



FOREIGN POLICY INITIATIVE EVENT – RESTORING AMERICAN LEADERSHIP: A CONVERSATION WITH SENATOR MARCO RUBIO

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GRIFFIN: Good Morning. My name is Chris Griffin. I am the executive director of the Foreign Policy Initiative. On behalf of the entire team at FPI, it is my pleasure to welcome you today to our event this morning: “Restoring American Leadership: A Conversation with Senator Marco Rubio.” I ask you at this time to please make sure that your cell phones are turned off or muted so that we can get our event started.

The Foreign Policy Initiative was established in 2009 as a non-profit, non-partisan organization committed to educating American policy makers, opinion leaders, and the public about the importance of continued American engagement and leadership in world affairs; the importance of standing up for our democratic allies and standing up to the rogue regimes that threaten them; the promotion of human rights for those who are oppressed by their governments; and maintaining a strong defense and open economy. It is an honor to be joined this by Senator Rubio today for a conversation about these ideas and how to effectively promote them.

Before we get started, I want to take a moment and thank the many members of our Leadership Network from FPI, these are the alumni of our professional development programs in Washington DC and New York. If you would like to learn more about FPI after today’s event, I invite you to please chat with me, any member of that network, or any member of our staff, and point out that we have upcoming on October 1 in Washington, DC at the Newseum, our Forum where we will be continuing this type of conversation with other national security leaders.

Senator Marco Rubio of course is well known to this audience. Elected in 2010 to represent the state of Florida in the U.S. Senate, his duties in that body include service on the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, the Select Committee on Intelligence. He is chairman of the Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere for the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Before his election to the Senate, he served the State of Florida in its House of Representatives, and from 2005 to 2009, was the Speaker of that body.

After Senator Rubio's prepared remarks, he will be joined on stage by Ms. Kathleen Troia McFarland, known to all those fortunate enough to call her a friend as "KT." She will hold a conversation with the senator before moderating your questions for him. You should find on your table index cards and pens. We'll ask as we look forward to that part of the conversation that you may have on those index cards, and if you'll be kind enough to write a one word or two word topic at the top so that we may get them sorted and through those as efficiently as possible.

Ms. McFarland is FOX News' national security analyst. She also the anchor of "DEFCON3" on FOXNews.com. Her service in government spans across three administrations, and received the Defense Department's highest civilian award for her service during the Reagan administration. I thank KT for serving as our moderator today, and ask all of you to please join me in welcoming Senator Rubio.

RUBIO: Thank you very much. Well thank you. I'm honored to be with you at the Foreign Policy Initiative again. Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak with you today.

As we gather here today, two historic events are in progress. The first is the arrival of Secretary of State John Kerry in Cuba. The second is President Obama's continued campaign to secure Congressional approval for his deal with Iran.

While numerous crises around the globe will require the attention of America's next president, I would like to focus my remarks today on these two dangerous developments with Iran and Cuba, as I believe they represent the convergence of nearly every flawed strategic, moral, and economic notion that has driven President Obama's foreign policy, and as such are emblematic of so many of the crises that he has worsened around the world during his time in office.

These deals demonstrate with jarring clarity how this administration has failed to anticipate impending crises, ignored the realities of the globalized economy, and sought to make America liked rather than respected; the way it has placed politics before policy, adversaries before allies, and political legacy before leadership; the way it has confused weakness for restraint, concession for compromise, and – most simply of all – wrong for right.

[APPLAUSE]

To fully understand what we're dealing with in regards to Iran and Cuba, we have to understand who we're dealing with.

In Iran, we face radical Shia clerics who wish to one day unite the world under Islam – their version of Islam – and who believe this will only happen after a cataclysmic showdown with the West; leaders who have been directly responsible for the deaths of hundreds of Americans in the last decade, who continue to lead chants of "Death to America" each week, and who refuse to stop financing terrorists that seek to kill Americans and wipe Israel off the map.

In Cuba, we face proudly anti-American leadership who continue to work with nations like Russia and China to spy on our people and government; who harbor fugitives from American justice; and who stand in opposition to nearly every value our nation holds dear by violating the basic human rights of their own people, by preventing democratic elections, and by depriving their nation's economy of freedom and opportunity.

The world has missed having an American President who speaks honestly about the world in which we live. In the eyes of Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton, his former secretary of state, the

Cuban people are suffering because not enough American tourists visit the country, when the truth is the Cuban people are suffering because they live in a tyrannical dictatorship.

[APPLAUSE]

It is ironic that the same President who visited a US prison to talk about inequities in our criminal justice system is silent about the fact that minor offenses in Iran and Cuba are punishable indefinite detention, torture, and even death. And that these offenses often include nothing other than speaking out with the wrong political opinion.

