

## The View from the Senate

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=03FM3m2ILMM&list=PL7fuyfNu8jfP8TWSJzPCsyScNGwbW6xbQ&index=26>

### Speakers

- Chris Coons, U.S. Senator for Delaware, U.S. Senate
  - Mark Warner, U.S. Senator for Virginia, U.S. Senate
  - **Moderator:** Peter Baker, The New York Times
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### Baker

Well. Thank you very much. Nick, appreciate it. Thank you guys for coming this morning. Thank you senators for being here. We are lucky to have two of the most senior senators, most the smartest and most insightful senators on national security, foreign affairs, intelligence. Unfortunately, Senator Cornyn couldn't be here, which is a shame, so we're gonna try to get Senator Warner and Coons to disagree with each other a little bit, so we have a little bit of, you know, a little bit of multiple points of view. So senators, just last night, the House passed the bill that you guys had passed a day earlier on rescissions, cutting back on foreign aid. And of course, we know that USAID has all basically been shuttered. I think I know where this audience might stand. I think I know where you stand. But talk a little bit about your view about this bill. Isn't there? I mean, there is certainly gonna be a popular bill among a lot of people who actually do think we spend too much on foreign aid. So what is the value of spending money on foreign aid these days? Why were you against this bill, and what were the implications be?

### Coons

Well, Peter, thank you, and thanks to Aspen security forum for a chance to be back. Don't just ask me go back and roll tape on what a guy named Marco Rubio as a senator said about foreign aid. Lindsey Graham said about foreign aid. General and Secretary Jim Mattis said about foreign aid. We had a long, deep, bipartisan understanding that spending just 1% of our discretionary budget on disaster relief, on humanitarian assistance, on development around the world stabilized countries that were otherwise teetering over into internal conflict, helped prevent jihadism, terrorism, extremism, helped interdict folks who would otherwise migrate to the American Southern border, and, frankly, helped treat and cure diseases which otherwise might well come to this country. I've long believed in the power of our foreign assistance programs as an example of America's values. Unfortunately, the abrupt, chaotic and disorganized way that Doge came in and tore up USA ID has been incredibly disruptive and wasteful. There's hundreds of millions of dollars of food and medical supplies that we're actually spending more money to burn or to dispose of, and in dozens of countries around the world, the Chinese have moved in with an argument that we are not a reliable partner. They will never replace us as a humanitarian donor. That's really not their main goal. But Jeanne Shaheen, who is today the senior Democrat on Foreign Relations, just released a Minority Report. I'm behind her in seniority on the committee, and it was a terrific report that looked at this question in detail. How

is it hurting our standing in the world? What are our adversaries doing to take advantage of this moment? And what I'm now trying to work on with colleagues is, how do we make the argument successfully in the upcoming elections? How do we rebuild support? We have not gone to zero. We did manage to save the core of PEPFAR. There is still some programming, but the depth of the cut and the harm to our reputation, I think, is deep and broad, and this rescission has set us on a very, very bad path as an appropriator. Our appropriations meeting yesterday was all about the rescission and how this fundamentally undermines trust in each other as appropriators in what has to be a bipartisan process, despite OMB Director Russ vote saying it needs to be less bipartisan.

**Baker**

Right. Well this is... Please.

**Warner**

Last time I let you go first.

**Coons**

I wanted to get a word in edgewise, Mark.

