

Economic Terrorism: U.S. “Caesar” Act Tries to Suffocate 17 Million Syrians

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Since 2011, the US and allies have promoted, trained and supplied militants trying to bring about “[regime change](#)” in Damascus. Having failed in that effort, they have tried to strangle Syria economically. The goal has always been the same: to force Syria to change politically. This month, June 2020, the aggression reaches a new level with extreme sanctions known as the [Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act](#).

The new law is fraudulent on two counts. It is called “Caesar” in reference to a 2014 propaganda stunt involving an anonymous Syrian who was alleged to be a military photographer. He claimed to have 55,000 photos showing about eleven thousand victims of Syrian government torture. As the Christian Science Monitor [said](#) at the time, the “Caesar” report was “A well-timed propaganda exercise funded by [Qatar](#).” A 30 page [analysis](#) later confirmed that the “Caesar” report was a fraud with nearly half the photos showing the OPPOSITE of what was claimed: they documented dead Syrian soldiers and civilian victims of “rebel” car bombs and attacks.

The Caesar Syrian Civilian Protection Act is also fraudulent by claiming to “protect civilians”. In reality, it punishes and hurts the vast majority of [17 million](#) persons living in Syria. It will result in thousands of civilians suffering and dying needlessly.

Pre-Existing Sanctions

The US has been hostile to Syria for many decades. Unlike Anwar Sadat of Egypt, Syria under Hafez al Assad refused to make a peace treaty with Israel. Syria was designated a “state sponsor of terrorism” and first sanctioned by the U.S. in 1979.

After the US invasion and occupation of Iraq in 2003, Syria accepted about one million Iraqi refugees and supported the Iraqi resistance in various ways. In retaliation, the US escalated punishing sanctions in 2004.

In 2010, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton pressured Syria to change their foreign policy and be more friendly to Israel. Syrian President Bashar al Assad [pointedly declined](#). Twelve months later, when protests and violence began in Syria in 2011, the US, Europe and Gulf monarchies (Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates) quickly supported the opposition and imposed more sanctions.

In 2016, after five years of crisis and war, a [report on the humanitarian impact of sanctions](#) on Syria was prepared for the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for

Western Asia. It noted that “U.S. and E.U. sanctions on Syria are some of the most complicated and far-reaching sanctions regimes ever imposed.” The 30 page report went on document with case studies how humanitarian aid which is supposed to be permitted is effectively stopped. The sanction regulations, licenses, and penalties make it so difficult and risky that humanitarian aid is effectively prevented. The report concluded with thirteen specific recommendations to allow humanitarian and development aid.

But there was not relaxation or changes in the maze of rules and sanctions to allow humanitarian relief. On the contrary, as the Syrian government was expelling terrorists from east Aleppo, southern Damascus, and Deir Ezzor, the US and EU blocked all aid for reconstruction. The US and allies were intent to NOT allow Syria to rebuild and reconstruct.

In 2018, the United Nations Special Rapporteur, Idriss Jazairy, prepared [a report on the negative impact of unilateral coercive measures](#) on human rights in Syria. He noted,

“Unilateral coercive measures on agricultural inputs and outputs, medicines, on many dual use items related to water and sanitation, public electricity and transportation, and eventually on rebuilding schools, hospitals and other public buildings and services, are increasingly difficult to justify, if they ever were justifiable.”

Before 2011, 90% of pharmaceutical needs were filled by Syrian factories. Those factories which remain have trouble getting raw materials and cannot get replacement parts for equipment. For example an expensive dialysis machine or MRI machine from Siemens or General Electric is rendered useless because Syria cannot import the spare part of software. On paper, they can purchase this but in reality they cannot.

Over 500,000 civilians returned to Aleppo after the terrorists were expelled at end of 2016. But reconstruction aid is prohibited by US sanctions and UN rules. They can receive “shelter kits” with plastic but rebuilding with glass and cement walls is not allowed because “reconstruction” is prohibited. [This article](#) describes numerous case examples from war torn Aleppo.

The author had a personal experience with the impact of sanctions. A Syrian friend could not get hearing aid batteries for a youth who was hard of hearing. Sanctions prevented him from being able to order the item because financial transactions and delivery is prohibited without a special license. A stockpile of the specialized batteries was easy to purchase in the USA but took almost a year to get to the destination in Syria.