Instead of focusing his criticism on these illegitimate governments, the President has chosen to attack opponents of his policy here at home – going so far as to demonize critics of the Iran policy as "lobbyists with money" and "warmongers" and those who are opposed to his Cuba policy as "practitioners of ethnic politics." This is shameful, derogatory rhetoric, and it should have no place in our democracy, especially from our President.

[APPLAUSE]

Centuries of global affairs tell us the best way to affect an outcome with volatile leaders is through strength and example, while the worst is through weakness and concession. Yet weakness and concession are the preferred tools of statecraft for this administration.

President Obama has not only permitted Iran to retain its entire existing nuclear infrastructure, he has also endorsed the construction of a full-scale, industrial-size nuclear program within 15 years. He has conceded a vast enrichment capacity, preserved Iran's fortified underground facility, and failed to secure "anytime, anywhere" inspections. He has virtually guaranteed Iran becomes a regional power with the ability to build long-range missiles capable of hitting the U.S. homeland. And on top of all this, he wants to hand Iran \$100 billion in sanctions relief, which will be used in part to fund Hamas and Hezbollah, promote instability in Bahrain and Yemen, and to prop up Bashar al-Assad in Syria.

He has given all of this away without any commitment that Iran will end its support for terrorism, accept Israel's right to exist, or return a single American hostage. In short, the deal with Iran isn't a deal at all. It is a string of concessions to a sworn adversary of the United States.

The negotiations with Cuba have proven equally one-sided.

President Obama has rewarded the Castro regime for its repressive tactics and persistent, patient opposition to American interests. He has unilaterally given up on a half-century worth of policy toward the Castro regime that was agreed upon by presidents of both parties. He has ensured the regime will receive international legitimacy and a substantial economic boost to benefit its repression of the Cuban people, which has only increased – increased – since the new policy was announced.

And as a symbol of just how backward this policy shift has turned out to be, not a single Cuban dissident has been invited to today's official flag-raising ceremony at the US Embassy in Havana. Cuba's dissidents have fought for decades for the very Democratic principles President Obama claims to be advancing through these concessions. Their exclusion from this event has ensured that it will be little more than a propaganda rally for the Castro regime.

And so I will make this pledge here and now: As president, as a symbol of solidarity between my administration and those who strive for freedom around the world, I will invite Cuban dissidents,

Iranian dissidents, Chinese dissidents, and freedom fighters from around the world to be honored guests at my inauguration.

[APPLAUSE]

Our current President has made no such effort to stand on the side of freedom. He has been quick to deal with the oppressors, but slow to deal with the oppressed. And his excuses are paper-thin.

He has made the argument that if the Cuban embargo hasn't worked for 50 years, why shouldn't we try something new. My question is: Why hasn't he made a similar argument to the Castro regime? For over 50 years, they've tried tyranny and Communism and it hasn't worked either. The Cuban people today have a standard of living well below that of virtually every other nation in the hemisphere.

He has also made the claim that the people of Cuba do not have access to advanced twenty-first century technology because of the U.S. embargo. This is patently false. They don't have access because the Castro regime has made this technology illegal. The notion that the Cuban people will be allowed freedom of speech and freedom of information now that President Obama has made concessions to the very government denying them these rights is complete fiction.

The concessions to Iran and Cuba both endanger our nation.

[APPLAUSE]

And here's how. Here's how. The deal with Cuba threatens America's moral standing in our hemisphere and around the world, brings legitimacy to a state sponsor of terror, and further empowers an ally of China and Russia that sits just 90 miles from our shore. And if the effort to stop the Iran deal in the Senate fails, the threat posed will be truly historic: a nuclear arms race will likely overtake the Middle East, and the national security stakes of the election before us will become higher than those of any election since the Cold War.

It is important to note that Hillary Clinton not only supports these two deals, she now brags about her instrumental role in bringing them to fruition. The fact of the matter is that Hillary Clinton will not overturn these deals as president. I will.

[APPLAUSE]

Beginning on day one, I will undertake a three-part plan to roll back President Obama's deal with Iran and repair the damage done to America's standing in the Middle East.

First, I will quickly re-impose sanctions on Iran. I will give the mullahs a choice: either you have an economy or you have a nuclear enrichment program, but you cannot have both. And I will also ask Congress to pass crushing new measures that target human rights abusers and Iran's leaders involved in financing and overseeing Iran's sponsorship of terrorism.

Second, I will ensure our forces in the Middle East are positioned to signal readiness and restore a credible military option. This will be bolstered by my administration's efforts to rebuild our military by ending defense sequestration once and for all.

Third, after imposing crippling sanctions on Iran, I will link any talks to Iran's broader conduct, from human rights abuses to support for terrorism and threats against Israel. I will insist that a deal must terminate Iran's nuclear program. Iran will never be allowed to build a nuclear weapon if I become president – not now, not decades from now.

