

Trump Administration Confirmation Hearings: Secretary of State Marco Rubio Policy Insights



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After the first week of confirmation hearings, the first round of Executive Orders, and statements from President Trump, certain policy positions have begun to emerge. In this series, we summarize each candidate's relevant positions as it relates to international trade.

What we have learned is that a consistent theme for the new Administration is addressing the threat posed by China, energy independence, development of a U.S. energy capabilities, and strengthening the U.S. border against threats posed by illegal immigration and illicit drug smuggling.

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Secretary of State Marco Rubio

CONFIRMED AND SWORN IN ON JANUARY 21, 2025

AMERICA FIRST AND CHINA AS A THREAT

During his confirmation hearing, Senator Rubio addressed Trump's primary foreign policy focus as one that places America first. To that end, Rubio emphasized the threat Chinese influence plays in the western hemisphere and to U.S. national security. The competition between the United States and China, Rubio stressed, is the most important issue of this century.

FOCUS ON DETERRENCE

For foreign policy generally, Rubio commented that American foreign policy has lost its deterrent effect during the Biden Administration, and that the United States needs to re-establish deterrence. Rubio pointed to the demise of Qasem Soleimani, the Iranian commander killed during the previous Trump Administration, as an example of creating a deterrent effect. Iran changed its behavior after the demise of Soleimani, Rubio explained. The lack of deterrence, Rubio noted, is an invitation to war. Rubio also stated that he would address the unfortunate marketplace that has developed in kidnapping Americans for fraudulent charges in countries like Venezuela, Russia, and Iran.

CUBA

Senator Rubio stated that Cuba is without question a state sponsor of terrorism and cited to its support and friendly relationship with the FARC, Hamas, Hezbollah, its relationship with Iran, and Cuba's harboring of American fugitives. Rubio also noted, in reference to the Biden Administration's recent actions removing the state sponsor of terror label, that nothing that was agreed to by the Biden Administration was irreversible or binding on the incoming Trump Administration. This statement was foreshadowing as President Trump signed an Executive Order on January 20, 2025, rescinding certain Biden-era Orders and reinstating the State Sponsor of Terrorism label on Cuba. During his confirmation hearing, Rubio also expressed concern with Chinese military installations in Cuba as a threat to U.S. national security. Rubio further referenced the Biden Administration's lifting of sanctions on GAESA as not binding on the new Trump Administration, and that the imposition of sanctions on GAESA was a good decision by the first Trump Administration.

RUSSIA

During his confirmation hearing, Senator Rubio admonished the dependence of European countries such as France and Germany on Russian energy as the reason Vladimir Putin has tremendous leverage in Europe. Rubio stated that he hoped Europe would continue to disentangle this dependence. Rubio implied that Russian sanctions would likely continue under the Trump Administration and believed that it should be the position of the U.S. that the war in Ukraine should end. The path to an end to the war, that would not open Ukraine up to another Russian incursion in the near future, would be difficult to negotiate, Rubio conceded.

IRAN

Senator Rubio commented that he is of the view that the Iranian regime is at its weakest point. Rubio noted that its air defenses and influence in the region have been badly damaged, and its economy is in shambles. Rubio believes it is the responsibility of the U.S. to ensure that Iran can never regain its position as a powerful sponsor of terrorism and to ensure that Iran never gains the technological capabilities to threaten the U.S. in a nuclear capacity or otherwise. We would expect sanctions to remain in place against the Government of Iran and can expect a renewed focus on secondary sanctions and enforcement of existing sanctions programs targeting Iran.

NORTH KOREA

Senator Rubio noted that Trump's decision to meet with Kim Jong Un in his previous Administration, while not leading to a lasting agreement, did calm the tension and cause North Korea to stop testing missiles. Rubio stated that the new Trump Administration will need to take a very serious look at broader North Korean policies to stabilize the situation to prevent a crisis, but without encouraging other states to develop nuclear weapons. Rubio also explained that no number of sanctions has stopped North Korea from gathering the resources it needed to develop nuclear capabilities.

