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PAGE 01 STATE 291493 082155Z
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PAGE 02 STATE 291493 082155Z
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E.O. 12356: DECL: OADR
TAGS: XF, ZR, IZ, KU, UR, MOPS, PINR, XD
SUBJECT: INTSUM: 828: SEPTEMBER 8, 1992

LONDON FOR JOHNSON
PARIS FOR ROSENBLATT
MOSCOW FOR STOFFER
ROME ALSO FOR VATICAN AND MFO FOR DIRECTOR GENERAL
DOD/ISA FOR NESA
CINCEUR FOR POLAD
CINCUSNAVEUR FOR INTAF
NSC FOR HAASS
NSA FOR CHIEF G GROUP

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE
REVIEW AUTHORITY: ARCHIE M BOLSTER
DATE/CASE ID: 10 MAY 2007 200605566

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USVIENNA FOR UNVIE
OTHER ADDRESSEES FOR CHIEFS OF MISSION

CONTENT: 1. SYRIA: ASSAD, THE ALAWIS' AND INTERNAL
WOES

2. ALGERIA: ISLAMIST OPPOSITION IN DISARRAY

I. SYRIA: ASSAD, THE ALAWIS. AND INTERNAL WOES

1. (S) DISORDER WITHIN PRESIDENT ASSAD'S OWN ALAWI
CLAN IS TAKING UP AN INCREASING SHARE OF HIS TIME.

2. (S) ALAWIS MAKE UP APPROXIMATELY 15 PERCENT OF
SECRET

PAGE 03 STATE 291493 082155Z
SYRIA'S POPULATION, AND ASSAD SHOWS THEM DEFERENCE NOT
SHOWN TO THE SUNNI MUSLIM MAJORITY. SOME ALAWI ELEMENTS
HAVE BECOME MORE AGGRESSIVE THAN EVER IN A FEEDING
FRENZY OVER PERKS AND TURF. THEIR OUTRAGEOUS BEHAVIOR
HAS WEAKENED ASSAD'S TRADITIONAL POWER BASE AND DARKENED
THE PUBLIC'S APPRECIATION OF HIS LEADERSHIP.

3. (S) LATAKIA. ONE OF THE FIRST HINTS OF TROUBLE
WERE REPORTS BEGINNING IN EARLY MAY FROM THE ALAWI
DOMINATED PORT CITY OF LATAKIA - ASSAD'S HOME BASE AND
CENTER OF THE ALAWI HEARTLAND - THAT FEUDING BETWEEN
ASSAD'S NEPHEWS AND OTHER PROMINENT ALAWIS OVER THE
CONTRABAND TRADE HAD REACHED SERIOUS PROPORTIONS. ON
MAY 7 ASSAD DISPATCHED BASIL, HIS SON AND HEIR-APPARENT.
TO LATAKIA TO ARREST THE NEPHEWS AND BRING THE
EMBARRASSING PROBLEM UNDER CONTROL.

4. (S) [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] BASIL FAILED
TO ARREST THE FAMILY MEMBERS IN QUESTION, WHO WENT INTO
HIDING. BY LATE MAY A NUMBER OF CHECK POINTS MANNED BY
SYRIAN INTERNAL SECURITY HAD SPRUNG UP ALONG THE
TARTUS-LATAKIA ROAD. A ROAD NOT NORMALLY PATROLLED. A
SHOOTOUT IN EARLY JULY, INVOLVING ASSAD'S NEPHEWS, LEFT
SEVERAL PEOPLE DEAD. BASIL WAS REPORTEDLY SENT TO
LATAKIA AGAIN, BUT THIS TIME WITH INSTRUCTIONS TO "COVER
UP THE INCIDENT."

