CHARLES "CHUCK" HAGEL
UNITED STATES SENATOR FROM NEBRASKA, 1997 — 2009

An Interview by Heather Vaughan

Chuck Hagel is a distinguished professor at Georgetown University and the University of Nebraska at Omaha. He is co-chairman of the president's Intelligence Advisory Board; chairman of the Atlantic Council; a member of the secretary of defense's Defense Policy Board and the secretary of energy's Blue Ribbon Commission on America's Nuclear Future; and is a member of the Public Broadcasting Service's board of directors. He also serves on the board of directors of Chevron Corporation; the advisory boards of Deutsche Bank Americas, Corsair Capital, and M.I.C. Industries; is a director of the Zurich Holding Company of America; and is a senior adviser to McCarthy Capital Corporation. Hagel served two terms in the United States Senate (1997-2009) representing the State of Nebraska. He was a senior member of the Senate Foreign Relations; Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs; and Intelligence Committees. Senator Hagel is a combat Vietnam veteran and a former deputy administrator of the Veterans Administration. Senator Hagel is the author of the recently published *America: Our Next Chapter.*

GPPR: The impetus and overarching theme of the *Georgetown Public Policy Review* this year is the state of national security ten years after September 11th. Let's begin by getting your thoughts on that. Do you believe we're safer today? What have we done to improve national security in that time?

Chuck Hagel: The United States of America is safer and more secure today than it was on September 11, 2011. That is because the Congress, the president, America's citizens, and all our institutions recognized the threat that faced our country in 2001 and the threat of more sophisticated terrorist acts in the future. The Congress and the president worked together to do a number of things.

First, we consolidated our intelligence agencies – the 15 independent agencies. That consolidation is still being implemented, but what that has done and will continue to do is bring more cohesive and coherent information sharing to the overall intelligence framework. It also brought intelligence into a real-time dynamic that we didn't always have previously. So our people on the ground, our military, our decision makers, and in particular, the president and his national security people are getting the maximum amount of relevant, timely intelligence for big decisions. So the intelligence agencies coming together in a more coherent sharing way was a big part of the last ten years, and we're still not finished.

Second, we consolidated 22 departments and agencies under one new Department of Homeland Security. Now that's still being worked out – there are a lot of management issues. We rolled up 22 departments into one, and there are different cultures, different backgrounds, and different objectives. But even with the difficulties and adjustments we're working through, in the end I think it was the right thing to do. It brought a more strategic emphasis to using our resources to the 21st century threats that face our country. Until that consolidation, there was really no central homeland security office. You had different pieces, but this really consolidates it in a way where it's not only manageable, but more to the point, it utilizes and gets maximum return from all of these agencies, resources, and people.

The third area we must assess ourselves on is the military. We're better off and more secure today because the military has been reshaped, although not to where it needs to be. [Secretary of Defense Robert] Gates has talked about it; [former Secretary of Defense Donald] Rumsfeld talked about it; all our commanders talk about it: we need to transform our military to be better prepared for these 21st century threats and challenges. And we're still working on that, but the military has made astounding progress. It's more agile and more flexible, with capabilities that we didn't have ten years ago to address big issues before they get to be bigger issues.

Fourth, our institutions and our communities have adapted – meaning not just police forces and state governments, but businesses, NGOs, and educational institutions. Over the last ten years all of these organizations have started to address security challenges. Universities are a good example – Georgetown is a very good example. Ten years ago – and I suspect this is the case with most universities – you didn't have the same kind of emphasis on security issues. You didn't have centers dedicated to studying these issues. You didn't have people coming in to build programs on security. They were usually an adjunct to some other department. That's a huge part of this because you're developing the next set of leaders. Their cultural take on security and their early absorption into it gives a whole new dimension to the next set of leaders

that will govern our country. That wasn't the case 20 years ago.

The last reason I believe we're better off is the collaboration with our allies. Alliances are critically important today. Look around the world – every issue, whether it's Libya, Afghanistan, or Iraq requires alliances and cooperation. And that really begins with developing seamless networks of information and intelligence that we gather and share with our allies. The point is to stop a terrorist attack before it's perpetrated. The only way you can do this is with intelligence. And you cannot do it without the cooperation of the countries and regions where these terrorists are bred. Pakistan is a good example. And I know a lot of people are not happy with Pakistan, but we've got to have their cooperation. Wherever you go, it's those intelligence relationships that make the difference.

So I think those are the five factors are really important to think about when you're reviewing what we've done in the last ten years. All of these achievements are imperfect, all need more work, but nonetheless I think that's an important outline of items that have been accomplished.

GPPR: Is there a conflict between improving our security and maintaining our liberties?

Have we sacrificed freedom to improve our safety?

