

Senate subway sticks [via *CNN News Central*]

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11 minutes and 31 seconds

SECRETARY OF STATE MARCO RUBIO: Here's the message I want to deliver Americans who are in the Middle East and in need of assistance: It is very important — and I ask this of the networks as well — it is important for you to please put both the website and the phone numbers on your screens, because we need people — we need to know where you are. We need to know we need to have contact information for Americans that need assistance. They have to register with us because, as these options begin to open up and as they open up, we have to be able to call you, we have to be able to reach you, we have to be able to know where you're staying so we can get this information to you and coordinate appropriately. And it will be a variety of methods: charter flights, military flights and transports, expanded commercial opportunities, and in some cases, land routes that will allow them to go to neighboring countries who might have open airports at that point. So, it's a lot of different things here that need to happen in order to move people. But it all starts by knowing that you're there. It all starts by knowing that — that where you are and how we can get ahold of you. So, I'm asking the networks and all of the media outlets, please publicize the two phone numbers that we've put out, as well as the website, so people can contact us and register. We've had, you know, thousands of people call already. As I said we've identified 15 — almost 1,600 that are requesting assistance with departure. But we need you to please be able to identify that. As I came in, I also saw the media reports about Dubai's Consulate. The last update I had with seconds before getting before these cameras was that a drone, unfortunately, struck a parking lot adjacent to the — to the Chancellery building and set off a fire in that place. All personnel are accounted for. As you're aware, we began drawing down personnel from our diplomatic facilities in advance of this and the cases, for example, of Beirut, we basically drew down to a bare bones as well as in — as in Baghdad and in Erbil and in a couple other posts as well. So, we've been very fortunate, obviously, but our embassies and our diplomatic facilities are under direct attack from a terroristic regime. With an update, I will obviously refer you to the Department of War. Suffice it to say, our objectives remain as they've been identified from the beginning and by the President laid out clearly yesterday. Iran can never have a nuclear weapon, and we will not allow Iran to hide behind the immunity of a massive short term ballistic missile inventory or the ability to make them or launch them. And so CENTCOM, in a joint operations, is carrying out a systematic destruction of their missile belt, destruction of their launchers, and destruction of their ability to make these, as well as the destruction of their navy. From what I've been told by the Department of War, everything is on or ahead of schedule and proceeding on these objectives, we have every confidence in the world that these objectives will be achieved. The last point I would make is and I said this yesterday, and I repeat what's about to — you know, you're about to see — we're going to unleash chiang on these people in the next few hours and days. You're going to really begin to perceive a change in the scope and in the intensity of these attacks as, frankly, the two most powerful air forces in the world take apart this terroristic regime and defang it and take away its ability to threaten its neighbors or hide behind a zone of immunity that allows them to develop their nuclear ambitions. This terroristic, radical, cleric-led regime cannot be ever allowed to have nuclear weapons. We saw what they were willing to do to their own people. They were willing to slaughter their own

people in the streets. Imagine what they would do to us. Imagine what they would do to others. Under President Trump, that will never, ever happen, alright?

[REPORTERS SHOUTING]

MANU RAJU: Mr. Secretary, yesterday — yesterday, you said — yesterday you talked about Israel — Mr. Secretary. Mr. Secretary.

RUBIO: Shhh! Please, guys, I can't hear them all. [TO REPORTER] Yes.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE REPORTER #1: Yesterday, you told us that Israel was going to strike Iran and that that's why we needed to get involved. Today, the President said that —

RUBIO: No.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE REPORTER #1: — Iran was going to get strike [sic].

RUBIO: Yeah, your statement is false. So, that's not what — I was asked very specifically. Were you there yesterday?

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE REPORTER #1: Yes, I asked a question.

RUBIO: Okay. No. Were you the one that — because somebody asked me a question yesterday, did we go in because of Israel? And I said — [TO KHALIL] you were asking me that — you — that follow-up. And I said, no, I told you this had to happen. Anyway, the President made a decision, and the decision he made was that Iran was not going to be allowed to hide behind its ballistic missile program, that Iran was not going to be allowed to hide behind its ability to conduct these attacks. That decision had been made. The President systematically made a decision to systematically destroy this terrorist capability that they had, and we carried that out. I was very clear on that answer. This was a question of timing, of why this had to happen as a joint operation, not the question of the intent. Once the President made a decision that negotiations were not going to work, that they were playing us on the negotiations, and that this was a threat that was untenable, the decision was made to strike them.

