

RELEASE IN FULL

From: Sullivan, Jacob J <SullivanJJ@state.gov>
Sent: Monday, September 19, 2011 10:29 AM
To: H
Subject: Syria travel warning

Here is what we told the R's:

Q: What is the significance of the clause "while commercial transportation is still available" in the Department of State's travel warning on Syria? Does the U.S. government have any information to suggest that commercial transportation to or from Syria will come to a stop?

The Department of State is not aware of any imminent halt of commercial transportation to or from Syria.

Given the uncertainty and volatility of the situation in Syria, there is potential for the availability of commercial transportation to deteriorate.

Furthermore, recent U.S. and EU sanctions against Syria may cause some transportation companies to scale back or cease their operations in Syria. Meanwhile, the new U.S. prohibition on the export of services to Syria has made it more difficult to conduct financial transactions using credit cards, which could make it more difficult to purchase airline tickets.

This most recent update to the Travel Warning on Syria includes the same language we have used since April regarding the unreliability of commercial transportation and the recommendation for all U.S. citizens to depart Syria.

Background: On September 16, Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov questioned the Department of State's inclusion of the phrase "while commercial transportation is still available" in the Department of State's September 15 travel notice on Syria. He was particularly interested in whether the U.S. government had information that suggested commercial transportation would become unavailable, or if we were considering actions that would lead to that development. The Department of State's two previous travel warnings on Syria, issued on April 25 and August 5, also recommended that U.S. citizens depart Syria while commercial transportation was available.

Current and previous travel warnings on Syria may be found at:
http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/tw/tw_1764.html