

U.S. Relations With Syria

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More information about Syria is available on the [Syria Page](#) and from other Department of State publications and other sources listed at the end of this fact sheet.

U.S.-SYRIA RELATIONS

The United States established diplomatic relations with Syria in 1944 following the U.S. determination that Syria had achieved effective independence from a French-administered mandate. Syria severed diplomatic relations with the United States in 1967 in the wake of the Arab-Israeli War. Relations were reestablished in 1974. Syria has been on the U.S. list of state sponsors of terrorism since the list's inception in 1979 because of its continued support of terrorism and terrorist groups, its former occupation of Lebanon, its pursuit of weapons of mass destruction and missile programs and use of chemical weapons, and its ongoing efforts to undermine U.S. and international stabilization activities in Iraq and Syria. Syria is subject to legislatively mandated penalties, including export sanctions under the Syrian Accountability Act and ineligibility to receive most forms of U.S. assistance or to purchase U.S. military equipment. Since conflict erupted in Syria in March 2011, subsequent Executive Orders have been issued in response to the ongoing violence and human rights abuses taking place in Syria.

From 1990-2001, the United States and Syria cooperated to a degree on some regional issues, but relations worsened from 2003 to early 2009. Issues of U.S. concern included the Syrian government's failure to prevent Syria from becoming a major transit point for foreign fighters entering Iraq, its refusal to deport from Syria former Saddam Hussein regime elements supporting the insurgency in Iraq, its interference in Lebanese affairs, its protection of the leadership of Palestinian rejectionist groups in Damascus, its human rights record, and its pursuit of weapons of mass destruction. In early 2009, the United States began to review its Syria policy in light of changes in the country and the region, leading to an effort to engage with Syria to find areas of mutual interest, reduce regional tensions, and promote Middle East peace.

In late February 2011, the Syrian government arrested a group of Syrian school children in the southern city of Dara'a for writing political graffiti on walls that said, "It's your turn, Doctor," suggesting that Assad would meet the fate of other leaders in the region. The government's brutal response to the Syrian people's call for freedom and dignity sparked nation-wide demonstrations and escalating tensions, which descended into an armed conflict that has lasted more than nine years, taken more than 500,000 lives, and displaced over 12 million people within the country and beyond its borders.

The United States supports the UN-facilitated, Syrian-led process mandated by UNSCR 2254. There is no military solution to the Syrian conflict. As we have seen, the Syrian regime, Russian, and Iranian military actions only offer more destruction and death.

Since the rise of ISIS in 2014, the U.S. government has worked closely with the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS to achieve a lasting defeat of the terror group. Working by, with, and through local partners, the Coalition achieved the territorial defeat of ISIS in Syria in March 2019. The Coalition remains committed to ISIS's enduring defeat through stabilization support to liberated areas, facilitating the return of displaced individuals, finding long-term solutions for detained foreign ISIS fighters, and promoting justice and accountability efforts in Syria and Iraq.

U.S. Assistance to Syria

The United States is the largest single donor to the humanitarian response in Syria, providing over \$12.2 billion in humanitarian assistance for vulnerable individuals inside Syria and those displaced in the region since the start of the crisis. The U.S. government supports emergency food assistance, shelter, safe drinking water, urgent medical care, humanitarian protection activities, and other urgent relief. U.S. humanitarian aid reaches 4.8 million people inside Syria's 14 governorates every month, as well as more than five million of the 5.65 million refugees from Syria in the region.

In northwest Syria, from 2012 to 2018, the United States provided non-humanitarian assistance to bolster the Syrian opposition. This assistance included: supporting local councils, activists, and civil society organizations to counter the influence of extremist groups like Al-Qaeda, including their ability to recruit youth and disenfranchised Syrians, and provide essential services to their communities; supporting journalists and independent media outlets to counter regime and extremist narratives and to provide unbiased reporting to their communities; bolstering the education sector to keep children in opposition-held areas in school and deliver quality education; providing non-lethal assistance to units of the Free Syrian Army and Free Syrian Police who protected communities resisting both AQ, extremist, and regime influence and control; and supporting those members and organizations in the community engaging in political negotiations, among other activities.

In southwest Syria, the United States provided non-humanitarian assistance to support the moderate Syrian opposition and to bolster the de-escalation arrangement until the regime took over control of this region in July 2018. This assistance included: capacity-building for local governance entities; essential service restoration; and, non-lethal support to units of the Free Syrian Army and Free Syrian Police to promote safety and stability.

