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FOUNDATION FOR DEMOCRACY IN IRAN



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*Jan. 10, 2013*

## **Why FDI Opposes the Hagel nomination**

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FDI opposes the nomination of Senator Chuck Hagel to become the next Secretary of Defense.

For the past 17 years, FDI has championed the pro-freedom movement in Iran, and has argued that helping Iranians to achieve their freedom from an oppressive Islamic tyranny is in America's best interest.

Congress has been instrumental in helping steer the Obama administration toward policies to increase pressure on the Islamic regime in Tehran, while expanding on work done by the two previous administrations to build an international coalition to slow down the emergence of a nuclear-armed Iranian regime.

Chuck Hagel actively opposed these policies of confronting the Islamic Republic when he was in the U.S. Senate, and has continued to do so since then.

The Iranian state-controlled media has welcomed Hagel's nomination.

- "Hagel's selection is a message of peace from Obama administration to Islamic Republic of Iran"
- [- "Hagel: unilateral sanctions on Iran will only lead to US isolation"](#)
- [- "New US Sec Def staunchly opposes military action against Iran"](#)

- Iran's official English language propaganda outlet, Press TV, suggested that Hagel had been picked to help craft a "[grand bargain with Iran.](#)"

## Hagel and the pro-Tehran lobby

Hagel has long-standing ties with the pro-Tehran lobby in the United States. [Since 2002](#), he has [appeared as a keynote speaker](#) at fund-raisers and conferences for the American-Iranian Council, a group whose founder, Housang Amirahmadi, has boasted that he is "[the Iranian lobby in the United States.](#)"



[Amirahmadi, *left*, is pictured here with Hagel at an AIC event]

The founder of another pro-Tehran group, the National Iranian American Council (NIAC), has [championed](#) Hagel as someone who can stand up to the "extremist pro-Likud circles... who are seeking to establish a veto on US national security policy."

On Jan. 13, 2007, NIAC founder Trita Parsi [praised Hagel](#) for criticizing the surge in Iraq, a policy Hagel compared to the expansion of the Vietnam War into Cambodia.

The surge in Iraq not only ended the al Qaeda reign of terror in Iraq's Sunni provinces; it also did real damage to the IRGC Quds Force by [confronting their intelligence and terrorist operations in Iraq](#). NIAC's praise for Hagel in this context coincided with the interests of the Tehran regime, which sought a diminished U.S. presence in Iraq so the Islamic Republic could play a larger role.

## Hagel and U.S. sanctions on Iran

Lifting U.S. sanctions, resuming U.S.-Iran trade, and restricting U.S. military option against Iran have been the top agenda items of the pro-Tehran lobby, as voiced by AIC and by NIAC. Sen. Hagel has been active in supporting all three of these policies.

Hagel opposed U.S. sanctions on Iran early on.

In July 2001, Hagel was [one of just two U.S. Senators](#) who opposed renewing the original Iran Libya Sanctions Act (ILSA). This was the initial effort by Congress to put pressure on the Iranian regime by imposing sanctions on foreign energy companies investing in Iran's oil and gas sector.

Hagel's supporters [have claimed](#) that the Senator only opposed unilateral U.S. sanctions. But Hagel's statements and actions both in the Senate and beyond suggest otherwise.

In March 2002, he [addressed a conference sponsored by the American-Iranian Council](#) in Washington to emphasize the need for the U.S. to abandon sanctions and open trade with Tehran.

From 2006-2008, he [opposed numerous bills and resolutions](#) that would have stepped up pressure on the Iranian regime, including [an October 2006 measure](#) calling on the European Union to join the U.S. in placing the Iranian-backed Hezbollah terrorist group on its terrorism list.

In October 2008, he used a Senate privilege to [single-handedly kill](#) broad bipartisan legislation, the Iran Counter-Proliferation Act, to extend U.S. sanctions and harmonize them with measures then in place from the United National Security Council.

While sanctions are an imperfect tool, they are a necessary one. Thomas Jefferson called economic sanctions "the only option ... between appeasement and war." Hagel's steadfast opposition to sanctions on the Islamic Republic puts him at odds with overwhelming majorities in Congress, as well as the stated policy of the past three administrations to step up economic pressure on the Iranian regime.

## **Hagel favors unconditional negotiations with a terrorist regime**

Rather than sanctions, Hagel has favored a policy of outreach, negotiation and accommodation with the Iranian regime regardless of the regime's actions against the United States, U.S. allies, or its own people.

