

Welcome, Chuck

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I FIND CHUCK HAGEL eminently likeable. I am not quite certain why.

Perhaps it's his war record. He was decorated for valor in the Vietnam War (which I detested). He was a mere sergeant. Since I was a mere corporal in our 1948 war, I find it elating to see a non-commissioned officer become Minister of Defense.

Like so many veterans who have seen war from close up (myself included), he has become an enemy of war. Wonderful.

NOW Hagel is violently attacked by all the neocon warmongers, almost none of whom has ever heard a bullet whistle in the wars to which they sent others, and the combined political regiments of the American Jewish establishment.

His main sin seems to be that he objects to war against Iran. To be against an attack on Iran means to be anti-Israeli, anti-Semitic, indeed to wish for the destruction of Israel if not all Jews. Never mind that almost all present and past chiefs of the Israeli army and intelligence community object to an attack on Iran, too. But Binyamin Netanyahu knows better.

Last week, the former much-lauded chief of the Shin Bet painted a frightening picture of Binyamin Netanyahu and Ehud Barak at a security meeting to discuss the bombing of Iran some time ago. The two were in high spirits, puffing on cigars and drinking whiskey, much to the disgust of the assembled security chiefs. In Israel, cigars are considered an ostentatious luxury and drinking at work is taboo.

Netanyahu's spin-doctors retorted that Winston Churchill, too, was a brandy drinker and smoked cigars. Seems that spirits and cigars are not enough to make a Churchill.

Actually, I think that the appointment of Hagel may come as a relief to Netanyahu. After years of depicting the Iranian nuclear bomb as the end of the world, or at least of Israel, the bomb is mysteriously absent from Netanyahu's election campaign. Hagel's appointment may allow Netanyahu to climb down from this tree altogether.

But the catalogue of Hagel's crimes is much more

extensive.

Many years ago he called the pro-Israeli lobby in Washington (would you believe it?) the "Jewish lobby". Until then, it was understood that AIPAC is mainly composed of Buddhists and financed by Arab billionaires like Abu Sheldon and Abel al-Adelson.

HOWEVER, HAGEL'S most heinous sin is not often mentioned. While serving as the Republican senator for Nebraska, he once uttered the unspeakable words: "I am an American senator, not an Israeli senator!"

That is really the crux of the matter.

US senators are nearly all Israeli senators. Ditto for US congressmen. Hardly any of them would dare to criticize the Israeli government on any issue, negligible as it may be. Criticizing Israel is political suicide. Not only does the Jewish lobby use its huge resources to get loyal pro-Israelis elected and re-elected, but it openly employs these resources to unseat the few elected officials who dare to criticize Israel. They almost always succeed.

In the present election campaign, the Likud is showing again and again (and again) the scene of Netanyahu addressing the US congress. The senators and congressmen are seen wildly applauding after every single sentence, jumping up and down like children in gymnastics class. The text of the clip says: "When Netanyahu speaks, the world listens!"¹

Somebody sent me a satirical piece saying that if Hagel's appointment is not cancelled by the US Senate, Israel will have to use its veto power to block it. In such a case, the senate would have to muster a 90% majority to overcome the veto. If this fails, President Obama would have to choose another Defense Secretary from a list of three names provided by Netanyahu.

Jokes aside, the Israeli defense establishment is not worried by the Hagel appointment. They seem to know him as quite receptive to Israeli requests. Several Israeli generals have already come to his defense.

THIS WHOLE episode might be considered trivial, or even funny, were it not for the question: Why did President Obama put forward this controversial figure in the first place?

¹A curiosity: right after this shameful scene, the clip shows Netanyahu addressing the UN General Assembly. Since the applause there was sparse—hardly anyone, other than Avigdor Lieberman and the other members of the Israeli delegation in the half-empty hall did applaud—the editors of the clip used a little trick: they took the applause from the US Congress and transferred it to the UN Assembly hall.

An obvious answer is: Revenge. Obama is a master of controlling his emotions. During all the months of Netanyahu supporting Mitt Romney, Obama did not react. But his anger must have been building up inside.

Now the time has come. Appointing Hagel and openly humiliating the pro-Israel lobby was one way. More of this can be expected to come. Any slight nudge from America is bound to be felt by Israel as a heavy blow.

