

Dan Rather Reports

Episode Number: 721

Episode Title: Running for Their Lives

Description: With the violence escalating, hundreds of families are escaping the hell that is Syria every day. We have first access to crowded camps on the Jordanian border where families show us the horrors of what's happening just a few miles from their safe haven. Also, Middle East expert Fouad Ajami.

TEASE:

DAN RATHER (VOICE OVER)

TONIGHT, RUNNING FOR THEIR LIVES. AS SYRIA DESCENDS INTO CIVIL WAR WAVES OF REFUGEES WONDER WHY THE WORLD WAITS WHILE THE MASSACRE CONTINUES.

MOHAMED ALMAT, SYRIAN ACTIVIST

We need help. We need support, in any way - any way. We need it now. Now. Not tomorrow. Please, now.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

AND A CONVERSATION WITH ONE OF THE WORLD'S RANKING AUTHORITIES ON THE MIDDLE EAST, FOUAD AJAMI, ABOUT WHAT'S AT STAKE FOR SYRIA -- AND THE WORLD.

FOUAD AJAMI, SENIOR FELLOW,
THE HOOVER INSTITUTION, STANFORD UNIVERSITY

Our country has always, if you will, come to the rescue of the weak and to the rescue of the persecuted; I think it's really been-- a truly embarrassing chapter in American foreign policy.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

PLUS -- BUILDING A FREE PRESS TO SQUARE-OFF AGAINST A MURDEROUS DICTATOR...

SUMMER AJLOUNI, CO-FOUNDER, SYRIA AL-SHAAB

It is absolutely rewarding to know that we are bothering the Assad regime. It lets us know that we're doing exactly what we started off to do and it just makes you want to work harder and do more.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

WE'LL BRING YOU THE NEWS TONIGHT ON DAN RATHER REPORTS.

ACT 1: RUNNING FOR THEIR LIVES

RATHER (ON CAMERA)

GOOD EVENING. WHILE POPULAR UPRISINGS ACROSS THE ARAB WORLD HAVE PUSHED OTHER DESPOTS FROM POWER, SYRIA'S PRESIDENT BASHAR AL-ASSAD HAS STUBBORNLY STOOD HIS GROUND -- BEATING BACK DISSENT WITH A HEAVILY-ARMED MILITARY. NO ONE HAS BEEN SPARED -- NOT PEACEFUL DEMONSTRATORS, NOT WOMEN -- NOT EVEN CHILDREN.

FACING THIS EXTREME VIOLENCE, THOUSANDS OF SYRIANS ARE FLEEING THE COUNTRY. WE WERE THE FIRST JOURNALISTS TO VISIT A REFUGEE CAMP IN JORDAN, WHERE HUNDREDS OF DESPERATE AND FRIGHTENED PEOPLE ARRIVE EVERY DAY. FREE TO FINALLY TELL THEIR STORY, THEIR MESSAGE WAS URGENT AND SIMPLE: IF THE REST OF THE WORLD ONLY KNEW - REALLY KNEW - WHAT WAS GOING ON INSIDE THEIR COUNTRY, SURELY SOMEONE WOULD DO SOMETHING TO STOP IT.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

WE'RE IN THE VERY NORTH OF JORDAN -- LESS THAN 20 MILES FROM THE BIRTHPLACE OF THE SYRIAN UPRISING. THAT'S SYRIA ALONG THE RIDGELINE THERE -- AND JUST OUT OF SIGHT, THE BLOODY CRACKDOWN CONTINUES.

BUT THE IMPACT OF ASSAD'S UNRELENTING BRUTALITY CAN CERTAINLY BE FELT HERE, IN THE DUSTY JORDANIAN BORDER TOWN OF AL RAMTHA.

THERE'S NO GOOD COUNT OF HOW MANY SYRIANS HAVE SOUGHT REFUGE IN JORDAN -- MOST HAVE SNUCK INTO THE COUNTRY ILLEGALLY, AND REMAIN UNCOUNTED BY UNITED NATIONS AND JORDANIAN AUTHORITIES. BUT THE KINGDOM OF JORDAN ESTIMATES THAT THERE ARE MORE THAN 130,000 SYRIAN REFUGEES IN THE COUNTRY - - AND THE NUMBER CONTINUES TO GROW.

THIS IS THE FIRST STOP FOR THOUSANDS OF SYRIANS ESCAPING THE VIOLENCE -- A COMPLEX OF BUILDINGS IN THE HILLS ABOVE AL RAMTHA THAT NORMALLY SERVES AS A TEXTILE PLANT. THE PLANT'S WEALTHY JORDANIAN OWNER HAS DONATED HIS PROPERTY TO REFUGEES UNTIL THEY CAN FIND A MORE PERMANENT PLACE TO LIVE. THERE ARE FAMILIES EVERYWHERE, CRAMMED INTO EVERY SPARE CORNER. THESE TRAILERS ARE FULL OF DONATED CLOTHES, BUT SOMETIMES, THEY ALSO SERVE AS TEMPORARY HOUSING.

SINGLE MEN SLEEP IN ROWS OF STACKED BUNK-BEDS UNDERGROUND IN WHAT WAS ONCE A WAREHOUSE. THE WALLS ARE COVERED WITH GRAFFITI SCRAWLED IN ASH -- MESSAGES CALLING FOR ASSAD'S FALL...AND FREEDOM AND PEACE IN SYRIA.

IN THIS MAKESHIFT DORM, ONE OF DOZENS IN THE CAMP, A CLUTCH OF WOMEN AND CHILDREN ARE SEATED ON THE FLOOR. LIKE EVERYONE HERE, THEY HAVE STORIES OF UNIMAGINABLE HORROR AND VIOLENCE AND NOW, IN THE SAFETY OF JORDAN, THEY ARE FINALLY FREE TO TELL THEM -- BUT MANY WERE STILL AFRAID TO SHOW THEIR FACES ON CAMERA.

