

NATIONAL PRESS CLUB VIDEOCONFERENCE LUNCHEON ADDRESS BY IRANIAN
PRESIDENT
MAHMOUD AHMADINEJAD

MODERATOR: JERRY ZREMSKI, PRESIDENT OF THE NATIONAL PRESS CLUB

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(Note: The president's remarks are provided through
interpreter.)

MR. ZREMSKI: Good afternoon, and welcome to the National Press
Club for our luncheon today with Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the president of
the Islamic Republic of Iran.

My name is Jerry Zremski, and I'm president of the National Press
Club and Washington bureau chief for the Buffalo News.

I'd like to welcome our club members and their guests who are
joining us here today, along with the working press and the audience
that's watching us on C-SPAN.

We're looking forward to today's speech and afterwards I will ask
as many questions from the audience as time permits.

I'd now like to introduce our head table guests and ask them to
stand briefly when their names are called. From your right, Ron
Baygents, Washington correspondent for the Kuwait News Agency; Lucie
Morillon, Washington representative for Reporters without Borders; Ken
Mellgren, manager of affiliate relations at Associated Press
Broadcast; Hiroki Sugita, Washington bureau chief of Kyodo News Agency

of Japan; Donna Leinwand, correspondent for USA Today and treasurer of the National Press Club; Clarence Page, columnist and member of the editorial board of the Chicago Tribune; Dr. Kaveh Afrasiabi, professor of international relations at Bentley College, author of books on Iran's foreign and nuclear policies, and a guest of the speaker.

Skipping over the podium, Angela Greiling Keane of Bloomberg News, the chair of the National Press Club Speakers Committee; Myron Belkind, a member of the Speakers Committee and the member of the committee who organized today's luncheon; Greta Van Susteren, anchor of Fox News's "On the Record"; Jon Allen, correspondent for Congressional Quarterly; Eleanor Clift, contributing editor to Newsweek and a regular panelist on "The McLaughlin Group"; and Tom Baldwin, Washington bureau chief for the Times of London. (Applause.)

For nearly a century now, the National Press Club has brought the world's leading newsmakers to this stage. Yasser Arafat, Golda Meir, Nelson Mandela and Nikita Khrushchev are just a few of the notables who have all addressed the world from the National Press Club. And today we are hosting one of the most newsworthy heads of state in the world, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, president of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Here at the National Press Club, it's our job to facilitate the news, to help bring newsmakers and journalists together. That's exactly what we're doing here today. We're not endorsing anything the president has said or will say, just as we didn't endorse what Fidel Castro said when he spoke at the National Press Club. We simply arranged for this opportunity for President Ahmadinejad to share his thoughts with us.

One thing is different and historic about this National Press Club luncheon. This is the first videoconference luncheon in the 100-year history of the National Press Club. We invited President Ahmadinejad to join us via video from New York where he is attending the U.N. General Assembly.

President Ahmadinejad, welcome to the National Press Club.

PRESIDENT AHMADINEJAD: In the name of God, the compassionate, the merciful --

INTERPRETER: The president is reciting verses from the holy Koran in Arabic.

PRESIDENT AHMADINEJAD: -- I am very glad to sit down and meet with members of the press and congratulate a 100th year of your activities.

At the outset, I would like to raise a fundamental question on a key issue. I'd like to invite all to look at world events. When we take a look around us, we're not happy with what we see. Indeed it is the most unsatisfactory state of affairs; insecurity, discrimination and threats of war and security concerns have affected everyone. Continuous wars have, in fact, hurt the human spirit. I believe if we look at the root cause of some of these problems, we will be able to think of how to build a better future, a more prosperous future based on peace and security for all humanity. I believe we all believe

strongly that it is possible to create a better world for humanity, and to realize this sublime and beautiful goal, we need to take a look and revise how we view the world around us.

In looking for the root causes of the world problems today, we first look -- confront (deviations ?) on how mankind is viewed and how the world is viewed through the prism and point of view, in fact, of some politicians and statesmen. I would say we believe in the sublime value of humanity.

