

Exclusive: Middle Eastern Americans Virulently Oppose Ahmadinejad's Visit

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Recently, we sat down with a distinguished group of Middle Eastern experts to ask specific questions related to Ahmadinejad's visit to the UN and Columbia University. Here, they give a voice to most Americans from both parties, and all backgrounds, regarding the dreaded Iranian threat.

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The participants of the discussion were:

Banafsheh Zand-Bonazzi, Iranian American activist

Farid Ghadri, President of the Syrian Reform Party

Tom Harb, Secretary General, World Council of the Cedars Revolution (WCCR)

Dr. Zuhdi Jasser, President, American Islamic Forum for Democracy

Dr. Katrin Mikhael, Iraqi American activist

Nonie Darwish, author, "Now They Call Me Infidel: Why I Renounced Jihad for America, Israel and the War on Terror"

Cliff May, President of the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies

Carol Taber, President, FamilySecurityMatters.org

Dr. Walid Phares, director of Future Terrorism Project at the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies, and the author of "The War of Ideas: Jihadism against Democracy";

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Dr. Walid Phares, FSM's Contributing Editor and Terrorism Expert, had a chance to read the forum discussion and to comment on it below.

Carol Taber: Tell us, if you will, Dr. Phares, what are your thoughts after reading our discussion of Ahmadinejad's visit to the UN and Columbia University?

Dr. Walid Phares: The visit by Iran's President, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, to the United Nations opened the opportunity for Middle Eastern American leaders and activists to express their opinion to you regarding not only his UN appearance, but also the bizarre invitation extended by an Ivy League institution, Columbia University, to a leader of a regime responsible for massacres, terrorism and nuclear threat. If I could title the discussion, it would be "Betraying Democracy at Columbia".

When I read the forum conversation before it was published, I realized that, when put together, one gets a different picture from the one usually projected by some parts of the mainstream media and most parts of Middle Eastern studies scholarship in the US. Unanimously, the American Middle Eastern leaders consulted rejected Ahmadinejad's visit to the UN on the grounds of his regime's involvement in oppression inside Iran, and of backing and sponsoring terrorism in Afghanistan, Iraq, Palestine and Lebanon. The statements made by these Americans from Iranian, Syrian, Lebanese and Palestinian background, as well as the statements by Dr. Zuhdi Jasser of the American Islamic Forum for Democracy and the answers of the President of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies in Washington, Cliff May, show clearly that ethnic, religious and democracy groups based in the US and dealing with human rights in the Middle East oppose dictatorships, totalitarian regimes and Jihadi terrorism. Unlike what "mainstream" academia says and Wahhabi-supported lobbying groups pretend, a majority of the 5 to 6 million Middle Eastern Americans, including particularly Iranian-Americans, oppose Ahmadinejad's policies and endorse US containment of his regime.

From the discussion, one can see clearly that the Columbia University decision to invite Ahmadinejad to a prestigious

podium in America is the product of an intense lobbying effort by Iranian oil interests that has penetrated the intellectual sanctity of American campuses. This invitation won't change much the regime's standing, which will continue to behave as fascist and terrorist per the testimonies of dissidents and opposition groups, but it will change the perception by more Americans of the role of some elite schools in this country. Such a moral disaster will increase the ability of US citizens to see clearly how oil regimes, Wahhabists and Khomeinists have been successful in penetrating the educational fortresses of America. For the arguments presented by the University about "freedom of thought and expression" do not fool an increasingly aware public.

Columbia University wouldn't have accepted inviting Chilean dictator Pinochet to express his "views," on the vanishing of 30,000 persons; nor would the Ivy League institution invited Milosevich, or Haiti's Papa Doc to share their "analysis" of world events. Why? They don't have Petrodollars. Maybe Columbia is jealous of Harvard and Georgetown who received a few months ago a combined \$40 million from Wahhabi emirs.

Will a good \$40 million from Iran's oil dividend soon be used to buy Columbia's chair to teach the social work of the Pasdaran and security studies by Hezbollah? Who knows? For by inviting a leader who sends money to terrorists in Iraq, Lebanon and Gaza and who endorses killings in Buenos Aires, and who wants to eliminate entire nations with nuclear weapons, and who wants to "educate" the American public, is a chilling reminder of July 2006, when Harvard invited "Taliban scholars" to "educate the American public as to their achievements."

One of their achievements was the massacre of 3,000 Americans, some of whom were Harvard graduates. In fact, Ahmadinejad's security services are now - as we speak - training cells to kill Americans and others, and among them may be some who were educated at Columbia.