SYRIAN WOMAN (translated from Arabic)

My husband was arrested because he demonstrated against the regime.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

WHILE THIS WOMAN'S HUSBAND WAS IN CAPTIVITY, SYRIAN SOLDIERS SCALDED, SHOCKED AND BEAT HIM.

THE WOMAN STILL SUFFERS FROM THE BEATING SHE GOT WHEN SHE FOUGHT OFF GUARDS WHO WERE TRYING TO SNATCH HER 3-YEAR-OLD SON FROM HER ARMS.

IN THE END, HER SON WAS NOT TAKEN BUT SHE TOLD US HER HOUSE WAS BOMBED BY SYRIAN TROOPS -- AND SHE AND HER CHILDREN WERE FORCED TO FLEE ACROSS THE BORDER TO JORDAN -- AND SAFETY.

NEARBY, IN ANOTHER ROOM, IS ANWAR, A YOUNG MAN WHO ASKED THAT WE NOT SHOW HIS FACE BECAUSE HE FEARED SPEAKING TO US WOULD PUT HIS FAMILY IN SYRIA IN DANGER. UNDER ANWAR'S SHIRT ARE SCARS FROM WHAT HE SAYS WERE BULLETS FIRED BY SYRIAN TROOPS DURING A PEACEFUL DEMONSTRATION.

ANWAR, SYRIAN REFUGEE (translated from Arabic)

The tanks came our way and started shooting at us. We weren't scared and we raised the sign of victory. We faced them.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THE VIDEO OF THAT ATTACK IS ONE OF THE MANY SCENES FROM SYRIA'S REVOLUTION DOCUMENTED ONLINE. THAT'S ANWAR ON HIS KNEES, IN THE TANK TOP. MOMENTS LATER HE WAS HIT. HE AND HIS FRIEND, WHO ALSO WAS IN THE CROWD THAT DAY, SAY THEIR MESSAGE TO ASSAD HASN'T CHANGED.

ANWAR (translated from Arabic)

I want to tell Assad, “Don’t sit on your throne because eventually it will break and you will fall.” By our power and by the Free Army’s power and the Syrian nation’s power, by God’s will, we will win.

PROTESTERS CHANTING (translated from Arabic)

God, we want freedom! Only freedom!

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THE SYRIAN UPRISING BEGAN IN MARCH 2011 WITH PEACEFUL PROTESTS -- AND BRUTAL CRACKDOWNS IN RESPONSE BY THE ASSAD REGIME. SINCE THEN, AN ESTIMATED 9,000 SYRIANS HAVE LOST THEIR LIVES AND HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS HAVE BEEN DISPLACED FROM THEIR HOMES.

THIS IS NOT THE FIRST TIME A PRESIDENT ASSAD HAS OPENED FIRE ON HIS OWN PEOPLE. IN 1982, BASHAR ASSAD’S FATHER, HAFEZ, MASSACRED SOME 20,000 OF HIS OWN PEOPLE AND SENT SCORES OF OTHERS FLEEING FOR SAFETY ABROAD, BUT THE OUTSIDE WORLD WAS LEFT IN THE DARK THEN. A MEDIA CRACKDOWN BY THE REGIME THAT WOULD BE IMPOSSIBLE TODAY HID THE TRUE SCALE OF THE MASSACRE.

MANY OF THOSE HELPING THE SYRIAN REFUGEES TODAY ARE THOSE WHO FLED 30 YEARS AGO - MEN LIKE ADIB SHISHAKLY, WITH WHOM WE TRAVELED TO THE CAMP.

ADIB SHISHAKLY, SYRIAN ACTIVIST

The maximum capacity of this place is around 12, 13-hundred people. Last week, I came here, there were over 1900 people.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

SHISHAKLY NORMALLY SPLITS HIS TIME BETWEEN HOUSTON AND SAUDI ARABIA, WHERE HE RUNS TWO AVIATION COMPANIES. BUT HE’S PUT THAT ON HOLD FOR MONTHS AND LATELY HE’S BEEN PUTTING IN 20-HOUR DAYS HELPING SYRIAN REFUGEES FIND MORE PERMANENT HOMES HERE IN JORDAN.

SHISHAKLY

We’re trying to minimize the time of how long they stay here. I heard today, yesterday that 400 people crossed, so I’m trying to find who crossed in the past two days and to see if they have any injured people, people who need care, or people who need to move to houses. We’re looking, our priority here are families in need.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

SHISHAKLY IS FROM A PROMINENT SYRIAN FAMILY. HIS GRANDFATHER SERVED BRIEFLY AS PRESIDENT OF THE COUNTRY IN THE 1950s AND SHISHAKLY HOPES TO ONE DAY RETURN TO A FREE SYRIA. MANY OF THESE YOUNG MEN WHO HAVE RECENTLY FLED THEIR HOMETOWN FEEL THE SAME WAY.

SHISHAKLY

Okay, there are two bullets in his body, his hands are paralyzed, he cannot move his hands and his arms. His family's inside. Don't show his face because his family might be affected. Okay, Derek, this is a very interesting story...

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

SHISHAKLY IS BOMBARDED WITH STORY AFTER STORY ABOUT THE BLOODY CONSEQUENCES OF FACING DOWN THE ASSAD REGIME.

SHISHAKLY

This guy he has a bullet, and the bullet is still in his body - still.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

FOR THE WOUNDED, GOING TO A HOSPITAL IN SYRIA IS ALMOST NEVER AN OPTION. THOSE WHO ARE THOUGHT TO BE PROTESTERS ARE OFTEN TORTURED -- OR EVEN KILLED. SHISHAKLY IS APPROACHED BY A MAN WITH A FRESH WOUND TO HIS EYE. HE FLED TO JORDAN SEEKING TREATMENT.

SHISHAKLY

No hospitals. No, no health care. Nothing. So he had to leave to take care of his eye. That was the only way. He came just for the operation. Nothing else.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THE MAN'S INJURY WAS NOTHING COMPARED TO OTHER HORRORS HE ENDURED.

