



Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on September 4, 2014

Rand Paul: Changing Feathers, Now Flying With the Hawks?

The war birds of the Grand Old Party are flying back to their hawks' nests after a brief interlude from crying havoc to a war-weary public.

The crimes and atrocities committed by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) have prompted "a sudden shift in Republican politics, putting a halt to the anti-interventionist mood that had been gaining credence in the party," the U.S. Armed Forces publication [Stars and Stripes](#) noted Thursday, citing a discernible "thirst among many conservative activists for a more muscular U.S. foreign policy." At a meeting of the Koch Brothers-backed Americans for Prosperity over the past weekend, the paper noted, the loudest applause came when Sen. Ted Cruz (R-Texas) called for bombing the Islamic State "back to the Stone Age." It's hard to see how that would deter the rampaging jihadists. They like the Stone Age.



Even Rand Paul, who like Cruz is a likely presidential aspirant for 2016, is now singing from the hawkish hymnal about a U.S. military solution to the chaos in Iraq, a significant shift for the Kentucky senator who has built a reputation as a leading opponent of intervening in conflicts abroad. "If I were president, I would call a joint session of Congress. I would lay out the reasoning of why ISIS is a threat to our national security and seek congressional authorization to destroy ISIS militarily," Paul said in a statement released from his office.

"Some pundits are surprised that I support destroying the Islamic State in Iraq and Greater Syria (ISIS) militarily," he wrote in a piece posted Thursday at Time.com. "They shouldn't be. I've said since I began public life that I am not an isolationist, nor am I an interventionist."

Yet it was barely two weeks ago, on August 27, that a markedly different op-ed by Senator Paul appeared in the *Wall Street Journal*, sounding a strongly cautionary note about U.S. military action in Iraq. He noted that the CIA arming and training of Syrian rebels served to strengthen the militants affiliated with al-Qaeda. Setting his sights on former Secretary of State and likely Democratic presidential contender Hillary Clinton, Paul wrote:

We are lucky Mrs. Clinton didn't get her way and the Obama administration did not bring about regime change in Syria. That new regime might well be ISIS.

Appearing on *Meet the Press* a few days later, Paul repeated his non-interventionist theme, calling



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Clinton a “war hawk.” In the *Wall Street Journal* piece, he observed that “many of those clamoring for military action now are the same people who made every false assumption imaginable about the cost, challenge and purpose of the Iraq war.”

Paul had also penned an op-ed piece that appeared in the *Wall Street Journal* on June 19 under the headline “America Shouldn’t Choose Sides in Iraq’s Civil War.” In that article Paul emphatically opposed reintroducing U.S. ground troops in Iraq for any purpose other than “to secure or evacuate U.S. personnel and diplomatic facilities.” He also questioned the usefulness of airstrikes.

“What would airstrikes accomplish?” he wrote. “We know that Iran is aiding the Iraqi government against ISIS. Do we want to, in effect, become Iran’s air force? What’s in this for Iran? Why should we choose a side, and if we do, who are we really helping?”

A question might arise as to what Paul is helping with his new more aggressive stance, other than his chances of winning the presidential nomination from a party known for the kind of “muscular” foreign policy that followed those false assumptions about “the cost challenge and purpose of the Iraq War.” Less than two weeks ago, Paul was citing his ability to attract Democratic and independent support with an approach to foreign policy that would be in sharp contrast to that of “War Hawk” Clinton. Many Republican voters as well had been attracted to the more non-interventionist foreign policy espoused by both Sen. Paul and his father, former Texas Congressman Ron Paul, during the latter’s two campaigns for the Republican presidential nomination. Such a sudden about face on the part of the younger Paul may lose him support among many in the Republican Party who helped propel him to national prominence. It may make his political aspirations seem a good deal less principled and more opportunistic — even, some might say, “Nixonian.”

Stars and Stripes noted that veterans among this year’s Republican U.S. Senate candidates are stressing their military background and their support for U.S. military actions. The Iraq experience is still fresh in people’s minds, and for millions of older Americans, Vietnam is still a painful memory. Those candidates might do both their campaigns and the nation more good if they harkened to the Rand Paul of but a fortnight ago, when he wrote,

A more realistic foreign policy would recognize that there are evil people and tyrannical regimes in this world, but also that America cannot police or solve every problem across the globe. Only after recognizing the practical limits of our foreign policy can we pursue policies that are in the best interest of the U.S.

Photo of Sen. Rand Paul: AP Images



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