

U.S. closes Syria embassy after U.N. fails to act, crackdown continues
By The Washington Post
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The United States has shut down its embassy in Damascus and pulled out its ambassador and diplomatic staff from the country. The administration cited security concerns after increasing violence over the weekend, in which one assault reportedly killed over 200 people. But the decision had been coming for months. As Alice Fordham reported:

“On Monday, U.S. Ambassador Robert S. Ford and all diplomats and American citizens associated with the embassy left the country. The State Department issued a travel warning recommending that all U.S. citizens in Syria “depart immediately.” It said the Polish Embassy now “serves as protecting power for U.S. interests” in Syria.

While couched in security concerns, the decision to close the embassy could signal a shift in policy toward Syria following the collapse of the U.N. diplomatic efforts. The State Department had long sought to keep the embassy open in order to better monitor the situation in Syria, and to preserve an open channel with the Syrian opposition.”

Since mid-January, the administration had said it was considering shutting down the embassy, following three car explosions in the previously calm capital. As Karen DeYoung and Liz Sly reported:

The Obama administration is preparing to evacuate American personnel and close the U.S. embassy in Damascus, Syria, by the end of this month unless the embattled government of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad provides additional security for the facility, senior administration officials said.

Officials said they have not reached a final decision and are engaged in talks with the Assad government, but there so far have been no tangible results in providing more protection for the embassy.

U.S. Ambassador to Syria Robert Ford left the country in October 2011, following direct threats from supporters of the Assad regime. One attacker tried to wrap Ford in a flag; another group pelted him with eggs and tomatoes. Ford returned to Damascus in December.

Since the ambassador’s return, however, the fight between Assad supporters and the rebel Free Syrian Army has only become more militarized.

And Alice Fordham reports, the tipping point may have been Russia and China’s veto of a United Nations resolution condemning Syria’s crackdown. Fordham writes:

On Saturday, Russia and China vetoed a U.N. security council resolution condemning Syria that had been strongly supported by Western countries and the Arab League. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton denounced the vetoes as a “travesty.”