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30 Questions for Chuck Hagel

The Constitution requires the Senate consent to many senior executive branch nominations, which provides the Senate a fixed and critical point to review the President's policies. Here are a set of questions about how former Senator Chuck Hagel, if confirmed as Secretary of Defense, might advise the President and implement policies on the most critical national security issues facing our country.

Defense Budget Cuts

President Obama has demanded defense cuts that will usher in an era of military decline. For example, by the time of the fiscal year 2012 budget request, the Department of Defense on its own initiative committed to cutting its budget by \$178 billion over the next five years. On April 13, 2011, President Obama [announced](#) his intention to seek an additional \$400 billion in defense cuts over the following 12 years. This was all prior to the Budget Control Act and its additional defense cuts through sequestration.

- Do you agree with the [testimony](#) of General Dempsey at his confirmation hearing to be Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff that cuts in the range of \$800 billion over 10 years “would be extraordinarily difficult and very high risk”?
- Do you agree with the [testimony](#) of former Secretary of Defense Gates to the House Armed Services Committee that a 10 percent, or \$50 billion, cut to defense spending in one year “operationally would be catastrophic”?

The House Armed Services Committee asked several senior service members to assess the consequences of defense cuts in excess of the planned \$400 billion. They said:

“We would start to have to make some fundamental changes in the capability of the Marine Corps.” – Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps

“We would have to go into a fundamental restructure of what it is our nation expects from our Air Force.” – Air Force Vice Chief of Staff

“We won't be able to meet the global force management plan today.” – Vice Chief of Naval Operations

- Do you agree with their [testimony](#)?

Iran's Nuclear Program

On page 90 of your book, *America: Our Next Chapter*, you seemed to suggest a nuclear-armed Iran would not be a wholly unacceptable outcome because “sovereign nation-states possessing nuclear weapons capability ... will often respond with some degree of responsible, or at least sane, behavior.” You also wrote that “we cannot count on rationality and logic” of nuclear-armed stateless terrorist groups.

- Are you asserting that a nuclear-armed Iran might be acceptable because we can count on the rationality of the Iranian regime?

Iran is nothing more than a terrorist group masquerading as a state. As opposed to being a stateless terrorist group, it is a state sponsor of terrorism. The State Department consistently finds it to be the most active state sponsor of terrorism, and in its most recent report on the matter [found](#) that Iran is actually increasing its terrorist-related activity.

- Can the United States and our allies take the risk that Iran would act more rationally with nuclear weapons than a terrorist group simply because it possesses attributes of statehood, such as territory?
- Given all the other assistance Iran provides to terrorist groups, how can we guarantee Iran would not help terrorist groups gain a nuclear capability?

Iran Sanctions

Congress unanimously passed the Iran Sanctions Act in 1996. In July 2001, you were one of only two senators to [vote](#) against extending the sanctions regime of that Act.

In 2007 you voted against an amendment to a defense bill stating the position of the Senate that the United States should designate the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) as a Foreign Terrorist Organization. The State Department has [said](#) the external operations branch of the IRGC, known as the Qods Force, is Iran’s “primary mechanism for cultivating and supporting terrorists abroad.” Secretary of Defense Panetta and the Former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Mullen, later [testified](#) to the Senate Armed Services Committee that there was a spike in Iranian support to Shia militias in Iraq in the summer of 2011 and that the increase in U.S. casualties in Iraq was directly attributable to this increased Iranian assistance. As the State Department [summarized](#): “Iran was responsible for the increase of lethal attacks on U.S. forces and provided militants with the capability to assemble explosives designed to defeat armored vehicles.”

On October 2, 2008, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid asked unanimous consent for the Senate to pass the Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestment Act of 2008. The original version of this bill in 2007, the Iran Counter-Proliferation Act, S. 970, had 72 co-sponsors, as Senator Reid [pointed](#) out. Among them were Senators Clinton, Kerry, and Obama. A similar bill was reported out of the Banking Committee by a vote of 19-2, with you in opposition. According to media [reports](#), you blocked the unanimous consent request on the Iran sanctions bill. Once you left the Senate, a bill imposing these sanctions passed by a [vote](#) of 99-0.

- Why did you consistently oppose increased sanctions against Iran, including three major pieces of legislation expanding the authority of the President to impose sanctions?