SHISHAKLY

His cousin died. He says his cousin exploded next to him. The whole body went into parts. And they're showing me their friends who were killed there.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

IN REPEATED PUBLIC STATEMENTS, ASSAD HAS CLAIMED AL QAEDA-BACKED TERRORISTS ARE BEHIND MOST OF THE VIOLENCE. BUT THESE MEN WERE EAGER TO SHOW THAT THIS IS, IN THEIR WORD, A LIE.

SHISHAKLY

They are trying to convince the people around the world that we are not terrorists. This is people that they went out into the street for freedom. The regime is trying to turn it as they are terrorists and they are terrorist militias that they are coming to de-- destroy Syria. This is absolutely -- they are trying to prove a point. That's what you see - because we have a Syrian TV and I've never seen it on TV. You only see it on - on mobile phones. It seems that -- the situation is getting worse. We see more refugees coming out. So it's not getting any better.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THIS WENT ON FOR QUITE SOME TIME -- MEN DESPERATE FOR THE WORLD TO BEAR WITNESS TO THE TRAGEDY OF A NATION PLUNGING INTO CIVIL WAR. THEN SOMETHING REMARKABLE HAPPENS.

MEN CHANTING (translated from Arabic)

God is great! Freedom!

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THE MEN WHO HAD SEEMED SO DISPIRITED AND BROKEN BEGIN TO CHANT.

MEN CHANTING (translated from Arabic)

The people want Assad executed!

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THE SAME DEFIANT CALLS FOR FREEDOM THEY MADE IN THE STREETS OF DAMASCUS AND THE RESTIVE CITIES OF HOMS AND DARAA.

MEN CHANTING (translated from Arabic)

Hey Bashar! You outcast! Long live the Free Syrian Army!

SHISHAKLY

And they tell you about the people they left behind, please help us get them across the border. We have wounded. Someone was telling me that there are three or four wounded and how can I bring them and mostly they just want the whole world to know about the situation.

MEN CHANTING (translated from Arabic)

May God punish Bashar Al-Assad!

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

ONLY AN HOUR-AND-A-HALF DRIVE FROM THE SYRIAN BORDER IS THE JORDANIAN CAPITAL OF AMMAN. TUCKED IN THE FOLDS OF THE SPRAWLING CITY ARE HUNDREDS OF SYRIANS. AFTER A BRIEF STAY IN THE REFUGEE CAMPS, MOST ARE RELOCATED TO MORE PERMANENT ACCOMMODATIONS IN THE HOMES OF ORDINARY JORDANIANS.

REFUGEES ALSO HAVE GONE TO NEARBY TURKEY AND LEBANON - AND TURKEY HAS BEEN ACCOMMODATING TO MANY REFUGEES - BUT IT IS THE ESPECIALLY WARM WELCOME FROM JORDAN THAT'S LEADING MORE AND MORE SYRIANS HERE -- EVEN WHEN IT MEANS TRAVELING HUNDREDS OF EXTRA MILES.

SHISHAKLY

The refugees feel safer in Jordan. In Lebanon, the political situation is very complex. A lot of people who support the Syrian regime, they are waiting for refugees on the Lebanese border, so it's really unsafe to cross from the Lebanese side.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THE KINGDOM OF JORDAN HAS HISTORICALLY PROVIDED A HAVEN FOR DISPLACED PEOPLE...EVERYONE FROM PALESTINIANS FORCED FROM THEIR LAND IN 1948 AND 1967 - - TO HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF IRAQIS FLEEING THE RECENT WAR IN THEIR COUNTRY. JORDAN'S GOVERNMENT DESCRIBES REFUGEES AS GUESTS. AND IT SEES THE CAUSE OF WELCOMING SYRIAN REFUGEES AS A JUST ONE.

SHISHAKLY

Well, letting the people cross illegally, it's a message that they are in support of the revolution, and in support of the Syrian people. I look at their cause also humanitarian; you cannot just turn the people back and tell them, "We cannot let you in," because most of these people would be killed.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

WHEREVER WE FILMED IN JORDAN -- EVEN ON THE CROWDED STREETS OF AMMAN -- SYRIANS WOULD EMERGE AND ASK US TO TELL THEIR STORIES. IT STARTS TO FEEL LIKE SYRIANS ARE CRAMMED INTO EVERY VACANT SPACE.

LIKE HERE, IN A QUIET RESIDENTIAL BLOCK OF THE CAPITAL, A HOME FOR MORE THAN 20 SYRIAN MEN SUFFERING FROM SERIOUS INJURIES SUSTAINED IN THE REVOLUTION. THE MEN ARE MISSING LIMBS AND NOW LIVE WITH PAINFUL, PERMANENT DISFIGUREMENTS.

THE MEN SPEND MOST OF THE DAY SITTING AND SEETHING. "WHY," THEY ASK, "ISN'T THE WORLD DOING ANYTHING TO STOP THE VIOLENCE?" LIKE THIS ENGLISH TEACHER WHO HAS A BULLET STILL LODGED IN HIS LEG- AND PINS WHERE IT SHATTERED HIS BONE.

NASAR AWEIR, SYRIAN REFUGEE

They are killing us. They are killing civil people. We want our freedom. We are looking for freedom and democracy.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

ANOTHER MAN HERE TOLD US HE WAS FORCED BY SYRIAN TROOPS TO HOLD A PIECE OF DYNAMITE.

THIS HOME IS RUN BY A SYRIAN WOMEN'S CHARITY. THE ORGANIZER DIDN'T WANT TO APPEAR ON CAMERA, BECAUSE THE KINGDOM OF JORDAN HAS TRIED TO BE DISCREET ABOUT ITS WELCOMING OF REFUGEES, WHAT SOME REFER TO AS A "DON'T ASK, DON'T TELL" POLICY.

