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TEXT  
TAGS: PREL, PGOV, PHUM, SY, GE, FR, AU  
SUBJECT: ALOIS BRUNNER -- DEAD OR ALIVE?

1. (U) OVER THE RECENT HOLIDAY SEASON, EMBOFFS WERE TOLD BY VARIOUS EUROPEAN DIPLOMATS IN DAMASCUS THAT NEWS STORIES WERE CIRCULATING IN FRANCE AND GERMANY ON THE DEATH OF FUGITIVE NAZI WAR CRIMINAL ALOIS BRUNNER, LONG BELIEVED TO HAVE FOUND REFUGE FROM FRENCH, GERMAN, AND AUSTRIAN PROSECUTORS IN SYRIA. THE ACCOUNTS VARIED ON MINOR DETAILS (SUCH AS THE SOURCE OF THE NEWS, WHICH IN SOME VERSIONS WAS PURPORTEDLY BRUNNER'S FAMILY), BUT ALL CITED AN ANONYMOUS "WESTERN DIPLOMAT" IN SYRIA.

2. (C) THE FRENCH CHARGE CONTACTED DCM ON CHRISTMAS EVE TO ASK WHETHER WE WERE THE WESTERN DIPLOMATS IN QUESTION. HE ALSO LATER ASKED ANOTHER EMBOFF. ONE OF OUR GERMAN COLLEAGUES TOLD US THAT WHEN HIS EMBASSY

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HEARD THE NEWS, OVER THE FRENCH TELEVISION CHANNEL TV5, HE HAD CHECKED WITH HIS FRENCH AND AUSTRIAN COUNTERPARTS. EACH OF THEM DENIED BEING THE SOURCE OR OF HAVING ANY RECENT, RELIABLE INFORMATION ON BRUNNER'S WHEREABOUTS.

3. (U) EMBASSY FINALLY OBTAINED A COPY OF A FRENCH "LE MONDE" ARTICLE, DATED DECEMBER 22, THAT CONTAINS AN INTERVIEW WITH NAZI HUNTER SERGE KLARSFELD ABOUT BRUNNER'S SUPPOSED DEMISE. IT CITES A PARIS-BASED "ECONOMIC, STRATEGIC, AND POLITICAL INFORMATION BULLETIN" ENTITLED "LA LETTRE D'ORIENT" AS BEING THE SOURCE OF THE CLAIM THAT THE 80-YEAR-OLD BRUNNER DIED "SEVERAL MONTHS AGO." IN THE INTERVIEW, KLARSFELD ACKNOWLEDGED THAT BRUNNER'S DEATH WAS PLAUSIBLE, GIVEN THE GERMAN'S ADVANCED AGE AND ILL HEALTH (KLARSFELD CLAIMED THAT HE WAS SEEN BEING HELD UP BY TWO MEN IN OCTOBER 1991, WHEN THE SYRIAN GOVERNMENT PURPORTEDLY MOVED BRUNNER OUT OF DAMASCUS FOLLOWING WESTERN "PRESSURE"), BUT HE REMAINED SKEPTICAL, SINCE THERE IS NO WAY TO VERIFY THE REPORT AND SINCE BRUNNER (IF ACTUALLY ALIVE), HIS FAMILY, AND SYRIA WOULD ALL STAND TO BENEFIT IF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY PRONOUNCED BRUNNER DEAD. KLARSFELD NOTED THAT FRENCH JUDGE JEAN-PIERRE GETTI IS STILL THINKING ABOUT COMMITTING BRUNNER TO TRIAL, AGAIN, IN ABSENTIA, BUT IT WOULD BE PREFERABLE IF SYRIA COULD BE PERSUADED TO DEPORT HIM TO FRANCE OR GERMANY OR AT LEAST TO EXPEL HIM TO A THIRD COUNTRY FROM WHICH BRUNNER COULD BE EXTRADITED. HE DESCRIBED THE SYRIAN POSITION AS BEING CONSISTENT IN RESISTING "WEAK FRENCH AND GERMAN DIPLOMATIC PRESSURE." HE ATTRIBUTED THIS DIPLOMATIC FAILURE TO THE STRENGTH OF "ASAD'S CHARACTER" AND, IMPLICITLY, TO FRENCH AND GERMAN CONCERN NOT TO JEOPARDIZE THEIR RELATIONS WITH DAMASCUS, GIVEN SYRIA'S IMPORTANT INTERNATIONAL POSITION.

4. (C) COMMENT: WE FORWARD THE ABOVE WITHOUT ANYTHING NEW TO ADD FOR ADDRESSEES' INFORMATION. THE CASE OF ALOIS BRUNNER, WHO WAS ONE OF **ADOLF EICHMANN'S** ASSISTANTS, COMES UP FROM TIME TO TIME. THE MOST DRAMATIC RECENT INSTANCE OCCURRED IN 1991, WHEN SERGE KLARSFELD'S WIFE BEATE ENTERED SYRIA AND STAGED A ONE-WOMAN DEMONSTRATION IN FRONT OF THE SYRIAN MINISTRY OF INTERIOR CALLING FOR BRUNNER'S DEPORTATION (SHE WAS TAKEN INTO CUSTODY AND SWIFTLY EXPELLED). THE GERMAN AND FRENCH AMBASSADORS HAVE STANDING INSTRUCTIONS TO DELIVER A JOINT DEMARCHE TO THE SYRIANS ON BRUNNER, BUT THE SYRIAN MFA HAS NEVER GRANTED THEM AN APPOINTMENT TO DO SO. WE UNDERSTAND THE AMBASSADORS HAVE USED OTHER MEETINGS WITH SYRIAN OFFICIALS TO MAKE THEIR POINTS SEPARATELY. THE SYRIAN RESPONSE HAS INVARIABLY BEEN TO DENY THAT BRUNNER (BY THAT NAME OR HIS ALIAS GEORG FISCHER) HAS EVER BEEN PRESENT IN SYRIA. NONE OF OUR COLLEAGUES HAVE GOOD INFORMATION ON BRUNNER'S CURRENT WHEREABOUTS. UNLESS AND UNTIL BRUNNER'S DEATH CAN BE UNDENIABLY ESTABLISHED, SYRIA WILL CONTINUE TO BE ACCUSED OF SHELTERING HIM.

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Page 2

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Page 3

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