RAJU: But Mr. Secretary —

RUBIO: That's what I said yesterday. And you guys need to play it. If you're going to play these statements, you need to play the whole statement —

RAJU: — but, Mr. Secretary —

RUBIO: — not clip it to reach a narrative that you want to do, all right?

RAJU: — this is your — this is your — this is your statement. Mr. Secretary!

RUBIO [TO MALE REPORTER]: Go ahead.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE REPORTER: What do you make of the War Powers resolution that's being considered here in Congress?

RUBIO: I mean, Congress votes on those they can if they want. There's mechanisms for it. We've complied with the War Powers Act, even though we believe it's unconstitutional, as has every other administration. Every other president has found the War Powers Act to be unconstitutional. Nonetheless, we notified the Gang of Eight, which was an appropriate mechanism by which to notify Congress. We — we sent a notification within 48 hours the way the law requires. I'm here today to have — I don't know — my sixth or seventh briefing before the entirety of the House and Senate, which is far more than I ever got from any administration at the time that I was here, certainly when I was a member of the Gang of Eight. And so, we've complied with all — we've complied with the law and what it requires. This is an action by the President to address a real threat, a real threat. This is hostilities designed to eliminate a threat to the safety and the security of the United States and to our allies, all right?

[REPORTERS SHOUTING]

RAJU: But, Mr. Secretary! Mr. Secretary! Can I get an answer to — can I read you something to [inaudible].

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE REPORTER #2: Was there a plan in place to evacuate Americans before the attack took place?

RUBIO: Well, that's the plan we're trying to carry out. The problem is, or the challenge we are facing is airspace closures. If a country closes their airport — for example, in some cases the airports have been hit. So, the airport in Kuwait was hit. So, if an airport's been attacked or the airspace is closed, then we can have the planes lined up to go, but we can't get them to land because we don't have the permissions to land there, so that's the challenge. But rest assured, we are confident that we are going to be able to assist every American. As I told you, right now we have about a little over 1,500, maybe closer to 1,600 Americans requesting assistance. And we know that we're going to be able to help them. It's going to take a little time because we don't control the airspace closures. That said, there may be more people out there that need help. We need to know who you are. So, please, I'm asking the media publicize the phone numbers and the website because we need people to call in, so we have their name, we have their contact information, we have their location and their requests. So as these opportunities begin to open up, we can act very quickly to reach them and get them out of harm's way.

RAJU: Mr. Secretary! Mr. Secretary! Mr. Secretary! I want to just clarify what you said. I want to clarify what you said because you said —

RUBIO: There's nothing to clarify.

RAJU: — you said — no, but you said —

RUBIO: No, but you have to read — if you're going to read the whole statement —

RAJU: — no, but your quote is about, we knew that there was going to be an Israeli action. We knew that would precipitate an attack on American forces —”

RUBIO: — yeah, no, I understand, but listen. All right, let me explain something.

RAJU: — and that's what — and that's why the U.S. acted.

RUBIO: Yeah, but I had a very specific question from that gentleman, right?

JOE KHALIL: I asked you a question on timing.

RAJU: And the President said — the President said that —

RUBIO: Hold on one second. I [was] asked a very —

RAJU: — that he forced Israelis to act.

RUBIO: — okay, but let me answer because this is my press conference.

RAJU: Sure.

RUBIO: Okay. The — you asked me — I was asked a very specific question, so you guys can misrepresent it, but I was asked a very specific question yesterday. The bottom line is this. We — the President, determined we were not going to get hit first. It's that simple, guys. We are not going to put American troops in harm's way. If you tell the President of the United States that if we don't go first, we're going to have more people killed and more people injured, the President is going to go first. That's what he did. That's what the President will always do. He will always put the safety and security of our men and women in uniform and of all Americans before anything else. He's always going to do that, and that's what he did here. In addition to that, I would argue that this threat from Iran — they are hiding behind these missiles and hiding behind these drones. They wanted to reach a point where you couldn't touch them, and then they could do whatever the hell they wanted with their nuclear program. And there was no way in the world that this terroristic regime was going to get nuclear weapons, not under Donald Trump's watch. That's for sure.

