

in 2002 when *National Review* labeled Hagel, “Sen. Skeptic, (R., France).” Just before the Iraq invasion, Bill Kristol of *The Weekly Standard* called Hagel a member of the “Axis of Appeasement.”

“They hate the idea of a morally grounded foreign policy that seeks aggressively and unapologetically to advance American principles around the world,” Kristol wrote in August 2002 of Hagel, former President George H.W. Bush adviser Brent Scowcroft, and others who hadn’t fully bought into the program and whose arguments against the war—destabilizing the region, getting bogged down in a bloody occupation, and undercutting the War on Terror on the basis of overstated threats—were “laughably weak.”

The reality on the ground in Iraq nearly four years later has not tempered their views. In fact, realists like Hagel and other congressional critics are emboldening the enemy, according to Vice President Dick Cheney and his surrogates on the talk-show circuit. Then there are the personal attacks: after Hagel’s March press conference, *National Review* contributor John Podhoretz dismissed him as a “megalomaniac.”

But on the issues, Hagel points out that he has voted with the president more than any other senator today and has a lifetime rating of 85 from the American Conservative Union.

He is pro-life, defends an individual’s right to bear arms, and supports a flag-burning amendment. A self-made millionaire—he started a cellular phone company that eventually became part of Vanguard Telecommunications in the ’80s—he draws high marks from pro-business and property-rights groups.

On the other hand, Hagel voted against the Republican-sponsored Medicare prescription drug bill and No Child Left Behind. He sides with the president on creating some kind of guest-worker program for illegal immigrants but does

not advocate a federal amendment to ban gay marriage.

It is no surprise, then, that some think he’s primed for a third-party breakout. If he can’t be the new face of the flagging, post-midterm GOP, then maybe it’s time to move on, the buzz goes. To his supporters, pragmatism is much more attractive than blind ideological genuflection.

“He definitely breaks the mold, his voice is so authentic in my view, and as a consequence he has great appeal,” said good friend and former Nebraska Sen. Bob Kerrey, a fellow Vietnam combat veteran who was one of the Senate’s most conservative Democrats until his retirement in 2001. “I’m sure it drives the White House crazy. If he ended up with the Republican nomination he would be a formidable candidate.”

Hagel’s conversational style is easy, even solicitous, but he doesn’t seem prone to name dropping or telling secrets, especially about himself. He

certainly won’t entertain speculation regarding his future, particularly where the conservative base “problem” is concerned. “I don’t let things like that worry me,” he said. “I just do what I think is right for my country.”

Baker said Republicans should worry about a liberated Senator Hagel. The current field of Republican candidates, according to recent surveys, are not endearing GOP voters. “If they could forgive his sensible and often prescient view on foreign policy,” said Baker, “he would probably be one of the few Republicans with a prayer of retaining the White House for the party in 2008.”

Safranek doesn’t think Hagel has been spooked for good, noting that supporters there in Nebraska are “ready to go all out” for him. “He has a plan,” he said. “He always does.” ■

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## Hegemony Lite

How different would a Hagelian foreign policy be?

By James P. Pinkerton

CHUCK HAGEL has walked the walk. His experience in military service, not to mention his medal-winning heroism in Vietnam four decades ago, distinguishes him from most of those who make American foreign policy these days. But as for talking the talk—well, his talk about foreign policy isn’t ultimately much different from that of the foreign-policy establishment that got us into Iraq and that wants to keep us imposing martial hegemony in the Middle East forever.

So those who rhapsodize over a possible Hagel run for the White House might consider the question: if the Cornhusker

senator becomes the 44th president, would a Hagelian foreign policy represent a true change in direction, or would it be merely a slow-boat chug along the same route we are on now?

Indeed, that’s a good question to ask all of those who seek to replace George W. Bush in the Oval Office. Is the next president, whoever he or she might be, going to offer a bold-colors alternative to the Bush/neoconservative status quo, or will we get a pale-pastel continuation of Bushconism?

As far back as February 2002, in the days following the 43rd president’s “axis

of evil” speech, the Nebraskan recalled his own wartime service as a counterweight to the Texan’s soaring bear-any-burden rhetoric. The rime of an ancient soldier, one might say. Hagel had been there and done that in ’Nam; he and his two Purple Hearts knew better about war than the unscarred ex-Guardsmen and draft-deferring grad students sitting in the White House.

