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Transcript

American Leadership and the Future of the Transatlantic Alliance

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Marco Rubio:

I am honoured by this opportunity to address you here today.

I want to thank the Legatum Institute for helping to arrange this event and Chatham House for hosting. This is one of the leading think tanks in the world and I'm excited to have an exchange with you about the common challenges we face.

One of my favourite parts of serving on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee is having the opportunity to travel to different countries and meet people around the world. Most of the nations I've visited are strikingly different from my home country. They have different types of government, different cultures, different ways of life.

But I am always struck by how people everywhere want for their families what Americans want for theirs: things like peace, security, prosperity and, perhaps most importantly, liberty.

Though strides have been made in spreading these values in recent decades, sadly they remain a dream in many nations around the world.

But in others, I see a long tradition of support and adherence to these ideals. The United Kingdom is one such country. And though our two nations may differ in some important regards, the partnership we have enjoyed has not developed by accident. It has developed due to our shared set of values and goals.

I recently read about a Sunday morning service that Winston Churchill and President Roosevelt attended together aboard a British warship in 1941. Churchill was moved by the fundamental similarities between Americans and Britons. He said that among the Americans he observed, quote, 'The same language, the same hymns and, more or less, the same ideals.'

These shared ideals go back through centuries of British tradition, dating back to the Magna Carta. In fact, at the National Archives in Washington, DC, an original copy of the Magna Carta sits just steps away from our constitution.

Americans and Britons have stood side by side for the last century because our shared convictions have united us around a common cause. That cause is the defence of liberty and the spread of freedom around the globe.

The partnership we've shared has been one of extraordinary consequence. It has liberated nations. It has relieved the suffering of millions. It has sparked the spread of liberty to new regions. No partnership in history has seen such influence, certainly not such beneficent influence.

This partnership is what brings me here today. I'd like to discuss what the United States and the United Kingdom have achieved together in the past, but also where our special relationship should go in the future, especially given recent developments in my country.

Our achievements in the past were marked by our partnership's unique beginning. The colonies that would later become America were, of course, born largely out of the enterprise of the British. Despite these roots, we fought two wars against the Crown in a span of 40 years.

But eventually, the animosity of our forbearers grew into friendship. It quickly became clear to our respective countrymen, particularly as they entered the 20th century, that the fates of our nations were tied to the defence of liberty, and that standing together to defend this liberty was not only strategically important but also morally prudent.

Over the last century, our people stood together on multiple occasions to oppose the advancement of evil, perhaps most famously on the beaches of Normandy. In doing so, we protected not just ourselves but the very survival of liberty itself.

Together, we served, in the famous phrase, as watchmen on the walls of world freedom. Together, we won the Cold War and brought peace and prosperity to Europe, a project that continues to this day.

Together, we drove those that plotted the attacks of 11 September 2001 from Afghanistan and – in the years that followed – toppled a murderous dictator in Iraq. Together, even as we pursued victory on the battlefield, we built schools and created opportunities that did not exist before. Together, we partnered to save millions of adults and children from the affliction of AIDS through innovative partnerships such as The Global Fund.

But despite all of these vitally important achievements, many have begun to wonder whether things are changing. Many on both sides of the Atlantic have begun to question the future of our partnership in an increasingly complex world.

In recent years, this scepticism has come in the form of growing doubt about whether America can still be counted on to contribute to our mutual security and to uphold an international order that reflects our interests and ideals.

Many look to the dysfunction of Washington and wonder how America could ever expect to lead the world when it can't seem to get its own affairs in order.

Americans are indeed deeply and passionately divided on many public policy issues. From abroad, and even from within, the current state of my country's politics often looks chaotic and uncertain. And on matters such as our nation's role around the world, Democrats and Republicans appear equally uncertain about the best path forward.

Many factors have led to the current tenor of debate in the United States.

Americans are emerging from the most dramatic economic crisis in a generation and many feel financially insecure. As the cost of living continues to rise, some feel trapped in jobs that do not pay enough to maintain a middle class life. Many others fear that the cornerstone of what we call the American dream – the knowledge that your children will have the opportunity to achieve their dreams and live a better life than your own – may be slipping out of reach.

In the midst of this economic insecurity, our people – like many of yours as well – are also weary from decades of global engagement. Many who have lost loved ones in Afghanistan and Iraq watch as those nations suffer setbacks, and they wonder if those sacrifices have been worth it.

