



Are Rand Paul and Ted Cruz Isolationists?

On December 7, 1991, former President George H.W. Bush spoke in Hawaii to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the bombing of Pearl Harbor, marking the entrance of the United States into WWII. Interestingly, he diverted the blame for the attack away from the Japanese government.

Bush claimed it was “isolationists” who were to blame for the bombing of Pearl Harbor.

Now, in the first debate of Republican presidential candidates with low poll numbers, Senator Lindsey Graham (S.C.) — who has advocated putting American soldiers into the Middle East in increasingly large numbers — claimed that Senators Rand Paul (Ky.) and Ted Cruz (Texas), who spoke later in the evening in prime time, have put forth “isolationist” proposals.



A recent editorial in the Oklahoma City *Oklahoman* claimed,

Paul’s isolationist leanings came through in his repeated calls for the United States to stop seeking regime change in the Middle East. [Governor Chris] Christie, solid and forthright, said he would strictly enforce a no-fly zone over Syria, including shooting down a Russian plane if it violated the air space.

The paper reported that Paul responded, “Well, I think if you’re in favor of World War III, you have your candidate.”

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Following the “reasoning” of the *Oklahoman* opinion piece, if one opposes America intervening in a foreign nation to effect “regime change” — or to put it bluntly, overthrow a foreign government by force — then that person is an “isolationist.” Because Christie would shoot down a Russian plane, does this mean that refraining from shooting down the planes of other nations is “isolationism”?

Next in the debate, a nationally syndicated “progressive” columnist took issue with Senator Cruz, who had asserted that he believed American foreign policy should be based on the concept of “America first” — conjuring up memories of the old America First Committee, formed to keep the United States out of WWII. But, according to the columnist, the America First Committee was pro-Nazi — and, of course, “isolationist.”

Whatever one thinks of the wisdom of the America First Committee, it was not a pro-Nazi organization. There were many famous, patriotic Americans among its 800,000 members in 450 chapters, including Gerald Ford, Sargent Shriver, Potter Stewart, John Kennedy, Walt Disney, John T. Flynn, and Charles A. Lindbergh.



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Lindbergh was unfairly smeared by President Franklin Roosevelt and his attack dogs in the press as being anti-Jewish and a supporter of Nazi Germany and Adolf Hitler. But Lindbergh, the first man to fly solo across the Atlantic Ocean, sympathized deeply with the Jews. “It is not difficult to understand why Jewish people desire the overthrow of Nazi Germany,” he declared. “The persecution they suffered in Germany would be sufficient to make bitter enemies of any race. No person with a sense of the dignity of mankind can condone the persecution of the Jewish race suffered in Germany.”

Conservative pundit Pat Buchanan praised the America First Committee. “The achievements of that organization are monumental,” he said. “By keeping America out of World War II until Hitler attacked Stalin in June, 1941, Soviet Russia, not America, bore the brunt of the fighting, bleeding and dying.”

It is not known whether Cruz had the America First Committee in mind when he suggested what America’s foreign policy should be, but one must ask, “What is wrong with a policy of “America first”?

In truth, what critics dismiss as “isolationism” should more properly be called “non-interventionism.” Isolationism would better describe Japan prior to 1853, when it had little contact at all with the rest of the world, commercial or cultural. Non-interventionism better describes the philosophy of the patriotic America First Committee, which simply means that the United States should not intervene in the affairs of other nations. It was the historic foreign-policy position outlined by our first president, George Washington, who warned us in his “Farewell Address” to steer clear of “entangling foreign alliances” (which could drag us into armed conflicts with little if anything to do with our national interests). It was America’s position, for the most part, until the Spanish-American War of 1898. And that intervention resulted not from any vital American national interests, but rather from the desire to protect the people of Cuba from the alleged atrocities of the Spanish occupiers.

Non-interventionism is not pacifism. Certainly if the United States is attacked, it is proper for us to defend ourselves. For example, the America First Committee closed its doors after the Japanese attack upon Pearl Harbor.

But a non-interventionist does not want to be the “world’s policeman.” While he may have sympathies for one side in a civil war, or even a conflict between two nations, he does not favor American intervention into such conflicts.

When George W. Bush was seeking the presidency in 2000, he promised a “more humble foreign policy” than the repeated interventions of his predecessor, Bill Clinton, who found supposed American “vital interests” in places such as Somalia, Haiti, and Bosnia. But by 2005 and his second inaugural address, Bush had ditched the humble foreign policy pledge in favor of intervening all over the world to spread “democracy and liberty.” This interventionism is the foreign policy favored by those sometimes called neoconservatives, who dominated the administration of George W. Bush. To these people, it is always 1939, and every two-bit dictator in the world is another Adolf Hitler.

Rand Paul has made it clear that he does not think it prudent for the United States to oust foreign dictators in the volatile Middle East. In the recent presidential debate, he pointed out that American intervention in Iraq and Libya has only contributed to the rise of ISIS and similar extremist Islamic groups. While GOP presidential candidates such as Governor John Kasich of Ohio have insisted that “[President Bashar] Assad [of Syria] must go!,” Senator Paul rightly explained that the fall of Assad would only lead to the greater advancement of ISIS.

The decision of President Bush to overthrow Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein has unleashed the militant Islamic forces with which we contend today. As we explained in the December 21 print issue of *The*



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New American, “While both Saddam Hussein and Bashar al-Assad were/are authoritarian strongmen, they were also largely secularized Muslims with a fair amount of tolerance for Christians and other religious minorities in their countries.”

An interventionist foreign policy, as practiced by both Presidents Bush, as well as Clinton and Obama, has serious negative consequences for the United States. As we also pointed out,

Considering that it was the U.S. interventionist foreign policy begun under George W. Bush and continued under Obama that has been responsible for the destabilization that has strengthened ISIS and allowed the terrorist group to gain large swaths of territory in both nations — that policy can be blamed for the plight of the millions of refugees pouring out of the Middle East to seek sanctuary in Europe and the United States.

Labelling a political figure “an isolationist” is intended as a slur — to associate that person with pacifism. But Rand Paul’s father, Ron, for example, though clearly a non-interventionist, is not an isolationist — and certainly not a pacifist.

It is to be hoped that rational voters would not favor a foreign policy as espoused by, for instance, New Jersey Governor Chris Christie, in which we would risk a war with Russia over some airspace in Syria. As the writer of the biblical book of Ecclesiastes observed, there is a time for war, and a time for peace. And surely a war with Russia is something to be avoided at all costs, unless America’s vital national interests are at stake.

*Photo of Senator Ted Cruz (left), New Jersey Governor Chris Christie (center) and Senator Rand Paul:
AP Images*

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