LIKE MANY OTHER COUNTRIES AROUND THE WORLD, JORDAN'S ECONOMY IS AILING -- UNEMPLOYMENT IS HIGH AND THE KINGDOM DOESN'T WANT ITS HUMANITARIAN EFFORTS TO STIR LOCAL RESENTMENTS, ESPECIALLY BECAUSE THERE APPEARS TO BE NO END TO THE BLOODSHED THAT'S SENDING SO MANY SYRIANS INTO EXILE.

THE BORDER BETWEEN SYRIA AND JORDAN IS LONG AND POROUS. ASIDE FROM A LONE WATCHTOWER MANNED BY JORDANIAN MILITARY, THERE'S NOT MUCH ELSE. HUNDREDS OF FAMILIES HAVE SNUCK INTO JORDAN ACROSS DESOLATE STRETCHES LIKE THIS-- OFTEN WITH THE HELP OF THE LOCAL JORDANIAN AUTHORITIES.

WE MET NABEGH SROUR, A SYRIAN ACTIVIST, WHO IS PART OF A NETWORK THAT HAS HELPED SMUGGLE REFUGEES TO FREEDOM -- ACTIVISTS CONNECTED THROUGH FACEBOOK AND ENCRYPTED TELEPHONES IN A MODERN TAKE ON THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD. HE SAYS JORDAN HAS PLAYED A CRUCIAL ROLE.

NABEGH SROUR, SYRIAN ACTIVIST

Like, we have a green light from Jordan, because it's something for humanitarian reasons, and the Jordanian government is coordinating with us, or are helping us, because it's just for humanitarian reasons, you know. The smuggling is illegal everywhere, but you know, the borders cannot be controlled.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THOSE LIGHTS IN THE DISTANCE ARE FROM THE SYRIAN CITY OF DARAA, THE BIRTHPLACE OF THE REVOLUTION... THE FOCUS OF INTENSE SHELLING BY SYRIA'S MILITARY.

SROUR

I'm right next to the Syrian border, 500 to 700 meters from here. It's really sad to see my country and I can't pass my country because I will be killed if I go there. I think it's--I can't say, I can't express myself for this. It's a sad feeling.

ANDREW GLAZER, PRODUCER

To be so close to be able to see --

SROUR

Yes, it's see close to your family or your people and you can't see them. Just you can't speak with them over the phone.

CHILDREN AT THE REFUGEE CAMP (translated from Arabic)

God protect the Free Army!

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

AMONG THE SYRIANS FLEEING VIOLENCE ARE THOUSANDS OF CHILDREN. THEY LAUGH AND PLAY IN THE DUSTY LOTS OF THE REFUGEE CAMP... OR HAPPILY WATCH MOVIES AT THE TINY SCHOOL THAT VOLUNTEERS HAVE SET UP.

BUT ALL THIS IS JUST A DISTRACTION, BECAUSE WHEN GIVEN CRAYONS AND PAPER, THE CHILDREN DRAW WHAT'S ON THEIR MINDS. AND THEY'RE DOING SO SPONTANEOUSLY -- NOT AS PART OF ANY ORGANIZED THERAPY.

NOUR (translated from Arabic), SYRIAN REFUGEE

We were sitting at home. The tank came and Mom told us to go to our neighbor's house.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THIS IS WHAT THE CHILDREN, LIKE 10-YEAR-OLD NOUR, THINK ABOUT DAY AND NIGHT.

NOUR (translated from Arabic)

This is our home. We were out. We weren't there. My friend was standing there and the Syrian troops were standing here. They shot her and she started bleeding. Later, this soldier came and launched rockets. The house collapsed and everything was destroyed. There was nothing left. The smoke started to rise and the clouds were turned black.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THIS IS A REALITY THAT SHISHAKLY WORRIES ABOUT.

SHISHAKLY

My, my major thing and my major focus is kids. Their situation is really bad. I talked to some kids, last time they were in school was more than a year ago, so a major need for schools. Second is psychological care for these kids. They, these kids, with most of them, I mean, when you ask them to draw something they draw tanks, they draw blood, they draw dead people, so I think psychological care and help for these kids would help us create a new generation that could be of service to Syria and the whole region. Their situation is very critical, and we don't want to see these people in the future being mentally disturbed, because of the trauma they went through during the revolution.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

AT THE OFFICIAL BORDER CROSSING BETWEEN AL RAMTHA AND SYRIA, WE SPOKE TO MOHAMED ALMAT, A SYRIAN ACTIVIST WORKING WITH SHISHAKLY AND HIS TEAM. ALMAT SAYS THAT THE REST OF THE WORLD -- INCLUDING THE UNITED STATES -- IS MAKING A BIG MISTAKE FOR NOT TAKING A MORE ACTIVE ROLE IN STOPPING THE VIOLENCE IN SYRIA.

MOHAMED ALMAT, SYRIAN ACTIVIST

We need help. We need support, in any way - any way. You're American. If you can give us any kind of help, any kind of support, we need it now. Now. Not tomorrow. Please, now. If the whole world don't give support to these kind of people...the children going to grow up and going to be a terrorist. I'm sure about that. But if they feel the world is looking for them, helping them, they will feel that they are human. But if not, it's going to be animal. That's not good. It's not good. They will go to revenge from everyone.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

NEAR THE END OF OUR TRIP, WE WENT TO A MOSQUE NEAR THE REFUGEE CAMP FOR AFTERNOON PRAYERS, BUT ON THIS AFTERNOON THE MANY SYRIAN REFUGEES WHO GATHERED HERE HAD ALSO COME TO SAY FAREWELL TO A FALLEN COMRADE.

LEADER (translated from Arabic)

Everyone, chant!

MOURNERS (translated from Arabic)

God is great!

LEADER (translated from Arabic)

“Syria the Just” is not Assad’s house!

MOURNERS (translated from Arabic)

“Syria the Just” is not Assad’s house!