We send billions of dollars in aid to people around the world, and in turn we watch as they celebrate our tragedies and burn our flag. And we mourn the murder of four of our diplomats in Benghazi, the very city in which we intervened to prevent mass murder.

While we face all these challenges, our federal government is in the grip of gridlock, seemingly unwilling and unable to move forward to solve the problems before us.

In the face of these struggles, I understand why so many at home and around the world fear that America's best days may lie in her past. And yet I am here to assure you that, while the road before us will be long and difficult, our finest hour as a nation – and as an alliance – is yet to come.

I'm optimistic because my country, like yours, is more than just its government. Both of our peoples express their differences loudly and passionately because they live in free societies. And political conflict is not the only product of our individual liberty. From this freedom also emerge movements that empower, ideas that inspire, and innovations that change the world.

We've had debates about looming American decline for more than six decades. During the Cold War, some thought the Soviet Union was destined

to be the preeminent global power. In the 1980s, it was Japan. And now we hear the same about China.

This has led to declinist predictions about not just the United States, but also Europe, or even more broadly, our system of democratic capitalism.

Many question whether industrialized democracies are past their prime. We hear a lot about the rise of the so-called “BRICS” or the supposed success of ‘managed capitalism’, and wonder whether our system is too messy and dysfunctional to continue creating opportunity and spreading prosperity for our people.

But to paraphrase the American writer Mark Twain: reports of our demise are greatly exaggerated. Despite the prophets of decline, our fundamentals as democracies remain strong.

You see our strength in the way the rise of prosperity across the globe is creating demand for the innovations of our people. Our countries remain engines of the global economy and this entrepreneurial spirit will continue to make us competitive, even as China’s economy grows.

You see the strength of America in the fact that, despite our fiscal debates back home, the US dollar remains the world’s premier reserve currency. And despite those in China who talk about a “de-Americanized world,” foreign investors know that America is still the safest financial bet. Those in the United Kingdom understand this as well given that Britain remains our largest foreign investor.

You see it in the innovations that have recently transformed America into the world’s greatest producer of oil and natural gas, creating new hubs of regional prosperity along the way.

The United States is on track to become the world’s largest oil producer by 2016 and energy self-sufficient by 2035. And as Europe begins to explore its own shale gas revolution, there is potential for similar developments here.

You see the strength of our nations in the resilience and might of our militaries. Despite the budget cuts that have been imposed in America, we respond more swiftly and effectively to crises than any other nation, as we have recently witnessed in the Philippines.

When problems arise that require global attention, we do not circle the wagons and take cover. We roll up our sleeves and get to work to find solutions. And when necessary, our brave men and women in uniform remain

willing to sacrifice their safety – and even their lives – for the cause of freedom.

So given all of this, you may be asking yourself, ‘If neither America nor Britain are fading from the scene anytime soon, what does this mean for the world? What is the agenda for our work together in the years to come?’

Some may question, given that Europe is largely free and at peace, whether there is more we need to do together.

But work will always remain for the cause of freedom. We need to be clear-eyed and realistic about the threats that we face as an alliance. Threats that are in some ways just as profound as those of the last century.

We are witnessing an attack on our shared values. Rivals question whether our economies and our systems of government remain viable in this competitive world. We still confront a serious challenge from radical Islam and its tool of global terror. We face continued instability in the Middle East and Africa, as well as increasing uncertainty in Asia.

To meet these challenges, we need to first build on the success of our transatlantic alliance. We should continue adapting NATO to meet new threats from rogue states and jihadists. And we must leverage our partnership to confront uncertainty in the Middle East and Asia, as well as promote the promise of our values in Africa and Latin America.

We’ve achieved quite a bit since the end of the Cold War, but we need to continue to extend the influence that European institutions have had on Europe’s periphery. Part of this involves being blunt about our differences with Vladimir Putin’s government and reassuring our allies in the region that we support their ambitions to move forward toward liberty rather than backwards toward the days of Soviet domination.

Many of these allies face ongoing threats to their territorial integrity, including in new realms such as cyberspace.

We also need to ensure that those on Europe’s periphery who still desire to join the Western community of democracies retain the option if they meet the entry requirements.

