



J.D. Vance, Blake Masters Poised to Expand America First Foreign Policy Caucus in the Senate

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The election of Blake Masters in Arizona and J.D. Vance in Ohio would likely expand the emerging America First foreign policy caucus in the U.S. Senate.

Last week, the Senate voted to grant Ukraine \$40 billion in military and economic aid, which revealed a chasm between the America First conservatives in the Senate, who want to deescalate conflict with Russia, and more establishment-style Republicans who want to expand America's role in the conflict between Russia and Ukraine.

Eleven Senate Republicans — representing more than a fifth of the Senate GOP conference — voted against the Ukraine aid package, believing that it is not America's place to intervene in distant conflicts, spend money abroad while Americans cope with record-high inflation, and appropriate tens of billions of dollars without proper offsets to foreign aid spending.

Sen. Josh Hawley (R-MO), the Missouri populist, was one of the 11 Republicans that voted against the \$40 billion Ukraine aid package.

In an op-ed for Compact Magazine, Hawley said that too many Republicans have forgotten about the GOP's noninterventionist foreign policy heritage.

“They have traded the nationalism of Theodore Roosevelt for the globalism of Woodrow Wilson,” Hawley explained. “That’s a mistake. What America needs is not nation-building, but nationalism.”

In contrast to Hawley, Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) vigorously supported the Ukraine aid package and voiced some “veiled criticism,” reportedly for Hawley:

McConnell also said he hopes to push back against a “pretty small group” of noninterventionist lawmakers who have been “somewhat encouraged by the former president” to take the party in a different direction on foreign policy.

Hawley questioned the wisdom of spending tens of billions of dollars when America's European allies have spent so little in comparison:

Start with the \$40 billion Ukraine package. The cost alone is startling. It is three times what all of Europe has contributed to date and roughly the size of Ukraine's entire national budget.

Speaking of which, the bill includes funds for Ukraine's treasury to the tune of \$8.8 billion. And Biden administration officials suggest they will soon ask for more. This goes far beyond targeted military assistance. This package treats Ukraine as a client state of America, a fraught relationship that will put us on the hook for financing the war and then the reconstruction.

Hawley then spelled out his vision for an America First foreign policy based on nationalism, not endless interventionism:

That kind of robust nationalism is what America needs today. We can't afford to be isolationists. That would mean letting other nations direct our trade, dictate our interests, and imperil the livelihoods of our people. But nor can we afford further adventures in globalism. Wilsonian foreign policy, left and right, has nearly bankrupted the country, while siphoning away our national sovereignty and decimating our industrial base. The time has come for a policy of national strength, at home and abroad. Republicans should lead the way.

While Hawley and other Republicans, such as Sen. Rand Paul (R-KY), led a vigorous defense of the Republican Party's Old Right vision of a foreign policy that does not entangle Americans in endless wars, they are not currently the majority of the Senate Republican conference.

However, with the election of Blake Masters and J.D. Vance, the Senate America First foreign policy caucus could expand.

"The time has come for a policy of national strength, at home and abroad. Republicans should lead the way," Vance — who recently won his Ohio Senate Republican primary and has called for noninterventionism abroad — quoted Hawley's op-ed on Twitter. Vance has been a vocal critic of Republican efforts to grant aid to Ukraine.

"What America needs is not nation-building, but nationalism.' [@HawleyMO](#) nails it," Blake Masters, who just took a clear lead in the Arizona Senate Republican primary, said in relation to Hawley's piece.

Vance and Masters, if elected, would replace the retiring Sen. Rob Portman (R-OH) and Sen. Mark Kelly (D-AZ), both of whom voted to pass the Ukraine aid package. It would also likely expand the number of Senate conservatives who would oppose further entanglements abroad and refocus the Senate's efforts to address the many crises unfolding under the Biden administration. Tech billionaire Peter Thiel is funding many of the efforts to elect more populist-leaning Republicans. Thiel has put an additional \$3.5 million behind a super PAC supporting Masters.

The Republican candidates' election to the Senate would give them access to an increasingly coordinated right-leaning coalition of noninterventionist groups.

Ahead of the Senate vote on the Ukraine aid package, Paul strategized with members of the Koch Stand Together network, the CATO Institute, the populist-oriented American Moment, and the American Conservative magazine.

"Promoting a realist foreign policy agenda has always been a priority of Dr. Paul's, which is why he has been holding meetings with interested groups and fellow members for years and will continue to do so in the future," a Paul spokesperson told Axios's Lachlan Markay.

Kevin Roberts, the president of the Heritage Foundation, said, "We're going to come out on the back end of this — probably in a period of months, but certainly by 2024 — with a strong

conservative and libertarian consensus about a more restrained, but still very robust, American foreign policy.”

Other organizations, such as the Center for Renewing America — headed by former Trump Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Director Russ Vought — will add more voices to the fight.

The new conservative coalition on foreign policy will be further tested now that Biden has approved a plan to redeploy hundreds of ground troops to Somalia, reversing Trump’s move to withdraw troops from the country. Additionally, McConnell and Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY) are looking to rush the paperwork to admit Sweden and Finland into NATO, setting the stage for another showdown over America’s role in the world.

The Missouri senator raised significant concerns about how admitting Sweden and Finland into NATO would aid America’s foreign policy objectives, “As for NATO, we should have a real debate. The key question is how expanding the European alliance will help Washington confront our most serious foreign-policy challenge—the rise of China—and build our strength at home.”

Dan Caldwell, the vice president of foreign policy for Stand Together, said he anticipates that conservatives and libertarians will rally against NATO expansion and escalation into Somalia.

“I am expecting to see most of these groups heavily involved in future debates over NATO expansion, increasing America’s military presence in Europe, and ending our endless wars in Iraq, Syria and Somalia,” Caldwell explained. “We might not agree on every individual issue, but I think we all share a sense that the foreign policy that was dominant on the right prior to Trump was not making America safer and was becoming increasingly unpopular with the GOP base.”