**Warner**

Well it was also, I think, this led to the fourth sleep over we've had this year in the Senate, and Chris and I get tired but, but you know, you got to give credit for Chuck Grassley, who keeps coming out and doesn't miss any of these votes. Let me just add a piece on that. In that, you know, for 75 years, America's powers come from economic power, military power, but soft power. And the remarkable thing is, starting with Doge in this effort, we're basically seeing the destruction of 75 years of soft power in six months. If that doesn't, kind of just warp your mind. I'm not sure what would. And I think about the fact from the Intel side, as we have back way, way back, and Trump one. We started this day, and I was a former telecom guy, and we kind of woke up and said, Holy shit. Huawei is kind of eating our lunch, and we see China tech move in domain after domain. So there was an aggressive, bipartisan, multi year effort to try to wean countries away and say, stick with us. We've seen an area, Chris, much more knowledgeable than I am on Africa, writ large, but I've gotten very, very engaged in the last two and a half years in Sudan, where more people die every day than Gaza and Ukraine combined. And we literally had medicine rot on ships that we had paid for because we wouldn't pay the pennies a day for people to get off at Port Sudan and get it to the tragedy. And we are seeing nation after nation decide that we are not the reliable partner. I mean, look at Spain picking Huawei just just this week. That wouldn't have happened, I don't believe if we hadn't had this retreat. And as Nick Burns mentioned before, he came in every time we move out. And not just in terms of our aid workers, but VOA and other communication tools, China and Russia are rushing in, I think again, about five or six years ago, sitting with our German partner, Goldman, had all the German businesses and talking about China. At first, they were like, well, we don't know. You may be over the top. COVID came. A couple years later, they were they were all in on the challenges around China threat, but when we are not viewed as dependable, when we are not viewed as being willing to carry our our fair share, in terms of this relief that affects not only the

countries that we're talking about, but affects our relationship with our first World partners in many ways as well. I think this will be looked at, I mean, this is stupidity on steroids. What we're doing, this will be looked back on as a long litany of failures. But this failure and this retreat and the irony, as Chris mentioned, you know, if there was suddenly a change, and we said, Okay, we're going to return the aid. Returning the aid does not get rid of the break in trust. And it's like we could suddenly say we're not going to try to kick Canada out of the five eyes anymore, or stop tariffing. It's still going to be a long time before a lot of Canadians start drinking American bourbon again. And these breaks in trust are not reversible, even with policy action.

### **Baker**

Unfortunately, the Senator didn't bring the burden today, but we're going to keep going. Senator Coons, you mentioned Secretary Rubio, also known as National Security Advisor Rubio and National Archivist Rubio. What is your view? He obviously, as you said, was a supporter of foreign aid. He was a supporter of Ukraine. Was a supporter of a lot of things that many Republicans and Democrats agreed on for years, on foreign policy, and he's sitting on the couch now in the Oval Office, and people are watching for body language. Is it your view that he has changed his mind on a lot of these things and genuinely subscribes to the point of view of the President, or is he playing a role behind the scenes that is trying to nudge the President a different direction?

### **Coons**

Look, I can't speak for what he's actually doing in terms of his impact on the president, but I'll be positive and negative in brief, on Ukraine, Trump's actions towards Zelensky in the Oval, cutting off in temporary intelligence sharing and weapon shipments, and his just slavish repeating of Putin's view of the causes of the war in four months was just alarming and disheartening. Our European partners, our NATO allies, there was just a terrific NATO Summit where they all stepped forward and said, We hear you. We need more burden sharing. We're coming to the table. We're going to dramatically increase our defense spending and in general, the movement in terms of us, Ukraine, Europe has been positive in the last two weeks, but at the same time that a partner and ally like Germany commits to doubling their defense spending, and a partner and ally like Japan commits to doubling their defense spending and to sharing some of the challenges and seeing things in terms of addressing China's aggression the same way we do, we then whack them all with tariffs and Trump's chaotic and discoordinated tariff policy, he's rolling back some of the controls on very high performing AI chip exports to China without getting anything back in return. The chaos of the economic policy is causing some of our closest and most trusted partners and allies to really question What the heck we're doing? I was on a bipartisan code out to the Philippines and Taiwan, and TSMC had just announced the single largest foreign direct investment in American manufacturing, I think, ever, but certainly in modern times. And then got hit with a 32% tariff. And leaders there understandably said, What does this mean? So to Mark's point, to reinforce it, I think Secretary Rubio still believes in the full suite of hard power, smart power, soft power. But what he's allowed to happen under his leadership as secretary, National Security Advisor and archivist and what's about to happen are really alarming. We just had the budget hearing with the Deputy Secretary for Management. They're proposing to slash the US State Department in half. That's not this Doge trimming