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THE MAN THEY’RE HONORING WAS A LIEUTENANT IN THE SYRIAN ARMY WHO DEFECTED TO JOIN A RAGTAG GROUP OF REBELS TAKING ON THE ASSAD REGIME. THE FIGHTER WAS SHOT IN BATTLE 48-HOURS BEFORE – AND THEN RUSHED ACROSS THE BORDER FOR MEDICAL TREATMENT. BUT IT WAS TOO LATE, AND HIS WOUNDS TOO GRAVE. HE DIED SOON AFTER ENTERING JORDAN.

MOURNERS CHANTING

Vengeance is with God!

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

AS THE BODY IS CARRIED TO THE GRAVESITE, THE PROCESSION GROWS, SYRIANS TRICKLING IN FROM ALL PARTS OF THE DUSTY TOWN.

GUY ON STREET IN PROCESSION

The martyr is in the hands of God!

SHISHAKLY

They're calling for the father of the martyr to be proud of his son. There's a lot of mix of emotions. You feel anger. You feel also at the same time, pride. People are really -- this is like a celebration and people saying that this -- this man is a hero. They're chanting for the downing of Assad.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

SHISHAKLY SAYS THAT THE DEAD MAN'S PARENTS HAVE BEEN NOTIFIED IN SYRIA – BUT IT'S NOT CLEAR WHETHER THEY'LL MAKE IT TO THE CEMETERY IN TIME.

SHISHAKLY

The parents of the martyr just crossed the border from Syria to join us for the funeral and for the burial ceremony.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

ISLAMIC LAW CALLS FOR BODIES TO BE BURIED AS SOON AS POSSIBLE...AND AFTER A FLURRY OF PHONE CALLS FAILS TO FIND THE PARENTS, THE IMAM LEADING THE FUNERAL COULD WAIT NO LONGER. THE MAN IS FINALLY LAID TO REST. THE PARENTS DIDN'T MAKE IT. THE LAST THEY WILL SEE OF THEIR SON ARE THESE PICTURES, RECORDED ON CELL PHONES BY FELLOW EXILES WHO HOPE THE IMAGES WILL FINALLY PROMPT THE WORLD TO TAKE NOTICE.

SHISHAKLY

You know, we don't have time to be sad, upset or anything. We are standing by each other. Syrians outside in exile, and Syrians who they are coming as refugees. You see more of a unity, more than ever. Everybody's chanting as one. This is a very united voice, regardless of where they come from or what part of Syria. This is, this is great.

ACT 2: FOUAD AJAMI

RATHER (ON CAMERA)

THE PLIGHT OF SYRIA'S REFUGEES IS BUT ONE DYNAMIC IN A VERY COMPLEX MIDDLE EAST STORY. BUT IT'S WHAT'S NOT HAPPENING IN SYRIA THAT IS PARTICULARLY TROUBLING TO OUR NEXT GUEST. THE DISTINGUISHED PROFESSOR FOUAD AJAMI IS A SENIOR FELLOW AT STANFORD UNIVERSITY'S HOOVER INSTITUTION AND A LONG-TIME FRIEND OF THIS PROGRAM. HE'S ALSO ONE OF THE WORLD'S LEADING AUTHORITIES ON THE REGION. TONIGHT HE HAS SOME SHARP WORDS FOR THE OBAMA ADMINISTRATION'S HANDLING OF SYRIA.

RATHER

You wrote a piece for a Lebanese newspaper, the title of which was, "America's Shameful Abdication in Syria." What do you mean by that?

FOUAD AJAMI, SENIOR FELLOW,
THE HOOVER INSTITUTION, STANFORD UNIVERSITY

Well, I think we-- we can't duck this-- this fight in-- in Syria. And we keep-- we keep, if you will, thinking perhaps this story would go away. And I think that if you take a look at the be-- at the behavior of the Obama administration and the policy of the Obama administration towards Syria I actually describe it as both a moral and a strategic catastrophe. A moral and a strategic scandal. We continue to have one alibi after another. One alibi says, "Oh, look at the borders of Syria. They're complicated," when actually I would maintain that these borders in fact should counsel us to intervene in Syria. Another one is, "We are waiting for the Russians. We are going to bring the Russians into the game. The Russians are going to come on board. They will go with us and vote with us at the United Nations Security Council." When everybody knows that-- that for Putin and for-- for Russia, Syria is a strategic asset. And Syria, if you will, you know, to quote a movie line, 'It's mini me.' It's like Russia. It's run the same way. It's a mafia regime. And so we keep hoping that the Russians are going to bail us out and they will never bail us out. So when you take a look at the-- at the behavior of-- of-- of the Obama administration and when you take a look at our country, which has always, if you will, come to the rescue of the weak and to the rescue of the persecuted, I think it's really been-- a truly embarrassing chapter in American foreign policy.

RATHER

And to that viewer and/or listener who may be saying, "Wait a minute. We-- we're just now beginning to get out of Iraq. We're still bogged down in Afghanistan. We can't even think about intervening in a place like Syria," you would say what?

AJAMI

The people who are asking for intervention in Syria are not asking for boots on the ground. And this is the-- the genius, if you will, of the Obama administration. What they've done is they've-- they've depicted the issue in Syria and the fight in Syria as either boots on the ground or head in the sand. One-- you know, it's either/or. But it isn't. Much could be done to rescue the Syrian population and to advance their cause of liberty and to topple this monstrous regime in-- in Damascus. You could establish no fly/no drive zones on the Syria-Turkey border. The no fly/no drive zones would make an enormous amount of difference. How so? If you were a Syrian soldier-- and most of these poor recruits, the Syrian soldiers, are Sunni. And they-- they dread this regime. They fear this regime. If you want to defect, if you want to quit these units you're in, where do you go? You don't know where to go. If there are these zones, you know where to go. And again-- again and again, the balance of forces would be altered by that.

RATHER

Any reason that you can see to believe that a new Republican administration would handle Syria any differently?

