

Red Lines on Iranian Nuclearization

Below is a list of statements from administration officials and other international players on “red lines” on Iran’s nuclear program and intended responses if these lines are crossed.

UNITED STATES

President Barack Obama

[NBC Today Show](#), February 5, 2012

“Our goal is to resolve this issue diplomatically, that would be preferable,” Obama said. “We’re not going to take any options off the table though. Obviously any kind of additional military activity inside the Gulf is disruptive and has a big effect on us. It could have a big effect on oil prices.”

“We are prepared to exercise these options should they arise.”

[State of the Union](#), January 24, 2012

“Let there be no doubt: America is determined to prevent Iran from getting a nuclear weapon, and I will take no options off the table to achieve that goal.”

[Interview with Time Magazine’s Fareed Zakaria](#), January 18, 2012

“I have made myself clear since I began running for the presidency that we will take every step available to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon,” Obama said. “Can we guarantee that Iran takes the smarter path? No, which is why I’ve repeatedly said we don’t take any options off the table in preventing them from getting a nuclear weapon.”

[AIPAC Policy Conference](#), June 2, 2008

Note: This is during the presidential primaries, before the Obama administration

“I will do everything in my power to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon, everything in my power to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon, everything.”

Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta

[Barksdale Air Force Base](#), February 17, 2012

“We’ve made very clear that Iran will not develop a nuclear weapon. We will not tolerate an Iran that has a nuclear weapon. Secondly, we’ve made clear that we will not tolerate an Iran that tries to block the Straits of Hormuz. A fifth of the oil of the world goes through those straits. They’re international waters. We’re not going to allow them to block that. And frankly, we don’t want an Iran that basically spreads violence around the world, that supports terrorism, that conducts acts of violence. They planned an attack here against ambassadors of other countries here in the United States. So we’re not going to tolerate that, and we’ve made that clear. And as a result, the international community has come together. We have implemented strong diplomatic sanctions, we have implemented very strong economic sanctions, and we’re continuing to do that—sanctions that are in many ways crippling Iran, crippling their economy, isolating them from the rest of the world, and having an impact on Iran.

“The basic message is, you got to change your behavior. If you're a nation that wants to be part of the international family of nations, then join it. Operate by international rules. Operate by international laws. Join us in an effort to try to diplomatically reduce your efforts in terms of nuclear capability.

“So that pressure needs to continue, and Israel has been part of that. And my hope is that—for the future, that Israel will be part of that international effort to keep the pressure on. That's the most effective way to isolate Iran and to keep the pressure on.

If they cross one of those lines I talked about, then we have all options on the table—we, the United States, have all options on the table. But, as the prime minister of Israel himself said, that ought to be the last option, not the first.”

[House Appropriations Subcommittee](#), February 16, 2012

“We will not allow Iran to develop a nuclear weapon. This isn't just about containment. We will not allow Iran to develop a nuclear weapon,” Panetta told the House Appropriations Defense Subcommittee. “We will not allow Iran to close the Straits of Hormuz. And in addition to that, obviously, we have expressed serious concerns to Iran about the spread of violence and the fact that they continue to support terrorism and they continue to try to undermine other countries.” The Pentagon chief delivered President Barack Obama's oft-repeated statement that “we do keep all options on the table.”

Panetta, the former CIA director, said U.S. intelligence shows that Iran is continuing its uranium enrichment program. “But the intelligence does not show that they've made the decision to proceed with developing a nuclear weapon. That is the red line that would concern us and that would ensure that the international community, hopefully together, would respond.”

[CBS 60 Minutes](#), January 29, 2012

“The United States, and the president's made this clear, does not want Iran to develop a nuclear weapon. That's a red line for us. And it's a red line obviously for the Israelis so we share a common goal here. If we have to do it, we will do it.”

[CBS Face the Nation](#), January 8, 2012

“Are they trying to develop a nuclear weapon? No. But we know that they're trying to develop a nuclear capability. And that's what concerns us. And our red line to Iran is do not develop a nuclear weapon. That's a red line for us.”

“We made very clear that the United States will not tolerate the blocking of the Straits of Hormuz. That's another red line for us and that we will respond to them.”

[AIPAC Policy Conference](#), May 22, 2011

“You also see our commitment to our shared security in our determination to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. Here in the United States, we've imposed the toughest sanctions ever on the Iranian regime. At the United Nations, under our leadership, we've secured the most comprehensive international sanctions on the regime, which have been joined by allies and

partners around the world. Today, Iran is virtually cut off from large parts of the international financial system, and we're going to keep up the pressure. So let me be absolutely clear—we remain committed to preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons.”