around the edges, RIF-ing 1300 people, that's laying off 30,000 people, that's shuttering embassies and consulates around the world, and it didn't get the attention it deserved because there was all this other stuff going on, but at the moment when China is expanding its Democrat its diplomatic footprint and engagement around the world, at the exact moment, as Mark said, where China is rushing in to fill Some of the communications and the relief and development holes that we're creating. To cut our State Department in half would be an enormous, owned goal, a huge weakening of our position and role in the world. And if you look at what Russ votes strategy is for appropriations, it tells you where they're headed. He intends to run this government for four years on a continuing resolution and to do reconciliation every year and use it to throw huge chunks of money at defense and homeland security for weapons and our military and deportations. And then use rescission after rescission after rescission to chop up the rest of our government, sell it off for parts and the State Departments included so someone, God willing, and I hope that Secretary Rubio is talking in the president's ear about how that is not a workable solution, and Democrats will not continue to work on an appropriations process if we know that right on the other side of it is another, as Mark put it, sleepover, where we're Up All Night fighting, and they take 10s and 50s of billions more out of everything but defense and Homeland Security.

**Baker**

Let me ask you, Senator Warner, and by the way, if you haven't watched them yet, Senator Warren has been doing a lot of videos online. If you want to know what he's thinking, he's telling you my video on Twitter has been fun to watch. He's a Born Again tick tocker, I think is, let's talk about another member of the administration. You're the Vice Chair of the Senate Intelligence Committee. Do you trust Tulsi Gabbard to tell you what the intelligence is and and, because the President doesn't seem to so I'm curious at this...

**Warner**

No.

**Baker**

Okay.

**Warner**

But let me also thank you for letting me glide past the Rubio question.

**Baker**

You can also answer that, please.

**Warner**

I have a really strong working relationship with him when he was Vice Chair and I was Chair, and I think maintaining that would probably be a good way not to comment on that. Here. Let me try to see if we can get a little more. I want to talk about Gabbard and the politicization of the IC, but let's get a little stronger on Vought. Russell Vought is a complete liar. He is not competent to do the job. He testified when he tried to get the job that he would try to be

bipartisan. He specifically said he does not believe in that. He has tried to traumatize, his words, not mine, the workforce, and he has been remarkably successful. We got a hell of a lot of federal workers in the DMV, disproportionately in Virginia, the level of trauma, there is not an audience that I've gotten in, and not just in Northern Virginia, but you Winchester, Charlottesville, Richmond, where a crowd like this town hall, and how many people have been either affected by Doge or worker or government contract, three quarters of the people. And this is coming to your community soon, and it is incompetent. As a matter of fact, I believe the DOGE cuts under, under at least the musk period. If we do an actual accounting, again, I've never seen such cooking of the books will cost the American taxpayer money, not save a dime because of such incompetence about how they fired. On the question of Gabbard, again, somebody who testified that she would not politicize the IC, and she has done absolutely the opposite. It started, this was not maybe directly her, but firing of General Hawk at the NSA and his top assistant, extraordinarily competent, served under both administrations DSNR served under Trump because a lunatic like Laura Loomer, you know, called him out in a White House office, and we still don't know why he was fired. It continued at ODNI, where you literally have people being fired if they don't cook the books on the intelligence assessment. We know the intelligence assessment that was made about Tren de Aragua, the Venezuelan gang, bad gang. Maduro government, bad government. But because they wouldn't say what Trump wanted, Adam Collins and a few others senior intelligence officials fired because they would not corrupt their product. And I have had Five Eye partners say, "Warner, what the hell is going on?" I do believe our Five Eye partners and others are not sharing as much information as they would. Even the Israelis were extraordinarily upset about what happened on the strike on the Houthis. Anyone who was in the military or in the IC if you had been that sloppy on sharing classified information, you would be fired. And if anybody says it's not classified, come down to Norfolk, Virginia and talk to the friends and family of the sailors on the Truman where that strike was launched, and explain how if that information had gotten to the Houthis that their loved ones would have been in harm's way, tell them that that was not classified. Now let me finish, and I've only taken a third of the time that Coons has taken so far, so get the stopwatches out. Not my first rodeo with this guy. But you know, we have also seen as recently as this weekend, Tulsi Gabbard appearing on a, at a political convention of Charlie Kirk's Turning Point America. There's never been an ODNI who's ever appeared this many times on left wing or right wing media, and her whole appearance was about trashing the workforce. So you have efforts to politicize product. You know, this crowd knows better. Last time that happens, you end up with a war in Iraq. We have political trashing of the workforce. We have Gabbard trying to put people who would report to her directly in the IG's office. And you know, both of us have been doing this for a while. Both of us have a lot of friends on the Republican side, but nothing has been almost since I've been in the Senate, nothing has been more heartbreaking to me than the fact that my Republican colleagues, particularly on the Intel Committee, where we've always been bi-, and we are still bipartisan, we just passed an intel bill 15 to two, but the number of my Republican colleagues who have said this is awful, but won't speak up. Matter of fact, I had one say to me, you know, because I will not criticize them in public, but I'll criticize them in the SKIF, "Oh, Mark, it's like you're our conscience." I don't want to be your damn conscience. Vote your conscience. And it has been absolutely crushing that these are good men and women on this committee. They know this is wrong, and at least to date, they have not raised that Tulsi Gabbard is not

