

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

March 5, 2026

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

Dear Secretary Rubio:

We write to you with alarm about what appears to be a complete failure by the Trump administration and your State Department to adequately plan for and respond to the need to safely evacuate U.S. citizens from the Middle East following the Trump administration launching a war against Iran. Up to one million U.S. nationals are reportedly living in the Middle East,¹ and the Trump administration's failures to prepare to evacuate them after the administration and Israel launched a war against Iran puts these citizens' lives at risk. Additionally, the Trump administration and State Department appear ill-prepared for attacks targeting U.S. embassy personnel, despite the administration having spent months planning Operation Epic Fury.

The Failure of the State Department and the Trump Administration to Evacuate American Citizens in the Middle East

On March 2, the State Department put out an alert for U.S. citizens to "DEPART NOW" from Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, the West Bank, Gaza, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, the UAE, and Yemen "due to serious safety risks."² This announcement came at a time when much of the region's airspace was already fully closed or partially closed due to the war, significantly limiting options for U.S. citizens to evacuate.³ And we have seen and heard several reports of U.S. citizens, including our constituents, struggling to leave the region and get to safety.⁴ One Massachusetts family stuck in Qatar described how they could see and "hear the missiles outside."⁵

¹ BBC News, "US sends planes to evacuate nationals from Middle East as Iran conflict spreads," Jaroslav Lukiv, March 3, 2026, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c2lrgwl8n7go>.

² Post on X by Assistant Secretary Mora Namdar, March 2, 2026, <https://x.com/AsstSecStateCA/status/2028588420403241021>.

³ The Washington Post, "State Dept. scrambles to aid stranded Americans amid attacks, airport closures," Adam Taylor, Dan Lamothe, and Sammy Westfall, March 4, 2026, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2026/03/03/iran-embassy-closures-stranded-americans/>.

⁴ The Guardian, "Many Americans stranded in Middle East after US advisory to depart immediately," Anna Betts, March 3, 2026, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2026/mar/03/americans-stranded-middle-east-iran-strike>; NBC Boston, "'No way to leave': Mass. families stuck in Middle East amid war in Iran," March 4, 2026, <https://www.nbcboston.com/news/politics/no-way-to-leave-mass-families-stuck-in-middle-east-amid-war-in-iran/3910073/>.

⁵ NBC Boston, "'No way to leave': Mass. families stuck in Middle East amid war in Iran," March 4, 2026, <https://www.nbcboston.com/news/politics/no-way-to-leave-mass-families-stuck-in-middle-east-amid-war-in-iran/>

Now, despite the evacuation warnings, the Trump administration appears to be leaving Americans on their own to scramble to get to safety, including by dissuading them from seeking assistance from their own government. On March 3, the U.S. Embassy in Jerusalem tweeted that “The U.S. Embassy is not in a position at this time to evacuate or directly assist Americans in departing Israel.”⁶ U.S. Ambassador to Israel Mike Huckabee posted that there are “VERY LIMITED options” for Americans wishing to depart Israel.⁷

Americans are facing a severe lack of evacuation options, with little support from the State Department as they seek safety. “[M]any airports are shuttered” across the Middle East and “transportation options are limited.”⁸ As of March 3, diplomatic staff have been forced to evacuate from embassies due to the danger of Iranian retaliatory strikes and “[t]he U.S. embassies in Jordan, Bahrain, Iraq, Qatar, Kuwait and the UAE were operating with limited staffs.”⁹ The U.S. embassies in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait have both been closed and in Jordan “diplomatic staff was temporarily evacuated Monday over a threat.”¹⁰

The United States initiated this war but appears to be caught flat-footed in its response, lagging behind other countries.¹¹ It was not until several days into the war and after Iran had reportedly conducted strikes against at least nine countries in the region that the White House announced it was “actively working on plans to help Americans in the Middle East return.”¹² One U.S. citizen and retired U.S. Army major general explained that, “It’s little bit disheartening, as you can probably imagine, as it was announced earlier today by BBC that the British government is going to schedule flights by British air force transport planes to get the UK citizens out, whereas here for the United States, we still have not heard anything through the state department, even though we’re all registered.”¹³

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⁶ Business Insider, “Multiple US embassies told Americans they could not evacuate or help them get out of the Middle East,” Polly Thompson, Bryan Metzger, Kelsey Vlamis, and Matthew Loh, March 5, 2026, <https://www.businessinsider.com/us-embassies-say-they-cannot-evacuate-americans-middle-east-iran2026-3>.

