

Syria: From the Capital of the Umayyads to the Capital of Captagon



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Global Justice stands with all just causes in the world and believes, as Ibn Khaldun said, that “justice is the basis of permanence of power” and that international and local stability cannot be achieved without the highest level of justice internationally and locally. This task requires a comprehensive survey of the population in Syria and the countries where Syrian refugees have sought asylum, and a careful exploration of the details and data that paint a comprehensive picture of their needs and reality in order to provide solutions and tangibly implement the long held desire and vision for a better future.

An introduction

The language of Global Justice economic advisor, Dr. Osama Kadi, is characterized by its many dimensions, and when he deals with the Syrian or global economic issue, he does so armed with an arsenal of historical, cultural and political knowledge in his writings; a point that has gained him much acclaim throughout his successful career. Today, in this excellent research, he goes into depth about Syria and the Captagon drug issue, which has become exasperated due to the Assad regime and has negatively transformed the center of our beloved nation in its capital Damascus, into the most dangerous center for the manufacturing and export of drugs in the region.

The Captagon issue, which has become central to Syria's internal demise, reflects not only Assad's handwork in a black market world full of crime and numerous violations of both local and international laws, but also the impossibility of rehabilitating Assad and his regime again.

The world is aware today, more than ever before, that after great efforts made by the Syrians affected by this harmful trade, that its damaging affects impact not only those inside the country - and particularly the youth -- but that this toxicity has spilled over into neighboring countries and regions into which Captagon is freely dispersed. The manufacturing of Captagon, under the guidance of Assad, has been further enabled by the Iranian and Lebanese militias and exported to neighboring countries. In July, Senator Michael McCaul (R-TX) demanded that the U.S. Department of State provide clear answers about why a report issued by them failed to address the Assad regime's role in smuggling the drug "Captagon" and called for "understanding Assad's role in the Captagon trade" as "important to the national security of the United States."

Senator McCaul joined other lawmakers, including Jim Risch (R-ID) and French Hill (R-AR), in a letter addressed to US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken, on July 22, writing: "We were disappointed that the State Department's latest report, which was mandated under Section 6507 of the Authorization Act, The National Defense for the fiscal year 2022, regarding the estimated net wealth and sources of income for the head of the regime, Bashar al-Assad, failed to explain the large role of the Assad regime in drug smuggling."

The White House did not list the Assad regime among 22 countries identified as a major transit country for narcotics, or major illicit drug-producing countries, even though prominent elements of the Assad regime and its affiliated networks engage in state-sponsored amphetamine production and trafficking.

In 2021 alone, the Captagon trade earned the Assad regime approximately \$6 billion. This contradicts the content of the sanctions imposed by the United States on the regime, to prevent it from financing the killing of its own people. Rather, it turns a blind eye to Assad's involvement in the killing of other innocents outside the borders and with the use of weapons of another kind, deadly and debilitating drugs.

Senator McCaul said that in addition to fueling Assad's ongoing crimes against the Syrian people, the smuggling of Captagon threatens regional stability and impedes economic growth in the affected countries. Senator Hill stressed that Assad was not satisfied with the gross violations of human rights and his systematic perpetration of war crimes against his people, but that this regime has now become a "drug state."

And at the beginning of this year, a report by the Middle East expert Jean-Pierre Filiu, published by the French newspaper Le Monde, revealed of Assad: "He developed the industrial production of Captagon in Syria, in order to circumvent international sanctions and consolidate networks of loyalty to it." Filiu indicated that Assad was not satisfied with crimes against humanity, war crimes, organized massacres, systematic rape, enforced disappearance campaigns, the expulsion of entire populations, and other crimes attributed to him; he added to it with the crime of mass production and aggressive marketing and disbursement of illicit drugs, because of his confidence that he would not be punished for this for as long as the Syrian territories under his control continue to be the main production areas for Captagon.

The history of the Assad regime's relationship with illicit drugs is not only linked to Bashar, but goes back to the era of his father, Hafez al-Assad, who exercised it in complete freedom when the Lebanese file was entrusted to him; since the mid-seventies and until the twentieth century, allowing for the cultivation of hashish in the Bekaa Valley. Special factories were established to convert local opium into heroin with the protection of the Syrian army, which controlled all of Lebanon.

That role ended when the United States forced Hafez's heir, Bashar, to withdraw from Lebanon in 2005, and then he returned to practicing this trade on Syrian territory. Thus, Assad became "the leader of the Captagon around the world."

In this research, Dr. Kadi traces this path and clarifies the nature of this trade and its widespread effects, while clarifying the confusion and international inaction regarding this phenomenon and the lack of seriousness in dealing with it. All of this research is supported by diagrams, documents and statistical data. Meanwhile, Syrians and public opinion around the world are in dire need of enlightenment about this dangerous situation, which has been added to the laundry list of Assad's horrific crimes against humanity.

Ibrahim Al-Jabin
Marsberg - Germany
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Index

A contradictory vision of the United Nations	01
Main intakes	07
Action points	07
The rise of the drug state	08
What is captacon	08
Conflict dynamics	09
The geography of the Syrian drug trade	10
Triangle trade: major drug export routes	11
The main places of production of Captagon are in Syria and Lebanon	14

A contradictory view of the United Nations

The work of the United Nations seems contradictory and antithetical to human progress. The latest and most blatant example of this is the provocative news of the appointment of the “ambassador” of the Syrian regime, Dr. Ghada Wali as the Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and Director-General of the United Nations Office in Vienna. It appears that Mrs. Ghada Wali does not follow up on the work of the United Nations, which issued a report in September 2020 on war crimes committed in Syria which was submitted to the Human Rights Council in Geneva, in which the Syrian regime forces were accused of “carrying out air and ground attacks that decimated civilian infrastructure, evacuating towns and villages.” Hundreds of women, men and children were murdered and many sites protected by international law in the northwest of the country were destroyed in air and ground attacks, including with cluster munitions. According to the report, which was conducted from November 2019 to June of this year

there were 52 attacks including 17 attacks on hospitals and medical facilities, 14 attacks on schools, 12 on homes and 9 on markets. Such actions amount to war crimes as they are indiscriminate and deliberate attacks on protected targets.



I advised Mrs. Ghada Wali to meet with French Judge Catherine Marchi-Uhel, the head of the UN entity investigating serious crimes in Syria, the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism (IIIM) to ensure justice for war crimes in Syria in March 2021, as this mechanism provided information and evidence to 12 national judicial authorities, which conducted 84 investigations and prosecutions. In addition to this, it has a list with 3200 suspected names from the Syrian regime.

