



Propaganda Coup

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While people of good will and good intentions argue over whether it was right or wrong or neither to allow Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to take the dais at Columbia University, I have a simple way to resolve the debate: Just look at the news and tally up how many times Ahmadinejad is mentioned. What you will find is that Iran's smirking strongman is, quite literally, everywhere.

With a hint of admiration, The New York Times tells us, "President of Iran Is Defiant to His Critics." Time magazine enlightens us as to "Why Ahmadinejad Loves New York." Newshour details how "Ahmadinejad Lashes Out at Israel." Evoking comparisons to a U.S. presidential campaign, Newsday cheers, "Iranian Prez Comes out Swinging", while Newsweek's website offers an

understated headline: "President Ahmadinejad Goes to Columbia."

There's more of the same at Le Monde, The Guardian, the BBC, The International Herald Tribune and others. Ahmadinejad is called defiant and controversial and mad. But no matter what he is labeled, he is the center of discussion and attention. He is the top story. He is setting the terms of debate. His positions are adjacent to that of Washington and London and Tokyo and other legitimate governments.

All of which means it has been a very successful trip for Ahmadinejad. And by that measure, it's hard to see how giving him a platform was the right thing to do.

If, as Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice concluded, it "would have been

a travesty” to allow Ahmadinejad to visit Ground Zero, how is it any different to allow this state sponsor of terrorism to visit a city that was maimed by terrorism? For that matter, why should he be allowed in the country at all? Leaving the door open for his diplomats to travel to and from the UN is one thing; it’s quite another to welcome the leader of a regime that bankrolls Hezbollah, harbors members of al Qaeda, and arms and trains terrorists who are killing American soldiers and Marines.

Such a visit would have been simply unimaginable in those distant days when Washington consigned Iran to an “axis of evil,” when America changed the rules of the game and put the world on notice that trafficking in terror was a death sentence for regimes like the Taliban’s Afghanistan, Saddam’s Iraq, Assad’s Syria and the mullahs’ Iran.

Even if America’s sons were not being killed by Ahmadinejad’s terrorists, the United States had plenty of reasons to deny his visa. Just pick one: Ahmadinejad’s Hezbollah henchmen are fomenting wars in Lebanon and Israel. Ahmadinejad’s denials about what might one day be called the first holocaust are shocking, and his apparent desire to carry out another is terrifying. Toward that unspeakable end, Ahmadinejad’s scientists are building a subterranean nuclear arsenal, in open defiance of the UN.

Numbed by decades of moral relativism and seduced by the myth that all people want peace, those who

invited Ahmadinejad to speak at Columbia University may think that they opened a dialogue or exchanged ideas. But there was no dialogue or exchange during Ahmadinejad’s visit. The Columbia faculty and student body may be open-minded, but they didn’t persuade Ahmadinejad of anything—because he wasn’t there to listen. He was there to spew his ideas and defend his regime. And it appears he succeeded. After all, he was actually interrupted by applause. He couldn’t have asked for better props.

The sad episode calls to mind something FDR said in the midst of another war. “As a nation, we may take pride in the fact that we are softhearted,” he explained. “But we cannot afford to be soft-headed.”

Indeed, offering a propaganda platform to one of our fiercest, most formidable enemies does us no good in this war. Back in Iran, the state-controlled propaganda machine will use the Columbia lecture to highlight America’s divisions, to bolster Ahmadinejad’s international legitimacy and standing, to reiterate that it is Ahmadinejad and his puppet masters who raise Iran’s prestige and position, and to underscore to the beleaguered Iranian people that the regime is in charge.

History proves, time and again, that men such as Ahmadinejad and regimes such as the one he leads cannot be reasoned or negotiated or dialogued into civilized behavior. They have to be confronted and defeated—sometimes by threat of

arms, sometimes by force of arms.
The academics may not understand
this. But the authors of the Bush

Doctrine do—at least they did, once
upon a time.

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