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## **RUBIO SIGNALS RENEWED FOCUS ON U.S.-CENTRAL ASIA RELATIONS AND TRADE NORMALIZATION**

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At his Senate confirmation hearing, U.S. Senator Marco Rubio, nominee for secretary of state under President-elect Donald Trump, outlined a vision for strengthening ties with Central Asia, emphasizing trade normalization, energy partnerships, and geopolitical engagement in the region. Rubios remarks signal a potential shift in U.S. foreign policy focus toward a strategically vital yet historically overlooked area.

Central Asia is a neglected part of the world, Rubio stated, referencing his recent visits to five Central Asian countries, including a stop just 20 miles from the Iranian border. They have the fourth-largest reserves of natural gas in the world, and theyre caught between China, Russia, Iran, and Afghanistan. He underscored the regions precarious geopolitical position and its eagerness to engage with the United States amid growing competition from China and Russia.

Rubio expressed support for repealing the Jackson-Vanik amendment, a Cold War-era law that restricts trade with non-market economies. The amendment, he said, is outdated for countries like Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, which have made significant strides toward market reforms.

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