

Americans for Peace Now

A MIDDLE EAST BLUEPRINT FOR THE FIRST 100 DAYS OF THE OBAMA ADMINISTRATION



President-elect Obama has the opportunity to open a new chapter in America's history. In this election, President-elect Obama received a clear mandate from America's voters – including 78% of American Jewish voters – to change course and re-establish U.S. engagement and leadership in the Middle East policy arena. In particular, he was given clear endorsement of his commitment to engage immediately in an effort to achieve Israeli-Palestinian peace, to support Israeli-Syrian peace negotiations, and to adopt a more pragmatic approach toward Iran, including the support – where possible – of direct engagement with Teheran.

His victory is thus a moment of powerful promise and hope for all who care about Israel, peace, and stability in the Middle East. It offers an end to the pattern of neglect, foot-dragging, and erratic, half-hearted engagement that characterized the Bush administration's approach. It provides the opportunity, at long last, to restore our nation's standing worldwide and to leverage America's recovered credibility toward the kind of robust peace efforts that can finally deliver Israeli-Palestinian and Israeli-Arab peace.

As the bipartisan Iraq Study Group observed in its report issued December 6, 2006: "The United States cannot achieve its goals in the Middle East unless it deals directly with the Arab-Israeli conflict and regional instability. There must be a renewed and sustained commitment by the United States to a comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace on all fronts: Lebanon, Syria, and President Bush's June 2002 commitment to a two-state solution for Israel and Palestine." Clearly, the Israeli-Palestinian and the Arab-Israeli conflicts are not the source of all problems in the region. At the same time, there is an undeniable connection between these festering conflicts and developments in other countries in the region. It is also evident that Israeli-Palestinian and Israeli-Arab peace are key U.S. national security interests, and that achieving peace will have an immense, positive impact on other U.S. goals in the region.

Americans for Peace Now – the leading American Jewish, Zionist organization dedicated to peace and security for Israel – urges President-elect Obama, immediately upon taking office, to begin to work to carry out this critically important mandate. We stand ready to support and offer advice to him and his administration in their efforts.

What an Obama Administration Can and Should Accomplish in the Middle East Policy Arena in Its First 100 Days

There will be many pressing issues and crises competing for President Obama's immediate attention when he takes office in January. The Middle East – the effort to achieve peace and stability in this vital region – must be among them. It deserves high priority and requires immediate, strategic action.

APN urges President Obama to take advantage of the rare window of opportunity his first 100 days in office present – a period during which the Middle East and the entire world will be looking to him to signal that real change is on the horizon. We urge him to use this period to set the tone for the coming four years – making clear that we have entered a new era characterized by serious, committed and credible U.S. engagement and leadership in the Middle East policy arena.

All those who care about the Middle East will be holding their breath, united in the collective hope that during this period President Obama will, by his actions and words, make it clear that he believes that “yes, we can” achieve Middle East peace, and that he will spare no effort to realize this long-cherished and long-denied goal.



Americans for Peace Now (APN) was established in 1981 to mobilize support for the Israeli peace movement, Shalom Achshav (Peace Now), and has since developed into the most prominent American Jewish, Zionist organization working to achieve a comprehensive political settlement to the Arab-Israeli conflict. **We are the leading voice of American Jews** who support Israel and know that only peace will ensure Israel's security, prosperity and continued viability as a Jewish, democratic state. Positions advocated for more than two decades by APN and Shalom Achshav – like calling for the evacuation of settlements and the creation of a viable Palestinian state – are now recognized by most American Jews and Israelis as basic requirements both for peace and for a secure future for Israel.

APN is a non-partisan organization with a non-partisan mission. We supply timely information and education, providing a pro-Israel, pro-peace, American Jewish perspective on issues and legislation. APN also engages in grassroots political activism and outreach to the American Jewish and Arab American communities, opinion leaders, university students and the public at large. We further promote our agenda through press releases, editorials and personal contacts with journalists, serving as a respected source of balanced information, analysis, and commentary.