The University's leadership is dipping its hands in promoting past, current and future commanders of killers of American citizens. This is what historians will write years from now, and this is what the next generations of Columbia's classrooms will study.

The below statements to Family Security Matters are clear answers to questions raised by many Americans and citizens of the world: how can a political culture pretending a defense of democracy "betray" its principles in such a fashion? As I heard it from a student yesterday, indeed, had she had the money she would have published a full ad page in the same New York Times with this title: "Columbia Betrays Us".

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And now, on to the forum.

Carol Taber (CT): Let's open with this question, and I'd like each of you to comment on it and express your point of view.

CT: How do you view the visit of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to New York?

Banafsheh Zand-Bonazzi (BZ), Iranian American activist: I believe that Ahmadinejad going to the U.N. is a good thing in that it allows him to be viewed in comparison and in contrast to the rest of the world's leadership. He and all the rest of the Islamic regime's authorities, from Khatami to the various U.N. reps to the Iranian permanent mission have used the U.N. as a place to manipulate other member nations and to use that "diplomatic" venue to further spread the regime-orchestrated lies and schemes, but their initiatives have back-fired on numerous occasions and exposed to the world the real nature of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Farid Ghadri (FG), President of the Syrian Reform Party: Though there is an agreement between the UN and the US that any invitee by the UN shall receive an entry visa into the United States, I believe it is time to update this agreement whereby people who call upon the destruction of other people or other countries are prohibited from entering the US. Ahmadinejad's visit makes a mockery of international law.

Tom Harb (TH), Secretary General, World Council of the Cedars Revolution (WCCR): As long as the Iranian regime supports terrorism in Afghanistan, Iraq, Hamas in Gaza and Lebanon (Hezbollah), the free world should not allow Ahmadinejad to enter the UN. The UN charter is based on respect for human rights and the Iranian regime is defying each one and challenging democracy throughout the world.

Dr. Katrin Mikhael (KM), Iraqi American activist: Maybe it is better to listen to him so that the public in America realizes that he is a fascist and an oppressor. Many Iranians think that he is a "stupid" politician but I think that he is the representative of the real power in Iran, the Mullahs.

Dr. Zuhdi Jasser (ZJ), President, American Islamic Forum for Democracy: Whether feeding international terrorism, suffocating domestic dissidents, or spreading global militant Islamism, the fascist President of Iran is arguably the world's greatest threat to freedom and security. It is disgraceful for any American even to consider providing an

invitation to President Ahmadinejad of Iran. We dishonor all the victims of terror who have suffered from Ahmadinejad's policies of exporting terror into every corner of the world including Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, and the west.

Nonie Darwish (ND), author, "Now They Call Me Infidel; Why I Renounced Jihad for America, Israel and the War on Terror". This is his golden opportunity to play games with US political divisions and appear reasonable and moderate to gullible Americans. He will also play to the Muslim world as being heroic to dare insult Bush while on American soil.

Cliff May (CM), President of the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies: It's an outrage. This is a man who leads a regime that, every day, murders Americans, a regime that has expressed clearly genocidal intent. If the U.N. had a shred of integrity it would tell him he is not welcome to appear in its halls.

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CT: How do you view his visit to Columbia University?

BZ: The event would have not been possible without the controlled and focused efforts of the well known Tehran advocate Dr. Gary Sick, an influential figure in Columbia. In the past two decades Dr. Sick has been a tenacious activist in advancing the interests of Iranian Ayatollahs. His dossier of friendship with Tehran includes positions such as the directorship of the Gulf 2000 Project established in 1993 in the School of International and Public Affairs at Columbia University. This project is mainly financed by the oil industry and is focused in engaging Tehran.

This is also not the first time that Columbia University, in its on-going and audacious intellectual dishonesty, has taken steps to promote the Islamo-Imperialist authorities of Tehran's regime. A panel discussion on "Dialogue among Civilizations, a New Paradigm" was held on May 6th, 1999, at Columbia which was sponsored by the Islamic Republic of Iran in collaboration with the University's School of International and Public Affairs. Mullah Mohammad Khatami who has from the beginning falsified facts and misappropriated the idea as his own and gone on actively to conceal the real provenance of that concept. The Dialogue Among Civilizations initiative had been conceived in 1976 by Farah Pahlavi, the Empress of Iran, and a letter to that effect was in fact submitted to the U.N.'s Secretary General, Kofi Anan, clarifying the conceptual origins of such an effort.