[APPLAUSE]

That would be my policy with Iran – there would be no room for equivocation, no room for manipulation, and no room for cheating. Some will say there will be no room for negotiations. But history proves otherwise. Iran may not return to the table immediately, but it will return when its national interests require it to do so.

I will also undertake an equally bold plan to roll back President Obama's concessions to the Castro regime. [APPLAUSE] Thank you very much.

First, on day one, I will give the Castros a choice: either continue repressing your people and lose the diplomatic relations and benefits provided by President Obama, or carry out meaningful political and human rights reforms and receive increased U.S. trade, investment, and support.

Second, I will restore Cuba to the state sponsor of terror list until it stops supporting designated Foreign Terrorist Organizations, helping North Korea evade international sanctions, or harboring fugitives from American justice.

And third, I will do everything in my power to provide support, both direct and moral, to Cuba's pro-democracy movement, promote greater access to uncensored information for the Cuban people, and deprive the Castro regime of the funding for its repressive security state.

[APPLAUSE]

These are the actions required to restore the safety and security President Obama has cost us through his diplomacy with dictators.

When it comes to the challenges posed by Iran and Cuba, our task is straightforward – we must prevent Iran from gaining a nuclear weapon and we must guarantee that the United States stands on the side of the Cuban people, not the side of their oppressors. But we also know that straightforward is not a synonym for easy.

Confronting these challenges and the many other crises we face around the world will require what has always been required: leadership – principled leadership, based on strategy and security, not politics or legacy.

And that is what I intend to offer our nation and the world in the years ahead.

So, thank you for having me today and I look forward to taking your questions.

[APPLAUSE]

McFARLAND: I'm the mother and grandmother of five, so I'm going to take the liberty of giving Senator Rubio his water first. ... Now the hard part, you have talked very eloquently about what you would do now to stop President Obama's relationship with Cuba, but let's fast forward to when you are President of the United States, if you are President of the United States, we've already established relations, the flag is flying over Havana, and you have said just now that you

would roll back the relationship, but how realistic is that? By 18 months from now, the U.S. will have business interest in Cuba, we will have contracts, major American companies will have already started building hotels, will have started tourist trade, will have started investment in industrial investments—so, how do you undo all that?

RUBIO: Actually, I don't think that is what's going to happen. First of all, people have to understand, there is no such thing as the Cuban economy, when we talk about an economy we think of our own economy or some other economy. There is no such thing as the Cuban economy, what there is, is a massive holding company called Gaesa—G-A-E-S-A—and it's run by the Cuban military, they own everything in Cuba, all of the hotels, the telecommunications, the rent-a-cars, the gas stations, every major industry in Cuba is owned or operated by a company held within this larger company called Gaesa. When you open up to the Cuba economy, what you're opening up to is this holding company run by, in fact, Raul Castro's son-in-law.

So, what American companies are going to find when they go to Cuba is: Number 1, a government that's going to say "Well, we'll let you flag a hotel under your name, but it belongs to us, the workers work for us, you have no real ownership stake other than maybe 20 percent, but we're the majority owner and everything and there is no property rights or contracts that can be enforced anywhere. And, so I don't think it's going to be as quick as people think. I think the initial bump is going to be travel, remittances are going to continue obviously, you'll see some minor investments, but not major investments.

The second point that I would make is, I'm in favor of any policy that helps bring about change in Cuba. I would tell you today that if what the President had done had been an exchange for concrete promises from the Cuban government, "we are going to begin to do this..." "we are going to begin to do that...", I'd still be uncomfortable with elements of the deal, but it would be harder to argue against.

Understand that this arrangement, this arrangement is simply this: we are going to give—we are going to do all of these things with Cuba, we're going to open up all these things that we're willing to do with Cuba, and Cuba responds "Thank you very much, but we still want you to pay reparations and we're not going to change a single thing." And they've said that repeatedly to their own people and they've carried out—this Sunday, they rounded up, arrested, and beat over 90 dissidents, some of them wearing Barack Obama masks as they were parading down the street in protest.

So, my point is, if they want to continue down this path there better be some action on the part of the Cuban government or we're not going to have an American flag flying over a so-called embassy that, in fact, is nothing more than the same facility we had once there, but now we've given them this diplomatic recognition and legitimacy to an illegitimate government.

MCFARLAND: Alright, so let's ask the tougher question, from the United States' perspective, the only time we've ever come close to having a nuclear war was over the Cuban Missile Crisis, and the Soviet Union tried to put nuclear weapons, nuclear missiles in Cuba, how are you going to prevent the Chinese, who are interested in the region, the Iranians, who have also expressed interest in the region, and the Russians, who have some kind of military relationship with the Castro government, and potentially using those ports as ports that they would put their own military naval vessels in?

