

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

February 1, 2022

The Honorable Antony J. Blinken
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken:

We write to express serious concerns regarding the energy deals the Biden Administration is facilitating between Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, and Egypt that would undoubtedly enrich the Assad regime and trigger U.S. sanctions under the Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act. As we saw with recent attacks against noncombatants in Idlib and Daraa, the Assad regime's atrocities are not things of the past. Rather, the Assad regime continues to wage a brutal war against the Syrian people. The United States and its partners must maintain our economic pressure on the Assad regime to halt its murderous attacks on the Syrian people and to support a transition to a government in Syria that respects the rule of law, human rights, and peaceful co-existence with its neighbors.

This administration has argued that preventing Lebanon's collapse necessitates limited engagement with the Assad regime. While we acknowledge Lebanon's precarious situation, its energy sector is a black hole of corruption. Not only would such deals likely benefit Assad financially, they would exacerbate corruption in Lebanon. Recognizing Lebanon's crisis, the American people have already provided significant humanitarian, economic, and security assistance to reinforce Lebanon's stability. These energy deals, however, which do not require Lebanon's political class to make long-overdue reforms, fail to address Lebanon's fundamental underlying problems. Instead, these deals allow Lebanon's political class to delay on reforms and open the door to additional financial interactions with the Assad regime in violation of the Caesar Act.

Further, we have serious concerns that the administration has provided a blueprint for circumventing Caesar sanctions in the future, by involving the World Bank and claiming the amount of energy the Assad regime would receive as an in-kind payment is below the threshold to sanction to the suppliers. If the administration continues to confer its support for these deals, it sets a precedent that the administration is unwilling to enforce the Caesar Act, and will facilitate international actors finding loopholes to avoid the sanctions crafted by Congress with broad bipartisan and bicameral support.

We urge you to reconsider your support for these energy deals, and instead find alternative avenues to support Lebanon that prioritize Lebanese reforms necessary to address the country's ongoing economic crisis. Should you choose to pursue these energy arrangements, we urge you follow the

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law and utilize a Caesar Act waiver to make clear to the world that this bipartisan, bicameral legislation is the core framework through which the United States views dealings with the Syrian regime.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter.

Sincerely,



JAMES E. RISCH

Ranking Member

Senate Foreign Relations Committee



MICHAEL T. McCAUL

Ranking Member

House Foreign Affairs Committee