

# [***Rubio dismisses concerns about Trump's NATO remarks as backlash mounts***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6B9M-74T1-DY7V-G00S-00000-00&context=1516831)

CNN Wire

February 11, 2024 Sunday 5:53 PM GMT

Copyright 2024 Cable News Network All Rights Reserved

**Length:** 585 words

**Byline:** By Avery Lotz, CNN

**Dateline:** (CNN)

**Body**

(CNN) &#8212; GOP Sen. Marco Rubio defended former [*President Donald Trump's controversial comment*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/10/politics/trump-russia-nato/index.html) that he would encourage Russia to do "whatever the hell they want" to a NATO member country that didn't meet defense spending guidelines.

"That's not what happened, and that's not how I view that statement," the Florida Republican argued Sunday on CNN's State of the Union when asked whether he was comfortable with Trump's suggestion that he wouldn't defend NATO countries.

Rubio went on to note that the US did not leave NATO during Trump's presidency - though Trump [*made private threats about withdrawing*](https://www.cnn.com/2019/01/15/politics/trump-nato-us-withdraw/index.html) multiple times, according to [*The New York Times*](https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/14/us/politics/nato-president-trump.html).

"Donald Trump is not a member of the Council on Foreign Relations," Rubio told CNN's Jake Tapper. "He doesn't talk like a traditional politician, and we've already been through this. You would think people would've figured it out by now."

At Saturday's rally in Conway, North Carolina, Trump said "one of the presidents of a big country" at one point asked him whether the US would still defend the country if they were invaded by Russia even if they "don't pay."

"No, I would not protect you," Trump recalled telling that president. "In fact, I would encourage them to do whatever the hell they want. You got to pay. You got to pay your bills."

Trump has for years inaccurately described how NATO funding works. NATO has a target that each member country spends a minimum of 2% of gross domestic product on defense, and most countries are not meeting that target. But the figure is a guideline and not a binding contract, and it does not create "bills"; member countries haven't been failing to pay their share of NATO's common budget to run the organization.

Rubio, who recently pushed through legislation that would require an act of Congress before a US commander in chief could withdraw the country from NATO, contended Trump was merely reflecting on an anecdote from his presidency. He added that "virtually every American president" has aired grievances about other nations not doing enough for the alliance.

"Trump's just the first one to express it in these terms," said Rubio, who is vice chair of the Senate Intelligence Committee.

A stark departure

Rubio also responded to Trump's derisive comments about the absence of GOP contender Nikki Haley's husband, Michael, who is deployed overseas. Rubio characterized the remarks as a product of the "increasing nastiness of this campaign and every campaign in American ***politics***."

"I mean, they're calling him a grumpy old man. They're attacking Donald Trump," Rubio said. "So this sort of nastiness, Trump gives as good as he gets."

Reminded by Tapper that [*he had once said*](https://www.cnn.com/2015/07/19/politics/marco-rubio-donald-trump-john-mccain-disqualifier/index.html) Trump's remarks about the late Sen. John McCain - whom Trump called "not a war hero" - disqualified him from being commander in chief, Rubio responded, "Yes, I was running for president against Donald Trump."

Rubio has endorsed the former president in his bid to regain the White House, [*writing on X*](https://twitter.com/marcorubio/status/1746629924432310551) last month that "it's time to get on with the work of beating Biden & saving America!"

The endorsement marked a stark departure from Rubio's posture in 2016, when he [*told CNN*](https://www.cnn.com/2016/03/13/politics/marco-rubio-donald-trump-support/index.html) that "for years to come, there are many people on the right, in the media and voters at large that are going to have to justify how they fell into this trap."

CNN's Serena Golden and Kate Sullivan contributed to this report.

By Avery Lotz, CNN

TM & © 2024 Cable News Network, Inc., a Time Warner Company. All rights reserved.

**Load-Date:** March 12, 2024

**End of Document**