



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on June 10, 2016

Former Associates of Rand Paul and Charles Koch Launch Non-interventionist Think Tank

A team of libertarian and constitutionalist foreign policy experts have joined a team led by political activist Edward King in forming the Defense Priorities Foundation — a non-interventionist foreign policy think tank. King was the former national youth director for former Representative Ron Paul’s (R-Texas) 2012 presidential campaign and the COO of Concerned American Voters, a PAC that supported Senator Rand Paul’s (R-Ky.) failed 2016 Republican presidential campaign.



“We are just getting started,” King was quoted by *Politico*. “But one of the main things we want to accomplish is to expand the debate on foreign policy, which we think has been sorely lacking, especially for the last 10 or 15 years.”

“We are seeking support,” King continued, signaling out William P. Ruger, the new group’s senior advisor and foreign policy scholar, as “a tremendous asset.” Ruger, who is a veteran of the war in Afghanistan, is the vice president of research and policy at the Charles Koch Institute.

Visitors to the Defense Priorities Foundation’s website are greeted by a bold headline that summarizes the new group’s goals: “A Strong Military to Ensure Security, Stability, and Peace.” The foundation’s mission statement reads:

To inform citizens, thought leaders, and policy makers of the importance of a strong, dynamic military — used more judiciously to protect America’s narrowly defined national interests — and promote a realistic grand strategy prioritizing restraint, diplomacy, and free trade to ensure American security.

The language on the webpage provides a valuable education for those who are under the mistaken impression that “non-interventionism” is “isolationism” or that non-interventionists do not support a strong military defense for America. They state:

The most important function of government is to secure the rights and liberties of individual citizens, in part by providing for the common defense. As such, the United States should maintain the strongest military in the world in order to defend our homeland, maintain our national security, and protect our cherished freedoms.

While most people who consider themselves to be “conservatives” (including those such as Senator John McCain [R-Ariz.] who are really interventionist *neoconservatives*) might agree with the above statement, the message from the foundation goes on to explain the difference between having a strong military and using that military power to defend interests other than our own (i.e., “interventionism”).

These vital [national security] interests must be weighed against the prevailing Beltway narrative that obliges U.S. military engagement in so many places and at so many times. Too often, these



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needless and exhausting ventures are undertaken absent thoughtful consideration of the consequences here at home and abroad.

In contrast, Defense Priorities believes U.S. actions around the globe should derive from a realistic grand strategy focused on protecting and securing our vital national interests.

The group's statement goes on to summarize what a constitutionalist foreign policy should be:

Overall, the United States should pursue a more prudent, restrained foreign policy that assesses the world as it exists, carefully considering the numerous complexities and nuances of each situation. A principled, constitutional foreign policy would send our brave men and women into harm's way only after the American people, through their duly elected representatives in Congress, have debated the merits of military action.

The concept of combining a strong nationalism defense with a noninterventionist foreign policy is not a new one. It has existed since our founding era. George Washington stated in his First Annual Message, delivered in 1790, that the "most effectual means of preserving peace" is "to be prepared for war." Thomas Jefferson, Washington's secretary of state, advised him that "the power of making war often prevents it."

Yet Jefferson summed up the noninterventionist foreign policy position perfectly in his 1801 inaugural address: "Peace, commerce, and honest friendship with all nations — entangling alliances with none."

The combination of a strong national defense with a noninterventionist foreign policy largely prevailed among Americans until the 20th century, when the United States intervened in two world wars. However, those who opposed America's entry into the Second World War were branded as "isolationists." That label was applied to members of the America First Committee (which opposed U.S. involvement in World War II), whose membership included the famous aviator Charles Lindbergh, future U.S. presidents Gerald Ford and John Kennedy, Sears, Roebuck chairman Robert E. Wood, movie producer Walt Disney, and Robert McCormick, publisher of the *Chicago Tribune*. A leading noninterventionist in Congress prior to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor (when the American First committee was disbanded) was Senator Robert A. Taft (R-Ohio), who believed that the United States should avoid any involvement in European or Asian wars, yet supported a strong military.