Yet in October of 2002, Hagel voted “aye” on the Bush-Cheney Iraq War resolution, joining forces with those who took Uncle Sam waist-deep into the Big Sandy.

Since then, of course, Hagel has frequently compared Iraq to Vietnam, referring to each as a “national tragedy.” Warming to his theme, he has condemned the Surge of ’07 as “the most dangerous foreign policy blunder in this country since Vietnam.” And in his curious announcement of non-announcement for the presidency on March 12, he declared that in Iraq, “America is facing its most divisive and difficult issue since Vietnam.”

No kidding. But what remains to be seen is what Hagel would truly do about Iraq that’s different from what has been done and is being done. Even as he was non-announcing, Hagel seemed at pains to reassure his audience that he was not going to offer any starkly divergent choice to Americans—not then, not ever. “At the beginning of my remarks I said that America is reaching for a national consensus of purpose,” he said as he wrapped up. “We will find it because Americans expect it and will demand it. I do not believe America’s greatness is lost to the 20th century. There are chapters of America’s greatness yet to be written.” And, he assured everyone, “I intend to continue being part of America’s story.”

That’s the sort of high-minded but windy rhetoric that just about any politician might say on just about any

issue. But in context, Hagel’s use of such neocon-favored words as “greatness” can only be taken as a signal that he supports foreign policy continuity, even in the Middle East. Indeed, back on Capitol Hill three days later, Hagel voted with Mitch McConnell and all the other Bush loyalists to oppose a Democratic plan to bring most U.S. troops out of Iraq by 2008. Which is to say, Hagel came down on the opposite side from his fellow Vietnam vet, John Murtha, who has come to emblemize, in his 70s, a dovishness that represents at least a partial discontinuity from the current policy thrust. But not Hagel: while he talks his own Vietnam-inflected talk, he still walks the Bush Iraq walk.

Undoubtedly, Chuck Hagel will continue to criticize Iraq; he might even continue to throw around the word “impeachment,” without ever clarifying his own position on such a possibility. But after voting for Bush’s war at every key juncture, he is vulnerable to the charge of mere carping and second-guessing, as opposed to paradigm shifting.

It’s worth recalling that there were plenty of fierce critics of Vietnam who trashed that war’s conduct, too, without ever opposing its logic. Even some of the architects of the war got into the act. For example, Lyndon Johnson’s National Security Adviser Walt Rostow, who lived for 35 years after leaving the White House, was eager during those many decades to blame others for errors and blunders—although he was never willing to entertain the idea that the war itself was the mistake.

So it will be with Iraq. Richard Perle, Paul Wolfowitz, and all the rest of the War Partiers will undoubtedly be writing screeds and tomes. Yet seeking to vindicate the war, they will separate out “the mistakes that were made” from their own original brilliant conception of regime changing and democracy

building. There will be some agreed-upon fall guys—maybe Don Rumsfeld or Doug Feith or even Bush himself. But for the most part, the vision of a Middle Eastern Pax Americana—punctuated, of course, by *Bellum Americanum* when needed—will be endorsed and further enshrined.

And chances are good there won’t be much pushback from the Democrats, even in the future. Aside from the occasional Murtha, the party establishment is loath to criticize the basic purpose of the war as opposed to its prosecution. After all, most Big Dems supported the war in the 2002-03 run-up, and even after four years of Iraq, most donkeys still clutch onto words like “tough” and “muscular” to describe their preferred foreign policy, especially in regard to the Middle East—even as they deride Bush as a gunslinging cowboy.

On both sides of the partisan aisle, the basic consensus endures: it is America’s duty and destiny to shape and reshape the area defined by the Pentagon as Central Command—aptly named because the region stretching from Egypt to Pakistan is so central to American geopolitical thinking. And so we must, the consensus continues, all be Tommy Franks: we must be ready to use force to defend not only Israel but also its occupation of Arab territories. At the same time, we must persevere in Afghanistan and mind the rest of the “Stans.” We must safeguard Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the oil routes out of the Persian Gulf. We must keep Turkey happy. Yet we must also check Iranian ambitions, as well as thwart any possible Russian resurgence or Chinese adventurism. And, of course, we have to keep the Shia Arabs under control in Iraq, even as we seek to bring them into the same political harness as the Sunni Arabs and the Kurds.