Perhaps Mrs. Ghada Wali did not hear about the meeting in which two-thirds of the Member States of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons voted on April 21, 2021 to strip Syria of its rights in the organization after a report confirmed Damascus' responsibility for a number of chemical weapons attacks. How can the United Nations accuse a "state" of killing its people with various weapons, including chemical weapons, and then allow for it to appoint a representative to fight "crime and drugs"? This is counterintuitive.

I understand the likelihood that the Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime did not follow up on the news that came from Greece in May 2019 -- which is mere hours away from Vienna -- where Greek drug officers in the port of Piraeus in Athens placed containers filled with 33 million tablets of the psychoactive Phenylethylamine HCL (PEA HCL), better known as Captagon, and with a value of \$660 million dollars, in what has been deemed one of the largest drug seizures ever recorded. By chance, it came from Latakia, Syria; the home country of Syrian "Ambassador" to the UN Hassan Khaddour.

Furthermore, on July 1, 2020, Italian port officials announced the seizure of 84 million tablets of the synthetic narcotic Captagon, worth \$1.1 billion, on board three cargo ships coming from Syria. Does Ambassador Khaddour have an explanation for this? Likewise, Ms. Wali may not have heard that in December, a Syrian cargo ship - from the same country as Mr. Khaddour - was intercepted on its way from Latakia to Libya near the island of Crete with 3 million phenylethylamine (Captagon) pills worth \$113 million. Made, known locally as Abu Hilalin, was booked in France in 2017. Likewise, the Jordanian Public Security Directorate may have missed telling Ms. Wali about the confiscation of 47 million Captagon pills in 2018.

Perhaps Ms. Wali did not contact Mr. Werner Sepp, the head of the International Narcotics Control Board who has since 2016 called upon Syrian authorities to explain the disappearance of very large quantities of pseudoephedrine and other precursors to narcotics requested by Syria, and who warned at the time that narcotic substances from those ingredients may be manufactured and produced for export as narcotic pills (Captagon and others). He has not received an explanation. Maybe Mr. Khaddour has an explanation for him after five years? Or perhaps he can explain why nearly 30 million pills were seized on the Syrian-Lebanese border between 2013 and 2014 and how a third of Captagon seizures worldwide occur in the Middle East, specifically from Syria?

Strangely enough, Ghada Fathy Wali is the Director General/Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime; the same office that issued in April 2021 a report entitled: "The Syrian Economy at War: Captagon, Hashish, and the Syrian Narco-State." Just two months after the release of this report, Ms. Wali appointed Ambassador Khaddour.

The report shows the volume of drugs confiscated from hashish that was sourced from Syria reached 46.6 tons in 2020, 20.2 tons in 2019, 12.4 tons in 2018, 14.1 tons from Captagon in 2015, 13.4 tons in 2014, and 9 tons in 2013.



The Syrian regime's control through its allies in Lebanon is no secret. A study by GBC News stated that "Hezbollah's militia oversees a complex network consisting of 1,600 agents, whose mission is to sell narcotics, in cooperation with some of the Syrian regime's officers who facilitate the operations of the Syrian regime." They sell drugs affiliated with the party in return for a portion of the huge profits that the dealers reap. Therefore, it is natural for Ms. Wali to consider the drug trade in Lebanon and Syria as the responsibility of the Syrian regime. She should be concerned with the drug trade because the drug production network in the two countries is at the highest level of coordination. The volume of illicit drugs confiscated from Lebanon amounted to 2.5 tons of amphetamine, 8.3 tons of hashish and 258 kg of cannabis plants in 2018, and 1.08 tons of cannabis seeds in 2015, and there were 16 tons of other drugs in 2015.

International reports consider Syria the world center for the production of Captagon

It has been described as the Captagon capital of the world which is now more categorized, adaptive and technologically advanced than ever before. The value of Captagon exports from Syria in 2020 is estimated at no less than 3.46 billion US dollars, which exceeds the value of all Syrian exports. It explains the financial resources that helped the Syrian regime manage the Syrian "economy" for a decade.



Since with the collapse of the Syrian economy and the deprivation of the Syrian treasury of most of its oil, agricultural and tourism resources, and the weakness of industrial activity, the drug trade, including cannabis and amphetamine-type stimulants, has become a profitable trade that cannot logically take place without knowledge and perhaps under the direct supervision of the Syrian regime. Otherwise, how is this smuggled? Huge quantities of drugs from the official port of Latakia! Indeed, Ms. Wally's Office of Drug and Crime Control states that intercepted Captagon exports can be traced through areas nominally under Syrian regime control. Including the crossings (i.e. the Nassib crossing with Jordan) and smuggling routes (through Daraa, As-Suwayda and the western countryside of Homs). and port facilities. (Latakia and Tartous). He stresses that cannabis cultivation is concentrated along the porous border with Lebanon. The report suggests that cannabis and synthetic drugs are produced to varying degrees in all parts of Syria.



How did Mrs. Wali of Egyptian origin, morally and “internationally”, appoint “Ambassador” Khaddour as a representative of the Syrian regime to “fight crime and drugs”, the same regime responsible for manufacturing millions of Captagon pills that destroy the youth of the world, as 70 million pills were confiscated in 2015 Alone coming from the same system? Was this done with the approval of UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres? Did not the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay, declare in September 2013 that there is evidence “indicating responsibility” for Syrian President Bashar al-Assad for war crimes and crimes against humanity in Syria, the Captagon capital of the world? Did Mrs. Wally not hear what Pillay said? Does this behavior not raise the question of questioning the moral stance and mismanagement of the United Nations as an institution in more than one direction?

The value of agricultural products exports during the year 2020 amounted to 8.96 million dollars - according to the Chamber of Agriculture in Damascus and its countryside - and according to the Minister of Economy of the Syrian regime Samer Al-Khalil - February 2021 - Syrian exports amounted to one billion euros in 2020, while the value of Syrian drug exports is estimated at 4.3 billion dollars. It constitutes three times of all current Syrian exports, so it has become clear that the drug trade has become a real financial artery to finance the Syrian regime, making the economy of the Syrian regime, by relying on financial resources from the hashish and drug trade, the economy of the Hashashin?

agricultural exports

96.8
Million Dollar

Drugs Exports

3.4
Billion Dollar



Region	Sub Region	Country	Drug	2015	2016	2017	2018
Asia	Near and Middle East/ South-West Asia	Syrian Arab Republic	Amphetamine	4,176	716	1,488	2,055
			Other stimulants				147
			Cocaine salts	0			0
			Crack		0		
			Cannabis plants	27		30	48
			Cannabis seed			34	163
			Hashish (resin)	2,944	1,161	1,735	5,167
			Marijuana (herb)	1	0	0	0
			Other types of cannabis	0	0	2	
			Heroin	10	4	13	1
			Non-specified precursors	568			
			Non-specified sedatives	1		12	
			Psychotropic substances		20		

