Dialogues on American Foreign Policy and World Affairs: A Conversation with Senator Marco Rubio

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- Senator Marco Rubio, U.S. Senator for Florida

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Walter Russell Mead:

All right. Hello and welcome to the Hudson Institute's Dialogues on American Foreign Policy. My name is Walter Russell Mead, Distinguished Fellow at Hudson Institute, and today I have the honor of speaking with Senator Marco Rubio of Florida. Senator Rubio was first elected to the US Senate in 2010 and serves as a leading voice on immigration, human rights, and national security issues. Senator Rubio serves as the acting chairman of the Select Committee on Intelligence and is chairman of the Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship. He's a senior member of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations where he serves as chairman of the Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere, Transnational Crime, Civilian Security, Democracy, Human Rights, and Global Women's Issues. It's a very busy subcommittee. He also serves on the Senate Committee on Appropriations and the Special Committee on Aging.

Senator Rubio has been a vocal critic of the Maduro regime in Venezuela, the Islamic Republic of Iran's government, and the Chinese Communist Party. In July, Senator Rubio was part of a group of US citizens banned from China as a result of his criticism of the CCP's human rights abuses against the Uighur population in Xinjiang. In August, he and 10 other Americans were sanctioned by China for the same reason. Senator Rubio has recently sounded the alarm on issues such as Chinese espionage, US election security, and the path forward for recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. Senator Rubio, thank you for joining me today. Appreciate it.

Marco Rubio:

Oh, thank you. Thank you, Walter. Thanks for inviting me.

Walter Russell Mead:

All right. Well, as we're looking toward an election and trying to wrap our heads around where the United States may be going, what do you think the major themes of a second Trump administration's foreign policy would be?

Marco Rubio:

Well, if I could just set the stage, because I think this is relevant, and that is if you look at the, and you would know better than I would, but those who study American foreign policy, I think there's two themes that run through it throughout our history. The first is this balance between our ideals as a nation and our national interests, they don't always necessarily align, we saw that in the Cold War and we see that even now in parts of the world, and then historically, our nation seems to, especially since, probably from Waterloo forward, you've seen a country that has struggled between the exuberance of our power, which is considerable, and our limits. Even though we are the most powerful nation in human history, there are limits to our power.

What ends up happening is as we engage in the world, eventually, we find our limits and then there's a blowback against that and it causes the American people to say, "Pull back and focus on what's going on here at home," and so we're in a period like that right now where if you look at what's happening in the Middle East, it's a place where the United States' considerable power made big difference. It also is a place where our limits have been shown. Again, where it's we're not limited because we're not powerful, we're limited because every nation is limited. It's also a place where our ideals and our national interests are at stake, so I think for any president, and especially for this one, getting that
balance right is important, and I say especially for this one, because he has challenged a lot of the
convention around both pre-existing alliances and so forth.

In hindsight, I think that’s been a very positive thing. At a minimum, if you supported the world order
that existed from World War II to 2016, then it caused you to go back and justify it because it’s being
challenged and if you thought it needed to be reformed, then this administration has provided a
roadmap for that, so to answer your question, I think the biggest task of a second Trump presidency will
be to give structure to those instincts that he brought into the office.

What does 21st-century NATO look like? What does a Asia Pacific, Indo-Pacific Alliance look like with
India, Australia, Japan, and the United States? What do our interests in the Western Hemisphere look
like? What role do we want to play in Africa, in a place where the Chinese have become increasingly
aggressive, both for the votes at international forums and because the natural resources? In the Middle
East, how do you balance not just the geopolitical factor at stake there, but the ethnic and the religious
differences between Shia and Sunni, and so forth? That’s a lot, and it requires us to rethink it. What we
cannot do is assume that the world looks like it did in 2001 or in 1996. It is a different world and it
requires us to repurpose a lot of what we do around the world to confront that.

