

# Zinni Invokes Generals Who Were Peacemakers

by Carl Osgood

General Anthony Zinni (ret.), former chief of U.S. Central Command, made an important intervention against the Iraq war drive in remarks to the Middle East Institute on Oct. 10. The speech showed that Zinni has not backed down from his “Bay of Goats” characterization of utopian plans for war with Iraq, dating back to the time that he was still at Central Command, and likely represents an outlook that is widespread in the active-duty military.

Zinni insisted that alternative policies to that coming out of the White House must be pursued. He told his audience that over the past decade, Central Command has built up partnerships with numerous countries in its region, partnerships threatened by U.S. unilateral action. He pointed out that historically, Central Command has not had large, standing forces, unlike the European or Pacific commands—“to show that we’re not a colonial power.”

Zinni insisted on the U.S. commitment to the war on terrorism, which he defined in terms beyond tactical military operations. “Terrorism is a manifestation of something greater.” Could the issues behind that extremism be political, economic, or social, he asked, rather than religious fanaticism? He proposed that “we ought to think in terms of a Marshall Plan . . . one that is international, one that is cooperative, one that looks at what needs to be done on the economic front, political front and the social front to help this important, critical part of the world get through this rough patch.” He offered this approach as a better alternative to “unleashing the kinetic energy” of a military strike, because “you never know what’s going to come out of the other end.”

Here is the most pungent message Zinni delivered.

“I have a couple of heroes. One is George C. Marshall, a great general, who led us through a great war and victory. Look what that general did after the war. He didn’t look to fight more wars. He didn’t look to leave the situation in the condition—in a place, where those wars would re-breed themselves. Look at General MacArthur in Japan, a man who suffered through Bataan and Corregidor, who lost his troops to a horrific enemy—and his reaching out to the Japanese people, his using other means to re-create stability, prosperity.

“Look at Generals Grant and Lee, where Grant wanted the mildest of surrenders, where dignity was maintained, where friendship and connection could happen. Robert E. Lee did not want to go into the hills and fight guerrilla war. He knew it was a time to heal, to do it at the best level. Gen. George



Retired Commander of CENTCOM, Gen. Anthony Zinni.

Washington, who avoided a second war with England, despite everyone pressing him to go to war a second time, someone who’d been through the pains of fighting with the Continental Army. General Eisenhower, who didn’t see the solution in Indochina, in getting involved when the French were engaged with the Viet Minh. He saw that as a loser’s strategy, despite everybody clamoring about the dominoes that would fall.

“Like those generals, who are far greater than I am, I don’t think violence and war is the solution. There are times when you, reluctantly, as a last resort, have to go to war. But, as a general who has seen war. . . . I will tell you, I never saw anything come out of fighting that was worth the fight, in my time. Now, I’m sure my brother who served in Korea, my cousins who served in the Pacific and served in Europe in World War II, my father who fought for this country in the First World War, and the other 12% of Italian immigrants who served in the infantry—they may have a different view of their war. My wars that I saw, were handled poorly.

“I carry with me a quote from Robert McNamara’s book *In Retrospect*, which unfortunately was written 30 years after a war which put 58,000 names on that [Vietnam Memorial] wall, caused 350,000 of us to suffer wounds and crushed many lives. . . . He said, ‘I want to put Vietnam in context. We of the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations who participated in the decisions on Vietnam, acted according to what we thought were the principles and traditions of this nation. We made our decisions in the light of those values, yet we were wrong, terribly wrong. We owe it to future generations to explain why. I truly believe we made an error, not of values and intentions, but of judgment and capabilities.’ . . .

“Well, Mr. McNamara, my 24 hours a day and my troops’ 24 hours a day was in a sweaty, hot jungle, bleeding for these mistakes. When he resigned in 1968, he didn’t want to do it in a way where he objected openly to the war. There were many more years of that war left, and many more casualties that occurred. I wish he would have stood up for that principle.”