What is most absurd and disconcerting is that Ahmadinejad and Khatami, who are both so sought after by some of these academic institutions and treated with such pomp and circumstance, are the very men who brutally expelled, arrested, imprisoned, tortured (and in some cases even killed) innocent Iranian University students who dared to speak out and disagree with them and the Islamic regime's rule. Columbia University's message to the Iranian student movement therefore is that they are regarded coldly as nothing but mere statistics.

FG: I believe that the leadership at Columbia University will live to regret this invitation. There is a difference between inviting someone with whom we differ politically and inviting someone who is calling for another Holocaust or building his nation's foreign policy around the idea of genocidal denouements.

TH: There is a difference between freedom of speech that we respect and which should be granted to all those who respect humanity, and fascism and terrorism, practiced by someone like Ahmadinejad. To allow him to seize a podium to promote his own ideology of terrorism is encouraging terror. Columbia alumni should cease sending checks to the university at this time. Ahmadinejad should visit the Darfur refugees and give a speech over there.

KM: Ahmadinejad's regime is intervening in Iraq and causing terrorism and violence. He is obstructing the political process and has become a danger to Iraqi democracy.

ZJ: Most importantly, if we learn anything from history and human nature, we learn that fascists do not respond to diplomacy and debate. Rather, such invitations and acceptance serve only to appease fascists like Ahmadinejad with further reinforcement of the behavior which got him there in the first place. To invite and accept evil is to condone evil. And to dishonor all those he oppresses. It is the summit of hypocrisy that a supposed institution of higher learning like Columbia University which portrays itself as being liberal would allow itself to stoop to the level of a thug like Ahmadinejad who betrays women's rights, gay rights, and the rights of dissidents and all Iranian citizens.

ND: I see his Columbia visit as an opportunity for Bush haters and the blame America first crowd to have a love fest. Even though his regime stones and flogs women, I don't hear any protests against his visit from any feminist groups.

CM: Columbia's hypocrisy is stunning. The head of a hostile regime -- a regime whose rallying cry is "Death to America" -- is welcomed on their campus. But ROTC -- which educates Americans to defend their country -- is banned from that campus. This is indefensible..

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CT: How do you view the Iranian nuclear threat? .

BZ: The nuclear threat of the Islamic regime is very real though it was not something that was on Khomeini's agenda from the beginning. Approximately a year ago, Ali-Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, himself publicly disclosed two letters that were in his possession that clearly divulge the Islamic regime's absolute intention to obtain nuclear weapons. Rafsanjani served as president of the Islamic regime from 1989 to 1997. The two letters were written in 1988 when he was the Speaker of the Majlis (parliament) as well as commander-in-chief of the armed forces (acting on behalf of Khomeini). They represent a correspondence between Revolutionary Guard Mohsen Rezai, the commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, and Khomeini himself. In the letters Rezai requests that Khomeini endorse new weaponry so that the Islamic regime can accomplish several goals, one of which included defeating Saddam Hussein and establishing a Khomeinist regime in Baghdad, then moving on to "liberate" Jerusalem and wiping Israel off the map. Rezai asked for 300 new fighter-bombers, 2,500 tanks, 300 attack helicopters, as well as laser-guided missiles capable of carrying nuclear warheads. Khomeini endorsed Rezai's request. Therefore, Ahmadinejad and the rest of the Islamic regime's authorities' denial of the Islamic regime's intention to obtain nuclear weapons is considered Taqiyeh, which is the duty of every faithful Muslim. Taqiyeh is the art of sanctioned lying and dissimulation in order to protect and promote the faith and advance a hidden agenda. Lying and dissimulation therefore is considered a lesser sin than not protecting and promoting the interest of Shiitism.

FG: Very real and very scary.

TH: If the Iranians get a hold of a nuclear weapon, then the entire Middle East landscape will change within 20 years and radicals will be winning (extremists from both sides, Shiites and Sunnis) will get together to achieve their goals against the region's peoples and the West before they go back and settle among themselves.

KM: The Iranian nuclear system is a threat to the entire world because the Iranian regime is smarter, and more dangerous, than Saddam's.

ZJ: The Iranian nuclear threat cannot be ignored. It is real. Not only has Ahmadinejad continually voiced a hatred for America, Israel and the West, but he has also voiced military threats to the state of Israel while also hosting a Holocaust denial conference. Such evil must be taken seriously and we must not allow President Ahmadinejad to achieve nuclear weaponry which in his hands will become an even more frightening tool of oppression, both outside and inside Iran. His state theologians have condoned suicide bombing as a means necessary to achieve an ends in Israel and the West. It is not far-fetched for this fascistic Islamist to justify in his mind state suicide bombing and an attack on Israel or the United States. We have no indication to believe otherwise. In fact his bizarre and insulting letters to President Bush in the past lay the groundwork for just such a global threat.

