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DATE: June 30, 1971

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SUBJECT : Evolution of Syrian Foreign Policy

REF

1971-6-30, Assad, Khaddam, Sadaga

to JWS

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Sadaga said that the Syrians had become considerably more flexible and there were good prospects for progress on a number of outstanding issues such as nationalized property of Lebanese citizens. This more conciliatory attitude had led to some optimism for progress on other, more important matters such as sharing of the headwaters of the Orontes. However, as Sadaga added, one could never count on stability in Syrian attitudes and there might at any time be a reversion to previous rigid positions.

In talks with the Syrian Foreign Minister, 'Abd al Halim Khaddam, Sadaga said that it was clear how far Syrian foreign policy had evolved. (He added that Khaddam's own attitude had softened considerably.)

on June 21.

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2

Khaddam had told Sadaga that there could be no peace as far as Syria was concerned until the Israelis had withdrawn from "occupied Arab lands." Sadaga said he inquired what Khaddam meant by "occupied Arab lands": territory occupied since June 1967, or a broader definition? In reply Khaddam was not specific but said there must at first be withdrawal to the pre-1967 lines, and then the situation could be reevaluated. Sadaga said that he then remarked that this position was very close to that of the Egyptians -- and the French and the Soviets and the Americans. Khaddam had not demurred.

Sadaga said that, encouraged up to this point, he had asked whether Khaddam could somehow conceive in the unknowable future Syrian acceptance of SC Resolution 242. Khaddam's reply was a cautious statement that he could not give a flatly negative reply to the question.

Sadaga said that Khaddam was clear in his opposition to an interim Canal settlement. If Egypt were to agree, Khaddam said he thought that the situation would become frozen and Syria would be left holding the bag as far as the Golan Heights were concerned.

Mr. Houghton remarked that the USG is aware of and can understand this fear, but sees the interim settlement as only a step toward an overall settlement. The USG would continue in its peacemaking efforts after the interim agreement. Sadaga replied that he is convinced of U.S. intentions in this regard and so told Khaddam who was unmoved. Sadaga said that Khaddam expressed concern that if Egypt comes to an agreement with Israel, Jordan also will, and Syria will be left alone with its territory occupied. Sadaga said that he was tempted to reply, "In that case why don't you accept 242 and get into the game," but thought better of it and did not.

Sadaga said that Khaddam had been explicit in enunciating Syria's desire for good relations with the Arab countries and countries of the West and said he had added that Syria cannot live in isolation from those nations.

Sadaga concluded by saying that if Syria's foreign policy does not always seem very positive, it should be kept in mind how very far it has come.

COMMENT: Most of our Syrian sources have reported a more flexible approach to both external and internal affairs on the part of the Syrian government. The comments of Secretary

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3

General Sadaga are interesting because they result from a conversation with the Syrian Foreign Minister and because Sadaga as Chairman of the Lebanese-Syrian Permanent Commission has had frequent contact with the Syrians.

HOUGHTON



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