

Syrian protesters attack US, French embassies after ambassadors visited opposition stronghold

By [Bassem Mroue](#)

Global Research, July 11, 2011

The Associated Press | The Canadian Press

11 July 2011

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

In-depth Report: [SYRIA](#)

BEIRUT – Syrian government supporters smashed windows at the U.S. Embassy in Damascus on Monday, raised a Syrian flag and scrawled graffiti calling the American ambassador a “dog” in anger over the envoy’s visit to an opposition stronghold, witnesses said.

French Embassy guards in the Syrian capital fired in the air to hold back loyalists of President Bashar Assad’s regime who also attacked that compound to protest the French ambassador’s visit last week to the same restive city, Hama, in central Syria. Protesters smashed embassy windows and shattered the windshield of a diplomatic SUV outside the compound. The French Foreign Ministry said three embassy workers were injured.

Both the U.S. and France accused Syrian security forces of being too slow to respond to the attacks. And France said Syria was not living up to its international commitments to protect diplomatic missions and allow envoys freedom of movement.

“The people want to kick out the dog,” read graffiti written on the wall of the U.S. embassy, along with another line cursing America. The protesters smashed the embassy sign hanging over one gate.

Assad’s regime called the French and American ambassadors’ visits to Hama last week interference in the country’s internal affairs and accused the envoys of undermining Syria’s stability.

U.S. Ambassador Robert Ford on Thursday visited Hama where he was greeted by friendly crowds who put flowers on his windshield and olive branches on his car, chanting: “Down with the regime!” The State Department said the trip was to support the right of Syrians to demonstrate peacefully.

The protests erupted after Ford harshly criticized the Syrian government’s crackdown on a popular uprising that has raged over the past four months.

The U.S. said no embassy personnel were hurt in the melee and there was no immediate word on any other casualties.

The mob also attacked the residence Ford shortly after protesters breached a wall and stormed the embassy compound, U.S. officials in Washington said. They said no one was injured on the attack on Ford’s home, which is not part of the embassy compound, but that there was damage to his residence.

Marine guards quickly dispersed the mob, the officials said.

A U.S. official said the Obama administration will formally protest the attack and may seek compensation for the damage. The official said the State Department would summon a senior Syrian diplomat on Monday to condemn the assault and demand that Syria uphold obligations to protect foreign diplomatic missions.

Because the Marine guards reacted quickly, the attackers were not able to break into any buildings on the compound, the official said. But the attackers damaged the chancery building.

The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to discuss the matter publicly, said Syrian security forces were slow to respond to the attack.

At the French embassy, there was a similar scene.

The French flag was removed and replaced with a Syrian one.

"God, Syria and Bashar. The nation that gave birth to Bashar Assad will not kneel," read graffiti written outside the embassy. One witness said three protesters were injured when guards beat them with clubs. The witness asked not to be identified because of the sensitivity of the situation.

Hiam al-Hassan, a witness, said about 300 people were at the French Embassy while hundreds targeted the American diplomatic compound.

"Syrians demonstrated peacefully in front of the French embassy but they were faced with bullets," said al-Hassan.

Another protester at the French Embassy, Thuraya Arafat, 58, said: "I am here to find out why the French ambassador visited Hama. Did he go there to meet armed gangs?"

Some 1,600 civilians and 350 members of security forces have been killed since demonstrations began, activists say. Syria blames what it calls "armed gangs" and Muslim extremists for the violence.

On Sunday, Ford attacked the Syrian government for allowing pro-government protests while beating up anti-regime demonstrators. The pro-Assad protests in Syria are known as "mnhebak," or "we love you."

"I have not seen the police assault a "mnhebak" demonstration yet," Ford wrote on the embassy's Facebook page. "On July 9, a "mnhebak" group threw rocks at our embassy, causing some damage. They resorted to violence, unlike the people in Hama, who have stayed peaceful."

"And how ironic that the Syrian Government lets an anti-U.S. demonstration proceed freely while their security thugs beat down olive branch-carrying peaceful protesters elsewhere," he said. "I saw no signs of armed gangs anywhere not at any of the civilian street barricades we passed," Ford added.

On Sunday, the State Department complained that pro-government demonstrators threw

tomatoes, eggs and rocks at the embassy over the weekend to protest Ford's visit to Hama. There were no reports of injuries, but a senior department official said two embassy employees were pelted with food during the 31-hour demonstration.

Monday's protests coincided with government-organized talks in Damascus on possible political reforms after four months of unrest.

However the talks did not stop Syrian forces from pressing their crackdown on the opposition.

Before the embassy attacks, Syrian troops stormed the country's third-largest city with armoured personnel carriers and heavy machine-guns, a rights activist. At least two people were killed and 20 wounded in the attacks in Homs, activists said.

The clashes in Homs in central Syria suggest the Assad regime will not ease its four-month-old crackdown on the opposition despite proposing some political changes.

Vice-President Farouk al-Sharaa called Sunday for a transition to democracy in a country ruled for four decades by the authoritarian Assad family dynasty. But the talks, which wrap up Monday, are boycotted by the main anti-government factions and are unlikely to produce any breakthroughs to immediately end the bloodshed.

The two days of meetings, however, were seen as a major concession by Assad's regime after the most serious challenge to its rule.

In Homs, an activist in the city told The Associated Press clashes occurred after security forces on Sunday killed the son of an anti-regime tribal leader. The unrest lasted until 5 a.m. (0200 GMT) Monday.

Street lights were turned off then troops started entering neighbourhoods, shooting with heavy machine-guns atop Russian-made armoured personnel carriers, said the activist, who spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of government reprisals.

He said some people cowered in their bathrooms during the height of the assault. At least one person was killed and 20 wounded, the activist said.

Rami Abdul-Rahman, the London-based director of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, also said forces pushed into parts of Homs.

The original source of this article is The Associated Press | The Canadian Press
Copyright © [Bassem Mroue](#), The Associated Press | The Canadian Press, 2011

[Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page](#)

[Become a Member of Global Research](#)

Articles by: [Bassem Mroue](#)

Disclaimer: The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). The Centre for Research on Globalization will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: publications@globalresearch.ca

www.globalresearch.ca contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: publications@globalresearch.ca