⁷ Post on X by Ambassador Mike Huckabee, March 2, 2026, <https://x.com/GovMikeHuckabee/status/2028696725448167646>.

⁸ NBC News, “Americans urged to leave Middle East, but many airports are closed and embassy staff is reduced,” Abigail Williams and Julie Cerullo, March 2, 2026, <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/national-security/state-department-urges-americans-mideast-depart-strikes-continue-rcna261313>.

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ The New York Times, “Some Evacuation Flights Begin for Travelers Stranded in Middle East,” Isabella Kwai, Ceylan Yeğinsu, Omnia Al Desoukie, and Alexandra E. Petri, March 3, 2026, <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/03/03/world/middleeast/iran-war-middle-east-traveler-evacuations.html>; CNN, “Everything we know on the fifth day of the US and Israel’s war with Iran,” Issy Ronald, Jessie Yeung, Rhea Mogul, March 4, 2026, <https://www.cnn.com/2026/03/03/middleeast/iran-us-israel-what-we-know-intl-hnk>.

¹² CBS News, “Map shows attack locations across Iran, and Iran’s retaliatory strikes on Israel and other U.S. allies in Mideast,” Stephen Smith, March 3, 2026, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/map-iran-strike-locations/>; Post on X by Karoline Leavitt, March 3, 2026, <https://x.com/PressSec/status/2028892056790167602>; NPR, “White House begins arranging flights for Americans stranded in the Middle East,” March 4, 2026, <https://www.npr.org/2026/03/04/nx-s1-5734359/white-house-begins-arranging-flights-for-americans-stranded-in-the-middle-east>.

¹³ The Guardian, “Many Americans stranded in Middle East after US advisory to depart immediately,” Anna Betts, March 3, 2026, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2026/mar/03/americans-stranded-middle-east-iran-strike>.

There have also been confusing signals from the State Department about whether U.S. citizens can get help. While the State Department posted in the afternoon on March 3 that the government was “actively securing military aircraft and charter flights for American citizens who wish to leave the Middle East,” multiple reports indicate that when Americans called the number that the State Department directed them to for departure assistance, there was a voice message stating, “Please do not rely on the U.S. government for assisted departure or evacuation at this time. There are currently no United States evacuation points.”¹⁴ It was not until several days into the war that the State Department announced a charter flight with American citizens had departed the Middle East for the United States.¹⁵

The Failure of the Trump Administration to Protect U.S. Embassy Staff

These embassy closures and staff evacuations not only make it even more difficult for American citizens trapped in these countries to leave the countries they are stuck in; they also raise serious concerns about the Trump administration and State Department’s failure to adequately plan to protect State Department employees and other embassy personnel in the region in the aftermath of Operation Epic Fury.

On March 1, in response to the killing of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, a crowd of protesters attempted to storm the U.S. consulate, resulting in the deaths of at least ten protestors and fifty injuries of protestors.¹⁶ The U.S. Embassy in Saudi Arabia closed after a drone strike, and on March 3, two drones hit the Embassy, reportedly “causing part of its roof to collapse.”¹⁷ Additionally, “[i]n Bahrain, Jordan, Qatar and UAE, the U.S. embassies are also warning of potential drone or missile strikes from Iran.”¹⁸ This warning appears to have been well-founded for the UAE, given that a drone has now reportedly “struck the parking lot of the U.S. consulate

¹⁴ Post on X by Assistant Secretary of State Dylan Johnson, March 3, 2026, <https://x.com/ASDylanJohnson/status/2028889324456923210>; Post on X by Kathryn Watson, March 3, 2026, <https://x.com/kathrynw5/status/2028927838402027610>; AL-Monitor, “After launching Iran war, White House scrambles to evacuate stranded Americans,” Elizabeth Hagedorn, March 3, 2026, https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2026/03/after-launching-iran-war-white-house-scrambles-evacuate-stranded-americans?gift_code=r20-rPgMquo3VysBbHeqcSCgt9k; Post on X by Jonathan Karl, March 4, 2026, <https://x.com/jonkarl/status/2029186616686711145>.