RUBIO: Well, let me just tell you, I don't retreat from the doctrine that we will not allow any foreign power to establish in the Western Hemisphere an offensive military capability that's capable of attacking the United States, it's as simple as that.

MCFARLAND: Even though Secretary Kerry himself has said the Monroe Doctrine was dead.

RUBIO: Well, Secretary Kerry's not going to be my secretary of state. [LAUGHTER, APPLAUSE]... That's not going to happen, first of all. Second of all, the real threat posed by Cuba is two-fold: Number 1, on the island of Cuba there are at least two Signals Intelligence facilities, one from the Russians and one from the Chinese that actively collect against the United States—they particularly target Southern Command, Central Command, and NASA, all located in Florida.

Second, Cuba harbors dozens of fugitives of American justice, including a killer of a police officer from New Jersey, including dozens of people indicted or accused of Medicare fraud—basically people that stole your money and are now living off of it in Cuba. There are also two Cuban generals or high [ranking] military officials that were indicted for the murder of unarmed civilian Americans over international airspace back in 1996. And, so these are the sorts of things that we need to point to as the kind of threat that Cuba poses and people forget this, Cuba was caught last year helping North Korea evade UN sanctions. They were caught doing it and there was no punishment for it, nothing whatsoever—its been lost, its been forgotten.

These are the kinds of threats that Cuba legitimately faces—Cuba is not a legitimate military threat in that way, unless of course they ramp up spending in that direction and they don't have that capability, but they do have the capability of acting as base of operations for others to target us, whether it's in intelligence or in the case of the Russians increased port naval visits from an expanded Russian presence in the Western Hemisphere.

MCFARLAND: For the final question on Cuba, can you talk about—you said you would support a pro-democracy movement, I'm assuming that means covert activities—how would you do that?

RUBIO: Well, first of all, let me say that I would work quickly to transition radio and TV, Marti, the office of Cuba broadcasting. Today is it largely a content provider and we would remain functions of that, but I want it to become more of an access provider. So, for example, there now exists the capability of providing through satellite technology, access to the Internet. I believe if the Cuban people had unfettered access to the Internet, even if it's through satellite capability, it would allow them to not just join social media and download candy crush, it would also allow them to communicate with one another and receive news from around the world. The black-out that exists in Cuba, the news blockade that exists in Cuba by the Cuban government is extraordinary. They will have no idea this happened here today, they will have no idea about the debate going on in America, they don't get CNN or Fox News or MSNBC either [LAUGHTER]. That's their loss, right? But, all the information they get in Cuba is from Cuban government sources and so I think breaking that news blockade will be a big part of helping that government transition and we would peruse that quickly.

And, as far as a pro-democracy movement in Cuba, we have democracy programs now, we would continue to fund those and try to give them a stronger standing within the island—in essence, show that we are firmly on the side of those on civil society that are looking for a positive change, because you're also looking to empower the next generation of Cuban leadership, people capable of functioning in a democratic society if and when that day comes, as we hope it will soon.

MCFARLAND: Let's move to Iran and I want to go on two tracks. One, let's assume that as you have predicted that the President vetoes your bill to not have the Iran deal go through and then it is not overridden, so that the President's Iran deal does go through—you said when you're president you're going to unwind a lot of that, now let me ask the same kind of question about Iran as I did about Cuba. Two-fold—one, the other countries in the world, and there are other countries that are signatories to the Iran deal, they see an economic opportunity [in Iran] that they're not going to walk away from. The Europeans want to sell them cars, the Russians want to sell them weapons, the Chinese want to buy their oil—how effective would U.S. sanctions be in a Rubio administration?

RUBIO: Let's take out the Chinese and the Russians because they never cooperated to begin with and they're not cooperating now. Soleimani was just parading up and down the streets of Moscow and basically anything we're for, Vladimir Putin has decided he's against. And the Chinese have their own agenda and they pursue it in their own way, they've never really been a critical lynchpin of our efforts, they're at the negotiating table but they've never really cared or been as supportive about this as we want them to be or they should be, but don't realize they need to be.

The other countries, I don't agree, basically when our sanctions are re-imposed, for example, the banking sector in Germany, they're going to have a choice: they can have access to the U.S. economy, through which 50 percent of global capital flows or they can choose to have access to the Iranian economy, through which less than one percent of global capital flows go through. I think they're going to choose the U.S. economy. When given a choice between having access to the American economy or the Iranian economy, these companies are going to choose the American economy.

The second point that I would make about Iran is that we don't have to think hard to imagine what's going to be in place in about 10 years—just look at North Korea today. North Korea today possesses multiple nuclear warheads and long-range rockets capable of even reaching the continental United States. The good news is they're not very good at aiming, so we don't know if they're going to hit San Francisco or San Diego, but the bad news is they could hit something. And so, what does that mean?