Region	Sub Region	Country	Drug	2015	2016	2017	2018
Asia	Near and Middle East/ South-West Asia	Lebanon	Amphetamine	2,561	2,175	1,337	880
			Ecstasy-type substances	0	1	6	5
			Methamphetamine			0	0
			Other stimulants				
			Prescription stimulants	0			
			Cocaine salts	168	185	121	
			Non-specified cocaine			24	
			Other coca/cocaine type				174
			Cannabis oil	0		0	1
			Cannabis seed	1,089	5	31	107
			Hashish (resin)	6,678	7,637	6,369	8,352
			Marijuana (herb)	17	52	21	32
			Other types of cannabis	2,752	0		
			LSD			0	0
			Other Hallucinogens		0		0
			Heroin	6	4	3	5
			Opium	0	0		6
			Pharmaceutical	2	53	19	4
			Acetic anhydride				
			Other precursors	16,082	0		245

Source: Data UNODC -United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

Syria turned from a fragile state before 2011 to a real top failed state in the world in 2022, where nearly 90 percent live below the poverty line, and the unemployment rate exceeds 80 percent, and it has become a country divided into three areas of influence that lost its oil income, which was a third of the GDP. The national income and lost control of its crossings, besides that Syrian regime and its allies destroyed most of the infrastructure over a period of twelve years.

Over the past decade, and due to the regime and its allies killing more than a million people and displacing more than half of Syria's population, the Syrian economy has lost more than three-quarters of its agricultural and industrial production, and almost all its income from tourism.

In the face of this economic catastrophe, a political solution should have been urgent, but the regime, along with its allies, preferred to use another income, which is hashish, Captagon and other financial contrabands, to secure financial support for its the militias. It has been proven through a lot of evidence that the Captagon trafficking in Syria received official support and organized by the Syrian regime and its Iranian and Lebanese allies, and these illegal trafficking in Syria were not done by just ordinary smuggling gangs, as confirmed by the Jordanian authorities and others.

Executive Summary

Syria sank into a complex crisis a decade ago. Multipolar foreign military intervention, massive refugee flows and internal displacement, violent extremism, digital disinformation, politicization of aid, and paralysis of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms are just a few of the factors that combine to make the Syrian war a defining conflict for this generation.

In addition to these challenges, Syria can also claim another shameful distinction of the so-called new wars: it has become one of the world's most important nations when examining the international war on drug and narcotics.

On July 1, 2020, Italian port officials announced that 84 million tablets of the synthetic anesthetic Captagon, worth \$1.1 billion, had been seized on board three cargo ships from Syria. The incident attracted global media attention because it was one of the largest drug seizures in history and because the drugs were wrongly attributed to the Islamic State (IS), which authorities alleged was dealing in drugs to "finance jihad" (sic). [2] It can be argued that drug production and trafficking have always been poorly understood aspects of the Syrian conflict. While attention has been paid to drug use among combatants, little attention has been paid to the societal and individual costs of drug proliferation during the conflict. Even more important is the structural dynamics of drug trafficking and its impact on the course of the conflict itself. The Syrian state has regained control of a large part of the country since 2018, leaving drug smuggling in Syria more extensive and widespread.



محققون إيطاليون يعاينون أكبر شحنة مخدرات في العالم قادمة من سورية - 1 من تموز (دير شبينغل)

Main intakes

Syria is a narco state with two main drugs of concern: hashish and the amphetamine-type stimulant Captagon. Syria is the world center for Captagon production, which is now more industrialized, adapted and technologically advanced than ever before.

The value of Captagon exports from Syria in 2020 amounted to at least \$3.46 billion dollars. Although speculative, the market cap is believed to be much higher than this. Although Captagon smuggling has been among the sources of funding used by anti-state armed groups, the consolidation of territorial control has enabled the Assad regime and its key regional allies to cement their role as major beneficiaries of the Syrian drug trade.

The drug trade will perpetuate the conflict in Syria, undermine the rule of law, and impede the restoration of comprehensive economic functions. In addition to the social costs borne by the Syrians themselves, the Syrian drug trade will also have a destabilizing effect on neighboring and regional countries, which will have to bear additional social and law enforcement burdens as a result.

Action Points

- ▶ For international donors, policy makers, and providers of aid, the Syrian narco state encompasses two different sets of problems: regime-controlled drug trafficking (which is largely beyond the reach of donor-funded programs) and the social and societal costs of drug use (which can begin being addressed with a harm reduction strategy that begins with data collection and programming that targets some of the root causes of drug use.)
- ▶ It is likely that the Syrian narcotics industry will not be curbed until the conflict itself ends and political conditions allow international enforcement initiatives to coordinate directly with the non-Assad Syrian regime . This is a long-standing proposition for sure.
- ▶ A harm reduction strategy based on mental health and psychosocial support that addresses conflict trauma may be an effective starting point for harm reduction, although it will remain an incomplete solution to this multidimensional issue.
- ▶ Despite the stigma, drug use is a pervasive legacy of the long and seemingly endless Syrian conflict. Accurate data collection and analysis to better map and understand the scope and nature of drug use in Syria can assist in more targeted implementation.
- ▶ Drug exports from Syria are a direct result of the protracted conflict. Enhanced coordination with regional customs, borders, and law enforcement agencies could mitigate this destabilizing regional impact of the Syrian crisis. However, it is important not to confuse anti-drug law enforcement initiatives with high-security counterterrorism operations, or to enable socially repressive reactionary anti-drug practices.
- ▶ Ultimately, policy makers and aid implementers should articulate goals that relate to illicit drug financing and the social effects of drug use. The first is strategic considerations rooted in drug financing and the relationship between crime and conflict. The latter are moral and human imperatives resulting from the lack of progress towards a sustainable solution to the conflict.

Confiscations of ATS in Turkey (in kilograms)

2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010
566	658	251	261	179	1,150	163	291	272

Source: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

Confiscations of ATS in Lebanon (in kilograms)

2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010
880	1,337	2,175	2,561	5,997	2,163	263	85	116

Source: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

Confiscations of ATS in Jordan (in kilograms)

2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010
N/A	N/A	13,486	N/A	5,394	3,828	2,694	3,544	923