You have [said](#) you oppose “unilateral sanctions” and claim that “United Nations sanctions are working” against Iran. But it is actually these strong U.S. sanctions that lead the way for multilateral sanctions, which eventually get watered-down at the United Nations by the likes of Russia and China. As the Director of National Intelligence has said in [testimony](#) to Congress, “Russia is unlikely to support additional sanctions against Iran.” The notion that China cooperates on Iran is not plausible, given Beijing’s consistent opposition to sanctions.

- If we cannot get the rest of the world to join our tough sanctions, isn’t it a failure of diplomacy rather than a weakness of these pieces of legislation?
- With Iran continuing to accelerate its nuclear program, by what metric are U.N. sanctions on Iran working?

Iran Diplomacy

In *America: Our Next Chapter*, you advocated an approach of “engaging Iran with a direct and strategic diplomatic initiative,” including “direct bilateral talks” to address its nuclear program. You wrote, “Iran must change its behavior, not its regime” and, “regime change is desirable [in Iran], but that should not be our objective.” You then explained we cannot know if this Iranian regime wants to end its conflict with the United States “unless we begin the diplomacy required to break out of the current cycle of hostility.”

President Obama followed this course by reportedly sending two personal letters to Iran’s Supreme Leader in fulfillment of his 2009 Inaugural Address promise to Iran: “We will extend a hand if you are willing to unclench your fist.” There certainly has been no failure of the Obama Administration to try to engage diplomatically with Iran.

In response, in late 2011 we discovered that “elements of the Iranian regime,” as the State Department [said](#), were plotting a terrorist attack on U.S. soil to assassinate the Saudi Ambassador to the United States. Iran continues to accelerate its nuclear program, as the Director-General of the International Atomic Energy Agency [noted](#) in November 2012.

- Do you believe this Iranian regime can be talked out of its illicit nuclear program or its support for terrorism?
- What facts would you point to in support of the assertion that Iran can be talked out of its illicit nuclear program or support for terrorism, given all evidence to the contrary?
- At what point do we admit this Iranian regime has rejected our overtures and entreaties? Or, in the words of President Obama, when do we admit Iran has not unclenched its fist?
- When do we finally realize that talking with Iran is not a goal in itself and that such talks must produce some results?

Syria

In 2008 you co-authored an [opinion](#) piece under the title “It’s Time to Talk to Syria.” President Obama took that advice and rewarded Syria with the appointment of a U.S. Ambassador. The U.N. High Commission for Human Rights recently [estimated](#) at least 60,000 people have been killed in the internal conflict in Syria since March 15, 2011. It would appear Syria is about as interested in altering its behavior as Iran is.

- Is it still time to talk to Syria?

North Korea

Consistent with his 2008 promises to negotiate with rogue states without precondition, President Obama continues to believe he can talk the North Korean regime out of its weapons programs. For example, on February 29 last year the State Department announced North Korea had [agreed](#) “to implement a moratorium on long-range missile launches” in exchange for 240,000 metric tons of food aid. The ink was barely dry on this agreement when North Korea announced it would conduct a long-range missile test, which it did on April 13, 2012.

This should not have been a surprise. Over the past 20 years, North Korea has made [frequent](#) promises to halt long-range missile launches and nuclear activities. It has broken those promises every time. This Obama Administration effort at engaging North Korea was similar to a Bush Administration effort in 2008, which resulted in an agreement that North Korea promptly violated. During the Obama Administration, North Korea has conducted at least one nuclear test, several long-range missile tests, and murdered 46 South Korean sailors by sinking the South Korean ship Cheonan in May 2010.

When the Bush Administration completed its agreement, you [praised](#) it as an “achievement” and “accomplishment” of “painstaking, multilateral diplomacy.” Senator Obama was clear at the time what the consequences should be if North Korea did not live up to its agreement. He [said](#), “If the North Koreans do not meet their obligations, we should move quickly to re-impose sanctions that have been waived, and consider new restrictions going forward.” He later [added](#), “[W]e should lead all members of the Six Party talks in suspending energy assistance, re-imposing sanctions that have recently been waived, and considering new restrictions.”

Like Lucy pulling the football away from Charlie Brown, North Korea completes agreements with no intention of implementing them.

- If you are confirmed, will you work with President Obama to implement his previous position that tougher sanctions should be imposed on North Korea for its continued violation of all its nonproliferation agreements?