The Almighty God has replaced man on -- has replaced his position with man's position on Earth. As his representative, He gave dignity to him and respect and called on mankind to make every effort to move towards a prosperous life and to walk on the sublime path that will help achieve it. God placed man on Earth as His representative, and to guide him, He sent His prophets. God placed the world in man's hand and helped man control it, gave man talents with the ability to grow those talents, and placed no limits on man's progress in that respect.

God created man above material being and placed that material being into man's hands for his possession. What this means is that God placed man on a high status and respected him, so to God, man is a unified truth, beyond geographical borders, colors or ethnicity. God and all his prophets have addressed all human beings from all segments of life. The greatest harm to mankind is to prevent him from pursuing education, to prevent him from moving on the sublime, divine path.

The nature of mankind is imbued with God's spirit. God's spirit helps man pursue science and wisdom and love and beauty and kindness and to render service to other mankind. That's what it invites man to do, so no one should prevent the pursuit of science and knowledge by man; no one should prevent love and kindness from flourishing in mankind and turn that into hostility, enmity and all forms of grudges that we now hold against each other. No one should distort the beauty of thought and the beauty of feeling in emotion from man. Family is the center of love and beauty; fathers, mothers and children is our center for giving love.

Peace and tranquility is based in the family. No one has the right to take away the divine gift from humanity.

The result of love and kindness is the (ability to ?) render service, to sacrifice oneself for other people. That should not be prevented. Kindness and love also gives the result of forgetting about oneself for others. This is a realization of the sublime beauty of mankind that must not be denied to him. The security of thought and of being is a right and is a necessity.

Security can happen within the realm of God and the belief in God. Those who believe in God seek His assistance and depend on Him, the God who is the absolute power, who is the absolute knowledge, the absolute knowledge, and who loves his beings, the God who upholds the rights of those defenseless people. And those who believe in this God will believe in peace and will achieve peace. Those whose seek the approval of this God will never have fear or concerns.

Most certainly, to seek God's approval, one must follow him.

Following God means to respect the rights of others, to render respect and kindness to others, to engage in pious acts and behaviors, to remember God. Following God means wanting the best for all others, to invite them to good and to tell them to refrain from bad.

Insecurity happens when remembrance of God and following Him is weakened. When a group are not satisfied about their rights, they will become aggressors. And when the rights of another group of people and another land and other people's resources are usurped, insecurity arises.

When the boundaries of people is broken and security is robbed from them, that's when the threat of arms and nuclear arms overshadows the tranquility that mankind had before; insecurity prevails. And when security is taken away, the talents are no longer flourished, the happiness and joy of life is replaced by fear, insecurity prevents man's progressive development, and it distorts man's vision from achieving its sublime path -- goal.

My friends, man is a divine creature. It has the talent to move towards the indefiniteness of beauty, of joy and greatness. The human path is a movement from darkness to light. The truth of the world, of this universe, is pure, and the creator of the world is -- has no -- is free of all forms of lies and deceits and oppression.

The right path is the path to piety. Lies are incompatible with the truth of mankind and with the adjectives that the divine Lord has given us for humanity. Lies are an incorrect reflection of the reality and reflection of those behaviors of the liars and the way they think. Lies have nothing to do with the divine spirit of mankind. Lies deviate thoughts and lead to judgments that weaken the truth and deviate man's path.

Therefore, lies and deceits are in fact a form of oppressing mankind, and we are all against that form of oppression, of oppression of all sorts. Powers or human beings who create insecurity and impose it on the world, who threaten this divine creature and disable him from flourishing his talents, commit the highest forms of oppression by disallowing that man -- not allowing man to move from this material world up to the divine, to the heavens.

So from a divine perspective as well as from a humane perspective, insecurity, violence, terror are not all simple challenges or perhaps one of oppression or deviation from the collective rights of individuals and people, so that that is not just simply the case; rather, it goes broader. That level of insecurity is oppressing mankind in its totality.

