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Executive Order to Freeze Assets of Those Posing a Threat to Lebanese Government

Treasury Timetable for Actions Taken Against Those Supporting Negative Activity

Daily Press Briefing
Tom Casey, Deputy Spokesman
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INDEX:
LEBANON

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12:55 p.m. EDT

MR. CASEY: All right. Well, good afternoon, everybody. Don't have anything to start you out with, so let's go to what you've got.

QUESTION: I don't have any questions.

MR. CASEY: You don't have anything? Oh.

QUESTION: Can you amplify or expand upon this order that came out of the White House on freezing assets of those accused of harassing Lebanon?

MR. CASEY: Well, I can talk a little bit about this and this comes out of our desire to make sure that we're doing what we can to support the forces of democracy in Lebanon, including Prime Minister Siniora and his government.

And what this order that the President has announced does is makes it clear that there is now a vehicle, basically through the Treasury Department, to be able to freeze and seize property and other assets that are owned or controlled or in the hands of those individuals that are actively seeking to undermine Lebanon's democratic government and/or try and re-promote Syrian influence and domination of the country. And this is building on existing tools that are out there and that we've used against terrorist groups and other kinds of individuals, but what this does is expands the President's authority to be able to do this specifically to focus on those who pose a direct challenge or a direct threat to democracy in Lebanon.

Now in terms of -- you'll note that the order was put out without an annex listing any individual names. That's something, though, that I know the Treasury Department is speaking to and I suspect you'll see some designations under this order in a fairly short amount of time. But that is something that will come directly out of the Treasury Department as this is primarily their responsibility to enforce.

QUESTION: You mean today?

MR. CASEY: I don't have a timetable for you, Matt. I'd refer to them in terms of exactly when they would look to do this, but I know that they are actively looking at individuals and entities in light of the executive order today and I suspect you'll see something from them very shortly.

QUESTION: In light of the order today, meaning they weren't -- they didn't have anyone in mind when the President signed this (inaudible).

MR. CASEY: I would never imply that.

QUESTION: But --

MR. CASEY: It has now been issued and so now it's formally --

QUESTION: Right.

MR. CASEY: -- there on the books for people.

QUESTION: In the last, I think, month, the President signed two -- this is second of the (inaudible) one that had to do with Iraq as well.

MR. CASEY: Yeah, there was previously -- which was enabling people to take -- Treasury to take similar kinds of actions against, again, individuals or entities that were involved in promoting violence or trying to subvert the political process there.

QUESTION: Both of these seem to be aimed at Iran and Syria. Would you quibble with that?

MR. CASEY: Well, they're aimed at trying to help solve a serious problem for both those countries. What's certainly -- Iran and Syria are the principle sponsors, I would say, of both efforts to undermine the government in Lebanon and efforts to promote militia violence, EFP networks, and the other things we've talked about in Iraq. So to the extent that those countries are engaged in supporting those kinds of negative activities, then yes, it's very much directed against them and their --

QUESTION: Well, is there --

MR. CASEY: -- unhelpful efforts.

QUESTION: So -- okay.

MR. CASEY: Yeah.

QUESTION: So if they are directed against those countries and those unhelpful efforts, is there some thinking in the U.S. Government that there are entities and people in Iran who -- or Syria who would not be covered by both of these, and so you need to have the --

MR. CASEY: Well, again, Matt, I think there are certainly -- there's an overlapping and existing series of executive orders out there, some of which deal specifically with terrorist groups, some of which are sanctions that are applied directly to the Iranian Government, related to proliferation matters, related to other kinds of things.

What we're trying to do with both of these executive orders is make sure we have as many tools in the toolbox as possible to be able to comprehensively deal with the threats that are out there. And I think the feeling was that by putting orders out that specifically focus on, for example, militia violence and negative activities in Iraq, or those that are seeking to subvert democracy in Lebanon, that we were going to make sure that in a comprehensive way, we'd be able to deal with any individuals or groups out there.

So it wouldn't surprise me that some of the people who might be determined to be eligible under this executive order might be eligible under other kinds of orders as well. But what we do, again, want to make sure of, is that we can specifically go after those people who are playing this kind of negative role irregardless of what other kinds of things they might be involved in.