The Israeli Peace Now movement, Shalom Achshav, was established in 1978, when 348 Israeli senior reserve army officers and combat soldiers came together to urge their government to sign a peace treaty with Egypt. They knew then what remains true today – real security for Israel can be achieved only through peace. In the years since its establishment Shalom Achshav has worked for the achievement of peace agreements between Israel and all her Arab neighbors, and has come to be recognized, both in Israel and abroad, as Israel's leading grassroots, Zionist movement. Best known for mobilizing mass demonstrations, for many years Shalom Achshav has also been the only group conducting comprehensive monitoring of Israeli settlement activity in the West Bank (and until recently, the Gaza Strip). Shalom Achshav is widely cited in the Israeli and international media as the foremost authority on settlements.



Priority 1: Present to the Public a Vision of Robust, Sustained and Credible U.S. Leadership to Achieve Peace

President-elect Obama should clearly articulate that peace between Israel and its neighbors is a key U.S. national security interest. By doing so, he will set the tone for the coming years, committing his administration to be a leader and a catalyst of Israeli-Arab negotiations. He will also send a signal to the region's leaders that failure to meet America's challenge and deliver on their obligations to support peace efforts will be viewed as failure to cooperate with a new, popular U.S. president, governing with a strong mandate. To this end, during his first 100 days in office, President Obama should:

General

- Define Israeli-Arab peace as a vital U.S. interest, and articulate a commitment to serious, sustained, high-level U.S. engagement and leadership in this arena.
- Articulate a clear foreign policy vision for the Middle East, including support for and commitment to seeking Israeli-Palestinian peace and Israeli-Syrian peace.
- Embrace the Arab peace initiative as an historic opportunity and a basis for negotiations that could lead to regional Israel-Arab peace.
- Directly address the people of the Middle East – Israeli and Arab – making clear his personal commitment to open a new and more promising chapter in U.S. Middle East policy, and challenging them to embrace hope and look for ways to promote a more constructive, secure and peaceful future for their region.
- Directly address Middle Eastern leaders – Israeli and Arab – challenging them to get past the animosities and mistrust of the past and look for ways, on their own and in cooperation, to build a better future for their people and the region.

Israeli-Palestinian Track

- Articulate a clear commitment to maintaining Israel's security and Israel's qualitative military edge, and support for ongoing U.S.-Israel security dialogue.
- Articulate his personal commitment to achieving Israeli-Palestinian peace, making clear that this is a key U.S. national interest and priority.
- Spell out his understanding of the grave repercussions for Israel's future as a Jewish, democratic state of failing to achieve a two-state solution.
- Enunciate support for the two-state solution, including mutually-acceptable solutions on Jerusalem and refugees.



- Make clear that the U.S. expects both sides to meet previously-made commitments under the Roadmap, including Palestinian commitments regarding violence and security, and Israeli commitments regarding settlements and outposts.
- Articulate America's commitment to a significantly improved Palestinian economic outlook, recognizing the efforts of Prime Minister Salam Fayyad and noting that economic progress is hindered by the continuing lack of freedom of movement and access.
- Make clear that progress on the Palestinian economic front, while desirable, is not an alternative to and should not be made an obstacle to Israeli-Palestinian engagement to achieve a negotiated peace agreement.
- Recognize that current U.S. policy has failed to weaken Hamas and may even have strengthened it; make clear that while the U.S. will continue to support moderate Palestinian leaders and will not directly engage Hamas, a Palestinian government with the legitimacy and capacity to enforce its will is a priority.
- Embrace efforts by third parties, including Egypt, to promote Palestinian reconciliation.
- Make clear that the U.S. will not seek to block efforts to create a Palestinian national unity government and that U.S. relations with any such government will be determined on the basis of the positions taken by that government and the strategic interests of the U.S., not on the basis of whether Hamas is included.

Syria Track

- Articulate unequivocal support for Israel-Syria talks.
- Make clear U.S. willingness to support and participate in such talks.
- Make clear that the past policy of non-engagement as a strategy toward Syria is over.
- Announce support for strong U.S. diplomatic engagement with Syria.

