

RELEASE IN PART  
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**From:** Mills, Cheryl D <MillsCD@state.gov>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, June 22, 2010 9:45 AM  
**To:** H  
**Subject:** FW: Syria Trip in the San Francisco Chronicle

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**From:** Cohen, Jared A  
**Sent:** Tuesday, June 22, 2010 8:32 AM  
**To:** Slaughter, Anne-Marie; Chollet, Derek H; Burns, William J; Feltman, Jeffrey D; Mills, Cheryl D; Sullivan, Jacob J; Jentleson, Bruce W; Ross, Alec J; Crowley, Philip J; Djerassi, Alexander M  
**Subject:** Fw: Syria Trip in the San Francisco Chronicle

Fyi

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This email is unclassified

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**From:** Jared Cohen [redacted]  
**To:** Cohen, Jared A; alec.ross [redacted]  
**Sent:** Tue Jun 22 08:23:49 2010  
**Subject:** Syria Trip in the San Francisco Chronicle

<http://tinyurl.com/2afxnjf>

## Bay Area execs seek to open doors with Syria

Andrew S. Ross  
Sunday, June 20, 2010



Call it a dual purpose mission, with pretty high stakes.

Bay Area executives from **Cisco Systems Inc.**, **Symantec Corp.** and **VeriSign Inc.** returned Friday from a trip to Syria, where they were tasked by the Obama administration with helping open business and diplomatic doors to a member of what used to be called the "axis of evil."

Were the doors flung open to a country with whom U.S. businesses are still mostly forbidden to trade?

Not exactly, given that Internet freedom, transparency, the elimination of corruption and a general opening up, Syrian leaders were told, are among the sine qua non for getting them what they say they want - U.S. businesses and investment there.

"Candid" was a word used by one delegation member to describe the four days of talks last week in Damascus and Aleppo, a commercial center and Syria's largest city. "They provided a lot of clarity for both sides. On our side, how receptive the Syrians are to U.S. companies doing business there, and for the Syrians, what they need to do to get things going," said the delegation member, who agreed to speak only on background.

The delegation, which also included senior executives from **Microsoft Corp.** and **Dell Inc.**, was led by **Alec Ross**, Secretary of State **Hillary Rodham Clinton**'s senior adviser for innovation, and **Jared Cohen**, a member of Clinton's policy planning staff.

There were sit-downs with Syrian President **Bashar Assad** and other government ministers and meetings with business leaders, including those in the country's nascent high-tech sector, along with students, academics and leaders of civic and social organizations.

**Laying down the conditions:** Unlike most U.S. companies, Cisco, Symantec and the other high-tech firms on the trip are allowed to do business in Syria under a waiver granted, under certain conditions, to U.S. information technology companies.

According to Syria's state news agency, Sana, "the American executives discussed setting up authorized centers for (their) companies in Syria."

But in meeting after meeting, according to the delegate, the executives said there were too many barriers to entry, including Internet access, which Clinton has said is a key plank of U.S. foreign policy.

"They can't do business in a place that is not open," was the message, according to the delegate. (While Syria remains a member in good standing of the axis of authoritarians, some of the same concerns could be raised about countries these companies do conduct business with - like, dare we say, China).

The Syrian government said it was considering a law that would require that the blocking of Web sites - a common, often arbitrary and unpredictable happening there - be at least subject to judicial review.

"Now, we have to wait and see what the government does," the delegate said.

In an earlier statement about the trip, Symantec said it was also designed to help the Obama administration's "effort to continue strengthening diplomatic relations throughout the Middle East." That also remains to be seen.

It's not the first time the administration, responding to come-hither hints from Damascus, has, like Charlie Brown, teed up the football, only to have it snatched away, Lucy-style, as Syria got cold and persisted in allying itself with U.S. archenemy Iran.

Obama, announcing the renewal of sanctions on Syria last month, cited the country's "continuing support for terrorist organizations and pursuit of weapons of mass destruction and missile programs, (which) continue to pose an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security, foreign policy and economy of the United States."

**Opportunities in the sand:** Meanwhile, **Robert Ludden**, chief operating officer of San Francisco's **KMD Architects**, is back in the Middle East seeking more business, particularly in Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Saudi Arabia.

Recently Ludden nailed down the firm's first prime contract there, as designer of the \$15 million Imperial College of London diabetes center in Abu Dhabi, a showpiece facility for a disease that is surprisingly prevalent in the region.

He sees the Middle East as a growing market for architects and designers, as a number of countries there, especially the desert kingdoms, are seeking to develop sustainable communities.

"Saudi Arabia is the next big one," Ludden says.

**Going global:** The **Bay Area Council** officially opened its first "overseas global office" on Friday, in Shanghai.

The office, located in Shanghai's Knowledge and Innovation Community, is meant to serve as a gateway service for Bay Area companies looking to set up in China, as well as "guiding Chinese companies and investment to the Bay Area."

Next up for a global office, the council says: India.

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