

Dear Secretary Lew:

We write to urge the Department of the Treasury to designate those Russian banks that have helped enable Syria to avoid the effects of sanctions. In our view, these institutions are complicit in prolonging the brutal conflict in Syria and should be barred from the U.S. financial system.

According to numerous reports, banks such as VTB, Vneshekonombank, and Gazprombank are carrying on “business as usual” with Syria, and have repeatedly undermined American, European Union, and United Nations sanctions. Such activities have reportedly included Vneshekonombank’s facilitating Syrian payments for S-300 missile batteries, VTB’s holding President Assad’s personal funds, and Gazprombank’s making payments for crude oil.

Russian bank support violates international sanctions by enabling Syria to pay for imports and receive funds for exports. This assistance eases much of the financial burden on the Assad regime, allowing it to continue military purchases and pay the soldiers that sustain the war in Syria.

Most of the international community has banded together in the face of Assad’s cruel war to isolate his regime. The financial lifeline offered by Russia’s state-owned banks undermines Executive Orders 13582, 13573, and 13608. We urge the Office of Foreign Assets Control to vigorously pursue all violations of the U.S. sanctions regime, designating any and all Russian individuals and entities found to be in non-compliance.

We write to you mindful that there is clear and compelling evidence that the Syrian regime has used chemical weapons to brutally murder over 1000 Syrians, including hundreds of children. It is now more critical than ever that you swiftly designate those financial institutions that have profited from violating sanctions to prop up the Syrian regime.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent issue.

Sincerely,

Kelly Ayotte, United States Senator

Richard Blumenthal, United States Senator

John Cornyn, United States Senator

Jeanne Shaheen, United States Senator