competent to be the Director of National Intelligence. I believe she has politicized, and is trying to politicize the workforce and the work product, and that makes America less safe.

**Baker**

Because we only have a...

**Warner**

And frankly if Republican Senators were up here and they had a bag over their heads, they would say the same.

**Baker**

Well, unfortunately, we don't have Republican senators on here, which is a shame, I think. Which is a shame, I think, but so let me ask you a counterintuitive question. It's, you all have a lot of criticism of President Trump and his administration. It's the opposition party. It's your job too, and I know it's genuinely felt. What is it? But foreign policy, national security has often been one of the areas where there has been bipartisan consensus, at least on some areas, on some broad goals, even if not on tactics. Is there anything in the six months of the Trump second term on foreign policy or national security that you agree with him on? Do you think he's done a good job that you support him on?

**Coons**

Look, I'll say in the first Trump administration, getting NAFTA updated through the usmca, which was an effort, a bipartisan product, that was a significant step forward in terms of our economic and regional integration, and the Abraham Accords, avoiding the annexation of the West Bank and instead moving ahead some of the normalization in the region, was a really positive step. I am struck that USMCA is now almost completely undone by the terror fight. The strike on Iran is one that I disagreed with because of the process, the lack of consultation with Congress, the partisan way that Republicans were notified at the most senior levels, Democrats were not. And I frankly did not believe that we'd end up in the period we seem to be in where a counter strike by Iran against American soldiers and interests has not yet come. If it actually ends up securing a movement towards regional peace and really knocking down Iran's nuclear enrichment program. It's a good thing. I mean, having Iran on its back foot and having the Iranian enrichment progress as halted is something I'm not going to criticize. My concern is the lack of a clear path forward his engagement right now with Bibi Netanyahu to press him to end the war in Gaza and to find some path towards Saudi Israeli Palestinian reconciliation and recognition is a positive. My core concern is how unreliable and uneven he is. As I just said my first comment, he'll spend a week praising Putin and terrorizing Zelenskyy, and then a week praising Zelenskyy and criticizing Putin that unpredictability, that sort of Mad Man theory of leadership, where nobody knows what he's going to do next, is profoundly destabilizing to our alliances, to our values, to how the world views us and sees us. So I did manage to find my way back around to criticizing.

**Baker**

I noticed that.

