

U.S. seeks to try Syria's Assad in Hague criminal court

By [Global Research](#)

Global Research, June 18, 2011

[Russian Information Agency Novosti](#) 18 June 2011

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [Law and Justice](#)

MOSCOW: The White House is gathering information on alleged human rights abuses by Syrian security forces for possible consideration by the International Criminal Court (ICC) in the Hague, the Wall Street Journal reported on its website, quoting U.S. officials.

"We're consulting on that internally and regionally," an unidentified U.S. official was quoted by the paper as saying.

The Obama administration is also exploring ways to more directly target Syria's oil and gas revenues, a major source of income for Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and his inner circle, the paper said.

"Assad is pushing his country on the path of being a pariah state," the U.S. official said. "We are operating in a number of ways to increase the pressure" on him, he added.

Syria has not signed the Rome Statute that governs the ICC, which makes the Court unable to independently exercise jurisdiction over crimes allegedly committed by the Syrian regime. But the United States and European powers could press the UN Security Council to refer the Syria case to the ICC, as it happened after Gaddafi sent his troops and tanks to fight protesters in Libya, the paper said.

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Washington has not officially called on Assad, who has been ruling Syria for more than a decade, to step down as it did with former Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and Libya's Col. Muammar Gaddafi. However, the United States, along with the European Union, has imposed sanctions on Assad and many of his family members.

U.S. State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland said on Friday that the United States was trying to persuade Russia to work together on a resolution on Syria to be put to a vote at the UN Security Council.

Russia has opposed a resolution condemning violence in Syria and urged a diplomatic solution to the crisis, while France, Britain and Germany have been pushing for such a resolution to be passed by the Security Council to prevent further bloodshed.

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