ND: It is perhaps the single most urgent current threat to world peace.

CM: For Iran to acquire nuclear weapons today, it is akin to Germany re-arming in the 1930s. We knew then what the Nazis planned. We know now what Tehran's regime plans. .

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CT: Do you view confronting the Iranian regime as part of the war on terror? .

BZ: Yes indeed; Iran is in fact the world's biggest sponsor of terrorism. Over the years the mullahs developed a sophisticated strategy for waging low-intensity war against the US. The Hezbollah movement was created to make life difficult for US allies in the region, notably Israel, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. By 1987, the Islamic Republic had organized the killing of hundreds of Americans, including 241 marines in Beirut, while Teheran agents seized 27 Americans hostages in Lebanon at different times. For 25 years the Islamic Republic has helped prop up various anti-American regimes, including those of North Korea, Syria, Sudan and Cuba, with cheap oil, cash gifts, and general political and economic support.

Today, this insidious war is being fought in Afghanistan and Iraq. In Afghanistan, Tehran is supporting Ismail Khan, the "emir" of Herat, while the US has put its chips on President Hamid Karzai. In recent months the mullahs have helped the Hazara Shi'ites create a 10,000-man army within a day's march to Kabul, ready to overthrow Karzai as soon as the circumstances are favorable. To make life more difficult for the US-led coalition, Tehran is also helping the Pushtun fundamentalist leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, who has just concluded an alliance with the remnants of the Taliban. Last, but certainly not least, Tehran is behind most of the attacks that the US-led coalition in Iraq is suffering daily at the hands of the so-called "insurgency." In recent months credible intelligence reports have linked Iran to various weapons used by anti-US militia to kill Americans and Iraqi civilians. Such weapons are manufactured in Iran and smuggled into Iraq by Iranian intelligence operatives, who are sponsoring, fomenting and organizing Islamist guerrillas against American forces inside Iraq. Tehran has also been the moving spirit and total financier of the last summer's Lebanese aggression against Israel and continues financially to support Islamists in Lebanon. Tehran's regime also has a very large number of proxies and operatives in the West which they actively fund -

especially in the U.S. Most of these people who blend into to a Western life style are connected to various organizations and groups that give the appearance of legitimacy but which actively network and recruit on behalf of Tehran's regime and "the hidden Imam";

FG: Absolutely. If not the Mullahs of Iran, who then? As Michael Ledeen has so eloquently put it in his book "The Iranian Time Bomb", the Mullahs of Iran have been at war with the United States since 1979 and we still have to realize it.

TH: Confronting Iran and changing regimes is the way against terror. Since '79 (American embassy in Tehran), '83 (American embassy in Beirut), '83 (American marines in Beirut), every time the Iranian regime struck, the West pulled out. Negotiating was going on between USA, the West in general and Iran throughout the 80's, but it got us nowhere, and changed the landscape in Iran to most radicals.

KM: The Iranian regime is a part of the Jihadi Terror networks worldwide. It is to the Shia what al Qaeda is to the Sunni: a radical ideology which is trying to subdue Muslims and force them into radical policies and violence. The Khomeinist regime is a danger to freedom in the Muslim world.

ZJ: At the center of the misnamed "war on terror" is actually an ideological war against political Islam (Islamism). No single state in the world represents all of the manifestations of this enemy better than Iran and its theocrats in power. President Ahmadinejad and his Islamist theocracy must be defeated. Their theocracy can be dismantled from within by the Iranian citizenry who generally want nothing to do with such governments. Proving the foundational failures and oppression of theocracies like Iran will go a long way toward defeating global Islamism (political Islam) - the primary enemy we face in this transnational struggle. We must confront Iran with firm diplomacy and critical ideological engagement. We must not appease the Iranian president for that will only encourage him to continue spreading terror all over the world against those who seek freedom. We need to make it clear that we will not allow a nuclear Iran.

ND: Absolutely. Iran is killing American soldiers in Iraq and in fact Iran has been in war with the US since 1979. Ahmadinejad did solicit young Iranian men to volunteer for suicide Jihadist operations.

CM: Absolutely. The modern Militant Islamist movement began with Ayatollah Khomeini's revolution in 1979. Osama bin Laden founded a rival movement. The former is Shia, the latter Sunni but the basic ideology of waging war against the Judeo-Christian world and all Muslims not implacably hostile to Christians and Jews is the same.

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CT: Thank you all for your time and for your valuable perspectives on this important occasion. We can only hope that Americans - especially those in Washington, the media and in academia - will learn from your experience and expertise.

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