

## The Syrian People and the Implications of Caesar's Law in the Siege of Assad

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### Brief Analysis

The ramifications of the application of the Caesar Civilian Protection Act, known as the Caesar Act, are becoming apparent in the wave of fear and anxiety that hit Syrian and Arab businessmen and traders who deal with the Syrian regime and who fear international sanctions that have begun to affect some of them. The Syrian regime attributes the stifling economic and humanitarian crisis inside Syria to the introduction of this law. Regular Syrians are also discussing the act, and a widespread conversation in support of the act has begun under the hashtag #Caesar\_Act. For some Syrians, the act has renewed hopes of achieving protection from the Assad regime's brutality and safeguarding the future of those who benefit from the conflict after the demise of Assad's regime.

The Caesar Act—coming more than eight years after the Syrian people first called for international support to protect protesters and civilians—aims to prevent Syrian President Bashar al-Assad from transforming battlefield success into political gains that he can use to remain in power indefinitely. The sanctions target entities that work with Assad in four sectors: oil and natural gas, aircraft manufacturing, construction, and engineering. The act applies to entities that offer both direct and indirect support for the regime, including support for Iranian and Russian sponsored militias operating inside Syria. The sanctions also target all international and regional actors that cooperate with Assad, thereby preventing him from bypassing the sanctions. Similarly affected are any entities that trade with Iran, or any other regional or international actors that invest in Syria.

Adding to the country's precarious economic situation, at the moment, Assad faces an unprecedented crisis related to the livelihood and well-being of Syrian citizens, the majority of whom have seen their living conditions diminish. The Syrian lira has depreciated at an unprecedented rate against the US dollar (SYP 3,000). This pushed several security institutions to intervene to coerce businessmen and major traders to supply the public treasury in support of the Syrian Lira, which has lost about 70 percent of its value since April and stood around SYP 1600 against the U.S. dollar. This has led to a steep increase in the price of basic goods like rice, sugar, and oil. The lines in front of bakeries have grown longer and many commodities and medicines are absent from markets.

The majority of Syrians are losing hope for any improvement in their situations under a regime which is causing a new blockade that continues to afflict its supporters who have become a time bomb that could explode at any moment. Signs of anger have begun to appear in southern Syria, with protests erupting in response to high inflation. In the cities of Daraa and Sweida, many Druze - Syria's second largest minority—have taken part in the demonstrations, calling for the overthrow of the Assad regime as a solution to the suffering of the country.

These events are making an impact on Assad's calculations, triggering a reshuffle within the Syrian military. Assad has dismissed, transferred, and redeployed many of his [senior officers](#)

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[\(//C:/Users/MAZiz/Desktop/%D8%B3%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%86%D9%85/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%AE%D9%8A%D8%B1%D8%A9%20%D9%8A%D9%82%D9%88%D9%85%officers](#). Meanwhile, he has appointed [twenty new](#) (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QyGazSi10Xs>) Alawite officers in his militias. It is clear that Assad is trying to rearrange his cards, perhaps in anticipation of a military act against him. These moves also suggest a growing discontent among high-ranking officers in critical posts throughout Syria, many of whom consider Bashar al-Assad to be directly responsible for the country's growing strife. Some officers are even hinting at a desire to defect, like one officer did at a military airbase. It should also be noted that the unclear reasons behind the simultaneous deaths of a number of first-class officers raised a lot of anger and questions.

With the Caesar Act, a large segment of the Syrian population believes that conditions will change, and many hope that the act will successfully target those who are benefiting from the conflict and start a new chapter of national reconciliation.

At the same time, the act also poses drawbacks that affect the regime's controlled areas. As one analyst believes, ["the Caesar Act sanctions do not punish the government as much as they punish the Syrians living in their country \(... \[the sanctions\] push them further into poverty and suffering."](#) Adding to that the regime's previous policy has increased poverty and daily sufferings. (<https://politicalstreet.org/2020/06/17/%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%88%D9%86-%D9%82%D9%8A%D8%B5%D8%B1-%D8%B9%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D8%A3%D9%85%D8%B1%D9%8A%D9%83%D9%8A-%D9%84%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%B3%D8%AF-%D9%8A%D8%AF%D9%81%D8%B9-%D8%AB%D9%85%D9%86-2/>)

However, an uneasy compromise has been reached: aid is now only [directed through the Bab Al-Hawa international crossing](#) (<https://www.fr24news.com/a/2020/07/un-security-council-adopts-resolution-authorizing-cross-border-aid-to-syria-after-russian-opposition.html>)—located between Turkey and Northern Syria and outside of direct regime control—after the closing of the additional crossing of Bab al-Salaam. That Bab al-Hawa remains open, despite Russian efforts to redirect aid exclusively through the Syrian regime, ensures that the aid reaches all Syrians without submitting to the whims and conditions of the conflict. This stance may also serve to stabilize the region as long as possible, exerting more pressure on the Syrian regime through the Caesar Act.

This analysis is not without reason. Sanctions apply to vital institutions that provide important support (like clothing) for millions of Syrians. Among these institutions are the Central Bank of Syria as well as other banks, the oil and gas sector, Syrian airlines, and companies exporting and importing goods and services. The act has also sparked fears among companies with headquarters in Lebanon that carry out economic activities in Syria, threatening to push Lebanon's already deeply [troubled economy](#) (<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/ar/policy-analysis/view/the-caesar-act-comes-into-force-part-1-increasing-the-assad-regimes-isolati>) closer to collapse.

Despite the serious effects of the sanctions, a positive reaction from the regime is unlikely. Even though the Trump Administration does not insist that the Assad regime step down, stressing instead the need for the regime to change its behavior, it is unlikely that the Assad regime will respond to the sanctions with any political reforms, especially given the regime's recently launched military campaigns against opposition forces in southern Syria.

Moreover, Syrians mainly fear that the regime and its allies will continue to manipulate international aid allocated for the Syrian people. During the years of conflict, the regime systematically exploited the aid file as a political card to consolidate its control. American officials have fought to ensure that aid is not used to the benefit of the Syrian regime while guaranteeing the continued flow of aid to ensure that the Caesar Act is not used against Syrian civilians.

As such, the United States must re-engage in Syria, working with the Syrian opposition and relevant international actors to achieve a strong, inclusive, and unified political entity representative of all Syrian parties from abroad and at home.

Moreover, the international community dedicated to peace in Syria must work with Syrians loyal to a new and stable Syria and who have a commitment to protect it during the transition phase and set the stage for political action. If it so chooses, the United States can exert greater pressure on Russia and Turkey to be the key players that pressure the Assad regime and reach

a political solution that reflects the will of the Syrian people rather than that of Assad.

More importantly, the United States must realize that the recent sanctions imposed by the Caesar Act are going to affect a large segment of the Syrian people in addition to those it is designed to pressure. Therefore, the United States must seek to mitigate the effects of the sanctions by routing aid and support for sectors that will be greatly affected by the act through civil society organizations and institutions not targeted by the act. In doing so, the United States can also disprove any regime propaganda blaming the United States for the deteriorating situation in Syria.



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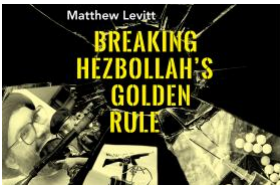
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