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One Hundred Sixteenth Congress
U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Foreign Affairs

2170 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515
www.foreignaffairs.house.gov

October 26, 2020

The Honorable Mike Pompeo
Secretary
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Pompeo:

As strong supporters of the Syrian people, we write to you with deep concern that various countries have taken steps to renew formal diplomatic ties with Bashar Al-Assad despite his ongoing and unrepentant brutality.

The House of Representatives condemned Assad for crimes against humanity and chronicled his regime's violence in H.Res.1165, which the House passed on December 11, 2018, and in H.Con.Res.121, which the House passed on March 14, 2016. Congress has also used legislation to outline the behavioral criteria that the Syrian regime must meet to rejoin the international community. The regime must: cease the bombing of civilian areas and infrastructure; release political prisoners and allow for the safe and voluntary return of refugees and displaced persons; cease its support for terrorist groups such as Hezbollah, Hamas, and Palestinian Islamic Jihad; cease research, development, and acquisition of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons and ballistic missile technology; and allow full, unfettered access to the United Nations and other international observers to verify such activities have indeed ceased. None of these criteria have been met.

The regime and its allies, Russia and Iran, are guilty of barbaric violence against the Syrian people. International organizations and human rights groups have documented the use of chemical weapons against civilians, indiscriminate bombing of civilian infrastructure, deliberate use of siege tactics, and mass torture. For example, a June 2019 report by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons Investigation and Identification Team found that the

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Syrian Arab Air Force is responsible for the use of sarin as a chemical weapon in multiple attacks on civilians at Ltamenah on March 24 and 30, 2017, and of a chlorine chemical weapons attack on March 25, 2017. In 2020, the United Nations Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic released a report documenting extensive war crimes by the Russian Federation, the Assad regime, and Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham between November 2019 and June 2020. Earlier this year, Assad and Russia engaged in a ruinous assault on civilians in Idlib province. No one could argue that the regime has abandoned the devastating tactics that originally led the international community to ostracize it.

For these reasons, we are alarmed by efforts of some in the Middle East and beyond to extend formal diplomatic recognition to the Assad regime. We support the position you articulated on June 17, 2020 that the U.S. will not cease its pressure on Assad and “will not stop until Assad and his regime stop their needless, brutal war against the Syrian people and the Syrian government agrees to a political solution to the conflict as called for by UNSCR 2254.”

We are pleased that the Administration has imposed sanctions under the Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act, which we strongly supported. We look forward to working with you to ensure ongoing robust implementation of the Caesar Act, including sanctions, in order to communicate to the international community that the United States opposes any efforts to rehabilitate Assad and his cronies absent the behavior changes outlined in law.

Given the regime’s continued deplorable crimes against its own people, we urge the Department of State to continue to make clear—publicly and privately—to our allies and partners that the U.S. opposes any efforts to renew diplomatic ties with or extend formal diplomatic recognition to the Assad regime. We look forward to your response, and to continuing to work with you to support the Syrian people.

Sincerely,

Chairman Eliot L. Engel
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