In particular, the United States needs to continue to work closely with the EU to bring Ukraine into the Western fold. We should all be concerned about the Ukrainian government’s recent decision to bow to Russian pressure and not sign an association agreement or free trade pact with the EU. Our thoughts

are with the hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians who have taken to the streets to express concern about the future of their country.

I share the views of Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt who recently said of Ukraine that, 'They are not going West; I don't think they are going East. I feel they are going down.'

The United States needs a strong European Union that continues to be a stabilizing force on the continent but also an effective partner on key international issues. As for Britain's role in Europe, that should be a matter for the British people to decide and your American partners should respect whatever decision you make. Our alliance, our partnership, and our affection for your nation will continue regardless of the road you choose.

One of the key components of our unshakeable alliance is NATO. It remains relevant to the changing strategic landscape. The alliance has played an enormously important role in extending our shared values and solidifying peace and security in Europe.

But in the last 15 years, we have also gone to war together three times – in Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Libya – a development likely never envisioned by NATO's founders in 1949 when Soviet aggression posed the biggest threat to our mutual security.

Not all allies look back on these operations through the same lens, but we need to recognize that these conflicts serve as illustrations of the fact that threats to our mutual security still exist more than two decades after the end of the Cold War.

Even as our joint mission in Afghanistan transitions to a new phase, we must focus on confronting new and emerging threats. Cooperation on challenges such as missile defence and threats emanating from the cyber realm are important, but not sufficient to ensure the long-term viability of our alliance.

We need to explore ways that NATO can prepare for its future missions. For instance, despite the sacrifices borne by many allies in Afghanistan, our militaries gained valuable experience in coalition warfare. We should determine how these capabilities can continue to be relevant in the future.

We also must be frank about where we can improve our efforts. Most can agree that the operation in Libya, for example, shouldn't have turned into such a difficult effort for the alliance. We should determine the best ways to apply the lessons we learned during this operation to future efforts. We also must examine how our failure to provide support to the pro-Western

government that followed Gaddafi's ouster contributed to the current instability in that country.

Each of our nations must also rethink our approach to defence spending. We both face significant budgetary issues. But we must ensure that we do not repeat the mistakes that followed both the First World War and the Cold War, when we assumed we could cut back on our security in hope of a peace that never materialized.

In addition to our work through institutions such as NATO and the EU, we need to capitalize on the already deep economic ties between our two countries.

An important first step is the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP). Both of our countries should give this agreement the special attention that it deserves. If successful, TTIP will create one of the largest regional economies in the world. It will also help bring new prosperity to both the United States and Europe, providing tangible benefits of our partnership to our citizens.

Even as we work on TTIP, we should redouble our efforts to reduce global trade barriers. I'm hopeful that at the conference beginning in Bali today, we can overcome differences and move toward the first global trade agreement of the twenty-first century.

We should not limit our efforts to just these trade agreements. For example, right now the United States is experiencing a shale revolution in oil and natural gas that has made our country a net energy exporter for the first time in 60 years. We must work together to ensure that this geopolitical opportunity is used to the advantage of our longstanding allies by expediting reviews of our export permits.

Additionally, recent accusations regarding intelligence programs must not be allowed to poison our ability to work together. Cooperation between our two countries in this realm has been a pillar of our postwar alliance.

As I said recently during a speech in Washington, our citizens' rights to privacy should be respected, but those who wish to harm us do not use carrier pigeons to communicate. They use cell phones and the internet. We need to be able to understand what those who threaten us are planning, while still operating within the confines of our respective legal systems.

But we can't deal with these threats by focusing solely within our borders. We must understand that in this globalized world, whether it is the disillusioned home-grown terrorist or someone propagating hate from overseas, these

problems will eventually threaten us if left unaddressed. Tragically, this is a reality you have experienced in this city on several occasions.

Our cooperation is especially important in a Middle East that's currently going through a fundamental transformation. It presents us with great opportunities, but also with the potential for great peril. Europe and the United States should work more closely together on tasks such as shepherding Egypt's transition to democracy or helping Tunisia and Libya provide benefits of their newfound freedom to their citizens.

We must find ways to alleviate the human suffering of the Syrian people and work to build up elements of the moderate opposition. It should be a priority to ensure that the ongoing civil war does not create further regional instability or provide a new safe haven for Al-Qaeda affiliates that would one day turn their attention toward us.

