

CAMPAIGN FOR A NEW AMERICAN POLICY ON IRAN

The Campaign for a New American Policy on Iran is a trans-partisan coalition of advocacy organizations united in the belief that US diplomatic leadership is urgently required to resolve the current dispute with Iran. While serious concerns regarding the Government of Iran's statements and behavior persist, we believe America must pursue new, far-sighted and direct engagement in order to resolve outstanding tensions with Iran.

On election night in Grant Park, President-elect Obama told the world "a new dawn of American leadership is at hand." We welcome this new American leadership, and we look forward to a new US approach toward international relations.

The specific challenge of dealing with Iran is widely believed to be among the most critical foreign policy issues facing the United States today. After thirty years of sanctions, threats and isolation, the world is still no closer to a solution. It is time to make a change.

The Need for Change

- **In the coming months, President-elect Obama should announce a fundamental change in America's approach to Iran.**

The President-elect should abandon the policy aimed at isolating Iran and signal a willingness to engage with the current government in mutually respectful negotiations. He should replace inflammatory, threatening and derogatory rhetoric with a prudent strategy for reaching a bilateral solution. The foundation for a new approach to US-Iran relations should be based on good-faith negotiations and dialogue.

As recommended by the foremost group of Iran scholars in the *Joint Experts' Statement on Iran*, the US should allow Iran to take part in multilateral discussions regarding Iraq, Afghanistan and the region. Making Iran a stakeholder in issues of common concern will satisfy its demand for recognition as a regional power while offering Iran a choice between isolation from the rest of the international community and cooperation with it.

President-elect Obama said of his election: "This victory alone is not the change we seek - it is only the chance for us to make that change. And that cannot happen if we go back to the way things were." Dealing with Iran will require a reorientation of American policy away from the *status quo* of the last thirty years. We believe the President-elect should publicly embrace such a change and begin a new chapter in US-Iran relations commensurate with his vision for a new American foreign policy.

The following are our recommendations for the immediate next steps the President-elect should take regarding US policy on Iran.

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Next Steps

➤ **Open a US diplomatic interests section in Iran**

Opening a diplomatic outpost and facilitating the visa process will help reduce US-Iranian tensions through people-to-people exchanges and American public diplomacy. It will also send an important signal to the Iranian people that the US is serious about improving relations. It is critical, though, to manage such an overture properly. The State Department should manage expectations among visa applicants in order to avoid discontent with American consular protocol, and the administration should consider easing visa restrictions for Iranians wishing to travel to the United States. Finally, Washington should grant Iran's interests section in the US equivalent status to that of ours in Iran.

➤ **Appoint the right envoy for the job**

We welcome the plan to appoint a special envoy to Iran, and we encourage the President-elect to fill such a position promptly. The envoy should have direct access to the President, report directly to the Secretary of State, and be given the necessary latitude to obtain an agreement at the negotiating table. The President-elect should appoint a high-ranking diplomat with experience dealing with Iran and a commitment to obtaining a negotiated solution. Low-level talks should begin immediately, followed by engagement with the highest levels of the Iranian government, notably the Supreme Leader. It is also vital that talks with Iran be given enough time to succeed. Imposing artificial deadlines for talks to succeed is sure to doom diplomacy from the outset.

➤ **Tell Congress: no new sanctions**

Introducing new sanctions prior to negotiations is counterproductive and should be avoided. The President-elect should work with Congress to prevent the introduction of new sanctions measures while the administration begins to explore diplomatic avenues. Sanctions, along with divestment and other unilateral coercive measures, reduce the prospects for diplomacy and suggest America is not serious about engagement. The President-elect should encourage Congress to review the Iran sanctions already in place and assess whether their application effectively promotes America's objectives. American negotiators already have enough leverage to strike a deal with Iran; imposing further sanctions will only encourage Iran's intransigence.

➤ **End the "Democracy Fund" as we know it**

US support for human rights should be an integral part of all diplomatic initiatives with Iran. Unfortunately, the State Department's "Democracy Fund" has failed to aid the cause of democracy in Iran and instead has provided a pretext for increased repression and intimidation by government hardliners. The President-elect should work with Congress to end this failed program and replace it with proven alternatives such as people-to-people exchanges and public broadcasting. In order to promote democratic ideals such as freedom of the press, US Government broadcasting also must improve its credibility in the eyes of Iranian citizens. This requires a new commitment to journalistic integrity and reportorial objectivity, along with enough resources to ensure US broadcasting in Iran lives up to American ideals.

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3D Security Initiative
American Conservative Defense Alliance
American Friends Service Committee
Bill of Rights Foundation
Common Cause
Council for a Livable World
DownsizeDC.org, Inc.
Fellowship of Reconciliation
Friends Committee on National Legislation
Global Security Institute
International Civil Society Action Network
Just Foreign Policy
Mennonite Central Committee of the United States
National Iranian American Council
Open Society Policy Center
Pax Christi USA
Peace Action
Peace Action West
Physicians for Social Responsibility
Project on Middle East Democracy
The Leadership Conference of Women Religious
Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations
USA*Engage
Win Without War
Women's Action for a New Direction