My last point, I know it was a long answer, but that’s what senators do, and that is clearly, in my view,
when they write a book about the 21st century, the vast majority of that book is going to be about the
relationship between the United States and China and whether there was a sustainable equilibrium
between the two countries or whether there was a disequilibrium, an imbalance that led to conflict,
which I think would define the 21st century negatively, so that’s a big undertaking, but that, I think, is
the overarching themes, I hope, of a second Trump term.

Walter Russell Mead:

I mean, you certainly meet with the president and talk about these issues with him. Do you have a sense
of what those instincts are telling him about how to bring a structure? Because I think one of the
criticisms people sometimes make of him is that he has a lot of instincts, but it’s harder to try to put
these in, to build an architecture and to develop a strategy around those instincts. What’s your view?

Marco Rubio:

Well, I don’t, again, pretend to speak for the administration. I can tell you my views on what the
president’s instincts tell him and that is as someone who’s not a political figure, who has not spent 20
years attending conferences of Council for Foreign Relations or things of that nature, his just logical,
common-sense question is: "South Korea is a rich country. Europe is a rich continent with rich economic
powers. Why are we spending so much money providing for their defense?" and I think that’s a valid
question, and by the way, he’s not the first one to ask it. I think there’s a good opportunity to balance
that.

We don’t keep doing things just because we’ve always done it that way. It’s a good opportunity to
answer that question and I do think it’s a good opportunity, as previous presidents have done, to ask for
our partners to do more in their own defense. You should at least be able to expect from your allies that
they are capable, especially developed nations, that they are capable of protecting their national
territory. Their ability to provide assistance in foreign conflicts outside of their national borders are a
different matter, but their ability to protect their own territory is something that is not too much to ask
of a developed nation, so I think that's a good starting point where I think he'll think about.
I think that the same is true with regards to South Korea, to some extent. Now, we’re in active negotiations with them now, so how much of that is negotiating tactic and how much of that is how he really believes is something I can’t speak to, but I do think you’ll see a re-examination of both our presence in South Korea and our presence in parts of Western Europe and the NATO Alliance. I don't think, I hope, it's not an abandonment of either one, but certainly a modernization of both of those relationships.

Walter Russell Mead:

Let’s turn to the Western Hemisphere for a little while, because I think that’s a part of the world where you have taken a lead on some issues. It looks as if the original strategy to try to help the internal opposition in Venezuela developed some more space and have free elections there has not succeeded, at least not yet. Where would you see Venezuela policy going in a second Trump term?

Marco Rubio:

Well, and I think that's the way it's been couched, but let me say two things about it. It is actually a place where both our national interests and our ideals align. In the case of Venezuela, you have a criminal corrupt regime. It's not a government, it is an organized crime ring that actively participates in the trafficking of drugs destined for the mainland of the United States, that has created military intelligence and economic alliance with Iran and invited them onto their national territory in our hemisphere, which has also invited a Russian military presence in terms of advisors and technicians and things of that nature, who also have a very close technical and espionage relationship with the Chinese, so here you have three global adversaries who have found a foothold in our hemisphere.

The second is that the catastrophic situation there has created a humanitarian crisis, which is undermining Colombia, Peru, Brazil, a huge challenge for those countries, particularly in Columbia, which is our closest ally in the region, in South America, so there's a national interest there. It's also a place that we can't... Unless we're going to send military forces in there to topple them by force, the US sanctions were never designed to topple a regime. What they were designed to do is ensure that the concrete doesn't dry on that system that they're trying to create there and thereby giving an opportunity for the Venezuelan people to find a different way forward.

Ultimately, the future of Venezuela belongs to Venezuelans. What we can do from our end is support them as best we can, and at the same time, do everything we can diplomatically, geopolitically, and from a economic standpoint to be supportive of them, but the second thing that we can do is ensure that we don't accept as legitimate invalid regime, that frankly is not in our national interests and also is against our ideals, so that's always been the view, that continues to be the view.