By the way, this blow could be used by the opposition parties here to expose Netanyahu's rank incompetence. Supporting Romney was plain stupid. All the more so as Netanyahu, who was raised in the US, depicts himself as an expert on US affairs. But no party dares to raise this subject in our election campaign, for fear of being considered less than super-patriotic.

I don't expect President Obama to change the US treatment of Israel in the near future, beyond some small punitive acts like this one. But when we raise our eyes towards the horizon, the picture looks different.

There is already a marked difference between Obama I and Obama II. When he was elected the first time, he chose Chas Freeman, a highly respected diplomat, to head the National Security Council. The pro-Israel lobby raised a storm, and the appointment was withdrawn. Obama then preferred public humiliation to a confrontation with the lobby. How different this time!

This change may well become more marked in Obama's second term and far beyond. The lobby's stranglehold on Washington DC is loosening, slightly, slowly, but significantly.

Why?

I believe that one of the reasons is that the perception of the American Jewish community is changing. American politicians are beginning to realize that Jewish voters are far from unanimously behind the lobby. American Jewish "leaders", almost all of them self-appointed and representing nobody but a small clique of professional representatives, as well as the Israeli embassy and some right-wing billionaires, do not control the Jewish vote.

This became clear when Netanyahu supported Romney. The great majority of Jewish voters continued to support Obama and the Democratic Party.

This is not a sudden development. For years now, American Jews—especially young Jews—have distanced themselves from the Zionist establishment. Becoming more and more disillusioned with official Israeli policy, alienated by the occupation, disgusted with the pictures of Israeli soldiers beating up helpless Palestinians, they have quietly dropped away. Quietly, because they fear an anti-Semitic backlash. Jews are indoctrinated from early childhood that "*we Jews have to stick together*" in face of the anti-Semites.

Only a few brave American Jews are ready to openly—though ever so timidly—criticize Israel. But US politics are slowly adjusting to the fact that much of the lobby's

strength is bluff, and that most American Jews don't let Israel determine their voting pattern.

AMERICANS MUST be a race of angels—how else to explain the incredible patience with which they suffer the fact that in a vital sphere of US interests, American policy is dictated by a foreign country?

For five decades, at least, US Middle East policy has been decided in Jerusalem. Almost all American officials dealing with this area are, well, Jewish. The Hebrew-speaking American ambassador in Tel Aviv could easily be the Israeli ambassador in Washington. Sometimes I wonder if in meetings of American and Israeli diplomats, they don't sometimes drop into Yiddish.

I have warned many times that this can't go on forever. Sooner or later real anti-Semites—a disgusting breed—will exploit this situation to gain legitimacy. The hubris of AIPAC bears poisonous fruit.

Since Israel is dependent on US support in almost every sphere—from the UN Security Council to the battlefields of future wars—this is a real existential danger.

Perhaps the lobby is becoming alert to this danger. In the present affair, their voice is remarkably subdued. They don't want to stand out.

THE SADDEST part of the story is that all these false "friends of Israel" in the US Congress and media are not really embracing "Israel". They are embracing the Israeli right-wing, including the extreme and even fascist right-wing. They are, thereby, helping the right-wing to tighten their control over our country.

American policy plays a major role in the agony of the Israeli peace camp, which is so manifest in the present election campaign. Just one example: the huge settlement effort now in process, which makes the two-state peace solution more and more difficult to implement, is financed by American Jews who funnel their donations through tax-free organizations. Thus the US government in practice finances the settlements, which it officially condemns as illegal.

Since the 19th century, newspapers have got used to abbreviating their reports by saying "*France protests*" and "*Germany declares*" when they mean "*the French government protests*" and "*the German government declares*". Thus the media today write that "Israel" promotes the settlements, when in actual fact it is the Israeli government which does so. Several respected recent polls prove that most Israelis want peace based on the two-state solution, which is undermined by our government on a daily basis.

BACK TO Senator Hagel: the Israeli government and the "friends of Israel" will do anything to undermine his appointment.

Speaking for myself, I hope that his appointment will herald a new American policy—a policy of support for a sober, rational, liberal, secular, democratic Israel, striving for peace with the Palestinian people.