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To the Editor of the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung (NZZ)*

Today (17 June), the United States launched a fresh attack in the war against Syria. It comes in the form of draconian 'Caesar Act' economic sanctions, as reported in the *NZZ* (Neue US-Sanktionen erschüttern Syrien) on 16 June 2020. These are unilateral sanctions, imposed without UN Security Council approval. The declared war goal is regime change in Damascus, as stated by the US President in 2011.

By imposing its own sanctions on Syria in 2011, Switzerland became a participant, together with the EU, Turkey, and the Arab League, albeit a very junior one, in Washington's anti-Syrian coalition of coercion.

Nearly two years ago, the UN Special Rapporteur on Unilateral Coercive Measures, Dr. Idriss Jazairy, warned that the sanctions were blocking Syrians' access to "medicines... items related to water and sanitation, public electricity and transportation" and hindering the rebuilding of schools, hospitals and other public buildings.

Today, Syria's economy is on the brink of collapse. Over half the population faces food scarcity, and Syria's currency has plunged 70% since April. The minority of Syrians who were still able to provide for their families are witnessing the collapse of their livelihoods.

If Bern wants to return to a foreign policy based more squarely on the Swiss tradition of neutrality and humanitarianism policy-makers can take three initial steps:

- 1) Terminate Swiss participation in the coalition of coercion against Syria.
- 2) Harmonize Swiss sanctions policy with the 4th Geneva Convention (Art. 33:1) against the collective punishment of civilian populations on account of the alleged crimes of their rulers.
- 3) Commission an independent report building on the disturbing initial findings of the UN Special Rapporteur.

The destruction of national economies by means of economic sanctions can create as much damage to humanity as bullets, bombs and chemical weapons. These sanctions need to be recognized for what they are: weapons of modern warfare.

John Eibner
Director, CSI-Switzerland Foundation

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