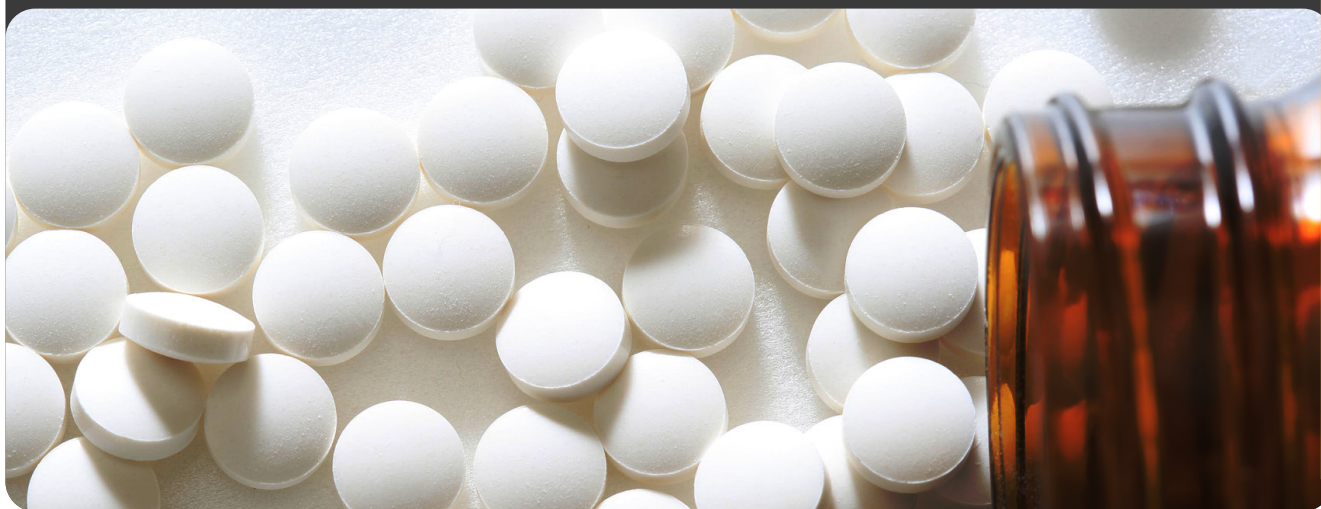
Source: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

The rise of the drug state

It is impossible to paint a picture of the rise of the Syrian narcotics state without first identifying its roots in Europe's drug law enforcement initiatives. The emerging drug Captagon was produced in Syria as an indirect result of the intensification of drug law enforcement in Europe, especially Bulgaria, in the early 2000s (see inset: What is Captagon?) The elimination of Captagon manufacturing in Europe has driven production to fragile states near the primary consumer markets for recreational drugs in the Arabian Peninsula. [4] In Lebanon, where a weak central state had limited control and was unable to enforce anti-trafficking measures, the Captagon industry expanded rapidly in the mid-2000s. Iranian forces are said to have pushed the Lebanese industry by supplying its local allies with synthetic drug equipment in the aftermath of the July 2006 war [5]. The illicit Captagon laboratory discovered in Lebanon in 2007 was the first to be officially reported to the relevant United Nations office, Drugs and Crime (UNODC) throughout the Levant. In late 2011, Syria did not officially report the discovery of a single Captagon lab, although the Syrian regime acknowledged "high demand" for the drug domestically and local Captagon seizures nearly doubled between 2008 and 2009. The truth, denied by the Syrian authorities, emerged after 2011.

What is Captagon?

Syria has a long history of cannabis production, but the drug most associated with the ongoing crisis in the country is the amphetamine-type stimulant Captagon, which is still little known outside the Middle East region. Captagon is the brand name for a drug developed in the 1960s and is described as a treatment for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), narcolepsy, and depression. The clinical effects of Captagon differ slightly from those of well-known drugs still commonly used to treat ADHD, although it was no longer usable in clinical settings by the 1980s. The drug improves users' situational awareness and provides an increase in energy. It can increase focus, reduce appetite, and relieve anxiety. Like amphetamines and other stimulants consumed in nearly all modern conflicts, the drug is a force multiplier for combatants undertaking long-endurance missions or seeking to eliminate fatigue and boredom in combat environments. Media reports describe Captagon as "chemical bravery" and portray its users as "zombie-like" or fearless "super soldiers" are circulated widely. These reports are rooted in exaggeration and Orientalist fiction and not in clinical reality



In Syria today, Captagon is best understood not as a specific drug, but as a general class of synthetic steroids. Pills sold as Captagon rarely contain phenethylamine, the active compound found in branded Captagon. Instead, the pills produced in Syria today are typically made from a mixture of the most common substances, including caffeine, amphetamine, and theophylline. Formulas are adapted based on available resources, including diverted medicines and pre-formulated compounds that are transported by road and packaged in Syria. Despite these circumstances, the narcotic pills that are trafficked in Syria are usually described as Half Moon which indicates the real Captagon. Two grades of so-called Captagon pills are found in the country: low-quality yellow pills and high-quality white pills. The latter are more expensive and are exported.

One Captagon pill can be made for very little cost. Production facilities are highly mobile. Drug synthesis requires little equipment and only rudimentary chemical knowledge. Since 5,000 tablets can be placed inside a shoebox weighing about 1 kg, the drug is super easy to disguise for export by volume. Captagon consumption within Syria has become a common feature of daily life across the country, with a Captagon pill on the market being worth between 50 cents and \$1, as of early 2021, according to local sources. However, the main overseas market for Captagon is the Arabian Peninsula - particularly Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates - where it is used as a recreational drug.

Cheap

The value of a Captagon pill on the market is between 1 cent and 1 US dollar.

Captagon



Easy to Manufacture

Drug synthesis requires little equipment and only rudimentary chemical knowledge.

Easy to hide

Because 5000 tablets can be placed inside a shoe box weighing about 1 kg.

Wider market

The main overseas market for Captagon is the Arabian Peninsula.

The of the Syrian Narcotics state

The conflict dynamics divide the wartime Syrian drug trade into two separate, albeit ambiguous, periods. The first lasted from the start of the crisis in 2011 until roughly 2018. During this period, war economy activities escalated as the diverse groups that made up the initial opposition fought the Syrian regime and each other. In parallel, pro-government militias, including Iran-backed armed factions, gained a strategic foothold with the fragmentation of the central Syrian state. By the spring of 2013, the beleaguered state had withdrawn into a defensible heartland, ceding mixed armed groups from nearly all of Idlib and Aleppo provinces, most of the land east of the Euphrates, and major pockets of central and southern Syria. Illicit economies flourished in the space vacated by the state, and Syria emerged as the "Captagon capital of the world" as control of drug production and movement became an important source of income for diverse armed groups.