Iran

- Reiterate the U.S. goal of a nuclear weapons-free Iran.
- Articulate U.S. willingness to engage in direct talks with Iran without preconditions.
- Directly address Iranian leaders and elected officials, challenging them to abandon the hatred and mistrust of the past and, for the sake of their own people, embrace this opportunity to chart a new course in U.S.-Iranian relations.
- Directly address the Iranian people, laying out a vision for the kind of positive, mutually respectful relationship that can and should exist between Iranians and Americans.



Priority 2: Put People on the Ground, Invested with Presidential Mandates

President-elect Obama should demonstrate his seriousness about charting a new way forward in the Middle East by immediately naming senior envoys and officials, vested with his personal confidence and authority, to begin engaging energetically and creatively on all tracks. To this end, during his first 100 days in office, President Obama should:

Israel-Palestine

- Designate a high-ranking individual, respected and trusted by both Israelis and Palestinians, as the lead U.S. official responsible for the Israeli-Palestinian peace track.
- Vest this individual with the backing of the President and with real authority to hold Israelis, Palestinians, and other interlocutors accountable.
- Place any current and future U.S. missions on the ground (Lt. Gen. Keith Dayton and others) under the authority of this individual, streamlining accountability and oversight, and investing such missions with the clear backing of the White House.
- Recognize where current U.S. initiatives – like the mission of Lt. Gen. Dayton to build an effective Palestinian security capacity – are achieving success on the ground and re-commit to and expand such efforts.

Syria

- Immediately name an Ambassador to Syria and make Senate confirmation of this Ambassador a key priority.
- Name a senior U.S. envoy to take charge of the Israel-Syria track.
- Dispatch this individual immediately to the region, to meet with leaders in Israel, Syria, and other relevant countries (e.g., Turkey) and to facilitate and participate in direct Israel-Syria talks, to be held at the earliest possible date.

Iran

- Immediately appoint a high-ranking individual as the lead U.S. official dealing with Iran, vested with authority to begin reaching out to appropriate Iranian counterparts and ready to engage at the highest level once a decision is made to do so.

Regional

- Announce a new strategic dialogue with Egypt, led by a senior official, to strengthen the bilateral relationship, including the U.S.-Egypt aid program and U.S.-Egypt military cooperation, and to work with Egypt and Israel to address security challenges associated with the Gaza border.



- Call on the Secretary of State to appoint a senior U.S. liaison to the Arab League, charged with promoting further development and progress on the Arab peace initiative.
- Recognize the challenge Iraq refugees pose to countries in the region, particularly Jordan and Syria, and call for the establishment of an office in the Department of State charged with coordinating U.S. strategy to address the issue and U.S. assistance.

Priority 3: Galvanize International Support

International support and buy-in will be critical to the success of President-elect Obama's Middle East agenda. Now is the time to signal clearly and emphatically both that the U.S. is serious about its responsibilities and that the U.S. welcomes and desires cooperation and collaboration from regional parties and from members of the broader international community. To this end, during his first 100 days in office, President Obama should:

- Announce a plan to convene an international contact group, including members of the Quartet and key regional players, including Israel, Turkey, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia, to develop a broad, strategic approach to Middle East challenges and to coordinate various bilateral approaches and aid programs.
- Work with members of the Arab League to encourage and build upon their initiative for regional peace.

Priority 4: Embrace and Invest in Working-Level and People-to-People Engagement

At the popular level, the election of Barack Obama has sparked hope across the Middle East and around the world. Now is the time for President-elect Obama to reach out directly to the population of the Middle East, showing empathy for their fears and concerns and appreciation for their hopes, and making clear that the people of the United States, like people everywhere, want to find common ground, normal relations, and peace. To this end, during his first 100 days in office, President Obama should:

- Announce U.S. intention to work with Israel, Egypt, and the UN to improve the humanitarian situation in Gaza, including facilitating travel of Gazans for educational, medical, and business purposes.
- Announce the administration's intention to support new exchange programs with Iran, including parliamentary exchanges, cultural and education exchanges, and inter-religious dialogue.
- Provide a robust mandate for U.S.-sponsored development and bilateral cooperation programs in the Middle East, including those related to economic development, bolstering education and civil society, and supporting rule of law, democracy, and human rights.

