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## Snubbing Iran

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**Meetings that** were to have been held Friday over Iran's nuclear status between the "EU-3" (Germany, France, and the United Kingdom), the U.S., Russia and China have been postponed. It is no wonder that talks are in trouble. It's not just that the Iranians have rejected the latest European "carrots and sticks" proposal: U.S. ambassador to the U.N. John Bolton stated that the U.S. reserves the right to reject the proposal as well. The U.S. already rejects negotiating with the Iranians, either directly or by joining the Europeans at the table—a course of action former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright has recommended, as have European governments and U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan.

Why on earth would Iran accept a proposal when it knows the U.S. is waiting in the wings to up the ante? The EU "precursor" negotiations track is completely useless unless and until the U.S. joins for face-to-face comprehensive negotiations with the Iranians, including a discussion of security guarantees.

While serious negotiations are left in limbo, Iranian President Ahmadinejad is free to jet around the world, playing the hero to cheering anti-American crowds, most recently in Indonesia where his rabble-rousing undermined moderate Indonesian President Yudhoyono's efforts to tamp down Islamic radicalism. The longer the U.S. refuses to negotiate, the longer Iran will have to build up support. How is this good for our country? The U.S. ought to try and make Yudhoyono's job easier, not harder.

What's wrong with negotiating? Negotiations bore fruit with Libya's Moammar Gadhafi. It took eight years, but U.S.-Libyan relations are now normalized. There is no good reason not to join negotiations with Iran. What would be on the table? Iran has offered to let the U.N.'s nuclear arm, the IAEA, return to full inspections if the case is taken out of the Security Council and returned to the IAEA. Certainly Iranian behavior has fully justified suspicions of its intentions and a referral to the Security Council. Iran has not, however, renounced its membership in the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and, in fact, is in minimal compliance with its obligations as a member. Ahmadinejad has said that inspections may resume if the matter is taken out of the Security Council (where the U.S. is working towards a mandatory sanctions vote against Russian and Chinese opposition) and returned to the IAEA. There is no reason to reject discussion of such a proposal.

Bush, however, has undoubtedly not forgotten that IAEA head Mohamed ElBaradei defied him in Iraq. The IAEA may be ruled out as a solution for that reason alone. The issue of security guarantees will be on the table. Administration hawks, however, have already gotten \$75 million out of Congress to assist anti-regime forces inside and outside Iran. The U.S. has not renounced regime change in Iran; therefore it doesn't want to talk about security guarantees.

The administration does not want to defuse the situation. It can use the resulting standoff to hype further the Iranian danger. Iran's rejection of the EU offer will be billed as further proof of Iran's intentions to build a nuclear bomb. Ironically, the president may actually be drawing a lesson from his Iraq war. In Iraq he claimed there were actually existing weapons of mass destruction. His administration couldn't wiggle away from "failure" when that claim proved unambiguously false. If

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the administration plans to bomb Iran—and its unwillingness to negotiate is supportive of that conclusion—it is inoculated against “failure.” No one can prove Iranian intentions after the fact. Preemption doctrine moves father away from “imminent threat.”

Even Ahmadinejad’s freedom to build up anti-U.S. feeling—and who would have thought we could make Ahmadinejad look good—plays into the administration’s distorted reasoning. The administration will use his rhetoric to support its refusal to negotiate and bolster our case for mandatory sanctions. The administration rejected Ahmadinejad’s letter to President Bush offering to negotiate as insincere, referring to its insulting tone. Since when are negotiations limited to friendly interlocutors? We are negotiating with North Korea, in spite of ongoing inflammatory statements and documents.

The U.S. seems determined to set rhetorical parameters for its critics. Bush ended arms sales to Venezuela for not being “helpful” on terrorism—partly on the grounds of President Hugo Chavez’s anti-American rhetoric. Apparently, if you don’t support Bush you are soft on terrorism. The U.S. ratcheted up its own anti-Venezuelan rhetoric: the acting assistant secretary for arms control told a congressional committee the U.S. was “concerned” that Chavez wants to build a military “that can fight against the United States.” The administration will take statements by Ahmadinejad or Chavez as proof of hostile intentions to the U.S. and meet them with threats to take preemptive action—including military—on the basis of those asserted intentions.

The U.S. demands that its targets do what the U.S. says and only use language approved by the U.S. This is what passes for a security doctrine. This doctrine, as it has played out over Bush’s term in office, is fundamentally at odds with the peaceful resolution of conflicts.

Unilateralism, with its inevitable linkage to the threat or use of force, is at the heart of the administration’s refusal to negotiate. Such unilateralism cannot possibly enhance U.S. security or the security of others. By doing anything he can to avoid international negotiations, organizations, laws and customs, Bush is gaming the system—against U.S. interests.