We don't have a credible threat of force against North Korea's nuclear program because if we were to target their nuclear program, the cost of it will be an attack on Seoul or on Tokyo or on Guam or on Hawaii or potentially on the West Coast of the U.S. Well, that's where we're going to be in about 10 years with Iran, we will not have a credible threat of force against Iran because they will have rapidly already expanded their conventional capabilities. But we will also know that any sort of military action against Iran's nuclear program would result in an attack on Paris or London or Washington or New York. And that's where I know we will be in 10 years because of this deal.

MCFARLAND: What if we're there in a year and a half? What is Iran is a threshold nuclear state within a year and a half?

RUBIO: Well, again, I think that's why it's important—the only approach to Iran that has any chance of success in the short or long term is a combination of two things: crippling sanctions on their economy and on individuals, which is, quite frankly, what forced them to the negotiating table to begin with, despite the fact that this administration fought against those sanctions, but they go around now saying “we put those sanctions in place and forced Iran to the table.” The Obama Administration was against and argued against these sanctions, using the same arguments they're using now.

Sanctions combined with the credible threat of military force. Basically, as long as you're enriching uranium or reprocessing plutonium, sanctions will remain in place and if you try to move towards a weapon, we will hit your facilities with a credible threat of military force [APPLAUSE] and that's the only way that in the short to mid-term we can really rein in this program, that's the only thing that has a chance of success.

MCFARLAND: When you say the Russians and the Chinese have never been with us on the sanctions anyway, how do you prevent the Russians and the Chinese from establishing a much closer relationship with Iran? Especially if we're not in the deal, if they [Iran] can't buy American weapons, European weapons, they want to buy Russian weapons.

RUBIO: We can't prevent per se them from pursuing this route, it's a fact of what we face now and I think it's an eye opener. But, you know what, that actually answers my question—we've put a tremendous amount at stake in the United Nations Security Council, in which both of these countries have a veto power in. We're putting our faith in the enforcement of this mechanism and two of the main countries involved in this endeavor have the sort of relationship that you've outlined.

I still think and I believe that ultimately, Iran's economy is impacted by U.S. sanctions in ways that the Russians cannot overcome—in fact, the Russian economy itself is the subject of sanctions now, so you would have two sanctioned countries interacting with one another but neither one having access to the modern developed economies of the world. Look, it isn't going to prevent them from doing any commerce, but it's going to have a significant impact on their ability to grow their economy and therefore fund the operations that they're seeking to fund.

MCFARLAND: I want to turn to ISIS before we go to audience questions. You've talked about a joint Arab Force and that would be the way to fight ISIS

RUBIO: Sunni—Joint Sunni Arab Force.

MCFARLAND: Right, a joint Sunni Arab Force, but it hasn't materialized.

RUBIO: No, it hasn't and it requires American to convene it. I think there's a willingness on the part of many of these countries to participate in this effort and the elements of it would be nation states like Egypt and Jordan and many other Gulf kingdoms—and Saudi Arabia—but it would also involve empowering local forces in Iraq. The Sunni tribes themselves to help defeat a radical Sunni movement, obviously it involves Kurds as well and I think it also involves Christian communities who are asking for the ability to defend themselves from these attacks they've experienced—so it's a combination of all of these things.

It would require U.S. leadership to help convene it and bring it together and it will require some U.S. involvement—for instance, technical, logistical, and intelligence support and vetting Special Operations forces to help with targeting and training and strategic advice and so forth, but I do think ultimately this is not just because we don't want to be in the fight directly, it is also because I believe that the fastest and most enduring way to defeat a radical Sunni movement is for Sunnis themselves to defeat it, Sunnis themselves to reject it. It has to happen that way, otherwise, the elements that made it possible are still in place, the resentment between Sunnis and Shia remain in place, which is one of the reasons why ISIS was created as a liberator initially when they re-entered Iraq, they were greeted as liberators from the Shia government in Baghdad was the view of many of the Sunni communities, obviously they don't feel that way

anymore because they now see the reality of this group. So, I think it's critical that Sunnis play a lynchpin role in defeating this radical Sunni movement.

MCFARLAND: So I take it from that then you would not have cooperation with the Shiite militias that are active.

RUBIO: The problem with the Shiite militias is they're basically extensions of the Iranian government, they are part of this web of surrogates used by Iran to spread their influence in the world and the Shia militia are involved not simply for the purposes of defeating ISIS, they're involved also for the purposes of increasing Iran's influence and leverage on Iraq, they want to become the dominate power in Iraq and the Shia militias are part of that effort. In fact, they supplanted the regular Iraqi army in many instances in that regard.

