



More Answers Needed From John Kerry

By: Doug Bandow – January 24, 2013

Senators usually have it easy when they seek confirmation for a cabinet job. Their colleagues aren't inclined to be tough. Indeed, a "no" vote would leave the disgruntled member a member of Senate, free to vent his anger at his opponents.

The only exception is when members, such as former senator Chuck Hagel, challenge their party's conventional wisdom, in his case the war in Iraq. Then the knives come out, though Hagel still seems likely to prevail. Sen. John Kerry has no such problem, however: He has embodied the mainstream interventionist consensus for decades.

Which would be why he deserves a "no" vote. Washington is heading toward de facto bankruptcy while attempting to micromanage the rest of the world. And Senator Kerry has supported this policy since joining the Senate. Unfortunately, more of the same will only lead to more of the same result. Spouting today's conventional wisdom should be a disqualification for becoming secretary of state.

Of course, his colleagues mostly suffer from the same myopia. They aren't likely to condemn themselves by opposing him.

They could have, however, asked Senator Kerry a few questions other than the softballs that were served up at the pro forma hearing. He should have been forced to confront today's most important international challenges. There's a slight chance that his answers might have offered some illumination for the public.

For instance:

How does America's fiscal crisis, with over \$200 trillion in unfunded liabilities, affect Washington's ability to intervene around the world? What policy changes would he support to reduce U.S. financial liabilities?

What are the standards for intervening militarily abroad? What costs should Americans bear and risks should Americans run? What past conflicts does he believe were both moral and successful?

Does he regret supporting the Iraq War? What lessons does he draw from that conflict when considering proposals for military intervention in Syria, Mali, and elsewhere?

How fast should the troop drawdown proceed in Afghanistan? How many American personnel should be there in 2014? Does he favor a long-term garrison or full withdrawal once

responsibility is turned over to the Afghan government? If the former, does he believe the United States ever can go home?

Should Washington take a front-line role in defending contested territorial claims by such nations as Japan and the Philippines? Would he support devolving more responsibility for their defense on those nations themselves?

These are just a start. How should the United States promote continuing political and economic liberalization in Burma amidst ongoing ethnic conflict? How should Washington respond to the potential death of Hugo Chavez to encourage a more liberal domestic policy and more responsible foreign policy? How far should the administration go in supporting French military action in Mali? Should Congress vote on this policy?

America faces a challenging international environment. If Senator Kerry embraces the conventional wisdom, the American people will find themselves poorer and less free. But if he is willing to rethink today's failed policies, there may be a chance for better times ahead.

His fellow senators, and the rest of us, deserve to know which future he can be expected to deliver.