Similarly, the growing threat from Iran threatens regional stability and global security. It is vitally important that we work together to alleviate the concerns of our partners in the region, many of whom remain unconvinced that we should trust the commitments of a regime that sponsors terrorism, represses its people, and aims its verbal and political firepower at Israel, America and Europe.

I am personally sceptical of the interim agreement that the P5+1 have concluded with Iran. I am convinced that Iran's ultimate goal for these negotiations has been to achieve relief from the pressure of international sanctions, while retaining the option of developing a nuclear weapon. This model has been used by others in the past, such as North Korea, to successfully exploit talks to create the time and space to go nuclear.

In Asia, the world's most populous region, so much depends on our efforts to ensure that China's rise remains peaceful. There are increasing signs that this may be easier said than done, including China's recent declaration of an air defence identification zone in the East China Sea.

This recent action by Beijing is an example of an issue on which it would be ideal to have America and Europe in lock step, making clear to Beijing that freedom of flight in the region should not be held hostage to political agendas.

America is currently engaged, at least rhetorically, in a 'rebalance' to Asia. Despite this, a renewed US focus on this strategically vital region cannot and should not come at the expense of our transatlantic commitments.

Given the values that we share and our history of facing new challenges together, I believe there is little we can do effectively in Asia without Britain

and our European allies by our side. After all, your future will be just as dependent on what happens in that region as ours will be.

In Asia and beyond, we must continue our cooperation in speaking out on behalf of those who cannot. Both of our nations have long histories as supporters and defenders of human rights.

Margaret Thatcher was a voice for those in the Soviet Union who were repressed by the Kremlin. She noted that we in the West should not only be concerned about such actions as a humanitarian issue, but also as a global security issue. As she put it, 'a nation that denies those freedoms to its own people will have few scruples in denying them to others'.

This remains as true today as it was 30 years ago. Unfortunately, one need not look far to see gross human rights violations, whether in Russia, China, Cuba, Iran, or North Korea, just to name a few. This includes the rising persecution of religious minorities, especially Christians, for doing little more than practicing their faith.

When the United States and Britain speak out together about these acts, our message is amplified and our case is stronger than when either stands alone.

I am convinced that the people of our nations understand this. And so, whether it is strengthening the transatlantic alliance, confronting challenges in the Middle East, engaging in Asia, or standing up for the values that our countries hold dear, I am confident that the United States and the United Kingdom will continue to work hand in hand as we did in the last century.

The fact is, we must.

If we do not stand together for liberty and freedom, and instead allow our historic partnership to fade into history, an enormous vacuum will open up. And imagine the forces of darkness and evil that would gladly move in to fill this void.

Our two nations still have a common challenge and a common destiny.

It's also true that in America, we have some work to do.

Many of our political leaders are still hoping that our budget balances itself. Many hope they can force their political opponents to adopt their agenda in its totality. They hope that America can simply look inward and ignore the global challenges of our time.

It is human nature to wish for the challenges before you to resolve themselves. Or to wish they could be handled easily with minimal sacrifice.

But earlier generations have left us with a common charge. In this city, in Grosvenor Square in front of our embassy, there is a statue of Ronald Reagan, with a quote from his first inaugural address. It says, 'No arsenal, or no weapon in the arsenals of the world, is so formidable as the will and moral courage of free men and women.'

We – Americans and Britons – are descendants of men and women who took great risk and faced great challenges in their pursuit of liberty. And that is why each time our alliance has been confronted with a test, we have risen to meet it.

Together, we can continue to meet the world's challenges. We cannot rest, because those who oppose liberty will not rest.

We will always have critics who predict that the end of this truly special relationship is near. That Britain and the United States have both had their days in the sun and that the world's attention is shifting elsewhere.

But they underestimate the power of our nations and our shared values. They underestimate what we can achieve together. And more importantly, they underestimate the will and moral courage of free men and women.

In the end, freedom will triumph in this world. I am sure of that, just as I am sure that it will be the United States and the United Kingdom leading the way.

That is why I stand before you optimistic today. Optimistic about where America is headed and where we – working together with our European allies – will be able to take the ideals of freedom, economic opportunity, and human rights. Together, we will be able to respond to the challenges of the twenty-first century, just as our forbearers faced those of the last. And when we do, our children will inherit a world better than the one that was left to us.

Thank you.