

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

July 1, 2026

The Honorable Marco Rubio  
Secretary of State  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Rubio,

We write to urge you to remove Syria from the State Sponsor of Terrorism (SST) list, where it currently sits alongside Iran, Cuba and North Korea. Since the fall of the Assad regime, President Ahmed Al-Sharaa and the new Syrian government have demonstrated continued commitment to counterterrorism operations within Syria. While Syria does need to make more progress in a variety of areas, discussed further below, the grounds for the SST designation in U.S. law no longer apply and the listing remains a significant barrier to achieving the Administration and congressional priority of giving Syria a chance to succeed.

The new Syrian government has joined the U.S.-led Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS and sustained counterterrorism cooperation with U.S. Central Command.<sup>1</sup> Last month, in an annual report to Congress, the State Department removed Syria from a list of countries that do not cooperate with the U.S. on counter terrorism efforts.<sup>2</sup> The Executive branch has also repeatedly highlighted Syria in reports and briefings to Congress as a willing and capable partner to deter terrorist groups.<sup>3</sup>

In addition to addressing ISIS threats, the Syrian government has taken serious steps to degrade Hezbollah's networks in Syria, particularly by targeting transnational weapons and financial flows.<sup>4</sup> For example, last month the Syrian Ministry of Interior arrested and deterred an attack

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Central Command and U.S. Africa Command Posture Hearing Before the S. Comm. on Armed Servs., 119th Cong. (May 14, 2026) (statement of Adm. Charles B. Cooper II, Commander, U.S. Central Command) (“USCENTCOM continues to actively target ISIS and pragmatically expand CT collaboration with the Syrian government.”); Lead Inspector General for Operation Inherent Resolve, Quarterly Report to the United States Congress: Operation Inherent Resolve and Other U.S. Government Activities Related to Iraq & Syria, Jan. 1, 2026–Mar. 31, 2026, at 5 (May 2026) (“In Syria, the United States has been developing a bilateral partnership with Syria in support of the mutual objective of suppressing ISIS remnants in Syria.”); U.S. Central Command, “U.S. Forces Protect the Homeland with Aggressive Pursuit of ISIS in Syria,” Dec. 17, 2025, <https://www.centcom.mil/MEDIA/PRESS-RELEASES/Press-Release-View/Article/4362977/us-forces-protect-the-homeland-with-aggressive-pursuit-of-isis-in-syria/>.

<sup>2</sup> Determination and Certification of Countries That Are Not Fully Cooperating with U.S. Anti-Terrorism Efforts, State Department, May 2026.

<sup>3</sup> See, e.g., Report to Congress: Repeal of Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act of 2019, Sec. 8369(B) of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2026, June 26, 2026.

<sup>4</sup> Loveday Morris & Souad Mekhennet, “Syria seeks to sever last Iran-linked networks for smuggling arms and cash,” *Washington Post*, Apr. 12, 2025, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2025/04/12/syria-iran-hezbollah-weapons-smuggling/>; Syrian Arab News Agency, “Syrian security forces foil sabotage plot linked to Hezbollah terrorist militia,” Apr. 19, 2026, <https://sana.sy/en/syria/2311437/>; Ahmad Sharawi, “Israel and Syria’s Shared Fight

from Hezbollah-linked terrorists who targeted a rabbi in Damascus.<sup>5</sup> In March, President Al-Sharaa was the first leader in the region to publicly declare support for Lebanon's efforts to disarm Hezbollah.<sup>6</sup> President Al-Sharaa's predecessor embraced the opposite: funding for Iran's proxy terrorist network was embedded in Assad's agenda and security apparatus. The stunning reversal by the new Syrian government changes the balance of power in the region.

Critically, U.S. financial institutions have been clear that the SST designation represents a key remaining roadblock to Syria's financial connectivity, which is needed to facilitate private sector investment and billions of dollars pledged for economic recovery. According to the World Bank, Syria's reconstruction will cost an estimated \$216 billion—or “nearly ten times Syria's projected 2024 GDP, underscoring the scale of the challenge and the immense need for international support.”<sup>7</sup> But financial institutions, including banks based in allied countries, are redescent to process financial transactions related to Syria or extend financing to U.S. and allied companies for projects in Syria due to the immense perceived risk of dealing with a country under an SST designation. U.S. financial institutions have been clear that the combination of export control requirements and reputational, insurance, legal and correspondent banking risks stemming from Syria's SST designation are too large and can trigger massive fines and loss of U.S. regulatory standing. The State Department has worked to give American businesses an advantage in investing in Syria,<sup>8</sup> and while other barriers like the security situation also remain, removing the SST designation would meaningfully increase these financial institutions' ability to enable the private sector to operate in Syria.