AJAMI

Not that I can see. I mean if you-- if you listen-- or don't listen, to, you know, Mitt Romney, because you don't hear him talking about foreign policy. You know, Governor Romney thinks he's running for CEO of the United States. And he has not really spoken to the inner yearnings, if you will, of the American people on matters in the foreign world. Governor Romney believes this election is about the economy. He may be right. For all we know he may get elected by only talking about the economy and by only talking about employment and by only talking about the deficits. But there are things in life which are not about the economy. But if I listen to-- and I-- I watch the Republican candidate and the people who advise him on foreign policy, I don't think there's an-- much difference. And he-- Governor Romney seems timid about foreign policy. He doesn't want to take on President Obama. He seems to subscribe to the view that President Obama has mastered foreign policy. That he's done well on Afghanistan. He's killed Osama bin Laden. And if you listen to that great line of the Obama administration, you know, they tell you, "Osama bin Laden is dead. General Motors is alive." That's all we need to run on.

RATHER

Would you say, or is it too strong to say, that Syria is President Obama and for the United States the Sudan of this time?

AJAMI

I think so. And I think I actually use the metaphor, in anger I believe. It's obviously overstated. I said that Syria will be-- it will be President Obama's Rwanda. This is a moral catastrophe unfolding on his clock, on his watch. If you-- go back and read the memoirs of-- of Bill Clinton, Bill Clinton was so ashamed of Rwanda and so proud of Kosovo. And you look at what-- what we did in Kosovo. It is actually a textbook for what could be done in Syria. Bill Clinton never went to the United Nations Security Council for Kosovo. He did it through NATO. And we never asked the Russians for any help. I think it remains to be seen. One day there will be the Obama memoirs. And President Obama may have to be forced by history to speak to the question of Syria, because if you see-- if you hear the sounds of silence from him on Syria-- he doesn't even-- he doesn't really speak about Syria.

RATHER

In terms of Syria are we at the end of diplomacy? And if so, what's next?

AJAMI

I really don't know. I think that when you take a look where we are. We sent Kofi Annan as an envoy.

RATHER

Former U.N. Secretary General.

AJAMI

Exactly. And he-- he came to the Syria deliberations, the Syrian negotiations, and the Syria stalemate as both an envoy of the United Nations and the Arab League. He was given this-- this authority. And you know Dan, what happened since the Kofi Annan diplomacy began on April 12, as we are speaking now, 1,500 people have died on the Kofi Annan clock. It didn't do anything. You know, the Syrian people have been schooled by tragedy. Even children in Syria have become unbelievably witty and smart and wise to the ways of the world. There was a banner held by one Syrian that said, "The butcher kills, the observers observe," because we sent these foreign observers, "And the people go and with the rebellion." So the Annan diplomacy has no teeth in it. There's no-- there's no force to it. And-- you know, and even—it actually puts people in jeopardy. I have news for-- for former Secretary General Annan. When his observers go in and talk to people and leave, then the regime's vigilantes and forces come and punish people and kill the people who were talking to-- to-- to the observers. Because he not only has his forces, his regular forces. He has his own communities. The Alawis. And they're invested in his regime. And they're convinced that if the regime falls that they will themselves come in for heavy retribution from their Sunni neighbors. And those people go out and kill with-- with abandon. Not only do they kill, they torture, they rob people, because the regime is not paying so they're on their own. It's very important to them to kill under torture because the view exists in Bashar's mind, and in the mind of his brother-- he has a brother who's a killer. He farms out the real heavy repression to his brother. He also has a mother. She is the most important member of this family. His mother is really the iron lady of the regime. And what she tells him is, "If your father was still alive he would have killed all these people very-- in a very different way."

RATHER

And he probably would have.

AJAMI

He-- he would have. But you know what Dan? He wouldn't have had to. There was politics in Syria under the old man still. This is now very different. This war, in-- in good measure, this moment in Arab life is about plunder. It's about money in many ways. Like half is Assad-- old man Assad, the man who conquered power in Syria in 1970, died in 2000, bequeathed power to his son Bashar, he used to have a salary and two cartons of cigarettes a month. That was it. He was a soldier. Bashar and his brother and and his cousins and his brother-in-law and his sister, they have become multi-billionaires. It's-- in part it's about just the privilege of money. You kill for wealth. And they are enormously wealthy people.

RATHER

How long does Assad have to last or can he continue to last?

AJAMI

You know, Dan, I don't know. But I think we can-- we can say the following things. First of all, Bashar al-Assad and his regime now are running out of money. He's now selling his gold in the markets in Dubai at a discount. So, financially he's hurting. Yes, the Iranians will help him. They can give him some cash. But even the Iranians themselves, there's-- so much that they-- they could do for him. So, I think if you take a look at the broken bonds between the Syrian people and Bashar al-Assad you can't see this regime surviving. What's interesting about this regime-- like if you take a look at Syrian cities, in the daytime they will be controlled by Bashar's army. When the army withdraws at night, these places belong to the opposition. So the government, the regime, if you will, has withdrawn from massive parts of the country. It only comes in to do some killing and to do order, by its definition. So I-- how long can a regime like this survive? And how long can a regime survive when it has actually lost the consent of the governed? Because the Bashar regime has always hoped that the Sunni bourgeoisie, the middle classes, the merchant classes in Aleppo and Damascus will not desert him. They've begun to desert him. These are the two biggest cities in the country. Once he loses Aleppo and Damascus, then the regime is cooked.

RATHER (ON CAMERA)

WE'LL HAVE MORE OF OUR CONVERSATION WITH PROFESSOR FOUAD AJAMI. IN A MOMENT...SO STICK HERE WITH US...

ACT 3: FOUAD AJAMI

RATHER

Let's talk about who's involved—

AJAMI

Sure.

RATHER

--and who has a stake in what happens in-- in Syria. First, Iran. Put that in perspective for us.