Afghanistan

The decision-making process about what kind of residual force to leave in Afghanistan is ongoing. The commanders on the ground will make their recommendations on the matter, while

the White House has [reportedly](#) directed them to provide an option of removing all forces and leaving the Afghans alone in their fight against terrorism—the “zero option.” President Obama [said](#) last May that he would continue to support the missions of training and counter-terrorism operations in Afghanistan beyond 2014.

- Can we do that with zero troops remaining in Afghanistan?

Intelligence and Benghazi Terrorist Attack

You are co-chair of the President’s Intelligence Advisory Board, which is designed to advise the President on the effectiveness of the intelligence community.

- What is your assessment of the intelligence community’s performance leading up to the attack on the mission in Benghazi, Libya, and its conclusion that it was a terrorist attack?

2007 Iraq War Surge

When it was politically safe in 2002, you [voted](#) to authorize the use of force against Iraq. When it became a politically unpopular effort, you turned against the war there. In January 2007, President George W. Bush committed additional resources necessary for a counterinsurgency strategy to succeed in Iraq. Around Thanksgiving 2006, you [wrote](#) an opinion piece for the Washington Post under the title “Leaving Iraq, Honorably,” previewing your opposition to the “surge” and advocating “a phased troop withdrawal from Iraq.” You [voted](#) in February 2007 in favor of a bill expressing opposition to the surge. You later said the surge represented “the most dangerous foreign policy blunder in this country since Vietnam.” On page 63 of *America: Our Next Chapter*, you wrote that “more troops” was not the answer to problems in Iraq, although on page 161 of the book you complained that not enough troops were committed to the war “to prevail,” which is precisely what the surge remedied.

You also wrote in your book, on page 64, that “history ... will show” that your legislative efforts to oppose the surge correctly framed the political matters at issue at the time. Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman Levin, on the other hand, [said](#) in 2009, “in considering whether or not to surge troops in Iraq ... I think that history will show that President Bush reached the right decision.”

- Do you agree with Senator Levin that the surge was a success and not the most dangerous foreign policy blunder since Vietnam?

Nuclear Complex Modernization

In order to secure Senate ratification of New START, President Obama made a commitment to U.S. nuclear modernization. That commitment is most manifest in two places: 1) the 1251 plan (named after the section of the Defense Authorization Act requiring it) that identified specific dollar amounts to be spent; and 2) his agreement to conditions articulated in the treaty’s Resolution of Ratification. Former Secretary of Defense Gates [observed](#) in testimony to Congress that this promise “played a fairly significant role in the willingness of the Senate to

ratify the New START agreement.” Unfortunately, President Obama has already [abandoned](#) his 1251 plan commitments.

As required by the Resolution of Ratification, President Obama [certified](#) his intention to “modernize or replace the triad of strategic nuclear delivery systems.” You are a [signatory](#) to the Global Zero Movement that seeks to eliminate all nuclear weapons. You also were a primary author of the Global Zero U.S. Nuclear Policy Commission [Report](#) issued last year. That report rejected the President’s promise as it relates to all three legs of the triad, advocating “the follow-on nuclear ICBM program on the drawing boards would be cancelled, the plans for a fleet of next-generation bombers altered and the Trident follow-on program delayed.” It went even further to call for the complete elimination of the ICBM leg of the triad.

- Do you commit to carry out the President’s promise to modernize all three legs of the triad?
- Do you understand that the Obama Administration’s failures to adhere to its nuclear modernization commitments seriously jeopardize the Senate’s willingness to support implementation of New START and future arms control initiatives the President clearly wants?

Future Nuclear Arms Reductions

When New START was under [consideration](#) in the Senate, the former head of our Strategic Command was asked if the treaty allowed us to “maintain a nuclear arsenal that is more than is needed to guarantee an adequate deterrent.” He rejected this assertion, saying it was “exactly what is needed today.” James Schlesinger said the treaty numbers were “adequate, though barely so.”

Yet, the Global Zero report advocated cuts to the U.S. nuclear arsenal far below the New START numbers. Moreover, it disturbingly said the reductions it advocated could be “negotiated in another round of bilateral arms reduction talks, or implemented unilaterally.”

