

Rand Paul gave the most anti-war speech in Republican convention history

Jack Hunter

August 26, 2020

Sen. Rand Paul's support for President Trump during his Republican National Convention speech on Tuesday leaned heavily on anti-war themes — for good reason.

“President Trump is the first president in a generation to seek to end war rather than start one,” Paul declared in his prepared remarks. “If you hate war like I hate war, if you want us to quit sending \$50 billion to Afghanistan for luxury hotels and natural gas stations ... you need to support President Trump for another term.”

Targeting Trump's Democratic opponent, Paul said, “Joe Biden voted for the Iraq War, which President Trump has long called the worst geopolitical mistake of our generation. I fear Biden will choose war again. He supported war in Serbia, Syria, and Libya.”

“Joe Biden will continue to spill our blood and treasure,” Paul insisted. “President Trump will bring our heroes home.”

Paul, time and again on Tuesday night and in no uncertain terms, portrayed Trump as the anti-war "America First" Republican leader the country needs and Biden as representing the same old hyperinterventionist Washington foreign policy consensus.

Which is accurate.

The old Republican guard that Trump trounced in 2016, the entrenched GOP gatekeepers that have long defined “conservative” policy (especially foreign policy) are aching to get back to the Bush-Cheney neoconservative model of old.

They might twist "America First" for pro-war purposes in a second Trump term, as the historically hawkish former United Nations Ambassador Nikki Haley alluded to in the opening of her GOP convention speech on Monday, using the “good neocon”-originated “blaming America first” line more than once. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo took a similar tact in his convention speech Tuesday, praising where Trump has extended America's global military footprint while generally ignoring the president's relative military restraint and anti-war rhetoric.

But far more Republican war hawks have distanced themselves from Trump completely and are actually rooting for a Biden win, such as the George W. Bush alumni group the Lincoln Project, as well as the 73 Republican national security officials who have lined up behind Biden.

So, the hawks are covering their bets.

Paul is saying these establishment hawks in both camps must be rejected because Trump has permanently reset the Republican foreign policy table, and it's time to embrace it.

“We must not continue to leave our blood and treasure in Middle East quagmires,” Paul said. “I’m supporting President Trump because he believes, as I do, that a strong America cannot fight endless wars.”

Trump doesn't believe in fighting wars with no end, even if he hasn't ended them soon enough for Paul's liking. But for Biden, whether wars should ever end is an open question at best.

As the Cato Institute's Emma Ashford observed in her Tuesday *New York Times* op-ed, “Biden Wants to Return to a ‘Normal’ Foreign Policy. That’s the Problem.” She writes that Biden’s agenda signals “a reversion to the post-Cold War view that America can and should be everywhere and solve every problem. It’s the kind of approach that could commit the United States to more years of high military spending, an even longer ‘global war on terror’ currently fought in over a dozen countries, further humanitarian interventions that turn into quagmires and a more confrontational approach to China and Russia.”

Ashford concluded, “In short, Mr. Biden’s vision looks less like a better approach to foreign policy and more like a rerun.”

A rerun indeed. The libertarian-leaning Paul hopes, as his brazen Tuesday convention speech conveyed, that Republicans reject what the foreign policy establishment hawks in both parties want and fully embrace the "America First" anti-war messaging example set by Trump.

In other words, the alternative to Trump on foreign policy is the same old swamp.

Ashford writes, “The best way to understand where Mr. Biden stands today is to look at the people with whom he has surrounded himself. If personnel is policy, so far it looks like we’ll be getting little more than a rehash of the Beltway consensus.”

The primary purpose of Paul’s Republican convention speech was for his party to reject that Beltway foreign policy consensus finally and fully.

If America is our first concern, as Trump has expressed, Republicans will.