Like many, I awoke early on Thursday to watch President Trump and other leaders mark the 75th anniversary of D-Day. This was a moving ceremony, reminding us of a critical moment in history and celebrating the contributions of those who fought gallantly and gave their lives to save the world.

As a partisan, I am normally critical of Mr. Trump’s rhetoric. In that vein, I was delighted that President Emmanuel Macron of France used his speech diplomatically but clearly to lecture Mr. Trump about the importance of Western values that really made America great.

However, as a scholar of communication who understands the importance of separating political beliefs from professional judgments, I salute Mr. Trump for his excellent speech (perhaps his best ever). It hit the right note both in content and form.

But this was only so as a written text—one prepared by others. As someone who for four decades has studied speeches, the delivery was a “tell”—completely
animatronic, uninflected, with halting fluency. From a rhetorical perspective, it is highly unlikely that the President meant a word of it; it is doubtful he understood a word of it. Put bluntly, it was a completely cynical speech that will look good only on paper.

Giving the President the benefit of the doubt, and assuming he was sincere, I can only wish that Trump would not return, as he probably will, to his usual practice of following scripted speeches with shameful and unpresidential tweets and remarks undermining Americans, American institutions, America’s closest friends and allies, and our most cherished democratic values.

In fact, moments either after or before his speech, Trump recorded a Fox News interview with Laura Ingraham in front of the grave sites of all those brave soldiers who lost their lives at Omaha Beach. In that interview, he continued his revolting habit of insulting and making ad hominem comments on foreign soil about American leaders and patriots—something unprecedented in United States history.

In another interview conducted by ITV’s Piers Morgan during his trip to Europe, Trump displayed his lack of patriotism in responding to claims that he did not serve his nation allegedly because of bone spurs. Astonishingly, the President said he was “not a fan” of the Vietnam War. Not a fan? Yet Trump made clear in the interview that he chose not to protest by marching in the streets—something so many patriotic Americans did who opposed the War.

It would be naïve, therefore, to hope that President Trump’s speech was sincere. As has been the case all too often, his future deeds and discourse likely will not reflect the written words in his D-Day anniversary speech. Trump’s words on Thursday are yet another example documenting his hypocrisy.

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