

Washington weaponizes history against Iran

American hypocrisy at Acropolis



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**OPINION
EXCLUSIVE**

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio's recent speech in Athens, delivered against the historic backdrop of the Acropolis, was more than a tribute to ancient Greek civilization. By recalling the Persian invasion of Greece in 480 BC and drawing a sharp contrast between the supposed moral traditions of the West and the contemporary Iranian state, Rubio presented a deeply politicized interpretation of history. His remarks raise a fundamental question: why is Washington invoking events from more than 2,500 years ago to reinforce its confrontation with Iran today?

The answer may lie in the political value of portraying a modern geopolitical dispute as an age-old civilizational struggle. Rather than addressing the specific causes and consequences of tensions with Tehran, such rhetoric encourages audiences to view Iran as a permanent adversary of the West. This approach deserves scrutiny from at least three perspectives: the manipulation of history, the political objectives behind Washington's rhetoric, and the contradiction between American claims to moral authority and the record of US foreign policy.

History as a weapon against Iran

In his Athens address, Rubio recalled how the armies of the Achaemenid ruler Xerxes invaded Greece and destroyed parts of the Acropolis. He then contrasted the heroic traditions he associated with ancient Greece and Western civilization with what he described as a "cult of death" among Iran's religious leadership. His language went beyond criticism of particular policies, presenting a broad cultural contrast between the West and Iran. The historical events themselves are well documented. Persian forces invaded Greece (the issue should be analyzed within the context of the historical rivalries between the Persian and Greek empires in antiquity). However, acknowledging these events does not justify using an ancient military campaign to define the character of a modern nation or its people. The Greco-Persian Wars emerged from the political and strategic rivalries of the ancient world, including imperial expansion, competing interests, and earlier conflicts involving Greek cities and the Persian Empire. These events should be examined within their historical context, rather than reduced to a simplistic narrative in which one civilization embodies virtue and another represents an eternal threat. More importantly, the Achaemenid Empire and the modern Iranian state belong to different historical eras, separated by profound political, social, and cultural transformations. Pres-



US Secretary of State Marco Rubio speaks in Athens, Greece, on October 7, 2026, with the Acropolis in the background.
● ALEXANDROS VLACHOS/EPA

ent-day Iranians cannot reasonably be held collectively responsible for the military decisions of an ancient ruler. By the same logic, contemporary Americans cannot be treated as personally responsible for every war or conquest undertaken by earlier Western powers. Rubio's framing therefore risks turning history into a tool for political mobilization. The implication is that Iran's relationship with the West should be understood not simply through present-day policies and interests, but through an allegedly permanent conflict between civilizations.

Such an interpretation is neither historically sufficient nor politically constructive. Ancient history should help societies understand the complexity of the past, not provide a ready-made justification for hostility in the present. Iran possesses a rich civilizational heritage encompassing philosophy, poetry, science, architecture, and intellectual exchange. Its historical identity cannot be reduced to the military campaigns of the Achaemenid period, just as Greek civilization cannot be reduced to its wars with Persia. Both histories are considerably more

complex than the political narratives advanced by contemporary officials.

Washington's political calculations

Rubio's remarks must also be considered in the context of the current confrontation between the United States and Iran. At a time of heightened tensions and mounting concerns about the consequences of military escalation, Washington has a clear political interest in presenting its approach as legitimate, necessary, and morally justified. Framing the confrontation as a defense of Western civilization can serve this purpose. It shifts the debate away from questions about military strategy, civilian casualties, regional stability, economic disruption, and the legal basis for the use of force. Instead, it encourages audiences to view the conflict as a historic struggle between fundamentally different systems of values. This is a consequential shift. Political disputes can be addressed through negotiations, reciprocal concessions, security arrangements, and diplomacy. A conflict presented as an existential struggle between civilizations, however, becomes more difficult to resolve. Once an adversary is portrayed as inherently hostile, compromise can be dismissed as weakness and diplomatic engagement as appeasement.

Rubio's speech also comes at a politically sensitive time in the United States, with congressional midterm elections scheduled for November 3, 2026. Although the timing alone does not establish the secretary of state's motives, the domestic political value of presenting a controversial foreign policy as a historic mission should not be overlooked.

The American public and international audiences have legitimate reasons to ask whether Washington's approach to Iran is reducing tensions or increasing the danger of a wider conflict. They are also entitled to question the human and economic costs of military confrontation. Historical symbolism cannot answer these questions. Nor can references to ancient Athens establish that contemporary American policies are necessarily defensive, lawful, or beneficial to regional security. If Washington wishes to justify its conduct, it must do so through evidence, international law, and a serious assessment of the consequences of its decisions.



US President Donald Trump (C), CIA Director John Ratcliffe (L) and Secretary of State Marco Rubio (R) watch the illegal abduction of the president of Venezuela, another western country, unfold from Trump's Mar a Lago resort, in Palm Beach, Florida, on January 3, 2026.
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The prestige of ancient Greek civilization cannot substitute for that responsibility.

Contradiction in America's moral claims

Perhaps the most striking aspect of Rubio's remarks is the contrast between the moral authority claimed by Washington and the historical record of American foreign policy. Over recent decades, the United States has launched or participated in military interventions, supported regime-change operations, imposed extensive economic sanctions, and pursued policies that have contributed to instability and human suffering in different parts of the world.

The 2003 invasion of Iraq remains a particularly significant example. The war was justified in part by claims about weapons of mass destruction that were not substantiated by the subsequent discovery of such stockpiles. Its consequences included civilian deaths, extensive destruction, prolonged instability, and far-reaching regional repercussions. The wars in Vietnam and Afghanistan, along with other American military operations, have likewise generated enduring questions about the human costs of US strategic decisions.

This history does not mean that the actions of other governments should escape scrutiny. Every state must be accountable for its conduct, and allegations of violations of international law should be examined on the basis of evidence. But the same standards must apply to Washington. The United States cannot credibly claim an exclusive right to define civilization, morality, or legitimate self-defense while treating its own military record as beyond criticism.

The principles of the United Nations Charter, including sovereign equality and restrictions on the use of force, provide a more appropriate framework for evaluating international conduct than sweeping claims about cultural superiority. The UN Charter principles apply to all states, regardless of their political systems or historical traditions.

Rubio's characterization of Iran also risks blurring the distinction between criticism of a government and the demonization of an entire nation. Specific policies and actions can be debated and challenged without portraying millions of people as representatives of an inherently hostile civilization.

Iran is not synonymous with any single administration, just as the United States is not synonymous with the policies of its current government. Both societies possess complex histories and diverse intellectual traditions that cannot be adequately represented by political stereotypes.

Iran cannot be defined by Washington's narrative

Ultimately, Rubio's speech illustrates the dangers of using historical memory to reinforce contemporary geopolitical confrontation. The Acropolis is a



The Achaemenid Empire and the modern Iranian state belong to different historical eras, separated by profound political, social, and cultural transformations. Present-day Iranians cannot reasonably be held collectively responsible for the military decisions of an ancient ruler. By the same logic, contemporary Americans cannot be treated as personally responsible for every war or conquest undertaken by earlier Western powers.