

DECLASSIFIED
Authority E.O. 12958
By [Signature] NARA Date 11/7/08

1970-11-14 **Assisi, Assad, Tareed**
MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

TOP SECRET / [Redacted] **WASHINGTON**
SANITIZED INFORMATION
November 14, 1970

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT
FROM : Henry A. Kissinger **HK**
SUBJECT: Syrian Power Struggle

As of 0900 EST on the basis of reports from Beirut the latest facts, there appears to have been an army takeover in Syria overnight. The Army now apparently controls all communications media, borders and airport. The borders and airport remain open, and Damascus radio content is normal. Embassy Beirut reads these facts as indicating that the military wing of the party "has merely assumed in public a control which it had already established behind the scenes -- notably by transferring supporters of the civilian faction from all key military posts."

1. Our reports on actual personnel shifts come so far only from press reports from Beirut. These are sourced to lesser Syrian officials who have escaped from Syria. There is no official announcement yet from Damascus. We know [Redacted] that a power struggle has been going on in the past few days in the ruling Baath Party National Congress, and there have been reports ever since the September invasion of Jordan of increased tension within the leadership.

2. The military move is more the result of a power struggle within the ruling group than a move by a group with sharply opposing views to oust a party in power. The change is characterized by most reports as a move by the military wing of the Baath Party to take over from the civilian wing, which is itself composed of former army officers. The [Redacted] recent party conference indicate that the civilian wing of the party intended to submit a proposal to dismiss Defense Minister Asad, head of the military wing. Last night's move was apparently the military's pre-emptive response.

3. In so far as ideological and policy differences are involved, the civilian wing that has been ousted apparently can be characterized as more ideologically oriented and the military wing as more pragmatic. The consensus among informed observers in Beirut is that the dominant faction in the armed forces has been increasingly resentful of the civilians' efforts to impose party rule over the country and to implement

SANITIZED
TOP SECRET / [Redacted] EO 12958 3.3(b)(1)>25Yrs
(C)

SANITIZED COPY

DECLASSIFIED
E.O. 12958, as amended, Sect 3.5
N.L.N. 01-30/2, 3-3(6)(c) 3-2-05
By [Signature] NARA, Date 9-25-07
[Signature]

SANITIZED
SANITIZED

DECLASSIFIED
 Authority E 012938
 By MM NARA Date 11/7/08

ANDY

SANITIZED 3.3(1)(1)

TOP SECRET / [redacted]

radical doctrines such as a "people's war" against Israel, political exploitation of the fedayeen and refusal to cooperate with non-Baathist governments such as the Egyptian. There are also reports of resentment of the extent of Communist participation in the government and, above all, of the decisions to commit Syrian forces in Jordan and then to pull them out. Beneath those differences, however, both groups are Baathists (a party with a vague Arab socialist philosophy) with the civilians representing a more fanatical element.

4. No fundamental policy shift should be expected. We have had reports over the summer that, if Jordan and the UAR appeared to be getting somewhere in peace negotiations with Israel, the Syrians might find a way to join the process later. If the reported shift in leadership in Damascus has any effect, it might be in the area of greater willingness at some point to join negotiations. There might also be less criticism of the UAR and Jordan for negotiating.

Comment: In short, insofar as this shift may make a difference, it is more likely to be a difference for the better and not for the worse, since this government may be less fanatical. The possible advantage is that the Syrians might be less active in trying to undercut Israel-Jordan-UAR peace talks. The disadvantage would be that, if the Syrians joined peace talks later, this would inject into them the most difficult security issue to resolve -- the Golan Heights. In some ways, peace talks might be easier if that issue did not have to be addressed. On the other hand, it is not certain that the UAR would sign an agreement with Israel -- or the USSR support it -- unless a Syrian settlement were part of it.

SANITIZED

TOP SECRET / [redacted]

3.3(1)(1)

SANITIZED COPY

[b2][2]