

## **POLITICAL VIEWS OF MARCO RUBIO, THE NEW U.S. SECRETARY OF STATE**

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### **Summary**

Donald Trump, who won the 2024 United States (U.S.) presidential elections comfortably and will be sworn into office in January 2025 as the 47<sup>th</sup> U.S. President, has chosen Florida Senator Marco Rubio as his Secretary of State. Rubio, who had previously been a rival to Trump for the Republican Party presidential nomination, has nevertheless become a name that President Trump has shown his trust in by appointing him to the most critical position, the Department of State, along with the Department of Defense. Rubio will begin his new position in 2025 after receiving Senate approval. Since the Republican Party has a majority in both houses of the U.S. Congress, including the Senate, there are no obstacles to Rubio's appointment. In this context, Rubio will also go down in history as the highest-ranking Hispanic politician in American history. This study will summarize Marco Rubio's life and his views on critical issues, particularly those concerning international politics and Türkiye.

**Keywords:** Marco Rubio, Republican Party, Donald Trump, American Foreign Policy, Turkish-American relations.

## **ABD'NİN YENİ DIŞİŞLERİ BAKANI MARCO RUBIO'NUN SİYASİ GÖRÜŞLERİ**

### **Öz**

2024 Amerika Birleşik Devletleri (ABD) Başkanlık seçimlerini rahat bir şekilde kazanan ve 47. ABD Başkanı olarak 2025 yılı Ocak ayında yemin ederek göreve başlayacak olan Donald Trump, Dışişleri Bakanı (Sekreteri) olarak Florida Senatörü Marco Rubio'yu seçmiştir. Geçmişte Trump'a karşı Cumhuriyetçi Parti Başkan adaylığı konusunda rakip olmuş olan Rubio, buna karşın bu yeni dönemde Başkan Trump'ın Savunma Bakanlığı ile birlikte en kritik görev olan Dışişleri Bakanlığına getirerek güvenini gösterdiği bir isim olmuştur. Rubio, Senato onayını almasının ardından 2025 yılı içerisinde yeni görevine başlayacaktır. Cumhuriyetçi Parti'nin ABD Kongresi'nin –Senato da dahil olmak üzere her iki kanadında da çoğunluğu sağlamış olması nedeniyle, Rubio'nun atanması için herhangi bir engel bulunmamaktadır. Bu bağlamda, Rubio, Amerikan tarihinde en yüksek konuma gelen Hispanik siyasetçi olarak da tarihe geçecektir. Bu çalışmada, Marco Rubio'nun hayatı ve özellikle uluslararası siyaset ve Türkiye'yi ilgilendiren kritik konulardaki görüşleri özetlenecektir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Marco Rubio, Cumhuriyetçi Parti, Donald Trump, Amerikan Dış Politikası, Türk-Amerikan ilişkileri.

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## **Introduction**

The 60<sup>th</sup> United States (U.S.) Presidential elections, on which the eyes of the whole world were fixed, and the concurrent federal elections for both chambers of the U.S. Congress - the entire 435-member House of Representatives and one-third (33) of the 100-member Senate - ended without major incidents on November 5, 2024. As a result of the elections, Donald Trump, the Republican Party candidate and the 45<sup>th</sup> U.S. President (2017-2021), was once again elected President of the United States for the 2025-2029 term.

Donald Trump, who was sworn into office towards the end of January 2025 as the 47<sup>th</sup> President of the United States, has chosen Florida Senator Marco Rubio as his new Secretary of State (Herman, 2024). Rubio, who had previously been a rival to Trump for the Republican Party presidential nomination, has nevertheless risen to a critical politician position that President Trump has shown his trust in by appointing him to the Secretary of State, one of the most vital positions in the American political system. After nominating him, Trump called Rubio a “highly respected leader” who would be “a true friend to our allies and a fearless warrior who will never back down from our enemies” (Kornbluh, 2024). Rubio began his new position in 2025 after receiving Senate approval. In that sense, Rubio also went down in history as the highest-ranking Hispanic politician in American history.

This article will summarize Marco Rubio’s life and his views on critical issues, especially those concerning international politics and Türkiye. This is important because influential U.S. Secretaries of State could gain their autonomous role from the U.S. President in shaping U.S. foreign policy by their firm beliefs and sharp ideas as well as technical information provided by the Department of State. There have been examples of highly influential and popular U.S. Secretaries of State from both parties, including Henry Kissinger (1973-77) from Republicans and Madeleine Albright (1997-2001) from Democrats. Looking at his earlier high profile, Rubio could be a similar success story but of course, his relationship with President Trump and structural conditions will also have effects on his performance. Since detailed information and academic works on Rubio’s leadership style and foreign policy understanding are rare, this work will be a preliminary study to understand the worldview of the young top American diplomat. That is why, no theoretical framework will be used and Rubio will be assessed based on his earlier speeches and declarations.

