

Sample Letter-to-the-Editor on Iran and Diplomacy

By Adam Gerhardstein, Acting Director of the UUA Washington Office for Advocacy

**Do not submit this in its current form. Components of this letter have already been posted to a blog.*

I have been listening to Senators McCain and Obama spar over whether they would have a diplomatic relationship with Iran, and if so, how “tough” that diplomacy would be.

The Iranian people did not pass a national declaration of animosity towards Israel, nor have they democratically chosen to pursue a nuclear program. Yet, Senator Obama mentioned in the last presidential debate that we may want to set up a blockade to prevent refined petroleum products from entering Iran. President Ahmadinejad might say deplorable things and ignore international dictates, but millions of Iranians depend on petroleum as much as we do. The Iranian people would be punished for their President’s behavior. For our own sake, I would not like to set that precedent.

Many have said that pursuing diplomacy with Iran legitimizes President Ahmadinejad outlandish proclamations and his worst policies. In place of diplomacy, they want to impose sanctions, blockades, and “keep all options on the table.” But ultimately, those “solutions” are isolating Iran and avoiding the issues at play.

Look, I know President Ahmadinejad is dangerous. I know that he condones and conducts huge violations of human rights. I know that there are many legitimate reasons that principled persons may not want to spend a minute of their lives in dialogue with this man. But for two powerful countries, in an ever shrinking world, to not be on speaking terms is too dangerous. Around 20-40% of the world’s oil supply passes through Iran’s territorial waters. Iran is supporting Hamas, Hezbollah, and insurgent groups in Iraq; and the U.S. is supporting rebel groups within Iran. Diplomacy is most important with your rivals and enemies. You do not need to negotiate with your friends.

If it were up to me I would only have one option on the table, diplomacy. All those other options - tougher sanctions, naval blockades, military incursions, or all out war – would be hidden under the table. Because the longer we fail to diplomatically engage with Iran without preconditions, the longer the issues between us will remain unaddressed. I am interested in peace and progress, and I believe diplomacy is the vehicle that will get us there.