

Attack On Venezuela Will Destroy The US Empire | Amb. Chas Freeman

Can a superpower simply kidnap a foreign leader and charge them with possessing weapons on their own soil? Now that the U.S. has effectively "caught the car" in Venezuela, is there any road left for international law, or have we fully entered the era of the outlaw state? To make sense of this unprecedented aggression, I brought back Ambassador Chas Freeman. As a former Assistant Secretary of Defense and Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, Chas has seen the machinery of empire from the inside, and his assessment of this latest intervention—and the constitutional crisis accompanying it—is as chilling as it is essential. Links: Neutrality Studies substack: <https://pascallottaz.substack.com> (Opt in for Academic Section from your profile settings: <https://pascallottaz.substack.com/s/academic>) Goods Store: <https://neutralitystudies-shop.fourthwall.com> Timestamps: 00:00:00 Trump's Attack on Venezuela 00:11:24 US Interventionism: Oil & Historical Parallels 00:22:08 The "Automatic Weapons" Charge & Legal Imperialism 00:32:37 Designing New Institutions: What to Keep from the UN? 00:36:46 How the Global Majority Can "Unfreeze" the System 00:41:59 Bottom-Up Sanctions & Overcoming Inertia 00:49:59 Conclusion: Deepfakes & The End of the Order

#Pascal

Hello, everybody, and welcome back. Today we're joined once again by Ambassador Chas Freeman, a former Assistant Secretary of Defense and Ambassador to Saudi Arabia. Chas, welcome back. Thank you. Good to be with you, Pascal. Chas, we've now seen that Donald Trump, on the second or third day of the year, attacked Venezuela. As a former U.S. official and diplomat for the United States, what did you make of this blatant attack on another nation?

#Amb. Chas Freeman

Well, I think there are several dimensions to this that need to be explored. One is, of course, that this was a meticulously planned information campaign—really, a disinformation campaign—with a lot of accusations against Israel, most of which had no substance. It was preceded by careful preparation of the press environment, the information environment, as well as by murders on the high seas of people suspected of being involved in moving drugs—not to the United States, actually, but to Trinidad for onward shipment to Europe and West Africa. Quite an elaborate story was developed in the media. The Trump administration announced a revised version of the Monroe Doctrine, presaging a rampage through South America and the Caribbean, presumably also Central America and North America, in the form of Mexico. All of this was quite out in the open.

I think Nicolás Maduro underestimated it. He seemed to believe that Trump wouldn't be serious. The first thing is that the operation itself was very skillfully managed. The second is that it was entirely

illegal—indecent, really an atrocity. I think it brought to an end three centuries of effort to develop a kind of international rule of law, starting in the 18th century and continuing on. Much of the 20th century, especially the last 50 years, was spent by the United States trying to promote that vision of the rule of law internationally. By the time of the Biden administration, that had decayed into something called the “rules-based order,” which basically meant: we make the rules, we enforce them on whomever we wish, and we exempt whomever we wish—including ourselves—from those rules.

But I think what we're seeing is an international reaction building against this really outrageous repudiation of the whole idea of rules internationally. I've seen very strong statements by smaller countries—Singapore in your region, since you're in East Asia, as well as Malaysia, Vietnam, and Indonesia. The fact is, the rule of law has two purposes. One is, of course, to provide predictability to the environment so that people can carry on business in a normal manner, fairly sure of what is and isn't going to happen. But more importantly, it protects the weak against the strong. And the strongest country in the world now—the United States—has just repudiated all consideration of the rights of everyone else. This is, in effect, a sort of tyranny over the globe.

And I think, frankly, we've seen with the case of Gaza that words of outrage accomplish nothing. If the United States is not subjected to sanctions by the global majority—if it doesn't pay a price, particularly its business elite—I think what we're looking at is a horror. I see that Mette Frederiksen, the prime minister of Denmark, is once again under threat from Trump about Greenland. And where does this stop? You know, Trump came into office claiming Greenland. He's also laid a claim to Iceland, remarkably. And I don't see how the European relationship with the United States survives this kind of thing. What happens to NATO? What happens to the EU? Who stands up to this bully? I think this is really a deciding event, if there ever was one. And I haven't even mentioned Panama.

