



Strengthening Efforts to Protect U.S. nationals from Wrongful Detention Abroad

Administration Policy:

President Trump issued an executive order (EO) titled [Strengthening Efforts to Protect U.S. Nationals from Wrongful Detention Abroad](#) which reaffirms that protecting U.S. nationals from wrongful detention abroad is a core priority, declaring that such detentions are coercive tactics by adversaries, undermine the rule of law, and will not be tolerated.

Specifically, this EO authorizes the Secretary of State to designate a foreign country as a State Sponsor of Wrongful Detention if its government wrongfully detains a U.S. national, fails to release a U.S. national after notification, or demonstrates a pattern of wrongful detentions of U.S. or third-country nationals. The EO extends this authority to non-state actors or entities controlling territory of a country, even if not formally recognized as that country's government.

The EO directs the Secretary of State to use existing authorities against designated governments, including sanctions under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act, visa bans under 7031(c) of the Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Act, 2024, inadmissibility under the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA), passport travel restrictions, foreign assistance limits, and export controls under the Arms Export Control Act and Export Control Reform Act.

The Secretary of State may lift this designation if the foreign government releases detained U.S. nationals, demonstrates policy changes, and provides credible assurances against future wrongful detentions, or at the President's discretion. Finally, the EO would clarify that it does not interfere with lawful U.S. investigative or intelligence activities, and that not every detention in a designated country will automatically qualify as wrongful under the Levinson Act.

Background:

- The [Robert Levinson Hostage Recovery and Hostage-Taking Accountability Act](#) codified the [Special Presidential Envoy for Hostage Affairs](#) and put in place a number of mechanisms to secure the recovery of American hostages abroad.
- The [International Emergency Economic Powers Act](#) provides the President the authority to impose economic sanctions in response to a national emergency.
- [7031\(c\) of the Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs](#) provide the Secretary of State with the authority to impose visa bans for persons involved in corruption and human rights abuses.
- The [Arms Export Control Act](#) gives the president of the United States the authority to control the import and export of defense articles and defense services, while the [Export Control Reform Act](#) authorizes the President to control exports for national security and foreign policy purposes.
- During President Biden's administration 24 more Americans were taken captive than rescued in four years. Since returning to office, President Trump and his Administration have [secured](#) the release of 72 detained Americans abroad.
- On September 9th, 2025, President Trump [announced](#) that he had secured the release of Princeton University Ph.D. student and Israeli citizen Elizabeth Tsurkov who had been held captive for over 3 years by the Kata'ib Hezbollah terrorist organization in Iraq.
- A fact sheet from the White House can be found [here](#).