National Security Adviser Thomas Donilon

[Brookings Institution](#), November 22, 2011

“If Iran doesn't change its course, the pressure will grow. Working with allies and partners, we will continue to increase sanctions. With our Gulf Cooperation partners, we will continue to build a regional defense architecture that prevents Iran from threatening its neighbors. It will continue to deepen Iran's isolation, regionally and globally, and again even as the door to diplomacy remains open, we'll take no option off the table. For our focus and our purpose are clear: pressure is a means, not an end, and our policy is firm. We are determined to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons and all that flows from that.”

[Carnegie Endowment](#), March 29, 2011

“President Obama has also long understood the regional and international consequences of Iran becoming a nuclear weapons' state. That is why we are committed to preventing Iran from developing nuclear weapons. From his first days in office, he has made clear to Iran that it has a choice: it can act to restore the confidence of the international community in the purposes of its nuclear program by fully complying with the IAEA and Security Council resolutions, or it can continue to shirk its international obligations, which will only increase its isolation and the consequences for the regime. There is no escaping or evading that choice... Unless and until Iran complies with its obligations under the NPT and all relevant UN Security Council resolutions, we will continue to ratchet up the pressure. We will not close the door on diplomacy. Like all NPT Parties, Iran has the right to peaceful nuclear energy. But it also has a responsibility to fulfill its obligations. There are no short-cuts and we will not take our eye off the ball.”

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton

[Department of State Treaty Room](#), February 13, 2012

“We continue to pursue a dual track that both applies sanctions to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons but also makes it clear that we are ready to sit down and discuss in a purposeful way, through diplomatic engagement, the nuclear program. I have said many times from this podium and elsewhere we recognize Iran's right to peaceful nuclear energy, but Iran also has international responsibilities that we expect it to live up to.”

[Thai Television](#), July 22, 2009

“We will still hold the door open [for negotiations], but we also have made it clear that we will take actions, as I have said time and time again, crippling action working to upgrade the defenses of our partners in the region.

“We want Iran to calculate what I think is a fair assessment: that if the United States extends a defense umbrella over the region, if we do even more to develop the military capacity of those [allies] in the Gulf, it is unlikely that Iran will be any stronger or safer because they won't be

able to intimidate and dominate as they apparently believe they can once they have a nuclear weapon.”

[AIPAC Policy Conference](#), June 4, 2008

Note: This is during the presidential primaries, before the Obama administration

“The second principle is a simple one: no nuclear weapons for Iran. Iran is a country whose leaders, whose president denies the Holocaust. He defies the international community. His government trains, funds, and arms Hamas and Hezbollah terrorists in attacking Israeli civilians. He threatens to destroy Israel. Just this week, he said that Israel is about to die and will soon be erased. We can never let Iran obtain nuclear weapons. The next president will have to deal with the Iranian challenge from day one. This is not just in Israel's interests. It is in America's interests and the world's interests, and this is a threat that I take very seriously. I'm a co-sponsor the Iran Nonproliferation Act. I support calling the Iranian Revolutionary Guard what it is: a terrorist organization. I have also said that should Iran ever, ever contemplate using nuclear weapons against Israel, they must understand what the consequences will be to them. But we must do everything in our power to prevent such an unthinkable day from ever happening and the best way to do that is to stop Iran from getting nuclear weapons in the first place.

“We should start by developing an international consensus against Iran's nuclear program with a set of tougher sanctions if Iran continues to defy the international community. We should also work with Israel and moderate Arab neighbors to roll back Iran's influence in that region. If the Iranian government wants to become a responsible member of the international community, we would wholeheartedly welcome that change but Iran simply cannot be allowed to continue its current behavior and I wish to underscore I believe that we are further behind in constraining Iran today because of the failed policies of President Bush than we would have been had we taken a much more aggressive engagement course earlier. That is why it is imperative that we get both tough and smart about dealing with Iran before it is too late.”

CIA Director David Petraeus

[Senate Select Intelligence Committee](#), January 31, 2012

“What we think we would be evident if there is a decision to enrich beyond the 20 percent that they are currently enriching to the weapons grade would be very significant, and I think a tell-tale indicator.

“There's no commercial use for that arguably—in fact, not arguably. I think factually the amount of 20 percent enriched uranium that they have exceeds any requirement, for example, for the Tehran Research Reactor for the foreseeable future. So there are already concerns just with that.”

Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Martin Dempsey

[CNN Global Public Square](#), February 19, 2012

Question: Do you think that is still unclear, that they're moving on a path for nuclear technology, but whether or not they choose to make a nuclear weapon is unclear?

Dempsey: It is. I believe it is unclear, and on that basis I think it would be premature to exclusively decide that the time for a military option was upon us. I mean, I think that the economic sanctions and the international cooperation that we've been able to gather around sanctions is beginning to have an effect. I think our diplomacy is having an effect, and our preparedness.

