

## International Affairs Forum Transcript

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By Michael Loeb



Former United States Marine Corps General Anthony Zinni spoke about military conflict and his new book, *Battle for Peace*, to a crowd of over 150 at the Ronald Reagan Building and International Trade Center on April 11. The dialog was hosted by the World Affairs Council and was moderated by James Kitfield, a national security and foreign affairs correspondent for *National Journal* magazine.

General Zinni has served with the U.S. Marines for 35 years. He is a veteran of the Vietnam War, was part of Operation *Provide Hope* (the relief effort for the former Soviet Union in the early 1990s), Operation *Continued Hope* in Somalia, and has been the special envoy to the Middle East for former Secretary of State Colin Powell. Among his decorations are the Defense Distinguish Service Medal, the Purple Heart, the Combat Action Ribbon, and the Vietnamese Honor Medal.

At the World Affairs Council event he spoke about the war in Iraq, the conflict between Israel and Palestine, combating Iran's nuclear program, terrorism, and the dynamic international affairs arena since the fall of the Soviet Union in 1989. Below are excerpts of the various topics and issues General Zinni addressed in his conversation with James Kitfield.

The following excerpts come from a recorded transcript made by Michael Loeb.

### **The Global Changes since fall of the Soviet Union**

"The world changed significantly beginning in 1989 with the collapse of the Soviet Union. ... We still have a system, an organization, a structure in government - that mentality - that I believe is still locked in the Cold War era. We never quite understood the change that had happened - the new world ordering or reordering. ... And because we never understood it, we didn't do the things necessary to be able to deal with it.

"We have not had a new strategic vision for where we are in the world. If you look at the national security strategies and the strategies that we've articulated since the end of the Cold War, [U.S. leaders] really don't get it. They really don't understand what's going on out there.

"If you look at the things that threaten us, the things that wash up on our shores, the concerns that you read every day in the paper about - illegal

immigration, drugs, threat of terrorism, health concerns, environmental problems – they virtually all originate in some unstable part of the world.

“We tend to think we can defend ourselves against it. More walls, more bloated bureaucracy – like Homeland Security. ... I guess it goes with our isolationist tendencies as a nation. ... That’s no longer possible. We have to deal with these problems at the source.”

“At the end of the Cold War, we did nothing to realize a new world order would come up. And I don’t find fault with President Bush, 41, I think everybody believed, ‘My God, we just moved the doomsday clock back. We’re now in a position where there ought to be a reasonable self-ordering in the world.’ ”

### **Bureaucracy in the United States**

“Not only do we not get this new world disorder and that we haven’t prepared and gone through the right strategic thinking and generated a strategy to deal with it. But we don’t have the kind of government structure to deal with it.

“No military organization or business organization would ever have the kind of structure the U.S. government has now. Bloated bureaucracy, layers of it. ... For example the 9/11 Commission, the Congressional Commission, Homeland Security. What do we do to answer the problems of lack of integration and cross communication? We create more bloated bureaucracy.

“It’s a feudal system. The barons are named Rice and Rumsfeld and others. And they protect their castles very well. ... We have archaic systems ... that allow the president to put 3,000 appointees into key positions that could mean life or death. Now we have seen the performance of Brown and Katrina. The fact that five of the eight senior leadership positions in FEMA had no real experience in disaster relief should tell us something.”

### **Combating Terrorism**

“I think [instability] is the new enemy. This takes a change in mindset to be able to understand that. We like our enemies to be nation states, or alliances of nation states, or alien political ideologies. We like to demonize enemies. We are faced now with a condition that becomes the enemy. Instability generates a whole series of problems that right now are the biggest threats we face.

“Typical of not understanding this is the war on terrorism. Just the fact that we declared war on terrorism tells you we don’t understand what we’re up against.

“Terrorism is a tactic. And to declare war on a tactic, and a symptom, means that you will fight it at the tactical level. You’ll never truly deeply understand what it’s all about, where it comes from, where its roots are, what are the conditions that cause this symptom that threatens us so greatly.”

### **The United States Government’s Rationale for the War in Iraq**

“Iraq is an example of what was wrong. All the faults and mistakes that we went through in Iraq came clearly from a lack of understanding in what we were dealing with. The region, the people and culture, the military aspects of what we faced, the symptoms and problems that would rise up from what we were about to do, and naïve beliefs in things we thought we could effect, like beaming in exiles to take over countries where their credibility was virtually nil.

“That lack of understanding is ... symbolic of the larger problem of not understanding the world totally. And maybe in arrogance, [for Americans] to believe we don’t need the rest of the world. And we believe we can build a wall and keep the rest of the world out. ... [In actuality,] you’re going to have to lead and help resolve the instabilities that generate these problems around the world. It is cheaper to do it when you sense these instabilities beginning rather than waiting until the moment when intervention is necessary; then we end up with political problems, the sapping of our treasure, and even worse, the casualties suffered by our sons and daughters.”

### **What the United States should do in Iraq**

“There aren’t a lot of options left. I don’t think you’re going to find some exquisite plan, some magic answer, some, ‘Ah-ha, I haven’t thought of that.’ ... One thing that never happened in Iraq was that the economic future never became clear. The hope. ... I think certainly in the provinces that are secure, or relatively secure, that getting Iraqi businessmen, maybe holding a summit in the region somewhere, like Amman, Jordan, bringing in international investors, American business men, partnering them up, and seeing where we can start investments, Iraqi businesses, moving forward. ... Begin in the most secure provinces and send a message to those that are not so secure that if we can square away this security situation and [they] cooperate, [economic growth can happen to them too.]

