



Republicans Go From Daddy Party to Baby Party

By Doug Bandow February 19, 2013

WASHINGTON, DC – JANUARY 31: Former U.S. Sen. Chuck Hagel (R-NE) testifies before the Senate Armed Services Committee during his confirmation hearing to become the next secretary of defense on Capitol Hill January 31, 2013 in Washington, DC. President Barack Obama nominated Hagel, a controversial choice as Hagel opposed former President George W. Bush and his own party on the Iraq War and upset liberals with his criticism of a gay ambassador, for which he later apologized. (Credit: Getty Images)

During the Cold War Republicans presented themselves as the Daddy Party, prepared to defend America in a dangerous world. They won an enduring electoral advantage on international issues.

But the GOP lost that advantage with the end of the Cold War. The world is still dangerous, but not so much to America. Terrorism is a monstrous crime that frightens, but it does not pose an existential threat. And the United States far outranges any other power or group of powers militarily.

The Republican Party has had trouble adjusting to the new world. Losing its automatic advantage on international issues has shifted the political battle further to economic and domestic issues. George W. Bush's disastrous tenure further soured Americans on the GOP. Mitt Romney spent most of the campaign doing the Maori Haka in an unsuccessful attempt to portray Barack Obama as weak in foreign policy.

The dishonest and immature campaign against secretary of defense nominee Chuck Hagel demonstrates that the Daddy Party has turned into the Baby Party. There are important defense issues that deserve serious debate. But the Republicans are not interested in conducting one.

The vicious claims of anti-Semitism from some critics were risible, an attempt to foreclose discussion. Much of the opposition was driven by politics rather than substance: war-hawks like Lindsey Graham (R-SC) used Hagel's confirmation hearing to posture rather than discuss serious defense issues. John McCain (R-AZ) spent most of his time attempting to vindicate his awful judgment in having supported the Iraq

war, which left thousands of Americans dead and tens of thousands wounded, created carnage in Iraq, and empowered Iran.

Even worse, though, Sen. McCain admitted that much of the angry opposition, which led Republicans to block a vote on Hagel's nomination, was personal. Republicans were irritated that Hagel had the temerity to criticize President Bush, who did so much to ruin America's fiscal future and strategic position.

Reported the Huffington Post:

“There's a lot of ill will towards Senator Hagel because when he was a Republican, he attacked President Bush mercilessly, at one point said he was the worst president since Herbert Hoover, said the surge was the worst blunder since the Vietnam War, which is nonsense, and was anti his own party and people,” McCain said during a Thursday interview with Fox News. “You can disagree, but if you're disagreeable, people don't forget that.”

At least McCain agreed that the filibuster would end, probably on February 26, when the next vote on Hagel's nomination is scheduled. But the GOP has wrecked what little remained of its foreign policy reputation. The world may be in flames, but Republicans don't care. They are upset that Chuck Hagel had the courage to break with neoconservative orthodoxy when it mattered. While he might not be as transformational a defense secretary as some of his supporters hope, he can be expected to bring a fresh and thoughtful perspective to a foreign policy which is largely brain dead. Most important, it would be good to have a Pentagon chief who understands why war truly should be a last resort.