In May 2007 – less than one year after Hezbollah provoked a war in Lebanon at the instigation of Tehran - Hagel joined Senators Joe Biden and Arlen Specter in addressing [a formal invitation](#) to the speaker of the Islamic Republic parliament, calling for a joint meeting of U.S. and Iranian officials.

Later that year, Hagel sent [a private letter to President Bush](#), urging him to engage in "direct talks" with the Iranian regime. The goals of such talks was to dispel the notion "that the United States' actual objective is regime change in Iran, not a change of Iran's behavior... Unless there is a strategic shift, I believe we will find ourselves in a dangerous and increasingly isolated position in the coming months," Hagel wrote.

In September 2007, Hagel also [joined just 15 other Senators](#) in opposing a bill to add the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) to the State Department's list of

international terrorist organizations because of its involvement in murdering U.S. troops in Iraq.

Hagel's supporters [write](#). "In an interview on Nov. 9, 2007, Hagel told the Lincoln Journal Star that he feared the Bush administration might use the Senate resolution on Iran as cover for a military attack." But as a member of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, Hagel knew full well that the soon-to-be released National Intelligence Estimate on Iran would impose an insurmountable roadblock on any such plans, if they did indeed exist.

## **Hagel on Iran's military and WMD programs**

Hagel's views on the military buildup by the Iranian regime and how the U.S. should respond to it are also troubling.

Hagel has repeatedly downplayed the threat posed by Iran's nuclear weapons program. In 2004, he [refused to join his colleagues](#) in a letter urging President Bush to highlight Iran's violations of its commitments under the Treat on the Nonproliferation of Nuclear Weapons at an upcoming G8 summit. In 2007, he welcomed the widely discredited National Intelligence Estimate on Iran that claimed Iran had ceased nuclear weapons development four years earlier.

The NIE removed, "if nothing else, the urgency that we have to attack Iran, or knock out facilities," Hagel said at the time. "I don't think you can overstate the importance of this."

State Department cables illegally disclosed by Wikileaks show Hagel's continued refusal to fully appreciate the threat from the nuclear and missile programs of the regime in Tehran.

During a visit to Moscow in 2009 as part of the Hart-Hagel Commission on U.S.-russian policy, Hagel urged top Russia strategic arms negotiators to worry more about the missile programs of Pakistan than those of the Islamic Republic of Iran. "Pakistan poses the greatest threat to the world," Hagel reportedly said.

Those comments are [buried in the 64<sup>th</sup> paragraph of a lengthy classified cable](#) penned by Acting Assistant Secretary of State Vann H. Van Diepen following his own failed efforts on December 22, 2009 to get the Russians to cooperate more closely with the United States in countering the Iranian missile programs.

In his account of the talks, Van Diepen complained that while the Russian side "came prepared to engage seriously" on Iran, they ultimately brushed off U.S. intelligence information on the Iranian missile programs, using Hagel's concerns over Pakistan as a diversion from the State Department focus on Iran.

## **Why Hagel's Views Make him Unsuitable to be Secretary of Defense**

From his statements and U.S. Senate votes, it is clear Senator Hagel does not believe the United States should be exerting pressure on the Islamic Republic of Iran to abandon its nuclear weapons program.

In numerous meetings with world leaders during his last year in the U.S. Senate, Hagel repeatedly expressed the view that engaging the Iranian leadership was a better policy than confrontation.

For example, [meeting with Brazil's president Lula in September 2008](#), Hagel said that he looked forward to the change of U.S. administrations. He "agreed [with Lula] that engagement [with Iran] was essential," and that "bringing Iran back onto a good track will require allowing them the prospect for developing nuclear capabilities."

At no point has Hagel shown the slightest concern for human rights abuses, religious liberty, the lack of political freedom, or the threats made by Islamic Republic leaders to Israel, to Jews worldwide, or to Americans. Instead, he has publicly stated that the United States should not seek or promote regime change, merely a change of "behavior" by the current leadership. This is not just bad policy; given the nature of the clerical leadership, it's a call to genocide.

The Secretary of Defense sets the tone for America's military posture. The Iranian regime likes what it has heard so far from Chuck Hagel, and interprets his statements as a form of unilateral American disarmament.

FDI has never called – and is not calling today – for U.S. military strikes on Iran. However, for U.S. military power to have any impact on decision-making in Tehran, the Islamic Republic leadership must believe in U.S. resolve.

Senator Hagel's confirmation as Secretary of Defense would send a message of weakened U.S. resolve to the leaders of the Islamic Republic, which could serve as an inducement for aggressive behavior.

For these reasons we urge the Senate to reject Senator Hagel's nomination.

*- Kenneth R. Timmerman, President & CEO, Foundation for Democracy in Iran*