
Book Review

Warrior Diplomat: The Zinni Story

by William Jones

Battle Ready

by Tom Clancy, Gen. Tony Zinni (ret.), and
Tony Koltz

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450 pages, hardcover, \$26

If anyone hopes to find a reiteration of Gen. Tony Zinni's now widely circulated and devastating indictment of the Pentagon neo-conservatives around those ill-starred friends of Ahmed Chalabi—Richard Perle and Paul Wolfowitz—in the autobiography of the General, they may be somewhat disappointed, as little has been said about the issue of the neo-cons' "rush to war" in Iraq, with its multifarious and unfolding scandals. And yet the purpose of the book, included in the Clancy series on "The Commanders," was not to be another Zinni polemic against the neo-cons, but rather was aimed at elucidating who Zinni, the man and the Marine, actually is, and where he is coming from. In that respect, the book is a very enlightening, and a tremendously interesting read. Most interesting is how it gives a broader picture of the psychology of those within the U.S. military, and they are many, who have reacted with horror to the effects of the decisions made by the Bush Administration, in conducting the operations to overthrow Saddam Hussein.

Zinni, who worked his way up the ranks from his beginnings as a junior Marine Corps officer in the Vietnam War era (like most of the present-day flag-grade officers, active-duty as well as retired), is a prime example of the psychological outlook of that particular brand of warrior.

For these men, the Vietnam War was absolutely determinant, in teaching the lessons how *not* to fight a war; indeed, it was indicative of the type of war which the United States should *never* get involved in in the first place. In his tour of duty as a military "advisor" to the South Vietnamese Marines early in 1967, Zinni became close to many of his Vietnamese colleagues. As with most soldiers in "the Nam" then and later, he was just starting to ask some questions about the real purpose of U.S. involvement there.

One day in speaking to a village chief, Zinni was asked by the chief's wife about his own family back home. Zinni writes, "All I had was a picture of my wife and me taken in front of her parents' home. I pulled it out, the old lady stared at it for a while, and then she looked up at me with a deeply penetrating expression. 'Why are you here in Vietnam?' she asked me. I gave her the standard answer about stopping communism and protecting democracy and our Vietnamese allies. She shook her head. 'It's sad that you have to come to leave your family and get involved in this tragic mess,' she said. I continued to offer the party line. 'But what are you going to do to protect us from them?' she asked, her hand pointing toward the south. I thought she had made a mistake, the enemy was to the north, after all. But then I realized she was saying exactly what she meant to say. She was talking about the corrupt South Vietnamese government. As far as she was concerned, the enemy was both to the north and to the south."

In that incident, Zinni discovered what many other American servicemen discovered in their time in Vietnam, beyond the party line that was drummed into their heads before and during their tour of duty in Vietnam: that the "containment of Communism," the great shibboleth of that era's protagonists of what was essentially the continuation of a colonial war, was largely a bogus issue. For a "people's war," which the North Vietnamese and the Southern-based National Liberation Front successfully adopted from their Chinese colleagues, can only be successful if there is some underlying interest in promoting the welfare of the people. Had the irascible Harry Truman not succumbed to the wiles of Winston Churchill in Churchill's efforts to reverse FDR's post-war decolonization program under the rubric of "containing communism," the post-war relationship to our World War II allies, such as Vietnamese liberation leader, Ho Chi Minh, or even Mao Zedong, might have been much different.

The lesson drawn by Zinni from the Vietnam debacle was the need for the United States, in whatever conflict she might find herself, to operate on the basis of a policy which is capable of winning the "hearts and minds of the people," in order to succeed.

As General Zinni proceeded later into a larger sphere of activity, it would become more and more apparent that any "hearts and minds" policy had to have very definite social and economic dimensions.

Rebuilding a Damaged Military

The major post-Vietnam task facing an officer like Zinni, was repairing the damage done to the U.S. military by the Vietnam War policies. The war had served to underline the social and economic inequalities in American society. The unfair nature of the military draft, while basing itself on the concept of "universal military service," contained enough loopholes to allow the children of the wealthy—or any family that could afford to keep their children in college—from being



Gen. Anthony Zinni (ret.), who served his country more than 40 years as a fighter and a diplomat, opposed the war in Iraq before it began. The conflicts since the end of the Cold War, could have been avoided, Zinni says. "We should have gone full throttle into a visionary program like the Marshall Plan that would have injected energy, education, money, and hope into the Third World. . . . We are an expectation of better things," he says. What role could the military play? "Other people want help, leadership, and guidance in getting to where we are. They want our help in reaching their potential."

called up. Those who couldn't afford that, the young men of poor white, and particularly poor black and Hispanic families, were quickly put into uniform and sent to the jungles of Vietnam.

