

Chas Freeman: Israel-Turkey Conflict Could Explode Into War

Ambassador Chas Freeman was a former Assistant Secretary of Defense, earning the highest public service awards of the Department of Defense for his roles in designing a NATO-centred post-Cold War European security system and in reestablishing defence and military relations with China. He served as U. S. Ambassador to Saudi Arabia during operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm. Read Chas Freeman's Substack: <https://substack.com/@chasfreeman662157> Books by Prof. Glenn Diesen: <https://www.amazon.com/stores/author/B09FPQ4MDL> Follow Prof. Glenn Diesen: Substack: <https://glenndiesen.substack.com/> X/Twitter: https://x.com/Glenn_Diesen Patreon: <https://www.patreon.com/glenndiesen> Support the research by Prof. Glenn Diesen: PayPal: <https://www.paypal.com/paypalme/glenndiesen> Buy me a Coffee: buymeacoffee.com/gdieseng Go Fund Me: <https://gofund.me/09ea012f> Buy Diesen merchandise: <https://diesen-shop.fourthwall.com/en-nok>

#Glenn

Welcome back. We are joined today by Ambassador Chas Freeman, the former U.S. Ambassador to Saudi Arabia and also the former Assistant Secretary of Defense. Thank you for coming back on the show.

#Chas Freeman

Very glad to be with you, Glenn.

#Glenn

We knew for a long time that the relationship between Turkey and Israel was a difficult one. Indeed, we see this has become much worse in this struggle over post-Assad Syria. Indeed, all those years of this war against Syria, we saw you had this grand coalition between the U.S., the Gulf states, Turkey, Israel, various jihadist groups, all with a common goal of toppling Assad. I guess a lot of this coalition would predictably fall apart after Assad would be gone and the common interest would be gone. And I guess the main two contenders for influence in post-Assad Syria would be Turkey and Israel.

And now we see that Israel attacked this airbase in Syria, the Abu al-Duhur airbase. And we are told, although I don't think Turkey has confirmed it yet, that they either had troops there or they planned to send troops. Anyways, it seems that the rivalry over influence in Syria is now sparking or intensifying a conflict between Israel and Turkey that could potentially lead to something like a war. And indeed, if you listen to some of the rhetoric from people like Naftali Bennett, Turkey seems

more of a threat to Israel than even Iran. So I wanted to get your view on this, how you read the situation and also the recent developments.

#Chas Freeman

Well, I think it's very complicated, as everything in that region seems to be. I think the state of U.S.-Turkish relations is also a factor in this, and I'll come to that. But basically, one of the major strategic achievements of Israel in the region, in its view, was the disarmament and subjugation of Syria, subordination to Israeli control. That is not just the seizure of some territory in Syria, which Israel clearly plans to keep, but the removal of what Israel Katz, the Israeli defense minister, described as a hostile force on Israel's borders. Of course, there's a certain irony there because Israel has no borders.

It simply expands them wherever it wishes, and then it's surprised that the people it has dislodged have an opinion against it. Anyway, there is a contest going on in Syria between the Turks and Israelis. The Turks have just, according to Israeli sources, supplied Syria with military equipment, including tanks, which would give it some minimal ability to resist the Israeli incursions. I don't believe there were Turkish troops at that airbase. I think they've clearly said there weren't. Of course, one has to take denials from governments with a grain of salt.

In fact, the usual rule is you should never believe anything until it's been officially denied. But in any event, this is a real contest, and it's just been complicated by the Syrian foreign minister declaring that Syria is considering whether it should join the Pakistani-Saudi-Turkish entente, one function of which clearly, perhaps the principal function of which, is to counter Israel. And so this is, I think, a clever diplomatic move. There's no indication that Syria would actually be welcomed into that entente. But there it is. There's also a Syrian statement that they might be open to a Pakistani-brokered rapprochement with Iran.

