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Syrian Synopsis

The Syrian Arab Republic is 71,498 square miles of land on the continent of Asia in the center of the Middle East that borders with, Turkey, Iraq, Jordan, Israel and Lebanon. It has 120 miles of coastline on the Mediterranean Sea. It's capital is Damascus, which is in the southern part of the country. Most of the country is a desert climate, with hot dry summers and mild winters that only occasionally bring snow and sleet.

Various Muslim sects make up 90% of the country's religion of which the majority is Sunni. The population of Syria is 17,537,000, and 2,228,000 of those people live in Damascus. Several languages are spoken in Syria including Kurdish, Armenian, Aramaic, Circassian, French, English but by far the most common is Arabic.

The official currency of Syria is the Syrian pound, which currently is extremely weak against the dollar. The exchange rate for one dollar is 46.43050. That means for every dollar you can get approximately 46 and a half Syrian pounds and conversely one Syrian pound will get you 0.021538 of a U. S. dollar. The inflation rate in Syria has fallen slightly from 2003 when it was 4.3% to 3.7 in 2004, due to the cautious practices of the new government that took power in 2000.

Despite recent promises to shift the economy to a more market driven one the Syrian president, Bashar al-Asad, has not relinquished control of the state run (command) economy. The GDP (Per Capita) of the county is \$3,700. The growth rate has risen modestly between 2003 and 2004 from 1.8% to 2.4%. Syria's major trading partners are Germany, Italy, Lebanon, France, Saudi Arabia, Japan, and Spain. The Major exports of Syria are Petroleum, fruits and vegetables, textiles, cotton fiber and clothing. The major

imports of Syria are Manufactured goods, machinery, food and livestock, chemicals and chemical products. The agricultural staples of the economy are wheat, barley, cotton and beef. Presently oil is on the export list but if the current government continues its course they will surely run the oil business into the ground and be forced to import this vital commodity.

The social state of Syria consists of many parts that the president has vowed to improve upon. First there is the crime rate, which many would say, is nonexistent but that is hard to believe. The unemployment rate could use some drastic improving. It is officially estimated that the unemployment rate is at 10% but many analysts who live in the country have contested that it is actually around 20%. Although the fertility rate is at 3.7 children per woman and the life expectancy is just under 70 years, the infant mortality rate is still 31 deaths per 1000 live births. The gender bias of the predominantly Muslim country can be seen when it comes to the literacy rate. While it is around 80% when the whole population is considered, there is a huge gap between the amount of women and men who are literate. Only 64% of the Syrian women are literate while 90% of the men can read and write. The Human poverty index value of Syria is about middle of the road when compared to the various nations of the world but at almost 20% it is by far nothing to brag about. Education levels are also gender prejudiced. There is a compulsory 6 years of school that every one must attend but beyond that usually only the males receive further teaching. (Country Watch 2004)

The government in Syria is a republic, but not like the republic the United States is supposed to be, it is a socialist republic controlled by the Ba'ath party. There are three branches executive, legislative and judicial that are also all controlled by the Ba'ath party. There are several different parties that include Arab Socialist Resurrection (Ba'ath) Party,

Syrian Arab Socialist Party, Arab Socialist Union, Syrian Communist Party, Arab Socialist Unionist Movement, and Democratic.

Amnesty International has a rap sheet of human rights violations on Syria that makes the practices of George Orwell's *Big Brother* seem timid. The violations include torture, ill treatment, false imprisonment, and possible disappearances. These violations all stem from things that average Americans do everyday and take for granted that it is our right to do. Most of these people were tortured and/or imprisoned because they disagree with their government and spoke up about how their government is mistreating its citizens.

Recently Syria has been in the news, when it was accused by one of their bordering nations of supporting terrorism. Iraq's defense minister, Hazem Shaalann, stated that Iran and Syria are working with former Saddam Hussein's followers to help al-Qaeda terrorist Abu Musab al-Zarqawi wreak havoc in Iraq. Of course, Syria and Iran are refuting all allegations, but the terrorists are getting money and support from somewhere or they would not, still be causing trouble. Some political analysts believe that this is just coming into play now because of the formation of the new government and they hope to influence decisions.