

Senate Foreign Relations: Rand Paul is acting alone in Russian invite

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As Russian officials push Rand Paul to organize a meeting between members of each country's foreign affairs committee, the U.S. Senate foreign affairs committee is trying to distance itself from Paul's invitation.

"No invitation has been extended from the Senate Foreign Relations Committee," said a spokesperson for Bob Corker, chairman of the committee.

During a trip to Moscow on Monday, Paul invited members of the Russian parliament's upper house to Washington to "continue dialogue on vital issues such as nuclear non-proliferation and combating terrorism."

One of those invitees was Konstantin Kosachev, who urged Paul to loop in other members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, of which he is a part.

"The issue at hand is trying, perhaps, to organize a new meeting, this time at the level of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations and the Federation Council's Foreign Affairs Committee during the autumn session, that is, before the end of this year," Kosachev told state media.

Paul's trip is not funded by the Senate, but by the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank co-founded by Charles Koch.

On Russia, the Cato Institute encourages policymakers to adopt diplomatic relations with the country to work on issues like nonproliferation and ending the Syrian civil war.

Its policy handbook also advocates for replacing current American sanctions on Russia with ones that aim to impede the modernization of Russia's military.

The Trump administration's most recent sanctions against Russia have targeted Russian oligarchs tied to President Vladimir Putin and the companies they control, including oil and gas giants. The sanctions are meant to punish Putin's inner circle for its interference in the 2016 elections. But sanctions were first instituted against Russia by former President Barack Obama in 2014 when Russia annexed the Ukrainian peninsula of Crimea.

In meetings with Paul, Russian leaders have commented on how sanctions have limited diplomatic relations with the United States.