“On that basis, I think it would be premature to exclusively decide that the time for a military option was upon us,” Dempsey said.

Director of National Intelligence James Clapper

[Senate Select Intelligence Committee](#), January 31, 2012

“Well, certainly a key indicator will be, without going into sensitive areas here, but a clear indicator would be enrichment of uranium to a 90 percent level would be a pretty good indicator of their seriousness.

“There are some other things they would need to do, which I'd rather not go into in an open session, that we would also look for, as apart -- and apart part from whatever we could glean from across the -- across the community on an actual decision to go forward.”

Then-Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Mike Mullen

[Detroit Economic Club in Detroit](#), August 26, 2010

“Iran is a particularly difficult issue,” Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told local business leaders here. “Their achieving a nuclear weapon capability is unacceptable and incredibly destabilizing.”

Former White House Adviser Dennis Ross

[New York Times Op-Ed](#), February 14, 2012

“Iran can have civilian nuclear power, but it must not have nuclear weapons.”

ISRAEL

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu

[Knesset Meeting](#), February 15, 2012

“Iran is undermining the stability of the world. It is attacking innocent diplomats around the world. The countries of the world must condemn these acts and draw a red line against Iranian aggression. This aggression, if not stopped, will eventually spread.”

[Joint Meeting of the United States Congress](#), May 24, 2011

“When I last stood here, I spoke of the dire consequences of Iran developing nuclear weapons. Now time is running out, and the hinge of history may soon turn. For the greatest danger facing humanity could soon be upon us: A militant Islamic regime armed with nuclear weapons...if

history has taught the Jewish people anything, it is that we must take calls for our destruction seriously. We are a nation that rose from the ashes of the Holocaust. When we say never again, we mean never again. Israel always reserves the right to defend itself.”

Defense Minister Ehud Barak

[Interview with Ronen Bergman](#), January 25, 2012

Note: Although not a direct quote from Barak, Ronen Bergman summarizes how Barak would calculate a decision to use force

Netanyahu and Barak have both repeatedly stressed that a decision has not yet been made and that a deadline for making one has not been set. As we spoke, however, Barak laid out three categories of questions, which he characterized as “Israel’s ability to act,” “international legitimacy” and “necessity,” all of which require affirmative responses before a decision is made to attack: 1. Does Israel have the ability to cause severe damage to Iran’s nuclear sites and bring about a major delay in the Iranian nuclear project? And can the military and the Israeli people withstand the inevitable counterattack? 2. Does Israel have overt or tacit support, particularly from America, for carrying out an attack? 3. Have all other possibilities for the containment of Iran’s nuclear threat been exhausted, bringing Israel to the point of last resort? If so, is this the last opportunity for an attack?

Vice Prime Minister Moshe Ya’alon

[Interview with Ronen Bergman](#), January 25, 2012

“Our policy is that in one way or another, Iran’s nuclear program must be stopped. It is a matter of months before the Iranians will be able to attain military nuclear capability.”

Former Mossad Operative Rafi Eitan

[Interview with Ronen Bergman](#), January 25, 2012

“As early as 2006 (when Eitan was a senior cabinet minister), I told the cabinet that Israel couldn’t afford to attack Iran. First of all, because the home front is not ready. I told anyone who wanted and still wants to attack, they should just think about two missiles a day, no more than that, falling on Tel Aviv. And what will you do then? Beyond that, our attack won’t cause them significant damage. I was told during one of the discussions that it would delay them for three years, and I replied, ‘Not even three months.’ After all, they have scattered their facilities all over the country and under the ground. ‘What harm can you do to them?’ I asked. ‘You’ll manage to hit the entrances, and they’ll have them rebuilt in three months.’”

Asked if it was possible to stop a determined Iran from becoming a nuclear power, Eitan replied: “No. In the end they’ll get their bomb. The way to fight it is by changing the regime there. This is where we have really failed. We should encourage the opposition groups who turn to us over and over to ask for our help, and instead, we send them away empty-handed.”

EUROPE

Prime Minister David Cameron, Chancellor Angela Merkel, and President Nicolas Sarkozy

[Joint Statement](#), January 23, 2012.

“The Iranian leadership has failed to restore international confidence in the exclusively peaceful nature of its nuclear programme. We will not accept Iran acquiring a nuclear weapon. Iran has so far had no regard for its international obligations and is already exporting and threatening violence around its region.

“We call on Iran’s leadership immediately to suspend its sensitive nuclear activities and abide fully by its international obligations. The door is open to Iran to engage in serious and meaningful negotiations about its nuclear programme. Until Iran comes to the table, we will be united behind strong measures to undermine the regime’s ability to fund its nuclear programme, and to demonstrate the cost of a path that threatens the peace and security of us all.”

