

## Obama needs Hagel in Pentagon

By: Doug Bandow - January 6, 2013

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Lobbying over the prospective appointment of former Nebraska Sen. Chuck Hagel as U.S. Secretary of Defense is intensifying. Washington's bipartisan war party is leading the charge.

Hagel is the neoconservatives' worst nightmare. A decorated combat veteran who disdains promiscuous war-making. A conservative Republican who rejects a foreign policy of hyper-intervention. A supporter of Israel who won't subcontract his judgment to the demands of Israel's Likud Party.

The usual suspects responded in the usual way: By calling Hagel an anti-Semite. Hagel is under consideration because he would be an excellent choice. He offers a thoughtful, realistic, and measured perspective that has been largely lacking in Washington over the last decade.

And it is Hagel's thoughtful, realistic, and measured perspective that most angers the neoconservatives who believe war is the best way to solve every international problem. Observed the National Interest's Jacob Heilbrunn: "Hagel's independent streak derives from the fact that his deepest loyalty is to the soldiers who actually fight the battles that Washington politicians direct them to wage."

Hagel has a lifetime 84 percent rating from the American Conservative Union, but criticized the Iraq war. He believes in talking to Iran and Hamas.

Six years ago he warned that "until we are able to lead a renewal of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, mindless destruction and slaughter will continue in Lebanon, Israel and across the Middle East." As has happened.

His critics don't want a genuine debate over his foreign policy views. The charges against Hagel come down to the fact that he is independent. Unlike so many of his former colleagues, he was not willing to temper his views for political advantage.

Critics complain that Hagel acknowledged the obvious, that there is an Israel lobby. This is hardly earth-shaking. There are lobbies for Greece, Turkey, Poland, Ukraine, etc. That for Israel simply is far more effective.

Hagel commented in 2008 that "The political reality is that ... the Jewish lobby intimidates a lot of people up here." It was bad phrasing — Hagel said he misspoke and had used "Israel lobby" in the same interview. Of course, there is an Israel lobby, and it scares legislators, as many admit privately.

Another charge is that Hagel said that the Israel lobby "intimidates." I suspect more than a few conservatives have claimed that AARP "intimidates." A gaggle of liberals likely has charged that the National Rifle Association "intimidates." Every influential, effective, consequential lobby "intimidates." As does the Israel lobby. It can and will wreck careers.

Maybe Chuck Hagel isn't the right man to head the Department of Defense. If so, it isn't because he is an anti-Semite. Let's have an honest and civil debate over his qualifications. But Israel loses when its American supporters resort to demagoguery on its behalf.