But setting a precedent—I just saw a wonderful cartoon someone sent me. It showed a television broadcaster saying, “In news of the Western Hemisphere, a peace-loving democracy has invaded and captured the leader of a neighboring war-mongering country.” And it shows the Canadian Royal Mounted Police hauling Donald Trump off. He's just set a precedent that can be applied to him. That is to say, if a leader is regarded as intolerable in his behavior, others can now take action. And someone pointed out, you know, what was the justification Trump used here—which was fictitious for the most part—about drug production in Venezuela?

You know, the Mexican government could easily respond—since it's failed completely to get any diplomatic reaction to its repeated requests to stop the flow of weapons from the United States into Mexico, weapons that are used by the drug cartels there to terrorize Mexican society. Mexicans, following this precedent, could simply bomb the places where the guns are made or stored. And they would have the precedent that Donald Trump has set as justification. So I think this has huge implications, not just for Venezuela. And there are a number of other aspects of this that are quite absurd. It's very clear that Donald Trump expects Delcy Rodríguez, who is the constitutional successor—acting president through Nicolás Maduro in his absence now that he's incarcerated in

New York—that they expect her to take over because she had a major role in the partial repair of the Venezuelan petroleum sector after the extremely bad management under Maduro.

And she revived Venezuelan oil production to a considerable extent. That just means she can be bought to help American oil companies—she can be enticed to cooperate with the United States. So she's being subjected, on the one hand, to blandishments: "If you cooperate and run Venezuela to our satisfaction, we'll leave you alone, our companies will invest, and everything will be wonderful—for a while, anyway." Of course, if you make that kind of deal with a mafioso, it doesn't last. On the other hand, she's being told, "If you don't cooperate, your fate will be worse than Maduro's." So this is, again, the mafioso approach to managing relationships.

A final note: I'd just say there's a lot of absolute nonsense in the media. There's a report that twenty plutocrats from Wall Street are headed to Venezuela to look into oil investment opportunities. I wouldn't want to be one of those guys, given the likelihood that there will be armed opposition in Venezuela to that kind of thing. But aside from the danger that any American oil company investing there is likely to face from guerrilla action, I think it has to be said—well, you know, I was ambassador to Saudi Arabia. At one point I read that people had advised Henry Kissinger, in an earlier era, to send the military in to take over the oil fields and the operations of Saudi Aramco, and I just had a good laugh.

If you know anything at all about modern petroleum industries—extractive industries—they're enormously complex. They require great expertise. They take years to revive production. There's no immediate payoff from this under any circumstances, even if the security situation allows companies other than Chevron, which has been there all along and cooperated with the regime in Venezuela, to enter the Venezuelan market. So I think this is loony tunes. This is complete lunacy, and it needs to be stopped. Is the world going to do something, or are we just going to do the usual European thing—wringing your hands while sitting on them, which is an uncomfortable position, but it's about all Europeans do these days?

#Pascal

Well, I mean, that's, I think, the Swiss position, if I understand their statements. They're not happy with what happened, but they're not even willing to mention that the United States committed the infringement. The European Union is more or less content to say that Maduro is gone. So basically, without saying "we applaud what happened," they're saying, "we're fine with the outcome." But may I ask you—because we do, unfortunately, have the precedent that these kinds of operations can work—a lot of people say the Iraq war was a huge blunder and failure and whatnot. But the fact of the matter is that, thanks to the 2003 invasion, the United States, for the last 22 or 23 years, has been controlling Iraq's oil, successfully so. It also did so in Syria. So there is a history of successfully getting oil out of countries through war.