AJAMI

Oh, everything. They're all in, to use the gambling term. The Iranians are all in. The Iranian regime craves access to the Mediterranean and craves access to a border with Israel. I always say the Iranians bought a border with Israel. How so? They bought the border in Lebanon for Hezbollah. So they are, if you will, present on the border with-- with Israel. So for the Iranians it's very important to prevail in Syria. No money is spared. No help is spared. They'll throw everything at-- at the-- at the Syrian situation. And, of course, it's a sectarian issue because they are much more sympathetic to the Alawi regime of Bashar al-Assad than they are to the Sunni rebellion, because the Sunnis of-- of Syria, the

people mostly of the cities of Aleppo, Damascus, Hama, the famous city of Hama, these people have gone out with banners saying, you know, that what they hate above all are Hezbollah and Beirut because they are allied with Bashar and Iran. So for the Iranians this is a very, very important fight. And in a way there is a kind of-- if you will, a contest in Syria. A proxy contest between Iran on the one side and Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, et cetera, and the Western democracies on the other. And the bad news, the Iranians are winning thus far.

RATHER

Russia you mentioned. But you don't you don't hold out much hope that the Russians are going to help the U.S. and the rest of the West?

AJAMI

Why would they? Why would-- why would Putin, who runs his own mafia regime, look at-- at-- at Syria and say, "I should help the United States." What for? And, remember, the Russians have some investments-- not so much financial, but strategic in-- in Syria. There is-- the Syrians have a port. At Tartus. This is-- this is now the only warm water port that Russia has access to.

RATHER

In the time we have remaining let's broaden out as we see in television. Broaden the shot. What other Middle Eastern countries should we be paying special attention to now? Egypt comes to mind. We all had such high hopes at the time--

AJAMI

Sure.

RATHER

--at the time of the Arab Spring. Now, at the very least-- we have to draw back a little. What do you see happening with Egypt? It-- it looks from afar to be more dangerous now than it was under Mubarak.

AJAMI

You're-- you're absolutely right about the centrality and the importance of Egypt, because I think the test of this Arab Spring-- I prefer the-- the term awakening. You know, the-- I like it more. It doesn't-- it has nothing to do with seasons. I think the test of the Arab Awakening-- are two countries. Syria, because of the barbarism of the regime and the tenacity of the regime. Egypt because of the size of Egypt. Egypt is a trendsetter in Arab life. It, 25-percent of the Arab people are Egyptians. You know, there're well over 80 million people. And the rebellion, even though this Arab Awakening began when a poor Tunisian fruit vendor set himself ablaze on December 17, 2010 in a forlorn Tunisian town, the rebellion became important. This Arab moment came up on us because of the importance of Egypt.

So what's going on in Egypt? There was a moment in-- in Egypt which I thought was really quite, in many ways, moving. And it was August 3rd, last August 3rd, when-- when President Mubarak came to court on a stretcher, on a gurney. And the judge called on him and he said, "Sir, I'm present. Sir, I'm present." Now if you would say, "What's the meaning of all this? Why is that so exciting?" It's about the rule of law. And when you look at what happened to Hosni Mubarak, he was tried. He was tried by a good judge in many ways. And he was given a life sentence. He was not killed. He was not dragged out of-- of a drainage pipe like Muammar Qaddafi. Tormented and tortured. So people think, "Ah, you know, Egypt is in chaos." It's in partial chaos. There is a kind of legal culture in Egypt. There is a human culture in Egypt. Judges. There is a bar association which harks back to the-- to the 19th century. So, in my opinion Hosni Mubarak made his own bed. He really is responsible for his own story. He was president for 30 years or so. He became the third longest serving ruler since Ramses the Second. You know, this is the--

RATHER

Since the pharaohs?

AJAMI

Exactly. And he-- at many, many turning points he could have taken the exit. He could have allowed an orderly process of succession. He could have even chosen a vice president. Instead he let everyone think, for good reasons, that he was entertaining dynastic ambitions for his son. So millions of Egyptians said, "Look, this is not a farm. It's a big country. You can't give the country over to your son who has absolutely no qualifications whatsoever." So I sympathize with the Egyptian rebellion. I think it was a noble rebellion. It was by the standards of such rebellions, a peaceful rebellion. 800 people were killed in the confrontations. You know, it's 800 people. It's not nothing. But when you consider that thousands of people have been killed in Syria and you compare that with-- with the 800 fatalities in Egypt, it tells you something.

RATHER

Let me turn to Yemen, which occasionally makes the headlines but only-- occasionally. Most dangerous place in the world for U.S. interests right now?

AJAMI

I call Yemen, 'Afghanistan with a coastline.' It's just-- we think that the-- al Qaeda is in-- in Afghanistan. We have our-- our men and women, our-- our-- our-- our good kids, we have them there in the forlorn lands of Afghanistan. But actually Yemen is much more dangerous. You know, when you look at Anwar al-Awlaki, this preacher, we killed who was an American citizen, ironically. Born in New Mexico. Again, ponder the irony of an anti-American preacher. Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, the young Nigerian, we know as the-- the underwear bomber, he came out of Yemen. I mean this was where he received his training and inspiration. So when you look at a lot of the terrorists episodes directed at us, Yemen figures

prominently in this. And Yemen is-- is a lawless land. There's hardly any authority left in Yemen. The only good news, if you will, about Yemen is the Yemeni government allows America free run in terms of we can-- we can use our drones. And the Yemenis say, "You go ahead. Use your drones, kill these terrorists and we'll pretend we're the ones doing it." But it's a very dangerous place. And of course it's dangerous because of its proximity to Saudi Arabia. And I think, if one savors a note of irony, God gave Saudi Arabia blessings. Huge reserves of oil. Made it rich. But you know what? Into the bargain it made Yemen its neighbor.

RATHER (ON CAMERA)

PROFESSOR FOUAD AJAMI. HIS NEW BOOK IS ENTITLED "THE SYRIAN REBELLION". NOW, JUST AHEAD ON OUR PROGRAM, THE COURAGEOUS STORY OF SYRIAN CITIZEN JOURNALISTS WHO WON'T BE SILENCED.

