

# United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6225

March 5, 2026

The Honorable Marco Rubio  
Secretary of State  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C Street NW  
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Rubio,

We write with deep concern for the safety and security of U.S. diplomatic personnel and American citizens across the Middle East as a result of Operation Epic Fury. As you have often acknowledged, the State Department has no higher responsibility than protecting American citizens and U.S. personnel overseas. Unfortunately, the Department's actions demonstrate a clear lack of preparedness for the predictable risks this operation would create for our personnel and assets abroad.

Despite a very public U.S. military buildup and the President's own comments that a strike may be forthcoming, when the U.S. launched strikes against Iran on Saturday, only one overseas post, Embassy Beirut, was on ordered departure. Our posts in Israel were only put into authorized departure a day before the strikes began—too late for many diplomats and their families who were forced to shelter in place as commercial airspace closed. On Monday—more than 48 hours after the strikes began—the Department urged Americans to immediately depart 14 countries across the Middle East. But by then, commercial air options were extremely limited. Other embassies in the region were subsequently put on authorized and ordered departures, again only after airspace had largely closed and commercial travel was largely unavailable. Meanwhile, U.S. embassies in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait a sustained drone attacks and protestors attempted to storm diplomatic compounds in Iraq and Pakistan—with U.S. Marines at the U.S. Consulate in Karachi apparently firing their weapons to defend our facility and personnel.

The Department's ability to respond to this rapidly unfolding situation has been unnecessarily hampered by the Administration's own recall of ambassadors and failure to nominate experience individuals, as well as the Department's decision to eliminate civil service and foreign service officer positions across the Department with no assessment of particularized needs. Between terminations, deferred resignation and early retirements, the Near Eastern Affairs Bureau lost 76 employees between August 2025 and December 2025. The Consular Affairs Bureau lost 155 employees during that same time frame, constraining the Department's ability to support U.S. citizens. The Administration has not prioritized getting experienced ambassadors in place in the Middle East: three experienced career ambassadors in the region—to Qatar, Kuwait and Egypt—were dismissed without explanation. Of the 14 countries where the Department urged Americans to urgently leave last Monday, only six have confirmed ambassadors. There are currently no

# United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6225

pending nominees before the Senate for ambassadorships in the Middle East. As a result, many key posts are without experienced senior leadership at a time of crisis.

The failure to adequately protect our personnel and assets overseas is evident from the President's own statements. Despite widely reported expectations that Iran would engage in retaliation, to include U.S. assets in the region, on Monday, President Trump called Iranian attacks on Gulf countries "the biggest surprise" of the conflict. In a press briefing on Tuesday, President Trump indicated that no formal evacuation plan for Americans in the Middle East had been developed because "it happened all very quickly." However, public reporting makes clear that the United States and Israel had been discussing a possible military offensive against Iran for weeks and that the United States even *delayed* its own operational plans. Indeed, the President said yesterday that the U.S. may have spurred Israel to commence its strikes, not the other way around. Given all this, it is incomprehensible that the Administration did not take more steps to ensure the safety of Americans overseas.

Simply put, abrupt decision-making and lack of planning by State Department leadership to ensure the safety and security of its own staff left our personnel and their families unnecessarily at risk. Days into the conflict, the Department still appears caught off-guard and lacks a clear, comprehensive plan to safeguard American personnel, their families, or other Americans in the region. Notably, there have been no public press briefings by the Department. Although Congress has been briefed on aspects of the conflict, the State Department has failed to keep Congress adequately informed about embassy security developments or the status of personnel. This is unacceptable.

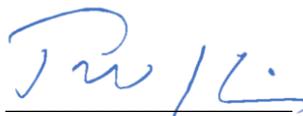
The Department routinely plans and prepares for evacuations and responding to crises overseas. Yet despite clear military planning for a significant conflict in the Middle East with the potential for regional escalation, it appears the Administration failed to take sufficient steps to protect our diplomats and their families.

We owe our diplomats and U.S. citizens better. We expect the Department to keep us updated on threats facing U.S. personnel and assets in real time, to ramp up efforts to evacuate personnel and family members and prioritize filling key posts.

Sincerely,



Jeanne Shaheen  
United States Senator



Tim Kaine  
United States Senator

# United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6225



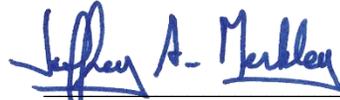
Chris Van Hollen  
United States Senator



Tammy Duckworth  
United States Senator



Jacky Rosen  
United States Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley  
United States Senator



Cory A. Booker  
United States Senator



Christopher S. Murphy  
United States Senator