In the case of Venezuela, I would say this: The Maduro regime is waiting. They are trying to do two things at the end of this year: They're hoping Donald Trump doesn't get reelected and they're hoping that the international community will fall for these fake elections that they are planning on holding in December and they believe if they can pull those two things off, if Trump loses and they can pull off these fake elections and enough countries recognize them as valid, then they can buy themselves a new era. If it doesn't work, then I think you're going to see some very serious internal tumult over there and what direction that has is unpredictable.

I don't know what the alternative was. The alternative in Venezuela was to say, "Sure, Maduro is fine," but then the president would be criticized for coddling an authoritarian, so it really was a no-win situation politically. It's one of those situations where you don't have the luxury of having a great option,
you were trying to choose between two less than ideal options and come up with the one that best reflects our national interests.

Walter Russell Mead:

It seems that Iran has been openly defying US sanctions and sending oil and other things to Venezuela. Do you see any role for the United States in dealing with that collaboration?

Marco Rubio:

Yeah. I mean, there's two things to keep in mind there. The first is they are actually stealing the gold of Venezuela, both out of their national reserves and also illegal mining and they're getting a great deal. I mean, you are able to sell a dollar worth of gasoline for a $1.50 or $2 worth of gold in a country that's hard up for currency. That's a great deal for the Iranians. The second is anything they can do to defy the United States is something they're going to be for.

I think more concerning is if you were to begin to see weapons sales, which I think is a possibility if in October here coming up very soon, the conventional weapons ban is lifted against Iran. Now, you can see them beginning to share weaponry with the Venezuelan military, which is problematic because in addition to them, there are all sorts of criminal elements that control large swaths of Venezuela, the FARC, the ELN, other criminal groups, and it would be a catastrophic outcome to see those groups wind up in possession of advanced weaponry that they can use to target the Colombians' US anti-drug efforts, anti-cocaine efforts in that region, and so forth.

It would also, frankly, lead to Colombia and other countries having to pursue the same weapons in return and if they can't get them from us, they'd buy it from the Israelis or somebody else, so I do think there's a role to play there. I think in that sense, many options are on the table, including the physical prevention of those weapons reaching there. I think for that includes intercepting vessels at sea, that's a real possibility, the US has sanctions and then has a right to enforce them, and also, from an economic standpoint, going after any commercial carrier that allows for that to happen, obviously they can always send things over with Mahan Air, which is their airline, but there are only certain things you can fly, many other things have to be shipped, but that's a deep concern and an issue to keep an eye on.

Walter Russell Mead:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Cuba has dropped off the foreign policy radar in some ways. It's not a subject you hear a lot discussed. Where do you see administration policy on Cuba going and do you see any hope for change in Cuba?

Marco Rubio:

I do see hope for change in Cuba. You have to go back to the last couple of years of the Obama administration. Fidel Castro is on his deathbed, Raul Castro and the 80-something-year-olds that were involved in the revolution, I mean, they don't believe they're immortal, and so what they viewed themselves as "We need to set in stone," going back to the phrase I used earlier, "We need to concrete to dry on this form of government and if we could get the US to take us off the terrorism list and begin relations with us diplomatically and some economic opening is the first step towards normalizing our system of government that allows us to maintain control of the people by maintaining control of the economy, but our system of government will be acceptable."
That was their plan and the president blew it up and he blew it up by basically saying, "We can have economic engagement with Cubans." In fact, that's one of the great untold facets of what he did. He basically said, "If you're an individual Cuban who opens a business, you can do trade and commerce with us, and we want to do more, but if you are an entity-owned, especially those owned by the Cuban military through a holding company called 'GAESA,' then you can't," and he's gone pretty aggressively against that and it's put them in a very bad spot because they realize they're running out of time for the firming up of that system of government and the people left behind are largely technocrats, they are not individuals who inspire the sort of revolutionary zeal that Fidel might have among some in the population.

