



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on April 30, 2014

WSJ/NBC Poll: “Anti-Interventionist Current ... Sweeps Across Party Lines”

A *Wall Street Journal*/NBC News poll  conducted from April 23-27 found that 47 percent of Americans believe that the United States should become less active in world affairs. Thirty percent think the United States should maintain its present level of activity and only 19 percent believe our nation should become more active.

When asked to rate President Obama’s foreign policy, 36 percent of those polled said Obama is “is too cautious and lets other countries control events,” 42 percent said “he takes a balanced approach depending on the situation,” and 15 percent said “he is too bold and forces issues with other countries.”

Significantly, when reporting the results of the poll, the *Wall Street Journal*, an influential news organ closely associated with America’s establishment, described the results of the poll as being indicative of “an anti-interventionist current that sweeps across party lines.” This is a marked departure from the pejorative term “isolationist” that those favoring an interventionist U.S. foreign policy have often used to brand non-interventionists such as 2008 and 2012 Republican presidential candidate Ron Paul.

In an interview with former Rep. Paul in December 2011, CNN correspondent Wolf Blitzer asked Paul: “Tell our viewers right now, once and for all, the difference between an isolationist and a non-interventionist.”

Paul replied:

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. 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. And yet, the opposite is what we believe in....

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.

In the interview, when Blitzer asked Paul if he would “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,” the congressman said: “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.”

In a news conference April 28 in the Philippines during his Asian tour, President Obama — despite his record of intervening militarily in Libya, Yemen, Pakistan, and elsewhere — sounded almost as if he had lifted a few talking points from one of Ron Paul’s 2012 campaign speeches. “Why is it that everybody is so eager to use military force after we’ve just gone through a decade of war at enormous costs to our troops and to our budget?” said Obama. “And what is it exactly that these critics think would have been



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accomplished?”

Senator Bob Corker, who is the ranking Republican on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, in a statement on April 28 was critical of Obama’s response to Russia’s intervention in the Ukraine: “After a week of rhetoric from the administration, I had hoped we would have responded to Russia’s blatant violations of its commitments to cease efforts to destabilize Ukraine with more than just a slap on the wrist.”

Corker was joined by Sen. Kelly Ayotte (R-N.H.), who said, “The administration’s tepid, incremental sanctions are insufficient given Russia’s continued occupation of Crimea and ongoing actions to fuel unrest in eastern Ukraine.”

Another interesting choice of words used by the *Journal* to report the results of the poll was: “The poll findings, combined with the results of prior Journal/NBC surveys this year, portray a public weary of foreign entanglements.”

The reference to “foreign entanglements” has long been favored by constitutionalist noninterventionists as a rebuff to the largely interventionist U.S. foreign policy that has prevailed since the onset of World War II (and also temporarily during World War I). It is based on similar wording from Thomas Jefferson’s inaugural address on March 4, 1801: “... peace, commerce, and honest friendship with all nations, entangling alliances with none.”

While the “foreign entanglements” quote is quite familiar to readers of *The New American*, finding the phrase in the *Wall Street Journal* may indicate that the noninterventionist viewpoint has come into its own. The *Journal* further summarized the significance of the poll:

The poll results have broad implications for U.S. politics, helping to explain, among other developments, Mr. Obama’s hesitance to have the U.S. take the lead in using military force in Libya, the reluctance of Congress to authorize force against Syria and the ascent as a national figure of Sen. Rand Paul (R., Ky.), a potential 2016 presidential candidate who has called for a restrained foreign policy.

The *Wall Street Journal*/NBC News poll reinforces the findings of the America’s Place in the World survey conducted by the Pew Research Center last year that found 53 percent of Americans think that the United States should “mind its own business internationally.” This figure compared with 42 percent who took that position in 2005, 41 percent in 1995 and only 18 percent back in 1964.

Interestingly, the America’s Place in the World survey is described as “a quadrennial [every four years] poll on foreign policy issues” that is “a collaborative effort between the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press and the Council on Foreign Relations [CFR]” on the CFR website.

Both the Council on Foreign Relations and its sister organization, the Royal Institute of International Affairs (now known as Chatham House) were established after World War I (1921 and 1920, respectively) by some of the same figures who has attended the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, at which the League of Nations was created. Disenchanted by U.S. involvement in the war, a new spirit of non-interventionism (branded “isolationism” by its opponents) had taken hold in America. This prevailing viewpoint was reflected in the rejection of the League of Nations Treaty by the U.S. Senate on November 19, 1919.

Viewing this vote as a crushing blow, members of the CFR worked relentlessly to steer U.S. foreign policy in a more interventionist direction (more than a dozen secretaries of states have been CFR



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members, including John Kerry), resulting in U.S. participation in World War II, U.S. membership in the United Nations (conceived largely by CFR members) after the war, and U.S. involvement in a long string of wars from Korea until present-day Afghanistan.

A summary on the Pew Research Center People & the Press website notes that a companion survey of 1,838 CFR members conducted online from October 7-November 11, provided “a unique perspective on public attitudes about America’s place in the world.” One statement that belabors the obvious to an almost amusing degree notes: “The [CFR’s] members have a decidedly internationalist outlook.”

The summary also notes that “there is consensus among the [CFR’s] members that the public has become less internationalist. Fully 92% say that in recent years ‘the American public has become less supportive of the U.S. taking an active role in world affairs.’ ”

The Pew Research summary observed that, although 62 percent of CFR members believe that U.S. global power has declined, they are still interventionist:

But the organization’s members — unlike the public — continue to support an activist U.S. foreign policy. An overwhelming majority (86%) favors a shared global leadership role for the U.S., and 55% think the country should be the *most assertive of the world’s leading nations*. (Emphasis in original.)

The increased support among the American public for a noninterventionist foreign policy can be attributed to several factors, including a weariness with the long involvement of the United States in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The 2008 and 2012 presidential campaigns of the outspoken noninterventionist candidate Rep. Ron Paul, while considered a failure from a political standpoint, served to air Paul’s fresh views and expose many more Americans to new possibilities rarely talked about by the CFR-dominated Republican and Democrat parties.

The reference in the *Journal* to “the ascent as a national figure of Sen. Rand Paul (R., Ky.), a potential 2016 presidential candidate” is an indication that the senior Dr. Paul’s words had an impact and that the public is willing to allow his son to continue his legacy of promoting a noninterventionist foreign policy.

Furthermore, as we noted, the *Journal*’s willingness to use terminology once shunned by the mainstream media (“anti-interventionist,” “foreign entanglements”) indicates that anti-interventionism has shed its “isolationist” stigma and enjoys a new-found mainstream respectability.



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