THE MANDATE: OBAMA'S CAMPAIGN PROMISES ON THE MIDDLE EAST:

"...Across the political spectrum, Israelis understand that real security can only come through lasting peace. And that is why we – as friends of Israel – must resolve to do all we can to help Israel and its neighbors to achieve it. Because a secure, lasting peace is in Israel's national interest. It is in America's national interest. And it is in the interest of the Palestinian people and the Arab world. As President, I will work to help Israel achieve the goal of two states, a Jewish state of Israel and a Palestinian state, living side by side in peace and security. And I won't wait until the waning days of my presidency. I will take an active role, and make a personal commitment to do all I can to advance the cause of peace from the start of my Administration." (June 4, 2008)

"...Our job is to renew the United States' efforts to help Israel achieve peace with its neighbors while remaining vigilant against those who do not share this vision. Our job is to do more than lay out another road map; our job is to rebuild the road to real peace and lasting security throughout the region..." (March 2, 2007)

"...these are difficult times and it can be easy to lose hope. But we owe it to our sons and daughters, our mothers and fathers, and to all those who have fallen, to keep searching for peace and security -- even though it can seem distant. This search is in the best interests of Israel. It is in the best interests of the United States. It is in the best interests of all of us. We can and we should help Israelis and Palestinians both fulfill their national goals: two states living side by side in peace and security. Both the Israeli and Palestinian people have suffered from the failure to achieve this goal. The United States should leave no stone unturned in working to make that goal a reality...We must be partners - we must be active partners. Diplomacy in the Middle East cannot be done on the cheap. Diplomacy is measured by patience and effort. We cannot continue to have trips consisting of little more than photo-ops with little movement in between. Neither Israel nor the U.S. is served by this approach..." (March 2, 2007)

"...the U.S. has a special relationship with Israel that is both strategic and historical and cultural. Israel is a long-standing democracy, a powerful ally of the United States. There are a lot of connections between us that go back a long way. And I think that our willingness to ensure their survival is always going to be a central aspect of, of our Middle East policy. There's also no doubt that we have a huge strategic stake in bringing about a peaceful resolution to the conflict there. And the truth is the road map process that we're on, or the road map process that had been laid out starting in the Clinton term and continuing through the Bush administration, is basically a sound one. I think both sides acknowledge now that if there's going to be peace it's going to be centered on a two-state solution..." (March 11, 2007)

"...The lack of a resolution to this problem provides an excuse for anti-American militant jihadists to engage in inexcusable actions, and so we have a national-security interest in solving this, and I also believe that Israel has a security interest in solving this because I believe that the status quo is unsustainable. I am absolutely convinced of that...I want to solve the problem, and so my job in being a friend to Israel is partly to hold up a mirror and tell the truth and say if Israel is building settlements without any regard to the effects that this has on the peace process, then we're going to be stuck in the same status quo that we've been stuck in for decades now..." (May 12, 2008)

"...Israel is strong enough to achieve peace, if it has partners who are committed to the goal. Most Israelis and Palestinians want peace, and we must strengthen their hand. The United States must be a strong and consistent partner in this process – not to force concessions, but to help committed partners avoid stalemate and the kind of vacuums that are filled by violence. That's what I commit to do as President of the United States." (June 4, 2008)

"...the United States has a responsibility to support Israel's efforts to renew peace talks with the Syrians. We must never force Israel to the negotiating table, but neither should we ever block negotiations when Israel's leaders decide that they may serve Israeli interests. As President, I will do whatever I can to help Israel succeed in these negotiations..." (June 4, 2008)

"...I will do everything in my power to prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon. That starts with aggressive, principled diplomacy without self-defeating preconditions, but with a clear-eyed understanding of our interests. We have no time to waste. We cannot unconditionally rule out an approach that could prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon. We have tried limited, piecemeal talks while we outsource the sustained work to our European allies. It is time for the United States to lead..." (June 4, 2008)