**Ahmadinejad Slams Shut Obama’s ‘Open Door’ of Engagement, Again**

By Anne Bayefsky

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The U.N. performances of President Obama and Iranian president Ahmadinejad, who spoke a few hours apart at this year’s opening of the General Assembly, were not just two ships passing in the night. They made it startlingly clear that the U.S. president does not understand the threat facing America and the world from Iran.

When Obama took center stage at the U.N., it got off to a bad start and only got worse. The president arrived late and, as leader of the host nation, delivered his speech one slot after its originally scheduled time. He then spent just a few short sentences on the most lethal threat to peace and security today: the acquisition of the world’s most dangerous weapon by the leading state sponsor of terrorism, Iran. In those few minutes, Obama chose not to speak the plain truth — that Iran seeks nuclear weapons — or to commit his government to stopping them, period. He said instead that Iran had not yet demonstrated peaceful intent and asked Ahmadinejad to “confirm” this intent. Obama’s primary message was that “the door remains open to diplomacy should Iran choose to walk through it.”

Ahmadinejad has heard this plea from the Obama administration so many times before that he has clearly stopped counting. Ahmadinejad understands perfectly well that confronting Iran is out of sync with the “new era of engagement” that is the trademark of Obama’s foreign policy. “Engagement” looks like this: The president of the United States keeps talking about “extended hands” and “open doors,” and the president of Iran keeps building nuclear weapons. As recently as September 19, even Secretary Hillary Clinton told Christiane Amanpour, “We’ve said to the Iranians all along…we still remain open to diplomacy. But it’s been very clear that the Iranians don’t want to engage with us.”

Ahmadinejad, therefore, took the opportunity provided by the U.N. to slam the door once more in President Obama’s face. While he lectured about the “lust for capital and domination” and “the egotist and the greedy,” the American U.N. delegation sat stoically in their seats. They had instructions to tough it out until Ahmadinejad really got offensive — though what would count as sufficiently offensive was never publicly announced.

The tripwire turned out to be Ahamdinejad’s suggestion that 9/11 was an inside job. “The U.S. government orchestrated the attack to reverse the declining American economy and its grip on the Middle East in order also to save the Zionist regime.” With that, the Obama representatives finally hauled themselves out of their seats and put engagement temporarily on hold.

But Ahmadinejad was only warming up. After all, this was the United Nations, a place where Iranians are comfortable throwing their weight around. Once more Ahmadinejad declared his opposition to the existence of the state of Israel, repeating his call for a “vote of the people of Palestine” that would democratically outnumber and therefore rid the region of Zionists. He repeated his grotesque anti-Semitism: “All values, even the freedom of expression, in Europe and in the United States are being sacrificed on the altar of Zionism.”

Of course, there is no freedom of expression in Iran, courtesy of Ahmadinejad’s regime. Jewish conspiracy theories are a violation of the U.N.’s fundamental principles. A call for the destruction of a U.N .member state violates the U.N.’s Charter. Ahmadinejad’s words were predictable; they have been repeated in every speech he has given to the General Assembly. Yet he was permitted to say them again. Nor did Obama’s representatives simply refuse to attend in the first place. They waited, hoping for a new and improved Ahmadinejad that somehow never came.

In fact, President Obama played to his U.N. audience just as the president of Iran did. Obama made the centerpiece of his speech an overt squeeze on the state of Israel. Before a U.N. audience infamously hostile to Israel, he demanded that Prime Minister Netanyahu renew the moratorium on building “settlements.” He made no such specific demands of the Palestinian side. Instead, he painted a picture of moral equivalence between the terrorists that seek Israel’s annihilation and Israel’s reasonable skepticism of a negotiating partner that still refuses to accept a Jewish state, referring to “rejectionists on both sides” that “will try to disrupt the process with bitter words and with bombs.”

Ahmadinejad got the message. Israel is vulnerable with President Obama in office, and Iran has no serious reason to believe that hate and terror will be on the losing end any time soon.

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