**Warner**

You know, and this actually started the last three months of Biden, but the fact that we don't have the number of crossings at the border is significant. But you can be for border security and be absolutely against masked ICE agents picking up people when they drop their kids off for daycare, or somebody going and paying a parking ticket. And the outrageousness of this implementation, and one of the things with this giant plus up on ice, ice now has a much larger budget than the FBI. And if you look at the ratio, and I've been trying to get these numbers, and it is many, many times. I can't give you the number, because the number on what we do on counter intelligence is still classified, but it is 10s of times more that we are spending on picking up people in America than we are spending on counter espionage to the other points, and that to me, I don't know when what world that's a rational policy choice. I would also grant on the Iran strike, I had the same concerns, and I was Gang of Eight and did not get told. But the fact, again, this is where, in his effort to tame claim total credit, he turned something that was a success, but by saying, within two hours, total obliteration, when we didn't even try to fully take out all the enriched uranium sites set a standard that was too high. Setting Iran back dramatically was important. But then you had everybody trying to kowtow to this, this level that, candidly, is unobtainable, unless you had troops on the ground. And I would echo again, the only way we will know on Iran is when. And I thought, this is where I hope the president was headed, which was to, you know, re-engage and get inspectors back on the ground. It feels like that moment has already passed. The other thing, and I thought you would have completely grabbed the easy takeaway, thank you for leaving me a little drama. You know, the fact that NATO is dramatically increasing the defense budget, that that is extraordinarily that is a success, but it's got to be tempered by the, I think, the break in trust, the challenge that I think President Trump has, and I think it's reflective of his business career, he does not. It appears that he does not view that there's any value in long term relationships. Everything is a short term transaction. You have to win the moment, and winning the moment when we're thinking about a geopolitical world where our strength has been military, economic, soft power and values, so many of those things are undermined, and that even with the short term increase in the defense spending, I do worry that the long term trust.

**Baker**

One last question. We'll ask the audience to have a few.

**Warner**

And I get to go first on this one.

**Baker**

You get to go first. On this one, you're not going to be happy about that.

**Coons**

So I get to close.

**Warner**

Well maybe we'll rethink that.

### **Baker**

So the Trump administration Pentagon decided not to send people here because they said that the people here believe in the "evil of globalism." That's the phrase "evil of globalism." So talk a little bit about globalization today. Is, has the history history changed its view of globalization? Have you changed your view of globalization? Is there something to their point? And what does it tell you that globalism, or globalization today, is termed evil and seen that way by a lot of Americans?

### **Warner**

If anybody thinks we're going to retreat to, kind of, nation state only, economies or focus, I think that's wrong. I mean, we, I can tell you, in Virginia, we're looking at this audience. You know, this audience looks like America. That is, is multiracial, multicultural, and I think we are strengthened by that. I do think that as elites, most all of us in this category, we over-talked on the upside value, and elites did very well, and a hell of a lot of working people got screwed, and we had neither party has come up with a thoughtful approach on that. And I'll just close out on it, if that was a massive change that will pale in comparison to the transformation that is about to take place with artificial intelligence, and unless we can formulate, I think, thoughtful approach around the dislocation that AI is going to create. I think the already populism on the left and the right against globalization will manifest itself exponentially greater in terms of against technology advancement, and that ought to be as a top topic for one of these forums or elsewhere, there's lots of talk and we, and again, on AI, we, I think we've gone from, you know, who had we thought who had the most data would win, then it was who had the most compute. I see my friend Don DePalma here, it's now going to be who has the most electrons, who has the most power. So we can solve that. Lots of conversation there about leading edge models, Frontier models, so little conversation about how we deal and who should be responsible for the enormous economic dislocation. We got to get ahead of that, and it's coming so much faster than we thought.

### **Coons**

Globalization and its profound harm to Middle America and to manufacturing the 80s, 90s, first part of last decade. I'm from Newark, Delaware. We had two auto plants. They were the backbone of the county where I was county executive. In the about a three year period, we had our steel mill close, our Chrysler plant clothes, our GM plant clothes, our refinery closed, and the consequences for the folks I represented in the heart of my state were just devastating. We had managed to avoid a lot of that. We'd kept our plants open longer than many other states. But when it happened, it was immediate, deep, and the despair and the anger over the loss of those jobs was profound. It also partly helps explain why Joe Biden, as vice president, was so focused on saving the American auto industry, and as president, so focused on trying to bring manufacturing back. And we've had a remarkable record in the last decade on manufacturing, but it will never be what it was before, and I could not agree more with Mark's point that the changes that the internet and globalization of 30 and 40 years ago are nothing compared to what's about to happen is already happening globally. Whether or not our children and our



society continues to be free and open and a free market society is going to be determined by whether AI is principally designed, developed and owned out of the PRC or out of countries aligned with us and our alliances, which I think our president fails to really appreciate and value, are critical, and we can no longer be a constellation of America and a whole bunch of other countries we sort of pat on the head and tell them what to do in terms of NATO votes and the UN we need to be invested in their innovation and their competitiveness. Because collectively, the US, Japan, Australia, South Korea, UK, NATO, EU, Canada, Mexico, we have a remarkable global community of countries committed to the free market, to free societies, to the rights of individuals, only if that community of our common partners and allies has a common orientation and works together, do we stand a chance in what is the greatest contest of this century.