## **Marco Rubio’s Life Story**

Born in Miami in 1971, Marco Antonio Rubio is the third-born child of a middle-class Cuban-American family of Cuban immigrants. Marco Rubio’s father, Mario Rubio Reina, and his mother, Oriales (Garcia) Rubio, left Cuba in 1956, before Fidel Castro came to power as a result of the

Cuban Revolution, and settled in the United States. In fact, when Marco Rubio was born, his parents were not even U.S. citizens; the duo only became U.S. citizens in 1975 (*Britannica/b*).

Little Marco grew up as an underprivileged child in Miami, where the Hispanic (Latino) population was predominant. Rubio, who came from a Catholic family, was baptized in the Mormon Church and was a Mormon for a while. In the following years, he returned to the Catholic faith. Rubio graduated from South Miami Middle School in 1989, studied at Tarkio College in Missouri on an American football scholarship for one year and then at Santa Fe College, then graduated from the University of Florida's Political Science department in 1993 (*Britannica/b*). He graduated from the University of Miami School of Law in 1996 and became eligible to work as a lawyer. Thus, Rubio prepared himself for active political life by studying Political Science and Law. Rubio also met Jeanette Dousdebés, who was a dancer for the Miami Dolphins team while he was in Miami, and the couple married shortly thereafter (Farrington, 2024). The couple had four children from this marriage.

Marco Rubio, who has always been close to the Republican Party due to his being a devout Christian and his opposition to the communist regime in Cuba, gained his first political experiences by interning for Republican Party representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen and working on Republican Senator Bob Dole's presidential campaign in 1996. Rubio was first elected as a Republican Party representative (MP) from the 111th district in Miami, Florida, in 1999 at the age of 28, and served in the House of Representatives for four terms from 2000 to 2008. Rubio gained great experience at a young age by serving as Speaker of the House of Representatives from 2006 to 2008, and he also managed to make his name known throughout the country.

After Mel Martinez retired in 2010, Rubio ran for Senator from the Republican Party for the first time in Florida and was elected. Rubio was elected thanks to his youth, hard work, his ability to appeal to Cuban Americans and Latin Americans in general, and his style that was in line with the general political norms of America. After being elected Senator, Rubio became a legend in Miami and Florida and has been re-elected in all Senate elections to date. During this period, he also stood out as one of the leading figures of the Tea Party movement that formed within the Republican Party in the early 2010s. Rubio, who quickly became the young star of the party, ran for the 2016 U.S. Presidential election on behalf of his party in 2015. However, he lost the primary in his home state of Florida in March 2016 and withdrew from the presidential race, thinking that he had no chance. At the end of these elections, famous American businessman Donald Trump, who had just entered politics from the outside, was elected U.S. President on behalf of the Republican Party. During the presidential primary process, Trump taunted Rubio and gave him nicknames, just like he did to all of his rivals, and Rubio's nickname that Trump uttered during this process - probably due to his young age - was "Little Marco" (*TPM Tv*, 2016).

Rubio, who was seen as Trump's "Virtual Latin American Minister" during Trump's first presidency due to his influence on the Hispanic population and Latin American countries, managed to become an important name in American right-wing politics, especially due to his harsh criticisms of the rising power China and his critical approach to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) (*ABC News*, 2024). In fact, Rubio is known as a name who supports tough policies on China and gives unconditional support to Taiwan (*Newsweek*, 2024). Rubio is quite emotional and rigid in his hostile approach towards China, undoubtedly due to the influence of his family members who were harmed by the communist regime in Cuba, which is undoubtedly open to criticism. Rubio, whose name was mentioned as Trump's Vice President before the 2024 U.S. Presidential elections, announced his open support for President Trump and thus managed to be elected as Secretary of State after the elections. Rubio is currently preparing for this most critical seat in the US. Rubio is also the author of two important books: *An American Son* (2012) and *American Dreams: Restoring Economic Opportunity for Everyone* (2015). Of these books, the autobiographical *An American Son* (2012) has particularly attracted attention among the American public.

### **Marco Rubio's Political Views on Some Critical Issues**

In this part, Marco Rubio's political views on some critical issues, namely, U.S.-China relations, interventionism in foreign policy, approach to the idea of American exceptionalism, U.S.-Israel relations, American foreign policy towards Latin America, Turkish-American relations, and U.S. stance against Russia-Ukraine War will be analyzed based on Rubio's earlier statements and analyzes written on the expected new American Secretary of State in the international press.