Tribal violence and ethnic violence is imposed by the powerful groups, by the oppressors is in fact a form of oppressing mankind altogether. Of course insecurity does not arise only through security activities or through police activities or through indirect means but -- principally, the mind should not be marred by things that prevent it from thinking clearly and finding the true path, the correct path. Materialism, hedonism, engaging in immoral behavior mars the heart, spirit and thought of mankind and prevents it from thinking about pureness and piety and prevents man's joyous movement towards

progress. This, too, is insecurity of the mind.

In the teachings of the divine prophet, these are what prevent man from growing. In this logic, there are no principles; rather, there is a propensity to engage in corruption and all that it represents, and that all hurts man's movement towards the sublime path and the final branch of insecurity of the mind and of the thoughts. We disagree with that. We do not like to see that prevail. And I think that to have a better world, our vision of how we look at mankind must change. We have to look at the rights of man, the needs of mankind and the dignity of mankind.

I believe in setting up a prosperous future, the role of the press is very important. The press plays a connecting role, and it provides information and promotes -- can serve as a channel for promoting correct thinking. The role of the press is to disseminate moral behavior, to disseminate goodness, purity, honesty, peace, security and all positive messages that arise from that. And this role is extremely significant; God forbid -- they must prevent the dissemination of hatred and impurity and insecurity, for in that sense, too, they play a very sensitive role.

The press can be the voices of the divine prophets or, God forbid, the voice of those who seek the worst and those who oppress humanity. Time will pass and join history, so it is best for all of us to seek peace, security and purity and let that remain for posterity.

There are some powerful groups that do not allow that. Their interest rests in belittling mankind. Their interest rests in the unawareness of mankind. Their interest rests in controlling the free flow of information. Their interest rests on attacking and aggressing other nations and the rights of other people. Their interest rests on producing weapons and to sell those weapons and arms. But our human responsibility requires us to reflect on the reality and truth as it is, and bring the message of peace and friendship for all humanity. I hope that we will all succeed in our efforts.

I'm very glad to meet with all of you again today. I look forward to receiving your comments and views.

MR. ZREMSKI: Thank you very much, President Ahmadinejad. Can you hear me?

PRESIDENT AHMADINEJAD: Yes.

MR. ZREMSKI: Yes. Okay, great.

We have many, many questions, starting with this, which directly relates to your speech. How important do you think that the worldwide spread of Islam is to creating the sublime and beautiful world that you envision? And is there room for other religions?

PRESIDENT AHMADINEJAD: We think that all religions and all divine religions have the same message. They all come from the same place. They have several clear messages: to invite man to worship God, which is the root of all goodness; to invite man to justice, which guarantees love, friendship and viable security; to invite man

to dignity and to respect of mankind; to invite man to love the rest of mankind.

These messages are set in the religion of Christ -- of Moses and Christ as well as the holy passage of Islam. These prophets have all given the same messages. They never had differences in that respect. There was never a conflict there because their root goes back to the same -- (word inaudible) -- and their message was the same as well.

MR. ZREMSKI: Does that mean there is room for Christianity --

PRESIDENT AHMADINEJAD: They all believe in beauty and goodness --

MR. ZREMSKI: -- (off mike) -- that you're describing?

PRESIDENT AHMADINEJAD: They're all brothers. They all want the same thing, justice and friendship, and this is the common ground for all religions. True pious people have no differences with other --

MR. ZREMSKI: Yes, but do those religions have a place in the world you described?

PRESIDENT AHMADINEJAD: They're all human beings and followers of different religions, and all of their views should be respected. We should all build a prosperous community together, and we must all move hand in hand. This is a responsibility for all.

MR. ZREMSKI: We have many questions regarding the Baha'i religious minority in Iran. Many of our questioners say that the Baha'i minority has been deprived of their human rights. What would your response be to that?