¹⁵ U.S. Department of State, “Department of State Charter Flight Departs Middle East to United States,” press release, March 4, 2026, <https://www.state.gov/releases/office-of-the-spokesperson/2026/03/department-of-state-charter-flight-departs-middle-east-to-united-states/>.

¹⁶ The New York Times, “Protesters Try to Storm U.S. Consulate as Thousands in Pakistan Protest Iran Strikes,” Elian Peltier, Zia ur-Rehman and Yaqoob Akbary, March 1, 2026, <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/03/01/world/asia/iran-afghanistan-pakistan-protests.html>; NBC News, “Pakistan deploys troops and imposes 3-day curfew after deadly protests over U.S.-Israeli strikes on Iran,” The Associated Press, March 2, 2026, <https://www.nbcnews.com/world/asia/least-22-people-killed-pakistan-protesters-angered-iran-attack-rcna261270>.

¹⁷ The Wall Street Journal, “Iran Conflict, March 3, 2026: U.S. Embassies, Consulates Under Attack as Iran Escalates Strikes,” March 3, 2026, <https://www.wsj.com/livecoverage/iran-israel-us-strikes-2026>; NBC News, “Americans urged to leave Middle East, but many airports are closed and embassy staff is reduced,” Abigail Williams and Julie Cerullo, March 2, 2026, <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/national-security/state-department-urges-americans-mideast-depart-strikes-continue-rcna261313>.

¹⁸ NBC News, “Americans urged to leave Middle East, but many airports are closed and embassy staff is reduced,” Abigail Williams and Julie Cerullo, March 2, 2026, <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/national-security/state-department-urges-americans-mideast-depart-strikes-continue-rcna261313>.

in Dubai” in the UAE on March 3.¹⁹ Officials also reportedly told members of Congress on March 3 that “they expected the U.S. death toll to rise, and that some of those deaths could be the result of Iran’s targeting of embassies.”²⁰

Reports also raise questions about the seriousness with which Trump administration officials are taking the safety and security of U.S. embassy officials. Ambassador Huckabee “joked to embassy staff about procreating while sheltering in place...in a memo one U.S. official described as ‘awkward’ and ‘odd.’”²¹ In the memo he addressed to “U.S. diplomats, local staff and family members,” he said that if the “extended time” with their spouses “results in the birth of your next child in about 9 months, I of course expect that you will want to name the little bugger after me!” and added, “If it’s a girl, Michelle is a nice name too.”²²

U.S. Embassy personnel play critical roles in protecting our national security and the failure to adequately protect them from this war shows blatant disregard for them and for the U.S. citizens they serve. We urge you to do more to protect their safety and request additional information on why it appears that the State Department and administration are so ill-prepared for potential attacks against embassies in the region.

Poor Planning and the Dismantling of the State Department are Exacerbating Safety Concerns for Embassy Personnel and U.S. Citizens Abroad

Despite what appears to have been months of planning at DoD, the State Department was caught flat-footed with no plans to ensure the safety of embassy personnel or American citizens in the Middle East. In a Department of Defense briefing on the operation on March 2, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff said that Operation Epic Fury “marked the culmination of months, and in some cases, years of deliberate planning and refinement against this particular target set.”²³ Secretary Hegseth also reiterated that “we put months and months of planning into what kind of effects we want to achieve.”²⁴ Despite these months of planning and the buildup of U.S. assets in the region over the 30 days prior to the operation,²⁵ the Trump administration appears to have failed to adequately prepare evacuation plans for Americans abroad. Instead, on March 3, President Trump admitted that the administration had no evacuation plans for Americans abroad because “it all happened very quickly.”²⁶

¹⁹ The Wall Street Journal, “Drone Targets U.S. Consulate in Dubai as Iran Escalates Attacks,” March 3, 2026, <https://www.wsj.com/livecoverage/iran-israel-us-strikes-2026>.

²⁰ Post on X by Mark Satter, March 2, 2026, <https://x.com/markssatter/status/2028963052926976418>.