#Amb. Chas Freeman

I think the case of Syria is a pretty egregious one. It's clearly motivated largely by control of the limited oil production there. But I have to correct you with respect to Iraq—the primary production is all Chinese companies. So we fought the war, and somebody else reaped the benefits economically. And of course, Iraq is still very unsettled. It's a society and a nation divided, trying to get rid of the American troop presence and continuously failing. So that is not a success. I'm afraid this invasion of Venezuela is fairly typical of failed American strategic reasoning. It's the same pattern: we invade, we remove the leader, and everything else is supposed to be fine.

We take out Saddam and everything is solved in Iraq. You know, we decapitate the government in Tehran with the Israelis and everything is wonderful. Well, no, it isn't. And if you take out, as we did, the leader of Syria, Bashar al-Assad, is everything wonderful in Syria? I don't think so. So this is a fallacy—and a perpetual one. It's very interesting to me that Venezuela has followed its constitutional process and appointed Delcy Rodríguez as acting president. She's apparently a very competent woman, educated in France, and, as I said, has a stellar record managing the mess in the Venezuelan petroleum industry. And so she—well, you know, Trump says, or rather, Rubio says, and Trump echoes, "Well, we can work with her."

She'll run the country to our satisfaction because we have her—because we've got her between threats and inducements. I don't think that's necessarily going to be the case. Venezuela is a country of 30 million people, and of course many abroad have fled the misery that our 25 years of sanctions have caused. This isn't the first time we've kidnapped a Venezuelan president. We did that to Hugo Chávez Frías in 2002 and installed a puppet government in Caracas, which the Venezuelan military then overthrew. And Chávez came back. He died of disease in 2013, I think. Maduro was a bad candidate—not very competent, and probably a fairly brutal dictator in his country. There's hardly anyone who has a kind word to say for him.

But a man who is totally illegitimate doesn't arm four and a half million people with rifles in a people's militia. So I think this problem of legitimacy that we claim—"well, he wasn't legitimate," and so forth—well, first of all, who are we to say that? But anyway, even if he wasn't legitimate in terms of having stolen an election, which we claim may be true, maybe not, even if he wasn't legitimate in that sense, he was in charge of Venezuela, and people had accepted him there for the most part. Those who didn't accept him, you know, left for Colombia, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Peru, the United States, other places. So I think this is far more complicated. I'd basically sum it up by saying the dog has caught the car.

#Pascal

Yeah.

#Amb. Chas Freeman

Know what?

#Pascal

May I ask you, though—there's a long, 200-year history of U.S. intervention in... excuse me—in Latin America, and also in the Pacific. Interventions all over the place, including, of course, places that today are part of the United States. Hawaii, right, started the process by having a coup against its legitimate government—the queen, back in 1894 or '95, I think—and so on. And South America, you know, with Chile, with Allende, and so on, and with Panama in '89. There are so many examples—Nicaragua, whatnot. In what sense do you think the current example of Venezuela is different from, let's say, the Cold War interventionism in South America? Well, you're right—it's 130 years of intervention.

#Amb. Chas Freeman

The United States spent the first hundred years of our independence proclaiming that we would never behave like the British and invade everybody—and then we did. And you're quite right. We started by overthrowing the Hawaiian monarchy. We then went on to a war with Spain, which gave us the Philippines, Puerto Rico, and Guam. That was the start of it—that was actually under McKinley and Roosevelt. However, Woodrow Wilson, the great avatar of democracy, was by far the worst—invading Mexico, Nicaragua, Honduras, Guatemala, and, of course, picking up on the Roosevelt intervention that created the state of Panama, which had been part of Colombia. We separated that to our advantage. We occupied, over the course of the 20th century, places like Haiti for about 30 years.

They didn't do the Haitians any good, as you can see from their condition today. We had the same thing in Nicaragua that produced the Somoza dictatorship. We did this in the Dominican Republic—we both installed and then removed Trujillo, and so forth and so on. It's a sorry record, but it should teach us something. These interventions did not solve any problems. They did not create democracies, better societies, or richer societies. You know, they were very good, for example, in the case of Guatemala and the overthrow of Jacobo Árbenz. They were very good in terms of protecting the assets of the United Fruit Company, but they didn't do anything for Guatemalans. And, you know, on top of everything else, we have an unholy relationship with various right-wing elements, particularly in Central America.

