



# Barack Obama creates fascinating fissure by nominating Chuck Hagel

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Now that Barack Obama has officially nominated former Republican Senator Chuck Hagel for Secretary of Defense, a fascinating fissure has emerged in American politics. The fissure takes place along the usual liberal vs. conservative lines (conservatives oppose the Hagel nomination, liberals support it), but this one is different because of the topic at hand: Anti-Semitism.

Conservatives accuse Hagel of being an anti-Semite who doesn't support Israel, and liberals/progressives defend Hagel by arguing that he isn't an anti-Semite, and that his views are perfectly within the mainstream.

It should be emphasized here that by "conservatives," I'm primarily referring to neoconservatives like Bill Kristol and his *Weekly Standard* magazine. The distinction between neoconservatism and conservatism as a whole is important because neoconservatism often differs strongly from social conservatism, fiscal conservatism, and most relevantly, paleoconservatism. In fact, paleoconservatives such as Pat Buchanan support Hagel's nomination.

But getting back to the issue at hand, the reason the fissure over Hagel is fascinating is because of the statement Hagel made that got him accused of anti-Semitism in the first place. Here's what Hagel said to Aaron David Miller back in 2008: "The political reality is that...the Jewish lobby intimidates a lot of people up here [on Capitol Hill]."

Notably, it wasn't just neoconservatives who jumped all over Hagel. It was also the Anti-Defamation League, a liberal hate group that hypocritically slanders people it doesn't like. They were all attacking Hagel for his use of the term, "Jewish lobby," which Wikipedia describes like so:

"[U]sage of the term is viewed as inaccurate, and – particularly when used to allege disproportionate Jewish influence – it can be perceived as pejorative or may constitute anti-Semitism."

But despite the social consensus against the use of the term, "Jewish lobby," and despite the stigma of anti-Semitism that is attached to those who evoke it, Hagel felt the hammer from only one part of the political spectrum instead of all of it. And even then the divisions aren't so precise.

As was mentioned before, Pat Buchanan and conservatives like him support Hagel's nomination. So does Justin Logan, director of foreign policy studies at the Cato Institute, a

conservative think tank. Logan even pointed out that Aaron David Miller approved of Hagel's comments.

The ideologically diverse list of prominent leaders and voices that support Hagel's nomination is quite impressive considering that Hagel evoked the taboo subject of the Jewish lobby. One would expect Hagel to receive widespread condemnation given the consensus that the Jewish lobby doesn't exist, but that hasn't been the case at all. MJ Rosenberg, a Jew himself who was a senior foreign policy fellow at Media Matters until April 2012, argued on his blog that the Jewish lobby is in fact an accurate term:

*It is true that it is impolitic to use the term "Jewish lobby" rather than "Israel lobby" although the very same people criticizing Hagel for using the former term objected just as vehemently when Stephen Walt and John Mearsheimer used the latter in their book on the subject. In any case, the term Jewish lobby is accurate when one refers to organizations like the American Jewish Committee or the Anti-Defamation League, etc. They are Jewish organizations and not AIPAC, the registered Israel lobby.*

Speaking of AIPAC (The American Israel Public Affairs Committee), it appears that not even they will fight Hagel's nomination. Jeffrey Goldberg reported in *The Atlantic* this morning that "The [Obama] administration is worried most about AIPAC -- it does not generally pay attention to the editorials of The Weekly Standard -- and its emissaries have been working overtime to ensure AIPAC's quiescence." In other words, if not even AIPAC will put up a fight, then Hagel's comments must not be as horrible as his detractors claim.

Moreover, regardless of whether one supports Hagel's nomination or not, it is healthy for the body politic that America is actually having a debate over whether or not Hagel's comments about the Jewish lobby are anti-Semitic. Instead of indiscriminately casting him out for broaching a taboo subject, his Jewish lobby comments are being debated, considered, and even defended. That is a fascinating development indeed.