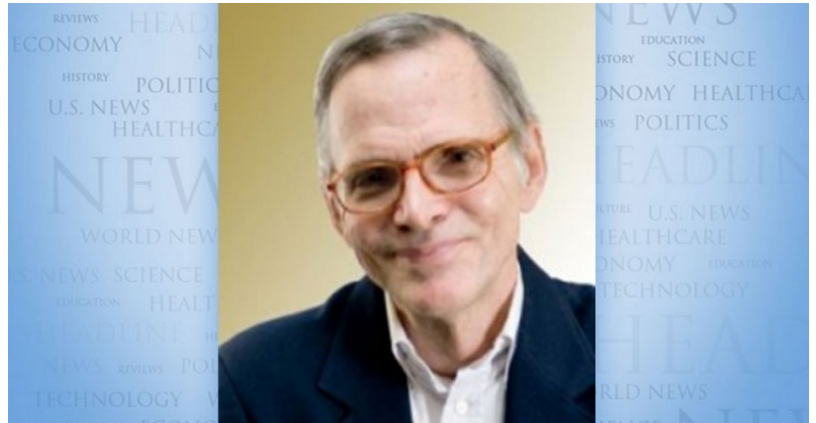




Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on December 22, 2014

Isolationist? So's Your Old Founding Father.

For years, even decades, partisans of the Old Right and segments of the New Left have protested the misuse and abuse of the epithet "isolationist." Yet we are now tempted to offer at least two cheers for U.S. Senator Rand Paul for the Kentucky Republican's timely picking up of that still-live verbal hand grenade and [tossing it back at a neocon colleague](#), one Marco Rubio, the junior U.S. senator from the state of Florida.



Ironically, Rubio's objection to President Obama's move to normalize relations with Cuba and Senator Paul's charge of isolationism came within about a week of the 73rd anniversary of the Japanese attack on the U.S. Naval base at Pearl Harbor. Originally the term was used to vilify the America First Committee and others who urged the United States to stay out of the Second World War, as another conflict between England and Germany seemed uninviting to a nation that had come to believe our entrance in the first global war was a tragic mistake and had bred the conditions that made the far-bloodier sequel almost inevitable. The so-called isolationists were merely reminding the country of the simple wisdom of our nation's Founders, who counseled against entanglement in the affairs and, especially, the wars of Europe. Honest trade and friendship with all nations, entangling alliances with none was the counsel of our first president, George Washington, and our third, Thomas Jefferson. Both believed the proclamation of human rights in the Declaration of Independence did not require the United States to, in the later words of John Quincy Adams, go abroad "in search of monsters to destroy."

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Hitler's Germany was, indeed, a formidable monster, as was its twin and ally in the Pacific, the Japanese Empire. To overcome America's innate "isolationism," it became necessary for the interventionists of the Roosevelt administration to lure one or the other of those monsters into firing the fateful "first shot" against the United States. President Roosevelt, having done his unsuccessful best to provoke Germany into attacking U.S. boats and planes aiding British subs on the high seas, turned his attention to Japan and skillfully isolated the empire through diplomatic and economic sanctions and, by cutting off its oil supply, left the desperate Japanese sufficiently at wit's end to commit the supreme folly of attacking the United States and awakening the sleeping giant.

After World War II, elements of the Old Right abandoned the cause of non-interventionism and turned their intellectual and rhetorical firepower against the unreconstructed "isolationists," also known as appeasers. It soon became clear that to the new conservatives, now called "neocons," the year was always 1938 and every international conflict involved at least one new Hitler or Stalin. All involved the peace of the world and, above all, America's national security.

The earth moved. America, in effect, created the postwar world. An important moment came even before America became embroiled in World War II, when Sen. Arthur Vandenberg, a Republican from Michigan and a leader of his party's "isolationist" wing, declared his abandonment of that cause, noting that "Our oceans are no longer moats." The danger in that statement lay not in the rejection of moats,



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but in the suggestion that the two mighty oceans that lapped our eastern and western shores are “our oceans.” Today the world is ours and every movement in it is regarded as a potential threat to our national security.

After World War II, even Mr. Republican, Robert Taft, supported the creation of the United Nations as a bulwark against future wars. He opposed, however, the NATO alliance that committed the United States to war if any one of a dozen nations should be under attack, regardless of circumstance or provocation. Without congressional approval, President Harry Truman declared the Truman Doctrine and intervened in the internal affairs of Greece and Turkey when communist subversion was an issue. In 1950, he used United Nations authority to go to war with North Korea, again with no authorization from Congress. Republican opposition to the “imperial presidency” appeared to die with Senator Taft in 1953, the year Dwight Eisenhower entered the White House and inaugurated the era of “modern Republicanism.” The new Republican internationalism involved deposing governments and even assassinating leaders in the Congo, Iran, Indonesia, and Guatemala, where the Dulles brothers, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles and brother Allen as head of the CIA, used the American military to make Latin America safe for the United Fruit Company, in which the Brothers Dulles had a financial interest.

Soon the tables had turned and it was conservative Republicans leading the charge into world conflicts and liberal Democrats who were accused of being isolationists and appeasers. During the Vietnam War, it was Democratic senators such as Frank Church of Idaho and George McGovern of South Dakota who were issuing the cry from the heart of the nation to, in McGovern’s words, “Come home, America.” McGovern’s nomination for president in 1972 seemed to be all the proof Republicans needed that the Democratic Party, over the protestations of Senator Henry Jackson (D-Wash.) and others, had gone over the isolationist cliff. The resulting reelection by a landslide of Republican Richard Nixon served to confirm that judgment.

But the debate over isolationism had become narrowly focused on military intervention, leaving economic, trade and diplomatic actions out of the equation. Senator Rand Paul has followed, with some variations, the basic concept of his father, the former Texas congressman and two-time Republican presidential hopeful, Ron Paul. Both Pauls have used the term non-interventionism, to set the record straight about the charge of isolationism. The non-interventionists would refrain from military involvement in the affairs of other nations, while leaving avenues of trade and diplomatic communications and negotiations open. Thus Senator Paul can call Rubio and others within the party isolationists for wanting to continue economic sanctions against Iran over that nation’s development of nuclear power and, possibly, nuclear weapons, and more to the point, against Cuba over that island-nation’s embrace of communism and its continuing disdain for human rights.

Rubio apparently believes that while isolating Cuba since the Castro revolution of 1950-1960 has not changed the Cuban dictatorship for half a century, several more years of it are required to get the job done. Senator Paul believes we need not approve of a nation’s political, economic, and social order to have normal economic and diplomatic intercourse with it. So who is truly the isolationist?

Paul has chosen his target carefully. He could have accused Senator Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.) or a host of other senators of isolationism, but Rubio is an obvious target. The son of Cuban refugees, Rubio claims a moral authority on the issue and has among his constituents thousands of hard-core anti-Castro Cubans now living in Florida. He is also an almost certain rival to Senator Paul in the quest both are expected to make for the 2016 Republican presidential nomination. A nation that has largely



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forgotten Robert Taft, Arthur Vandenberg, and the old “isolationists” will be watching. So too, we might imagine, will be the ghosts of George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and John Quincy Adams.



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