Secretary Panetta took the [position](#) that arms reductions would take place in the Obama Administration only as a result of an arms control treaty process. He said, “reductions that have been made, at least in this Administration, have only been made as part of the START process and not outside of that process; and I would expect that that would be the same in the future.” This makes sense, as nuclear reductions are almost always completed by treaty. As the Congressional Research Service has [observed](#), “[a]rms control treaties are the only category of agreement in the political-military field that have been concluded primarily in treaty form.”

- Do you commit to support and implement nuclear reductions only under the treaty-making power of the President articulated in Article Two, Section Two, Clause Two of the Constitution, requiring consent of two-thirds of the Senate?

Global Zero

On page 90 of *America: Our Next Chapter*, you assert “the world would be far more secure if no one had nuclear weapons.” We have experience of a world without nuclear weapons, and it is not a world where great powers are deterred from war with each other—from the Peloponnesian War between Athens and Sparta through World War II. On the other hand, the nuclear age is notable for its absence of war between the great powers. As John Lewis Gaddis wrote in 1986 in his seminal article *The Long Peace*, “the development of nuclear weapons has had, on balance, a stabilizing effect on the postwar international system.”

- What is the empirical basis for your view we would be safe without nuclear weapons?
- Doesn't the historical evidence actually point to the opposite conclusion?

Arms Control Compliance

A Resolution of Ratification to the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) was introduced in the Senate in 1997. It contained a condition requiring the President to certify certain measures of Russian compliance with the treaty. For example, that Russia had deposited its instrument of ratification, committed to foregoing activity inconsistent with the Convention, and resolved certain issues of verification and data exchange. You [voted](#) in favor of an amendment striking this condition, thereby relieving Russia of those compliance burdens as a condition of our acceptance of the arms control measure. To this day, the State Department is unable to [verify](#) Russian compliance with its CWC obligations.

Russia remains a serial violator of numerous arms control treaties. In addition to its failure to comply with CWC, there were a number of issues outstanding on the original START when President Obama went ahead and completed New START. The State Department cannot verify Russian compliance with the Biological Weapons Convention, while it affirmatively finds Russian noncompliance with the Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty and the Treaty on the Open Skies.

In his April 2009 speech in Prague promising to rid the world of nuclear weapons, President Obama [proclaimed](#) “rules must be binding. Violations must be punished. Words must mean something.” In 1985, Congressmen Les Aspin, Harry Reid, and others wrote to Soviet General Secretary Gorbachev to assert that if compliance issues are not “resolved in a satisfactory manner, it will have serious consequences for the future of the arms control process.”

Indeed, it is self-evident that parties must adhere to the commitments they have made for arms control to have any meaning and credibility. When Russia violates arms control agreements while the United States adheres to them, Russia gains a military advantage that puts U.S. national security at risk. For example, the former Commander of U.S. Strategic Command, General Chilton, [predicated](#) his support for U.S. nuclear levels and New START on the assumption “that the Russians in the post-negotiation time period would be compliant with the treaty.”

- Do you agree with the position that for the arms control process to have any meaning, parties must adhere to the treaty commitments they have made?

- Do you agree with the position of Les Aspin and Harry Reid that non-compliance should have consequences for future arms control negotiations?
- Do you agree with the position of President Obama that violations of arms control obligations must be punished?
- If we have evidence of a major arms control violation, shouldn't we resolve that issue prior to negotiating future arms control treaties?

War Supplemental Requests

President Obama [called](#) the fiscal year 2009 war supplemental “the last planned war supplemental.” Since that time, he has submitted five other supplemental war funding requests, which he calls funding for “overseas contingency operations.” In November 2006, you [said](#) this appropriations format was to fund war “dishonestly.”

- If confirmed, what will you do to help the President fulfill his promise to stop submitting supplemental war funding requests?

Victims of Terrorism and Crime Victims

When the Senate was considering the Terrorism Risk Insurance Act in 2002, Senators Allen and Harkin jointly introduced an amendment to help victims of terrorism gain justice. It provided that when a person sued a state sponsor of terrorism and won a judgment for compensatory damages, the victim could go after blocked assets of that state. You were one of only three Senators to [vote](#) against that.

- Why?

United Nations Human Rights Council

When the Senate was considering its budget resolution in 2006—something we don't do around here anymore—there was an amendment to redirect money made available for the United Nations Human Rights Council to increase U.S. border security. The United Nations Human Rights Council is easily one of the most anti-Israel bodies of the U.N. system.

- Why did you [vote](#) against the amendment?