This had changed by 2018; a year that can be seen as an inflection point in the conflict. In 2018, the Syrian regime achieved a series of major military victories, retaking pockets of the opposition in Eastern Ghouta, northern Homs countryside, and southern Syria. Collectively, the campaigns have driven the armed and political opposition into marginal areas along the Syrian-Turkish border and re-established state authority over major road networks, strategic international borders, and high-traffic commercial crossing points. The events of that year had an impact on the development of Syria as an equally important drug state. The return of state control coincided with a significant shift in drug flows from Syria. Buoyed by drug shipments on a commercial scale, interceptions of Syrian Captagon and hashish abroad increased significantly in the period since 2018. In addition to the growth of Syrian pharmaceutical exports, a profound qualitative change has also emerged, and concealment of drug shipments has become more technically complex. A growing body of evidence indicates the involvement of well-established figures in the Syrian regime and their regional allies in the volatile regional drug trade centered in Syria. Whereas, in earlier periods, drug smuggling was attributed to armed groups, some of which explicitly threatened the Syrian state, since 2018, drug trafficking has risen as its profits become a critical financial lifeline for the Assad regime and its international allies.

Although the Syrian drug trade fluctuates across the front lines, its apparent nerve center is a government-controlled area. The production of synthetic drugs depends on imports of chemical precursors from India, Latin America, Russia and elsewhere. These imports enter government-controlled Syria via Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq. Meanwhile, intercepted Captagon exports can be traced through areas nominally under Syrian regime control, including crossings (the Nassib crossing with Jordan), smuggling routes (through Daraa, Sweida, and the western Homs countryside), and port facilities (Latakia and Tartous). Cannabis cultivation is concentrated along the porous border with Lebanon. However, cannabis and synthetic drugs are likely to be produced to varying degrees in each Syrian region.

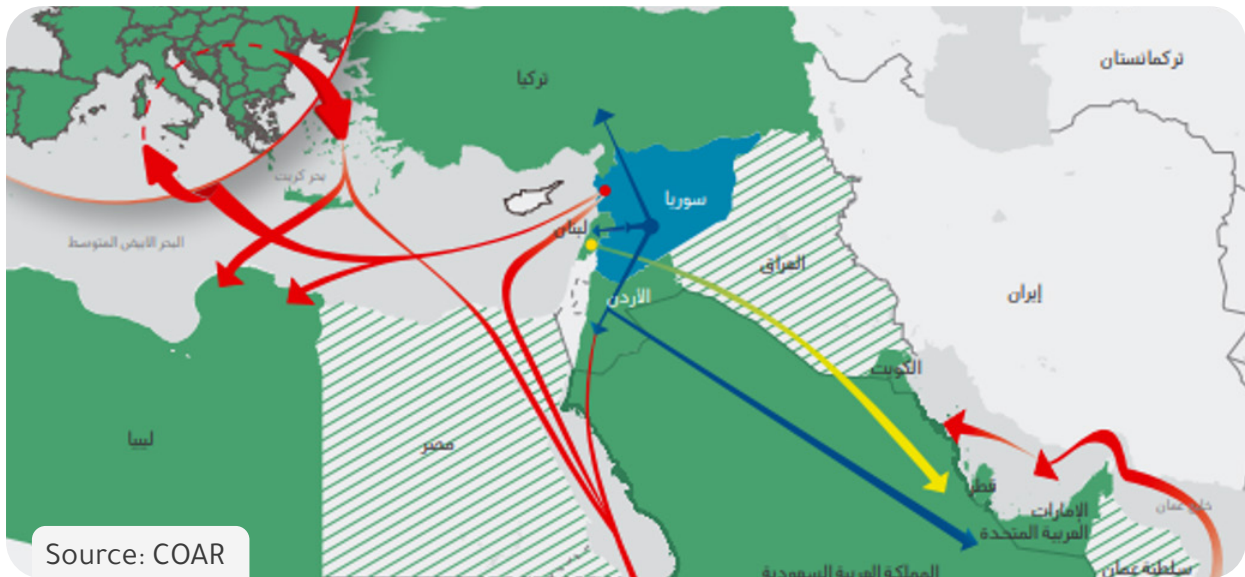
The geography of the Syrian drug trade

The local dynamics in the Syrian drug trade reflect the ambiguity of fragmented regional control. The drug trade is centered on government-controlled territory, but it is found throughout Syria. In each of the three distinct areas of state control—the opposition-held northwest, the SDF-controlled northeastern, and the government-controlled areas (central, southern, and coastal Syria)—trade conditions vary depending on local relationships and sources. Each region has variable access to inputs, markets and major transit routes.



Triangle trade: major drug export routes

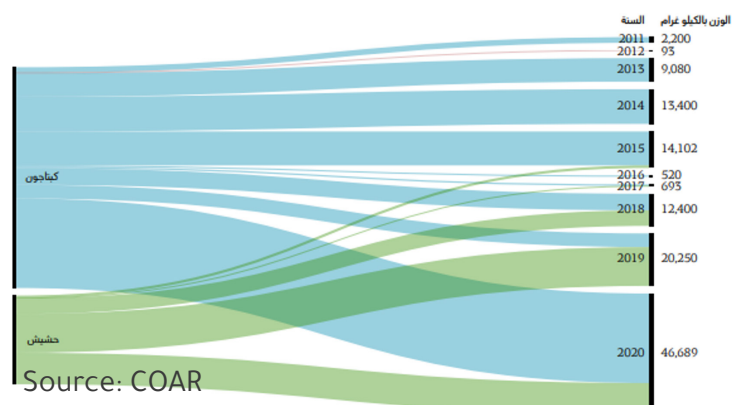
Drugs leave Syria for three main destinations: North Africa, the Arabian Peninsula and Europe. Available evidence indicates that Europe currently serves as a transit hub for drugs destined primarily for the Middle East and North African (MENA) markets.



Northeast Syria

Northeast Syria is distinguished from other regions of the country by the relatively limited extent of domestic drug smuggling. Domestically grown cannabis in the form of cannabis is exported to Iraq, but this trade is believed to be limited, although more data is needed. As such, cannabis grown in northeastern Syria is consumed, to a large extent, within the territory of the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria. Production takes place on a small scale near Amuda and Al-Yarubiyah, in the Hasakah Governorate, and along the Euphrates River, particularly in the area near Shuhayl in the Deir Ezzor Governorate. According to local sources, the most important site for large-scale drug cultivation in the northeast of the country is near Ayn al-Arab (Kobani) in the northeastern province of Aleppo. Kobani hashish is popular in northeastern Syria due to its affordability. Oddly enough, some hashish is also grown in Ras al-Ain - now under the control of Turkey-backed armed groups that clash frequently with the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) - and smuggled across the front lines to Autonomous Administration areas, where it is consumed directly or into northern Iraq.