5. (S) ALAWI TROUBLE ALSO IN DAMASCUS. IN JUNE SOME
600 SYRIAN SOLDIERS AND CIVILIAN POLICE CLASHED WITH

B1

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LOYALISTS FROM RIF'AT ASSAD'S FORMER "DEFENSE
SECRET

PAGE 04 STATE 291493 082155Z
COMPANIES." THE POLICE UNSUCCESSFULLY TRIED TO CARRY
OUT A GOVERNMENT EVICTION ORDER DIRECTED AT RETIRED
DEFENSE-COMPANY PERSONNEL STILL LIVING IN GOVERNMENT
HOUSING COMPLEXES. TO THE APPARENT SURPRISE OF THE
SECURITY FORCES THE RETIREES WERE JOINED BY ENLISTED
PERSONNEL FROM THE 569TH ARMORED DIVISION - THE DEFENSE
COMPANIES SUCCESSOR UNIT, WHICH IS ALMOST 85 PERCENT
ALAWI - WHO FELT THREATENED BY THE EVICTION ORDER.

6. (S) THE IMMEDIATE CAUSE WAS CONSTERNATION OVER
LOSING SUBSIDIZED HOUSING, BUT THE INCIDENT REFLECTED
SYRIA'S LATENT ECONOMIC TENSIONS. RENT ON
GOVERNMENT-SUBSIDIZED APARTMENTS IS CONTROLLED AT 400
SYRIAN POUNDS A MONTH, BUT EVEN A MODEST APARTMENT IN
THE OUTLYING DAMASCUS SUBURBS CAN COST UPWARDS OF 15,000
POUNDS A MONTH. AFFORDABLE HOUSING IS AN IMPOSSIBILITY
IF SUBSIDIZED APARTMENTS ARE GIVEN UP: THE AVERAGE
RETIRED SYRIAN OFFICER EARNS ONLY 3-4,000 POUNDS A
MONTH. ASSAD WAS REPORTEDLY FURIOUS AFTER THE INCIDENT,

7. (S) NO REAL ECONOMIC REFORM. ASSAD REPORTEDLY SEES
THE NEED TO LIBERALIZE THE SYRIAN ECONOMY. AND ATTRACT
FOREIGN INVESTMENT, BUT HE HAS DONE LITTLE TO ADVANCE
REFORM. A NEW INVESTMENT LAW HAS NOT APPRECIABLY
IMPROVED INVESTOR CONFIDENCE. THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY
HAD HOPED THE NEW CABINET, ANNOUNCED ON JULY 1, WOULD
PROVE THE GOVERNMENT WAS SERIOUS ABOUT REFORM. BUT ONLY
SECRET

PAGE 05 STATE 291493 082155Z
A FEW ECONOMICALLY ORIENTED MEMBERS WERE ADDED, AND MOST
OF THE OLD CABINET RETURNED TO THEIR SAME JOBS. IN THE
ABSENCE OF AN IMPROVED BUSINESS CLIMATE, ASSAD WILL DO
LITTLE TO CHALLENGE THE TRADITIONAL MEANS OF SECURING A
LIVING IN SYRIA - INCLUDING ENGAGING IN ILLICIT TRADE IN
LATAKIA OR SQUATTING IN GOVERNMENT HOUSING IN DAMASCUS.

8. (S) RIF'AT TO RETURN? RIF'AT. THE PRESIDENT'S
BROTHER INFORMALLY EXILED TO PARIS AND OFFICIALLY ONE OF
SYRIA'S THREE VICE PRESIDENTS, HAS BEEN IN SYRIA SINCE

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LATE JULY, AFTER THE DEATH OF THE ASSADS' MOTHER. HE HAS NOW STAYED BEYOND THE TRADITIONAL 40-DAY MOURNING PERIOD, LEADING MANY TO SPECULATE HE WILL REMAIN FOR GOOD. RUMORS ABOUT HOW RIF'AT'S REINSTATEMENT WOULD BE HANDLED; MOST ACKNOWLEDGE IT WOULD SHAKE THE EXISTING POWER STRUCTURE. MANY OF THE HEADS OF SYRIA'S 15 DIFFERENT SECURITY ORGANIZATIONS WOULD FIND RIF'AT'S RETURN THREATENING; SOME, [REDACTED] ARE WELL-KNOWN ENEMIES OF RIF'AT, DATING BACK TO RIF'AT'S 1984 POWER GRAB. ASSAD HAS REPORTEDLY TOLD RIF'AT THAT BASIL WILL DECIDE IF HE CAN STAY - BASIL, CLEARLY, REMAINS THE PRESIDENT'S CHOICE AS SUCCESSOR.



