

CBS News Special

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8:50:50 a.m.

4 minutes and 47 seconds

GAYLE KING: You know, Sam, you were listening as we all were. They gave a very thorough accounting of the planning and how it was executed. And clearly, in their minds, it was a huge success but I still didn't hear anything that said why this was an imminent threat.

SAMANTHA VINOGRAD: Well, Gayle —

KING: Can you help us understand that?

VINOGRAD: We did get some answers. We got some answers as to how this mission was executed. We got some answers on what they were targeting missile sites, the Iranian Navy, and ostensibly nuclear facilities as well. We left with a lot of questions. We have questions about why now.

KING: Yes.

VINOGRAD: We did hear and we do know that Iran was rebuilding their ballistic missile capabilities, which do have the capability to strike not just in the Middle East, but also into Europe. What we don't know is why now, whether there was some sort of intelligence or other indication that Iran was preparing to use those ballistic missiles against U.S. facilities or individuals in the region, and we're walking away with a big question, a big question about how long this military conflict is going to go on. Right now, Iran is striking back with their ballistic missiles. They could turn to cyber capabilities or trying to leverage their proxies, not just the region but around the world. And what metrics for success are going to look like? I do think there was a degree of messaging here not just to the American people, but also to remnants of the Iranian regime that the administration is prepared to continue this operation for a long time and because of that any remnants of the regime should consider laying down their arms, working with the United States and more. I also think there was some conditioning for the American people that we are going to suffer more casualties and more fatalities. And I do think that the secretary of war and that the commander of the Joint Chiefs of Staff were trying to condition the American people, that there is going to be more loss in — in the days and weeks ahead.

VLADIMIR DUTHIERS: Sam, let me ask you about something that you just talked about, which is the secretary said that this isn't so-called regime change. He called it literally so-called regime change. But there has been a theory that's floated. You and I talked about it earlier, which is what we saw in Venezuela happen — right — which is regime decapitation or regime alteration. Could that happen here? And if so, is this would that provide an off-ramp for the Iranians if they chose it after they heard this briefing?

VINOGRAD: There are certainly endless scenarios that could unfold. I think it's hard to say that this wasn't about regime change when we did see a hit list compiled by Israel and the United

States, and the decapitation of the senior leadership of Iran, the Supreme Leader, the ministry of defense — minister of defense and others. So, I think it's hard to say that this wasn't about regime change. We had a briefing just now from the secretary of war. There is a whole other line of effort underway through covert action channels, likely through the CIA and other foreign partners, to try to message directly to regime officials. We probably won't be getting press briefings on that because it's about covert action, but that is undoubtedly part of this picture.

ADRIANA DIAZ: Why do you think the secretary would be specific to say that the mission is not regime change, when that's exactly what President Trump said when he first announced this operation over the weekend?

KING: Yeah.

VINOGRAD: I think that the secretary of war and various parts of the cabinet are trying to differentiate this really incredible military operation from military operations that led to past prolonged conflicts from a political perspective.

DIAZ: So-called forever war.

VINOGRAD: The President has campaigned on putting American troops back on American soil and focusing on the Western Hemisphere. The reality is that no military operation in Iran is going to be successful unless there's a plan for the day after. The President probably doesn't want to go there because we're still in live, kinetic — live conflict right now, but while saying this isn't about regime change, I think it's hard to take that out of the equation when you've decapitated the senior leadership of the Iranian regime.

KING: Yeah, he said it's not about regime change, but the regime sure did change.

VINOGRAD: It did change. But what's unclear, Gayle, is whether the model that President Trump used in Venezuela when he kidnaped the leader of the country, but allowed for the Venezuelan administration under Delcy Rodriguez to stay in place whether that's a model he's pursuing and whether the model of government in Iran — known as guardianship of the jurist — is going to remain in place just with the different supreme leader, a different head.

KING: And they are allowed to do this without approval from Congress because?

VINOGRAD: It depends who you ask. Many members of Congress and a large portion of the American people would say that this is an unlawful conflict, and that congress has the ability to declare war and not the president and that is being hotly debated now and will likely continue.

KING: All right.

DIAZ: Is the — is the Venezuelan model a fair comparison? How centralized was the power in the ayatollah or has Iran been preparing for this to be able to withstand his death?

VINOGRAD: Every war, every military operation, every country is different, so I don't compare Venezuela to Iran to Iraq or elsewhere. What I am saying is that the President's model has been and ostensibly in Cuba, this could be the same as well, not to wholly replace a government, but to try to work with individuals that were previously in power to maintain some level of stability while figuring out a plan for what comes next.

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*CBS Mornings*

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9:03:56 a.m.

2 minutes and 28 seconds

KING: You know, they keep saying listen, this is not an overnight operation, expect more casualties. What comes next, in your opinion? Because there's still so many outstanding questions.

VINOGRAD: There sure are and we should expect more military operations on the ground in Iran, targeting an additional range of targets and that's going to involve, Gayle, for better or for worse, many U.S. service members, many U.S. military resources, and at the same time, we should also expect covert action to be underway, to try to convince members of the regime to try to put down their arms and work with the United States. And the secretary of war, I do believe, and the chairman of the Joint Chief of Staff are trying to condition the American people that we should expect additional fatalities and casualties, unfortunately. We should also expect Iranian retaliation against U.S. bases, U.S. diplomatic facilities in the region, in Europe, and here in the homeland as well.

DUTHIERS: Sam, you worked at the Department of Homeland Security. If the Iranian regime is in its death throes, what can we expect as far as sleeper cells and attacks directly on the American home land?

VINOGRAD: I do want to reassure our viewers that the U.S. government has been working for 47 years to defend the homeland from Iranian-backed threats. They are not starting from scratch. At the same time, the Iranian regime has effectively planted, recruited, and paid individuals here in the homeland to conduct acts of physical violence, against government officials, against entities and individuals affiliated with the state of Israel, the Jewish community, Iranian dissidents, and more, and outstanding question is whether they will turn to that, activating those proxies or surrogates or they'll turn to another tactic, which they have heavily relied on recently, which is cyber operations against networks, against individuals, to embarrass them, to sway public perception.

DUTHIERS: Against our elections coming up in September [sic]?

VINOGRAD: They've meddled in our elections before. They have used influence operations before to try and shift public perceptions and sow discord, and, of course, have been involved in

election interference as I mentioned. But we should also be aware of their capability to launch disruptive cyber attacks. And that's why the U.S. government posture has been about partnerships. Partnerships with foreign intelligence service to try to make sure we don't miss a threat, partnerships with businesses to build resilience to cyber intrusions, and partnerships with the public. All of our viewers need to know that they need to be on the look out right now, not just for physical threats, but — for effort by Iranian-backed proxies and individuals to try and infiltrate their cyber space.