

# Syrian Mobs Attack U.S. and French Embassies

by [Andrew J. Tabler \(/experts/andrew-j-tabler\)](/experts/andrew-j-tabler)

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



[Andrew J. Tabler \(/experts/andrew-j-tabler\)](/experts/andrew-j-tabler)

Andrew J. Tabler is the Martin J. Gross fellow in the Geduld Program on Arab Politics at The Washington Institute, where he focuses on Syria and U.S. policy in the Levant.

 Brief Analysis

## The attacks on the U.S. and French embassies in Damascus are a direct challenge to the international community and demand a prompt response.

Today's attacks on the U.S. and French embassies in Damascus were carried out by Asad regime supporters, representing a direct challenge to the international community that demands a prompt response. Last week, ambassadors from both countries visited the city of Hama, where opposition protestors welcomed their presence. The embassy incidents were apparently staged in retaliation for those visits -- the attackers, some carrying Russian flags, were egged on by Dunya TV, a station partially owned by President Bashar al-Asad's cousin, Rami Makhlof. Indeed, the regime has historically permitted rallies in front of the U.S. embassy or ambassador's residence -- many of which have involved demonstrators scaling compound walls -- to signal displeasure with U.S. policy. In today's attacks, both embassies suffered extensive damage; although no Americans were hurt, three French staff were injured.

The United States should sternly protest the assault, noting clearly the involvement of regime associates, the slow response of government security forces, and Syria's obligations under the Vienna Convention to protect diplomatic facilities. It should also demand payment for the damage, as well as approval of its long-delayed request to move the embassy -- currently located in an aging villa in the center of Damascus -- to a new compound in the suburbs, where proper security can be implemented.

In addition, Washington should make sure Russia understands the troubling significance behind the use of its flag. Damascus seems to be reading Moscow's blocking of UN action against Syria as a license not only to continue killing protestors, but to attack Western embassies as well.

Most important, however, the United States should condemn the regime's moves into Hama, where Syrian human rights activists are reporting fresh action against demonstrators.

Finally, Washington should further press the regime to create a constructive climate for transition to democratic rule. The Syrian opposition continues to boycott the regime's "National Dialogue" conference in the face of continued deadly assaults on peaceful protestors, ongoing arrest sweeps, broken promises to release more than 12,000 detained demonstrators, and the deployment of pro-regime thugs called *shabbiha* to terrorize civilians.

*Andrew J. Tabler is the Next Generation fellow in The Washington Institute's [Program on Arab Politics \(/template102.php?SID=1&newActiveSubNav=Program%20on%20Arab%20Politics&activeSubNavLink=template102.php%3FSID%3D1&newActiveNav=researchPrograms\)](/template102.php?SID=1&newActiveSubNav=Program%20on%20Arab%20Politics&activeSubNavLink=template102.php%3FSID%3D1&newActiveNav=researchPrograms) and author of the upcoming book [In the Lion's Den: An Eyewitness Account of Washington's Battle with Syria](http://www.chicagoreviewpress.com/catalog/showBook.cfm?ISBN=1569768439) (<http://www.chicagoreviewpress.com/catalog/showBook.cfm?ISBN=1569768439>). ❖*

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