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Marco Rubio and the Death of Diplomacy



Marco Rubio speaks to the press before departing Paris, France, April 18, 2025. Official State Department photo by Freddie Everett.

There is no more important or prestigious cabinet position than the secretary of state. The first secretaries included such luminaries as Thomas Jefferson, John Marshall, James Madison, James Monroe, John Quincy Adams, and Henry Clay. All became presidents or almost reached the presidency. In contemporary times, secretaries of state included Henry Stimson, George Marshall, Dean Acheson, Henry Kissinger, Colin Powell, and John Kerry. More recent secretaries have been less competent or successful (Rex Tillerson, Mike Pompeo), but no one has been more pathetic than the current secretary, Marco Rubio, who has embarrassed the country, the Department of State, and particularly himself in the first 100 days of the Trump presidency.

Rubio has made the Department of State virtually irrelevant, playing no role in key negotiations involving wars between Russia and Ukraine as well as between Israel and the Palestinians. Rubio is not participating in the sensitive talks between the United States and Iran to restore the Iran nuclear agreement. All of these matters are being handled by a billionaire real-estate developer, Steve Witkoff, who has no experience or knowledge in dealing with any of these issues. But Witkoff is worth \$2 billion, and presumably Trump felt that clinching real estate deals is good training for crafting complicated international agreements.

Witkoff has met with Russian President Vladimir Putin four times in the past several months, but the Russian bombardment against Kyiv, the Ukrainian capital, has only increased in that period. We know very little about Witkoff's experiences in these meetings, but we do know that Trump falsely believes that Putin has made key "concessions." The first concession, according to Trump, is that Putin will be "stopping the war." The second is even more risible: Putin has agreed "not to take the whole country." Even before the Putin-Witkoff talks, Trump endorsed Putin's key demands: "Crimea will stay with Russia," and Ukraine "will never be able to join NATO."

Following the most recent talks between Putin and Witkoff last week, Putin's key foreign policy adviser Yuri Ushakov praised the meeting for "allowing Russia and the United States to further bring their positions closer together, not only on Ukraine but also on a number of other international issues." Trump merely said he heard that Witkoff and Putin had "a pretty good meeting," but hadn't been able to talk directly to his envoy. As for other global matters, Trump falsely claimed he had concluded "200 economic deals," and that talks had begun on trade and tariff matters between China and the United States, which Beijing officially denied. Even before Witkoff left his \$6 billion condo in Miami Beach and arrived in the White House, Rubio had already begun the destruction of the Department of State as well as the important humanitarian and infrastructure projects of the Agency of International Development (AID) that were so important the world over. The position of undersecretary for civilian security, democracy, and human rights will be eliminated. The office of global criminal justice that investigates war crimes and conflict operations to prevent wars will be closed. My 42 years of bureaucratic experience tells me that folding a smaller office into a larger one—which is what Rubio is doing—essentially means fewer resources and less bandwidth, and the end of institutional memory.

Elon Musk's elimination of AID is a good example of the damage that Rubio inherited and even expanded. There were 10,000 AID staffers before the Trump administration arrived;

there are now 10 full-time employees seconded to the Department of State. Just as President Bill Clinton's elimination of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency in 1999 weakened the U.S. capabilities to engage in essential arms control agreements, the elimination of AID means there will no longer be a stand-alone humanitarian assistance bureau. The recent earthquake in Southeast Asia found Russia and China sending humanitarian missions to Myanmar and Thailand. The United States send three humanitarian experts to Myanmar who learned upon their arrival that they no longer had jobs with the Department of State. This is typical of what has become the meltdown of U.S. diplomatic efforts in Trump's first hundred days.

Rubio has severely weakened the department itself in what the mainstream media euphemistically referred to as a "shake-up." The so-called "shake up" involved cutting the department's budget in half, from \$56 billion to \$28 billion. The State Department's budget is around 5% of the Pentagon's budget. Rubio also ended the department's role in human rights programs, war crimes monitoring, and bolstering democratic institutions abroad. Rubio was a huge supporter of these programs as a senator, but as an acolyte of Donald Trump, he said that he was at the department to reverse "decades of bloat and bureaucracy" and to eradicate an ingrained "radical political ideology." As part of his deference to Trump, Rubio eliminated the office that focused on combating disinformation from Russia, China, and Iran.

When Rubio was selected to become secretary of state, he immediately reversed his positions on key matters in order to align himself with the views of Donald Trump. Rubio had consistently praised Ukraine's efforts to defend itself against a more powerful adversary, but in February he said "it's hyperbole to believe that the Ukrainians are going to completely crush the Russian military." Rubio previously emphasized that we must help Ukraine "so that we're not seen as unreliable and undermined in our credibility." Following confirmation, however, he added that we must "do it in a way that doesn't drain us." Rubio added that U.S. involvement in Ukraine's self-defense was a "costly distraction from efforts to contain China."

Trump and Rubio are responsible for giving Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu an even freer hand to conduct genocidal attacks against the Palestinians. They state that Israeli attacks are being conducted with "clairvoyance and justice" to ensure that the Hamas terrorist organization may never "threaten the people of Israel again." Rubio opposes all restrictions on military aid to Israel as well as opposing restrictions on the extremist actions of the Jewish

settlers on the West Bank. There is no longer any discussion at the Department of State about a two-state solution in the Middle East, or any other kind of solution.

Rubio's original plan called for closing down the entire Bureau of African Affairs, but the Central Intelligence Agency lobbied to reverse that decision by intervening at the White House. Did Rubio not know that African capitals are leading sites for recruiting foreign assets. Also, without embassies or consulates in Africa, it would be next to impossible for the CIA to base its agents in African capitals.

There is little direct communication between Trump and Rubio, and certainly no love lost between the two men. They clashed as rivals in the 2016 presidential primaries. Rubio called Trump a "dangerous con man." Trump called Rubio a "total lightweight." Both men were right...and both are responsible for diminishing the influence of the United States in global diplomacy.

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