PRESIDENT AHMADINEJAD: In our constitution, Christianity, Judaism, Islam and Zoroastrianism are recognized as the official religions. When we speak of religion, we refer to divine religions. In our country we follow that law, a law that is based on the majority vote of the people.

MR. ZREMSKI: The 2007 Amnesty International Report on Iran said the following:

"Freedom of expression and association were increasingly curtailed. Internet access was increasingly restricted and monitored. Journalists and bloggers were detained and sentenced to prison or flogging, and at least 11 newspapers were closed."

Why?

PRESIDENT AHMADINEJAD: I think people who prepared the report are unaware of the situation in Iran. In our country law prevails. Freedom is flowing at its highest level.

You know that the newspaper that also -- you know that a government newspaper was actually shut down because it was engaging in illegal acts, a newspaper that was reflecting the views of the head of the state, but because it insulted a figure and disrespected the rights of

the people by insulting -- (inaudible) -- it was shut down. You know that on a daily basis we have many, many newspapers or the presence of newspapers in our country, and the number of those newspapers that are against the government in place right now are perhaps 10 times larger than the newspapers that are pro-government.

In our country, there are tens of millions of people who are connected to the Internet, they have access to it. So if you're talking about immoral, like acts of perhaps immoral sites, well, you would agree with me that the sites are harmful for society. Nobody can really allow access to those. But our people are the freest people in the world, the most aware people in the world, the most enlightened, so to say.

So the person who prepared this report, I would say, had he had the chance to walk in Iran -- in Tehran and other cities and visit them in Iran, and to really sit down with people and speak with them would have understood that people in Iran are very joyous, happy people and very free and very much aware of all world developments on -- as it continues every minute, every second. And they're very free in expressing what they think.

Last year in the university, a minority group of a hundred people stood against over 2,000 people, students who were -- who supported the president, and they were screaming and they tried to disrupt a session. There were lots involved, and the president sat down for two hours and listened to all of them. And right now they're free, they're walking freely.

I think the people who give this information should seek what is the truth and sort of disseminate what's correct.

So I invite everyone present in this meeting to come and visit Iran for themselves, to come freely and visit the country all over, to speak with the people there. Then their point of view will change.

MR. ZREMSKI: Two of the journalists that have been arrested in Iran have been sentenced to death simply for doing their jobs. Mr. President, can you give us your word that you will do everything in your power to keep this sentence from being carried out?

PRESIDENT AHMADINEJAD: The news is fundamentally wrong. This is incorrect. This is not correct at all about Iran, what's happening.

Which journalist has been sentenced to death? I'm sorry that some press here disseminates what's untrue. Why should we insist on propagating what's untrue?

MR. ZREMSKI: This report comes from Reporters without Borders.

PRESIDENT AHMADINEJAD: (Off mike.) Well, this is incorrect. Who are these people? Can you let me know who they are, so at least I can be aware of who they are too?

MR. ZREMSKI: I will certainly do that.

Moving on, Iranian women are --

PRESIDENT AHMADINEJAD: I would be certainly grateful. That would be very helpful to me.

MR. ZREMSKI: Okay, I've just been handed a report from Reporters without Borders, and it names the names Adnan Hassanpour and -- forgive me, this is a little difficult -- Abdolvahed Hiva Botimar.

PRESIDENT AHMADINEJAD: Where were they involved in as a journalist and where were they arrested? I don't know people by that name. I think that what you received was incorrect information.

You have to sort of rectify the information channel you have. On a daily basis, over 30 newspapers currently are filled with pages and pages of basically criticizing the president and the administration in Iran and even sometimes insulting our policies and what we do. All the journalists and newspapers also receive loans from the -- actually not loans but grants from the government.

MR. ZREMSKI: Okay, I think we should move on from that question to the following.

Iranian women are campaigning for an end to discrimination. You have charged them with acting against national security. Some women leaders have been beaten and tortured. How do you justify such violations of human rights?

PRESIDENT AHMADINEJAD: Can you again tell me where you get this report from?

