

Chas Freeman: Collapse of Law, Reason & Return to War

Ambassador Chas Freeman discusses the breakdown of international law, reason and the subsequent return of great power wars. Ambassador 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-centered post-Cold War European security system and in reestablishing defense and military relations with China. He served as U. S. Ambassador to Saudi Arabia (during operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm). He was Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs during the historic U.S. mediation of Namibian independence from South Africa and Cuban troop withdrawal from Angola. 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: <https://buymeacoffee.com/gdieseng> Go Fund Me: <https://gofund.me/09ea012f>

#Glenn

Welcome back. We're privileged today to be joined by Ambassador Chas Freeman. Besides being a former diplomat and Assistant Secretary of Defense, he was also the U.S. Ambassador to Saudi Arabia. So, I hope you can share some of your insights on what's happening in that part of the world today.

#Chas Freeman

Well, I don't know that I have many insights. I think it's pretty obvious what is happening, and that is that Israel is preparing to go at it again with Iran in an effort to expand its hegemony beyond the Levant into all of West Asia. I note that Prime Minister Netanyahu has said that if Iran were to, quote, resume its missile development program, this would justify an Israeli attack on Iran. The fact is, of course, that Iran has never halted its missile development program. So this is a transparent pretext for an attack that the Israelis are clearly preparing. I would say that, from what I know of the Iranians, they are well prepared to retaliate against such an attack. I don't think it will be an inexpensive attack for the Israelis, but they seem to be very ingenious at doing things that are unexpected. So I think we just all have to be on watch.

#Glenn

Yeah, well, we do see some domestic instability in Iran, which, of course, could be taken advantage of by rival powers in the world. I saw Trump tweeted out, "If Iran shoots and violently kills peaceful

protesters, which is their custom, the United States of America will come to their rescue. We are locked and loaded and ready to go." Which is a very strange thing to send out. First, I was a bit surprised he was leaning into protecting human rights, because it looked like he was shying away from that sort of legitimacy in Venezuela. But then, of course, he goes back to "locked and loaded," so you know it's him. But besides how it might be taken advantage of, how do you see the actual current political and economic situation in Iran? Because often you do have genuine concerns or dissent or unhappiness among the population, and often these sentiments are hijacked by geopolitical actors. So how do you see what's happening in Iran on the ground?

#Chas Freeman

Well, first of all, thank you for correcting President Trump's grammar. He didn't use the word "shoot" correctly in that tweet, as I recall. It should have been "shot," shouldn't it? Shot, yeah.

#Chas Freeman

All right.

#Chas Freeman

Your English is better than his, obviously. So anyway, yeah, I think there are many reasons for ordinary Iranians to be deeply distressed about the conditions in Iran, particularly the economic ones. This apparently started with shopkeepers reacting to the sharp devaluation of the Iranian rial, the currency. In response, the government of Pezeshkian apparently changed some of the management at the central bank. I don't know what they can really do about the rial under current circumstances. Oil prices are low internationally, which has many implications for a country like Iran, as well as Venezuela, which we might talk about later.

But I think it's also the case that any demonstration in Iran—any protest on economic matters, about what are called affordability issues in the United States—will immediately be taken advantage of by external actors, in this case Israel and the United States. And to some extent, probably the more violent protesters are in fact associated with external forces, surfing along the wave that the genuine protesters have created. I don't think this is a threat to the regime, although it's intended to be, or at least portrayed as such. I think it's a request to the regime to take corrective action on economic policies. And of course, the great irony here is that Pezeshkian ran on a platform of outreach to the West—normalization with the West, cooperative relations with the United States—and he's been completely stymied at every step.

I think, on the other hand, we have to note that these protests broke out right after a meeting between Netanyahu and Trump at Mar-a-Lago in Florida. That's too much of a coincidence to dismiss as something that just happened with no cause. In the case of President Trump and the tweet you cited, he apparently agreed with Netanyahu that if Netanyahu attacked Iran again, the

United States would back him. There are indications that heavy-lift aircraft have been transporting weapons through Europe to Israel in preparation for such an attack. So I think this is not good news. The unrest in Iran is being used as a pretext for preparing an assault.