And what this illustrates is what we've talked about before, and that is the displacement of ideology and theology as guiding forces for the foreign policies of countries in this region, and in fact generally. They're now guided by national interests. And the Shia-Sunni split, which was a defining chasm in the affairs of the region earlier, is now far less important. Turkey, obviously, is Sunni. With regard to the Turkish-Israeli relationship, there are several elements worth thinking about. One is, of course, that the last poll I saw showed that 97% of Turks were against Israel. Why? I mean, the Israelis killed Turks who were attempting to aid Palestinians in Gaza with humanitarian assistance.

And as you indicated, the rhetoric from Naftali Bennett and others in Israel now equates Turkey with Iran as a potential enemy of the existence of Israel, which maybe it is. Anyway, so there is that. Then there is the question of the F-35, which President Erdogan wants to acquire and which Donald Trump appears inclined to release to him. Israel is going hammer and tongs in the United States

against such a transaction on the grounds that it would impair the so-called qualitative edge that the Israelis enjoy as a matter of law in the United States. That is American underwriting of military superiority for Israel in West Asia. So that's a factor.

Lurking behind all of this is the continued American neglect of relations with Turkey, going back to previous administrations, not really repaired by the bromance between Trump and Erdogan, and the fact that Turkey is an essential partner, or at least an essential non-partner or non-antagonist, in a wide variety of American and European interests. You simply can't conduct a policy toward Turkey, Syria, Israel, Palestine, Iraq, Iran, Greece, Cyprus, the Eastern Mediterranean, the Balkans, the Black Sea, the Caucasus, the Central Asian region, including Afghanistan, the Persian Gulf region, and the European Union or NATO region and Russia without Turkish agreement or acquiescence.

So Israel sees Turkey as a rival, not just in the region, but as a rival for American affection or attention, given the level of interest that's involved and the widening realization in the United States that Israel is not a strategic asset for America but a strategic liability. So this is a dangerous situation, and if indeed Syria is a prospective partner in the tripartite entente between Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey, then I think we've got a game changer in the region. And let me just finish by saying, of course, that tripartite entente, whatever else it is, is a declaration by the major countries in the region of independence from reliance on American backing and support, which they no longer consider reliable.

So now they believe they must acquire self-reliance. This will involve further diversifying their international relationships away from America, but more importantly, building capabilities collectively and developing a habit of consultation on regional security affairs. This is obviously designed as a counter to Israel, which they see correctly as the principal source of instability in their region, a state that has no borders and that is expansionist and which has aspirations for still greater domination of the region. But the open question is, what relationship will this entente develop with Iran?

And I think it's entirely plausible, putting together the two Syrian statements, Pakistan perhaps mediating a rapprochement between Syria and Iraq—sorry, Iran—and the Iraqis developing a slowly improving relationship with Syria, which is quite contrary to historical precedent. This is driven by the closure of the Strait of Hormuz and the Iraqi requirement to send oil out to the Mediterranean through Syria, but also by the eclipse of theology as the driving force in the relations between the two: Syria now under Salafi Islamic Sunni rule, Iraq under Shia rule. And I think all of this comes together. The question is, what will the relationship between the tripartite alliance, or entente more accurately, I think, and Iran be?

And I can foresee a consultative relationship, not a membership in the entente, but something like the consultative relationship with Egypt that the other three parties had in dealing with regional efforts, regional activities, and developments. In other words, a coordination mechanism, not a membership, maybe a dialogue partner relationship, to use the ASEAN term. So I think this is what is happening between Turkey and Israel is really very important and a bit dangerous, because

Turkey is a formidable military power. And the Israelis, who aspire to dominate the entire region, have little hope of dominating Turkey.

#Glenn

Just a quick thought on the possibility of Syria and Iran improving relations. That would be quite interesting. Last time we spoke, you also mentioned that the Saudis could move a bit away from this religious thinking and lean more into national interest. And it reminds me a little bit of the Thirty Years' War we had in Europe 500 years ago. That is when you saw Catholic France allying with the Protestant Swedes to balance off the Catholic Habsburgs to avoid encirclement or domination.