(Laughter.) The freest women in the world are women in Iran. You should look at our women. They're active in every level of society, as researchers, in social groups, in university, in parties, in the press, in the arts, in politics, in political associations. They're one of the most active women in the world, and they're free. On the anniversary of the victory of the revolution, 22nd of Bahman, Iranian calendar year, over 20 million women come to rally in support of the revolution.

And many of them hold key positions. There are two female vice presidents in our country; in very high specialized fields they're involved as well. Over 60 percent of university students are female, and especially in the, you know, very specialized fields, as I said. Women have won medals in international sort of athletic championships.

So who said that Iranian women are being tortured in Iran? I think again that we --

(Cross talk.)

MR. ZREMSKI: (Inaudible) -- been making those points for years.

But again, let's move on to another series of questions. We've got so many topics that we would like to cover. I'm going to try to move quickly.

PRESIDENT AHMADINEJAD: Well, human rights groups say what they

want -- they say, and we tell them that they're wrong. They have to keep their independence.

MR. ZREMSKI: Okay, moving on to the topic of Iraq. You recently said that Iran was, quote, "prepared to fill the gap", unquote, as American influence wanes in Iraq. How, precisely, would you fill this gap?

PRESIDENT AHMADINEJAD: Well, again, this too is one of those distortions by the press. I said our region will soon face a power vacuum, and Iran, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia and regional countries are able to fill in that vacuum.

And I also analyzed what I meant. I said that nations -- countries in the region are able to establish security themselves and they do not need the presence of others in the region in order to arrive at security. This is what I said very clearly and will say

again. I am surprised by the words are distorted and what is said is sort of a distortion from what was initially said.

MR. ZREMSKI: What role, then, do you see Iran playing in the future of Iraq?

PRESIDENT AHMADINEJAD: For hundreds of years we've lived in friendship and brotherhood with the people of Iraq. We want an independent powerful Iraq, a developed Iraq which will benefit the entire region. That's what we believe in. We are the ones harmed most by insecurity in Iraq. We would like to see peace, tranquility and progress in Iraq because people in Iraq have historical ties with us. Annually, millions of people from the two countries travel to the other country. There are a lot of intermarriages. There are many Iranians who are born in Iraq and many Iraqis who are born in Iran. We are two nations interconnected. We are brothers and friends. We want nothing but goodness and progress for the Iraqi nation, but we think that regional countries themselves can know how to run the affairs of the region best. They don't need a guardian from outside to tell them how to do it.

MR. ZREMSKI: The U.S. military yesterday accused Iran of smuggling surface-to-air missiles and other advanced weapons into Iran -- or into Iraq for use against American troops. Is that true or will you categorically deny this allegation?

PRESIDENT AHMADINEJAD: We will allow the U.S. military there to basically take what it confiscates, whatever these missiles or whatever these weapons it claims it has or sees in Iraq. We think, in fact, the military should seek an answer to defeat in Iraq elsewhere, in the misguided policies that it has led and the wrong perspective that it has had towards Iraq and its people. Regretfully, they are standing against the Iraqi people.

MR. ZREMSKI: Are those Iranian weapons going into Iraq?

PRESIDENT AHMADINEJAD: Because Iraq's security means our security. We want --

MR. ZREMSKI: So is that confirming that those weapons are going in?

PRESIDENT AHMADINEJAD: No, this does not exist. Are you telling me that the U.S. military is defeated as a result of two or three weapons here and there? There are two problems here looking at it like this.

MR. ZREMSKI: No, I'm simply --

PRESIDENT AHMADINEJAD: First of all, it undermines the power of the U.S. military by making statements like this -- (inaudible). And second of all, U.S. politicians will not be able to make the right decision on matters about Iraq.

The problem of the U.S. military lies elsewhere. They need to change their methods.

MR. ZREMSKI: Why will Iran not agree to a civilian nuclear partnership with other countries? Why must Iran enrich its own uranium when doing so raises suspicions that it intends to develop nuclear weapons?

