



Chuck Hagel: the best for the Pentagon

The rumor mill is cocking in Washington D. C. that the former Nebraska senator Chuck Hagel should become the next Secretary of Defense. If US President Barack Obama chooses him, it would be a wise decision. Whether he would get his candidate approved by the US Senate remains to

be seen. It seems there is something to it, because the Israel Lobbyists are going haywire. A long list of Chuck Hagel's alleged misconduct or "insufficient voting record" on Israel-issues is presented and an anti-Hegel mood is artificially caused in order to undermine his approval by the Senate. It would be ridiculous, if the Lobby succeeded in preventing Hagel's appointment, like they did with former ambassador Charles Freeman. After the Lobby has bullied Freeman, Obama dropped him like a hot potato.

Definitely Hagel does not belong to the huge crowd of Israel lobbyists and "Israel-firsters" that populate the inner Belt Way and determine US foreign policy towards the Middle East to the detriment of the US. He is just a "normal" former US senator who sticks to his oath of office to the US constitution and puts the national interest of his country before the Israeli one. He also has refused to sign on to many silly pro-Israel statements that came from the Hill such as the "Syria Accountability Act" or the "Libya-Iran sanctions act". And he has called for direct negotiations between Iran and the US and between Hamas and the US. The Israel lobbyists defame him already as an "anti-Semite". Coming from the "Israel lobby" such smear rhetoric should not mean a thing anybody, except, that he views Israel like it is: an occupying power that violates human rights on a regular basis, disregards international law, and disdains the United Nations. Such a state constitutes not an asset but a heavy liability to the foreign policy of the US.

In his book "America: Our Next Chapter" he writes about Iran: "Isolating nations is risky. It turns them inward, and makes their citizens susceptible to the most demagogic fear mongering." The answer, he says, is engagement. "Distasteful as we may find that country's rulers, the absence of any formal governmental relations with Iran ensures that we will continue to conduct this delicate international relationship through the press and speeches, as well as through surrogates and third parties, on issues of vital strategic importance to our national interests. Such a course can only result in diplomatic blind spots that will lead to misunderstandings, miscalculation, and, ultimately, conflict."

For Hagel, an Iranian bomb would not be the end of the world, an opinion that is also held by Kenneth Waltz and other realists in international relations. They argue that Iran needs the bomb in order to counterbalance Israel's huge unchecked nuclear arsenal which is perceived as a security threat to the whole region. Hagel does not regard Iranian diplomats' outcasts; consequently, he met several times with the Iranian ambassador to the United Nations.

Already in 2006, Hagel wrote in an article in the "New York Review of Books" "that negotiating with Hamas was Israel's last chance for peace". Israel should grasp the opportunity to engage in direct negotiations with Hamas. Israeli politicians know that the rhetoric of the Hamas charter is meaningless. One should read Khaled Hroub's book "Hamas. A Beginner's Guide". It's written in a question-answer sequence in a way that even US politicians would understand. The Emir of Qatar has already pulled the teeth of the organization by financially sweetening Hamas' move from Damascus to Doha. The Emir

even paid a visit to the Gaza Strip to substitute the radical rhetoric with money. Hamas has since mutated from a roaring lion to a rug, not to speak of "President" Mahmoud Abbas.

Hagel sees the attack on Iraq as a triumph of neoconservative ideology. As the new Secretary of Defense he could represent a counterweight to the liberal interventionists that still dominate Obama's inner circle. He also could back the President against the bullying of the "Israel lobby" and its cheerleaders on Capitol Hill. President Obama needs guys like Hagel and John Kerry as the new Secretary of State around him to reframe US foreign policy towards the Middle East. American interests must have top priority.

The US should engage in direct talks with Iran on the nuclear issue without the European cacophony and Israel's detrimental influence. Iran has to be treated on an equal footing. And Obama should put the Israeli Prime Minister in its place. He cannot accept any longer to be pushed around by a leader of a tiny little country. Hopefully, Obama and his new team will open a more realistic chapter on US Middle Eastern policy.

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