The designation also undermines U.S. national security interests with respect to adversaries and competitors seeking to regain influence in Syria. As you argued in your confirmation hearing, Iran and Russia have been largely pushed out after supporting Assad's brutal rule, but they are pragmatic foreign policy operators who will exploit any U.S. failure to make the best of our opportunities. Their willingness to engage regardless of U.S. sanctions regimes gives them an advantage over responsible actors. For example, Russia continues to keep Syria reliant on Russian crude oil and wheat supplies while maintaining military bases from which it can project power in the region. In addition, China is gaining an enormous advantage by embedding itself in critical Syrian sectors like telecommunications and technology despite Syria's preference for

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Against Hezbollah,” *Foreign Policy*, Apr. 27, 2026, [https://foreignpolicy.com/2026/04/27/israel-syria-hezbollah-iran-sharaa-terrorism-lebanon/?tpcc=recirc\\_latest062921](https://foreignpolicy.com/2026/04/27/israel-syria-hezbollah-iran-sharaa-terrorism-lebanon/?tpcc=recirc_latest062921); Rudaw, “Dozens arrested in Syria security sweep ahead of Sharaa-Trump talks,” Aug. 11, 2025.

<sup>5</sup> “Syria thwarts Hezbollah plot to attack religious figure in Damascus; Israeli TV says target was rabbi,” *Times of Israel*, Apr. 11, 2026.

<sup>6</sup> Ahmad Sharawi, *Foreign Policy*, “Israel and Syria's Shared Fight Against Hezbollah,” Apr. 27, 2026.

<sup>7</sup> World Bank, “Syria's Post-Conflict Reconstruction Costs Estimated at \$216 billion,” Oct. 21, 2025, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2025/10/21/syria-s-post-conflict-reconstruction-costs-estimated-at-216-billion>.

<sup>8</sup> See, e.g., *U.S. Embassy Syria, Business: Investor Guides*, U.S. Dep't of State (“To support American businesses exploring opportunities in Syria, the U.S. Embassy Syria has developed an Investor Handbook and Investor Guides for several key sectors.”), <https://sy.usembassy.gov/business>; U.S. Embassy Syria, *Investor Handbook* (May 2026), <https://sy.usembassy.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/59/2026/05/The-Investors-Handbook.pdf>.

U.S. and European companies.<sup>9</sup> It is in our interest that Syria have options other than Iranian, Russian and Chinese entities.

Even with a removal of the SST designation, Syria will still have a long path ahead. We urge you to continue pressing the government on our shared priorities, including pressing Syria to do the following:

- continue to take credible steps to limit and eventually end Russia’s military presence in Syria;
- share power among Syria’s diverse communities and among others beyond those close to President Al Sharaa;
- ensure women have a full seat at the table including through opportunities to join the military and leadership roles;
- complete the removal of foreign fighters from leadership positions;
- officially designate groups like Hezbollah that they are already working against; and
- press forward with peaceful integration of the northeast and, eventually, the south of the country.

Removal of the SST designation does not mean deprioritizing these steps, which are critical to securing a free and prosperous future, just as waiver and eventual repeal of the Caesar Act did not mean deprioritizing these steps. Nor would the removal of the SST designation preclude the United States from applying targeted counterterrorism sanctions on individuals and entities as necessary. Rather, it is an acknowledgment that reliance on SST instead of more targeted tools for leverage is counterproductive to achieving our shared priorities.

Syria’s SST designation represents the most significant remaining legal impediment to Syria’s reconstruction. Its removal could create new opportunity for foreign investment, economic development and capacity building to ensure the Syrians can remain capable and willing partners to the United States. Thank you for your consideration and partnership.

Sincerely,



Jeanne Shaheen  
Ranking Member  
Senate Foreign Relations Committee



Joe Wilson  
Member of Congress



Elizabeth Warren  
Ranking Member  
Senate Committee on Banking,  
Housing, and Urban Affairs

<sup>9</sup> Josh Rogin, “Syria Sanctions Are Holding U.S. Businesses Back—to China’s Benefit,” *WP Intelligence*, June 15, 2026, <https://wpintelligence.washingtonpost.com/topics/2026/06/15/syria-sanctions-are-holding-us-businesses-back-chinas-benefit/>.