²¹ The Washington Post, “Huckabee jokes to embassy staff about procreating while sheltering,” John Hudson, March 3, 2026, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2026/03/03/us-iran-israel-military-strikes-trump-live-updates/#link-VJRHD76LK5CPJI5565L7ILXZSQ>.

²² *Id.*

²³ U.S. Department of Defense, “Secretary of War Pete Hegseth and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Dan Caine Hold a Press Briefing,” March 2, 2026, <https://www.war.gov/News/Transcripts/Transcript/Article/4418959/secretary-of-war-pete-hegseth-and-chairman-of-the-joint-chiefs-of-staff-gen-dan/>.

²⁴ *Id.*

²⁵ *Id.*

²⁶ Post on X by Kyle Griffin, March 3, 2026, <https://x.com/kylegriffin1/status/2028886904762970216/>; The Hill, “Trump on lack of Middle East evacuation plan: ‘It happened all very quickly,’” Ashleigh Fields, March 3, 2026, <https://thehill.com/policy/international/5765069-donald-trump-middle-east-evacuation-plan/>.

We are also concerned that this debacle is a predictable consequence of the Trump administration's dismantlement of the State Department. In July 2025, you fired over 1,300 of its employees, including over 1,100 civil servants and nearly 250 foreign service officers as part of its reorganization directed by the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE).²⁷ You also recalled almost 30 career diplomats from ambassadorial and senior embassy posts across the world in December 2025.²⁸ This included the ambassador to Egypt, who has not yet been replaced, and is one of the countries that the State Department urged citizens to immediately evacuate due to "serious safety risks."²⁹ Presently, as the Middle East is embroiled in a widening war, the U.S. has no confirmed Ambassadors in Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar, Egypt, Kuwait, Algeria, Libya, or Iraq.³⁰

Conclusion and Questions

Americans abroad rely on the State Department when they need help overseas — particularly when the United States has started a war that could result in a diplomatic and national security quagmire. The early failures of the Trump administration to provide protection for American citizens abroad are inexcusable. We urge the State Department to take immediate action to support the evacuations of American citizens and provide protection for personnel in U.S. embassies throughout the Middle East.

In order to understand the failures of the Trump administration and State Department to adequately prepare for the threats to American citizens living in the Middle East and personnel in U.S. embassies in the Middle East, we request answers to the following questions no later than March 12, 2026:

1. What plans and resources did the State Department have in place for evacuating Americans from the Middle East if a regional war broke out?
2. When did the State Department first learn of Operation Epic Fury?
3. What role did the State Department have in any of the planning for Operation Epic Fury?
4. What planning and analysis did the State Department, or any other federal agency, conduct on the potential impacts of Operation Epic Fury on the safety of U.S. citizens in the Middle East? Please provide a copy of any planning and analysis.

²⁷ AP News, "State Department lays off over 1,300 employees under Trump administration plan," Matthew Lee, Farnoush Amiri, and Manuel Balce Ceneta, July 11, 2025, <https://apnews.com/article/layoffs-diplomats-state-department-trump-rubio-bfdb86767b7bd5b6570819d404a7782e>; AFGE, "State Department RIFs Spark Chaos, Confusion, and Outrage," July 21, 2025, <https://www.afge.org/article/state-department-rifs-spark-chaos-confusion-and-outrage/>; Federal News Network, "State Dept finalizes mass layoffs, says employees won't be reinstated under shutdown-ending deal," Jory Heckman, December 2, 2025, <https://federalnewsnetwork.com/workforce/2025/12/state-dept-finalizes-mass-layoffs-says-employees-wont-be-reinstated-under-shutdown-ending-deal/>.

²⁸ PBS News, "Trump recalls nearly 30 career diplomats from ambassadorial and embassy posts," Matthew Lee, December 22, 2025, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/nation/trump-recalls-nearly-30-career-diplomats-from-ambassadorial-and-embassy-posts>.

²⁹ *Id.*; BBC, "US sends planes to evacuate nationals from Middle East as Iran conflict spreads," Jaroslav Lukiv, March 3, 2026, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c2lrgwl8n7go>; American Foreign Service Association, "Tracker: Current U.S. Ambassadors," as of March 3, 2026, <https://afsa.org/list-ambassadorial-appointments>.