A predominately interventionist foreign policy view has dominated both political parties since Dwight D. Eisenhower defeated Taft to secure the Republican presidential nomination in 1952. Those who bucked that trend, such as former Representative Ron Paul and his son, Senator Rand Paul, have repeatedly been labeled as "isolationists."

During an interview with CNN news correspondent Wolf Blitzer in 2011, Blitzer said to then-presidential candidate Ron Paul:

Blitzer: In the past I've called you an isolationist, but I get hammered by your supporters out there ...

Paul: Good.

Blitzer: ... when they write to me and they say, "Ron Paul is not an isolationist, he's a non-interventionist." Tell our viewers right now, once and for all, the difference between an isolationist and a non-interventionist.

Paul: An isolationist is a protectionist that builds walls around their country, they don't like the trade, they don't like to travel about the world, and they like to put sanctions on different countries.



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So some of the people who call me that, are actually much more in favor of sanctions and limited trade, they're the ones who don't want to trade with Cuba and they want to put sanctions on anybody who blinks their eye at them....

So non-intervention is quite a bit different since what the founders advised was to get along with people, trade with people, and to practice diplomacy, rather than having this militancy of telling people what to do and how to run the world and building walls around our own country. That is isolationism, it's a far cry from what we believe in.

Blitzer: And just to be precise, you want to bring all the U.S. troops home, not just from Iraq and Afghanistan, but from Germany, Japan, South Korea and everywhere else around the world. Is that right?

Paul: Yea, because I believe in national defense and our first responsibility, and probably one of the major responsibilities of the federal government, is the national defense. And fighting these wars does not help us, I mean, getting bogged down in Afghanistan brought the Soviet Union to its knees, and is bringing us to our knees, too. We've been there for ten years and it's contributing to this huge deficit that we have. Those wars over there have contributed 4 trillion dollars worth of debt in the last 10 years. So yea, I want to bring them home, and I think we'll be stronger for it, I think we'll have a stronger national defense and we'll have a lot stronger economy. If we're serious about straightening this mess up, we have to deal with foreign policy as well monetary policy and fiscal policy and tax policy.

An [article posted by The New American](#) last December noted that Senator Lindsey Graham (S.C.) had asserted that fellow senators and presidential candidates Rand Paul and Ted Cruz had put forth "isolationist" proposals.

The article also quoted from a then-recent editorial in the Oklahoma City *Oklahoman*, which 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 [during a presidential debate] 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 to Christie, "Well, I think if you're in favor of World War III, you have your candidate."

The New American observed that following the "reasoning" of the *Oklahoman* opinion piece, if one opposes U.S. intervention in a foreign nation to effect "regime change" (which involves overthrowing a foreign government by force) then that person is an "isolationist."

The goal of the Defense Priorities Foundation will be to promote a strong U.S. military and a noninterventionist U.S. foreign policy. To enable the foundation to accomplish that objective, it has enlisted some very capable individuals as part of its team. They include (partial listing):

- Lt. Col. Daniel L. Davis, (U.S. Army, retired) who served on active duty in Operation Desert Storm in 1991, and Iraq in 2009 and in Afghanistan twice (2005, 2011). Davis was awarded the Bronze Star Medal for Valor at the Battle of 73 Easting in 1991, and a Bronze Star Medal in Afghanistan in 2011. He earned a Master of International Relations degree from Troy University in 2006.
- Capt. Sarah Feinberg (USMC, retired), a veteran of the Iraq War. Feinberg earned an MBA from the Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania and writes on national defense and foreign policy issues.



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- Eleanor May, who served as the national press secretary for Rand Paul's 2016 presidential campaign. Prior to that, she worked in the U.S. Senate under Senators Paul, Jeff Sessions (R-Ala.), and Richard Shelby (R-Ala.).
- Charles (Chuck) Peña, the former director of defense policy studies at the Cato Institute. Peña was also a foreign policy advisor for the 2008 Ron Paul presidential campaign.

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