RAJU: So, the U.S. attack had nothing to do with Israel? It had nothing to do with Israel?

RUBIO: All right, hold on. [TO KHALIL] Go ahead.

KHALIL: [inaudible] this operation, there's a general question of why the President gave the green light. And then there's a question of why did it have to happen this weekend? Are you saying it had to happen this weekend because of that Israeli action?

RUBIO: No, this weekend presented a unique opportunity to take joint action against this threat, and I've just outlined we wanted this to have maximum success. We want this operation to be successful at achieving its objectives. I'll repeat the objectives. The President laid them out yesterday. Iran cannot have a nuclear weapon. It cannot have, and therefore it cannot have the things it was hiding behind to have a nuclear weapons program. What are those things? Number one, we are going to destroy their missiles and their missile launchers, we are going to destroy their capability to make these missiles and these launchers, and we are going to destroy their navy. Those are the objectives. And this weekend, acting at this time gave us the highest probability of success in achieving those objectives. And, as the Department of War will brief you, we are on or ahead of schedule to do that.

RAJU: Would the U.S. attack have happened no matter what? Would the U.S. attack have happened no matter what Israel — Israel is planning to do?

KHALIL: Speaker [told us] Israel was going to act with or without U.S. —

RUBIO: The President had already made a decision to act. On the timing —

KHALIL: — they were going to act without us?

RUBIO: — the President acted on the timing that gave us the highest chance of success. And that's what you're seeing play out right now. You're seeing it play out right now, and you'll see it in the days to come. We will systematically take apart their missile program. We will destroy their ability to sponsor terrorism. By the way, we will destroy their factories. We will destroy their navy. Those objectives are going to be met. We're well on our way to meeting them. It will not be easy. There will be a price to pay for it. But that is a much lower price to pay than having a nuclear-armed Iran. I've got to go brief these guys. [REPORTERS SHOUTING] Hold on. [TO FEMALE REPORTER] Yes, yes, ma'am.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE REPORTER #3: Mr. Secretary, how heavily is the administration leaning into the 2001 AUMF for justification of this strikes?

RUBIO: What now?

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE REPORTER #3: How — how heavily is the administration leaning —

RUBIO: Well, that's not our notification to Congress. Our notification — listen, let me explain to you guys this in simple English, okay? Iran is run by lunatics, religious fanatic lunatics. They have an ambition to have nuclear weapons. They intend to develop those nuclear weapons behind a program of missiles and drones and terrorism, that the world will not be able to touch them for fear of those things. And this is the weakest they've ever been. Now is the time to go after them. The President made the decision to go after them, take away their missiles, take away their navy, take away their drones, take away their ability to make those things, so that they can never have a nuclear weapon. That's why the President made this decision. It was the right decision, and the

world will be a safer place when these radical clerics no longer have access to these weapons. You see how they're using them. Now imagine how they would use them a year from now if they had more of these. All right. [REPORTERS SHOUTING] I got time for one more. [TO KHALIL] Yeah, go ahead.

[REPORTERS SHOUTING]

KHALIL: Yesterday, several — several Democrats criticized what you said and argue that Israel

RUBIO: Yeah, of course, they criticized. The question is several Democrats criticized — they're going to always criticize. We've been doing this for years, guys. They come out. I'll tell you right now, they're going to come out after the briefing and say, we didn't hear anything. We have more questions than answers. You mark my words, but we still do these briefings. Go ahead.

KHALIL: Mr. Secretary, their criticism was on the timeline. They said that Israel is dictating the timeline for the United States.

RUBIO: No.

KHALIL: As you know, several people on the right have also agreed with that. How would you respond to that?

RUBIO: Well, I — the United States made a decision — under the President of the United States, made a decision. This is intolerable. Iran cannot have these missiles, cannot have these drones, cannot threaten the world. The President said this is the weakest they've ever been. If we don't hit them now, a year from now, or a year and a half from now, no one will be able to touch them and they'll be able to do whatever they want. And he made the decision to go, and he made a decision to go in a joint operation because it gave us the highest chance of success, and he made the decision to go first because he concluded that we were not going to get hit first. We were not going to absorb a blow from them. We were going to go first. He was not going to run the risk that they could attack us before we could hit them, because in addition to costing lives, it would undermine the effectiveness of our operation. All right, guys, I got to go. Thank you.