10. (S) RIF'AT IS REPORTEDLY SUFFERING FINANCIAL
SECRET

PAGE 06 STATE 291493 082155Z
DIFFICULTIES. HIS AGREEMENT TO RETURN UNDER WHAT WOULD BE CAREFULLY NEGOTIATED CONDITIONS WOULD ALLOW HIM BETTER ACCESS TO THE PUBLIC TROUGH. ASSAD PROBABLY BELIEVES THAT, IF RESENTMENT AMONG OTHER KEY REGIME FIGURES CAN BE KEPT TO A MINIMUM, HE MIGHT BENEFIT FROM RIF'AT'S PRESENCE. HE WOULD HAVE ONE MORE FAMILY MEMBER, WITH SOME REMAINING POWER BASE, WHO WOULD BE ABLE TO HANDLE THE ALAWI COMMUNITY AND BACK THE PRESIDENT AS HE MOVES THROUGH THE PEACE PROCESS AND CONTINUES TO ATTEMPT MODEST ECONOMIC REFORM.

II. ALGERIA: ISLAMIST OPPOSITION IN DISARRAY

11. (S/NF/NC) THE BANNED ISLAMIC SALVATION FRONT (FIS) PROBABLY STILL REPRESENTS THE GREAT MAJORITY OF THE ISLAMIST MOVEMENT. BUT WITH ITS ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE LARGELY DISMANTLED AND ITS LEADERSHIP IN JAIL, THE FIS IS INCREASINGLY OVERSHADOWED BY HARDER-LINE ELEMENTS.

12. (S/NF/NC) THE GROWING WAVE OF FUNDAMENTALIST VIOLENCE HAS DRAWN ATTENTION TO THE MOVEMENT'S RADICAL EXTREMES, BUT THE ISLAMISTS SPEAK WITH MANY VOICES.

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CONSERVATIVE MAINSTREAM PARTIES SUCH AS HAMAS AND AN-NAHDA HAVE ESCHEWED VIOLENCE AND TRIED TO WORK WITH THE GOVERNMENT. THE FIS HAS SPLINTERED INTO MODERATE AND EXTREME FACTIONS, WITH NEITHER SIDE GAINING COMPLETE CONTROL OVER THE ORGANIZATION. EXTREMIST GROUPS ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE SPIRALING VIOLENCE.

SECRET

PAGE 07 STATE 291493 082155Z

13. (S/NF/NC) MODERATES MARGINALIZED. DESPITE ATTEMPTS TO BROADEN THEIR ELECTORAL APPEAL, THE REMAINING LEGAL ISLAMIST PARTIES HAVE BEEN UNABLE TO EXPLOIT THE FIS'S DEMISE AND CAPTURE ITS GRASSROOTS SUPPORT. HAMAS LEADER MAHFOUZ NAHNAH MET WITH REGIME LEADERS IN LATE JUNE, AND BOTH PARTIES JOINED A BLOC OF SECULAR PARTIES TRYING TO WORK WITHIN THE SYSTEM. YET THEIR WILLINGNESS TO WORK WITH THE GOVERNMENT WIDELY DISCREDITS THESE PARTIES. THEY ALSO LACK THE LOCAL NETWORKS THAT HELPED TO CARRY THE FIS TO POWER. AS THE RIFT BETWEEN THE REGIME AND THE OPPOSITION HAS WIDENED. THESE PARTIES HAVE BECOME STEADILY MORE MARGINALIZED AND ARE UNLIKELY TO PLAY A MEANINGFUL ROLE IN THE FUTURE.

