



[New U.S. Sanctions are Imposed on the Syrian Regime](#)

The United States imposed sanctions on the Syrian government this week, accelerating Syria's economic decline. The Caesar Act, passed as part of the American government's annual defense spending bill, targets members of the Syrian regime led by Bashar al-Assad. The sanctions are the most severe regulations placed on officials since the start of the Syrian revolution nine years ago. Collectively, the sanctions are known as the Caesar Syrian Civilian Protection Act, or Caesar Act for short. The sanctions came to fruition as a result of a member of the Syrian military defecting to Qatar and bringing thousands of photos with him that documented widespread atrocities committed by the Assad regime. This individual, using the pseudonym Caesar, testified before the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee in March of this year.

The sanctions authorized under the Caesar Act would target companies and individuals tied to the Assad regime anywhere in the world. Any person or organization who attempted to supply the Syrian government with significant construction or engineering services is now liable to be punished. Previously, U.S. sanctions had frozen all Syrian government assets, and made it a punishable offense for American citizens or residents to invest, sell, export, or supply services to Syria. Now, those regulations apply to nationals of any country. The existing sanctions had already caused chaos in Syria, as government corruption and infighting, in addition to an economic collapse in neighboring Lebanon, has caused the Syrian pound to drop exponentially in value. Recently, protests have begun in some government-controlled areas of Syria over the economic situation, as many Syrians are unable to purchase basic necessities due to hyperinflation. The Syrian government called the implementation of the new sanctions "economic terrorism" and accused the United States of trying to starve the Syrian people, despite the sanctions only targeting government officials.

The Caesar Act came to existence through the action of a former military forensic officer for the Syrian government, who smuggled over 50,000 photos documenting widespread human rights abuses out of the country to Qatar, before travelling on to the United States. This individual has testified before Congress on multiple occasions, most recently in front of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in March of this year. In part of his testimony, Caesar said the Syrian government has not stopped killing people indiscriminately in nine years of conflict, and the inaction of the international community had given the Assad regime courage to continue committing human rights abuses.

Critics of the sanctions have argued that they will only harm Syrian civilians, who have already suffered greatly due to the ongoing conflict. Hyperinflation in Syria has been compounded by economic collapse in neighboring Lebanon, which Syria uses as a link to the rest of the world. Now, Syria is in a worse economic situation than it has been in throughout the revolution, with problems compounding daily. The sanctions were also opposed at the United Nations by representatives of Russia and China, who called them inhumane and unnecessary.