**US to join advisory group once shunned**

(AP)

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WASHINGTON — U.S. officials say the Obama administration is preparing to join an international advisory group that the United States has largely shunned over fears it would adopt anti-Israeli and anti-Western stances.

The officials say the administration plans to announce soon it will begin a formal relationship with the Alliance of Civilizations.

The alliance is a United Nations-backed organization that seeks to ease strains between societies and cultures, particularly the West and Islam, and promote better ties. However, the U.S. boycotted the group when it was founded in 2005 over concerns it would become a forum for bashing Israel and the United States.

The officials say those concerns have now been addressed. They spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss the move publicly.