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زبان های اروپایی

Al Jazeera

## Crowds vandalize Arab embassies in Syria

11/16/2011

Crowds supporting President Bashar al-Assad have vandalised at least two Arab embassies in the Syrian capital Damascus as Arab League foreign ministers gathered in Rabat to discuss formalising their suspension of Syria from the league.

Large crowds threw stones and debris and sprayed graffiti on the walls of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) embassy on Wednesday, witnesses told the Reuters news agency, while others attacked the Moroccan embassy, that country's foreign minister told journalists.

The attacks came as Arab foreign ministers gathered in the Moroccan capital to follow up on a pledge to suspend Syria from the league if it did not move to comply within three days with a previously agreed plan to halt violence and allow international monitors.

"You bastards, you agents of Israel," read some of the graffiti on the UAE embassy, witnesses said. The embassy is located in the affluent Abu Dummana neighbourhood, where Assad has his home and personal offices.

A statement issued earlier this month, and supported by 18 of the league's 22 members, including the UAE and Morocco, recommended withdrawing ambassadors from Damascus.

French Foreign Minister Alain Juppe told his country's parliament on Wednesday that the ambassador to Syria, Eric Chevallier, would be provisionally withdrawn.

"New violence has taken place, and that has led to the closure of our missions in Aleppo and Latakia," Juppe said.

A gang of people armed with knives and clubs broke in to the French consular offices in Latakia earlier this month, Al Jazeera's Jacky Rowland, reporting from Paris, said, adding that the French embassy in Damascus would remain open.

### **'Stop the flow of blood'**

The Syrian government boycotted the Rabat meeting on Wednesday. Moroccan Foreign Minister Taieb Fassi said earlier that Syria would be welcome to attend the meeting.

"In light of statements by officials in Morocco, Syria has decided not to participate in the Arab meeting in Rabat," an official in the ministry of foreign affairs told the state news agency.

The statement did not give more details.

Syria's suspension, which the league put on pause to give Assad's government time to comply, came after Damascus failed to abide by an agreement to halt violence and allow international monitors.

On Tuesday, the UK-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported that at least 70 people had been killed in violence across the country in just 24 hours, making it one of the bloodiest days since the uprising began in March.

The rights group said that 27 civilians were shot dead by security forces, and that 34 soldiers and 12 suspected army deserters were killed in clashes, mostly in the southern province of Deraa.

"What has happened in Syria is very sad for all of us, we cannot accept that people are being killed in the way they are now. We are moving to stop the flow of blood," said Qatari Foreign Minister Hamad bin Jassim Al Thani, whose country has taken the lead in isolating Syria.

"The Syrian government must apply the Arab League plan."

The meeting is expected to formalise the earlier decision to suspend Syria, though the Qatari foreign minister told the AP news agency before a closed-door meeting that ministers could still decide against it.

In a rare move among Arab leaders, Jordan's King Abdullah said earlier this week that **Assad should step down** in the best interests of the country.

Recep Tayyip Erdogan, **Turkey's prime minister, warned Assad on Tuesday** that Syria is on a "knife edge", adding that he no longer had confidence in the Syrian government and that the Syrian president's actions threatened to place him on a list of leaders who "feed on blood".

Last week, the UN [warned of an increasing risk of a Libyan-style civil war](#) in Syria as defections among the army increased.

### **Boldest attack**

In what may be a sign of more fighting to come, Syrian activists on Wednesday say that army defectors have attacked an intelligence complex in the Damascus suburbs in what appears to be one of their boldest assaults so far against government security forces.

Members of the [Free Syrian Army](#) fired heavy weaponry and machine guns at a large air force intelligence complex in Harasta on the northern edge of the capital along the Damascus-Aleppo highway early on Wednesday, a spokesperson for the Syrian Revolution General Commission told Al Jazeera.

The spokesperson said the attack followed a raid by the Syrian army on Harasta on Tuesday and carefully co-ordinated army defections which enabled former soldiers to run away with their weapons.

A gunfight ensued and helicopters circled the area, sources said.

"I heard several explosions, the sound of machine-gun fire being exchanged," said a Harasta resident who declined to be named.

There was no immediate report of casualties and the area where the fighting occurred remained inaccessible, the sources said.

Syria's has banned most foreign media from the country and tightly controls access for foreign visitors, making it difficult to verify events on the ground.

"This is probably not the first attack on [a] security headquarters," said Al Jazeera's Rula Amin, reporting from Lebanon. "But what is significant about this attack is that it is in Damascus, the capital. This shows how much trouble there is for the regime."

In addition to other responsibilities, the air force intelligence services work with military intelligence to prevent dissent in the army.

The two divisions have been instrumental in the crackdown on the ongoing uprising against Assad, which the UN says has killed at least 3,500 people since March.

Syria's military is controlled by Assad's brother, Maher, and members of their minority Alawite faith, a sect of Shia Islam.

But the army is composed mostly of Sunni Muslims, who are a majority in Syria and have been defecting from the army in growing numbers.

Syrian authorities have blamed "armed terrorist groups" for the unrest, which they say has caused the deaths of 1,100 army and police personnel.