



Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on May 25, 2010

## Paul Won't Rule Out Preemptive Strike on Iran

Since his stunning primary victory last Tuesday over the party establishment's candidate, Kentucky Secretary of State Trey Grayson, most of the media attention on Paul has been focused on his statements about a landmark Civil Rights Act passed 46 years ago. Considerably less attention has been given to the candidate's remarks about a war that could begin in the very near future.

"I do think Iran having nuclear weapons is a threat to the stability of the Middle East," Paul said in an interview with Bill O'Reilly on Fox News the day after his lopsided victory. "I think we should do everything possible to keep Iran from having nuclear weapons." O'Reilly then asked if he would be willing "to go the military route" if necessary.



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**Rand Paul:** Well, I think that, interestingly, I think Iran destabilizes the Middle East a little more now that Iraq has become a Shiite country. But the interesting thing about whether or not you want to use military force — recently, you know, President Obama took nuclear weapons off the table in certain circumstances and I think that's a mistake. I think it's reckless to take them out of the equation. But I think it's also equally reckless to say, well, if they get a nuclear weapon, I'll drop a nuclear weapon on Teheran. I think there is a certain uncertainty that is there from the unknown and throughout the Cold War we didn't announce what we would do in every circumstance.

**O'Reilly:** And I don't think we should.

**Rand Paul:** And that was part of the mutually assured...

**O'Reilly:** Okay, but if you take Sen. Bunning's seat, we know Sen. Bunning would have said: 'Look if you have to use military force against Iran to keep them from getting a nuke, do it. Bunning would have voted for that....

**Rand Paul:** I don't think you don't take it off the table.

**O'Reilly:** Okay so you're not going to say you're opposed to it.

**Rand Paul:** I don't think you preannounce what your strategy is in every military situation.

Wholly apart from the debatable aspects of "strategic ambiguity," Paul's comments seemed a little unusual, coming from one who often quotes Michael Scheur, the author of *Imperial Hubris*, and has spoken often of our overextended military. "Correct me if I'm wrong," wrote rightwing libertarian Justin Raimondo on [Antiwar.com](#), "but that sounds to me like he's in favor — given the right circumstances —



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of nuking Iran."

It does seem strange that Paul injected the idea of using nuclear weapons when O'Reilly had asked only in general terms about "military force" to prevent Iran from developing a nuclear weapon. And Paul went out of his way to criticize Obama for taking nuclear weapons "off the table." Yet the guidelines for the potential use of military weapons Obama announced last month would leave open the possibility of a first strike against Iran. The President has ruled out a nuclear strike against non-nuclear states that are in compliance with the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, even if they attacked the United States with chemical or biological weapons or launched a cyber attack. Yet Obama said he was making exceptions for "outlier states like Iran and North Korea."

During his primary campaign, Paul was the subject of attack ads based on statements he had made either in his own campaign or as a surrogate and spokesman for his father, Rep. Ron Paul of Texas, during the elder Paul's campaign for the 2008 Republican presidential nomination. In a question-and-answer session with the Bluegrass Policy Institute in March of last year, Paul praised his father as someone who, in discussing terrorist attacks on the United States, had the courage to "stand up and say, 'Maybe some of the bad things that have happened are a reaction to our presence in some of these countries with military troops.'" "Saying he didn't believe we need to have 175 bases in some 30 countries around the world, the younger Paul said, "We do have to change our foreign policy to be less expansive and more of a protection of our country."

While campaigning for his father in Burlington, Vermont, in October, 2007, Paul reminded his audience that the United States had "stared down" the Soviet Union with its nuclear arsenal for 40 years without a nuclear war. "Can't we stare down Iran if they develop one in ten years?" he said. He also described a growing desire for more freedom among Iranian dissidents and what the likely consequences of a military strike on Iran would be. "If we go in and bomb, you know, facilities, we're going to kill surrounding people — collateral damage, innocent lives. And what that does is turn their families and their relatives against us in the end and we end up creating more animosity towards us and maybe defeating the cause that could rise up and oppose the mullahs over there."

The Grayson campaign attempted to paint Paul as anti-American and even, ran ads juxtaposing Paul's statements with the rantings of Obama's former pastor, Rev. Jeremiah Wright, implying a similarity between them. Yet Paul won nearly 60 percent of the vote in a Republican primary in a conservative state that McCain carried handily two years ago. So why, at a time when the wheels appear to be coming off the grand old war wagon, is Paul now entertaining the possibility of a pre-emptive strike against Iran and insisting that the nuclear option not be taken "off the table"?

The idea is not new, of course, and it is not, as Raimondo described it, "something not even the wildest-eyed neocon has seriously proposed." In the latter days of the Bush-Cheney regime, there were reports that the administration was considering it. In the 2008 Democratic primary campaign, Hillary Clinton criticized Barack Obama for ruling out the use of nuclear weapons in Afghanistan and Pakistan. And in a debate among Republican presidential candidates at Saint Anselm College in Manchester, Wolf Blitzer of CNN asked the following question:

"If it came down to a preemptive U.S. strike against Iran's nuclear facility if necessary, would you authorize as president the use of tactical nuclear weapons?"

Mitt Romney, Rudy Giuliani, Duncan Hunter, and Gary Gilmore all said "yes." Only one candidate emphatically said "no."



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"What is the most pressing moral issue in the United States right now?" asked Congressman Ron Paul. He continued: "I think it is the acceptance just recently that we now promote preemptive war. I do not believe that's part of the American tradition. We, in the past, have always declared war in defense of our liberties or go to aid somebody. But now we have accepted the principle of preemptive war. We have rejected the just war theory of Christianity. And now, tonight, we hear that we're not even willing to remove from the table a preemptive nuclear strike against a country that has done no harm to us directly and is no threat to our national security. I mean, we have to come to our senses about this issue of war and preemption and go back to traditions and our Constitution and defend our liberties and defend our rights, but not to think that we can change the world by force of arms and to start wars."

Rand Paul has no doubt learned a lot from his father over the years. But to whom, we might ask, is he listening now?

*Photo: AP Images*



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