MCFARLAND: One of the audience questions is, you previewed it—the Middle East Christians. You know, [in] the birthplace of Christianity, we're seeing the genocide of Christians. The Obama Administration seems to not put that front and center on his foreign policy, how would you change?

RUBIO: First of all, I think it is critical to talk about it. I mean, not enough has been said outside of groups like this about what's happening. This was the ritual slaughter of thousands of people of any other denomination I think there would be an outrage in the world, for whatever reason it hasn't led to the same level of outrage that's necessary. People driven from ancestral homelands or for the first time in two thousand years, there aren't masses being celebrated or Christian services on Sunday and it's important that these communities be empowered, so obviously they need assistance in short-term, they're displaced in a bunch of different places—but I ultimately believe they need the ability to defend themselves.

If you talk to many of these communities, what they will argue is “we have no capability of defending ourselves, we are at the mercy of Kurds or we are at the mercy of Sunni tribes, we are at the mercy of others, we count on others to provide for our defense.” And obviously the Iraqi government is not a huge fan of this notion that we're going to be arming different elements in the region, but in the case of the Christians, they deserve the right to self-defense. [APPLAUSE]

And I do believe that is a key part of it and ultimately I think they deserve the right to return to their historical, for example, in Iraq, the historical cities that have hosted them for thousands of years and it should be part of any effort once we defeat ISIS is to ensure that any successor government in Iraq is one that respects this pluralistic society with Christians and Kurds and Sunnis and Shias can all live side by side in some unity, with a unity government that ensures that and it's got to be part of our long-term strategic plans for the region, otherwise it won't succeed and we'll be right back here again in three or four years.

MCFARLAND: When you talked about preventing Iran from having a nuclear weapon and you've talked about North Korea, and it's the whole notion of nuclear proliferation. If Iran is a threshold nuclear state, other countries in the region have said “they will too.” So, what do you do as president when you are faced with a Middle East where a number of countries are “I want what Iran has” threshold nuclear states?

RUBIO: Prevent Iran from having it. That's the best way to prevent it from happening, otherwise that's exactly what you're going to face is a cascade and put yourself in their position, put yourself in the position of the Saudis for a moment—and I have many quarrels with the policies of the Saudi government both domestically and around the world—but put yourself in their position, they view themselves as allies of the United States, they also view themselves as a

strategic ally of the United States and they also view themselves as a nation in conflict with the ambitions of a Persian Shia government in Tehran that wants to become the regional power and they see themselves being in circle now for example, with the activities going on in Yemen and in Bahrain sponsored by Iran.

So, now they look at their ally the United States and the United States is cutting a deal with Saudi Arabia's rival in the region and that deal ensures that they're going to have an industrial capacity nuclear program, they're going to continue to develop long-range rockets and the Saudis are saying to themselves "I know we live in this neighborhood, we know who you're dealing with, and we know what these guys are going to do eventually, they're going to breakout towards a weapon." And then they say, "if there is a Shia bomb, there will be a Sunni bomb."

And so, I think we can anticipate that Saudi Arabia has already taken steps or will soon begin to take steps to be able to match anything Iran has—in essence, I am confident of this, if in 15 years Iran possesses—or 10 years—a nuclear weapons capability, they will not be alone in the region. At least Saudi Arabia will have the same capability and you will have a situation analogous to what you see today between India and Pakistan, except in much more unstable part of the world where you could have as many as three or four nuclear arm nations in the most unstable region on the planet.

MCFARLAND: You've talked about one of the first things you would do is increase defense spending and stop sequestration, how would you deal with missile defense?

RUBIO: I think missile defense is a critical component of it because one of the technologies where the threshold has dropped incredibly in terms of being able to access is intercontinental missiles. Nuclear weapons are still difficult to build because you need to have the enrichment capability, although the designs are widely available, even a poor country could. I mean, North Korea basically has no economy, it's a nation governed by a criminal syndicate and yet, it is capable of producing nuclear weapons. But, the missiles are even easier to acquire and nations like North Korea are proliferating that technology to anyone who's willing to pay for it. So you could easily foresee a situation in the next 10 or 12 years where 12 to 15 countries possess intercontinental missile capabilities with or without a nuclear warhead and they could also include electromagnetic weapons and all sorts of other potential threats, so I think missile defense becomes a critical part of our notion, both in Europe but also in the East and West Coasts of the United States and it does require a significant investment and, you know, the Gates Commission that looked at all of this and set the baseline funding level that we should be at but are not anticipated all of these threats in their budget decisions.