#Glenn

I mean, if you look at the possibility of miscalculation, there couldn't be a worse region in the world—or a worse country to go after—than Iran, because the region is so complex. How do you think such a war would play out? Because obviously, the last time around didn't go as Israel had hoped, and they can't afford a long, drawn-out war. So what does success look like in such a war? And who might be pulled in? The Russians, the Chinese, Pakistan—they don't want to see Iran fall. And how would the Arabs act? I mean, now we have a new government in Syria led by, well, a former ISIS figure. What about Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf states? How do you think this would play out? Where would Turkey stand? I have a very hard time getting a clear picture of how such a major war—one that goes beyond what we saw last time—would actually look.

#Chas Freeman

Well, let's start with Israeli objectives, which are not just regime change but the fragmentation of Iran—just as they did in Syria. They've worked to promote the breakup of Syria, continuing their efforts through relationships with the Druze in southern Syria and the Kurds in the northeast. Those are the objectives. They did not succeed in the so-called 12-day war. In fact, as you indicated, the Iranians, after expending much of their older ordnance on Israel, began to use their more advanced weaponry, which successfully penetrated Israeli air defenses and basically exhausted Israel's ability to intercept the incoming missiles, some of which were hypersonic.

As a result, Israel was basically forced to accept a ceasefire without completing whatever action it had intended—whether regime change or the fragmentation of Iran. For a time, at least, it seemed that the net effect of the Israeli attack was to unify Iranians, rallying them behind the flag of the Islamic Republic rather than dividing them. Of course, the protests now raise another possibility, and Israel has a long history of supporting external, exiled Iranian armed groups that carry out assassinations and other terrorist acts inside Iran—and may well be available to do the same again.

The other point I'd mention is that, of course, in the wake of the June attack on Iran by Israel, the Iranian security services have rounded up a large number of people who were allegedly receiving money from Mossad or Israeli military intelligence. As a result, the intelligence infrastructure that Israel had so carefully built in Iran has definitely been eroded. What would be the posture of other countries? No one wants a war of this kind. In fact, it would probably give further impetus to the already evident movement by the Gulf Cooperation Council Arab countries in the Persian Gulf toward some kind of coalition with Iran against Israel.

I mean, we've had a level of candor from some actors in the Arab Gulf that's unprecedented—with the Omani foreign minister saying that the source of instability in the region is not Israel, it's Iran. I mean, not Iran—it's Israel. And this is something people have very carefully avoided saying, in order not to offend the United States and, in Oman's case, to retain its position as a neutral mediator and intermediary with various parties. I'd note that Prime Minister Netanyahu has visited Oman.

So this is a very uncharacteristic statement, and it's an indication of a strategic realignment against Israel in the region. The Turks, you know, have their own problems with Iran, but they seem to have patched things up to a considerable extent. I don't know whether Turkey is actually now actively engaged in rearming Iran, but I believe it is—I can't be sure. The Russians, certainly, and the Chinese have stepped in to help Iran reconstitute its air defenses. And I think Egypt and Iran, which had been at odds, have patched things up pretty much. The one thing that's missing here, that might have been the case earlier, is action by—not the stooges or agents of Iran, Hezbollah, Hamas, and so on, because they're quite independent—but they are sympathetic to Iran and have received support from Iran. What's missing is their capability to attack Israel from close in.

I think they're not, in the case of Hezbollah. They're partially reconstituted, but not completely. In the case of Hamas, they're very much on the defensive, trying to make this phony Trump ceasefire in Gaza amount to something—which it really doesn't. So from Israel's point of view, it's not facing pressure close in. It's apparently neutralized or enlisted the United States in support of an attack on Iran, and it sees Iran experiencing internal divisions, which must excite its intelligence agencies about possibilities of intervention. So I think this is quite a complex picture, but I would expect, unfortunately, that we're seeing the run-up to another Israeli attack on Iran. As for Pakistan, Pakistan and Iran have begun to patch up their relations a bit. So there's a lot of potential here for further development of a coalition against Israel.

#Glenn

It seems to be unclear what the final objective would be, besides just destroying Iran. That's really the great question of our time—what actually creates security? I mean, here in Europe there's this obsession with deterrence and superior military force, as if that's the only way one can be safe. Essentially, it goes back to the hegemonic concept of security: we'll be so dominant that no one can possibly threaten us. But when the balance of power makes that impossible, you have to redefine what security means. In other words, instead of being so powerful that others can't challenge us, it should be about managing rivalry or security competition. And we don't really see that anywhere in the world among the major powers.