US Economic Bullying and Terrorism

The Caesar Act extends the sanctions from applying to US nationals and companies to any individuals and corporations. It claims the supra-national prerogative to apply US laws to anyone. “Sanctions with respect to foreign persons” include blocking and seizing the property and assets of a person or company deemed to have violated the US law. This is compounded by a fiscal penalty which can be huge. In 2014, one of the largest international banks, BNP Paribas, was [fined \\$9 Billion for violating US sanctions](#) against Cuba, Iran and Sudan.

The Caesar Act claims the Syria Central Bank is a “primary money laundering” institution and thus in a special category. It aims to make it impossible for Syrian companies to export

and import from Lebanon. It will make it extremely difficult or impossible for Syrians abroad to transfer money to support family members in Syria.

In addition to these extraordinary attacks, the US is undermining and destabilizing the Syrian currency. In October 2019, the Syrian currency was trading at about 650 Syrian pounds to one US dollar. Now, just 8 months later, the rate is 2600 to the US dollar. Part of the reason is because of the threat of Caesar sanctions.

Another reason is because of US pressure on the main trading partner, Lebanon. Traditionally, Lebanon is the main partner for both imports and exports. In spring 2019 US Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, [threatened Lebanon](#) if they did not change their policies. It was blatant interference in Lebanese internal affairs. In Fall 2019 street protests began, and the Lebanese and Syrian banking crisis also began.

With the devaluation of their currency, prices of many items has risen dramatically. Agricultural, medical, industrial and other raw materials and finished goods are almost impossible to acquire.

The shortage of food is compounded because wheat fields in North East Syria, the bread basket of Syria, have been [intentionally set on fire](#). In the past week, sectarian groups in Lebanon have [blocked World Food Program trucks](#) carrying food aid to Syria. Meanwhile, in eastern Syria, the US and its proxy militia [control and profit](#) from the oil fields while the Syrian government and civilians struggle with a severe shortage oil and gas.

James Jeffrey and US Policy

In a June 7 webinar, the Special Representative for Syria Engagement, Ambassador James Jeffrey, brazenly stated the US policy. The US seeks to prevent Syria from rebuilding. He said "We threw everything but the kitchen sink into the Caesar Act."

The exception to punishing sanctions are 1) Idlib province in the North West, controlled by Al Qaeda extremists and Turkish invading forces and 2) north east Syria controlled by US troops and the proxy separatists known as the "Syrian Democratic Forces". The US has designated \$50 million to support "humanitarian aid" to these areas. Other US allies will pump in hundreds of millions more in aid and "investments". US dollars and Turkish lira are being pumped into these areas in another tactic to undermine the Syrian currency and sovereignty.

In contrast, the vast majority of Syrians - about 17 million - are being suffocated and hurt by the extreme sanctions.

The US has multiple goals. One goal is to prevent Syria from recovering. Another goal is to prolong the conflict and damage those countries who have assisted Syria. With consummate cynicism and amorality, the US Envoy for Syria James Jeffrey [described](#) his task: "*My job is to make it a quagmire for the Russians.*" Evidently there has been no significant change in foreign policy assumptions and goals since the US and Saudi Arabia began interfering in Afghanistan in 1979.

In his [2018 "End of Mission" statement](#), the United Nations Special Rapporteur was diplomatic but clear about the use of unilateral coercive sanctions against Syria: "the use of such measures may be contrary to international law, international humanitarian law, the UN Charter and the norms and principles governing peaceful relations among States."

Caesar and the Democrats

The economic and other attacks on Syria have been promoted by right wing hawks, especially fervent supporters of Israel. Eliot Engel, chairman of the Congressional Foreign Affairs Committee, pushed to get the Caesar Act into law for years. This was finally done by embedding it in the humongous [2020 National Defense Authorization Act](#).

In a hopeful sign that times may be changing, a progressive candidate named Jamaal Bowman [may unseat Engel](#) as the Democratic candidate in the upcoming election. Eliot Engel is supported by Hillary Clinton and other foreign policy hawks. [Jamaal Bowman](#) is supported by Bernie Sanders.

While this may offer hope for the future, the vast majority of Syrians continue as victims of US foreign policy delusions, hypocrisy, cynicism and cruelty.

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