But, again, that's why I believe why we must return to that baseline number and here's my argument: the number one obligation of the federal government is to provide for our national security, there's a lot of other things the federal government wants to do [APPLAUSE] there are a lot of other things the federal government wants to do or has decided to do, but national security is the one thing the federal government must do. And so, my view of budgeting is this: before you pay for anything else, you fully fund defense and then you pay for everything else with the money that remains and we're not doing that right now, we're treating it the same as every other program and it's not.

MCFARLAND: Israel—longtime United States ally, but facing an even more dangerous neighborhood. I was on the Golan Heights recently and I saw the ISIS flag flying—there's Hamas, there's Hizbollah, now even the Sinai has become a hotbed of radical extremists, how would you repair the relationship with Israel if you were president?

RUBIO: By the way, you mentioned the Sinai, the Sinai is being destabilized by ISIS operating out of Libya, they're using that as a base of operation both to target the Sinai, but I predict eventually Europe. Because from the Libyan port cities you're just across the Mediterranean and right into Europe and it's a great transit point for that sort of activity. And, by the way, don't take your eyes off of ISIS in Afghanistan, there is a lot of instability in the Taliban and ISIS is beginning to try and fill that void.

The question of Israel is, I think this is the most significant erosion in our relationship that we've seen since the founding of the Jewish State, because what does Israel ask of the United States? Basically, two primary things—it hasn't asked our soldiers to fight for them, it hasn't asked us to conduct military operations in their place, it's asked for two things: Number one, that we support them in international forums, that we use our veto power at the [UN] Security Council to prevent international sanctions or actions against Israel. And the second thing they ask for, is if they run out of weapons, bullets, or rockets that we rearm and supply them. For the first time in a long time, maybe ever, there are significant doubts in Jerusalem about both of these things.

The Obama Administration has telegraphed a threat that they may not use our veto power to prevent, for example, recognition of a Palestinian Authority or the condemnation of Israel and, in fact, are intimating that if Israel does anything against Iran now they will be an international pariah and the U.S. won't be there to support them.

And we saw just a year and a half ago when Israel came under attack and required some resupply that the administration hesitated for a significant period of time because they were concerned about the way Israel was conducting its operations, so I think that's eroded the relationship significantly.

If I'm President of the United States, the Israelis won't have to worry about either one, it will be crystal clear to the world that the United States of America will do whatever it takes to ensure that the only pro-American, free enterprise democracy in the Middle East, the State of Israel, survives and prospers as a Jewish State. [APPLAUSE]

MCFARLAND: We have several audience questions about China. Given Chinese territorial expansion in the South China Sea, how would you deal with our maritime presence in the region and China's expansion?

RUBIO: Well, it goes back to defense spending. First, we have to have the capability. Unfortunately, for about three to four months out of the year, we don't have an aircraft carrier presence in the Pacific region. I, in fact, saw it myself when I was there in January or February a couple years ago. Our aircraft carrier for the region was in port in service, so we didn't have a carrier presence. So it goes back to having the capability.

I agree with a pivot to Asia, but you have to have something to pivot with and while the administration has taken some positive steps, for example, the Marines presence in Australia and some of the other measures that have occurred, I think we need to have a greater capability in the region.

I also am encouraged by, and we should continue to encourage, the Japanese willing to do more. Abe has looked for ways, has found some creative lawyers that have allowed them the opportunity to now provide for collective self-defense and that's important because the Japanese military or self-defense forces are quite capable, they are an incredible force

multiplier for us, they use our weapons systems, they're very good at missile defense and they're a critical part of our effort in that region as well.

And third is simply not accepting it. We do not accept these artificial islands and the claims that China makes around them and we need to challenge them. We need to continue to send ships through the South China Sea without asking for permission. We shouldn't in any way admit these exclusive air zones that China is claiming, we should continue to challenge them repeatedly and ensure that we have the presence in the region to be able to back that up.

And, by the way, when we talk about the capability to be in the region, understand that China doesn't want a direct war with the U.S., what they want to do is create conditions where we have to accept reality in their minds and here's why they're doing it: they are investing in anti-axis asymmetrical capabilities—in essence, they're not going to build 12 aircraft carriers, they're going to build a lot of cheaper rockets that can destroy expensive aircraft carriers. And once they can do that, they know it forces our fleet further and further away from the area of operations and then they can turn to countries in the region and say “You've got this American security agreement that you're relying on, but they can't really live up to it anymore, so you might as well fold in under the order that we've created.”

In essence, it's almost like a reverse Monroe Doctrine, it is the Chinese version of the Monroe Doctrine in the Asia-Pacific region that they must be the dominant military and political power in the region and we can't be around. We shouldn't accept it, we are a Pacific power with deep interests and relationships in that region, our economy is deeply dependent on access to the Asia-Pacific region, and in no way should we cede ground on that to China or any nation.
[APPLAUSE]

MCFARLAND: The countries you've identified as presenting real threats to the United States—Russia, China, Iran, North Korea—they all have one thing in common, which you alluded to: they don't let their people have access to the world wide web, they don't let their people have access to social media. What proactive foreign policy initiatives would you take to tear down the cyber wall?

