assad's government is popular with all segments of Syrian society, but under the present circumstances it is doubtful any alternative government could do better.

~~(S/NOFORN)~~ Political popularity in Syria, however, has never been a prerequisite for retaining political power. The ability to control the military and security apparatus and the willingness to use them when required have been far more important. President Assad has demonstrated unequivocally his control of the means of violence and his ability to use force when required to do so. Nevertheless, Assad clearly lays the blame on the Muslim Brotherhood for the tension in Syria and the destruction of portions of the city of Hama.

~~(S/NOFORN)~~ In a 7 March speech, President Assad accused the Muslim Brotherhood of distorting Islam, killing in the name of Islam, and "posing" as Muslims. The Muslim Brotherhood, the Syrian President said, was nothing more than criminals who "desecrated mosques and houses of God" by transforming them into arms warehouses. These criminals he said "butchered children, women, and old people in the name of Islam." Although most Syrians would probably discount much of Assad's description of the Muslim Brotherhood, they would probably admit that the current level of tension in Syria is a result of Brotherhood actions.

~~(S/NOFORN)~~ Assad's position in Syria is probably stronger now than at any other time since he came to power in 1970. As a result of Muslim Brotherhood and dissident Alawite actions, Assad has strengthened his control of both the military and the security apparatus. The possibility of a successful coup against President Assad, therefore, continues to be unlikely. Most Syrians also realize this, which is certain to reduce their willingness to support antigovernment activities.

~~(S/NOFORN)~~ Nonetheless, the Muslim Brotherhood is determined to continue its armed struggle against the Alawite-Baathist government of Syria. Iraq also appears equally willing to support anti-Assad activities and will probably continue to act as the middleman for the Muslim Brotherhood in dealing with disgruntled Syrian Alawites. The Syrian dissidents modus operandi will continue to be terrorism, particularly bombings and assassination. President Assad is likely to remain a prime target for any assassination plot by either the Muslim Brotherhood or dissident Alawites. Syrian security operations, however, are certain to continue their efforts to break or at least disrupt the Muslim Brotherhood infrastructure in Syria and kill its exiled leadership abroad. The covert war, therefore, is unlikely to stop, although there may be periodic lulls in the struggle.

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