Added to that is the fact that everyday Cubans no longer by this idea that this is all the result of the US embargo. They ask common-sense questions, "Fine, but why isn't Cuba full of Toyotas and Nissans and BMWs and Mercedes? Why can't I open a small business like my cousin that lives in Miami?" and so those questions are happening as well, so I do think that the only way forward is a combination of political and economic opening, and I don't pretend to say to you that Cuba is going to turn into Belgium overnight or Sweden or Switzerland or any of those places, but I do think that the process of more economic and political freedom is valuable, but only if we can prevent the current system from becoming a permanent feature and that's what these sanctions have done, so my sense is that the Trump administration in a second term will be watching and prepared to act and move on that possibility when it presents itself.

Walter Russell Mead:
Where do you see US-China relations headed in a second Trump term?

Marco Rubio:
Well, let me start by saying that a lot of times, I'm characterized as a Chinese or China hardliner. I'm not anti-China. I'm actually a huge admirer of their ancient culture and history and I believe it's inevitable that they're going to be a rich and powerful country and my hope is that we have a relationship with China that's built on equilibrium and balance, where we both understand each other's vital national interests and can be respectful of it. Now, that doesn't mean we're not going to speak out when people are being put into forced detention. That doesn't mean we're not going to speak out when people are mistreated and religious liberties are violated, but that also doesn't mean that we don't understand that they are almost the largest economy in the world at this point with a growing military presence, most populous nation on the planet. We have to deal with them and we need to do so in a balanced way.

What has happened over the last 25 years is that there was a consensus in American politics that we should allow China to cheat and to do whatever they wanted in the commercial realm, because once they got rich, once they became prosperous, they would become more democratic and play by the rules, and that hasn't worked out, and so the president takes office, that realization takes hold, and now it feels like we're doing a lot because we're trying to make up for 15 or 20 years of mistakes, so my hope is that in a second term, that we can begin to reach that equilibrium with them that's sustainable for the long-term and leads to both peace and prosperity. We'll be competitors, in some cases we'll be rivals, but we don't want to wind up being enemy combatants in an armed conflict, if that can be avoided, and I don't think they want that either, but that may be where we wind up at some point in the future if we do not do the things now to have some balance there.

There are things we need to do domestically on that front. We need to rebuild American industry. You can't be a great power if you're not an industrial power. We can't allow them to continue to be
industrialized. It's going to require us to invest in industries and to be engaged in industries that are important to our national security, so I think a second Trump term would continue in that direction. I think that's why the Chinese prefer he not be reelected because they think, frankly, that the Former Vice President Biden is a more traditional political figure that will go back to that previous consensus.

Walter Russell Mead:

Sounds like to me as if Taiwan may be the flashpoint in US-China relations, the one place where our vital interests might clash in some way. How do you view the Taiwan issue?

Marco Rubio:

Yeah. Well, it's a tricky situation. Obviously, the Chinese position within Taiwan has eroded. As you saw in the recent elections in Taiwan, clearly those who oppose being linked to the mainland have grown both in prominence and political strength at the same time as the US has become a more assertive in its relations with Taiwan, sending now two high-ranking officials there in the last month-and-a-half, and you've seen an uptick in Chinese air incursions into the air defense zone as a messaging exercise. I do believe that eventually it is a red-line issue for China, and eventually, if necessary, they will move by force, if necessary, to exert their claims on Taiwan, and in many ways, what we've seen them do in Hong Kong is a test for that in the sense that that's how they'd ideally want it to be. They would love that political figures in Taiwan that manipulate the existing system to make that happen, but they're prepared, as they were in Hong Kong, to send in forces, if necessary.

The only thing that would prevent that from happening is if the cost of doing that is too high, and so my view is the first thing is that we should help Taiwan not to win an all-out conflict against China, that's not possible, but to have the capability to raise the cost of military adventurism there to a level that China's not willing to pay and navigate that very carefully with an effort not to try to trigger a conflict like that from happening. That's, I think, the best hope that we have at this point in managing that relationship, but it's a very difficult one, it's a challenging and tricky one, and I do think we have to navigate it very carefully and not be overly provocative, but also not be provocative in the reverse by almost inviting a Chinese action there at some point here in the next decade.

