

## Syria: Reshuffling its Security Apparatus?

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Syria plans to make major changes in its entire security apparatus soon

By Stratfor Today This Report Expresses the views of Stratfor.

### Summary

Syria plans to make major changes in its entire security apparatus soon, Stratfor sources reported Feb. 28. The decision comes after the Feb. 12 assassination of key Hezbollah commander Imad Mughniyah in Damascus &mdash; an event that embarrassed Syrian President Bashar al Assad's regime. With pressure coming from several fronts on Syria's involvement in Lebanon, al Assad might benefit from cleaning house.

### Analysis

Stratfor sources reported Feb. 28 that Syria plans to reshuffle its entire security apparatus soon in the wake of the Feb. 12 assassination of Hezbollah chief commander Imad Mughniyah. The Syrian regime, which is mightily embarrassed by the Mughniyah hit on Syrian soil, could use the event as an excuse to eliminate several key members of its security apparatus, including former head of Syrian intelligence in Lebanon Gen. Rustom Ghazaleh and Jamii Jamii, one of his key assistants &mdash; both of whom were likely involved in the February 2005 assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik al-Hariri.

With pressure building on Syria to cut a deal over Lebanon, Syrian President Bashar al Assad might benefit from cleaning house. Syria, Hezbollah and Iran are fighting an aggressive battle in Lebanon to expand Hezbollah's political power in the Cabinet, ensure the next Lebanese president is favorable to Syrian interests and give Syria a clean break from the tribunal for the al-Hariri assassination. A formal removal of figures like Ghazaleh and his deputy could allow al Assad to demonstrate to the West and his regional rivals that his regime is taking concrete action against suspects involved in the murder, potentially paving the way for a broader agreement on the makeup of the Lebanese government.

Removing Ghazaleh would be largely for show, however. After the Syrian army pulled out of Lebanon in April 2005, the position of chief of intelligence in Lebanon was eliminated. After that, Ghazaleh was essentially put under house arrest and has been running a security office in the town of Rif Dimashq that holds little to no significance.

Depending on how far this military reshuffle goes, certain complications could arise that could threaten the stability of the al Assad regime. The big question is whether the regime will dare to dismiss Asef Shawkat, the director-general of Syrian military intelligence, who also happens to be the president's brother-in-law. Shawkat has long butted heads with Maher al Assad, the president's brother and head of the Republican Guard. Though this information has not been verified, a rumor is circulating that Shawkat could have had something to do with the Mughniyah assassination. According to a source, Shawkat was on bad terms with Mughniyah and resented his influence on the Syrian army. Maher, on the other hand, had a very strong relationship with the Hezbollah commander and reportedly had an altercation with Shawkat prior to the assassination. If these rumors are true, the al Assad regime would have an interest in removing Shawkat to shore up the regime's alliance with Iran and Hezbollah following the Mughniyah assassination.

But Shawkat is a highly influential member of the Alawite-Baathist regime, and certain factions would not take his removal lightly. Family politics cannot be underestimated in a country like Syria; the al Assad clan is a subset of the Alawite sect, which in turn is a subset of the Syrian branch of the Baath Party. A rupture of any of the major fault lines in the regime could cause serious trouble on the home front. For this very reason, the Syrian president will probably not cause any major upsets within the security apparatus. U.S. warships are already parked off the Syrian coast, Saudi Arabia is taking the lead among the Gulf Arabs to isolate the Syrian regime diplomatically, and Israel is giving strong hints that it is looking for a fight with Hezbollah. With so many issues at stake, the Syrian president will need to err on the side of caution in managing family politics.

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