PRESIDENT AHMADINEJAD: First of all, that's not right. We are a member of the IAEA, and the powers of the IAEA explicitly grant us that right. Secondly two years ago, I made the same proposal you just referred to in the United Nations. But those selfish groups that didn't want to listen to it did not embrace it.

And secondly why should a nation tie its future to another group, another nation? Is the U.S. government willing to engage in partnership with us and advance its nuclear activities in partnership with us? If they're willing to do that, we're willing to do it, too. Are they willing to divide their rights with us?

Why do you think the U.S. administration, the government, which is a member of the IAEA, should have more rights over Iran, which is also a member of the IAEA? If there is law, international law, it's equal for everyone. Why is it that some people want more rights for themselves?

MR. ZREMSKI: Bernard Kouchner, the new French foreign minister, recently said that the world should prepare for war with Iran if negotiations fail. Is Iran willing to go to war with the West to protect the Iranian nuclear program?

PRESIDENT AHMADINEJAD: First of all, he took back what he said and revised it. And secondly the United States and France are not the world, don't speak for the world. And fundamentally I think this way of talking and looking at things is wrong. It's really bad whenever a man fails logic, when logic fails, basically, to engage in military threats.

We're working under the inspection of the IAEA system, and our activities are legal and for peaceful purposes. We have -- we don't want anything --

MR. ZREMSKI: Would you be willing to go to war to defend your program?

PRESIDENT AHMADINEJAD: We think that the talk of war is basically a propaganda tool. Why is there a need for war?

People who talk about it have to bring a legal reason for going to war. Why should they threaten another country? Why should they create more insecurity? I think officials who talk this kind of talk should really be pressured and warned to know what to say and when not to say something. They cannot endanger world security. And if they haven't learned the lesson, then the international community has to tell them how to learn that lesson.

Of course, the foreign minister of France revised what he said, and I don't think that the French nation is the kind of nation who would want that kind of war. They're a very cultured society, a very cultured group of people, people who have good relations with the Iranian people.

I think, of course, give the foreign minister to gain more experience in his new position, too, and then I'm sure he'll talk from a level with more higher maturity.

MR. ZREMSKI: Very well. Is there any circumstance in which the Islamic Republic of Iran and the state of Israel can coexist in peace?

PRESIDENT AHMADINEJAD: (In Farsi.)

MR. ZREMSKI: Excuse me. We're not getting your translation, Mr. President.

PRESIDENT AHMADINEJAD: We do not recognize that regime because it is based on discrimination; ethnic discrimination, occupation, usurpation. And it consistently threatens its neighbors. Last week or so, it attacked Syria. And last year it attacked Lebanon. And when they talk about their goals, they speak about taking over the area between -- (inaudible) -- the Euphrates. This is occupation and expansionism in the true sense of those words.

And they discriminate between people. They kill people. They displace people. They kill young people in their own homes. How is it possible to recognize this? I am surprised why members of the press don't raise voices of objection to the policies there.

MR. ZREMSKI: Would you be willing to meet with Holocaust survivors who wanted to discuss their experiences with you? And why or why not?

PRESIDENT AHMADINEJAD: What do you want to happen from this?

MR. ZREMSKI: I don't -- I'm just asking the question that was handed to me.

MR. ZREMSKI: I raise two questions about the Holocaust. I said if the Holocaust happened and is a reality -- well, granted that the Holocaust is a reality, then why don't we allow more research to be

done on it?

Why are European researchers sent to prison when they question some major aspect of it?

Assuming that it -- the Holocaust, well the reality of the Holocaust is here, it saddens us when any human being is killed; Jews, Christians, Muslims, no difference. But let us remember, then, where did the Holocaust happen to begin with? It happened in Europe. And given that, why is it that the Palestinian people should be displaced? Why is it affecting them? Why are they paying the damage by giving up their land? Why?

That's what our question is based on. It's a very right question to ask. It's very transparent. It doesn't need me to sit down and meet with anybody, although, of course, I would welcome any meeting. But my questions remain the same. They're very clear. And I want answers that are as clear.

