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MEMORANDUM

## THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

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February 11, 1977

MEMORANDUM FOR:

THE PRESIDENT

FROM:

ZBIGNIEW BRZEZINSKI

SUBJECT:

Information Items

India's President Dies: Indian President Ahmed died last night of a heart attack. Ahmed, who was seventy-one-years-old had been in poor health as evidenced by his cancellation of several trips, the most recent on Tuesday. He was a long time member of Indira Gandhi's ruling Congress Party and had held many ministerial posts, including the finance and agricultural portfolios before being elected to the largely figurehead role of president. As prescribed under the constitution, Vice President Jatti has been sworn in as acting president pending elections of a new president within six months. The funeral will take place on Sunday and our embassy is checking on detailed funeral arrangements and plans regarding foreign attendance.

Internal Constraints on Asad: President Asad's continuing control of the armed forces and security apparatus suggest that he will remain in power at least through the coming months. However, the domestic opposition to him which has surfaced in recent months can be expected to place definite limits on what can be expected of Asad in a negotiating context. The State Department believes that:

--Asad will not unilaterally bargain away basic Palestinian interests, in spite of his influence over the Palestinian movement.

--Once substantive negotiations are begun, Asad will press for territorial concessions which are meaningful in military terms and not merely designed to show progress.

--He will make no concessions unless he is assured beforehand of the endorsement of Egypt and, more especially, Saudi Arabia; in the absence of Saudi support, entreaties from the U.S. will not suffice.

State Department review completed

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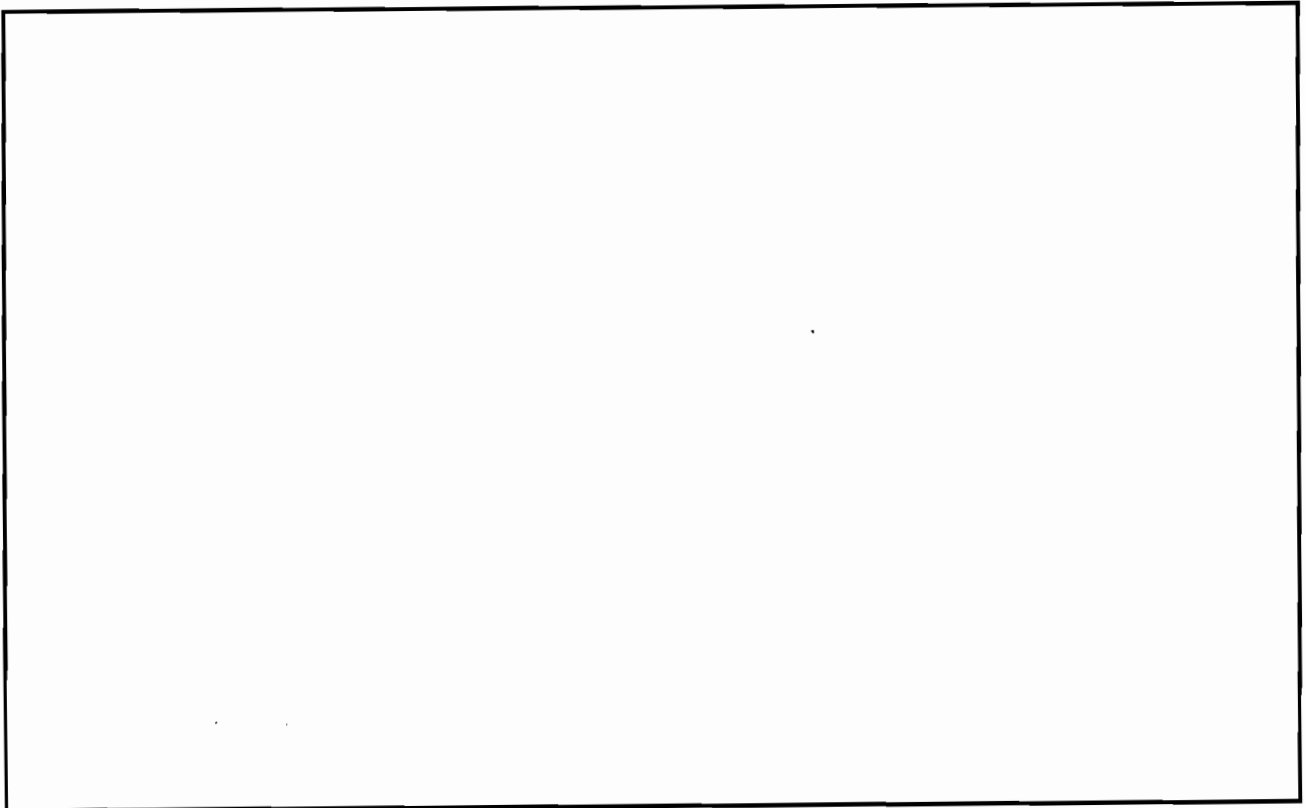
BY *[signature]* NARA DATE 9/23/05

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The immediate responsibility for defending the Asad government against an attempted coup rests with the president's brother Rif'at Asad, who is in command of a group of "defense companies" located in and around Damascus. Rif'at himself, however, is increasingly tainted with charges of corruption and doubts have been cast on his ability to keep his forces in line if faced with a concerted effort to overthrow his brother's regime.

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