#Chas Freeman

I think that is a parallel. And indeed, the Saudis have moved well away from religiously driven foreign policy. They are very much pursuing their national interest as they see it, sometimes ineptly, of course, with this reigniting of war with Ansar Allah, the Houthis, in Yemen standing out as a prime example of foolish, perhaps backing, perhaps not a direct action by the Saudis, but a collusive action with their government in Yemen, in South Yemen that they recognize. So, yeah, that is indeed a parallel. And let me draw a further parallel, because I think if you go back and look at the Peace of Westphalia, which resulted from that confused contest, people found a way of transcending religious differences and creating a new state system in Europe. And I think this is entirely possible within the Islamic context.

That is to say, there is an Islamic lore of statecraft which is very rich, 1,500 years of it, and many principles in common between Shia and Sunni. Of course, Shiism and Sunni Islam are both internally divided, but they have common principles, which people found in the Peace of Westphalia in Europe, and it could happen in the Gulf as well. One thing here is that Israel has succeeded, especially with the latest comments by Itamar Ben-Gvir, Minister of Security in Israel, advocating the murder of 50, 60 Palestinians a day, just as a matter of principle in Gaza, revealing himself to be not just the sadist we knew he was, but a mass murderer with no humanity at all. This has united the 57 Muslim-dominated countries in the world behind an anti-Israel policy, which is yet to be fully realized organizationally, but which is out there as a potential that Israel and its friends should be worried about.

#Glenn

Well, not just religious lines. It's quite interesting that the Russians were there for so long helping Assad to fight essentially Jolani and his crew. And then now we see Russia essentially seemingly being allowed to keep its military bases, something that annoys the Europeans. I think that was a—not think, I know that was a key motivation for supporting the toppling of Assad as well: to not just disentangle Syria from Iran, but also disentangle it from Russia. But I was wondering, what do you think might be the reactions here?

Because again, if Israel wants to deter Turkey from establishing a base in Syria, if that's indeed what they were intending to do, I assume that the Turks won't just pack up and leave and go home. How do you think they're responding? Will they strengthen their own presence in Syria? Will they just send a lot of arms? How might they respond, as you know there's a possibility now of Turkey and Israel going up the escalation ladder? I stress possibility, not certainty. Of course, now it's a moment—they're shadowboxing. They're not actually landing punches.

#Chas Freeman

But that could happen. I think history teaches an important lesson, and that is: don't mess with the Turks. I think you do that at your peril. And so the Israelis are right to be concerned that they have a formidable opponent in Syria. The Russian presence in Syria is indeed another indicator of, as you suggest, the eclipse of ideology or theology as a driving force in foreign policy, in this case in the foreign policy of Syria. And I know that the Russians retain a diplomatic ability, even though they are distracted at the moment by the war in Eastern Europe. They retain a diplomatic capability to mediate, to intervene, to broker various arrangements between Turks and Israelis, if that's possible, between Syrians and Iranians.

And the United States and Western Europeans don't have that ability because we have cut off our dialogue with Iran. And Israel is now at odds with us across the board, defiant on virtually every front, determined to finish the extermination of Palestinians in Gaza, to drive Palestinians out of the West Bank, to annex southern Lebanon, to keep the territories taken in Syria, and to attack at will its neighbors whenever they defy it. So this is the source of instability in the region, as I mentioned, and the appetite for instability in the region by Europeans and Americans is running quite low.

#Glenn

The Russians I speak with, they argue now that it's not so bad, actually, that Assad is gone because it put an end to Russia's military participation. But also, standing so close with Assad, it created a lot of tensions between Russia and the Gulf states. Now that they kind of divorced themselves from this situation, it's easier to work with the Gulf states. And so it's interesting how things turn out. But what else is there, though, in this relationship between the Turks and the Israelis? And I just would add, I think this is problematic for the Israelis.

I can understand why they might be concerned. Turkey has a massive conventional army, a huge population. Again, and as we said, the rivalry for U.S. affection, if you will—that is, you know, they're a NATO member, the Americans have nuclear weapons there—it is a problem. But you also see Erdogan, his rhetoric seems to suggest that Israeli actions in the region, it's now affecting Turkish security. So is there an actual security competition, or is it more limited to Syria here?