For many of the black soldiers, who had experienced racial discrimination as well as the remoralizing, yet unfulfilled promise of the civil rights movement of the 1960s, being thrust into a military operation which had all the earmarks of a colonialist venture, was a particularly galling experience. It was made all the more oppressive because of the disproportionate number of black troops actually serving in combat. The decision by Dr. Martin Luther King, against the advice of many of his closest supporters, to speak out against the Vietnam War on April 4, 1967, only underlined this glaring contradiction. With the assassination of King in 1968, preceded by the 1965 slaying of Malcolm X, and followed a month later by the murder of Robert Kennedy, all hell broke

loose. There was virtual rebellion in the ranks, with race riots breaking out at U.S. military bases both in Europe and in Asia. This was also aggravated, as Zinni points out, by Defense Secretary Robert McNamara's policies: "There were also misguided attempts to turn the military into a big Head Start program for dropouts. Chief among these was Project 100,000—a Robert McNamara brainchild—which dumped a hundred thousand young failures into the military in hopes this would lead to a better society." It was like throwing a match into a barn full of dry hay.

When Zinni was stationed in Okinawa in the early seventies, black Marines were organizing off-base in some pretty militant activities, leading nearly to race riots. Zinni succeeded in organizing out of his Marine unit an interracial "guard unit" of particularly heavy-set and well-trained troops, who could help quell the mini-riots that were being fomented by a few of the more militant individuals. The problem, however, was only resolved by the concerted efforts over a decade by an officer corps intent on ridding the services of any remaining discriminatory policies regarding promotions and treatment.

A Broader Vision

After a decade of more traditional staff posts in the U.S., at Quantico, Camp Lejeune, and again in Okinawa, in 1990, then Brigadier General Zinni was assigned to the European Command (EUCOM), serving under Commander in Chief (CINC) Gen. John Galvin. Zinni relates how Galvin, "probably the finest soldier-statesman I've known," proposed using NATO to help in the reconstruction of the countries of the former Soviet Union (FSU). "He realized that we needed a new Marshall Plan for the FSU," Zinni writes. "This would not have been a gift but an investment in future peace, stability and prosperity. Tragically, much of his vision was ignored. Washington was initially blind to his ideas about connecting with the Russians and the Warsaw Pact, the new Marshall Plan, and the restructuring of NATO." Similar ideas had been widely circulated by U.S. economist and statesman Lyndon LaRouche, particularly in his proposals for the "Paris-Berlin-Vienna Productive Triangle" and the "Eurasian Land-Bridge." The concept was also reflected in proposals made by Deutsche Bank chief Alfred Herrhausen. But by that time, LaRouche had been thrown into jail by his political opponents and Herrhausen had been assassinated, ostensibly by terrorists.

Zinni's thoughts on the subject were not limited to the former Soviet Union, but were also focussed on the many poor nations whose problems had been left by the roadside during the Cold War, including the growing conflicts and the possibility of a terrorist threat. Zinni writes, "Until that time, the whole world was simmering underneath the Cold War. And we've had to meet the challenge [of the post-Cold War world] unprepared. We should have gone full throttle into a visionary program like the Marshall Plan that would have

injected energy, education, money and hope into the Third World. Nothing like that happened." If General Zinni ever had the opportunity to discuss with the premier proponent of just such a policy from 1968 to the present, Lyndon LaRouche, LaRouche could tell him a great deal about why it has not even yet been adopted.

Zinni would later work with the State Department's Richard Armitage in Operation Provide Hope, an airlift of food, medicine, and other supplies to the former Soviet republics, which was but a dim reflection of the type of economic aid and development policy that was needed to get the former Soviet republics on their feet again.

Even before his appointment as commander of the U.S. Central Command (Centcom), Zinni got more experience of the problems of Third World Development, in working with the military assistance forces in Somalia and on diplomatic missions to Ethiopia.

In August 1996, Zinni was appointed deputy commander-in-chief for Centcom, and in 1997 he was appointed commander-in-chief. Interestingly, the issue of the economic development policy was foremost in a plan that Zinni recommended to deal with post-Gulf War Iraq. In 1998 when Richard Butler, the head of the UN inspections team in Iraq, UNSCOM, pulled his inspectors out after a long stretch of cat-and-mouse games with the Iraqis over inspections, the U.S. Operation Fox launched strikes against Iraqi facilities, attempting to destroy some of Saddam Hussein's alleged weapons of mass destruction before they could be moved. Envisioning a possible collapse of the Saddam regime in the aftermath of that strike, Zinni ordered his people at Centcom to develop a wide-ranging economic reconstruction program that could be implemented in a post-Saddam Iraq. Needless to say, the strikes against Saddam Hussein's alleged WMD did not lead to a collapse of his regime, and the Zinni plan was put on the shelf, still incomplete.

After his retirement from Centcom and from the Marine Corps in 2000, Zinni, who had already served as something of a "warrior diplomat" in his Centcom missions in Africa and Central Asia, was asked to participate in a variety of diplomatic missions. First he was asked to serve as an advisor in the ongoing negotiations between the Indonesian government and representatives of the island of Aceh, which was seeking its independence from Indonesia.

Zinni also relates the frustrating time he spent as Special Advisor to Secretary of State Colin Powell for the Middle East, noting problems such as the Palestinians' insistence on keeping Hamas in the discussions; but Zinni is uncharacteristically silent on the efforts by the pro-Likud crowd in the Vice President's office, which undercut his effectiveness by their own intrigues with Ariel Sharon's right wing in the Israeli Likud party.

