

November 2, 2021

President Joseph R. Biden
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Biden,

Our organizations write with growing concern regarding the stalled negotiations aimed at restoring the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), or Iran nuclear deal.

It has long been apparent that the Trump administration's sabotage of the agreement helped empower those in Iran who argue that the U.S. cannot be trusted to honor any diplomatic agreement. Amid ongoing U.S. sanctions and separate sabotage and assassinations inside Iran, Iran has significantly advanced its nuclear program and elevated a new hardline Iranian Presidential administration that is deeply distrustful of the U.S. but also representative of Iran's decision making apparatus.

Recent suggestions that the U.S. should move on from diplomacy to a "Plan B," while hinting at the possibility of military strikes, are deeply concerning. Doubling down on the failed path of mutual pressure and recrimination will harm U.S. and regional security, weaken global nonproliferation efforts, undercut vital administration priorities like defeating COVID-19 across the globe and risk a disastrous war.

All diplomatic options must be on the table at this critical juncture to arrest this dangerous slide. Allowing the window to close on the JCPOA -- or a separate agreement that builds on its strong nonproliferation benefits -- would be a severe blow to U.S. national security interests. Ensuring the JCPOA does not die requires greater flexibility and creativity by all sides.

There are still diplomatic options available to the United States to change this course and overcome the challenges that Trump's abandonment of the JCPOA have wrought before it is too late. Salvaging the diplomatic path will require steps to overcome the profound distrust between the U.S. and Iran.

By matching your rhetoric on ending failed "maximum pressure" policies and taking humanitarian steps to ensure sanctions do not exacerbate the COVID-19 pandemic in Iran, your administration can discredit those within Iran who argue there are no differences between your administration and the Trump administration and are eager to match U.S. economic pressure with Iranian nuclear leverage.

These steps can and should be done through goodwill gestures directed at the people of Iran, to demonstrate America's sincerity in following through on its words and commitments and determination to open a new chapter in diplomacy. They would be in line with new recommendations from the Treasury Department calling for the "careful calibration" of sanctions to "limit the impact of sanctions on the flow of legitimate humanitarian aid to those in need."

These clear goodwill steps should include:

1) Ensuring that sanctions do not block Iran from securing vaccines, including by authorizing restricted Iranian assets to be made available to purchase vaccines, medical supplies and other humanitarian goods through discrete humanitarian channels; issuing comfort letters to vaccine manufacturers; and encouraging vaccines to be made available to distribution hubs that Iran can access.

2) Carving out sanctions relief for Iran's public health sector by reviewing sanctions designations from the prior administration and identifying Iranian financial institutions that can be delisted to facilitate humanitarian trade; ensuring that all sanctions on Iran have an explicit and enduring humanitarian exemption; and ensuring sanctioned countries like Iran are allowed to access financing for its public health sector through the international fund for global health security proposed by your administration.

3) Support the growing population of Afghan refugees in Iran by encouraging the EU to surge funding for charitable organizations operating on the ground in Iran and supporting their efforts by opening up a dedicated and functional humanitarian channel.

Bold action is needed now before it is too late. None of these measures are concessions to Iran's government and can be implemented such that any relief is purely humanitarian and beneficial to ordinary Iranians. Such steps will advance U.S. national security by creating momentum for negotiations while also bolstering global vaccination efforts and the campaign to defeat COVID-19.

These goodwill gestures will demonstrate U.S. seriousness and sincerity in reversing "maximum pressure" and should be communicated to Iran as such. Even if these measures do not break the deadlock in the negotiations, the U.S. will still have taken important steps to combat the pandemic, build goodwill with the Iranian people and demonstrate to the world and our partners the true values that inform U.S. foreign policy -- upholding our commitments and supporting a population as it suffers under a repressive government and global pandemic.

Any feasible diplomatic solution to the Iran nuclear crisis will ultimately require equitable compromise. For the U.S., this means a commitment to adhere to its sanctions relief obligations for as long as Iran is in compliance with the deal. But the steps above will best position your administration for success, both in its efforts to catalyze the diplomatic track, live up to American values and defeat COVID-19. We encourage your administration to follow through with bold, concrete steps to turn the page on the prior administration's failed approach and salvage the diplomatic pathway to resolving challenges with Iran.

Sincerely,

American Muslim Bar Association

Armenian-American Action Network

Christian Peacemaker Teams

CODEPINK

Coloradans for Middle East Diplomacy & Peace

Common Defense

Elmahaba Center

Episcopal Peace Fellowship

Freedom Forward

Friends Committee on National Legislation

Friends of Human Rights

Historians for Peace and Democracy

Interfaith Peace Network of WNY

Iowa Peace Network

J Street

Jewish Voice for Peace Action

Just Security

Justice for Muslims Collective

Justice is Global

MADRE

Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

Massachusetts Peace Action

Methodist Federation for Social Action

Miaan Group

MPower Change

National Arab American Women's Association

National Iranian American Council

New York Progressive Action Network (NYPAN)

Nonviolence International

Pax Christi USA

Peace Action

Peace Corps Iran Association

Ploughshares Fund

Presbyterian Church (USA)

Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft

ReThinking Foreign Policy

Revolutionary Love Project

RootsAction.org

Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia

The United Methodist Church - General Board of Church and Society

Tunisian United Network

Truman Center for National Policy

Win Without War

Women's Action for New Directions (WAND)

Women's March

Women Watch Afrika

World BEYOND War