You know, Trump just pardoned the former president of Honduras, who had been convicted of an incredible trade in narcotics with the United States. At the same time that he's accusing Maduro of doing something, he's pardoning someone who actually did what he's accusing Maduro of doing—mostly falsely. Final note here: of course, the U.S. is asserting jurisdiction over Maduro. The Vienna Convention gives absolute immunity to a head of state or government, so this is completely illegal under international law. But this is taking place in the Southern District of New York, which is the

most corrupt judicial system in the entire United States. And it will be very interesting to see the trial, because if you read the indictment, it's basically a political speech with a lot of ideological baloney.

I don't think there's much legal in there, and I don't know whether, as corrupt as that jurisdiction is, they can get a conviction. Of course, the precedent everybody cites is George H. W. Bush going to Panama, removing Noriega as president, and then convicting him of narcotics offenses and putting him in jail, and so forth. That was widely condemned at the time as utterly illegal. It was. It's not a helpful precedent. But we've just set a precedent that's rightly regarded by smaller countries all over the world as very dangerous for them. We don't seem to think it's dangerous for us, but I suspect it is. And, you know... what will happen in the Ukraine context? Will Russia now feel it can abduct Zelensky from Kyiv? It has the capability to do that. So, you know, what have we started? We don't know.

#Pascal

Oh, absolutely. I think this is completely right. The precedent, and in general the kind of attack this represents on the norms of the entire system—let's speak of international law—are tremendous. Because, again, while taking out Maduro and pardoning the former dictator of Honduras who did drug trafficking, it just shows you that the U.S., as you once said—you were the one who gave that example—the U.S. is doing rule by law, not rule of law. And it just sets its own rules; it does whatever it wants. And it actually now says so to everybody.

Because it's a great power, it can do whatever it wants. Period. And if you want to stop it—well, you and what army? I mean, they're almost literally saying that. But I have one question, which is the weirdest thing about this legal case, because it also shows how legalistic the United States is, right? It's a country that's used to using its legal system against others. There's one charge against Mr. Maduro that, by any stretch of the imagination, just doesn't make sense to me: possession of automatic firearms.

#Pascal

I mean, even if he possessed that, he possessed it in Venezuela. In what sense is that a crime under U.S. law? I just don't understand how that ended up in there.

#Amb. Chas Freeman

No, because the Trump administration came up with a wonderful finesse of the issue. If you invade a country and the people there have machine guns and shoot at you, they're violating the law because they're attacking you. You see?

#Pascal

So now, being shot at—that's...

#Amb. Chas Freeman

They counterattack. That's an offense, you see? You know, in Afghanistan we suspended the Geneva Conventions and invented a new category called "enemy combatant," which didn't require the rights of prisoners of war conferred by the Geneva Convention. So the Red Cross had no access to people in Guantanamo or at Bagram Air Base in Afghanistan, and so forth and so on. Anyway, there's been a steady progression in the suspension of respect for the rule of law, international treaties, conventions, the UN Charter—and it's been spearheaded by Israel, which has violated every aspect of international law with complete impunity because my government, my country, has protected it and provided it with that impunity.

And we've now come to the point where we're emulating the complete lawlessness the Israelis have shown. I go back to the point that Gaza shows rhetorical outrage is not enough—you actually have to do something. And Israel has suffered no penalty for its genocide in Gaza. It's suffering no penalty for its illegal settlement of the West Bank and the eviction of Palestinians from their homes. It suffers no penalty for murder, even of Americans—journalists, American journalists, Americans on the USS Liberty during the 1967 war—complete impunity. So this is the result.

If you have no penalty imposed, you go on doing whatever the hell you want. And that is exactly what, as you said, the United States is now engaged in. So what are we going to do about this? I think a couple of things come to mind. First, the international legal crisis this has created is paralleled by a domestic constitutional crisis. We might as well get rid of the U.S. Congress and the legislative branch—they do nothing. They don't even pass budgets. They shut down the government. They don't hold the president accountable for anything he does.