14. (S/NF/NC) FIS FRAGMENTED. FORCED UNDERGROUND, THE FIS SEEMS TO HAVE SPLIT INTO SEVERAL FACTIONS. THE MODERATE DJHAZARA WING, LED BY ABASSI MADANI AND COMPOSED LARGELY OF WESTERN-EDUCATED INTELLECTUALS. FAVORS MOVES TOWARD A PLURALISTIC SYSTEM. IT PROPOUNDS PEACEFUL RESISTANCE TO THE REGIME AND IS REPORTEDLY OPPOSED TO THE ATTACKS AGAINST GOVERNMENT SECURITY FORCES. A FIS-AFFILIATED NEWS SHEET CALLED THE AUGUST 26 AIRPORT BOMBING WHICH LEFT AT LEAST TEN DEAD. "A TERRIBLE CATASTROPHE."

15. (S/NF/NC) BUT THE DJAZARA WING DOES NOT REPRESENT THE ENTIRE FIS. THE SALAFI FACTION LED BY THE IMPRISONED IMAM ALI BELHADJ CHALLENGES CALLS FOR DEMOCRACY, DEMANDING INSTEAD AN ISLAMIC STATE. THOUGH FIS SALAFISTS MAY NOT BE DIRECTLY IMPLICATED IN THE

SECRET

PAGE 08 STATE 291493 082155Z
ONGOING BARRAGE OF ANTI-REGIME BOMBINGS AND ASSASSINATIONS, THESE ARE PROBABLY THE WORK OF EXTREMIST SPLINTERS SHARING THE SALAFI OUTLOOK.

16. (S/NF/NC) EXTREMISTS GAIN MOMENTUM. THE MODERATE

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FIS CORE. NOW UNDERGROUND, IS NO LONGER ABLE TO CONTROL THE VIOLENT ISLAMIST CELLS. ANTI-REGIME ATTACKS AVERAGE MORE THAN TWO A DAY AND OFTEN TAKE AIM AT CIVILIAN OFFICIALS AND KEY ECONOMIC INFRASTRUCTURE. THE ALGIERS AIRPORT BOMBING SIGNALLED A SIGNIFICANT DEFARTURE BY TARGETING FOREIGNERS AND MARKING A GREATER LEVEL OF SOPHISTICATION.

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17. (S/NF/NC) RADICAL GROUPS - INCLUDING THE ARMY OF THE PROPHET MUHAMMAD. THE ARMED ISLAMIC MOVEMENT, AND HIJRA WA TAKFIR. WHICH CONDONE THE VIOLENT OVERTHROW OF THE REGIME - HAVE BEEN FINGERED IN MANY OF THE ATTACKS. THESE GROUPS WERE PROBABLY RESPONSIBLE FOR THE AIRPORT BOMBING.

18. (S/NF/NC) WHITHER THE ISLAMISTS. MORE VIOLENCE IS ALMOST CERTAIN, AND FOREIGNERS AND CIVILIANS MAY INCREASINGLY BECOME VICTIMS. INTENTIONALLY OR NOT. AS SECURITY ASSETS BECOME OVEREXTENDED. SUCH ACTIONS PROBABLY WILL NOT WIN SUPPORT FOR THE EXTREMISTS' CAUSE, AND MAY IN FACT TURN AWAY POTENTIAL ISLAMIST SYMPATHIZERS. BUT RISING LEVELS OF EXTREMIST VIOLENCE WILL REDUCE THE LIKELIHOOD THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS WILL RESUME.

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19. (S/NF/NC) THE MAINSTREAM FIS WILL NOT ABANDON ITS
SECRET

PAGE 09 STATE 291493 082155Z
BID FOR POWER BUT WILL CONTINUE TO TAP POPULAR DISAFFECTION. IT WILL BE FORCED TO REGROUP AND WILL PROBABLY RE-EMERGE IN MODIFIED FORM. MODERATE MEMBERS MAY TRY TO INFILTRATE LEGAL ISLAMIST PARTIES AND SEEK OFFICE IF AND WHEN THE ELECTORAL PROCESS RESUMES.

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