



Mahmoudapalooza: The Good, the Bad and the Craven

Michelle Malkin

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When my children are grown, I can tell them where I was when blood-thirsty Iranian thug-in-chief Mahmoud Ahmadinejad dared to disgrace Columbia University with his presence. I was standing with Jewish leaders, Iranian-American dissidents, World War II veterans and other concerned citizens, young and old, taking a stand against evil outside the campus gates.

Banafsheh Zand-Bonazzi, an Iranian-born activist whose dissident journalist father is jailed in her homeland, was appalled at the ignorance and moral equivalence of the leftists who paraded in front of the TV cameras with their Bush-is-a-terrorist paraphernalia. A few goons held a large banner that read: "Ahmadinejad is bad. Bush is worse."

"It's not always about Bush," Zand-Bonazzi exclaimed after schooling the Ahmadinejad apologists and

pointing out fellow Iranian protesters holding signs memorializing persecuted and executed countrymen. The ANSWER mobsters, she fumed, "have their history wrong. They don't see the greater threat. They don't get it."

Rabbi Avi Weiss, a Jewish Orthodox leader from the Bronx, gets it. Standing amid a small but sturdy sea of "Hitler lives" and "Never forget" placards, Rabbi Weiss told me: "The First Amendment means you have the right to invite in the arch-terrorists of the world. It doesn't mean that you are obligated to do so — especially when this whole visit was initiated by the Iranian mission, and Iranian missions around the world are known to have fomented and orchestrated in the communities where they are." Instead of being feted, Rabbi Weiss said, "this man, who is responsible for contributing to the killing of American troops in

Iraq, should be served with papers and hauled into court."

Several anti-Ahmadinejad protesters expressed disappointment that a larger crowd had not turned out in New York City. I concur. Ahmadinejad's nuclear ambitions, Mahdi devotion, Jew hatred, Holocaust denial, human rights repression and American troop-murdering machinery threaten us all. Not just Jews. Not just persecuted Persian activists. Not just military families.

Immediately before landing in the Big Apple, the Iranian madman was grandmaster of a military parade in Tehran punctuated with "Death to America" and "Death to Israel" posters.

Newsflash: It's not an either/or death wish.

Lost in the debate over the Columbia "debate" are the jumbo-sized jihadi dots connecting Iran to global Islamic terrorism, including 9/11. The 9/11 Commission Report stated in a section on Iran and the 1996 Khobar Towers bombing that "the evidence of Iranian involvement is strong."

On Iran and al Qaeda partnerships, the report concluded, "there is strong evidence that Iran facilitated the transit of al Qaeda members into and out of Afghanistan before 9/11, and that some of these were future 9/11 hijackers. There also is circumstantial evidence that senior Hezbollah operatives were closely tracking the travel of some of these future

muscle hijackers into Iran in November 2000."

The report said of Iran training al Qaeda that "In late 1991 or 1992, discussions in Sudan between al Qaeda and Iranian operatives led to an informal agreement to cooperate in providing support — even if only training — for actions carried out primarily against Israel and the United States. Not long afterward, senior al Qaeda operatives and trainers traveled to Iran to receive training in explosives . . . The relationship between al Qaeda and Iran demonstrated that Sunni-Shia divisions did not necessarily pose an insurmountable barrier to cooperation in terrorist operations."

You won't be surprised, then, to learn that the weekend before Mahmoud arrived at Columbia, foreign ministers of Iran and Saudi Arabia met to "stress the need for unity among world Muslims, and called for vigilance in the face of plots hatched by enemies to sow discord among the Shiite and Sunnite Muslims." No, it didn't come up in the "debate."

On my train ride home from Mahmoudapalooza, I spoke briefly with a Columbia University grad steeped in the Ivy League haze of non-judgment. She was upset and embarrassed — not by Columbia president Lee Bollinger's bone-headed decision to legitimize Ahmadinejad at its World Leaders Forum. No, she was mortified that Bollinger had delivered his face-saving introduction challenging Ahmadinejad.

With childlike naivete, this Columbia alum told me: "I'm frightened by the polarity." Which about sums up the majority view of academia and the Ahmadinejad excusers on the

left: They are more afraid of standing up and calling out evil than losing the West, their country and their own lives to it.

Michelle Malkin is a syndicated columnist and maintains her weblog at michellemalkin.com. She has also authored books such as [Unhinged](#) and [In Defense of Internment](#).

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