#Chas Freeman

No, I think it's a broad-based competition on all the fronts you mentioned. You've inadvertently reminded me of my chairmanship of the U.S.-Turkish Joint Commission on Military Cooperation, which took me to Ankara, where one of the issues at the time was the Turks were attempting to procure tanker aircraft from the United States. The Israelis, working through the Greek lobby in the United States, were trying very hard to snatch that contract away. And I was present at a discussion between our military representative in Ankara, Major General Philip Nuber, and the head of the Turkish Air Force, General Burhan, in which General Burhan, in the congenial manner of the Turkish General Staff generally, said to Phil Nuber, "Phil, if you don't get me those aircraft, I'm going to put you in a Turkish jail." And he said, "Have you ever seen a Turkish jail?"

And Phil said, "No." And General Burhan said, "Well, did you see Midnight Express?" And Phil said, "Yes." And General Burhan said, "They exaggerated the amenities." So the Turks don't play around, you know. Anyway, in the end, they did get the aircraft. And they used the tankers very effectively to send F-16s to Libya against American wishes. And so everybody in the region is behaving quite independently. Nobody regards the United States as reliable. That includes Israel, of course, which, as I mentioned, is now at odds with the United States across the board. This isn't going to go away if there is a new leader elected in Israel or if Prime Minister Netanyahu is reelected somehow. It's structural. And everybody in the region is reacting to this, I think, believing that Israel is now vulnerable. And perhaps the Turks are motivated in part by that.

#Glenn

How stable do you see... I mean, if I would assess Turkey in the region, I wouldn't just look at its interests. I would look at its, I guess, predictability and its path forward. Because what I find interesting about Turkey is, on one hand, they do talk a lot about, you know, harmonizing interests with others in the region. Last year, I had a meeting in the Vatican with Jeffrey Sachs, as well as the First Lady of Turkey. And, you know, she was also stressing a lot how you need to have this, you know, bridging the differences between different religions and different ethnic groups. And, you know, a lot of harmony in the language, but at the same time, you also see in Turkish foreign policy, they make deals and you think you have an arrangement, and then suddenly there's a knife in your back.

So I'm just—well, especially with, like, for example, with the Russians, they had a few incidents as well. As you know, for example, the Azov warrior from Turkey, which the Russians had apprehended. They were sent to Turkey. They weren't supposed to be sent back to Ukraine before or after the war. The Turks just, you know, went ahead. And, you know, same as with the attack on Syria. The Russians thought they had an arrangement with the Turks, and, you know, it didn't last very long. So my impression of Turkey is, yes, it's a very independent actor. I think many countries like Russia prefer to look towards the Turks exactly because they're able to act independently. But at the same time, they don't always seem predictable. Yeah, let's go with trustworthy as well.

#Chas Freeman

Well, I think you raise a number of issues. It's been some years since I've been in Turkey, but Turkish society has been divided between the secularism of the Kemalist element and the Muslim Brotherhood orientation of Erdoğan and his followers. And, of course, there was an alleged coup against Erdoğan, supposedly led by the Gülen movement, which has been ruthlessly repressed. And these fissures exist in Turkish politics, with quite sharp differences between the followers of Atatürk and the more Islamist democratic element behind Erdoğan. But in the middle of all this, let's not forget that the major national security issue that the Turks have faced internally, which was the violent opposition to terrorism of the PKK, the Kurdish Communist Party in Turkey, has been set aside.

Abdullah Öcalan, who's the head of that party, has made his peace with the Turkish government. The PKK is basically disarmed. And the Kurds over the border in Syria also seem to be integrating slowly with the government in Damascus, not focused so much on opposition to Turkey. And in Kurdistan, Iraqi Kurdistan, there's also quite a move, it seems, toward reconciliation with the Turks. So I think it's a mixed picture. And the erratic nature of Turkish policy reflects a strongman, Erdoğan, who is now in charge. I mean, by comparison with Trump, he's as steady and predictable as you can get. But most people would not apply that standard, I gather. And so, yes, there is the Turks again.

One can't take them for granted, and it's a mistake to do so. But I think what Israel is doing in Syria is—and generally, I refer back to the alienation of the 57 members of the Organization for Islamic Cooperation—what they're doing is making an enemy of Turkey. And I know you and I have discussed before that whereas Henry Kissinger remarked that even the paranoid have enemies, I had to correlate: the paranoid are particularly good at making enemies. And in this case, Israelis, who are very paranoid, dominated by all sorts of theories of global anti-Semitism and whatnot, which really don't hold up but which guide their policy, they are making an enemy of Turkey.