MR. ZREMSKI: Okay, we have about five minutes left before the president will have to leave, so we have time for just a couple of last questions.

I just wanted to ask you, Mr. President, about your thoughts and your feelings about the reaction to your visit -- your proposed visit to Ground Zero and your visit later this afternoon at Columbia University. Why do you think both of those proposed visits have caused such controversy in New York City?

PRESIDENT AHMADINEJAD: Last year I wanted to go to Ground Zero as well. I was interested in expressing my sympathy to the victims of that tragedy. And I think that it is the responsibility of all of us to also understand the root causes of events like 9/11. And that was on my plan and agenda this year, as well.

Columbia University has invited me to be there. It is an official invitation. And there are some pro-government members of the press that were -- that objected to it very severely. They've provoked the people, so to say. And this is sad to watch.

I think we should all have the capacity to listen to everything. I announce explicitly and clearly here, we oppose the way the U.S. government tries to manage the world. We believe it's wrong. We believe it leads to war, discrimination and bloodshed. And that we propose more humane methods of establishing peace.

We think that the world can be led in more humane ways than it is now, through peace, brotherhood and friendship and through justice.

We say this very clearly. Why is it that some people don't want to hear anything -- people to hear another point of view? It goes against the grain of freedom of speech and freedom of information here. All voices should be heard.

Last year, a reporter asked me about what the president of the United States had said to the Iranian people about addressing them. And I welcomed it. I said, we want him to talk to our people every

day. Whatever comes to his mind, he should tell our people. I will encourage people to hear what he has to say, as well. I'm surprised, in a place where they claim that they have freedom of information, they are trying to prevent people from talking. That's not good.

MR. ZREMSKI: Okay. In 1979, during the Islamic Revolution in Iran, Iranian students captured more than 50 American hostages and held them captive for 444 days. Do you believe this was morally justified? And if so, why? Or was it wrong?

PRESIDENT AHMADINEJAD: I propose we don't return to the past, because then we'd have to talk about records of 25 years of measures taken by the U.S. administration inside Iran and that history as well, from the coup in 1953 to its support of a dictatorship and the humiliation of the Iranian people and efforts to divide Iran and to insult Iranian people, robbing Iran of its resources and defending Saddam during an eight-year war against Iran.

I think everything should be examined within its own time period (and frame?). And instead of the past, we must now begin to think of the future. Let the future be a bright future.

MR. ZREMSKI: Last question is about the future and kind of reflects upon the fact that here in the United States, we have very long presidential campaigns. And it would prompt an American reporter to ask, do you plan on running for reelection in two years?

PRESIDENT AHMADINEJAD: What do you think?

MR. ZREMSKI: (Laughs.) I think I'll listen to what you have to say. That smile would seem to indicate --

PRESIDENT AHMADINEJAD: Well, I want to see what you have to say for once, too.

MR. ZREMSKI: (Laughs, laughter.) I have no opinions on Iranian politics.

PRESIDENT AHMADINEJAD: (The press if I ran?) and became as candidate again.

MR. ZREMSKI: (Laughs.)

PRESIDENT AHMADINEJAD: Because every day, you will be -- you will have news about peace, good news coming.

MR. ZREMSKI: Great. Thank you very much, President Ahmadinejad, for joining us here today. I'd also like to thank National Press Club staff members Howard Rothman, Tina Creek (sp), Melinda Cooke, Pat Nelson and Jo Anne Booze for organizing today's event. Also, I'd like to especially thank NPC General Manager Bill McCarren and our former General Manager John Bloom for all that they've done to make today's event happen, and thanks to the NPC Library for its research.

In addition, I would like to thank Mohammad Mir Ali Mohammadi of the Iranian mission to the United Nations and Javad Zarif, Iran's former ambassador to the U.N., for their extraordinary efforts to make

this event happen today.

Thank you. We're adjourned. (Strikes gavel.)

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