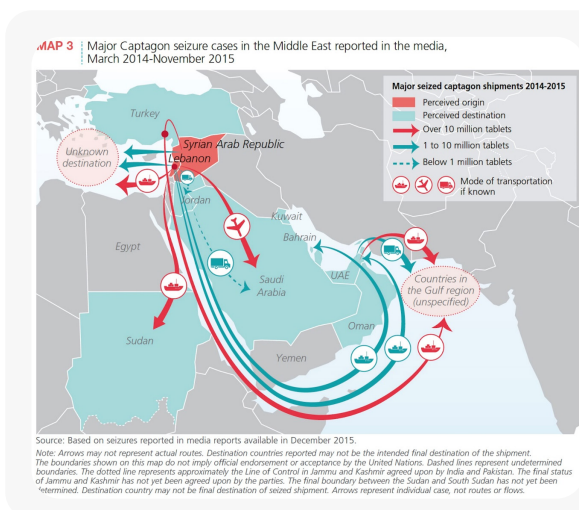
Interdiction of Syrian narcotics abroad



The production of synthetic medicines on an industrial scale is not known in northeastern Syria, according to local sources. However, the fact that only simple equipment is required for the packaging of synthetic drugs means that the existence of clandestine facilities should not be ruled out. Local sources indicate that the market for Captagon and other narcotic stimulants in the region is fueled primarily by active militants. Captagon and other drugs enter northeastern Syria from opposition-held areas through Manbij. Meanwhile, low-quality amphetamines enter the northeast via smuggling routes located along the region's broad border with government-controlled areas. Local sources indicate that the drugs reached northeastern Syria from Iraq through Al Yarubiyah. Although no further details regarding this entry point are available, it indicates that Syria's relationship with regional pharmaceutical production is volatile and to some extent bidirectional.

Between 2014 and 2015, Captagon made international headlines as the super drug fueling the Syrian civil war. It was supposed to be used by fighters in large numbers, and its sale financed various groups engaged in the fighting. To an American or Western audience, Captagon was an unknown entity. Drugs in the Middle East appeared contradictory, with many highlighting strict Islamic regulations regarding the use of drugs and other intoxicants. Opium cultivation in Afghanistan is well documented, but it was generally assumed that the medicines produced in and around the Middle East were destined for European and American markets, not the other way around. America and Europe were seen as a barrage of drugs, and the international community sought to restrict their unimpeded transportation from place to place.

Captagon, also known as fenethylline, is a combination of two drugs: theophylline and amphetamine. At high doses, the drug increases alertness, produces a feeling of euphoria, and reduces the need or desire for sleep and food. Captagon was widely used during the 1960s and 1970s to treat people with ADHD, narcolepsy, and depression, but was eventually banned in 1986 by the World Health Organization (WHO) due to its addictive properties.



Captagon abuse has been present in the Middle East for decades, with smuggling centers in Lebanon and Syria. The vast majority of Captagon use is in the Arabian Peninsula - it is said to be the most popular drug there, accounting for 40% of Saudi youth aged 12-22. A plane belonging to a Saudi was seized in Beirut in 2015 and contained two tons of Captagon pills

The United Nations World Drug Report has repeatedly noted the increased use and trafficking of Captagon since the 2000s, but only in 2015 the drug captured the mainstream media due to its supposed use by jihadist groups, particularly the Islamic State. The media also reported how the production and sale of Captagon fueled many other organizations such as Hezbollah, components of the Free Syrian Army, and even the Assad regime.

Captagon production centers moved to Syria after they were closed in Lebanon after 2011, and there are 15 huge factories that produce drugs and Captagon in Syria (the map is attached). It has a solid infrastructure to establish factories that can produce medicine in large quantities to this day, and they have imported a lot of medicine production lines to Syria from Korea and others for this purpose, and there are no official figures, of course, about where it was produced and who produced it, and huge shipments of Captagon were intercepted in Jordan, Lebanon, even Turkey and the Gulf. The one who suffered the most from the issue is Jordan after opening the Nassib Crossing, and even Jordan made an official UN request in order to help eliminate the organized gangs that were mostly raided by Maher al-Assad's forces, and it turned out that they are a regular army and not scattered single gangs.

As the Eastern Jordanian Military Region Command revealed in February 2022, the death toll of drug smugglers coming from the Syrian territories in the north of the country had risen to 30 smugglers since the beginning of 2022, while the Jordanian Armed Forces monitored more than 160 smuggling networks in southern Syria.

The Director of Military Information, Colonel Mustafa Al-Hiyari, told CNN in February that "Jordan is waging an undeclared war" on behalf of neighboring countries, and that the border guards are facing daily infiltration attempts, in response to a question for the site about the sources of smuggled drugs and the nationalities of smugglers. After it was announced earlier that Syria has become a major center for its manufacture, Al-Hiyari said that there is "cooperation by Syrian outposts" with some smugglers in some cases, confirmed by the Jordanian side and according to what was monitored in pictures and videos.