In northeast Syria, the United States is working with our partners in the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS to support the enduring defeat of ISIS through stabilization efforts in liberated areas. To date, U.S. stabilization and early recovery efforts have focused on restoring essential services like water and electricity; supporting local governance and civil society to meet citizens' needs; improving and supporting the education sector to help children return to school and to provide vocational training; supporting independent media to provide locally-relevant and accurate information to citizens; removing explosive remnants of war; generating economic activity; providing support and training

for community security providers; supporting transitional justice and accountability, reconciliation, and reintegration efforts at the community level; and; building local capacity to support longer-term sustainability.

To date, the United States has been the largest provider of stabilization assistance in NE Syria, providing over \$350 million in funding since late-2016 for stabilization and early recovery programs. For all areas of Syria, the United States has provided more than \$1.3 billion in stabilization assistance since 2011. This includes the announcement in October 2019 of \$50 million in new funding to continue these stabilization efforts with a focus on supporting religious and ethnic minorities. Additionally, through intensive efforts to encourage burden-sharing within the D-ISIS Coalition, the United States has secured pledges and commitments of over \$700 million since 2018 from Coalition partners for stabilization and early recovery efforts in NE Syria. Of the contributions raised, over \$180 million was contributed directly to U.S. government accounts to fund ongoing U.S. government programs.

Bilateral Economic Relations

The United States maintains comprehensive sanctions on Syria that broadly restrict the ability of U.S. persons to engage in transactional dealings involving the Government of Syria. The Government of Syria and its affiliated entities have been subject to U.S. economic sanctions since 2004 under the Syria Accountability Act, which prohibits or restricts the export and re-export of most U.S. products to Syria. Sanctions in August 2008 prohibited the export of U.S. services to Syria and banned U.S. persons from involvement in the Syrian petroleum sector, including a prohibition on importing Syrian petroleum products. In response to regime brutality against peaceful protesters beginning in 2011, the U.S. Government imposed additional sanctions beginning in April 2011, designating those complicit in human rights abuses or supporting the Assad regime. In April and May 2012, the U.S. Government authorized additional sanctions for serious human rights abuse against the Syrian people and for efforts and activities undertaken to evade sanctions. In 2019, the U.S. government authorized a new sanctions program under Executive Order 13894 that allows for sanctions to be levied on those preventing, disrupting, or obstructing a political solution to the Syrian conflict which includes both Syrians and any foreign enablers. In June 2020, the sanctions provisions of the Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act came into full effect, allowing the U.S. government to sanction regime financiers, officials, senior government figures around Bashar al Assad and their enablers, and military leaders who perpetuate the conflict and obstruct a peaceful, political resolution of the conflict as called for by UNSCR 2254. The U.S. Government is continuously identifying and designating individuals and entities subject to U.S. sanctions related to Syria, including but not limited to the Syrian regime's use of chemical weapons and other atrocities against its own people.

Syria's Membership in International Organizations

Syria and the United States belong to a number of the same international organizations, including the United Nations, International Monetary Fund, and World Bank. Syria also is an observer to the World Trade Organization.

Bilateral Representation

The U.S. Embassy in Damascus suspended its operations in February 2012. The Government of the Czech Republic, acting through its Embassy in Damascus, serves as protecting power for U.S. interests in Syria.

Syria maintained an **embassy** in the United States at 2215 Wyoming Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20008 until March 18, 2014, when the State Department notified the Syrian Embassy that their operations must be suspended immediately and that all personnel at the Embassy who are not U.S. citizens or lawful permanent residents must depart by March 31, 2014. After this date of ordered departure, the United States no longer accredited Embassy personnel or regarded them as entitled to any of the diplomatic privileges, immunities, or protections. This notification also required the suspension of operations of Syria's honorary consulates in Troy, Michigan and Houston, Texas.

More information about Syria is available from the Department of State and other sources, some of which are listed here:

[CIA World Factbook Syria Page](#)

[U.S. Embassy](#)

[USAID Syria Page](#)

[History of U.S. Relations With Syria](#)

[U.S. Census Bureau Foreign Trade Statistics](#)

[Office of Foreign Assets Control Sanctions Page](#)

[Library of Congress Country Studies](#)

[Travel Information](#)