

RELEASE IN FULL

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**From:** Abedin, Huma <AbedinH@state.gov>  
**Sent:** Thursday, September 22, 2011 10:45 AM  
**To:** H  
**Subject:** Fw: Syria crackdown risks sectarian strife-US ambassador (Reuters)

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**From:** OpsNewsTicker  
**Sent:** Thursday, September 22, 2011 10:39 AM  
**To:** NEWS-Mahogany; Syria Unrest  
**Cc:** SES-O  
**Subject:** Syria crackdown risks sectarian strife-US ambassador (Reuters)

AMMAN, Sept 22 (Reuters) - President Bashar al-Assad is losing support among key constituents and risks plunging Syria into sectarian strife by intensifying a bloody crackdown on pro-democracy demonstrators, the U.S. ambassador to Damascus said on Thursday.

Time is against Assad, Robert Ford told Reuters in a telephone interview from Damascus, citing the resilience of more than six months of what he described as overwhelmingly peaceful demonstrations demanding more political freedoms.

Ford said there was economic malaise in Syria, signs of dissent within Assad's Alawite minority sect and more defections from the army since mid-September, but the military is "still very powerful and very cohesive".

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