Walter Russell Mead:

Then for the last 20 years, as you say, we've had this consensus on China. There's also for the last 20 years, Americans keep trying to reset the relationship with Russia and I think every president since George W. Bush has tried to have a mind-meld with Putin or to reach some kind of an agreement. Where do you see US-Russia relations going in a second Trump term?

Marco Rubio:

Well, that, too, is a tricky one. I'm not an expert on Russian history, but I know that it deeply influences. That's a tough concept for us Americans. We're 244 years old. We're still a young country from a relative point of view and we are made up of people who come from all over the world a generation two or three removed from it. These nations we're dealing with have long histories that deeply infuse public policymaking even to this day, which is different from ours in that sense.

In the case of Russia, they've never been Europe and they've never been Asia, and so they're in the middle of these two worlds. They also have memories of both being a great empire under the czar and then again under the Soviet Union, and in many ways, Putin as a product of both, and you've seen him
try to meld the two into a czarist type role that he plays, but through elected office, and at the same
time rebuild their global reach, so his interests are to be viewed as an alternative to the United States on
the global stage and to be a great power again. Now, he's not going to be a great economic power and
he's not going to be a great conventional power, but he can be a spoiler in enough places that he
becomes relevant and that's why you've seen him engaged in place after place, so I just think whatever
we do, it begins with that.

I think with Russia, simply, I mean, we try to find places where there might be some common ground
that we can work together on, and look, I'm not a fan of Vladimir Putin. I think that obviously he has
done harm to this country and its interests around the world, but I think we have to deal with who
people are and what they are as a reality and do the best we can for our country. In that case, where
there are possibilities to cooperate, be it against international terror, eventually, I believe, be it against
Chinese expansion, I think that for all of their cozy relationship today, there remains in the back of the
Russian mind the belief that they're now the junior partner, and at some point, China is going to try to
exercise their long-held claim that Siberia is theirs, and so I don't think we should take that as something
that we don't think about.

I think to the extent that there are places we can cooperate and work with them, we should, but I think
we also need to recognize that what helps Putin both internationally and domestically is to act as a
spoiler to American interests and no amount of being nice to him is going to change that and approach it
as such, whether it's in the Middle East or the Western Hemisphere or other parts of the world.

Walter Russell Mead:

Yeah. It seems to me there's a deep discussion going on in the Republican Party. In a way, you can say
it's 30 years after the Reagan presidency. Where does the Republican party go? You've talked about
common-good capitalism as maybe a different twist on some elements of Republican Party ideas, and
also earlier in our conversation, you talked about the need to rethink some American foreign policy
ideas as part of a longer historical swing. How do you see the future of the Republican Party and to what
degree is the Republican Party moving away from the party that we knew for the last 30 years and to
what degrees is their continuity?

Marco Rubio:

Well, I think, first of all, we have no choice but to move away from the party we've been for 30 years on
some issues because the world is not the same as it was 30 years ago on some issues. You can't use
yesterday's answers to today's problems. In the case of common-good capitalism, it's a rejection of
socialism. It's an embrace of capitalism, but it's also the fundamental argument that capitalism will
always reach the most efficient outcome, and generally, that's very positive.

