



## The US and Us: The Mitvim-DC Monthly

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*The US and Us: The Mitvim-DC Monthly* is a monthly report on US-Middle East issues. Each report includes an analysis, a roundup of commentaries, and a profile of a major US policymaker. The series is of particular importance for Israel's regional foreign policies as the second Obama administration takes shape – a time in which personnel changes and policy re-evaluations regarding Israel and the Middle East are taking place. This report is prepared by Grant Rumley, a Visiting Fellow at Mitvim, [grumley@mitvim.org.il](mailto:grumley@mitvim.org.il).

### **A. Analysis**

We expected a busy and frenetic January, and between Congressional confirmation hearings, reactions to the Israeli elections, and an inauguration, January certainly delivered.

In the US, reactions were mixed on the Israeli elections. Many, if not all, accurately predicted the Netanyahu victory, fewer predicted the spoiler role Bennett could possibly play, and even fewer expected Lapid to emerge as the new kingmaker in Israeli politics. Many pundits joked that Obama was now forced to learn some new Israeli names; and as the American foreign policy establishment scrambles [to predict what Lapid's rise means for US-Israeli relations](#), Congress was busy interviewing two candidates for top Secretary positions.

Last week, John Kerry, the reigning chairman on the Senate Foreign Affairs committee and 2004 presidential candidate, was [confirmed](#) by a vote of 94-3 to the post of Secretary of State. His hearing and subsequent vote were remarkably smooth by confirmation hearing standards, and he assumes the post with both Democrat and Republican support. Kerry, a 28-year veteran of the Senate, has expressed his desire to work for peace in the Middle East during his tenure.

If Kerry's confirmation was smooth, former Republican Senator Chuck Hagel's is anything but. Hagel's confirmation hearing on the 31<sup>st</sup> was a messy affair, with Hagel fumbling over the Middle East, Congress's role in foreign policy formulation, and the issue of linkage with regards to Middle East conflict. At one point Hagel remarked: "if confirmed, I plan to know more than I do." As Jeffrey Goldberg [noted](#), Hagel had fallen into that trap of linking the Israeli-Palestinian conflict with greater Middle East conflict, a problem known as 'linkage.' But while Hagel's performance was anything but spectacular, many expect the 55 Democrat and Democrat-aligned Senators in the Senate to stay on board with his confirmation.

As we enter February, expect residual analysis from the Israeli elections, confirmation hearings, and how the new Cabinet shakes out to dominate the news cycle in the States.

## B. Article Roundup

### ***US-Israeli Relations***

[Writing in the National Review](#), Jim Talent thinks that if Chuck Hagel has a qualm with the US-Israeli relationship, he should say so. He warns, however, that the US putting distance between itself and Israel could lead to an increase in aggravations directed at Israel.

The Christian Science Monitor has a less than rosy view of the Israeli elections' impact on US-Israeli relations. [Writing that issues such as Arab-Israeli peace and how to proceed with Iran will likely increase tensions](#), Howard LaFranchi provides a rather pessimistic outlook.

Despite the criticisms that Hagel is weak on Iran and a detriment to the US-Israeli relationship, Georgi Ivanov [writes that the fact that Hagel puts America first](#) is reason enough to be Secretary of Defense.

### ***US-Middle East Policy***

[In the Washington Post](#), David Ignatius discusses what the 1956 Suez Crisis can teach us about US power. In particular, he references a book about the crisis that Chuck Hagel has given to Obama, Biden, and former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates: "Eisenhower 1956" by David Nichols.

Among other things, [speculations abound as to what Obama's Middle East policy](#) will look like in his second term. With a new Secretary of State who's devoted to peace, will Obama's second term prove more fruitful?

New Secretary of State, John Kerry—who is to be sworn in on February 1<sup>st</sup>—will likely [move cautiously on Middle East peace](#), as opposed to Obama's rather aggressive initiatives during his first years in office.

## C. Policy Profile

### ***Denis McDonough, newly-appointed White House Chief of Staff***

As Jack Lew departs to be Treasury Secretary, Denis McDonough – a veteran foreign policy and national security aide to Obama – [will fill the void](#). McDonough is considered a highly respected figure in the White House, and has had the President's ear on many key national security issues ([you can see him here](#) seated next to Secretary Clinton during the Bin Laden raid). McDonough is the former Chief of Staff of the National Security Council, and got his start in the 90s as an aide on the House International Relations Committee. After a brief stint at the Center for American Progress in 2004, he was pegged to advise candidate Obama in 2007 on foreign policy. He is a Minnesota native, has a Masters in Foreign Service from Georgetown, has once taught high school in Belize, and is 43 years old.