

Talk to Iran: Don't attack

From the Editors in the [June 17, 2008](#) issue

A report emerged from President Bush's visit to Israel saying that Bush told Israeli leaders he intends to launch a military strike against Iran before he leaves office. The president is reported to have said that Hezbollah's recent show of military strength in Lebanon proves that Iran's influence in the Middle East is growing and that "the disease must be treated—not the symptoms."

The White House denied that there is any truth to the report. We can only hope this is so. Suppose the U.S. were to strike Iran and knock out whatever nuclear program it has. It would postpone the Iranians' development of a weapon of mass destruction, but it certainly wouldn't end their pursuit of one. In fact, it would only strengthen their resolve to develop such a weapon. And Iran would likely retaliate by making life more miserable for U.S. forces in Iraq and Afghanistan. A strike against Iran would also harden the hold that radical Islamists have on the country and set back democratic reform for decades to come, leading to further clampdowns on pro-democracy activists and dissidents and more recruits for terrorist extremism.

Because a military strike would be disastrous and economic sanctions don't seem to be working, now is a logical time to open negotiations between the U.S. and Iran, much like the talks that the U.S. held with China in the 1970s. The first step would be to put on the table what each country's interests are and to identify mutual interests. And the two countries do have mutual interests: in a stable Iraq, a Taliban-free Afghanistan and a viable petroleum industry in Iran. Negotiations wouldn't be easy, of course—suspicions are high on both sides. The U.S. and Iran haven't had diplomatic relations since 1980, and since 1979 the U.S. hasn't even been training Persian-speaking diplomats. Negotiating with Iran would be entering uncharted territory.

Diplomacy offers no assured outcome. But one thing the U.S. should have learned from its misadventure in Iraq is that military interventions don't have assured outcomes either. Military efforts can exact an enormous price in human life and national treasure while unleashing new, uncontrollable forces of chaos. Now is the time to send a clear and unequivocal message to political leaders regarding an

attack on Iran: Don't do it. Not in our name, not with our tax dollars, and not with the lives of our men and women.