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SUBJECT: SYRIA AND THE PALESTINIANS IN LEBANON

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1. OUR ANALYSIS OF CURRENT RELATIONS BETWEEN SYRIA AND PLO IN LEBANON BASICALLY AGREES WITH THAT EXPRESSED REFTEL. AS DAMASCUS POINTS OUT, SYRIAN ASSETS WITHIN PLO IN LEBANON HAVE BEEN CONSTANTLY WHITTLED DOWN DURING PAST 18 MONTHS OF LEBANESE CIVIL WAR. THE PITCHED BATTLE BETWEEN JABRIL AND ABBAS FACTIONS OF PFLP-GC IN BEIRUT ON OCT 7 IS BUT THE LATEST IN WHAT APPEARS TO BE A CONSISTENT CAMPAIGN BY PRESENT PLO LEADERSHIP TO SUBVERT, DESTROY, OR NEUTRALIZE PALESTINIAN GROUPS IN LEBANON THAT HAVE ANY LOYALTY TO SYRIA. UNDER THESE CIRCUMSTANCES, IT IS NOT SURPRISING THAT ONE OF SYRIA'S AIMS HAS BEEN THE REPLACEMENT OF PRESENT PLO LEADERSHIP.

2. AS REGARDS SYRIAN GOALS VIS-A-VIS PLO, IT APPEARS FROM HERE THAT SYRIA HAS NOT BEEN SEEKING A RECONCILIATION OR COMPROMISE WITH PLO BUT RATHER TOTAL SUBMISSION OR UNCONDITIONAL SURRENDER, REDUCING PALESTINIANS IN LEBANON TO

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SAME STATUS THEY HAVE IN SYRIA; THAT IS, UNDER SUPERVISION OF ARMY AND GOVT. SINCE LEBANESE ARMY AND GOVT ARE CLEARLY INCAPABLE OF PERFORMING THIS TASK AT THE MOMENT, SYRIANS WILL DO IT FOR THEM UNTIL THE NECESSARY LEBANESE APPARATUS, UNDER SYRIAN CONTROL, CAN BE CREATED.

3. PLO LEADERSHIP IS BEGINNING TO UNDERSTAND SYRIAN INTENTIONS AND IS SQUIRMING DESPERATELY TO FIND A FORMULA SHORT OF UNCONDITIONAL SURRENDER THAT WILL BE ACCEPTABLE TO SYRIANS. SO FAR THEY HAVE BEEN UNABLE TO DO SO, IN PART, AT LEAST, BECAUSE OF INTERNAL DIFFERENCES. UNLESS PALESTINIANS ARE WILLING TO MAKE VERY SUBSTANTIAL CONCESSIONS DURING CURRENT MEETINGS IN SHTAURA, WE EXPECT THAT THESE TALKS WILL FAIL AND THAT SYRIANS, SUPPORTED BY THEIR CHRISTIAN ALLIES, WILL THEN MAKE ANOTHER MILITARY MOVE, PROBABLY FROM JEZZINE TOWARD SIDON AND PERHAPS SOUTH TOWARD MARJAYUN. ASSUMING THEY ARE SUCCESSFUL, SYRIANS WOULD THEN OFFER PLO ANOTHER CHANCE TO SURRENDER. HOW LONG THIS PROCESS WILL CON-TINUE PROBABLY DEPENDS ON (1) PLO ASSESSMENT OF WHETHER OR NOT THEY HAVE ANYTHING TO GAIN BY FURTHER DELAY AND (2) PRESSURE ON SYRIA (BOTH INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL) TO EASE UP ON PALESTINIANS.

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