British Foreign Secretary William Hague

[BBC Interview](#), February 19, 2012

“I don’t think a wise thing at this moment is for Israel to launch a military attack on Iran. I think Israel like everyone else in the world should be giving a real chance to the approach we have adopted on very serious economic sanctions and economic pressure and the readiness to negotiate with Iran. That’s what we need to make a success of.

“We do not take any options off the table, we don’t know how the situation will develop, it would be unwise to do that...But our approach is 100 percent diplomatically and economically focused to bring Iran to the negotiating table.”

[Guardian Op-Ed](#), July 11, 2011

“There will remain no rationale for lifting sanctions until Iran engages in negotiations to address what are well-founded concerns about its nuclear programme. So far, Iran has done the opposite.

“This latest revelation demonstrates the urgency of increasing pressure. The UK is prepared to take action: I have already agreed a further 100 designations to add to EU sanctions in May, and last week announced additional travel bans against known proliferators. Iran may hope that the unprecedented changes of the Arab spring will distract the world from its nuclear programme. We are determined that it shall not.”

French President Nicolas Sarkozy

[Press Conference in Dijon](#), February 6, 2012

In the wake of new U.S. concerns that Israel might strike Iran's nuclear facilities this spring, Sarkozy reiterated his ironclad commitment to Israel's security but emphasized “the solution is never military.” “The solution is political, the solution is diplomatic, the solution is in sanctions,” Sarkozy said, referring to a string of U.N. sanctions over Iran's nuclear program, which the West fears mask designs to build weapons. “We want the leaders of this country to understand that

they have crossed a red line, and to reassure Israeli leaders so that the irreparable is not carried out,” Sarkozy said of possible military action.

[Statement from President Sarkozy’s Office](#), November 21, 2011

“In addition to the unacceptable threat of nuclear proliferation, there is also the risk of triggering a military escalation in the region, which could have catastrophic consequences for Iran and the world...France therefore proposes to the European Union and its member states, the United States, Japan and Canada and other willing countries to take the decision to immediately freeze the assets of the Iranian central bank (and) stop purchases of Iranian oil.”

German Chancellor Angela Merkel

[Joint Session of Congress](#), November 4, 2009

“Zero tolerance needs to be shown when there is a risk of weapons of mass destruction, falling for example, into the hands of Iran,” said Merkel. “Iran knows our offer, but Iran also knows where we draw a line,” said Merkel. “Security for the state of Israel is for me, non-negotiable. Whoever threatens Israel, also threatens us.”

German Defense Minister Thomas de Maiziere

[Press Briefing alongside Leon Panetta](#), February 17, 2012

“I hope Israel will join the efforts of the international community and will not resort to unilateral action,” he said through an interpreter during a press briefing. “Germany will also stand by Israel. What this means in concrete terms remains to be seen.”

RUSSIA

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov

[Press Conference with UAE’s Foreign Minister](#), February 13, 2012.

“We are concerned about Iran’s nuclear issue. This issue should be solved peacefully, any military means should be excluded... We, along with other permanent members of UN Security Council, would be ready to strongly contribute to the security agreement between all the Gulf countries.”

[News Conference at Russia Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#), January 23, 2012

Sergey Lavrov expressed confidence that despite steps taken beyond the limits of the UN Security Council resolution, it is still possible to resume a dialogue with Iran. “Such opportunities exist, even though a number of steps have been taken, including the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) director general’s absolutely unfounded conclusion from well-known facts, that Iran’s nuclear program has a military dimension.”

“Since we have worked out collective sanctions at the UN Security Council, we must all follow the same line and not add or take away anything from this common position,” Lavrov underlined.

CHINA

Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao

[News Conference in Doha](#), January 20, 2012

“China adamantly opposes Iran developing and possessing nuclear weapons.

“I also want to clearly point out that China's oil trade with Iran is normal trade activity. Legitimate trade should be protected, otherwise the world economic order would fall into turmoil.”

TURKEY

Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu

[Department of State Treaty Room](#), February 13, 2012

“Iran must ensure that there will be no military dimension of their nuclear technology, but at the same time, the right of having peaceful nuclear technology should be given to all nations including Iran.”

JAPAN

Japanese Prime Minister Noda

[Barak's Japan Visit](#), February 15, 2012

Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda urged Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak on Wednesday not to resort to military action against Iran over its nuclear ambitions, according to Japanese Foreign Ministry officials.

Noda told Barak that such military action would be “extremely dangerous” and “escalate” the situation in the Middle East region, and called on Israel to resolve the matter in a diplomatic and peaceful manner, the officials said.