They don't exercise their constitutional authorities. They have the responsibility to declare war, to authorize the use of violence against other nations—but they don't do it. They're a cult following the president. Let's just get rid of them. We might as well, since we have a dictatorship, just recognize that. Same thing internationally. Why do we have the United Nations Security Council? What the hell does it do? It serves as a forum for the United States to veto effective international action on issues where there's a broad international consensus—whether those issues are climate change and efforts to combat it, peacekeeping, human rights standards, or the issues of genocide and enforcement of judicial decisions by the International Criminal Court or the International Court of Justice.

No, nothing is enforced because the United States vetoes it. In an earlier era, the Soviet Union did the same thing. So why do we have this institution? You know, it's clearly ineffectual. What can be done to restore respect for international, consensus-based norms? That's the question before us now. And I've always thought we're far too hung up on the post-World War II institutions. Of course, they give great advantages to the United States, the Russian Federation, Britain, France, and China—the nominal victors of World War II—and they don't allow the same privilege to major

countries like Japan or India. So the system isn't working. Yeah. So what are we going to do about it? Are we just going to let it continue not to work, as the entire edifice of human decency that the West rightly claims credit for creating over the last three centuries is crumbling? What do we do?

#Pascal

How about this: how about we change Article 51 of the UN Charter and remove the right to self-defense? Because with that right, every single attack on a foreign country has been justified—every single one. Just remove it. Countries will defend themselves anyway; they'll do that. But let's remove the legal right to do so.

#Amb. Chas Freeman

I don't know. Actually, that right of self-defense was also distorted by the Israelis, who claimed the right of preventive defense.

#Pascal

Yes, that's why we need to get rid of the right to self-defense in the first place.

#Amb. Chas Freeman

Well, we need to rewrite a lot of rules—that's one of them. But I'm talking about the institutions that are supposed to enforce the norms. We don't have them. So here's my proposition: if the existing institutions don't work, then convene ad hoc conferences and make the rules among the people who attend those conferences. If the United States doesn't want to attend, fine—let it do what it wants. But among the other countries, maybe starting with the BRICS as a kernel or some other group, I look at votes in the United Nations General Assembly.

And I find, you know, on a resolution that's basically proposing motherhood, you have three votes—either against or in favor, depending on which side you're on: the United States, Israel, and Argentina. That's it. Maybe you get Nauru, the Marshall Islands, and a couple of other places added in there, but even they often abstain rather than, you know, stand with. So then you have 149 or 157 countries voting for something, and you have this little minority voting against it—and nothing happens. So the resolution is nugatory; it has no effect at all. What kind of system is this?

What I'm saying is that what Trump has done is expose the utter hollowness we've reached. And that means we need to take action. There should be a discussion about that instead of, you know, a discussion about how wonderful the military operation was, or how brilliant the CIA's bribery of people around Maduro was, or how great the stealth drones were that spotted Maduro's—well, you know—location. By the way, about forty people apparently died in the attack to capture him, and a lot of others were injured. It wasn't a bloodless operation. But anyway, that's not the right topic. The

right topic is: how do we restore some decent respect for norms that we all, at least in the abstract, agree with?

#Pascal

I mean, your idea of a conference is very good. I mean, these create the new—well, BRICS is already working on creating a new consensus, new norms, right? Outside, and also new infrastructure that can be used. This will still take years, but one of the things that gives me hope is seeing that even when we fail, we try again, right? We tried with the League of Nations to solve the war issue. We failed. We tried with the United Nations. Obviously, we failed, but we tried, right? So the question then is, if you could copy-paste just part of the UN—the part that worked best or is most, you know, procedurally useful—which part would you copy and then paste into that conference, in order not to reinvent the wheel again with the same mistakes as before?

