

Syria Sanctions Fact Sheet

Existing Sanctions and Future Steps the Administration Should Take

Why has the United States imposed sanctions on Syria?

Syria has been subject to U.S. sanctions for several decades. The U.S. restrictive measures respond to a series of activities by the Syrian government that concern U.S. national security interests. The most notable of these concerns is Syria's apparent support for terrorists groups, such as Hezbollah and Hamas. Other activities, including the Syrian government's occupation of Lebanon, its intent to pursue weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) and missile programs, allegations of their involvement in the assassination of Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri, and undermining of U.S. and international efforts with respect to the stabilization and reconstruction of Iraq, have resulted in additional sanctions.

More recently, the Syrian government, under President Bashar al-Assad has waged – and continues – a violent campaign against unarmed civilian demonstrators in Syria. The crackdown has left over 9000 dead and elicited strong condemnations from the United States, the European Union, the Arab League, and the vast majority of the U.N. General Assembly. The United States and the European Union have imposed sanctions in response to the crackdown.

What is the aim of these sanctions?

The U.S. restrictive measures aim primarily to stop the Syrian government's weapons proliferation, involvement in terrorist activities, and its ongoing widespread and systematic attacks on Syrian civilians. Among other things, the sanctions deprive the Syrian regime of financial revenues and materials that it uses to sustain itself and to prolong its violent campaigns against civilians.

The U.S. sanctions regime against Syria prohibits all foreign assistance to the country, as well as exports and re-exports of items on the U.S. Munitions List, all items on the Commerce Control List, and all other U.S. products except food and medicine. U.S. sanctions prohibit any financial transaction with the Syrian government and block all property of the Syrian government, its senior leaders, U.S. persons that support the Syrian government, and individuals and entities involved in the planning, sponsoring, organizing, or perpetrating of terrorist attacks.

What sanctions have been implemented in response to Bashar al-Assad's crackdown?

President Barack Obama has issued a number of executive orders imposing and expanding sanctions against Syria since Assad's violent repression started last year. Under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (1977), the president has broad powers pursuant to a declaration of a national emergency with respect to a foreign threat "to the national security, foreign policy, or economy of the United States." In 2004, President George W. Bush determined the actions of the Syrian government in supporting terrorism, occupying Lebanon, and pursuing WMDs a national emergency; and last year, President Obama expanded the emergency to include the government of Syria's human rights abuses.

In Executive Orders 13572, 13573, and 13582, President Obama blocked all assets of persons responsible for, complicit in, or supporting the commission of human rights abuses in Syria. Specifically, President Obama ordered frozen all property of the Syrian government, its senior officials, its agencies

and instrumentalities, and any individual or entity responsible for or complicit in the human rights abuses. President Obama also ordered frozen the property of anyone acting on behalf of, or providing material assistance or support to, a sanctioned party. These executive orders prohibit all new investment in Syria by a U.S. person, the provision of any U.S. services to Syria, and any transaction in or related to petroleum products of Syrian origin.

In April, the Obama Administration signed an Executive Order authorizing a new set of targeted sanctions against Syria. The E.O. authorized sanctions and visa bans against those who commit or facilitate grave human rights abuses via information technology (“GHRVITY sanctions” related to Syrian regime brutality. According to the administration, “This novel sanctions tool allows us to sanction not just those oppressive governments, but the companies that enable them with technology they use for oppression and the ‘digital guns for hire’ who create or operate systems used to monitor, track, and target citizens for killing, torture, or other grave abuses.”

Is Syria subject to any U.N. sanctions?

Yes. Existing U.N. sanctions on Syria stem from investigations looking into Syria’s role in a terrorist attack in Beirut, Lebanon in 2005. The attack resulted in the assassination of Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri and the deaths of 22 others. U.N. Security Council Resolution 1595 condemned the attack and established a commission to investigate it. The follow-on UNSC Resolution 1636 sanctioned those individuals suspected of being complicit in the attack and the investigation’s obstruction. The resolution called on all states to take necessary measures to “prevent entry into or transit through their territories of such individuals.” It also ordered states to “freeze all funds, financial assets and economic resources that are on their territories that are owned or controlled” by persons suspected of being complicit in the attack.