The fact that contours of those many missions are so familiar to Americans is

revealing; they are the curves of binding energy that keep just about all politicians close to what might be called the “hegemonist consensus.” And much of the elite media, too: even now, the *Washington Post* editorial page, which elevated the re-election of Joe Lieberman and the protection of Scooter Libby into sacred causes, spends its time looking for Democrats to applaud for applauding the war.

So would the Middle East be much different today if John Kerry had been elected president three years ago? Probably not. In his Nov. 3, 2004 concession speech, the Massachusetts senator told his supporters in Boston, “Now more than ever with our soldiers in harm’s way, we must stand together and succeed in Iraq.” In his heart of hearts, Kerry is probably still the disillusioned man who testified against Vietnam before the Senate 36 years ago, but a President Kerry would have had to disabuse himself of his disillusion: once in office, he would have had to start thinking immediately about the next midterm election, not to mention his own campaign for a second term. And that would have meant “succeeding” in Iraq and the Middle East.

Similarly, one suspects that Hillary Rodham Clinton is still, deep down, an ecstatic love child of the ’60s. But to make it politically in the decades since, she has had to up-armor herself with cynicism and hypocrisy—the very evils she once inveighed against. Now she stiffarms the neo-New Left wing of her party and holds close to the hegemonist consensus, right alongside Kerry. Yes, Bush screwed up Iraq, Democrats agree, but we can’t just walk away, and we certainly can’t walk away from the whole Middle East.

In March, Clinton told the *New York Times* that “remaining vital national security interests in Iraq” would require a continuing deployment of American

troops, well past the end of the Bush presidency. Warning that a failed Iraqi state would be “a petri dish for insurgents and Al Qaeda,” she added that Iraq is “right in the heart of the oil region.” And of course, protection of “Israel’s interests” would incline her even further toward staying in Iraq.

Then there’s Iran and the rest of the Middle East. Every major politician in America declares a nuclearized Iran to be unacceptable, and neither Hagel nor the Democratic leadership seem eager to confront the administration on whether or not the president must seek specific authorization for a military strike against Tehran. In addition, the American political class agrees on a long list of outcomes deemed unacceptable, such as a Taliban victory in Afghanistan or a bin-Ladenized Saudi Arabia. Yes, most Democrats, and many Republicans, would like to see American policy become more multilateral—but the guiding presumption seems to be that the United States should figure out ways to persuade our allies to share in our policies, as distinct from actually changing our policies in collaboration with them. Indeed, in some troubled parts of the greater Middle East, such as Darfur, the Democrats seem determined to one-up Bush in terms of demonstrating America’s “indispensability.”

So it’s little wonder that Hagel, personal pique and prejudice aside, seems so supportive of Bush’s overall vision for the Middle East—because it’s the shared vision of the American political elite. Hagel might not hold much affection for the president and his team, and he obviously thinks he could do a better job managing national security policy, but the Nebraskan shows no sign of wanting to extract himself from the thick swath of stand-pat-on-the-Middle-East thinking that layers the country from New York to California.

There are alternatives, of course, and some can be found in Hagel’s own history. He sits in the Senate seat once occupied by George W. Norris, the Republican isolationist progressive who opposed U.S. entry into both World War I and World War II. Norris existed outside of the internationalist consensus of his time, as popularized by Woodrow Wilson and Franklin D. Roosevelt. And while recent history has not been kind to isolationism—Norris was defeated for re-election in the first election after Pearl Harbor—one can imagine that a new cycle of American realism, if not outright isolationism, is gaining momentum in reaction to Bushite neoconservatism.

It’s possible that the same landlocked environment that bred Norris and so many other anti-interventionist Midwesterners in the century past—from Robert Taft to George McGovern—has imprinted Hagel, too, with the urge to tend his own country’s garden first and foremost.

So maybe, as president, he would chart a new course for America. Starting from his own bitter experience in Vietnam and continuing with what he has learned in the decades since—that is, about the success of Cold War containment and the failure of regime changing—maybe he would summon a new way of talking the talk of American self-interest, while walking the walk of good-neighboring and international law-abiding.

Maybe Hagel would do all that and more. It’s nice to think he would, but there’s not much evidence to support such a hope. ■

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# Amnesty Impasse

Bush's immigration bill bogs down.

