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By CM NARA Date 6-12-08

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TO : Department of State

HANDLING INDICATOR

INFO : MOSCOW, AMMAN, CAIRO, HONG KONG, SINGAPORE, SPLIT

1972-4-21, Assad, Communist Party

FROM : Amembassy BEIRUT

SUBJECT : Split in the Syrian Communist Party

REF :

SUMMARY

1972 APR 25 PM 6 36

TO:	Action	Info.	Initials
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A split in the Syrian Communist Party between Secretary General Khaled Bakdash and his followers on the one hand and a bloc consisting of five of the seven members of the SCP's Politburo has been widening since May, 1971. Issues in contention have been the bloc's concern with Bakdash's strong-arm, undemocratic hold on the Party and with his close identification of the SCP with the USSR and its embrace of the ruling Syrian Ba'th -- even at the expense of the SCP. The split has been exacerbated by differences over the SCP delegation's stand at the Lebanese Communist Party Congress in Beirut last January, by the question of the Party's representation on the newly formed Syrian National Progressive Front (see Beirut 3457), and recent party elections in which anti-Bakdash elements gained ground. Mediation efforts by two Soviet Communist Party officials reportedly have failed. END SUMMARY.

A major split in the SCP first became evident as early as 1971, when a majority of the Politburo took occasion

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to criticize Secretary General Bakdash (then out of the country) for his "Stalinist" manner of running the Party. The five anti-Bakdash members, Riad al-Turk, Daniel Nehme, Ibrahim Bakri, Zohair Abdel Samed and Omar Kachache, criticized him for cooperating with the Syrian Government whose aim they felt is to stifle the voice of the SCP. Taking advantage of Bakdash's absence, the Politburo dissidents had the Party's Central Committee approve a program which was less than orthodox. Its text made no reference to SC Resolution 242, omitted placing responsibility for the Sino-Soviet dispute on Peking, and criticized aspects of the nascent Confederation of Arab Republics.

Upon his return, Bakdash attempted to regain control of the Party, but apparently only the Aleppo and Jazirah branches rallied behind him. He then called for mediation by the Soviet Communist Party, and a delegation reportedly headed by Mikhail Suslov arrived in Damascus at the end of 1971. The mediation attempt failed when neither the Politburo nor the lesser organizations of the Party agreed to submit to arbitration by Suslov, who naturally supported the party-lining Bakdash. Mediation efforts earlier this year by other Arab Communist Parties included the formation of a commission to study and renew the Party's program (the main sore-point of the "crisis") adopted by the SCP in Bakdash's absence. The commission came to naught and so did a further mediation attempt in February by Kiril Mazurov, CPSU Politburo member and First Deputy Chairman of USSR Council of Ministers.

The anti-Bakdash group is also unhappy with the orthodox Soviet-line resolutions adopted at the Lebanese Communist Party Congress held in Beirut earlier this year. The group's latest effort to undermine the Secretary General came with their success in organizing a congress of the Party's Damascus branch on March 31 at which about 70 per cent of the members attended and elected a new Secretary for the branch. At this point (April 5), Bakdash, who reportedly controls 12 of the Central Committee's 24 members, issued a statement

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accusing "deviationist elements" of wanting to lead the party away from the Soviet Union and trying to sabotage SCP participation in the National Progressive Front with the ruling Ba'th Party. (The Front was formed early in March, ostensibly in a move by the Ba'th to share supreme political authority with the pro-Cairo Arab Socialist Union, the pro-Assad Socialist Unionists, the Arab Socialist Movement, and the SCP. However, in a fashion analogous\* to the "National Front" (Charter-Front has not been implemented yet) proclaimed some months ago by the Iraqi Ba'th in Baghdad, insists on reserving for itself the exclusive right to political action in the army and among the students. The result, as in Iraq, appears to be a setup power, but in which it will continue to exercise effective political mistakes and failures with other "progressive" elements. As in Syria for its own foreign policy reasons -- i.e., as a vehicle for consolidating Soviet influence -- and is prepared to live with whatever grumbling and discontent this awakens among SCP members.) Bakdash supporters on the Central Committee apparently signed the statement, a step which confirmed the seriousness of the split.

On April 7, at the festivities marking the 25th anniversary of the Ba'th, Bakdash and two of his supporters, Yousef Feisal, Minister of State, and Omar Sibai, Minister of Communications, occupied prominent seats on the platform with Ibrahim Bakri, who marched with Syrian workers, none of the leaders of the anti-Bakdash group participated in the festivities. However, the Middle East News Agency, on the following day, published a statement issued by the Politburo dissidents who, in answer to Bakdash's earlier accusations, expressed support for President Assad's leadership, promised support and cooperation with the Ba'th party within the

\* Iraq announced "Charter for National Action" November 15, 1971 calling for cooperation from other groups in implementing it but not proclaiming the Front per se.

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framework of the National Progressive Front, lauded the Confederation of Arab Republics, and called for strengthened relations between Syria and the Soviet Union. According to one Beirut report, the anti-Bakdash group, apparently afraid of the Syrian Government's backing of Bakdash, also decided to call for a renewal of the dialogue with the latter, by proposing that he remain at the head of the Politburo if he should agree to abide by the will of the majority in the future.

COMMENT: It is still unclear whether a rupture can be avoided, but the dissidents' latest statement seems to be an effort at reconciliation. However, the reconciliation has a price -- Bakdash's agreement to submit to the will of the majority, i.e., to that of the anti-Bakdash elements who believe the SCP has been too weakened vis-à-vis the SARG. Even if the dissidents' apparent change of heart regarding SCP participation in the National Progressive Front is sincere, it would appear that the Party's veteran war-horse may have to change a few of his spots in the interest of preserving unity.

NOTE: Since drafting the above, we have seen a recently published collection of Bakdash's speeches before various international communist gatherings and his articles in international communist theoretical journals. The book, 285 pages in Arabic, is not dated nor is the publisher identified. It clearly was published very recently, although the materials date mostly from the mid to late 1960's. Entitled, "The Movement of National Liberation and the Struggle for Socialism," it is well printed and sells for IL 4.00 (\$1.35). The price suggests that the printing, which was obviously done in Lebanon, was subsidized.

We consider that the main purpose behind publication of the book this time is to emphasize Bakdash's legitimacy as the leader of the Syrian communist party.

BUFFUM

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