³⁰ Post on X by Robbie Gramer, March 2, 2026, <https://x.com/RobbieGramer/status/202865806933353368>.

- a. Did this planning and analysis account for the impacts of Operation Epic Fury on embassies' ability to assist U.S. citizens if their personnel were also forced to evacuate due to safety concerns?
5. What planning and analysis did the State Department, or any other federal agency, conduct on the potential impacts of Operation Epic Fury on the safety of personnel in U.S. embassies in the Middle East? Please provide a copy of any planning and analysis.
6. What steps did the State Department take to prepare for any potential threats to the safety of U.S. citizens in the Middle East due to Operation Epic Fury?
7. What steps did the State Department take to prepare for any potential threats to the safety of personnel at U.S. Embassies in the Middle East due to Operation Epic Fury?
8. On March 3, the State Department announced that it "is facilitating charter flights from the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan for American citizens."³¹ There are several other countries in the Middle East that the State Department is urging U.S. citizens to evacuate from.³² Why is the State Department failing to facilitate charter flights from those countries as well?
9. At the time of the State Department's announcement that it would be facilitating charter flights from the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan for American citizens, what was the status of the plans for those charter flights?
10. At the time of the State Department's announcement that it would be facilitating charter flights from the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan for American citizens, how many American citizens were manifested on those flights?
11. For each flight that the State Department helped charter in response to Operation Epic Fury, please list the date and time that the flight was announced, the date and time that the flight manifest was completed, the date and time that the flight departed with U.S. citizens, the number of U.S. citizens on the flight, and the location from which the flight departed.
12. Does the State Department expect to help facilitate the chartering of flights for U.S. citizens from any other countries in the Middle East?
13. Have any U.S. embassy personnel in the Middle East been injured or killed as a result of strikes, protests, or other ramifications of Operation Epic Fury?
14. Please provide a list of bureaus and offices from which State Department personnel were fired in July 2025, including a breakdown of the number of personnel fired from each of these bureaus and offices.
15. Did any of the State Department personnel who were fired in July 2025 have any roles, responsibilities, or experience related to evacuating and protecting U.S. citizens abroad during conflicts? Please provide the number of personnel and their roles, responsibilities, and experience related to evacuating U.S. citizens from conflicts.
16. Did any of the State Department personnel who were fired in July 2025 have any roles, responsibilities, or experience related to Middle East policy? Please provide the number of personnel and their roles, responsibilities, and experience related to Middle East policy.

³¹ U.S. Department of State, "U.S. Assistance to Ensure the Safety of American Citizens Overseas," March 3, 2026, <https://www.state.gov/releases/office-of-the-spokesperson/2026/03/u-s-assistance-to-ensure-the-safety-of-american-citizens-overseas/>.

³² Business Insider, "The US is urging Americans to leave 14 Middle Eastern countries amid the Iran conflict. Here's what's happening in each," Kristine Villarroel, March 4, 2026, <https://www.businessinsider.com/state-department-list-middle-east-countries-iran-3-2026>.

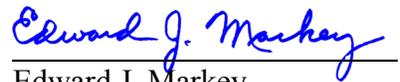
17. Did any of the State Department personnel who were fired in July 2025 have any roles, responsibilities, or experience with speaking, reading, or writing foreign languages used in the Middle East? Please provide the number of personnel and their roles, responsibilities, and experience related to speaking, reading, or writing foreign languages used in the Middle East.
18. Has the Department been able to fully staff its crisis operations task forces with current staff, including Task Force 1 and Task Force 2?
- a. Please provide the number of staff currently assigned to Task Force 2, which specifically supports American citizens, and please compare that number to the number of staff assigned to Task Force 2 during crisis operations over the past five years.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter.

Sincerely,



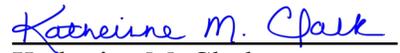
Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



Jake Auchincloss
Member of Congress



Katherine M. Clark
Member of Congress



William R. Keating
Member of Congress



Stephen F. Lynch
Member of Congress



James P. McGovern
Member of Congress



Seth Moulton
Member of Congress



Richard E. Neal
Member of Congress



Ayanna Pressley
Member of Congress



Lori Trahan
Member of Congress