



THE WHITE HOUSE

PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH

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For Immediate Release
Office of the Press Secretary
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Statement by the President

Today, I have signed an Executive Order implementing sanctions on Syria pursuant to the Syria Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Restoration Act of 2003. These sanctions will significantly reduce the level of trade and commercial activity between our two countries, and in particular target entities and officials in or closely associated with the Syrian government who have engaged in actions of concern specified in the Act.

Since 1979, the United States has designated Syria a State Sponsor of Terrorism due to its support for groups such as Hizballah and Palestinian terrorist organizations. In 2003, Congress passed the SAA because of Syria's continued support for terrorism, pursuit of weapons of mass destruction, occupation of Lebanon, and actions undermining U.S. and international efforts with respect to Iraq. Based on Syria's failure to take significant, concrete steps to address the concerns we have raised, I have determined that further economic sanctions be imposed.

The Syrian government must understand that its conduct alone will determine the duration of the sanctions, and the extent to which additional sanctions may be imposed should the Syrian government fail to adopt a more constructive approach to relations with its neighbors, weapons of mass destruction, and terrorism.

If the Syrian government demonstrates a genuine intention to seek true peace by confronting terror and violence, ending its pursuit and development of weapons of mass destruction, and respecting the sovereignty and independence of Lebanon, the United States will respond positively.

Similarly, I urge the Syrian government to offer its full support to the goal of a stable and sovereign Iraq, beginning with redoubled efforts along the border to prevent the movement of foreign fighters into Iraq. The Syrian government has taken some steps in this regard, but must do more, given that individuals bent on sowing terror continue to cross into Iraq from Syria. Additionally, it is time for the Syrian government to comply with its obligations under UN Security Council resolution 1483 and immediately transfer assets belonging to the former Iraqi regime to the Development Fund for Iraq.

This is a momentous time in the Middle East. I call upon the Syrian government to join the ranks of those nations that have committed themselves to political and economic reform, a decision that would benefit -- first and foremost -- the people of Syria. I sincerely hope that the Syrian government will conclude that its interests are best served by joining efforts to build a Middle East that is stable, secure, and free from terror and violence.

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