And I think this also applies to the Middle East. It seems there are some pathways to finding a deal with Iran. But is there any diplomatic path anyone is pursuing? Because the Iranian demands aren't that outrageous. I mean, yes, some would say they're too obsessive about Palestine—but in all fairness, it's a pretty horrific situation. Otherwise, their ties with Hezbollah, Hamas, the Houthis in

Yemen—across the board—are reasonable security partnerships, given the threat that the Western powers pose to Iran. So are there any initiatives at all we should look at to improve these relations, at least between the Arabs and Iran? I mean, is there any reason to be optimistic here? Because there seems to be a lot of bad news coming in.

#Chas Freeman

Well, you're a political scientist—I'm not. But I think we're both aware that deterrence requires reassurance as well as threats. And those reassurances are completely missing now in almost every context. We don't see any reassurance being offered to the Chinese about the future of Taiwan. Instead, we see a purely military deterrent approach by the United States—somewhat ambivalent and ambiguous at the moment, but nonetheless lacking any diplomatic component. The same is certainly true with Iran. There's no diplomatic opening available to Iran, no dialogue of consequence, and Iran has every reason to be suspicious.

If dialogue were offered—given its earlier experience when it was about to send negotiators to Muscat to discuss arrangements for rapprochement with the United States—and that meeting was in fact used as a cover for a surprise attack on it. Iran has also seen repeated violations of its sovereignty by Israel, often in coordination with the United States. Israel has assassinated quite a number of Iranian officials, scientists, engineers, and the like over the years. It also assassinated the leader of Hamas, Ismail Haniyeh, during the inauguration of Pezeshkian, the new president of Iran—a more provocative act could hardly be imagined. So what Iran faces is relentless military pressure and threats, with no offer of dialogue at all.

And when Iran did reach an agreement with the United States and others, which was approved by the Security Council and therefore became international law, the first Trump administration simply repudiated that agreement. So I don't see any opening for a diplomatic solution to this conflict. In fact, I would say, generally speaking, the Zionist approach to security issues has been entirely uncompromising—expansionist, zero-sum, offering nothing to others: certainly nothing to the Palestinians, nothing to the Syrians, nothing to the Lebanese, nothing to the Jordanians, nothing to the Yemenis, nothing to Iran. So we're looking at a region that has, through a series of steps, greatly eroded international law.

The rules-based order that we tried to create after World War II has basically been destroyed by a series of steps taken by Israel, with the support or protection of the United States, guaranteeing Israeli impunity from the law. The result is that the law itself has been devalued and has essentially disappeared. So I don't see how there's any real room for diplomacy in this context, given the Zionist mentality and the current mentality of the United States—as evidenced by the invasion of Venezuela, the kidnapping of its head of government and state, and the assertion that domestic U.S. courts have jurisdiction over foreign sovereigns, a complete violation of the principle of sovereign immunity. This is not a moment in which diplomacy seems to have much reason for hope.

#Glenn

Yeah, I was in Iran in May, before the war, and I saw the building where Ismail Haniyeh had been killed. They hadn't cleaned it up—it was still burned around the windows and all. It's kind of shocking, almost symbolic of the path we're on. Because again, if you're a top Hamas negotiator and you're being assassinated during an inauguration in Iran by Israel, it's just escalation on so many different levels.

#Chas Freeman

Let's not forget the attempt to assassinate the Hamas negotiators in Qatar. You know, there's no willingness to make peace. And the same is true of Hamas itself. In Gaza, any opportunity—or hope—for law or ceasefire is ignored, as Israel continues to assassinate officials of these movements and murder civilians.

#Glenn

Well, it's a wider problem. We have the same in Europe. For years, the Europeans refused to have diplomacy with Russia—and the Americans as well, before Trump came, of course. And even now, the only seemingly acceptable political settlement is something like NATO troops in Ukraine, which again, the Russians went to war to get NATO out of Ukraine, not to allow them to entrench themselves further. So it's a common theme these days that we don't have any willingness to look for security in which both sides—or at least our opponents—feel secure. Or at least in this part of the world, in Europe, we're not even really allowed to discuss the security concerns of our opponents unless you want to be castigated as a traitor. So it's kind of...

