

*U.S. Senator Charles E. Schumer released the following statement Tuesday regarding the nomination of former Senator Chuck Hagel's nomination for Secretary of Defense:*

When Senator Hagel's name first surfaced as a potential nominee for Secretary of Defense, I had genuine concerns over certain aspects of his record on Israel and Iran. Once the President made his choice, however, I agreed to keep these reservations private until I had the opportunity to discuss them fully with Senator Hagel in person.

In a meeting Monday, Senator Hagel spent approximately 90 minutes addressing my concerns one by one. It was a very constructive session. Senator Hagel could not have been more forthcoming and sincere.

Based on several key assurances provided by Senator Hagel, I am currently prepared to vote for his confirmation. I encourage my Senate colleagues who have shared my previous concerns to also support him.

In our meeting Monday, Senator Hagel clarified a number of his past statements and positions and elaborated on several others.

On Iran, Senator Hagel rejected a strategy of containment and expressed the need to keep all options on the table in confronting that country. But he didn't stop there. In our conversation, Senator Hagel made a crystal-clear promise that he would do "whatever it takes" to stop Tehran from obtaining nuclear weapons, including

the use of military force. He said his “top priority” as Secretary of Defense would be the planning of military contingencies related to Iran. He added that he has already received a briefing from the Pentagon on this topic.

In terms of sanctions, past statements by Senator Hagel sowed concerns that he considered unilateral sanctions against Iran to be ineffective. In our meeting, however, Senator Hagel clarified that he “completely” supports President Obama’s current sanctions against Iran. He added that further unilateral sanctions against Iran could be effective and necessary.

On Hezbollah, Senator Hagel stressed that—withstanding any letters he refused to sign in the past—he has always considered the group to be a terrorist organization.

On Hamas, I asked Senator Hagel about a letter he signed in March 2009 urging President Obama to open direct talks with that group’s leaders. In response, Senator Hagel assured me that he today believes there should be no negotiations with Hamas, Hezbollah or any other terrorist group until they renounce violence and recognize Israel’s right to exist.

Senator Hagel volunteered that he has always supported Israel’s right to retaliate militarily in the face of terrorist attacks by Hezbollah or Hamas. He understood the predicament Israel is in when terrorist groups hide rocket launchers among civilian populations and stage attacks from there. He supported Israel’s right to defend herself even in those difficult circumstances.

In keeping with our promises to help equip Israel, Senator Hagel pledged to work towards the on-time delivery of the F-35 joint strike fighters to Israel, continue the cooperation between Israel and the U.S. on Iron Dome, and recommend to the President that we refuse to join in any NATO exercises if Turkey should continue to insist on excluding Israel from them. Senator Hagel believes Israel must maintain its Qualitative Military Edge.

Regarding his unfortunate use of the term “Jewish lobby” to refer to certain pro-Israel groups, Senator Hagel understands the sensitivity around such a loaded term and regrets saying it.

I know some will question whether Senator Hagel’s assurances are merely attempts to quiet critics as he seeks confirmation to this critical post. But I don’t think so. Senator Hagel realizes the situation in the Middle East has changed, with Israel in a dramatically more endangered position than it was even five years ago. His views are genuine, and reflect this new reality.

On issues related to female and LGBT service members, Senator Hagel provided key assurances as well. He said he is committed to implementing the Shaheen amendment to improve the reproductive health of military women. He also supports the full repeal of Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell.

In general, I believe any President deserves latitude in selecting his own advisors. While the Senate confirmation process must be allowed to run its course, it is my hope that Senator Hagel’s thorough explanations will remove any lingering controversy regarding his nomination.