#Glenn

Yeah, no, no, I agree. And, well, also the quote by Kissinger, I think, is, yeah, a wise position to take because, you know, the Israelis, as you say, could be very paranoid. But Turkey is a huge country, as I said before. It has a formidable military force. And again, given that it could be a bit, or proven in the past to be a bit unpredictable, and also the region is shifting quickly, you don't know where the United States is going to be standing a year from now, especially after the defeat in Iran. And then you see Turkey making this defense pact with the Saudis and Pakistan, and I'm thinking this strategic... shifting the strategic alignment very rapidly.

#Chas Freeman

I'm sorry. I mean, you're absolutely correct. I mean, there is a parallel. You're an expert on Russia. There's a parallel to what the Russians are doing, and that is giving up 300 years of effort to

Europeanize themselves. And the Turks have done the same. They now straddle the region. And don't forget the list of Turkish influence on other interests that I mentioned. I can't think of a country which is as important in the management of other relationships as Turkey is. So Turkey is really a fulcrum from which can leverage all kinds of things, and it's a mistake not to pay attention to Turkey. Maybe the Israelis have finally figured that out, but they're giving it the wrong kind of attention, in my view, for their own long-term interests.

#Glenn

I think what's happening with—I like the way you compared Turkey to Russia on this, because it's hard to overstate how much Europe is undergoing change. That is, after the Cold War, the EU aligned itself at the hip, more or less, with the US, well, as it had been before. But the EU itself became, you know, always in literature, conceptualized itself as a gravitational force. That is, the entire region, all its neighbors kind of leaning in towards the EU. Everyone needs trade agreements. They're willing to accept the political conditions for trading with the EU. And essentially, everyone is standing at the door asking what they can do next. And this was kind of the regulatory power that Brussels enjoyed.

But now the Russians have essentially said, well, it's 300 years since Peter the Great of having a Western-centric foreign policy, looking towards the Europeans for economic development, technology. This is over. We're going to look to the East. And now you see the same from Turkey. And then even the Americans are now losing interest in Europe, saying, well, you're perhaps third in our priorities. This is new. And with the end of this gravitational pull, the EU itself, of course, can begin to fragment because suddenly the collective bargaining power that created this gravitational pull, that was kind of the main incentive for transferring your sovereignty to Brussels. So anyways, I get a bit off track here. What I do want to... I think it's very important. I mean...

#Chas Freeman

Conceiving of European influence as a gravitational force is exactly the right metaphor. It's been remarkably successful in extending its standards to its periphery and incorporating new members who accept standards pioneered by Western Europeans. You know, this has been a great success story. What Europe has not been able to do is to cohere sufficiently to act beyond its immediate periphery, and it has, in the case of the Ukraine war, acted so foolishly, without any dialogue with Moscow, no effort to find a stable resolution of the security issues that Ukraine represents, both for Russia and the rest of Europe, that, you know, it has fouled its own nest, as it were.

And there we are. But at least you can count one blessing. I think Donald Trump just threatened to bomb Oman, an inoffensive, neutral, diplomatically effective, and very helpful country on the Arabian Peninsula facing the Arabian Sea and Africa, an imperial power in the past. But so far as I know, he's not threatened to bomb Norway yet. Presumably the Save the Whales people will try to persuade him to do that. But I don't know if Laura Loomer has yet been converted to their cause.

#Glenn

I find it very strange. These are the people who are influencing Trump. It's deeply concerning to me, though.

#Chas Freeman

Well, you've probably been, as I have, to the House of Rasputin. Some of this is reminiscent of that, the last days of the Tsars.

#Glenn

Yeah, it's fascinating who gets, you know, the ear of the leaders. But, yeah, what I wanted to ask before I forgot was, you know, let's say from the Israeli perspective, there's good reason to fear Turkey. I would just like to make the point: I do think they're unnecessarily making an enemy out of Turkey where it's not necessary. I always make the same point with Europeans and Russia. You have reasons to be concerned about the Russians, but making an enemy out of it must have been something for the history books in terms of stupidity.

