



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on January 8, 2013

Defense Sec. Nominee Hagel Will Be Grilled by Senate, Then Likely Approved

In reporting President Obama's pick of former Nebraska Senator Chuck Hagel to replace outgoing Defense Secretary Leon Panetta on Monday, the *New York Times* [also noted that resistance to his selection is mounting](#) in the Senate. Hailing his nominee as "the leader that our troops deserve," President Obama added, "Just as Sergeant Hagel was there for his brother, Secretary Hagel will be there for you." Obama was referring to the two Purple Hearts Hagel received in Vietnam [as well as his work as CEO](#) of the United Service Organization (USO).



A number of voices, both inside and outside the Washington beltway, began to question whether or not Obama's pick is the best man for the job. The *Times* noted,

Conservative and Jewish groups say that Mr. Hagel has opposed sanctions on Iran, has inadequately supported Israel and has advocated engagement with groups like Hamas and Hezbollah. They also fault him for having once referred to pro-Israel lobbying groups on Capitol Hill as "the Jewish lobby."

His comments about "the Jewish lobby" having undue influence in Washington raised some eyebrows:

The Jewish lobby (in the United States) intimidates a lot of people here ... [and does some] dumb things [that aren't] smart for Israel. I'm not an Israeli senator. I'm a United States senator. I support Israel, but my first interest is I take an oath of office to the Constitution of the United States, not to a president, not to a party, [and] not to Israel.

[He also drew criticism for not being hard enough on Hamas](#), the Palestinian militant group that rules the Gaza Strip, by suggesting that a "pragmatic" approach be taken to convince Hamas to moderate its violent intentions toward Israel. Considering that Hamas is designated as a terrorist organization by Israel, the United States, Canada, the European Union and Japan, Hagel's critics think Hagel's suggestion to engage Hamas in dialogue reflects a softer position on the group.

This, coupled with his refusal six years ago to sign a letter asking the European Union to declare another anti-Israeli group, Hezbollah, as a terrorist organization, only added to his perceived image as a pacifist. In response, Hagel said, "I'm not a pacifist. I believe in using force but only after a very careful decision-making process.... I will do everything I can to avoid a needless, senseless war."

That did little to quell dissent over his nomination. Neoconservative William Kristol, editor of the *Weekly Standard*, published a ["special editorial"](#) which questioned Hagel's fitness for the position as defense secretary, and asked about any coherent foreign policy that could be gleaned from his two terms as a Nebraska senator. Kristol complained,



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His backers can cite no significant legislation for which Hagel was responsible in his two terms in the Senate. They can quote no memorable speeches that Hagel delivered and can cite no profound passages from the book he authored.

They can summarize no perceptive Hagelian analysis of defense or foreign policy, and can appeal to no acts of management or leadership by the man they'd have as our next secretary of defense.

Senator Dan Coats (R-Ind.) [also is unhappy with Obama's choice](#). In an interview with radio host Tom Rose, Coats said,

Chuck has alienated an awful lot of people. There have been grave concerns about this possible nomination among Republicans and among people who know and have served with Chuck Hagel.

We watched Chuck take positions that are, frankly, ... to the left of Barack Obama.

Hagel has moved from a conservative Republican coming out of Nebraska to someone [who] looks like they are out of the most leftist state in the country and exceeding even a lot of Democrats, who also have concerns about his ideology and where he is coming from. I think it would be a mistake for the president to put his nomination up.

Senator Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.) agreed with Coats. On *Fox News* on Sunday, Graham told Chris Wallace, "I can tell you there would be very little Republican support for this nomination. At the end of the day, there will be very few votes [for Hagel's confirmation by Republicans]."

John Cornyn (R-Texas) [said](#) that Hagel's confirmation would be "the worst possible message we could send to our friend Israel and the rest of our allies in the Middle East," while freshman Senator Ted Cruz (R-Texas) added,

If you are an Iranian mullah right now and you're looking at a Chuck Hagel, who thinks that sanctions [against Iran] are too harsh, you've got to be laughing. It is very difficult to imagine the circumstance in which I could support his confirmation.

Outside the beltway, resistance to Hagel's confirmation is building as well. Jay Sekulow, chief counsel for the American Center for Law and Justice (ACLJ) [wrote](#),

The fact is former Senator Hagel is the wrong person for this job. His record is deeply troubling. Instead of backing Israel, Hagel refused to sign a letter of support for Israel. He opposed labeling Hezbollah a "terrorist organization." And, he supported direct dialogue with the terrorist group Hamas. He even voted against labeling Iran's Revolutionary Guard, which has a long history of terrorist activity, a "terrorist organization."

Few are mentioning his record as a Nebraska senator. With a Freedom Index score of just 44, he voted for the Patriot Act, the [Senate Joint Resolution 23](#) (which authorized all "necessary and appropriate U.S. military force" against those whom the president determined "planned, authorized, committed or aided" the September 11 attacks), for the establishment of the Department of Homeland Security, as well as for the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) and its extensions.

No one is mentioning his biography, [Chuck Hagel, Moving Forward](#), in which he defends "internationalism" as justification for America's continued empire building around the world.

As chairman of the [Atlantic Council](#), a public policy think tank supporting and promoting internationalism for 60 years which has supplied other worthies to the Obama administration such as James L. Jones and Susan Rice, and a member of the ubiquitous Council on Foreign Relations, Hagel,



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despite some noisy challenges from a few Republican senators, is likely to be confirmed as the next secretary of the Department of Defense. In fact, the criticism he is drawing from some Republican senators is rather ironic, since Hagel is clearly an interventionist when it comes to foreign policy. Some seem to be criticizing him for not being *more* interventionist.

Photo of former Nebraska Senator Chuck Hagel: AP Images

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