

Press Statement - The United States State Department on Lebanon Bombing Captain Eid

Contributed by US State Department
Saturday, 26 January 2008
Last Updated Saturday, 26 January 2008

Daily Press Briefing
Tom Casey, Deputy Spokesman
Washington, DC
January 25, 2008

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QUESTION: Do you have anything more to say than you did this morning about the attack in Lebanon this morning?

MR. CASEY: I think I pretty much covered it.

QUESTION: Well, what -- do you have any -- are there any particular concerns you have given the intended victim was -- or the victim --

MR. CASEY: The victim, yeah.

QUESTION: Well, one of the victims at least was a pretty significant player in counterterrorism operations.

MR. CASEY: Well, I think it is always a concern when we see these kinds of actions taking place in Lebanon. This certainly isn't the first instance of an attack on someone who is an important figure, either in the security services or in the political establishment there, and it just goes to show that there are forces out there that are trying to undermine Lebanon's legitimate institutions. I think this case, at least as far as I know at this point, fits in with those concerns and that pattern that we've seen. But I don't think it -- at least at this point has raised any special concerns beyond those obvious ones.

QUESTION: Just to follow up --

MR. CASEY: Yeah.

QUESTION: Were there any reports of American injuries in the blast at all, do you know?

MR. CASEY: Not that I'm aware of. As far as I know there were no Americans on the scene and fortunately none or killed or injured. Obviously, and I'll just repeat again what I said this morning, Matt, for those that weren't here. This was a terrible act of terrorism and we condemn it and we offer our condolences to Mr. Eid's family as well as the family and loved ones of those other people who were killed or injured in this.

QUESTION: Tom, how many more of these explosions against people that have been in some ways involved in investigating or looking into Syria's role in Lebanon, how many more of these people need to die before the United States comes out and directly accuses Syria or Syrian agents or people operating under behest of Syria of being behind this? I mean, it seems pretty clear to a lot of people who's been doing this. Why is there reticence?

MR. CASEY: Well, I think, Matt, look, we certainly have concerns and we've talked about our concerns repeatedly about Syrian interference in Lebanon, in its internal political affairs. And the whole basis for the international community's actions in Lebanon, including Resolution 1559 and several of its successors, was based on the need to see Syria fully disengaged from Lebanon and remove itself from its internal political process. And there certainly are suspicions out there that you can hear in Lebanon and elsewhere about who was responsible for this and whether Syria or Syria's -- Syrian-related individuals had a hand in this particular incident or any of the others that we've talked about. That said, there's a difference between people's suspicions and what evidence there actually is and where that leads you. And I

think all we're doing is trying to make sure that we don't make judgments about issues and incidents where there still is not a clear set of evidence linking things.

So part of the reason why we have, for example, the tribunal and the Brammertz investigative process is so that there can be a real serious investigation of the Hariri assassination, that those responsible can be held accountable. But I don't think it helps anyone for us to make accusations or assert that we know who is responsible unless we in fact do.

QUESTION: Yeah, remind me again when the Hariri assassination was?

MR. CASEY: Matt, I --

QUESTION: I mean, it's getting to the point that it begs credulity for people not to be doing anything about this.

MR. CASEY: Well, again --

QUESTION: Or getting up and speaking their mind about it.

MR. CASEY: Well, again, Matt, I think we've spoken out strongly about our concerns about Syrian involvement. But I don't think you or your colleagues would -- if I stood here and said, "We accuse Syria of being directly involved in this," your first question to me would be, "Based on what?" And if my response is, "Based on the fact that there's many suspicions that they are" - I don't think that's a particularly credible position for us to take. Certainly, we want to see the violence in Lebanon end. And we are working with the Lebanese Government, with Prime Minister Siniora and with other regional partners to make sure that happens. We're also making sure that Syria understands that we do not want to see them interfering in Lebanese politics. I think that message is made loud and clear by any number of actions that we have taken, as well as by actions of our friends and neighbors and the international community at the UN.

QUESTION: To your knowledge, has there ever been any evidence uncovered directly linking in any of these attacks? Has anyone ever been brought to justice? Has anyone ever been prosecuted? Has anyone ever been arrested --

MR. CASEY: You'd have to - Matt --

QUESTION: -- or even directly accused?

MR. CASEY: -- Matt, you'd have to talk to the Lebanese about what their investigations have shown. I think Mr. Brammertz and his predecessor have put forward some reports in terms of the Hariri assassination. We've established a special tribunal to be able to handle those cases specifically. We certainly want to see people brought to justice. But again, there's a difference, I think, a very clear difference between having suspicions and having concerns and being able to assert who is exactly responsible for this.

QUESTION: Well, fair enough, and I'll drop it after this. But you know, the people are getting picked off, one by one --

MR. CASEY: You will? Okay.

QUESTION: I mean people who are either anti-Syrian or who have been involved in investigations into alleged Syrian complicity, they're getting killed. And you know, one - literally - I mean, it's systemically they're being assassinated. When is it the time to stop, you know, talking in broad and vague generalizations about the need for no outside interference to Syria? When is the time for that kind of talk over and when is it time to, you know, call a spade a spade?

MR. CASEY: Well, Matt, I don't think that there is anyone in the international community that has worked harder on behalf of Lebanese sovereignty and Lebanese ability to run their own affairs than the United States. We've played a leadership role in helping rally the international community for support for the people of Lebanon, for the Siniora government for investigation into these crimes that are being committed, for international pressure to be brought to bear on Syria to honor the commitments that it has made, as well as to honor the requirements of international law and we're going to continue to do that. But it's a rough game out there. It's a difficult situation and it's a terrible time in many ways for the people of Lebanon who have suffered tremendously over the years from the dominance any number of outside forces, most particularly Syria.

Samir.

QUESTION: Ambassador Satterfield gave (inaudible) a few days ago and calling for new sanctions on Syria. Are you considering putting new sanctions on Syria?

MR. CASEY: Not sure. I haven't seen comments from David to that effect. As you know, we have the Syrian Accountability Act that is on the books. We have sanctions imposed on Syria through that, as well as through some individual nonproliferation measures. Certainly, we're always looking at those issues and those sanctions that are

available to us to see whether there's more that we should be doing.

QUESTION: Despite Syria's presence at Annapolis, is it fair to say that you failed, the U.S. has failed to get them onboard the peace process you launched just a couple of months ago?

MR. CASEY: Well, again, we were pleased to see that Syria did, in fact, attend the conference. We want to see Syria as well as all of Israel's neighbors to be supportive of Israel and the Palestinians as they work towards an agreement on achieving a two state solution. We think that's in everyone's interest. Despite that position gesture on the part of the Syrians, though, their track record remains pretty clear. They continue to provide aid and comfort and support to Palestinian rejectionist groups, including hosting what we talked a little bit about yesterday, which is a conference of those opposed to the Annapolis process. They also continue, as you know, to provide support for Hezbollah and continue to do a number of other steps that are antithetical to their stated desire to see a peaceful resolution of the situation between Israel and Palestine as well as see resolution of their own disputes with Israel.

QUESTION: Have you seen anything positive in terms of support for the peace process in the last two and a half months? It sounds like there's nothing --

MR. CASEY: Well, I can't -- beyond their attendance at the Annapolis conference, I can't say I personally can think of anything off the top of my head that I would view as a particularly supportive effort on the part of the Syrian Government.

QUESTION: Staying on that --

MR. CASEY

Thanks, guys.

(The briefing was concluded at 1:11 p.m.)

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Released on January 25, 2008