RUBIO: The point you make is an excellent one and one I've been making increasingly over the last two weeks—look all over the world, all of the problems on this planet are being created by totalitarian states or totalitarian movements. In essence, there's not a single free enterprise democracy on the planet threatening people, creating instability, violating the rules of international engagement, all the problems are being created by tyrants and so, in some ways, while the world has rapidly changed, there is fundamental truths that are always there and that is the battle between liberty and freedom and tyranny and oppression. Now, what we can do about it?

Well, look, I think we need to be firmly on the side of those looking to change these societies. So, if I'm president and there's a Green Revolution in Iran, my first statement isn't going to be “I'm not going to interfere in the sovereignty of Iran.” My first statement's going to be “We stand with in solidarity and in support of those in the streets of Tehran who are protesting against them.”
[APPLAUSE]

It's why we pursued and I hope pass sanctions against human rights violators in Venezuela, it's why we've talked about the democracy programs in Cuba today, it's why we need to be firmly on the side of those seeking political change in China, in Russia, in Iran, everywhere in the world where tyranny is being confronted by brave people that are standing up for it. And I think sometimes unfortunately this administration has looked the other way on human rights, on pro-

democracy movements, and things of this nature and when you do that, you demoralize these movements.

The moral authority and power of the United States should not be underestimated, it is clearly a key role in providing us both moral sustenance but also international attention to those that sought freedom and opportunity in the world during the Cold War, we can play the same role now.

The last question you asked is how do we break the cyber blockade? Well, that's a little harder in large countries like Russia and China, but I can tell you how we don't allow it to accelerate and that is by turning the Internet over to a world government organization of some sort that now regulates the Internet and actually finds that these practices are legitimate.

MCFARLAND: You've often been compared with your optimism for America's future while the rest of the country and mainstream media and a lot of polls have said that a great majority of Americans think that the future is going to be less good than the past has been. They look ahead and said "we're a nation in decline." You have talked a number of times about restoring America's leadership role in the world, but also America's sense of itself and confidence in its own moral—in the shining city on the hill, to borrow Ronald Reagan's phrase. How would you go about doing that?

RUBIO: Well, first of all, I'm optimistic about America because despite our challenges, I wake up every morning with the belief that I wouldn't trade places with any other country in the world. [APPLAUSE] I encourage everyone here to ask yourself the same question—despite our challenges, who would you rather be? Would you trade places with Russia? Would you trade places with China? I don't think anyone in this room would and neither would I.

We have challenges and they need to be confronted, that's not new, every generation has faced challenges—some were domestic, some were international, some were both, but we've always faced great challenges and we always will. The question for us is not whether we face challenges, it's whether we're going to solve them and move on.

I actually think the 21st century holds extraordinary promise—for example, economically, we now live in a world where there are hundreds of millions of people who can afford to buy the things we make, the services we offer, who are prepared to invest with us and partner with us. We've never had a global economy with so many people who buy things and invest in things and we can be a big winner and as can they, it's not a zero sum game, I'm very optimistic about that.

I'm optimistic about the fact that all over the world a growing number of people aspire to liberty and freedom and, in many respects, while the Internet poses challenges—for example, the ability to radicalize Americans—it also poses extraordinary opportunity which is the ability to collaborate and spread news and information quicker than ever. These are positive developments—our choice is, do we harness them and lead or are we overwhelmed by them and are left behind?

Americans are insecure about tomorrow because the world is rapidly changing, our economy is not undergoing a downturn, it is undergoing a massive transformation, it is like the industrial revolution happening every five years and the question we must answer is are we going to embrace it or do we ignore it, fight against it, and get left behind?

And geopolitically, yes, the world is changing, but it still requires American leadership. In the absence of our leadership, what you leave behind is a vacuum and that vacuum leads to

chaos. America's never asked for this job of being the global leader, but for some reason, that we don't fully understand, fate has given it to us and now we have a choice—we must either accept it or the world will become a darker, more difficult place to live in because, as I said, in the absence of our leadership, there's no one that takes our place and the chaos that follows makes the world more dangerous and less prosperous.

MCFARLAND: With that inspirational closing, I think we should let Senor Rubio get on with the rest of his day because he has a hard out and he's on the air in about ten minutes across the street. Would everyone please stay seated? Please let's let Senator Rubio go out—

RUBIO: I'm going to Fox, so— [APPLAUSE]

MCFARLAND: Fair and balanced. So, Senator Rubio, if you would leave, everyone else stay seated and let the senator exit.

RUBIO: Thank you very much.