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INSIGHT

Syria's State Sponsor of Terrorism Designation

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The State Department has designated Syria as a country that has "repeatedly provided support for acts of international terrorism" (commonly referred to as a "State Sponsor of Terrorism") since December 1979. On July 8, 2026, President Donald Trump announced that he intends to rescind Syria's designation. The Administration has submitted a notification to Congress, 45 days before the proposed rescission is intended to take effect, as required under law (see below). Under the Al Asad [alt. Assad] family, Syria's former government, for decades had provided support to a range of U.S.-designated foreign terrorist organizations; in 2024, Bashar Al Asad was ousted by leaders of Syria's current government. Syria's transitional government is led by Ahmed Al Sharaa and other members of a former U.S.-designated foreign terrorist organization who have renounced their past ties to Al Qaeda and the Islamic State (IS, aka ISIS/ISIL) and have engaged in cooperative counterterrorism operations with the United States.

Syria's transitional government has formally joined the U.S.-led Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS and continues to conduct operations, including some joint operations, against IS-targets. The Islamic State and other extremist groups do not control territory in Syria, but have attacked religious and ethnic minorities, transitional government forces, and U.S. personnel in the country since 2024.

Syria's transitional government has sought U.S. and international sanctions relief to help spur investment and economic recovery. As of May 2026, two-thirds of Syrians (an estimated 15.6 million people) were in need of humanitarian or protection assistance including some of the 5.8 million who remained internally displaced. An additional 3.6 million Syrians were refugees in regional countries. The World Bank in 2025 estimated Syria's post-conflict reconstruction needs at $216 billion. Syria's State Sponsor of Terrorism designation may pose a deterrent effect to investment in Syria. Aspects of Syria's post-conflict investment environment and its still-nascent banking and financial systems may also be limiting recovery.

In 2025, Congress and the Trump Administration removed or suspended comprehensive U.S. sanctions on Syria while keeping in place some sanctions on individuals associated with the Asad government or responsible for terrorism or other specified activities. The Administration has amended or revoked the foundational executive orders and regulations providing for the implementation of U.S. sanctions in Syria, removing most Asad-era sanctions while preserving in amended executive orders the authority to impose new sanctions on individuals determined by the President to "threaten the peace, security, stability, or territorial integrity of Syria;" or be involved in "the commission of serious human rights abuse" related to Syria. As of June 2026, the Administration reported that the United States "no longer maintains a comprehensive Syria Sanctions program."

In December 2025, Congress repealed the Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act of 2019, which, among other things, had authorized the imposition of sanctions on third party investors in sectors key to the Syrian government's recovery plans. In repealing the act, Congress required the executive branch to provide regular reports to Congress on conditions in Syria, including on the Syrian government's performance relative to counterterrorism, minority protection, regional security, governance, human rights, and counternarcotics benchmarks.

Since the change in Syria's government, some Members of the House and Senate have advocated for the rescission of Syria's state sponsor of terrorism designation and have supported executive and legislative actions to suspend or remove sanctions on Syria and its current leaders. These and other Members of Congress have sought to ensure that Syria's transitional leaders fulfill commitments they have made to combat terrorism, preserve the safety and respect the rights of minorities in Syria, address concerns about foreign fighters present in Syria, limit security cooperation with Russia, and/or prevent Syria-based threats from jeopardizing the security of neighboring countries, including Israel. In reviewing the Administration's intended rescission of Syria's status as a state sponsor of terrorism, Congress may seek additional information from the executive branch about these and other matters.

Designation Rescission: Legislative Parameters

Syria was initially designated a country that has "repeatedly provided support for acts of international terrorism" under Section 6(j) of the Export Administration Act of 1979 (50 U.S.C. 4605), which has since been repealed; Section 1768 of the Export Controls Act of 2018 (50 U.S.C. 4826) continued designations previously made under Section 6(j) of the Export Administration Act of 1979, including Syria's designation. Three statutes currently govern the designation and its rescission:

- Section 620A of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 (22 U.S.C. 2371),
- Section 40 of the Arms Export Control Act (22 U.S.C. 2780), and
- Section 1754(c) of the Export Controls Act of 2018 (50 U.S.C. 4813).

All three statutes provide two possible paths for rescission. The Trump Administration's proposed rescission makes use of the option the statutes offer for the President, 45 days before a rescission takes effect, to certify to Congress that

> (i) the government concerned has not provided any support for acts of international terrorism during the preceding 6-month period; and
>
> (ii) the government concerned has provided assurances that it will not support acts of international terrorism in the future.

Should Congress seek to block a rescission, only the Arms Export Control Act provides an explicit legislative mechanism for taking such action (under expedited procedures, see Section 40(f)(2)). There may be questions regarding its applicability in the case of Syria because its designation falls under the Export Controls Act of 2018.

Over the years, the Secretary of State and President have exercised their authorities to rescind the State Sponsor of Terrorism designation from six foreign governments [Iraq, South Yemen, Libya, North Korea (subsequently redesignated), Cuba (subsequently redesignated), and Sudan]. Congress has introduced and, at times, adopted resolutions related to the rescission of a country as a state sponsor of terrorism. To date, however, Congress has not formally disapproved of any rescissions pursuant to congressional review procedures provided in the Arms Export Control Act. Passage of any such resolution would be subject to a possible presidential veto.

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