“On the security side ... it is a clear result of lack of street intelligence. We should be working with them to establish the kind of networks, have the money of the street, the connections, the counter-intelligence teams. ... The bad guys aren’t cohesive. ... You’ve got some al-Qaeda running around, you have criminals, some organized crime, some street crime. You have Sunnis that have been upset and felt victimized one way or another that are fighting. You have ex-Baathists running around. You have militia death squads out there in the streets. Every one of these requires a different approach. This isn’t the Vietcong. Street intelligence is the key more than firepower is the key in this.

“[There need to be] a national dialog about why we have this sectarian violence and this fighting and these differences. Why are Shia and Sunni fighting? Why do the Kurds and the Arabs have a problem? We know all the reasons, but what Arabs love to do is to get this all out. ... In the neighborhood, in the national level, in the provinces. We can’t let these perpetrators of violence act as catalysts to force us to fight each other. Let’s talk about the religious differences. The differences we have in feeling victimized.

“Legitimize the [Iraqi] militias. They’re a fact of life. It’s too late now; we’re not going to do anything about them. ... Make them territorial guards. ... Limit their tasks. Give them all record books; make it transparent to who’s in there. They would simply be security for the infrastructure; protection for the people. ... Disaster relief; help the people. Create engineer units. ... Keep the devils’ hands busy.

“We’re waiting around for the unity government, as if it would come out tomorrow and announce itself. ... We have to start thinking two or three levels down. We need to energize those in the region to help us with these kinds of things.”

### **An Attack on Iran**

“Military strikes on Iran can present some kinds of responses that would be extremely catastrophic and serious and require us to think through not to just the first level of action, namely air strikes. ... You may have to plan for the worst case. ... [If we strike Iran,] they respond by laying missiles all over Israel. They respond by laying missiles on our troops in the region. They respond by laying missiles on the oil and natural gas facilities in the [Persian] Gulf.

“We would be further and further dug into an exchange that could go down to us having to put boots on the ground in Iran. And if you liked Iraq, you’ll love Iran. In addition to that, even if you think ... ‘We can handle all of this from the air. And do all of this with kinetic energy unleashed from our ships firing their missiles, and our planes dropping their bombs and shooting their missiles.’ Remember you will probably shut down the economies of the world. And gasoline prices will go up. Access to 70 percent of the world’s oil and probably half the world’s natural gas is going to be disrupted. ... We are going to find ourselves more and more consumed as a military that’s already overstretched.

“You can’t think just at the first level or the first act. ... You have to be prepared to plan for that worst case.”

### **The Dispute between Israel and Palestine**

“You have in the Palestinians a highly educated population - eight universities in Palestinian territories. One of the most literate groups in that part of the world. I think 96, 98 percent literacy rate. ... Their greatest export has always been people, people who can [be managers of business, lawyers, and professors.]

“They’ve never effectively been able to establish what they see as their rights. They feel a sense of injustice. I think over time they have come to the belief ... the vast majority of them ... that there has to be a mechanism for Palestinians and Israelis to live in peace, to co-exist. I think you will find that the vast majority of Palestinians - they aren’t thinking in terms of driving the Israelis into the sea, just like I would say the vast majority of Israelis are not talking about driving Palestinians across to Jordan.

"It just seems that [Palestinians] have not been blessed by the greatest leadership in Yasser Arafat and Fatah. I think this last election for Hamas was a desperate effort to get somebody in charge that was not corrupt, that would tend to [the people's] needs. I do not believe this election was in any way the people saying that they wanted [Palestinians] to continue what they do to the Israelis, or to continue terrorism or anything like that. It was an anti-Fatah vote. It was a vote to an organization that's been shrewd enough to be honest and not-corrupt in dealing with the people and provided them support that Fatah didn't.

"Hamas now is like the dog that caught the car - 'What do I do with it?' They were probably more shocked winning that election than [I was.] ... What are they going to be? ... If it's just going to be a terrorist group that continues those practices, that doesn't rule and govern in a responsible way and a responsive way, they'll go by the wayside.

"If Hamas decides ... that ... it can reject violence, it can recognize the existence of Israel, and commit itself to a peaceful process to try to find a resolution, I think you will find that Israelis and others that will be willing to restart the negotiations."

### **The Mentality of a Suicide Bomber**

"It's very difficult for us in our society and culture to relate or understand [the motives of suicide bombers]. I use a poor analogy. ... I want you to think of those kids that committed that atrocity at Columbine High School. When you ask other kids at the school, 'What drove them to it?' they would tell you, 'They were bullied.' ... They were vulnerable. ... They are easily seduced into [the mentality], 'That's the way I can leave my mark. I may not be a hero in life ... I may not be able to be anything in the eyes of my peers ... I can be lured into a [negative state of mind.]'

"Keep that in mind. ... Think about the fifth son in a family of about 12 children. And this fifth son lives in a village in the West Bank. His father is out of work. Difficult to feed the family. Every time his father has to go work, he has to go through a checkpoint. ... The checkpoint is there for security reasons. ... Harsh treatment [for the father.] [The son] sees his father [humiliated.]

"[The son] begins to feel, 'I'm not the first son. Is there something I can do about this?' ... And then along comes a gang from Hamas, Islamic Jihad, the Al-Aqsa Brigade, you name whatever terrorist group it is, and [they] begin to start talking to [this son] about the injustice of this all. The need to be able to do something about it; to strike at the enemies, the fact that he can be a hero to his family and in his village, that his name will be remembered.

"Again, seduced into this. Pumped up with the courage given to him by the others in the group. ... It's a matter of your personal honor. And then you have a suicide bomber."