#Amb. Chas Freeman

Well, I think you're right to focus, in that context, on the right of self-defense. There are other issues. The word "terrorism" is thrown around with wild abandon, but it doesn't really mean anything. I mean, there are issues that need to be addressed. You know, when I say "ad hoc conferences," by the way, as an American, it distresses me enormously to have to advocate this kind of thing—isolating my own country, ostracizing it—because it has become an outlaw, which is what it is. And so, what do you do with outlaws? You let them run around in the wilderness if they want to, or you organize a posse and go after them. But I think when I say "ad hoc conference," it doesn't have to be universal. You could start with the reaffirmation of norms in a region.

You could take, if you want, some of the ideas that are out there. Of course, they're dismissed because of geopolitical considerations. China has put forward a set of ideas about a community of shared destiny and various rules about international security, which are very consistent with the Westphalian order and with the genius of the UN Charter in that regard. I mean, I think the Westphalian order is now destroyed. You know, if one country can change the leadership in another—for grounds that are largely manufactured disinformation—then even if those grounds were true, why should anyone have that right? I mean, that's what the agreements of Westphalia accomplished, and we've just undone it.

You know, **cuius regio, eius religio** is gone. And so ideological struggles apparently are no longer relevant. I mean, we have Donald Trump overthrowing the government in Caracas and then saying that the Nobel Prize winner the CIA basically maneuvered into that position doesn't have the respect of the Venezuelans and therefore shouldn't be the governor of Venezuela. And then we have Donald Trump saying Tony Blair should run Gaza. You know, that's not—that is neocolonialism. It's just imperialism. And it involves an oil grab. The Europeans are so embarrassed by that that they talk about, well, you should, you know, as Kyle Bill says, you should talk about democracy and freedom. But Trump doesn't give a fig about either. And we're losing both in the United States as I speak.

#Pascal

Yeah, I mean, of course they did. The question is, is this part of the United States reestablishing itself as an imperial hegemon, or is it part of the decay of the U.S. empire? And it's basically Nero singing while Rome is already burning, right? There are both interpretations of this out there. But the question remains: what can the rest of the world—the global majority, actually—do against it? Because with Israel, we've learned we're not even capable of doing something against genocide, even though large parts of the world, including China, absolutely detest what's happening there. But due to the structures in place, you're frozen. And that's what enables genocide in the end. So, how do we unfreeze the system?

#Amb. Chas Freeman

So yes, it's the structural issues we need to address. For example, we have common, planet-wide problems that require a planetary solution. The UN has traditionally been the provider of those solutions, but now it's blocked from doing so—take climate change, for instance. We have carbon trading systems and so on; people are trying to reduce carbon emissions. So why not have a conference that says, if you don't reduce carbon emissions, we're going to tariff you? We'll borrow Donald Trump's lexicon and put tariffs on you. In other words, if you don't act responsibly, we're going to penalize you. Does that have to go through the UN? I don't think so. Could Europe say to the United States, "Okay, if you're not going to do anything about global warming, your products are going to get taxed to help us do something"?

And we're going to penalize you. So you have to consider the possibility—maybe you ought to do something about this problem. If you're invading other countries, maybe one of the things that has to happen is an agreement on sanctions being imposed. In other words, not subject to a veto, right? Because it turns out that the worst offenders, at the moment at least, are the United States and the Russian Federation, both of which have acted entirely outside any legal framework. I'd say, in the case of the Russian Federation, there's a case to be made that the severance of Kosovo from Serbia and the dissolution of Yugoslavia set a precedent for the Russian annexation of Crimea—but they didn't set a precedent for what's going on now, which is clearly illegal, even if strategically it has a justification.

So, okay, there's a strategic justification. You do something illegal, you pay a price. Russia has been paying a price—just not enough. Because many countries, China and India principal among them, don't feel bound by the need to punish the Russian action. So basically, the Russians have impunity. They haven't been isolated; they've been reoriented toward China, India, West Asia, and Africa. So can we come up with structural fixes for these problems, which we know we have plenty of reason to understand? And, you know, I think you're not going to get that in the UN, because you're going to get obstruction from one or another superpower.