By Michael Brendan Dougherty

ON MARCH 6, federal agents raided a leather goods factory in New Bedford, Massachusetts, arresting 361 illegal immigrants. The news hounded President Bush during his diplomatic tour of Latin America. Guatemalan President Oscar Berger denounced the raid and personally asked Bush to halt the deportations. Mexican President Felix Calderon similarly chastised Bush, saying that U.S. border policy is "absurd." Bush countered with a bold promise: "My pledge to you and your government, but more important to the people of Mexico, is I'll work as hard as I possibly can to pass comprehensive immigration reform."

But pushing that legislation through the 110th Congress may be more difficult than the administration anticipates.

When Democrats took control of Congress, White House Press Secretary Tony Snow said that the president saw "new opportunities for comprehensive immigration reform." Assuming that comprehensive reform meant amnesty, border hawks were despondent. The most visible restrictionist in Congress, Rep. Tom Tancredo lamented, "We will fight it, we will lose. It will go to the Senate, it will pass. The president will sign it. And it will happen quickly..."

Asked about that post-election despair, Tancredo press aide Carlos Espinosa chuckles, "Obviously a lot has changed since then." "They have stalled the process," he says of the current state of play, "And that is working in our favor."

A rewritten version of last session's McCain-Kennedy immigration bill has been promised but has not been introduced. McCain's aides began circulating rumors that he may not want his name

attached to a bill unpopular with the conservative grassroots while he's campaigning for the Republican presidential nomination. Confirming that suspicion, the *New York Times* reported, "as he left Iowa, Mr. McCain said he was reconsidering his views on how the immigration law might be changed." Frustrated that disagreements were slowing the process, Kennedy elected to proceed on his own, promising to re-introduce legislation approved last year by the Judiciary Committee but never scheduled for a floor vote.

Senators have been meeting in evening sessions to discuss compromise bills. The White House dispatched Secretary of Homeland Security Michael Chertoff and Secretary of Commerce Carlos Gutierrez to grease the skids. But one Republican aide says that pressure from the White House "is not having the impact it once had. It's called being a lame duck."

The major sticking points revolve around the size and scope of the guest-worker program and the details of a path to citizenship for guest workers and illegal residents. But the pace of the process has caused some Democrats to wonder whether the Senate's eyes for immigration reform aren't bigger than its stomach: "I am now of the opinion that we may have reached too far in doing the comprehensive bill," said Dianne Feinstein.

Bush is counting on his No Child Left Behind point man: "[there is] a very good chance of getting the [immigration] bill out of the Senate, because Senator Kennedy is one of the best legislative senators there is..." But the Massachusetts liberal faces an uphill climb: in the closely divided Senate, Kennedy's bill, as

currently written, would likely lose support from red-state Democrats like Claire McCaskill and Jon Tester.

His efforts are further complicated by renewed lobbying efforts. The AFL-CIO is pressuring Kennedy to apply the Davis-Bacon Act, which would mandate that guestworkers receive "local prevailing wages and benefits." That would drastically increase the cost of an immigrant workforce, rendering it useless to employers looking for cheap labor.

But he's not giving up. According to Kennedy spokeswoman Laura Capps, he is still "working closely with GOP senators and the White House on the bill"—though she stopped short of predicting when the long-awaited legislation would arrive.

In the House, Congressman Steve King expects the immigration showdown to happen this summer. Commenting on the negotiations, the Iowa congressman's voice drips with sarcasm, "Really, it's a masterful political strategy to count the votes before there even is a bill." He observes that every time Congress gets ready to pass some kind of amnesty "they play this hide-the-ball game. They don't want to leave any time for debate on the floor." "They're looking for 20 to 30 Republican votes in the Senate and 50 to 70 in the House—nearly a third of our conference" to give the bill a bipartisan gloss and offset border-security Democrats, King says.

Indeed, many freshman Democrats found success running to the right on immigration. McCaskill and Tester ran ads criticizing the president's position. In the House, high-profile winners Zack Space, Brad Ellsworth, and Heath Schuler not only condemned amnesty but also advocated a barrier on the border. Rep. Lincoln Davis, who co-chairs a committee of Blue Dog Democrats exploring solutions to the immigration question, told a townhall meeting in Fairfax, Tennessee that any acceptable legislation must send