



## US wants to further sanction Syria amid reconciliation efforts

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US legislators are mulling tightening sanctions on Syria in a bid to undermine the efforts it has so far made as part of the reconciliation process underway with numerous Arab states, which most recently culminated in the country returning to the Arab League after more than a decade of being outside of it.

Lawmakers claim that the sanctions are aimed at Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad and numerous other officials in a bid to impede the reconciliation efforts. However, experts are saying the bid being pushed for would hurt the Syrian people instead of the government, as others underlined that it would impede Syria's reconstruction efforts.

US Representative Joe Wilson introduced the bill, known as the Assad Regime Anti-Normalization Act of 2023, backed by 35 others, which expands on the Caesar Act introduced in 2020 to impose harsh sanctions on Syria.

The bill would make it so that Arab countries, such as Saudi Arabia and the UAE, are punished for investing in Syria after their rapprochement with the country.

The US Representative chairs the House's Subcommittee on the Middle East, North Africa, and Central Asia.

Despite opposition from Western countries, Arab foreign ministers announced in early May Syria's return to the Arab League during an emergency meeting that took place in the Egyptian capital ahead of the May 19 Arab League Summit.

Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry said the Syrian crisis has proven throughout the years that it cannot be resolved militarily and that the only way to reach a solution is through Syria itself, without external diktats.

The US had told Arab states to only re-admit Syria to the Arab League after getting concessions from Al-Assad, but these demands were not met.

Washington itself refused to normalize ties with Damascus, underlining that it would not be doing so nor support allies doing so.

It is reported that Arab states made no public financial commitments to rebuilding Syria at Riyadh's Arab League summit.

The bill practically criminalizing investments in Syria makes it so that a country making an investment, signing a contract, or donating more than \$50,000 to Syrian territories liberated by the Syrian Arab Army would trigger a review for possible financial penalties.

*Bloomberg* reported in the wake of Syria's readmission into the Arab League that the decision was unanimous and came "in defiance of US warnings."

The report highlighted how the decision "could also be a win for Iran and Russia, which have supported Assad militarily but need regional help to rehabilitate him diplomatically and eventually help rebuild a country shattered by a war that's displaced millions."

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The Council said in a statement that it had been decided to "resume the participation of delegations of the government of the Syrian Arab Republic in the meetings of the Arab League Council and all its affiliated organizations and agencies," explaining that the decision is effective as of May 7.

Additionally, Doug Bandow of the Cato Institute said Thursday the US sanctions on Syria proved to be ineffectual and catastrophic for its people as the country from war for more than a decade.

The author expressed that Syria's neighbors attempt to reach an agreement with Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad while the US expects Syria's neighbors to uphold its brutal sanctions against the country.

In an op-ed for *The American Conservative*, Bandow called Syria "an enormous tragedy," detailing how it is the most disastrous nation in the Arab Spring.

Bandow states that the World Food Programme reported that, "following 12 years of conflict, an economy crippled by runaway inflation, a currency that has collapsed to a record low and soaring food prices, 12 million people do not know where their next meal is coming from. Another 2.9 million people are at risk of sliding into hunger, meaning that 70% of the population may soon be unable to put food on the table for their families."

He questions how impoverishing the Syrian people helps advance democracy and accuses supporters of sanctions of showing little regard for human life and compares it to the late Madeleine Albright's dismissal of the dead Iraqi children due to sanctions.