

## Homes of Americans in Syria reported under surveillance

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WASHINGTON &mdash; The State Department has warned Americans in Syria to be on guard.

The U.S. embassy in Damascus reported break-ins of homes of unidentified expatriates in Damascus. A statement by the embassy said Americans as well as other Westerners have come under surveillance from criminals, Middle East Newsline reported.

"This message is intended for the American community in Syria," the embassy said in a warden message on Dec. 5.

The embassy, which has also warned of the prospect of Al Qaida attacks in Syria, urged Americans not to allow unannounced or unidentified people into the home. The message said contractors should be admitted only if properly identified and expected.

The warden message said the crime rate in Damascus remains low compared to other cities. But the embassy raised the prospect that Syrians were monitoring the movements of Americans from criminal and other attacks.

"It's important to remember that criminals almost always engage in a period of surveillance before choosing a target," the embassy said. "If criminals see that your residential security infrastructure is solid and well-maintained, and that your family consistently engages in good security practices, they may move on to a 'softer' target."

Several thousand Americans, many of them with relatives in the country, were said to reside in Syria. The Americans also include embassy staffers and representatives of companies that operate in the Arab League state.

"Unfortunately, even the best habits and the most formidable residential security infrastructure cannot provide a 100 percent deterrent against a determined burglar," the warden message said. "If you believe someone has gained unauthorized access to your property, all family members should remain in a locked room and call local authorities immediately. If you come home to encounter strangers on your property, do not attempt to stop them. Leave the premises immediately and call for help."

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