But if we do recognize that Israel has some legitimate concerns about Turkey, well, what can Israel really do? I mean, their weapons stockpiles have been depleted, their military systems, their personnel. I mean, they've been largely exhausted. I think the head of the IDF warned that they were already profoundly overstretched. And so, you know, they're facing—also, they're already engaged in all these wars with Iran, Hamas, Hezbollah, Syria, Yemen. What is the capacity now of the Israeli army to actually take on such a massive giant like Turkey? I mean, if you...

#Chas Freeman

I don't think they have that capacity. I think a good deal of this is electoral rhetoric. You know, Israeli politics revolve around declaring everybody to be an anti-Semitic enemy. In Turkey, you know, 97% of Turks apparently are happy to accept that appellation. So part of it is that, but it is foolish because they don't have the capacity to do that. And they're doing this. It is possible to look at the past and to argue that one of the reasons that the Turks had a diplomatic relationship with Israel and did trade with it and so on was because the Turks had an overwhelming desire to appease American interests, which were manipulated by Israel to its advantage.

That's gone. No, the Turks still apparently facilitate the transport of oil through their territory for the benefit of Israel, oil from Azerbaijan, I guess. But so they're not actively acting against Israel. But then Israel isn't really actively acting against Turkey either. I mean, this is a war that is being carried out by proxy in a struggle in Syria and in Kurdistan, Iraqi Kurdistan, where the Israelis have

entrenched themselves, as have the Americans. This is the reason that the Iranians have been bombing Iraqi Kurdistan. And so, you know, everything in the region operates independently, but it's all interconnected somehow.

#Glenn

Yeah, that's a good way of framing it. But besides the material losses, though, and exhaustion in Israel, there's also the reputation it has. I mean, the reputation of Israel, I think, was quite important. I mean, on one hand, yes, the brutality they used against their enemies, it was always condemned because of the brutality of it. But on the other hand, this overwhelming superiority and force, it also established a powerful reputation for Israel that you would be careful before you go against it. Not only would you have a powerful Israel, but you would have a powerful America standing behind it. But the IDF reputation now seems to have suffered somewhat, and

#Chas Freeman

I think it's been gravely tarnished. And, you know, I mean, Israel basically has gotten by. Israel is a state established by Europeans, European Jews, and it has enjoyed honorary membership in Europe. You know, that's why it's at Eurovision and other things, which is now controversial, which never was before. I mean, Israelis are in West Asia, but they would prefer to be in Europe. And, of course, I think it was a grave mistake not to allow European Jews to set up a state in Bavaria after World War II, but that is not what happened. And we're left with the results. But this European identity has worn thin to the point of disappearing.

I mean, no European would say anything like what Ben-Gurion just said. No European would say anything like Bezalel Smotrich says. No European would dare say the sorts of things that Netanyahu says about a seizure of territory by force and the eviction of the existing population and so forth. Israel is now a complete outlaw. It has departed from the norms of international law crafted by Europe. It espouses no principles other than its own survival at whatever expense to others that entails. It's lost the admiration of the West. It never really had the admiration of the rest of the world.

But now it has the opprobrium of the rest of the world and a rising percentage of people in the West who do not want to be associated with genocide, mass murder, torture, sodomy in the prisons, and all the other ugly things that Israelis now stand for. So now, when you talk about the IDF, and if you were to say, as Netanyahu used to claim, that this was the world's most moral army, people would snicker. They would condemn you for moral blindness. This is the world's most sadistic army. It is the most uncontrolled army. It is the most brutal army. And it is the most successful army at making enemies for the state it serves that exists anywhere, despite some competition internationally.

#Glenn

Yeah, and all—it's not just reputation, I would say. Israel itself has changed profoundly, at least since the '60s, '70s. I mean, the kind of secular and different moral compass Israel assumed to have back then, it's not recognizable compared to what they are today. But this is also fueling internal problems, though, which is why I'm wondering—well, there's a lot of consensus on key issues like attacking Iran or, you know, what they're doing in Gaza, Lebanon, the wars. That seems to be a unifier. But beyond this, they have some profound problems at home, though, some divisions which are hard to overcome.

