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**U.S. would harm freedom by talking with sponsors of terror**  
**Lawrence J. Haas**

What's true in personal relationships is true in the global arena — talk has a seductive appeal. Why not talk? It seems harmless at worst, and it might produce something good, right?

Wrong. U.S. talks with Iran and Syria would give an American stamp of legitimacy to two outlaw regimes, rewarding their deadly behavior and their refusal to stop violating basic international norms — whether it's Iran's threat to wipe Israel off the map or Syria's refusal to respect the territorial integrity of Lebanon.

Talks also would send the wrong signal to three key audiences:

- First, U.S. allies in the region would worry that we do not recognize the dangers of a rising Iran that is seeking nuclear weapons.
- Second, activists in Iran and Syria who risk their lives to replace authoritarianism with democracy at home would worry that we have abandoned that goal.
- Third, the American people would lose sight of the key roles of Iran and Syria in fueling the global terror that threatens us.

Americans must understand that Iran and Syria are at war with the United States — Iran's leaders, after all, often proudly say so. They are run by outlaw regimes that provide critical funding, training, logistics and other support to terrorist groups with which we are doing battle.

The growing calls for Washington to talk to Tehran and Damascus are rooted in the belief that all three nations share key goals. Surely, we hear, Iran and Syria want a stable Iraq as much as we do, rather than one roiled by sectarian violence that could spill into their countries. Surely, they want a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian dispute that so poisons the region.

Surely not! Iran and Syria eventually may settle for stability in Iraq, but only after carving out their spheres of influence over the country. And they clearly do not want peace between Israelis and Palestinians, for they direct the terrorist groups that are sworn to Israel's destruction.

In Iraq, these outlaw nations provide critical support for terrorist groups that target U.S. soldiers, help fuel the insurgency that is bloodying all sides with increasing brutality, and destroy prospects for a democratic society that could inspire the peoples of Iran and Syria to create their own.

In Afghanistan, Iran provided explosives training to al-Qaeda in the 1990s and helped its members escape after the U.S. invasion that toppled the Taliban in the aftermath of September 11, 2001. Now, Iran is supporting a resurgent Taliban that is stepping up efforts to return to power, and it is recruiting suicide bombers to confront U.S. and European troops.

In Lebanon, Iran and Syria support the brazen efforts of Hezbollah, their key terrorist ally, to replace the U.S.-backed government through the pressure of street demonstrations and hard-ball parliamentary tactics. Rather than operate only from its base in southern Lebanon, Hezbollah seeks to control the nation at large, turning it all into a safe haven for terrorists.

The mayhem that Iran and Syria create in Iraq, Afghanistan and Lebanon serve their interests well, for it diverts global attention from what should be days of reckoning for Tehran and Damascus.

Tehran continues to ignore demands from the U.N. Security Council to stop enriching uranium, scrap efforts to develop nuclear weapons, and reopen nuclear sites to inspection. Damascus hopes to derail global efforts to investigate the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri, which could prove Syrian complicity at the highest levels.

Rather than talk with these regimes, the United States should rally the global community to raise the heat on them, making clear they must either abide by global norms or face growing isolation.

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LAWRENCE J. HAAS is visiting senior fellow at the Georgetown Public Policy Institute at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C.