



## Anti-Hagel Movement Symbol of Conservative Hypocrisy

Jeremy Kolassa February 1, 2013

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Conservatives are always thumping their chests about America, and how we must defend America, and how we must be American, and how if we ever dare criticize the government, we're hating America. It's a common thread that has been going on for at least the past ten years, if not more, and was pretty effective in dominating liberals from the turn of the century until at least 2006, though it wouldn't be until Obama's election in 2008 that the narrative actually fell apart.

However, is this really true? Are conservatives really all about America? I have some doubts, doubts that are being fanned by the recent conservative alliance against Secretary of Defense nominee Chuck Hagel, himself a conservative Republican. I don't usually wade into these high-profile topics, leaving them to be picked by others, but there's one thread here, a counterpoint to the thread of conservatives loving America to their dying breath, that I just have to comment on.

The Cato Institute has been supportive of Chuck Hagel's nomination, with Chris Preble, their senior foreign policy scholar, noting that "Chuck Hagel Is Not Controversial." He's no libertarian dove, but as an enlisted man who was wounded in Vietnam, he is a damn sight better than most people who are nominated for the role. This is not what infuriates the right, however. Instead, it was his remarks concerning Israel, and more importantly, the Great Israeli Lobby, also known as AIPAC:

Early in the hearing, Republicans criticized Hagel for his comments on the "Jewish lobby." Hagel's original remarks were: "The Jewish lobby intimidates a lot of people up here.... I'm not an Israeli senator. I'm a United States senator. Again, I have always argued against some of the dumb things they do because I don't think it's in the interest of Israel. I just don't think it's smart for Israel."

Hagel responded during the hearing that he regretted using the term Jewish lobby. "I should have said pro-Israel lobby." He also said he should not have used the word "dumb."

“I can’t think of a more provocative statement,” said Sen. Lindsey Graham, going back to the comment later.

Why? Why is this statement so “provocative?” Why is it provocative that a United States Senator says that he is not an Israeli senator, but a United States Senator? And why is it “provocative” to note that some of the things they do are dumb?

And hell, the man is still talking about “the interest of Israel,” not the interest of the United States, even though he admitted he is a US senator, not an Israeli one. So what on Earth could Graham really have to complain about?

Then, newly minted Senator Ted Cruz of Texas, a tea party and quasi-libertarian, said that Hagel accused Israel of war crimes. And you know what I have to say to that? So what? There are many instances where Israel has done things that have been deemed to be illegal. The Jewish settlements in Palestinian territory, for instance. Or the attacking of civilians in Gaza (which, contrary to popular belief, is not okay as a form of reprisal. Eye for an eye does not work.) Or any number of things. If Hagel said that Israel was guilty of war crimes, he would be agreeing with UN personnel, which is itself not a crime.

We have Republicans going off the deep end with these statements:

Then there is Hagel’s heresy on the question of Israel. Although he is, like most of us, a supporter of the Jewish state, he recoiled in the Senate at the way in which the Greater Israel Lobby choreographs the voting. He just refused to do the necessary grand plié whenever AIPAC’s emissaries came with their bills and resolutions to be rubber-stamped by the Senate. He dared to think outside the box of American foreign policy options called “What The Israeli Far Right Wants”.

He even at one point raised the possibility - are you sitting down? - of containment in foreign policy, the doctrine that guided the Cold War for generations. This puts him waaay outside the mainstream that gave us the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. It made him, in James Inhofe’s view, a virtual emissary of the Revolutionary Guards or in Ted Cruz’s fetid brain, an ally of Jihadism. But if you are McCain and Graham and go to a foreign country, Israel, and on foreign soil, side with that country’s prime minister in a diplomatic showdown with your own US president, you are fine and dandy, and any implication that they might be putting another country’s interests above your own is a disgusting anti-Semitic slur. But if

you are a Nebraskan war hero who dares to think about containment, rather than a new cycle in a global religious war, you are effectively called an Iranian double-agent in the Senate itself:

“Why do you think the Iranian foreign ministry so strongly supports your nomination to be the Secretary of Defense?”

That is beyond disgusting. Isn't it the right who are always saying that we must “Respect our troops” and get furious with anyone who insinuates that our soldiers are not patriotic? Then why are they smearing this man with these baseless allegations, a man who can be described thusly:

Hagel's unvarnished independence is well-known in Washington, but his opposition to the quagmire of the Iraq war is not idiosyncratic. It is philosophically consistent with being a small government conservative and a Vietnam veteran, suspicious of calls to war by people who won't have to serve in the combat zone.

He still carries shrapnel in his chest from being wounded in Vietnam. After his war service, he said, “I made myself a promise that if I ever got out of that place and was ever in a position to do something about war — so horrible, so filled with suffering — I would do whatever I could to stop it. I have never forgotten that promise.”

This doesn't mean Hagel is some kind of pacifist. But as the first enlisted man to serve in combat to be nominated for secretary of defense, he does have a grunt's-eye view of war and a commitment to making it a last resort, consistent with our national interest — hence his reasonable regrets about the invasion of Iraq and his caution about charging into a war with Iran.

Yet what does a Republican senate aide say to this should-be impeccable record?

In response to reports that Barack Obama is likely to choose Chuck Hagel to be the next secretary of defense, a top Republican Senate aide emails, “Send us Hagel and we will make sure every American knows he is an anti-Semite.”

When asked to elaborate, the aide writes, “Hagel has made clear he believes in the existence of a nefarious Jewish lobby that secretly controls U.S. foreign policy. This is the worst kind of anti-Semitism there is.”

The top aide Republican Senate aide passes along this quotation from Hagel: “The political reality is that ... the Jewish lobby intimidates a lot of people up here.”

It’s pretty clear to me, then, what this all is. This is not about being dovish, really, or general foreign policy. It’s about Israel, and Hagel’s reluctance to kowtow to the Israeli party line. It’s that “mainstream American conservatism” is not mainstream, nor American, nor even really conservative. These guys are putting the interests of Israel above the interests of the United States. How American is that?

Pray tell, what does America gain from constantly supporting Israel? Some sort of fuzzy feeling for support a democracy? A democracy that treats Arabs as second-class citizens and, as the media reported recently, forcibly injecting Ethiopian Jewish immigrants with birth control against their will and without their knowledge? Does that fuzzy feeling you get when you put your head on your pillow at night balance out the blood and carnage of 9/11, or the terrorist attacks on the US before or since? The death of American innocents who had to pay the price for an overzealous and overextended American foreign policy, a foreign policy that should not be involved in internal matters in the Middle East?

I can’t see what we’ve gained. I’m sure there are Americans who think differently, and that’s fine. But I, as an American libertarian, want my government to work for me and my interests, not the interests of foreign powers elsewhere. You would think American conservatives would be onboard. But apparently, they aren’t. It’s just another symbol of conservative hypocrisy.