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Germany Expels Four Syrian Diplomats

The Road to Damascus

2/9/2012

Germany has expelled four Syrian diplomats, apparently in connection with the arrest of two suspected Syrian spies earlier this week. German Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle also called Thursday for a new attempt to reach a UN resolution on the ongoing violence in the country.

Just two days ago, two alleged Syrian government agents were [arrested in Berlin](#) on suspicion of spying on Syrian opposition members living in Germany. Now the German government has continued its campaign against Damascus by expelling four Syrian diplomats from Germany.

German Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle announced on Thursday that he had informed the Syrian ambassador of the decision earlier that day. The diplomats, three men and a woman employed by the Syrian embassy in Berlin, now have three days to leave the country. German media quoted sources in the Foreign Ministry as saying that the four Syrian Embassy employees had carried out activities that were "not compatible" with their diplomatic status. Westerwelle did not go into detail about the reasons for the expulsion, but did refer to Tuesday's arrests.

On Wednesday, a judge at Germany's Federal Court of Justice ruled that the two suspected spies should be remanded into custody. They are accused of having conducted systematic observation of members of the Syrian opposition in Germany over a period of years.

The Syrian ambassador was already summoned to the Foreign Ministry in Berlin on Tuesday in connection with the arrests. The ministry said in a statement that the ambassador had been told that such action against Syrian opposition figures in Germany would not be tolerated.

The German authorities said they had no proof of possible attacks against Syrian exiles in Germany. "I have no evidence that this danger exists," said Harald Range, Germany's federal prosecutor general, adding that the case only involved "espionage activities." Commenting on the arrest of the two suspected spies, Range said that intelligence agencies in the Middle East were known to monitor opposition members in Germany and exert pressure on their relatives here or in their home country.

On Friday, members of the Syrian opposition are planning to discuss the uprising in Syria at an event in Berlin. Participants will include Ferhad Ahma, a Green Party politician and member of the Syrian opposition who was [attacked by two unknown men](#) in his Berlin flat in December. At the time there was speculation that Syrian intelligence might be behind the incident.

'Grim Harbinger'

Meanwhile the brutal crackdown on rebel forces continued in Syria on Thursday. The Syrian army continued to bombard the city of Homs, a center of the [uprising](#) against the regime of Syrian President Bashar Assad, with mortar and rocket fire. At least 50 people were killed on Thursday alone, according to activists, who put the total death toll since the start of the uprising in March 2011 at over 7,000.

United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon condemned the "appalling brutality" in Homs, calling it "a grim harbinger of worse to come." Ban said the UN's failure to agree on a resolution on Syria had encouraged Damascus "to step up its war on its own people." Russia and China have been [strongly criticized](#) by the West for their decision to veto the draft resolution on the violence in Syria on the weekend.

Speaking in Berlin on Thursday, Foreign Minister Westerwelle called for a new attempt to pass a UN Security Council resolution. He also expressed his support for a joint observer mission between the Arab League and the United Nations as well as the deployment of a UN special commissioner. Both moves would be "an unambiguous signal to the Assad regime," he said.