

# American

## NEWS & VIEWS

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## President Obama Approves \$105 Million More for Horn of Africa

By MacKenzie C. Babb | Staff Writer

Washington — President Obama has approved an additional \$105 million for urgent humanitarian relief efforts across the Horn of Africa, where the United Nations estimates that more than 12.4 million people are in urgent need as a result of the region's worst drought in more than 60 years.

The additional funding was announced by the White House August 8. It said the money will go toward funding "the urgently needed food, health, shelter, water and sanitation assistance to those who desperately need help" across the region. U.S. officials say the Horn of Africa faces widespread crop failure, livestock mortality and increased food prices.

The announcement of increased aid came as Jill Biden, wife of Vice President Joe Biden, and Dr. Rajiv Shah, administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), landed in Kenya for a trip to underscore the continued U.S. commitment to assisting "the people of the Horn of Africa during this urgent time of need and to investing in long-term solutions to hunger and food insecurity in the region."

The White House said August 8 that Biden will meet with Kenyan President Mwai Kibaki and Prime Minister Raila Odinga "to discuss how the United States can work with international partners on the best response to this crisis."

The United Nations says Somalia has been hardest hit by the crisis, with famine now affecting five regions across the country and threatening to spread. USAID estimates that more than 600,000 Somalis have fled to neighboring countries, many walking for weeks to refugee camps in search of food and water in a migration that has put additional strain on drought-affected areas of Kenya and Ethiopia.

The U.N. Refugee Agency said August 8 that it had landed an aircraft in Somalia's capital containing emergency aid to help thousands of people. The operation was the agency's first in five years to conflict-ridden Mogadishu.

USAID said the United States is the world's largest donor of emergency assistance to the Horn of Africa, helping more than 4.6 million people in need. The White House said in 2011, the United States has provided \$565 million in humanitarian assistance to the region, and will continue helping people in need as they seek assistance.

## U.S. Welcomes Stronger Arab Stand Against Syrian Violence

By Stephen Kaufman | Staff Writer

Washington — The Obama administration welcomed increased pressure on Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's regime from his neighbors in the Middle East as a sign that Syria's rulers are increasingly isolating themselves from the international community as a result of their brutal crackdown on peaceful demonstrators calling for political reforms.

State Department spokesman Mark Toner said August 8 that the United States is "encouraged [and] heartened" by strong statements from the Arab League and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) on August 7 and August 6, respectively, that expressed alarm over the Assad regime's actions and called for an end to the violence.

Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Bahrain have announced that they are recalling their ambassadors from Damascus.

"These are further signs that the international community ... is repulsed by the brutal actions of the Syrian government and is standing with the Syrian people," and "that President Assad and his government are further isolating themselves from the international community through their actions," Toner said.

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said August 4 that the Obama administration estimates that the Assad regime has killed more than 2,000 Syrians since the demonstrations began in March. The United States has enacted unilateral sanctions targeting the Syrian leadership and affiliated businesses, and Clinton called for countries with closer ties to Syria to join the United States in taking action and creating "a much louder, more effective chorus of voices that are putting pressure on the Assad regime."

Toner said Assad's "neighbors and other powerful countries and voices in the region" need to be involved, not just the United States and the United Nations, to bring enough pressure against Assad to make him end the violence and mass arrests.

The United States is beginning to see broader international pressure coalescing around Syria. Toner said the Arab League and GCC had issued "strong statements decrying the violence." Coupled with the recall of the Saudi, Kuwaiti and Bahraini ambassadors, "the message is becoming clearer and clearer to Assad that he has fewer and fewer friends," he said.

"What Assad will do with that message remains to be seen. He's talked again about reforms while at the same time ... carrying out armored attacks continuing in Hama

as well as now Deir ez-Zor. So it's not encouraging," Toner said.

Secretary Clinton spoke with Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu August 7 and thanked him for his upcoming visit to Syria and for Turkey's role in helping to address the crisis, including its assistance to Syrian refugees who have fled the violence.

According to Toner, Clinton told Davutoğlu that the Obama administration wants Syria to "immediately return its military to barracks and release all prisoners of concern."

"She asked the foreign minister to reinforce these messages with the Syrian government. She also discussed American support for a transition to democracy in Syria," Toner said August 7.

U.S. Ambassador to Syria Robert Ford told ABC Television's This Week that the Assad regime "is using a great deal more violence than was used in Egypt" by former President Hosni Mubarak against the demonstrations that ended his regime.

In an August 4 interview, Ford said U.S. officials see Assad and his regime as the source of instability and violence in Syria and that President Obama has said the Assad regime "will be left in the past."

"We have said, and we've been very clear on this, we do not view Bashar al-Assad as indispensable. We do not view his continuation in power as important to American interests," Ford said.

Ford was criticized by Syrian authorities for undertaking a visit to the besieged city of Hama in July. He told ABC that it is important for foreign diplomats to be able to travel in Syria in order to "bear witness to what the Syrian government is doing."

The Assad regime has largely barred independent media outlets from the country. Ford said the state-owned Syrian television service "is not credible and tells all kinds of lies."

For example, Syrian television has reported armed gangs in Hama, while "the only weapon I saw was a slingshot," Ford said.

He said it is important to relay a message of support to the Syrian people, and U.S. diplomats are looking for ways to reach out through Facebook and other social media outlets.

In his conversations with the Syrian people, Ford said, he has found that despite the violence being inflicted by

armed security forces against unarmed demonstrators, the people were "very clear" in saying they do not want the United States to intervene militarily to stop the violence.

"I want to underline that. They did not want American military intervention," Ford said.

The Obama administration will continue to look at additional unilateral measures it can take to pressure the Assad regime, as well as "measures that we can work with partners to get the Syrian government to stop shooting protesters, to release political prisoners and to stop these arrest campaigns," he said.

### **U.S. Muslims Gather for Iftar at Halal Restaurant**

The Islamic holy month of Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar, when the Quran was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad, and it falls in August this year.

During Ramadan, Muslims refrain from eating or drinking from dawn to sunset, breaking their fast after sundown with a meal known as iftar. In the United States, restaurants serving halal food — which is prepared in accordance with Islamic dietary laws — are a popular choice for iftar customers.

There, family groups enjoy iftar at the Ali Baba halal restaurant in El Cajon, California. Located near San Diego, Ali Baba specializes in Mediterranean food, and its interior, decorated with elaborately fringed tents, evokes the feeling of old Baghdad. Othman Kalasho, owner of Ali Baba, says the restaurant employs a well-known Iraqi chef and works hard to make everyone feel welcome.

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