#Chas Freeman

Well, some of those divisions reflect the evolution of Zionism. Zionism actually—I mean, the initial impetus for resettling European Jews in Palestine was actually a Christian invention. It wasn't a Jewish invention. And it was picked up later by secular Jews who had Christmas trees in their living rooms and so forth—Herzl. And the initial impetus for the establishment of the State of Israel, Zionism, it was basically modeled on Eastern European nationalism. That is, ethno-linguistic self-determination. In this case, involving the transformation of religious communities into a presumed ethnicity, which is, of course—I mean, one of the great ironies is Golda Meir and others used to refer to the Palestinians as an invented people, but Israelis are an invented people. I mean, Zionists are an invented people.

Anyway, Zionism has left Judaism far behind. The Orthodox in Israel, the ultra-Orthodox, the Haredim, do not accept the existence of the Israeli state or the moral justification for it, and continue to practice a form of Judaism which has nothing to do with Zionism. They don't want it to be associated with it. They're not prepared to defend it. They won't join the army if they can avoid it. And they devote themselves to religious studies. Secular Jews have been squeezed out. There is now net emigration at quite a rate from Israel. There's concern among Israelis that the best and the brightest, the people who made Israel a formidable country, innovator in science and technology, are leaving. And there's concern actually now in some neighboring countries, Cyprus, for example, that the exodus of Israelis is implanting new colonies on Cypriot soil.

There are billboards in Cyprus extolling the virtues of various candidates in the Israeli elections, to which ordinary Cypriots take issue. It's almost an extension of Israeli sovereignty, in their view. And, you know, within Israel, the divisions between the ultra-religious, the secular, and the simple nationalists are acute. And Israel, in many ways, is a society that is fissioning, dividing in multiple ways. The war in Gaza has produced a crisis in the army, to which you referred. The commander of the IDF has expressed grave concern about the possibility that the army might simply fall apart. Reservists often no longer report for duty. The popularity of wars at the level of the citizenry is not necessarily shared by the army. The atrocities being committed in the West Bank horrify decent Israelis, of whom there are quite a few.

And Israel has no strategy for survival in the long term. It assumes that it can always live by pointing a gun at everyone else. And this is not a survival strategy by any standard. So there are

grave doubts in Israel about its longevity as a state. And more and more, one hears analogies to the Christian Crusader kingdoms that were established 900, 800 years ago, which lasted about 100 years or less, and which fell afoul of the same forces that are diminishing Israel, and that is the loss of foreign support, which was essential to their survival, and the failure to make peace with their Muslim and Christian neighbors. So, you know, this is a story that is not over, and it does not necessarily have a happy ending for Zionism.

#Glenn

Well, I've seen articles in Israeli media, like Haaretz, where they question whether or not Israel should leave Zionism behind. Some of the arguments remind me of arguments put forward in Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*. That argument is that if you mix the church with politics, you don't bring the divine into politics; rather, you bring the corruption and decadence of politics into the church. So you should—this is essentially the secular argument of the religious. But of course, you can argue that the same can be applied to Judaism. I can understand why many Jewish people in Israel wouldn't feel completely comfortable with this mixture.

#Chas Freeman

I mean, Zionism is the analog to—I like the Dostoevsky reference—but I think of it as the analog to Daesh, the Islamic State, in its relationship with conventional Islam. I mean, Judaism is a global religion, and it's practiced in Europe and the Americas, not so much in Asia, but it is practiced in Europe and the Americas in ways that are completely incompatible with Israeli behavior, statements, interpretations. Jewish supremacy, which is what Zionism has evolved to advocate, is anathema to most Western Jews. So I would argue there's been a divorce between Zionism and Judaism. I'm not Jewish, but if I were, I would cringe at the pretense of Israelis to speak for me.