But there are times when the most efficient outcome is not in the best interest of our country. It may be
more efficient to source our active ingredients and pharmaceuticals, our rare-earth minerals, to depend
on China for personal protective equipment. That may be the most efficient place for it to happen, it's
not in our national interest. It was also not in our national interest to deindustrialize the United States,
and so the basic argument is we are a capitalist country, but in those instances in which the market
outcome is not in the best interest of America, we need to remember that the market exists to serve the
people, not the people to serve the market, and so that's the fundamental argument behind it. I would
say that if you ask most people on the street, they would say, "Yeah, absolutely. That's exactly right."
On the case of foreign policy, I think we remain. America's too powerful a country not to be involved in
the world and our absence from the world stage would lead to calamity and chaos and friction and
conflict that would eventually draw us in, that's the lesson from history. The other lesson from history is
that even though we have tremendous power, we don't have unlimited power, and that even though we
are in many ways more powerful than we've ever been from a relative point of view, that we have less
power in some cases because the world is a bigger place and there are other countries now where their
own capabilities and the cost of engagement is high, so we have to constantly remember that from an
outsider, someone who's not engaged in government, whether they're involved in academics or they're
involved in the press or involved as a candidate has the luxury of being an idealist across the board.
Policymakers don't have the luxury of idealism. You have to deal with the reality as it's presented to you
and try to find the best outcome possible and it's different in different parts of the world. There's no
way we can pretend that our relation with China, for example, has to mirror and be consistent with our
relationship with Cuba. These are two very diametrically opposed to geopolitical challenges and so I
think it has to be the party that sort of talks about that. It's not an abandonment of our principles and
ideals, but it is doing the best we can to further them within the context of the pragmatic and of our
national interests.

Walter Russell Mead:

As acting chair of the Select Committee on Intelligence, you have access to a lot of information that
most of us don't. Without asking you to give anything away, as you think about America's situation in
the world and what's out there, what worries you the most that you think may be public opinion is not
alert to or is not well-informed about? What threats keep you up at night?

Marco Rubio:

Well, I think in the short term, it's the long-term impact of a global pandemic could actually threaten
countries and governments and their stability and even it's not just about the infection rate, it is the
devastating impact it's had on many economies and multiple countries, it's what it will mean if there's a
recovery or the resources are available to some, but not to others, nations where perhaps a vaccine or a
cure may be available to people that are connected, but not to those who aren't, so you worry about
that sort of instability in the long term. In this pandemic, the tail on the thing is pretty long and its
impact is going to be felt for years to come in many developing countries, so you worry that that would
lead to political disruption and the failure of nation-states in multiple places, so I apologize [inaudible
00:00:28:17]. I think that's one of the areas that I worry about in the short term.

I think in the long term is the possibility of an unanticipated crisis in the Asia Pacific region. As an
example, I think at some point in the near future, China's going to have to pick a war of choice, a place
where they put their military power to use, to prove it. You can build all the ships and all the capabilities
you want. Until you've used it, no one believes you have it, so I think they need to find somewhere
where they're going to test it out. It has to be a place where they could maybe win quickly and be
escalate before there's any sort of global mobilization against them and I worry about that because that
could spiral very quickly if they pick the wrong place. For all of their growing military power, the Chinese
really haven't been involved in military conflict for a long time on a large and extended scale, so you
worry about the exuberance of generals and military officials who feel pretty confident about their
abilities and want to put these toys to use and I think that's something to be really concerned about in
the midterm.
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I think obviously, in the long term, there remains the issue of China and the fear that we may, if we don't take the appropriate steps now, wind up in 25 years or 20 years or even 15 years in a very different world where we no longer have some of the benefits of the role we play today in all sorts of things, setting standards on all sorts of industries and how that benefits Americans both from their security and their economic standpoint, so short term is the pandemic, midterm is some Chinese adventurism, and then long term is a reordering of the global order to our detriment.

**Walter Russell Mead:**

All right, conspicuously missing from that list would be the Iranian nuclear program. There's been some speculation that Iran may be in a position by the end of this year to build a bomb, they have enough fissionable material. How concerned are you about not only that possibility, but the reaction of other countries in the region to it?

**Marco Rubio:**

Yeah, missing only because I tried to prioritize the thing that keeps you up at night the most. That's an ongoing concern and I think the biggest concern about that obviously is we don't know who's going to succeed the current Ayatollah who clearly is not going to be around for much longer, I'm talking about it might be another decade from now. We don't know what that transition looks like. We don't know if the direction that that clerical regime moves is more aggressive and more abrasive, and frankly, there is that concern that they develop this capability.

From an Iranian standpoint, they don't even have to build a weapon, they just have to prove that they're nuclear-capable and it buys them some level of immunity, but then there's the second facet of it, and that is elements within that government that actually believe that they could use such a weapon and win, use it successfully in some conflict, be it from a tactical weapon eventually or a strategic strike on Israel, as an example.