General Zinni also has ample praise for the Clinton policy of "engagement," as opposed to the Bush Administration's arrogant Roman Empire policy of subduing nation-states, to

force them to accept the dictates of the self-styled imperial power. Zinni writes, "The Clinton strategy [of engagement] represented a significant shift in the way the United States related to the rest of the world. Though the administration did not always handle this shift as effectively as they could have, their overall approach was, in my view, correct. Unfortunately, the Clinton strategy lacked the resources to be fully and effectively implemented."

The U.S. Military Tradition

The United States does have a global role to play. This has been clear since the elaboration of the foundations of U.S. foreign policy by John Quincy Adams; but it is not that of a conquering empire. "We are an empire of influence," Zinni says. "Our power, our values, our promise affect the world. We are more than Jefferson's beacon. We are an expectation of better things. The world demands of us the delivery of the promise we project. We are seen to have an obligation to share our light. Other peoples want help, leadership, and guidance in getting to where we are. They want our help in reaching their potential."

And what role should the U.S. military have in that mission? Zinni has some definite ideas on that subject as well. "It could mean military civil affairs will change from being just a tactical organization doing basic humanitarian care and interaction with the civilian population to actually being capable of reconstructing nations. That will require people in uniform, and maybe civilian suits as well, who are educated in the disciplines of economics and political structures and who will actually go in and work these issues." (Here Zinni echoes some of the concerns voiced by Gen. Douglas MacArthur, who, as Superintendent of West Point after the First World War, was intent on giving budding U.S. officers training which would not be restricted to "military affairs," but would give them a broader understanding of man in his social and economic relationships.) "Either we get the civilian officials on the scene who can do it, get them there when they need to be there, give them the resources and the training, and create the interoperability that is necessary or validate military missions to do it." A necessary aspect of any such a "defense transformation" would be the LaRouche call for revamping and upgrading the mission of the Army Corps of Engineers, to give it the capabilities of doing what is necessary to "win the peace"—to accomplish some of the reconstruction tasks that have become such an integral part of our nation's security.

The Need To Speak the Truth

In summing up, Zinni returns to an image which he refers to often and which is probably now deeply ingrained, motivating the outspoken retired Marine to continue speaking out on issues of strategic importance. He relates how the former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Hugh Shelton, had made it mandatory for his CINCs to read *Dereliction of Duty: Lyndon Johnson, Robert McNamara, the Joint Chiefs*

of Staff, and the Lies that Led to Vietnam, by Army Maj. H.R. McMaster. *Dereliction* details the failure of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to speak out during the Vietnam War, when they knowingly built a military campaign based on lies. Shelton emphasized to the young CINCs and service chiefs that they must always be prepared to speak up.

Zinni elaborates: "Careerism is corrosive to the principle of truth telling. So is political expediency. In both cases, the hope of personal gain outweighs personal integrity and honor. 'Don't rock the boat' leads to moral blindness about threats to the mission or the lives and welfare of the troops and of their families. The troops are interested in more from their leaders back home than statements such as, 'We back them 100%.' That's the mentality of the chateau generals in World War I who sent hundreds of thousands of fine young men to useless deaths. If you make a political mistake, the troops have to pay for it with their blood. Our political and military leaders must be held accountable for their mistakes."

And then, towards the end of the book, Zinni returns to his critique of the neo-conservatives, who have plunged the country into an unnecessary war, citing a lecture he gave to Naval Academy midshipmen in the Spring of 2003. Zinni writes, "In the lead-up to the Iraq war and its later conduct, I saw, at a minimum, true dereliction, negligence, and irresponsibility; at worst, lying, incompetence, and corruption. False rationales presented as a justification, a flawed strategy; lack of planning; the unnecessary alienation of our allies; the underestimation of the task; the unnecessary distraction from real threats; and the unbearable strain dumped on our over-stretched military, all of these caused me to speak out.

"I did it before the war as a caution, and as an attempt to voice concern over a situation I knew would be dangerous, where the outcome would likely mean real harm to our nation's interest. I was called a traitor and a turncoat by Pentagon officials. The personal attacks are painful, as I told those young midshipmen, but the photos of the casualties I see every day in the papers and on TV convince me not to shrink from the obligation to speak the truth."

Zinni also lauds the courage of former Army Chief of Staff Gen. Eric Shinseki, who bucked the prevailing line of the civilian neo-con leadership at the Pentagon, and who underlined that a successful conclusion of the Iraq operation would require at least 300,000 troops. Shinseki's prediction got an icy reception, but it has been vindicated in spades. The outspoken Army chief went into early retirement.

Tony Zinni certainly lives up to those high-minded demands of conscience as well as to the highest military traditions of the United States. For this we salute him and support his efforts to bring the United States back to its role as a "beacon of hope and a temple of liberty" as General Lafayette described it, by reviving another important American tradition: riding those American neo-con "scalawags" around Cheney and Rumsfeld out of Washington on a rail!