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**32 senators call for 'no containment' strategy for Iran**

Posted By [Josh Rogin](#) ■ Thursday, February 16, 2012 - 4:08 PM ■ [+](#) [Share](#)



A group of 32 senators from both parties unveiled a new Senate resolution Thursday that would establish the sense of the Congress that containing a nuclear Iran is not an option.

The **resolution**, which will be formally introduced later today, "strongly supports U.S. policy to prevent the Iranian government from acquiring a nuclear weapons capability and rejects any policy that would rely on efforts to 'contain' a nuclear weapons capable Iran," and "urges the president to reaffirm the unacceptability of an Iran with nuclear-weapons capability and oppose any policy that would rely on containment as an option in response to the Iranian nuclear threat."

A group of senators held a press conference Thursday on Capitol Hill to explain the thinking behind the resolution and reinforce its bipartisan character, including Sens. **Joe Lieberman** (I-CT), **Lindsey Graham** (R-SC), **Bob Casey** (D-PA), **Kelly Ayotte** (R-NH), **Robert Menendez** (D-NJ), **Chris Coons** (D-DE), and **Richard Blumenthal** (D-CT).

"There are so many things that we disagree on, but we found something we can be united about and I hope the American people will take comfort in the fact that Republican and Democratic senators are joining forces to stand behind **President Obama** on one very important issue," said Graham. "We

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Josh Rogin reports on national security and foreign policy from the Pentagon to Foggy Bottom, the White House to Embassy Row, for *The Cable*.

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agree with you and we have your back Mr. President. President Obama is absolutely right that it is absolutely unacceptable for the Iranian theocracy to obtain nuclear capability."

Lieberman emphasized that he doesn't want to foreclose diplomatic options, but said that if Obama decided to attack Iran's nuclear facilities, he would have strong bipartisan support in Congress.

"I know that containment might have been viable for the Soviet Union during the Cold War, but it's not going to work with the current fanatical Islamist regime in Tehran," said Lieberman, referring to Iran's sponsorship of international terrorism, its record of proliferation, and its statements calling for the destruction of Israel. He called containment of a nuclear Iran a "dangerous and deadly illusion."

Casey, the head of the Senate Foreign Relations Near East Subcommittee, said the resolution is meant to address what he sees as a lack of clarity as to American policy regarding the possibility of living with a nuclear Iran.

"[The resolution] makes it very clear that containment is not good enough, that containment is not a fallback position here. If we say we're going to prevent them from getting a nuclear weapon, we have to mean it," said Casey, adding that there needed to be a greater sense of urgency on the issue as well.

Ayotte referred to the Thursday morning testimony of Director of National Intelligence **James Clapper**, who told her that Iran represented a "grave threat" to U.S. national security and the security of U.S. allies.

Senators from both parties said Thursday that a diplomatic solution was still the goal and they believed the sanctions on Iran were working, but that a containment strategy was less preferable than a military strike on Iranian nuclear facilities if all else fails.

"This is a deadly serious moment," said Coons. "We hope for a peaceful, diplomatic resolution, but we are determined to stop Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapons capability."

The senators sought to present their resolution as perfectly in line with the administration's stance. "I'm not here to criticize the president... the only thing I would say is 'Do it faster if you can,'" said Graham.

What's not clear is what, exactly, would constitute Iran crossing the red line of achieving a "nuclear capability," in the eyes of the administration, or for that matter, in the eyes of the Congress.

"To me, nuclear weapons capability means that they are capable of breaking out and producing a nuclear weapon -- in other words, that they have all the components necessary to do that," Lieberman said. "It's a standard that is higher than saying 'The red line is when they actually have nuclear weapons.'"

The resolution itself currently has 16 Democratic sponsors and 16 Republican sponsors. Behind the scenes, there were intense negotiations over the language to create a resolution that was acceptable to the broadest range of senators.

Graham admitted that an earlier version had included a clause, later removed, that would have affirmed that the United States has the power and capability to prevent the government of Iran from acquiring a nuclear capability. That clause was removed in order to build a bipartisan consensus.

"This is not an authorization for military force... if military force is the option to be chosen, that is a debate for another day, that is another discussion," he said.

At the press conference, Graham showed poster-sized photos of an Iranian missile in a parade with the words "Israel must be uprooted and erased from history" written on it. He then showed another poster-sized photo of an Iranian banner saying, "Israel should be wiped out of the face of the world."

"They could work on their grammar, but we all get the message." Graham said. "What we're all

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saying in a bipartisan fashion that we don't want to contain or contend with a nuclear Iran because we think the whole world would go into darkness."

On Friday, EU High Representative **Catherine Ashton** will meet in Washington with Secretary of State **Hillary Clinton** to discuss **Iran's letter** proposing a new round of nuclear talks between Iran and the P5+1 countries, a letter that **Ashton has already said** does not contain enough new concessions to justify a new meeting.

At Thursday's State Department press briefing, spokeswoman **Victoria Nuland** said that a more formal response from all the P5+1 countries would be coming and that Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs **Wendy Sherman** had held two rounds of consultations about the letter.

"I don't expect we're going to have a formal reaction to the letter before early next week," said Nuland. "What we want to do is not only react to the words on the page, but be in agreement about what the implications are for the potential for diplomacy further on."

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2:39 AM ET  
February 17, 2012

**"Sens. Joe Lieberman (I-CT), "**

That stands for "Joe Lieberman (Israeli - Connecticut)", correct?

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