Chuck Hagel: That is very big issue that I don't think the American people nor the Congress in the past ten years have paid enough attention to. I was one of four Republicans that put a hold on the Patriot Act Reauthorization [in 2005]. It's not that we four Republicans or any of the Democrats were any less committed to the security of this country, but as I have often said, don't ever give up one freedom in a tradeoff for security.

First of all, I think it's a false premise. We have done pretty well in America for 250 years without giving up liberties and still we have kept our nation as secure as any on Earth. In fact, we've added to our rights with our Constitutional amendments. Ninety-six years ago, women could not vote in America. When we set up this grand republic, unless you were a white male landowner, you didn't have that right. They said nice things in the Constitution about all men being created equal, but that's not the way it worked in reality. So we self-corrected and changed a lot of the things that needed changing. So what does that have to do with rights and terrorism? You don't need to give up rights as a tradeoff for security. It never works out anyway. And rarely do you have a situation where people give rights up and they ever get them back.

This was a big debate between the Bush White House and the Congress. President Bush felt that as commander in chief, he could make all the decisions about what was or was not important for protecting our country. So we had some pretty interesting exchanges with the Bush White House on these issues. But I think early on Congress abdicated much of its responsibility on these issues. I think history is not going to be

kind to either the Bush Administration or Congress on these issues. I don't think Congress did their job of asking the tough questions on how we got into these wars, and why, and how long we were going to be there. Some of us did ask questions, but they weren't answered. Now ten years later we have more troops in Afghanistan than we ever did, we're spending more money and we have more casualties. And we still don't know how to get out of Iraq after eight years. We're skirting with this situation in Libya. Point being: question the government. Question the policies. Question why society is being asked to give up a right. Question whether monitoring phone calls or bank accounts really keeps us safer. Let's be careful there, let's take a look. Those are issues that are still playing out.

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GPPR: I want to push you a little further on that. It's rare that we're asked outright to give up a right. But there are small encroachments on our freedoms; for instance, on our right to privacy. We accept it as common practice to share information with the government today that twenty years ago we might have balked at as intrusive.

Chuck Hagel: I think that this is a vital question. When you start getting into privacy issues, you hear, "Well, if you don't have anything to hide, why would you mind having your phone calls monitored, or your emails, or your web browsing, or your bank account? You're a law-abiding citizen, aren't you? Do you have something to hide?" This is the slow encroachment. It starts with that, but it can turn into the government saying, "Well, we need to know something about your friends." You give up more and more. Some people ridicule that. They say the atrocities that happened with dictators in the past can't happen again because we have mass media now. We wouldn't let it get that far. But the insidiousness of slow encroachment is what you have to watch. That's why we must debate these issues in Congress. Let it be transparent. Let the American public know what's going on. That's the strength of democracy: an informed public. Then if your representatives and the president agree that it should be done, it's done in the open. I've always had great confidence in our country that if nothing else, we tend to get that right. But that doesn't mean that can't be taken away if we're not careful.

GPPR: In your book, you mention the economy as a critical factor in our national security. You also discuss how economic inequalities help contribute to the growth of terrorism. How are those issues related?

Without economic freedom, people do not have choices or independence. Every specific freedom that is noted in our Constitution and Bill of Rights would fall apart without economic

freedom. Every other freedom will atrophy before the basic necessities of life.

Many of these countries have not been the recipients of the great advancements since World War II that most of the western world has enjoyed. We've benefited from economic prosperity, science, technology, and all these great new revelations in medicine and health care. When we examine these trouble spots around the world, we ask why are some of these people captive to dictators and terrorists like Bin Laden? There's a religious fervor in this which drives some of this. But when people have no hope, when they're chained to a cycle of despair, when they lack water and basic necessities that prosperous countries take for granted, something is going to happen. I don't blame all terrorism on poverty, but when you combine all of those dynamics into one region, that is about as combustible a dynamic as you can get. Anything can set that off.

We've seen a lot of that in the last 90 days in North Africa and the Middle East. Every country is different and every situation is different, but very little good comes out of those big reservoirs of poverty and hopelessness. They're easy prey for people who will distort God and religious fervor. When people are in a position where they have nothing, where they have no hope, they're going to reach for something.

So my point has always been: when you're looking at terrorism, you have to go beneath it. You have to look at the causes. Yes, you've got to stop it, but you need to utilize all of your foreign policy tools to do that, and I'm not sure over the years we've done a very good job of that.

For instance, take our association with [recently deposed Egyptian President Hosni] Mubarak for the past 30 years. He was important because he fulfilled the terms of the bilateral Israeli-Egypt peace treaty. He essentially kept that area stable. Israel had a reliable partner, and we had a reliable partner in the Suez Canal. He was involved in a lot of our vital interests. But that came at a price. He was a tyrant – a dictator. But we tried to sugarcoat it by saying he had elections. Come on. Those weren't free and fair elections.

