



Has Rand Paul Gone Neocon on the Ukraine?

Has Rand Paul (shown) gone “Neocon Lite” over Russia’s invasion of Ukraine? Paul, who has been widely regarded as a non-interventionist like his father, 12-term congressman and three-time presidential candidate Ron Paul, is sounding the alarm over the Ukraine turmoil as though it were right on America’s doorstep. Condemning “Vladimir Putin’s invasion of Ukraine” as a “gross violation of that nation’s sovereignty and an affront to the international community,” the Republican junior senator from Kentucky and potential candidate for his party’s 2016 presidential nomination wrote in an [op-ed article](#) for *Time* magazine that the United States should respond with punitive sanctions to ensure that the Russian president is “isolated for his actions.”



Paul did point out clearly that no one is calling for a military confrontation with the Russians, and some of what he recommends makes sense for the United States economically, regardless of what Putin has done or may yet do. He calls, for example, for immediate construction of the Keystone pipeline and says we should “aggressively market and export America’s vast natural gas resources to Europe.” He favors the removal of “every obstacle or current ban blocking the export of American oil and gas to Europe” and the lifting of restrictions on development of new oil and gas supplies to increase the amount of energy available in the United States while also supplying Europe with oil if the supply from the Ukraine is interrupted.

But he also advocates policies that would basically ensure that the supply is interrupted. “It is important,” Paul wrote, “that Russia become economically isolated until all its forces are removed from Crimea and Putin pledges to act in accordance with the international standards of behavior that respect the rights of free people everywhere.” Economic sanctions and visa bans “should be imposed and enforced without delay,” wrote Paul. “We should also suspend American loans and aid to Ukraine because currently these could have the counterproductive effect of rewarding Russia. Ukraine owes so much money to Russia that America would essentially be borrowing from China to give to Russia.”

That is sound reasoning, but it begs the question of why the United States, at the expense of its own taxpaying people, should be lending money to Ukraine or any other country, regardless of what Russia does. If Senator Paul likes the idea of suspending loans in order to punish a country for an “affront to the international community,” then perhaps he favors making such loans in order to have the leverage that suspending them can bring. If so, he differs from the foreign policy of his father, who was against all international loans or economic foreign aid.

Paul calls for the United States to suspend its participation in this summer’s G-8 economic summit in Sochi, Russia, and to take the lead in boycotting the event if Russian troops are still in Crimea. He



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favors the installation of anti-missile systems in Poland and the Czech Republic that President Obama cancelled in 2009, “Only this time, I would make sure the Europeans pay for it. The problem with the foreign policies of both Democratic and Republican administrations is that they never give a second thought to how America can afford what they implement.” Paul seems to believe the events in the Ukraine pose a threat to U.S. security, but not, apparently, the worst threat.

“At the end of the day,” he wrote, “I still agree with former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Mike Mullen — the greatest threat to America’s security is our national debt.”

With the scandal-plagued New Jersey Governor Chris Christie having fallen from the lead in the expectations game leading up to 2016 presidential caucuses and primaries, Paul, who believes in reining in the NSA surveillance state at home, appears to have as much claim as anyone on front-runner status, should he decide to run. Other candidates who are less rigorous in their defense of privacy and more inclined to intervene in foreign affairs, may compete for the honor of being the anti-Paul. Ted Cruz of Texas, another freshman senator, at times appears eager to be seen as an ally of the maverick Kentuckian, while at the same time distancing himself from the non-intervention aspects of Paul’s policy for dealing with other nations. Cruz, who finished a distant second to Paul in the straw poll taken at last weekend’s CPAC conference, said the following day on ABC’s *This Week* that he is less reluctant than Paul to assert U.S. power abroad.

“U.S. leadership is critical in the world,” Cruz said. “And I agree with [Paul] that we should be very reluctant to deploy military force abroad, but I think there is a vital role, just as Ronald Reagan did.” But on Monday, Cruz, who in his CPAC speech knocked past Republican presidential nominees Dole, McCain and Romney for being tepid in defense of conservative principles, was generous in praise of his Kentucky colleague.

“Rand Paul is a courageous voice for liberty, and I’m honored to call him my friend,” Cruz said in a fence-mending [statement](#) issued from his office. “We do not agree on everything, especially regarding foreign policy, but we have agreed on the vast majority of issues, and I am sure we will continue to do so.” The Texas Republican said, “I am proud to stand with Rand.”

The libertarian nature of Paul’s conservatism has been a major factor in his father’s and his own appeal to young voters especially, but former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee, a 2008 presidential hopeful who may enter the race again in 2016, sounded a warning reminiscent of Chris Christie’s last year, when he said libertarianism is not the “purer” Republicanism as some of its adherents claim.

“Libertarians have a very valid point of view, and increasingly we’re seeing a libertarian influence for the Republican Party,” Huckabee conceded in an interview on Newsmax TV. “But pure libertarianism is not Republicanism,” he said. “They’re welcome in the Republican Party, but don’t act as if somehow libertarianism is a purer form of being Republican.”

Huckabee, a Baptist minister and the pastor of a church in Arkansas, emphasizes the social issues that propelled him to victory in the Iowa caucuses of 2008 and warns that if Republicans fail to energize social conservatives, they will be courting more defeats on more election days. “If ten percent more of the social conservatives had voted in the 2012 election, Mitt Romney would be president today,” Huckabee said. “They stayed home, in larger numbers, in part because they didn’t feel like there was a message that really connected to them.”

But the voters that may turn the tide in the 2016 election may be those who have been out of work so long, their votes are nearly all they have left. NSA surveillance and Russian expansion in the Ukraine



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will mean little to voters who have had to move back in with their parents or are living in their station wagons. The candidate who is most convincing in offering a way or ways to bring about more jobs in America will likely be the next president of the United States.

Photo of Rand Paul: AP Images



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