Brendan Boyle



French Hill



Michael McCaul

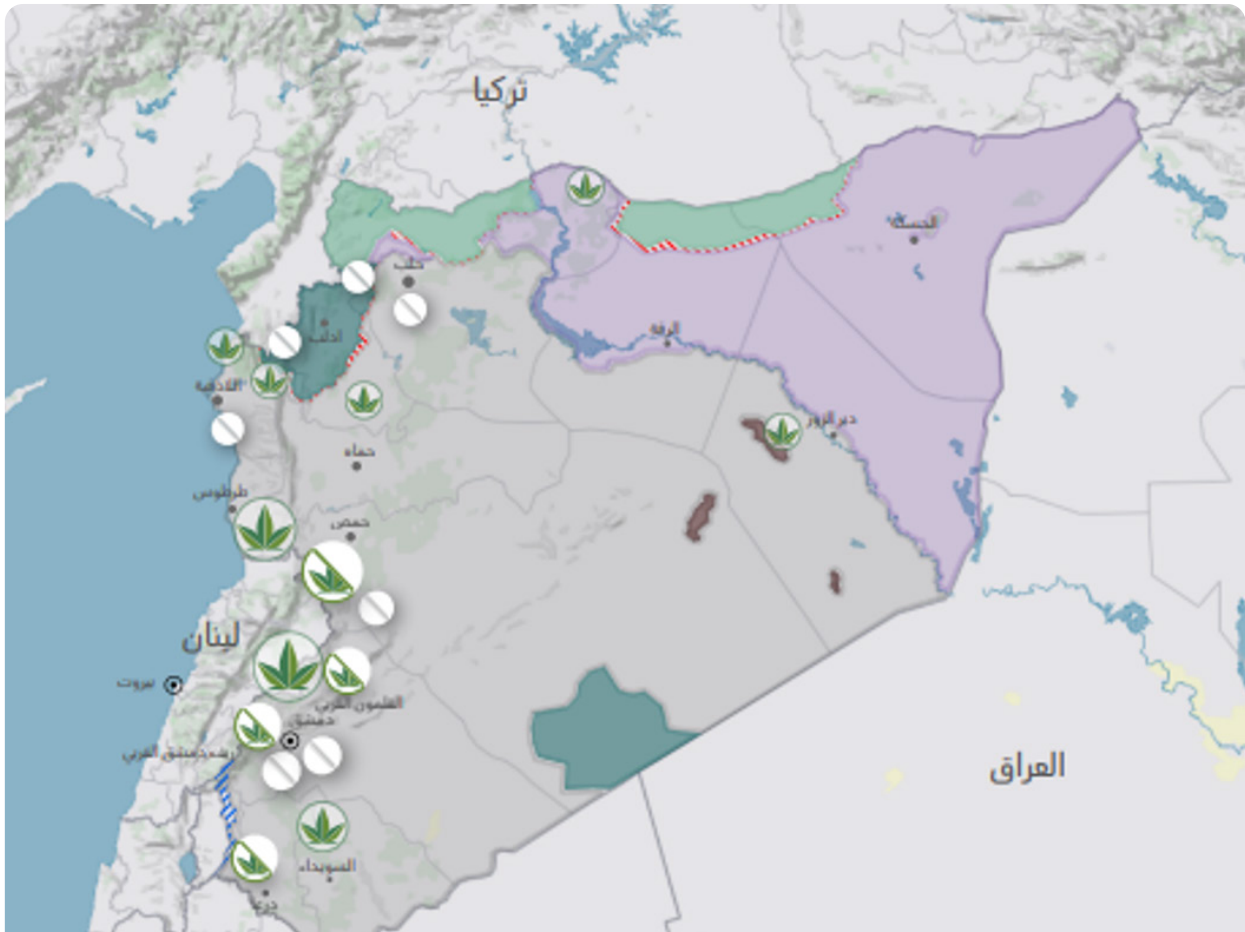


Jim Risch

Lead Republican Senator Mike McCaul and Senator Jim Risch have sent a letter to Secretary of State Anthony Blinken warning that Jordan is increasingly threatened by the flow of Captagon across its border and that it has had several dangerous skirmishes with drug traffickers on its border with Syria.

The letter warned that Saudi Arabia was "also under attack from the influx of Syrian Captagon" and had to increase security resources for interdiction efforts.

The main places of production of Captagon are in Syria and Lebanon



Source: The Captagon Threat A Profile of Illicit Trade, Consumption, and Regional Realities, By Caroline Rose and Alexander Söderholm, INTELLIGENCE BRIEFING, New Lines Institute for Strategy and Policy.

But more important is how the use of Captagon relates to the extreme violence that has characterized the Syrian civil war.

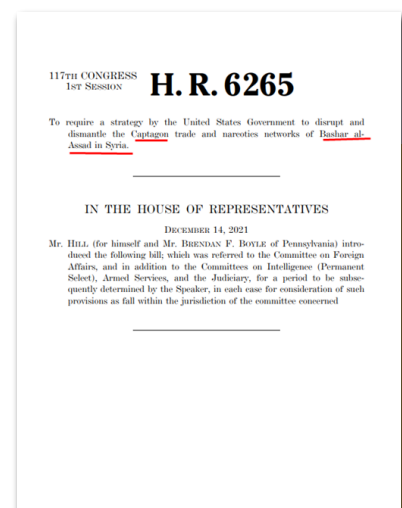
The volume of confiscated cannabis drugs from Syria reached 46.6 tons in 2020, 20.2 tons in 2019, and 12.4 tons in 2018. As for Captagon, its estimated quantities in Syria reached 14.1 tons in 2015, 13.4 tons in 2014, and 9 tons in 2013. More than 10 million Captagon pills were confiscated by land, sea and air from the UAE, Bahrain, Sudan, Saudi Arabia and others (2014-2015.)

The estimated market value of Captagon rose from about \$1.8 billion in 2017 to between \$2.9 billion and \$3.46 billion in 2020 – more than the country's legitimate exports that year, as Syria has a market estimated to be worth at least \$5.7 billion in 2021 according to Captagon Threat Report: A Glimpse of Illicit Trade, Consumption and Regional Realities, April 2022 Intelligence Briefing.

The value of exports of Syrian agricultural products, according to the Chamber of Agriculture in Damascus and its countryside, during the year 2020 was very low, amounting to only 96.8 million dollars. Ten times less than it was before 2011, meaning that the value of all Syrian exports is three times less than the estimated value of Syrian drug exports, originating at \$3.4 billion. The cannabis and drug trade is the “Hashashis economy”!

For 50 years, the Syrian regime and its Baathist governments were not satisfied with abusing the Syrians, shedding their blood, torturing and killing them in prisons, forcibly displacing them, destroying their homes, hospitals, schools and infrastructure, selling their wealth to their allies, burdening the Syrian people with Iranian and Russian debts, robbing the Syrians of their money and confiscating it, and defaming the reputation of their country further. A beacon of civilization in the world when Syria was the capital of the Umayyads 14 centuries ago, and seen as the cradle of civilization in the world with a bright civilized reputation, and an essential corridor of the Silk Road that contributed to the globe while providing many scholars who etched their names in the pages of scientific history has turned to darkness in the hands of the regime’s allies and its supporting militias and its allies to the capital of Captagon.

On July 29, 2022, the House Foreign Affairs Committee discussed Rep. French Hill’s resolution, a proposed resolution titled Captagon (an acronym for: Combating Assad’s Propagation of Drug Smuggling,) Countering Assad’s Proliferation Trafficking and Garnering of Narcotics. It was presented by Rep. Hill (R-AR) and Rep. Brendan F. Boyle (D-PA) on December 14, 2021, as Resolution 6265 (attached to the text of the resolution). It requires the Federal government to develop an interagency strategy to disrupt and dismantle drug production, trafficking, and networks associated with the Bashar al-Assad regime in Syria.



Rep. French Hill’s (AR) H.R. 6265, Countering Assad’s Proliferation Trafficking and Garnering of Narcotics (CAPTAGON)

“These drugs not only cripple the local population, but also fuel hostilities and fund the Assad regime and Iranian-backed groups in the region,” Rep. Hill said. The US government should do everything in its power to disrupt industrial-level drug production that is currently underway in Syria, and I thank my colleagues on the Foreign Affairs Committee for introducing this bill requiring the US government to develop an interagency strategy to disrupt and dismantle narcotics. Production, trafficking and affiliated networks associated with the Assad regime. The role of the Assad regime in the Captagon trade directly undermines US and international sanctions on the regime, while making the Middle East more dangerous, said Michael McCaul, Chairman of the Republican House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee and Chairman of the Republican House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee Michael McCaul.

Draft Resolution 6265 - passed by the House Foreign Affairs Committee on June 30, 2022 - calls on the White House to submit the strategy to Congress for review within 180 days of approval, if it includes support for regional allies that receive significant amounts of Captagon during smuggling operations. The strategy includes a general campaign to highlight the Assad regime's relationship with illegal drug trafficking and a list of countries that receive large shipments of Captagon, in addition to evaluating the capabilities of these countries to stop smuggling operations.