In support of UNSC Resolution 1595, President Bush issued Executive Order 13399 blocking all assets of persons involved in the planning, sponsoring, organizing, or perpetrating of the terrorist attack. E.O. 13399 also sanctioned those who materially assisted, sponsored, or provided financial, material, or technological support for, or goods or services in support of the terrorist attack and those who were found to have impeded the UN commission’s investigation into the attack.

Since the crackdown began, members of the UN Security Council have attempted to pass a resolution condemning the violence against civilians in Syria; the resolution called for an end to the repression and would have laid the foundation for imposing sanctions against the Syrian regime. However, in a rare double-veto, Russia and China blocked the resolution. A few months later, Russia and China blocked another resolution by the Arab League calling for an end to violence and laying out a solution for the crisis.

What other steps can the Obama administration take in response to the Syrian crackdown?

The Obama administration can expand existing sanctions to explicitly target persons and entities that provide any kind of material support to and enable the Syrian regime’s violent repression. For example, enablers such as Russian state arms dealers continue to provide the Assad government with munitions and large weapons platforms that enable the perpetration of attacks on civilians throughout Syria. While these weapon sales are legal in the absence of an international arms embargo against Syria, they directly undermine the effectiveness of existing U.S. and E.U. arms embargoes levied against Syria in an effort to stop the violence.

Having failed to get a Security Council resolution banning the sale of weapons to Syria, the Obama administration should immediately prohibit the United States and all U.S. persons and businesses from conducting business with any entity that transfers goods, technologies, or services to Syria that are likely to be used to commit widespread human rights abuses. These goods can include weapons, transportation, and telecommunications equipment, as well as the services and training needed to operate these materials.

Russian state arms company Rosoboronexport is a prime example and should be immediately designated by the U.S. Treasury Department for targeted sanctions. Rosoboronexport is the leading arms provider for the Assad regime and has openly stated its intention to continue to provide weapons, munitions, and spare parts despite their likely use in attacks on unarmed civilians.

During the course of the uprising in Syria, which began last March, the United States has continued to do business with Rosoboronexport, including the purchase of 21 Mi17V5 multi-purpose helicopters for the Afghan army in May last year. According to Department of Defense public records, the foreign sales contract for the Mi series rotocrafts shows an initial purchase value of \$375,051,442 and an estimated completion date of March 28, 2016.¹ Media reports from last year indicate this contract comes with an option for \$550 million in additional purchases raising the total value of the contract to nearly \$ 1 billion.² A few months ago, U.S.-registered arms broker Bulova Technologies Group, a Florida-based company, announced it started a strategic partnership with Rosoboronexport to aid Rosoboronexport in winning U.S. government contracts that require Russian weapons and ammunition.

In the last several months, members of Congress have taken up this issue and worked to end the current DoD contract with Rosoboronexport and to prevent future contracts of this kind. A bi-partisan group of 17 senators sent a letter to the Secretary of Defense in March, urging him to cut ties with a primary enabler of the Syria atrocities. Legislation is currently pending in both the House and the Senate respectively to prevent future U.S. defense contracts with countries arming the Syrian regime and to investigate the existing contract with Rosoboronexport.

To fulfill its commitment to the Syrian people and to bring an end to the violence, the U.S. government must expand its sanctions regime to include companies like Rosoboronexport and immediately cease all business with such companies until it is found that they are no longer enabling atrocities in Syria.

¹ <http://www.defense.gov/contracts/contract.aspx?contractid=4547>

² <http://www.wired.com/dangerroom/2011/08/pentagon-gave-no-bid-contract-to-russias-biggest-arms-dealer/#more-55335>