**Anti-China Hawk:** The most important feature that distinguishes Marco Rubio from other politicians is that his anti-communist stance is very strict as if it reminds us of the Cold War years. In this context, Rubio, also influenced by his personal anger towards the Castro regime in Cuba, evaluates the CCP-controlled regime in China in the same context and supports every initiative against China. Rubio, who is also a religious person and evaluates the regime in China negatively in terms of religious freedoms, considers China as the biggest rival for the global leadership of the United States and in this context, he frequently brings up issues such as Taiwan, the South China Sea, and the situation of the Uyghur Turks in East Turkestan (Xinjiang) in order to weaken China. Especially concerning the independence of Taiwan, Rubio has a very clear and consistent approach, which would certainly create problems between Washington and Beijing in terms of the continuation of the "one China policy" (*BBC News*, 2024).

Rubio previously in 2022 stated that China aims "to become the world's most powerful nation and to do so at the expense of everyone else" (*Newsweek*, 2024). More recently, in a September *Washington Post* opinion piece, Rubio wrote "China is the largest, most advanced adversary America has ever faced" (*Washington Post*, 2024). In that sense, Rubio can be classified as a

“China hawk” who will try everything to drive China into corner in its relations with the U.S. and other Western countries. In addition, Rubio recently issued a post on his X (Twitter) account stating that “Communist China IS NOT, and will never be, a friend to democratic nations” (Rubio, 2024/a). That is why, Martina points out that the pick of Rubio as the new Secretary of State signals a China policy that could go beyond tariffs in the second Trump era (Martina, 2024).

**Hawkish and interventionist:** Marco Rubio is more inclined to an interventionist and hawkish foreign policy, which is remembered with the Bush family, rather than Donald Trump’s isolationist stance in foreign policy, which is generally considered by the international press. Rubio, who supported the 2001 Afghanistan Operation and the 2003 Iraq War after the September 11 terrorist attacks (Jaffe, 2015), has also recently expressed support for the overthrow of Muammar Gaddafi in Libya (Friedersdorf, 2015) and Saudi Arabia’s intervention in Yemen (Sullivan, 2015). Rubio has also opposed the Bashar Assad regime in Syria and declared his support for the transition process (Quigley, 2017). Rubio defends the cause of democracy and human rights in justifying American interventions in other countries.

**Support for American exceptionalism:** American exceptionalism is the idea that the United States is a unique and even morally superior country for historical, ideological, and religious reasons (*Britannica/a*). Supporters of this view often claim that the U.S. in a sense is obliged to play a special role in global politics. Marco Rubio, like many other popular American right-wing politicians, believes in American exceptionalism (Rubio.senate.gov, 2018) and thinks that the United States should be the most powerful and special state that directs world politics in this context. This view complements Rubio’s defense for a more interventionist foreign policy including military options as well.

**Supporter of Israel:** Marco Rubio, like almost all top-level American politicians, is a politician who is extremely sensitive about the existence and security of Israel. Rubio thinks that Israel is the only democracy and Western state in the Middle East, and for this reason, he supports all of Israel’s policies, whether they comply with international law or not. Rubio not only defends Israel’s right to defend itself against terrorist attacks but also considers radical Islamic movements’ members as “vicious animals who did horrifying crimes” (*BBC News*, 2024). In that sense, Rubio perceives the world from a very pro-Israel perspective and considers countries such as the Islamic Republic of Iran and political organizations such as Hamas, Hezbollah etc. as “terrorists” (*BBC News*, 2024). Rubio has in addition personal friendships with key Israeli politicians including Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Rubio even accused U.S. President Joe Biden and the Democratic Party of being anti-Semitic due to their criticism of Israel’s policies in Gaza which led to a great humanitarian tragedy (*Euronews*, 2024).

**Anti-pink tide stance for Latin America:** Marco Rubio, who tends to consider left-wing regimes as enemies in Latin America due to his opposition to communism, does not want to directly target democratic countries such as Brazil, while he criticizes leaders in countries where democracy is controversial, such as Nicolas Maduro in Venezuela by calling him a “narco-dictator” (Sweigart, 2024). While not directly targeting him, Rubio also warns Brazilian President Lula da Silva of his close ties with Cuba, Nicaragua, China, and Venezuela (Sweigart, 2024). Rubio also completely rejects Chinese activism in Latin America. In this context, Rubio is a name that can give the green light for regime change policies in such countries after taking office. However, the final say on this issue will undoubtedly be with President Trump and his national security team.