So there are tradeoffs in this business and it's always imperfect, it's always difficult, and there's always a great hypocrisy zone in this. We're for values, we're for standards, we're for freedom, we're for democracy, but we also have a vital interest to keep the Suez Canal open to transport 40 percent of the world's oil. How do you balance that?

Back to your point, it's vitally important that we factor in all our instruments of power as we take positions in this part of the world that are vulnerable to terrorism. You've got to figure out what the cause of this or you never can fix it. We're seen as oppressors and occupiers in Iraq and Afghanistan. The American people are shocked by that; how can that be? We've lost 6,000 Americans, tens of thousands have been wounded, all because we're trying to help them. Yes, but we didn't assess this very carefully

because these are worlds that are so different from ours. That doesn't mean we shouldn't be involved, but we have to understand it better. And we can't fix it all.

This is part of the debate on Libya – why get involved in Libya and not Sudan or the Ivory Coast? Their people are being massacred by their tyrants. Actually, there has not been a massacre in Libya. [President of the Council on Foreign Relations] Richard Haass testified before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee two days ago and said that the whole premise of Gadhafi going east and massacring his people was flawed.[1] There was never any evidence of that. Some of the president's people said it might happen and so we can't let that happen.

But we have to do a better job of how we are seen as well – reversing the optics. We have to consider how we're viewed by this next generation of citizens in this region. They are combustible because 60 to 70 percent of these countries are under the age of 20. Where are they headed? What are they going to do? They have no education and no prospects. We're only at the beginning of these problems.

GPPR: One of your criticisms of the war in Iraq was that we didn't have our goals laid out at the outset. With Libya, it seems like we're seeing that problem again. How do we define success in Libya? Are we in a position to meet with success?

Chuck Hagel: We can't view this as a question of win or lose. There are too many cultural, ethnic, and religious dynamics at play for us to control. I told Secretary Gates the other day, it seems to me if there was ever a clear early 21st century case of the limitations of American power, it is our situation in Libya. And you can extrapolate from this situation in Libya across that entire area. After ten years in Afghanistan and eight years in Iraq, we still haven't done whatever we were supposed to do. Great powers really do have limitations. We are very limited in what we can do in Libya.

One option being put forth by Lindsay Graham, John McCain and Joe Lieberman is that we ought to go into Tripoli, put boots on the ground, and go after Gadhafi. That's one option. I don't agree with it, though, because what will that get us? Ten years in another war? As Colin Powell said, it's the Pottery Barn rule: you break it, you own it. We broke Iraq so we own it. Now people say, "We can't just leave them." Well, why didn't we think about that? Why didn't someone answer some of these questions about who is going to govern, how they will govern, what it will cost the U.S., how long are we going to be there, and what coalitions are going to come together? Now we're living it.

We can't go around the world and dictate and interfere and say we don't like a certain leader like [Libyan ruler Moammar] Gadhafi. Someone will have to come into power after Gadhafi. Look at Iraq and [Prime Minister Nouri] Maliki (*sic*). We may end up with another dictator there. Someone will replace Gadhafi, but there's a vacuum. There's a vacuum in

Egypt and Tunisia too, but those were different. Those were revolutions that were inspired by young people and driven by technology. It wasn't anti-American or anti-Israeli.

We have very limited options on what we can do. Secretary Gates said to Congress three weeks ago, there's a lot of loose talk about taking out air defense systems. Let me explain what that means. It means going to war. It means attacking another country. It's complicated, it means resources – he went through the whole thing. What do you want to accomplish with that? Now we're all befuddled. President Obama said Gadhafi must go. Is that our policy? Regime change? Well then, what are we going to do to fulfill our policy of no boots on the ground? Now the rebels are upset with us and with NATO because we're not doing enough. This is all part of the complications and limitations. In my opinion, Libya was a mistake. The first mistake we made was the president saying Gadhafi has to go. When the president of the United States speaks, it echoes around the world. So what happens if Gadhafi stays? Do we lose face? Have we disappointed people saying that the U.S. and NATO didn't fulfill what we said we would do?

The same questions I asked about Iraq and Afghanistan, you have to ask these.

I don't know about Libya. You always have to be hopeful. In Libya, the rebels, we really don't know who they are. We do have intelligence that says there is a combination of a lot of dangerous elements in that crowd, which is obviously why we're not arming them. We know that there are unsavory characters that want to take Gadhafi down. These are good examples about how you can get yourself into a lot of trouble. This goes back to my point about limitations – we're very limited in what we can actually do there. And this also goes back to my point about alliances. There's not a situation in the Middle East, North Africa, Central Asia, or that entire arc that is going to be resolved without enough members of an alliance coming together to work these things through.

In foreign policy, there is rarely a situation where you have good options. You're normally faced with bad options. But we have to make a decision – we're the most sophisticated, powerful nation in the world.