Also, related to that is that there's no way there's going to be a Shia bomb or not be a Sunni one, and so that some other countries in the region will quickly move to have their own capability and suddenly you have multiple nuclear powers in the most conflictive part of the world, so clearly, that's a concern, and from the Iranian standpoint, ultimately, the bottom line is that all we can do is try to make the price of being a nuclear weapon's power higher than the benefits. That's what we can try to do and to do it in a way that's sustainable in the long-term, which what the previous JCPOA, the Iran deal, did not do, in my view, and that continues to be our public policy and I hope that will continue in a new Trump administration, in a new Trump term.

**Walter Russell Mead:**

Do you think if Israel or we had the near certainty that Iran was on the brink of some kind of bomb production, that there would be a military strike in response, or how worried are you about that?

**Marco Rubio:**

Well, I'd hate to speculate on it. Obviously, that's the kind of thing that you don't want to be cavalier about. Suffice it to say, though, that what has been missing here is that Iran continues to upgrade and improve its conventional capabilities and it's done so despite these sanctions. Imagine if they weren't in place, they would have even more revenue to advance that, so I do think as Iran continues to build both their conventional and asymmetric capabilities, in essence, their ability to make people pay a price for
taking such action and continue to improve and harden their own domestic security, a military option that could successfully degrade their nuclear capability becomes less and less tenable.

I would say that every year that goes by, it becomes harder to envision a military attack that could deny them the ability to have a weapons program. It's not like they're going to put a neon light on the top of the place and say, "Here's where it is. Come hit it," so that's a big concern and it'll be a factor and it will have to be weighed. I hope that moment never comes, but leaders will have to make that decision on the basis of those options that are available before them at that moment, so our best hope for peace is to do all we can to show the Iranian regime that they are better off not having a weapon all across the board than from having one and that's a huge challenge and a topic of real concern.

Walter Russell Mead:

All right, well, we're coming to the end of our time, so I wonder, before we finish, do you have any good news you'd like to share with people? Because you've been talking mostly about very gloomy subjects.

Marco Rubio:

Yeah. Well, I mean, foreign policy is tough, right? I mean, as I said, it's a tough place to understand that the balance between idealism and pragmatism is very real and we have had to make throughout our history pragmatic decisions that sometimes are difficult, but they're the right choice. Unfortunately, history never talks about the crisis that was averted because it doesn't happen and then people can always dispute over whether it did happen and I think that's important to remember when we talk about all of this is is one of the big things about foreign policy is not simply dealing with what's before you now, but anticipating what it can turn into and trying to avoid that from happening and the willingness to do it, knowing you may never be rewarded for it, either politically or by history.

The world is changing, it's changing very fast, and our approach to it has to change to keep up. I do think there are real opportunities in the world as well. I think, by and large, the countries of the Western Hemisphere are democratic. I think, by and large, the world, for the most part, has seen, has learned more about... There's a growing global acceptance of what China's intentions are and pushback against it and we should be smart about mobilizing that in an effective way. Those are positive outcomes.

In the end, I always tell people this: With all our challenges, and we have many, I still wouldn't trade places with any other country in the world. I wouldn't rather be another country, I wouldn't rather have another country's future, I'd still rather us, and that certainly is something to remember every day before we take on all the bad and terrible and difficult things that we have to take on.

Walter Russell Mead:

Great. Well, thank you very much. I'm sure we'll be speaking again as time goes on and I know you've got some interesting work to do in the next couple of months, an interesting time.

Marco Rubio:

Yeah. It was an interesting year all the way around.

Walter Russell Mead:

Yes, and not finished yet.
Marco Rubio:
Not finished yet.

Walter Russell Mead:
The writers keep adding new plot twists.

Marco Rubio:
I know, I know. Okay. Well, thank you. I appreciate this opportunity.

Walter Russell Mead:
Thank you, Senator. Take care.