

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

January 11, 2022

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr.  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Biden:

We write to raise several urgent issues regarding U.S. Syria policy as Bashar Al Assad continues to wage his brutal war against the Syrian people.

Given Assad's horrific crimes against the Syrian people, the United States has long maintained that the international community cannot reintegrate the Syrian regime without meaningful reforms that demonstrate accountability and reflect the will of the Syrian people. We urge your Administration to reinforce that position. We are concerned that a number of our Arab partners continue to increase their formal and informal relationships with the Assad regime, including the establishment of official diplomatic outposts and publicly released diplomatic overtures. Your Administration should consider consequences for any nation that seeks to rehabilitate the Assad regime and to ensure all countries understand that normalization or Assad's return to the Arab League are unacceptable. Tacit approval of formal diplomatic engagement with the Syrian regime sets a dangerous precedent for authoritarians who seek to commit similar crimes against humanity.

Assad's crimes against the Syrian people are well-documented. With the support of the Russian Federation and the Iranian regime, Assad has used chemical weapons on innocent civilians, intentionally targeted hospitals and doctors, used starvation as a weapon of war, and disappeared thousands of political dissidents in his notorious prisons. In addition to the Caesar file, the International Commission for Justice and Accountability has secured over 900,000 government documents, many of which link these crimes directly to Bashar al Assad. Your Administration should continue efforts to seek justice for the Syrian people and expand accountability efforts to this end.

We also urge you to utilize the robust, mandatory deterrence mechanisms in the bipartisan Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act to maintain the Assad regime's isolation. While you have issued additional Syria sanctions under non-Caesar Executive authorities, utilizing Caesar designations would publicly underscore the U.S. position concerning political normalization. The law rightly calls for sanctions against the Assad regime and its supporters, both inside and outside Syria, until we see progress on the release of political prisoners, an end to the use of Syrian airspace for attacks against civilians, unfettered humanitarian access, and compliance with the prohibitions on the use of chemical weapons, and accountability for war crimes. Given the failure to secure progress on these fronts in UN-led political negotiations, U.S. pressure to this end is all the more important.

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr.  
January 11, 2022  
Page 2

Further, we remain concerned by reports that the Assad regime manipulated currency exchange rates to steal at least \$100 million in humanitarian aid money over a two year period. As this Administration works to expand humanitarian access in Assad held territory, including through a focus on early recovery projects, we ask you to share with us, within 60 days of receipt of this letter, your strategy to prevent such theft and to ensure U.S. and international aid ends up in the hands of those that need it most.

Finally, recent reports have shed light on the Syrian regime's significant role in trafficking captagon. We must deploy our counter-drug trafficking tools in the Syria context to cut off the regime's access to illicit funds gained through the captagon trade.

It is vitally important that U.S. policy in Syria is consistent with our values. Secretary Blinken promised that "When Joe Biden is president, we will restore U.S. leadership on humanitarian issues [in Syria]." While your Administration has secured renewal of the UN mandate for cross-border delivery of humanitarian aid and expanded stabilization support in areas liberated from the Islamic State, these efforts merely address symptoms of the underlying conflict and will ultimately fall flat in the absence of a broader diplomatic strategy to resolve the decade-long civil war.

Accordingly, we request an interagency briefing, to include National Security Council participation, on Syria policy moving forward.

Sincerely,



JAMES E. RISCH  
Ranking Member  
Senate Foreign Relations Committee



MICHAEL T. McCAUL  
Ranking Member  
House Foreign Affairs Committee



ROBERT MENENDEZ  
Chairman  
Senate Foreign Relations Committee



GREGORY W. MEEKS  
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