GPPR: It seems to me that President Obama is trying to avoid following in his predecessor's footsteps by not committing to troops on the ground and by not committing to nation-building. Can you still engage in another country if you don't want to commit to these things? Do you see this so-called "Obama Doctrine" as an appropriate framework for making decision on foreign policy?

Chuck Hagel: In America, we have a problem because the media and our political dialogue demand a one-sentence articulation of everything. On the Sunday morning talk shows

you have to give a five-second answer to a very complicated question. That's what we demand. So we get ourselves in trouble. It's more complicated than that. In foreign policy, there is rarely a situation where you have good options. You're normally faced with bad options. But we have to make a decision – we're the most sophisticated, powerful nation in the world. People look to us to lead. It doesn't mean that we always have to have the answer. We shouldn't always try to be the one with the absolute answer on everything. There is no answer many times, and certainly no good options in most cases.

So what you do is try to weigh your own sovereign vital interests with alliance interest and with longer-term regional interests. And you weigh these with who we are as Americans – what are our values? Our principles? Our standards? Do we stand for individual liberty? Do we stand for democracy? Well, we say we do, but you have to balance those and you have to make some choices and some adjustments and make some imperfect systems work.

I don't know about an "Obama Doctrine." I think in the complicated, interrelated, and combustible world we live in today it's hard to have a doctrine. Even within North Africa and the Middle East, each situation is different, each country is different, and each dynamic is different. So how do you frame a foreign policy that's consistent and applies to every situation? You can't do it.

You can have principles and you can work within a framework of those principles. You balance your interests, your values, and so on. We got in trouble in Iraq when we tried to explain why we were there – we hit on democracy. Democracy is not the answer for everything. Take Gaza, for instance. We knew Hamas was going to win the elections there. But when they did, America – the great champion of democracy – refused to acknowledge their government, even though the United Nations and outside observers said it was a free and fair election. Democracy has not fixed the problem there.

Generally some form of democracy works best because, if nothing else, democracy is about individual rights. But it doesn't fit the same way everywhere; therefore, I don't think you can come up with a general foreign policy that fits all cases. In the past, we had the Monroe Doctrine and the Eisenhower Doctrine, but every one of those doctrines was at a time when the world was less complicated. There was no mass media, no telecommunications, no weapons of mass destruction, no extremist movements. These are new realities that make the world so much more complicated now.

If you look at the demographics of the world, you can see where the problems are going to be. In the next 25 years, what do we do with all of these young people? The *Wall Street Journal* recently ran an article that said that for every 100 bright young Indians with college degrees, only about three are

employable. India is going to be the most populous country in the world in 25 years. And you keep rotating those young, smart people out with educations and expectations and there's nothing there for them. And this is the higher strata of societies!

GPPR: You mention rising populations and corresponding unemployment in India as one future challenge that needs to be addressed. What are some of the other challenges you see facing the U.S. in the next few decades?

Chuck Hagel: Well, I go back to where I started: the economy. We've got to ensure that our system remains the most flexible, innovative, competitive economy in the world. But there are so many challenges – starting with $14.5 trillion in debt. We have long term entitlement programs we're obligated to that we can't sustain. That's going to cut into our base of opportunity, but it will also cut into funding our discretionary requirements: defense, foreign policy, education, infrastructure, and agriculture. They'll all be limited. That affects our young people, our job opportunities, and our position in the world. The economy has to be as big a part of foreign policy as anything else. President Obama asked four of us to write him a memo and tell him where each of us thought his foreign policy priorities should be. I started with the economy and trade, because everything comes from that – everything flows from that. If you don't have any money, you don't have many options. If we don't have the capacity as a nation to protect our interests and maintain what we feel is important for a competitive position in the world, then we're going to have a huge problem that we'll never recover from.

We're going to have issues that we'll be dealing with for the foreseeable future – North Korea, Iran, the Middle East, Central Asia – these are all areas that aren't going to get fixed right away. They're going to be with us for a long time. So we have got to be smart in how we utilize all of our instruments of power. We have many instruments of power, starting with the strength of our economy. We also have diplomacy, trade, intelligence, military, and relationships. How we use those will determine America's future.

ENDNOTES

1 In testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on April 6, 2011, Haass, president of the Council on Foreign Relations, said, "It is not clear that a humanitarian catastrophe was imminent in the eastern Libyan city of Benghazi. There had been no reports of large scale massacres up to that point, and Libyan society (unlike Rwanda, to cite the obvious influential precedent) is not divided along a single or defining fault line. Gaddafi saw the rebels as enemies for political reasons, not for their ethnic or tribal associations. To be sure, civilians would have been killed in an assault on the city – civil wars are by their nature violent and destructive – but there is no evidence of which I am aware that civilians per se would have been targeted on a large scale."