**He is against the process in Türkiye after 2016:** Marco Rubio, who has not made many statements about Türkiye, has nevertheless taken a position against the policies towards the opposition and the transformation experienced by the regime in Türkiye after the 2016 failed coup attempt. So much so that Rubio even signed an open letter to Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in 2017, which included a proposal to lift the state of emergency and ensure judicial independence (CSCE, 2017). Rubio did not approve of the military operations that Türkiye successfully carried out against Kurdish groups affiliated with terrorism in Syria in the following period, and he stood more against radical Islamist groups than the Kurds (*BBC News Türkçe*, 2024). Rubio, a good Christian, also supported the Armenian Genocide bill. Rubio also criticized the Turkish administration for the S-400 air defense system that Türkiye purchased from Russia and supported the CAATSA sanctions. Regarding Ukraine, the same Rubio appreciated and praised the weapons (Bayraktar drones) support that Türkiye provided to the Kyiv (Kiev) regime against Russia (*BBC News Türkçe*, 2024).

In this context, considering his political background, it can be predicted that Rubio could oppose Türkiye on many issues such as the situation of the Kurds in Syria, democratic practices within the country, relations with undemocratic regimes (especially communist countries such as Venezuela and China), and the Armenian issue. In addition, Rubio is known to support the anti-Erdoğan Islamist Fethullah Gülen group (*Euronews*, 2024) and their member Turkish-American basketball player Enes Kanter Freedom (Rubio, 2024/b).

**Although he is personally a supporter of Ukraine, he would not oppose Trump’s plan:** Despite his open opposition to the military operation launched by Russia against the territorial integrity of Ukraine and international law, and despite making some harsh statements on this issue in the past, Marco Rubio, due to his loyalty to President Trump and the American State, will probably support the negotiation, ceasefire, and peace process between Ukraine and Russia in line with President Trump’s policies in the new term, and even contribute to this process himself. But if we look at his

recent statements, Rubio said “We do want to see that conflict end, and it’s going to require some very difficult choices” (*BBC News*, 2024).

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, Marco Rubio, who started his duty as Secretary of State in the United States in early 2025, is a good right-wing conservative politician by U.S. standards and has serious potential with his youth, energy, Hispanic support, and charisma. Unfortunately, Rubio’s general political stance is not warm towards Türkiye. But Rubio, who is an important politician, will definitely try to establish good relations with Türkiye, especially since he will prioritize dealing with anti-U.S. extreme leftist regimes.

In this context, the most important issue will undoubtedly be that the relations between Israel and Türkiye will not continue to be crisis-ridden and that harmony is achieved between the two countries in terms of Kurdish policy. If these do not happen, it is necessary to be ready for the rather angular and sharp statements and stances of Secretary Rubio and President Trump, who are tough right-wing hawkish politicians. However, we hope that the two countries will get along better in the new period and act responsibly, try to solve problems, and develop common policies despite structural problems in their relationship (Örmeci & Reginbogin, 2024).

Marco Rubio was sworn in as the new U.S. Secretary of State in early February 2025. He had a historically high 99-0 support from the U.S. Senate which proves high expectations from him during his tenure in office (U.S. Embassy in Belgium, 2025). During his hearing at the Senate, Rubio confirmed his hawkish position on China and described Beijing as “the most potent and dangerous near-peer adversary this country has ever confronted” (*The Economic Times*, 2025). Rubio also claimed that the risks posed by Beijing to Washington’s interests are even greater than the Soviet threat during the Cold War. During Rubio’s early days in the office, the U.S. government removed the phrase “we do not support Taiwan independence” from its website, in line with the “one China policy” that Washington declared decades ago. The fact sheet, however, retains the statement that Washington is committed to the one-China policy (U.S. Department of State).

Rubio made his first international trips as U.S. Secretary of State in early February to Panama, El Salvador, Costa Rica, Guatemala, and the Dominican Republic (*NPR*, 2025). These first diplomatic initiatives were followed by Secretary Rubio’s visits to Germany (as part of the Munich Security Conference), Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (*Reuters*, 2025). Rubio also made headlines in the international press when he tried to clarify President Trump’s “Gaza Plan” to relocate Palestinians from Gaza to eradicate Hamas and rebuild the city. Rubio underlined that the idea for Gazans to leave their territory was for an “interim period while debris was cleared and reconstruction took place” (*BBC News*, 2025). In that sense, Rubio gives the impression that he

will have to undertake a role in smoothing out the excesses of President Trump in the new era. However, Rubio's task would be extremely difficult since President Trump has a larger-than-life personality and both President Trump and his Vice President J. D. Vance have sharp opinions about ending the war in Ukraine by giving concessions to Russia despite European warnings.

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