ACT 4: SECRET STATION

RATHER (ON CAMERA)

WE'D LIKE TO END WITH SOMETHING THAT WE'VE TOUCHED ON THROUGHOUT THE PROGRAM THIS EVENING: THE DESPERATE CALL BY SYRIANS FOR SOME FOREIGN GOVERNMENT, OR SEVERAL, TO INTERVENE AND STOP THE VIOLENCE IN THEIR COUNTRY. THEY'VE FLOODED THE INTERNET WITH IMAGES SHOWING IN HIGH-DEFINITION THE BRUTALITY OF THE ASSAD REGIME, BUT THEY ARE STARTING TO FEAR THEIR PLEAS ARE FALLING ON DEAF EARS.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

IN A SECRET LOCATION ON A QUIET STREET IN JORDAN'S CAPITAL, A GROUP OF CITIZEN JOURNALISTS ARE WORKING TIRELESSLY TO TURN UP THE VOLUME UNTIL SOMEONE...SOMEWHERE...DOES SOMETHING.

WELCOME TO THE ALWAYS FRENETIC AMMAN-BASED STUDIOS OF SYRIA AL-SHAAB -- A 24-HOUR NEWS CHANNEL DEDICATED EXCLUSIVELY TO COVERING THE SYRIAN UPRISING. FINANCED BY DONATIONS, THE NEWSROOM IS RUN BY MOSTLY SYRIAN VOLUNTEERS, WHO ARE CONSTANTLY AMAZED THAT THE CHANNEL HAS MANAGED TO STAY ON THE AIR FOR NEARLY A YEAR NOW.

SUMMER AJLOUNI

I've never heard of a TV station ran by 15 people. I mean 15 people is a cast for just one program. We have 12 hours of live broadcast daily and, uh you know, we make it work. It's doing very well.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

SUMMER AJLOUNI FOUNDED SYRIA AL-SHAAB. SHE IS NOT SYRIAN -- SHE GREW UP IN JORDAN AND THE UNITED STATES -- BUT SHE WAS FRUSTRATED THAT SYRIAN PRESIDENT BASHAR AL-ASSAD HAS BEEN ABLE TO CONTINUE BRUTALIZING HIS OWN PEOPLE WITHOUT CONSEQUENCE.

AJLOUNI

The torture, the killing, the rape, the abuse that they go through day after day, and it's been over a year and nobody's doing anything about it. We want to be heard. We want people to see what's going on. We want to show people because they're asking for peace, democracy, people are getting killed.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

SYRIA AL-SHAAB RELIES EXCLUSIVELY ON FOOTAGE FROM ORDINARY CITIZENS WHO ARE WITNESSING THE VIOLENCE AND BLOODSHED -- THE SYRIAN REGIME HAS FORBIDDEN INDEPENDENT REPORTERS FROM WORKING THERE. SO FROM DARK WINDOWS OR BEHIND A WALL, CITIZEN JOURNALISTS HOLD CELL PHONE AND COMPUTER CAMERAS TOWARD THE ACTION. THE IMAGES... LIVE DISPATCHES FROM SYRIANS CONNECTED THROUGH SKYPE...AND RUNNING COMMENTARY FROM AN IN-STUDIO ANCHOR -- ARE THEN BROADCAST BY SATELLITE AND ON THE INTERNET AROUND THE WORLD.

AJLOUNI

Well, the station is somewhat licensed. We had to go around, you know, a few people to get it. But they know. I'm not gonna say that they don't. The government does know, but it's a "don't say, don't tell" kind of thing.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THE CHANNEL MAY BE UNDERGROUND -- BUT IT'S BEEN BUILDING AN AUDIENCE ALL AROUND THE WORLD. VOLUNTEERS HAVE HEARD FROM VIEWERS ACROSS THE MIDDLE EAST-- AND AS FAR AS THE UNITED STATES... THE SYRIAN REGIME ITSELF HAS APPARENTLY TUNED IN AS WELL.

AJLOUNI

We have absolutely seen signs that the Syrian regime is watching. We've been jammed twice within a month of our broadcasting. We were streaming on what we call Nile Sat, and we were jammed so we went to Arab Sat, and within the next 24 hours we were jammed as well. They hacked into our Skype account about a week ago and sent a virus to all the contacts in it so every time they do something like that, we know we're doing our job.

ONSCREEN ANCHOR OF SYRIA AL SHAAB (translated from Arabic)

We will be victorious in our struggle and our hope for a new dawn...

AJLOUNI

It is absolutely rewarding to know that we are bothering the Assad regime. It lets us know that we're doing exactly what we started off to do, that they are threatened by us, and it just makes you want to work harder and do more.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

EVEN WHEN IT MEANS DANGER FOR AL-SHAAB'S VOLUNTEERS. WE WERE ASKED TO NOT REVEAL THE EXACT LOCATION OF ITS STUDIOS, BECAUSE EVEN HERE IN JORDAN, THERE IS A FEAR THAT A SUPPORTER OF ASSAD COULD SABOTAGE THE OPERATION -- OR ATTACK ITS STAFF. AND THE DANGER IS NOT HYPOTHETICAL -- BACK IN SYRIA, THE FAMILIES OF SOME OF SYRIA AL SHAAB'S ANCHORS HAVE PAID A BIG PRICE.

AJLOUNI

One of our anchors' family's houses were burned. They've threatened that if he went back on the air that they would burn the house with his family in it. Another one of our anchors' both brothers were killed, so it does create quite a bit of a danger, but they still fight and they still do it to serve their country. Just because they're not within Syria doesn't mean that they can't do something about it as well.

RATHER (ON CAMERA)

...THE COURAGEOUS STORY OF THE VOLUNTEERS OF SYRIA AL-SHAAB. AND THAT'S OUR PROGRAM FOR TONIGHT. AS ALWAYS, WE WANT TO HEAR WHAT YOU HAVE TO SAY. SO PLEASE JOIN IN THE DISCUSSION ON OUR FACEBOOK PAGE, OR SEND YOUR COMMENTS TO VIEWER@HD.NET.

FROM NEW YORK, FOR HD-NET, DAN RATHER REPORTING. GOODNIGHT.