#Pascal

But the question is a very difficult one—how do we create something else? It's easy to say we need that, right? We all know we need it. But what kind of mechanisms that are already there can we use to do so? It would be lovely if China just said, "Let's do a big conference, everybody, and we'll implement this." But they're probably not going to do that, because China doesn't expose itself that much. Well, they also don't want to be the global leader. No. But, you know, on the other hand, what we see is that there's very strong adherence by a large number of people to the idea of law.

The idea of law, even international law, is a strong one. What we've tried to do is create a superstructure that then imposes the law. Could we do the opposite and say, okay, let's start working within our individual countries—all 193 or 200 of them—and try a bottom-up approach? Like, okay, we're going to push Switzerland to impose sanctions, we're going to push Singapore to impose sanctions if X happens. We just need a mechanism to coordinate them—a bottom-up approach.

#Amb. Chas Freeman

That's exactly my point—that people need to act. And if they can't act through the UN, they need to form coalitions to act, to establish rules they follow, and to impose penalties where those are appropriate. Also, you know, this is what's happening internationally. The WTO has been trashed by the United States. Earlier, India blocked the trade liberalization effort by the WTO. Now the dispute resolution mechanism is blocked by the United States. But what's happening is that regional variants of the WTO are being enacted. So, you know, you have the RCEP in the Asia-Pacific, and now the Shanghai Cooperation Organization is getting into rulemaking on trade.

The BRICS haven't done very much on this yet, but they're a potential factor. I mean, people have been—well, you have a Canada–EU trade agreement that has a duplication of the WTO dispute resolution mechanisms built into it. You don't have to have everything on a universal basis, but you can't—well, the fact that it can't be done universally is used as an excuse for not doing anything. And you have—I must say, by the way, that the most disgraceful statement about the Venezuelan issue came from Kaja Kallas. Yeah. It's the most weaselly, puppet-like— I mean, anyway, I have nothing good to say about her posture on much of anything these days. Very impractical.

#Pascal

Sorry, she's the author and architect of the sanctions against EU citizens and Schengen area citizens like Schakbo. I mean, it's a totalitarian mindset. So I'm not surprised that that totalitarian mindset is kind of applauding the totalitarian mindset of another one.

#Amb. Chas Freeman

Well, I think, yes, you and I have talked before. I don't know Jacques Baud, but, you know, I have no sympathy for him. He's been victimized by an unelected bureaucracy that has seized control of the European Union. And she's part of that—Kaja Kallas. von der Leyen is part of it too.

#Pascal

I just—I can't get over the fact that she's the Soviet-born daughter of a communist apparatchik. I just can't get over that.

#Pascal

It doesn't even surprise me that she's doing this.

#Amb. Chas Freeman

She's acting according to her heritage, I guess. But in the meantime, you know, there are all sorts of terrible issues in the United States. I think we are in a grave constitutional crisis, obviously. We have a president who is utterly indifferent to legal considerations, who uses the courts to ruin other people's lives by outspending them on lawyers' fees, and who sues people for absolutely outrageous amounts of money on no basis at all. I just don't understand the complacency of many of my compatriots. People are groaning and moaning about this, but nobody's doing anything. And the same thing is true internationally. Basically, the United States is behaving in a completely lawless, callous, even sadistic manner. And what is being done to counter this? Nothing. You know, Keir Starmer says, "We'll look into this and make a decision." And Macron says, "Well, we hope there'll be democracy in Venezuela." And Kaja Kallas says, "Well, you know, we have to follow rules."

#Pascal

I mean, this is, again, like the example of Israel shows. If the inertia of the system doesn't stop something, or if the inertia of the system can be abused to commit these kinds of crimes, then you get away with it. And that's all you need. You know, that's good enough. And unfortunately, it works. So the question is, how do we overcome the inertia of the system? Or better yet, how can we use the inertia of the system to our advantage? Because overcoming inertia is really, really hard.