Shouldn't the world cooperate with the Syrian people in order to clean up this reputation inflicted by the Syrian regime and its military and security apparatus, when Bashar al-Assad's name was mentioned in Resolution 6265 no less than 12 times? This is not only done by stopping the dissemination of Captagon poison to kill the youth of the world and discredit Syria, but by speeding up a political solution after 12 years of suffering the Syrians and not playing the Syrian card in political auctions between the countries of the world; whether in order to pass the Iranian nuclear agreement or in order to make Syria a place for conflict with Russia and in revenge for what it did in Ukraine, or strife with Syria's neighbors to serve agendas far from the goal of the Syrians when they came out with their revolution for freedom, dignity, justice and Syria's renaissance.

117TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. R. 6265

To require a strategy by the United States Government to disrupt and dismantle the Captagon trade and narcotics networks of Bashar al-Assad in Syria.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

DECEMBER 14, 2021

Mr. HILL (for himself and Mr. BRENDAN F. BOYLE of Pennsylvania) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Foreign Affairs, and in addition to the Committees on Intelligence (Permanent Select), Armed Services, and the Judiciary, for a period to be subsequently determined by the Speaker, in each case for consideration of such provisions as fall within the jurisdiction of the committee concerned

A BILL

To require a strategy by the United States Government to disrupt and dismantle the Captagon trade and narcotics networks of Bashar al-Assad in Syria.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Countering Assad’s
5 Proliferation Trafficking And Garnering Of Narcotics
6 Act” or the “CAPTAGON Act”.

1 **SEC. 2. INTERAGENCY STRATEGY TO DISRUPT AND DIS-**
2 **MANTLE NARCOTICS PRODUCTION AND**
3 **TRAFFICKING AND AFFILIATED NETWORKS**
4 **LINKED TO THE REGIME OF BASHAR AL-**
5 **ASSAD IN SYRIA.**

6 (a) SENSE OF CONGRESS.—It is the sense of Con-
7 gress that—

8 (1) the Captagon trade linked to the regime of
9 Bashar al-Assad in Syria is a transnational security
10 threat; and

11 (2) the United States should develop and imple-
12 ment an interagency strategy to deny, degrade, and
13 dismantle Assad-linked narcotics production and
14 trafficking networks.

15 (b) REPORT AND STRATEGY REQUIRED.—Not later
16 than 180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act,
17 the Secretary of Defense, the Secretary of State, the Sec-
18 retary of the Treasury, the Administrator of the Drug En-
19 forcement Administration, the Director of National Intel-
20 ligence, and the heads of other appropriate Federal agen-
21 cies shall provide to the appropriate congressional commit-
22 tees a written strategy to disrupt and dismantle narcotics
23 production and trafficking and affiliated networks linked
24 to the regime of Bashar al-Assad in Syria. Such strategy
25 shall include each of the following:

1 (1) A strategy to target, disrupt, and degrade
2 networks that directly or indirectly support the nar-
3 cotics infrastructure of the Assad regime, particu-
4 larly through diplomatic and intelligence support to
5 law enforcement investigations and to build counter-
6 narcotics capacity to partner countries through as-
7 sistance and training to law enforcement services in
8 countries, other than Syria, that are receiving or
9 transiting large quantities of Captagon.

10 (2) Information relating to the use of statutory
11 authorities, including the Caesar Syria Civilian Pro-
12 tection Act of 2019 (22 U.S.C. 8791 note), the For-
13 eign Narcotics Kingpin Designation Act (popularly
14 referred to as the “Kingpin Act”), section 489 of the
15 Foreign Assistance Act (relating to the international
16 narcotics control strategy report), and associated ac-
17 tions to target individuals and entities directly or in-
18 directly associated with the narcotics infrastructure
19 of the Assad regime.

20 (3) Information relating to the use of global
21 diplomatic engagements associated with the eco-
22 nomic pressure campaign against the Assad regime
23 to target its narcotics infrastructure.

24 (4) A strategy for leveraging multilateral insti-
25 tutions and cooperation with international partners

1 to disrupt the narcotics infrastructure of the Assad
2 regime.

3 (5) A strategy for mobilizing a public commu-
4 nications campaign to increase awareness of the ex-
5 tent of the connection of the Assad regime to illicit
6 narcotics trade.

7 (6) A description of the countries receiving or
8 transiting large shipments of Captagon, and an as-
9 sessment of the counter-narcotics capacity of such
10 countries to interdict or disrupt the smuggling of
11 Captagon, including an assessment of current
12 United States assistance and training programs to
13 build such capacity in such countries.

14 (c) FORM OF REPORT.—The report required under
15 subsection (b) shall be submitted in an unclassified form,
16 but may contain a classified annex.

17 (d) APPROPRIATE CONGRESSIONAL COMMITTEES.—
18 In this section, the term “appropriate congressional com-
19 mittees” means—

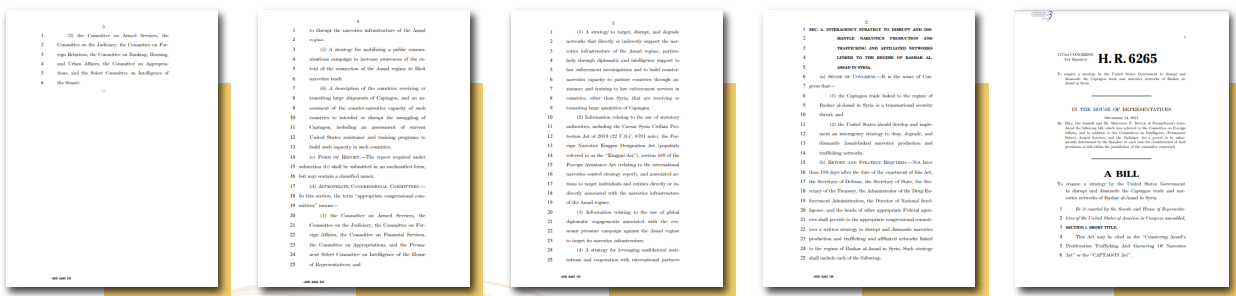
20 (1) the Committee on Armed Services, the
21 Committee on the Judiciary, the Committee on For-
22 eign Affairs, the Committee on Financial Services,
23 the Committee on Appropriations, and the Perma-
24 nent Select Committee on Intelligence of the House
25 of Representatives; and

1 (2) the Committee on Armed Services, the
2 Committee on the Judiciary, the Committee on For-
3 eign Relations, the Committee on Banking, Housing,
4 and Urban Affairs, the Committee on Appropria-
5 tions, and the Select Committee on Intelligence of
6 the Senate.

○

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