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### Brzezinski: Israel's Actions in Lebanon Essentially Amount to "the Killing of Hostages"

On Thursday, 20 July (last week), former National Security Advisor and one of America's top strategic thinkers, Zbigniew Brzezinski, spoke at a public policy dinner salon that my colleagues and I at the New America Foundation organized.

Brzezinski's presentation and responses to questions were riveting. He framed the stakes of what was evolving in the Middle East as well as the basic motivations of all the players in ways that many policy intellectuals and senior foreign policy writers had not considered.

I am posting Zbigniew Brzezinski's comments here. The Q&A was not fully on the record, so I will be working to digest the best material from the Q&A to protect the identities of those posing questions or making comments -- and will post that material at a later time. But I wanted to get Zbigniew Brzezinski's opening remarks on line now.

Some of the notable points made by Brzezinski were:

**1.** America's "policy in the Middle East is the basic test of America's capacity to exercise global leadership." This is similar to "what transpired during the Cold War when the ultimate test of America's capacity to act as a defender of the free world was its ability to conduct a meaningful policy in Europe."

If America does not do well in its Middle East challenge, the U.S. will lose its capacity to lead.

**2.** Neither the United States nor Israel "has the capacity to impose a unilateral solution" to Israel's problems in the Middle East. "There may be people who deceive themselves of that. We call them neo-cons in this country and there are other

equivalents in Israel as well."

**3.** Israel and its neighbors alone "can never resolve their conflict peacefully, no matter how much they try, now matter how sincere they may be." When one party is sincere, the other's intentions are not synchronous.

**4.** Brzezinski stated: "I hate to say this but I will say it. I think what the Israelis are doing today for example in Lebanon is in effect, in effect -- maybe not in intent - - the killing of hostages. The killing of hostages."

"Because when you kill 300 people, 400 people, who have nothing to do with the provocations Hezbollah staged, but you do it in effect deliberately by being indifferent to the scale of collateral damage, you're killing hostages in the hope of intimidating those that you want to intimidate. And more likely than not you will not intimidate them. You'll simply outrage them and make them into permanent enemies with the number of such enemies increasing."

**5.** "The solution can only come if there is a serious international involvement that supports the moderates from both sides, however numerous or non-numerous they are, but also creates the situation in which it becomes of greater interest to both parties to accommodate than to resist because both of the incentives and the capacity of the external intervention to impose costs. That means a deliberate peace effort led by the United States, which then doubtless would be supported by the international community, which defines openly in a semi-binding fashion how the United States and the international community envisages the outlines of the accommodation."

**6.** It's becoming increasingly difficult to separate the Israeli-Palestinian, problem, the Iraq problem and Iran from each other.

**7.** "The Iraq problem, look what Prime Minister al-Maliki said today -- it's an indication of things to come. The notion that we're going to get a pliant, democratic, stable, pro-American, Israel-loving Iraq is a myth which is rapidly eroding and which is now being contradicted by political realities."

**8.** "And that leads me then to the proposition beforehand, namely that we have now, we're not only committed to what I said earlier, regarding the Israeli-Palestinian process, but more deliberately by terminating our involvement in Iraq. And I have put forth a four-point program which [I am sure] I have discussed in one of the rare occasions within the last year administration has talked to me, some top level people in the administration. They listened to this:

That we start talking to the Iraqis of the day of our disengagement., We say to them we want to set it jointly, but in the process, indicate to them that we will not leave precipitously. I asked Khalilzad what would be his definition of precipitous

and he said four months and I said I agree. Are you saying to the Iraqis, we intend to disengage by some period? We need to."

9. "As far as Iran is concerned--and with this I'll end--thanks to Iraq, I think we have made an offer to the Iranians that is reasonable. I do not know that Iranians have the smarts to respond favorably or at least not negatively. I sort of lean to the idea that they'll probably respond not negatively but not positively and try to stall out the process. But that is not so bad provided they do not reject it.

Because while the Iranian nuclear problem is serious, and while the Iranians are marginally involved in Lebanon and to a greater extent in Syria, the fact of the matter is that the challenge they pose to us, while serious, is not imminent. And because it isn't imminent, it gives us time to deal with it. And sometimes in international politics, the better part of wisdom is to defer dangers rather than try to eliminate them altogether instantly, because the later produces intense counter-reactions that are destructive. We have time to deal with Iran, provided the process is launched, dealing with the nuclear energy problem, which can then be extended to involve also security talks about the region.

In the final analysis, Iran is a serious country, it's not Iraq. It's going to be there. It's going to be a player. And in the longer historical term, it has all of the preconditions for a constructive internal evolution if you measure it by rates of literacy, access to higher education, the role of women in society, a sense of tradition and status which is real.

I'm convinced that the mullahs are part of the past in Iran, not its future. But that process can change in Iran, not in a confrontation but through engagement. I think if we pursue these policies, we can perhaps avert the dangers that we face but if we do not, I fear that the region will explode, and for that matter, Israel will be in the long run in great jeopardy."