I don't think Israelis speak for world Jewry, and I think increasingly world Jewry is aware of that and reacting. Of course, there are those who are still scarred by the Holocaust and who are paranoid, who support Israel regardless of what it does. And they include many plutocrats. Usually, by the way, your transcription service renders "plutocrat" as "bureaucrat," but it's not what I mean. And so... anyway, I think Israel is in crisis internally and externally, and there's no gainsaying that. And one has to hope that it will pull itself together and rediscover the merits of the religion it was founded in the name of.

#Glenn

Yeah, well, just the last question on, you know, going back to what you started with, that is the competition between Turkey and Israel. And of course, the U.S. relationship is a big variable here. How do you see, then, the U.S. having tied its strategic position so closely to Israel? This is becoming difficult to sustain, and you see that in the region, and you see it in domestic politics in the United States, the way Israel is now referred to. Again, you didn't see any of this only a few years

ago. How do you think this plays into this? The U.S.-Israeli relationship plays into the wider regional tensions, because this must obviously play into some of the Israeli concerns then for Turkey—about Turkey, sorry.

#Chas Freeman

Yeah, no, it's become acceptable in the United States to ask whether Israel is a strategic liability rather than an asset. And I think very clearly the evidence supports the thesis that it is. It is the source of instability in West Asia. Its actions have repeatedly embroiled the United States in dangerous situations, not just recently, but during the Cold War. The surprise attack on Egypt and Syria in 1967, for example, which led to a U.S.-Soviet crisis. The same thing in 1973, although that was an Egyptian counterattack across the Suez Canal. The establishment of Israel as an independent state in violation of the terms of the United Nations Charter, for it also caused a crisis. And, of course, now we see the depletion of American strength on a global level as a result of a war that Israel advocated and basically suckered the United States into.

And Israel walking away from that war, leaving us holding the bag, Israel not being concerned about the Strait of Hormuz. We haven't really talked about that, but I would say where we are on that is that both the Iranians and the Americans have now recognized that there's no military solution to this war. Iran can't defeat the United States. It can do grave damage. The United States can do some damage to Iran, but we have now enough experience to know that that doesn't solve any problem. So Donald Trump has announced all-out economic warfare against Iran, including secondary sanctions against any country that trades with Iran. If that includes China, I suppose that is going to be a new wound on the U.S.-China relationship, perhaps fatal to the proposed Xi Jinping-Trump summit in Washington.

But quite aside from that, I think European allies of the United States have been careful to dissociate themselves from the American war on Iran, but they've not actively opposed it. I think this might actually generate outright opposition, and people doing what Spain has done and just say, "We're not— not only are we not with you on this, we're against you." So this is a gamble. And I don't think Scott Bessent has the cards, to use a phrase made popular by this administration, to pull off what he proposes in a shaky bond market, with the dollar unstable and rising antipathy to the United States internationally. So we shall see. This coming week, apparently, we will see a shot in the dark by the Secretary of the Treasury, the faithful stooge of President Trump.

#Glenn

Well, this whole conflict, you can see it spreading now because, again, Trump, as you said, he announced this economic D-Day on Iran. And then today, the Chinese responded, saying, "Well, we're not going to play ball because—"

#Chas Freeman

No, of course not. It's too much.

#Glenn

But that affects everything, because if it was only North Korea, they might play ball. If it was a little bit of pressure on Russia, then they would prefer to just work with the U.S. But now everything is going to go to the side, and they're just going to have to accept the difficult relations with the U.S. And all of these sanctions are going to become less efficient.

#Chas Freeman

Well, they are illegal under international law. These are secondary sanctions. They're illegal. Actually, primary sanctions are illegal unless they're approved by the Security Council. But who cares about international law these days? But I think really what the issue here is, of course, Russia and China, when there was the snapback to sanctions on Iran, said that was an illegal decision which they would not respect. And so they will clearly oppose this economic warfare on Iran. But I think the prospects are good that many others will join them. So we are doing something that is uniting opposition to our policy if we do what we're proposing to do. Of course, Donald Trump can always reverse his economic warfare tomorrow. He has a habit of doing that. If he can figure out how to make money by doing that, I assume he'll do it.

#Glenn

Well, thank you for sharing your insights and your analysis. It's always quite fascinating. So thank you so much.

#Chas Freeman

Well, thank you, Glenn, for what you do.