

visit is to address the United Nations General Assembly, but Ahmadi-Nejad will have accomplished much more than that by the time he leaves. By opening its gates to this man's hateful ideology, Columbia University is allowing him to take full advantage of a golden opportunity to spread it and giving it a level of deference it, frankly, does not deserve.

It is one thing for a foreign leader, even one as disreputable as Ahmadi-Nejad, to visit the U.N. and remain confined to the grounds of the U.N. As a head of state, he is legally entitled to visit the United Nations. It is quite another to give a man who has referred to the United States as the "Great Satan" and who denies the Holocaust a coveted platform from which to speak.

Let's consider for a minute what Iran has said and done during his Presidency. Iran actively supports militias that undermine the rule of law and export weapons that are killing our U.S. soldiers and marines in Iraq. Iran is actively pursuing a nuclear program that puts it on a path toward possessing nuclear weapons. Iran is a state sponsor of terror. Iran supports proxies that are undercutting attempts to bring peace, reconciliation, and democracy to Lebanon. Ahmadi-Nejad has called for Israel, one of America's closest allies, to be wiped off the map. Iran supports proxies in Syria and Gaza that are actively trying to goad Israel into war and undercutting the efforts to facilitate peace between Israel and the Palestinians. Ahmadi-Nejad has denied that the Holocaust ever took place, calling it a myth. He even hosted a convention of Holocaust deniers.

It is hard to imagine any nation on earth that threatens U.S. interests and those of its allies much more than Iran. It is equally hard to imagine any greater American university of generations past inviting a world leader to its campus who supported groups that kill U.S. soldiers and marines. Think of the irony: Columbia University, home of the core curriculum that prizes an in-depth understanding of Western civilization and the free exchange of ideas, is bringing to its campus a state sponsor of terror. A school that rejected the ROTC in 2005 on the grounds that the "don't ask, don't tell" policy discriminated against gays now welcomes a man whose government reportedly executes them.

Whether Mahmud Ahmadi-Nejad should be speaking at Columbia should not be the subject of a philosophical debate. He already rejected that debate by leading a regime which has chosen terrorism over reason and open dialog. Under Ahmadi-Nejad, the Iranian regime trains, funds, and exports terror. Defense Department sources tell us that explosively formed penetrators, the most lethal form of improvised explosive devices used against our forces in Iraq, are being manufactured in Iran.

I was heartened to see some common sense was injected into the Iranian

leader's visit when the New York City Police Department denied his request to visit Ground Zero and lay a wreath. Looking at Ahmadi-Nejad's record on terror, one wonders whether the wreath was meant to honor the victims of the World Trade Center attacks or its perpetrators.

I support the administration's approach to the Iranian nuclear program. Active diplomacy and ratcheting up international sanctions are, at this point, the best path forward. That said, diplomacy is only as effective as the credibility and potential force backing it up. The President, as Commander in Chief, is correct to preserve a broad spectrum of policy options in confronting the Iranian threat.

Some groups on the left, such as MoveOn.org, believe we should take military options off the table, then negotiate. Such an approach might make sense to the zealots on the far left, but it will not help us in our efforts to slow Iran's nuclear program. Why would Iran take us seriously if we negotiate with all carrots and no sticks? Why would they take us seriously when their hateful screeds against us and our allies are met with an invitation to join polite society's lecture circuit?

I will close by saying that I strongly support free speech. Free speech is a hallmark of democracy, a right not afforded by Ahmadi-Nejad to his own people. There is a world of difference between not preventing Ahmadi-Nejad from speaking and handing a megalomaniac a megaphone and a stage to use it.

I yield the floor.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, there will now be a period for the transaction of morning business for 60 minutes until the hour of 3:10 p.m., with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each, with the time equally divided between the two leaders or their designees, with the majority controlling the first half and Senator BYRD recognized for 25 minutes of the majority's time and the Republicans controlling the final portion.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from West Virginia is recognized.

IRAQ

Mr. BYRD. Mr. President, a few days ago, Congress and the American public were treated to a sales job on Iraq that would have made any used car salesman proud. We heard the half-truths and rosy visions put forth by authoritative diplomats in dark suits and rib-

boned and starred generals in uniform, topped off by the pomp and circumstance of a well-rehearsed Oval Office speech. Visions were painted for us of a peaceful and prosperous oasis of democracy and stability in the turbulent geography of the Middle East, if only—and only if—our gallant soldiers stayed for just a little while longer to bring the dream to reality. Such a grand vision, of course, produced yet another new Bush administration slogan, "return on success," which fits very nicely on a bumper sticker for the back of the lemon this team of salesmen is trying to peddle.

Like any good used car salesman, the President insists that we take him up on his once-in-a-lifetime good deal, just as he has insisted, each and every time, that he needs a little more time for his war in Iraq. If we don't buy in once again, Iraq will descend into chaos, militias will commence with ethnic cleansing, terrorists will set up complexes from which to launch attacks on the United States, and Iran or Syria, or both, will develop nuclear weapons and invade Iraq on their way to Israel.

Mr. President, I suggest that we stop and take a little time to consider this offer, consider what was said and what was not said. It is long past time to lift the hood and kick the tires.

President Bush said in his speech that things were going so well in Iraq that the extra troops needed for the surge could begin returning home, as long as conditions continued to improve. In the only time line that he laid out, the President suggested that, subject to his fine print, the number of U.S. troops in Iraq might be reduced to 137,000 by July 2008. While that is certainly welcome news, it carefully neglects to mention that this reduction would still leave 7,000 more troops in Iraq than were present before the so-called "temporary surge" began in February 2007. Frankly, that is not much of a drawdown, given all the so-called "progress" in Iraq cited by the President.

The President said in 2003, "Mission accomplished." Now the President says that in December, it will be time to "transition to the next phase of our strategy in Iraq." the President said, and I quote, "As terrorists are defeated, civil society takes root, and the Iraqis assume more control over their own security, our mission in Iraq will evolve. Over time, our troops will shift from leading operations, to partnering with Iraqi forces, and eventually to overwatching those forces."

In 2003, over 4 years ago, when U.S. forces overthrew the regime of Saddam Hussein, there was supposed to be a rapid transition to a new civil government in Iraq. In all the years since the invasion, civil society has not yet put down strong roots despite our efforts. By every assessment and every benchmark, it is not happening now, either. The Iraqi central government is nowhere near achieving reconciliation,