#Amb. Chas Freeman

And, of course, there are other aspects of international law that have been overridden. I mentioned the Geneva Conventions, which are rather important. By the way, there's a Geneva Convention that deals with the occupation of foreign countries, and that's going to be quite important—whether the U.S. neocolonial occupation of Venezuela is indirect, through a sort of paramount chief, as it were, if we manage to seduce Delcy Rodríguez or intimidate her into cooperating on Venezuela. Still, those rules apply. There are other rules too—for example, there's a right of armed resistance to occupation.

You know, the Palestinians haven't made much of that, but they do have that right—and so do the Venezuelans. I don't think this is going to be a happy story for major American oil companies that think they're going to go in there and clean up. First of all, the cleanup process is going to take years. Second, I don't think it's going to be without casualties—in the form of guerrilla warfare, resistance, sabotage. You know, the culture of Venezuelans, which ultimately derives from the culture of Spain, puts a lot of emphasis on honor. And honor requires you to stand up and resist; it doesn't allow you to concede.

Yeah. So I think this is, anyway—you know, the dog caught the car. Now what do you do? And I don't think Trump has an answer. I think his answer is, we're going to put a gun to the head of the driver, and then the driver is going to keep driving the way we want. I don't think that's necessarily going to be the case. I don't know Ms. Rodríguez—Vice President Rodríguez—at all, but I gather she's a woman of some principle and ability. And I think it's very questionable now what's going to happen. This has all the potential to turn into a worse quagmire than Afghanistan was for the Soviet Union.

#Pascal

For the sake of Venezuela, I hope it's not going to go down that route, because that's what happened with Afghanistan. I mean, the country is destroyed—there's nothing left of how it used to be before '89. Anyhow, Ambassador Freeman—Chas—thank you very much for your thoughts and insights, and for the analysis you shared with us. People who want to follow you should go to your homepage to find your writings there, which you very skillfully collect and post. Is there any other place where people can find you?

#Amb. Chas Freeman

No, well, there's actually a new site in Azerbaijan that has deepfaked me. Really—saying all sorts of things I never said and never would say. I feel quite honored, in a strange way, to be in the company of John Mearsheimer, who's also had this happen. But it's an honor I'd rather avoid. I don't know who's doing it, but—no, and I apologize to your viewers for being passionate and maybe a bit incoherent tonight. I'm very distressed, and I think we all should be, about the collapse of the vision my country was founded on. We began with a statement appealing to the decent opinion of mankind, and we give no attention to that now. We're seen everywhere as a threat, a potential ally, and we're attacking our allies as well as our partners, friends, and foes.

#Pascal

No, we should be distressed, you know—and we are. I mean, we feel it. We feel that things have been coming down left and right over the last couple of years. It reminds me of the feeling I've read about, you know, when you look at literature from the turn of the century—when people felt that things were changing, and not in a good way, and they were trying to do something about it. Let's

not forget the two Hague Peace Conferences, 1899 and 1907. That was an attempt to do something against what people could sense was not good. In the end, it all collapsed in 1914—and now we understand why it did. One day we'll understand when it started collapsing in the 2020s. But right now, we're unfortunately still before that collapse. And I pray to God that we can avoid it. I pray to God.

#Amb. Chas Freeman

There is no Bismarck. That was the end of the European order when Bismarck was set aside. You may not like him—you may think he was unscrupulous in some respects—but he held everything together. He knew how to manage it. And when he was gone, really, Kaiser Wilhelm and others were not up to the job. Now I think we have an issue. You're in Japan, and you have a prime minister who's female and who aspires to be Margaret Thatcher, but I think is more likely to turn out to be Liz Truss. I fear that. Japan is an enormously important country, and if it's poorly led, everybody suffers.

#Pascal

Yeah. No—and embroiling Japan in a war with China is very, very easy to do, because you have the basis over here. I mean, it takes almost nothing. In any case, we'll talk about this again, Chas, because the topic will stay with us, I think, unfortunately. But thank you very much for your time. And despite everything, Happy New Year.

#Amb. Chas Freeman

Happy New Year to you, and to everyone else.