

**STATEMENT OF ROBERT FORD
AMBASSADOR TO THE SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC
BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS
AUGUST 2, 2010**

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, I am honored to appear before you today. I am grateful for the trust and confidence placed in me by President Obama and Secretary Clinton in re-nominating me to serve as United States Ambassador to the Syrian Arab Republic at a time when it is more critical than ever that our voice be heard clearly by the Syrian regime and, more importantly, the Syrian people.

I last testified before this committee on March 16, 2010. Almost one year to the day later, the Syrian regime sparked what has become a nationwide uprising when it responded with deadly force to a peaceful protest over the arrest of a handful of youths in Dara'a. Since March 2011, over 1,600 people have been killed and more than 10,000 arrested in a ruthless attempt to cow the Syrian people into submission - an attempt that has failed. The Secretary reiterated on August 1 that President Assad has lost his legitimacy with the Syrian people. And the President on July 31 laid out my instructions: to stand with the Syrian people, increase our pressure on the Syrian regime, and work with other countries to isolate the Assad government.

I want to salute the courage of the Syrians who risk bullets or vicious beatings or arrest and torture but who will not be intimidated from demanding their government respect their basic rights. They are demanding nothing outlandish. They demand simply that the Syrian government respect the basic rights laid out in the United Nations Charter of Human Rights - a charter that the Syrian government signed. They want their government to respect the freedoms of speech and assembly, the right to just and fair governance, and freedom from the fears and wants that have resulted from decades of corrupt, incompetent, and brutal rule at the hands of an unaccountable clique. They want to be treated like human beings - with respect and dignity.

My team and I see it as an integral part of our mission to give these people an ear and a voice. To amplify their hopes and legitimate grievances so that the international community and most importantly the Syrian regime pays attention. I am convinced that my French colleague and I were welcomed in Hama because after weeks of fearless and peaceful protest, and on the verge of a potential crackdown, someone from outside Syria took notice. I wish you could have seen the eagerness of the Hama people to talk to me about their experiences with the

Syrian intelligence services and how they were determined to push their demands for respect and dignity from their government no matter what the pressure from the Syrian government.

When I return to Syria in a couple days, I will continue through my actions and my presence to demonstrate solidarity with the Syrian people and our rejection of the regime's empty promises, senseless violence, and sectarian fear-mongering.

Asad and his circle will not endure forever, but it is not entirely clear who or what will follow. An additional focus of my work on the ground, which I do not advertise widely, is getting to know the leading activists and assessing their needs and opportunities for the United States to help. They are independent. They do not want American military involvement.

The crisis in Syria is not about the United States directly. It does offer us opportunities to promote respect for our principles and ideals. It offers us opportunities eventually to reinforce stability and peace in the Middle East. But Syrians must resolve the crisis. The manner in which it is resolved must be a Syrian one. I see my job as helping establish the space for Syrian thinkers, political activists, and those who lead the street protests to organize their plan for the political transition that must occur if Syria is to know stability again. We have had some success in establishing that space through my frank discussions with elements in the Syrian leadership who claim to want a political solution to the crisis. And the Syrian opposition is slowly becoming an effective, broad-based opposition.

While the regime has generally dismissed new U.S. sanctions as "business as usual," President Obama's decision to take the unprecedented step of designating Bashar Asad personally, and our efforts to coordinate that step with the Europeans, absolutely stung. Our coordination on multilateral steps, such as at the United Nations, also stung. And new sanctions, coupled with the regime's own violence and mismanagement, have signaled to markets that Syria is increasingly "radioactive." Trade, tourism, investment, and foreign reserves are down, and the economy is hurting badly. Some of Asad's close business associates have contacted us to plead their cases. Another part of my job in Damascus is to identify how we can apply unilateral American actions to boost pressure and how working with our partners on multilateral actions we can help bring this crisis to a quicker and less bloody end. A new U.N. Security Council resolution would be useful in that effort. As we mull our steps, we aim to ensure that we neither harm

the Syrian people nor prejudice their ability to recover economically, socially, and politically.

It is time for us to start thinking about the day after Asad. Syria's 23 million citizens already have. I believe that we and they share a vision of what Syria could be: an open and democratic country where governance is based on consent of the governed. A unified and tolerant country where Arabs and Kurds, Sunnis and Alawis, Christians and Druze see themselves as Syrians first and celebrate their nation's diversity. A strong country at peace with its neighbors and exercising a stabilizing influence in the region. A strong country playing a responsible role in the broader international community. A country that does not support Iranian efforts to destabilize the region or give support to terrorist groups like Hizballah. As the President said on July 31, Syria will be a better place when a democratic transition goes forward.

I, my team in Damascus, my colleagues at the Department of State, and throughout the U.S. government and most importantly the Syrian people are working to make this vision a reality.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for this opportunity to address the Committee. I would be pleased to respond to any questions you may have.