



Obama's Rumored Sec. Of Defense Nominee Is A Step In The Right Direction

By Christopher A. Preble - 12/14/2012

The rumors that President Obama will nominate Chuck Hagel to be the next Secretary of Defense should be welcomed by anyone frustrated by years of war and foreign meddling, and out-of-control spending at the Pentagon. Which is to say, nearly everyone. I hope the reports are true.

The biggest boosters of the Iraq war, the Afghan war, the Libyan war, and possible war with Syria and Iran, are apoplectic. And they should be. Hagel, a decorated Vietnam war veteran, understands war, and doesn't take it lightly.

Although the president will obviously make the decisions, I expect that Hagel will generally advise against sending U.S. troops on quixotic nation-building missions. We might even see a resurrection of another Republican SecDef's criteria for restraining Washington's interventionist tendencies. At a minimum, Hagel will reflect Colin Powell's view that "American GIs [are] not toy soldiers to be moved around on some sort of global game board."

Hagel's speech earlier this week to the Atlantic Council encapsulated many of the views that he has articulated throughout his career: he favors active engagement with the outside world, wants America's allies to contribute more to global security and to cooperate with the United States in addressing common challenges, and is a consistent advocate for free trade.

I don't put much stock in the neoconservative echo chamber's claim that Hagel will have a tough time being confirmed. As David Boaz pointed out in 2010, Hagel's other views should put him squarely in the conservative Republican camp. Aside from the small (and shrinking) Interventionist Caucus in the Senate, on what grounds would other Republicans oppose his nomination? Because he learned the error of his ways in initially supporting the Iraq war, and many of them never did? If more Republicans had come to their senses sooner, they

would likely be the majority party in the Senate, and Hagel could just as easily have been nominated by a *Republican* president.

I had the pleasure of introducing then-Senator Hagel at a Cato event on Capitol Hill in 2007. We welcomed him to Cato to talk about his book in 2008. He is a serious and thoughtful individual who has served this country well, and will do so again. I sincerely hope that President Obama chooses him to be the next Secretary of Defense.