**Baker**

Well, we're gonna take just a couple questions from the audience. I know we're all behind, and we need we're all behind, and we need move on. Start with Jane Harman right over here, if you could.

**Harman**

So I think it's a shame that John Cornyn and Dan Sullivan are not here, because there are responsible Republican voices in the United...

**Warner**

They are great senators and great friends of both actually.

**Coons**

Agreed.

**Harman**

Look at that, they agree with each other. So as an escapee from the United States Congress and a former member of the gang of eight who fled to head the Wilson Center for a decade, which has now disappeared under the Trump cuts, you can imagine, I have a point of view about all this, but my premise question, and I just want to justify it in two ways, is that Congress has disappeared as a balance wheel on American foreign policy, and it didn't start with this administration. It's been a slippery slope for many years. I certainly saw it when I was there, and it was a reason I wanted to leave and got a better job, by the way, but at any rate, two examples in 2002 I voted for. Sadly, I was wrong to vote for it, the AUMF authorization use of military force on Iraq. So far as I know, that's the last vote Congress has made to authorize the use of military force anywhere. And there's been the use of military force all over the place, including, most recently, on Iran. That's one example. Second is something Chris mentioned, which is Congress's inability to pass budgets on time. It's been going on for decades, and continuing resolutions are the most inefficient, expensive way to fund a budget, and no new starts can happen because of this. So just question, is there any way that you know of in any near term to restore Congress as a balance wheel against any president in US foreign policy?

**Baker**

Quick answers.

**Warner**

Well, first of all, I'm going to disagree with whatever Chris says, so we can have some conflict. You're right with your premise, and I will give, I got to give a shout out from my 40 year partner and friend, Tim Kaine. He has been relentless on this, and he raised the issue first under Obama. So he has cred on both sides. In terms of currently, I believe it's not like because Trump is so transactional that everyone feels enormous, amongst my Republican colleagues, loyalty to Trump. They may fear. We got to find the time. And I got to believe it's got to be more than four, where we get five, six or seven to break, and if then the world doesn't end, I think you will see more of that. Because if we don't take back, and I'll turn this over, as you well know, Jane, there are three parties in Congress, Democrats, Republicans, and appropriators, and I will turn it over to the appropriator to give his biased final answer.

**Coons**

Thank you, Mark. Look Jane, as you know well, we are barreling towards what's going to be the most critical fight of this administration, which is whether or not we're going to appropriate this year, or have their insistence on rescission after rescission lead to a government shutdown. China does not build their military on continuing resolutions and government shutdowns, and this is enormously dangerous. I'm now the senior Democrat on defense appropriations. Senator McConnell is the chair. We're working well together, we can do reasonable, bipartisan appropriations across a dozen different areas, but you have to be willing to compromise on particular decisions and levels, and at the end of the day, if the President and Republican senators refuse to compromise and to reach bipartisan results, the relevance of the Appropriations Committee and of Congress' critical Article One role to determine spending levels is going to slip through our fingers. Appropriations has always been the committee where the most centrist or willing to work together senators get appointed because to get a bill done, you have to give up things and you have to work together. We had a very contentious markup yesterday. We voted two more bills out. In the end, we've done four out of our 12 bills, but we're a matter of a few weeks away from the question being right in front of us, are there more than three? Are there four or five or six? And if you find them, they'll be on the Appropriations Committee.

**Warner**

And just one last thing, you know, I want to thank Chris. One of the things he took on being the Chair of ranking on defense appropriations. It's actually probably the most significant role, because you get visibility in everything on DoD side and everything on the Intel side. And I am really glad that he took that on.

**Baker**

I wish we had more time, I think we're unfortunately pressed up against it, we've got other great panels coming up. Thank you Senator Coons Thank you Senator Warner, the great discussion. Thank you.