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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6225

April 21, 2025

The Honorable Marco Rubio
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20451

The Honorable Scott Bessent
Secretary of the Treasury
Department of the Treasury
1500 Pennsylvania Avenue N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20220

Dear Secretary Rubio and Secretary Bessent:

We write to encourage you to remove barriers to expanded engagement with the Syrian interim government. The fall of the Assad regime presents a fleeting opportunity for the United States to safeguard American interests. Nevertheless, our approach must strike the appropriate balance between opportunity and risk. While America should not rush into Syria, we can create space for our regional partners and others to do so. We recommend a thorough review of existing U.S. regulations on Syria, to include the extension and expansion of existing general licenses and limited or short-term sanctions relief in the near term.

To seize on the current opportunity, we urge you to quickly reduce the sanctions risk for critical sectors such as agriculture, energy, power grid infrastructure, finance, telecommunications and education. The Treasury has issued two general licenses to accommodate some needs, but time and geographic limitations have restricted the full utilization of the licenses.

We ask you to consider expanding these licenses to provide more time and geographic flexibility to those on the ground. In addition to expanding general licenses, you should consider short-term sanctions relief. These near-term actions would offer some immediate relief, increase liquidity in the market, and prevent immediate instability — essential to achieving the conditions to advance U.S. interests.

To further deepen U.S. engagement, we need to see movement on our national security priorities: preventing Syria from becoming a launching pad for terror attacks, ensuring Russia and Iran do not remain in Syria, eliminating any remaining chemical weapons and captagon stockpiles, and cooperating to find Austin Tice and any other remaining U.S. citizens. Progress has been made but has stalled on some of these priorities. A massacre in western Syria, reported talks for a continued Russian presence, and captagon smugglers intercepted in Iraq raise serious concerns. Should the Syrian interim government demonstrate irreversible movement on core American interests, we would encourage the administration to drop further barriers to U.S. and international engagement, including fulsome sanctions relief. However, should the Syrian interim government fail to take action on American priorities, deeper economic and diplomatic isolation would follow.

We look forward to the administration completing its ongoing Syria policy review and welcome its efforts to clearly communicate U.S. interests to Damascus. We look forward to continued work with the administration to calibrate U.S. policy based on the Syrian interim government's progress.

In addition to our challenges with the interim government, there is a growing competition between Israel and Türkiye over Syria's trajectory that may threaten American interests. We would encourage the administration to move quickly to mediate between our allies.

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter. We look forward to continuing to work with you to advance U.S. interests in the region.

Sincerely,



Jeanne Shaheen
Ranking Member



James E. Risch
Chairman