

HAGEL HEARING: TWILIGHT OF THE NEOCONS MAKES SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE DYSFUNCTIONAL

[youtube]<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XiXTyDnA2TI#!>[/youtube]

The disgusting bullying of former Senator Chuck Hagel (R-NE) during his hearing yesterday on his nomination to be Secretary of Defense is demonstrated clearly in the short clip above where Senator Lindsey Graham (R-Closet) asks Hagel to “Name one person, in your opinion, who’s been intimidated by the Israeli lobby.” Hagel said he couldn’t name one. A quick look at this word cloud from the hearing, though, or at this tweet from the Washington Post’s Rajiv Chandrasekaran: “At Hagel hearing, 136 mentions of Israel and 135 of Iran. Only 27 refs to Afghanistan. 2 for Al Qaida. 1 for Mali.” shows that Hagel should be at the top of the list of those intimidated by the Israeli lobby, which yesterday was embodied by the SASC.

Hagel did himself no favors when he stumbled badly on one of the few substantive and relevant topics brought up. On Iran’s nuclear program, even after being handed a note, he bungled the Obama administration’s position of prevention, stating first that the US favors containment. [His bungled statement of the Obama administration’s position should be considered separately from the logic of that position, where containment of an Iran with nuclear weapon capability is seen by some as a stabilizing factor against Israel’s nuclear capabilities, while prevention could well require a highly destabilizing war.]

Overall, however, the combative nature of

Republican questioning of Hagel was just as hostile as the questioning last week of former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton over the Benghazi incident. Why would Republicans turn on one of their own with a vengeance equal to that shown to their long-term nemesis? Writing at Huffington Post, Jon Soltz provides an explanation with which I agree when he frames yesterday's hearing as a referendum on neocon policy (emphasis in original):

"Tell me I was right on Iraq!"

Essentially, that's what Sen. McCain said during most of his time in today's confirmation hearing for Chuck Hagel. And that sums up why the die had been cast on the Hagel nomination, before we even got to these hearings today, which I am currently at. This vote, I believed (and now believe more than ever) is a referendum on neocon policy, not on Chuck Hagel.

Much of McCain's bullying of Hagel was centered on McCain trying to get Hagel to admit that he had been wrong to oppose the Iraq surge. This clinging to the absurd notion that the Iraq surge was a success sums up the bitter attitude of the neocons as the world slowly tries to emerge from the global damage they have caused. And that this view that the surge was a success still gets an open and unopposed position at the Senate Armed Services Committee highlights the dangerous dysfunction of one of the most influential groups in Washington.

A functional SASC would have spent much time in discussion with Lt. Col. Daniel Davis, who provided a meticulous debunking of the myth that the Iraq surge was a success. His report, however, has been quietly ignored and allowed to fade from public view. Instead, this committee has essentially abandoned its oversight responsibilities in favor of pro-war jingoism. That Hagel refuses to engage in their jingoism is at the heart of neocon hatred of him.

Hagel would have done himself and the world a favor by turning the tables on the Committee during the hearing. A report (pdf) released Wednesday by the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction highlights a massive oversight failure by the Senate Armed Services Committee that lies at the juxtaposition of US defense policy in both Iran and Afghanistan. Despite long-standing sanctions against US purchases of Iranian goods, the Committee has allowed the Department of Defense to purchase fuel for use in Afghanistan that could well have come from Iran. Here is the conclusion of the report (emphasis added):

DOD's lack of visibility—until recently—over the source of fuel purchased for the ANSF raises some concerns. DOD lacked certification procedures prior to November 2012 and had limited visibility over the import and delivery sub-contracts used by fuel vendors. As a result, DOD is unable to determine if any of the \$1.1 billion in fuel purchased for the ANA between fiscal year 2007 and 2012 came from Iran, in violation of U.S. economic sanctions. Controls—recently added by CJTSCC to the BPAs for ANSF fuel—requiring vendor certification of fuel sources should improve visibility over fuel sources. To enhance that visibility, it is important that adequate measures are in place to test the validity of the certifications and ensure that subcontractors are abiding by the prohibitions regarding Iranian fuel. Recently reported steps to correct weaknesses in the fuel acquisition process may not help U.S. officials' in verifying the sources of fuel purchased with U.S. funds for the ANSF. Given the Afghan government's continued challenges in overseeing and expending direct assistance funds, it will become more difficult for DOD to account for the use of U.S. funds as it begins to transfer

funds—in March 2013—directly to the Afghan government for the procurement and delivery of ANSF fuel. In light of capacity and import limitations of the Afghan government, the U.S. government may need to take steps to place safeguards on its direct assistance funding—over \$1 billion alone for ANSF fuel from 2013-2018—to ensure that the Afghan government does not use the funds in violation of U.S. economic sanctions.

Imagine the sputtering that would have ensued if Hagel had managed to ask Graham or McCain why the committee had failed to enforce the sanctions against purchasing Iranian fuel by the Defense Department. While he was busy singing “Bomb, bomb, bomb, bomb, bomb Iran” on the campaign trail in 2008, McCain was failing in his responsibility to see that Iranian fuel wasn’t purchased by the Defense Department.