SYRIA

Senator Rubio described the current situation in Syria as an opportunity to explore. It is in the interest of the U.S., Rubio explained, to have a Syria that is not an ISIS playground, respects religious minorities, protects the Kurds, and is not a vehicle for Iran's sponsorship of terrorism or terrorist groups in the region. Rubio believes that U.S. sanctions directly contributed to the downfall of the Assad regime, and that it may be possible to remove sanctions from Syria to achieve the interests of the U.S. Rubio said the second Trump Administration will be focused on maintaining stability and that it was important to maintain the ceasefire between Turkey and groups in the region.

LATIN AMERICA IN GENERAL

Senator Rubio is focused on Chinese incursion into the region and the western hemisphere generally. Rubio explained that China has used its investments as weapons to entrap countries into allowing China to buy up mineral and resource rights in places like Argentina, or to develop countries' 5g networks using Huawei as a condition of investing in a country.

PANAMA

Senator Rubio expressed concern about Chinese influence in Panama and pointed to Chinese port facilities on either side of the Panama Canal. The current leadership of Panama is cooperative with the U.S., and Rubio hopes to work collaboratively with Panama, but the current state of the canal is a threat to U.S. security.

MEXICO

During his confirmation hearing, Senator Rubio did not discount that labeling Mexican drug cartels as terrorist organizations. On January 20, 2025, President Trump signed an Executive Order identifying establishing a process under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act that would identify certain cartels as Specially Designated Global Terrorists and/or Foreign Terrorist Organizations. Specifically, Section 3 of the January 20 Order establishes that within 14 days of the Order,

the Secretary of State shall take all appropriate action, in consultation with the Secretary of the Treasury, the Attorney General, the Secretary of Homeland Security, and the Director of National Intelligence, to make a recommendation regarding the designation of any cartel or other organization described in section 1 of this order as a Foreign Terrorist Organization consistent with 8 U.S.C. 1189 and/or a Specially Designated Global Terrorist consistent with 50 U.S.C. 1702 and Executive Order 13224.

During his hearing, Rubio further stated that he hopes to work collaboratively with Mexico to address the cartels. Rubio also committed to ensuring that Mexico meets its obligations under the 1944 water treaty between the U.S. and Mexico.

NICARAGUA

Senator Rubio highlighted Nicaragua's development of a dynastic regime. He also addressed the threat to U.S. national security posed by Nicaragua's invitation to the Russians to establish a military presence.

VENEZUELA

Senator Rubio commented that Venezuela is not governed by a government, but by a narco-trafficking organization. Millions of Venezuelans have fled, Rubio said, and he disagreed with the Biden Administration's approach of attempting to work with Maduro. Rubio mused that the U.S.'s approach to allowing U.S. business in Venezuela needs to be re-examined. During President Trump's presser while he signed various executive orders the night of January 20, the President also commented that he did not see a need to import Venezuela petroleum products and that the policy allowing for those imports might change.

Secretary Rubio, on January 22, 2025, met with Venezuela's rightful president Edmundo González Urrutia and opposition leader María Corina Machado. The Secretary lauded the Venezuelan people's courage in the face of repression and reaffirmed the United States' support for the restoration of democracy in Venezuela as well as the unconditional and immediate release of all political prisoners in line with the peaceful democratic aspirations of the Venezuelan people.

HAITI

During his confirmation hearing, Senator Rubio commented that Haiti has the issue of no legitimacy of authority. There are gang elements that have threatened to destabilize Haiti and there is no easy answer to stabilizing the country according to Rubio. He called for foreign parties to help Haiti stabilize a government.

ECUADOR

During his confirmation hearing, Senator Rubio stated that he believes that Ecuador is facing security threats from violence and gangs coming over the Colombian border. Rubio stated that there is a lot that the U.S. can do to provide resources to increase stability. Rubio also described illegal fishing off of Ecuador's coast by China that the U.S. could help with.

Disclaimer: This information is strictly to provide public information on the administrations' policy positions and in no way indicates an affiliation with any political party.

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