#Chas Freeman

Sorry, the case of Jack Baudet, the Swiss colonel who's been basically stripped of all his rights by the unelected European Commission bureaucracy—this is a form of tyranny that any European should object to. But I think the more interesting thing to me, really, given the way the Ukraine intervention by the West has been justified—namely the statement that Ukraine, like every country, has the right to determine its own alliances and alignments—you know, is that true of Venezuela? Apparently not. Is that true of Cuba? Apparently not. Is that true of Denmark with regard to Greenland?

Apparently not. What really puzzles me—I have great respect for Prime Minister Frederiksen—but what really surprises me is why she doesn't announce that if there's an attack on Greenland, Denmark will invoke Article 5 of NATO against the attacker, and that Greenland is just as much a part of Denmark as Hawaii, Guam, Alaska, or Puerto Rico are parts of the United States. So where is the backbone of Europeans, either in terms of confronting the realities in Ukraine or the realities now of a threatened attack on part of the European Union?

#Glenn

You know, yeah, I've asked that same question many times—where is the backbone? But I think they wouldn't invoke Article 5 or do anything that might make the Americans feel that uncomfortable, because I think the Europeans are scared to death that the Americans will leave the continent. To be honest, I think they'd just try to pretend it didn't happen, brush over it, and hope things continue until the next administration might give it back.

#Chas Freeman

I don't think what's happening is just an episode. This is something much deeper. Three hundred years of Western effort to create rules for regulating international interactions have been thrown out, and now we have a pure appeal to "might makes right." I don't know if you saw Secretary of State Rubio when he was asked what the legal basis for U.S. intervention in Venezuela was. He couldn't answer the question. He said, "We have a lot of leverage. We can do what we want." That's not a legal argument. So the arguments based on law are gone. On the other hand, Prime Minister Frederiksen has said that if there's an attack on Greenland, this will mean the end of NATO. Perhaps she should say it will mean NATO will be challenged to defend a member state, and we'll see whether it rises to that occasion or not. We know that in the case of Ukraine, NATO is absolutely unwilling to engage directly.

These so-called stabilization forces don't even exist to be deployed anyway. But if they did, nobody would send them, because they're rightly afraid they'd be annihilated by the Russians. So, you know, NATO has been hollowed out in some ways, especially in its policies toward Russia—expansion into Ukraine and so on. Even though the British, I gather, are very actively pushing Moldovan membership in NATO, as if mighty Moldova would contribute a great deal to Europe's defense capability. And, you know, how could anybody oppose that? Or rather, how could anybody support that—that's really the question now. There's an unreasoning belligerence on the part of the Europeans, which is entirely empty talk. You know, as the Bahamian saying goes, "all suit, no man"—somebody in a wonderful suit with nothing in it, really. Empty talk.

#Glenn

It seems almost as if they want to provoke a war with Russia in Moldova as well, because that would probably happen over Transnistria if they tried to bring Moldova into NATO. Almost as if they want to provoke something like this just to prove to people that Russia is as bad as they say it is. It's quite extraordinary to see this reluctance to make peace and the continued escalation toward war when we can't win that war. It doesn't really make much strategic sense. But of course, going back to Iran, you can apply the same logic there. There's no reason to think that Israel would be more successful this time unless they have an even more powerful decapitation strike planned.

#Chas Freeman

Even in, you know, decapitation, I think the case of Venezuela is the most recent example that decapitating a government that has an institutional basis, not simply a personal entourage around somebody, doesn't change the regime. You know, what we've seen in Venezuela is, okay, the president has been kidnapped, and now the vice president is in charge. The vice president has an interesting background—she's apparently a very able economist, French-trained, who played a great role in revamping the terribly dilapidated Venezuelan oil sector and restoring a measure of production.

Um, she also apparently was approached by American intelligence officials and met in Qatar with people representing the U.S., the Americans. And presumably she was offered inducements—perhaps money, perhaps other things—to help overthrow Maduro. And maybe she, in fact, was complicit in that; we don't know. I mean, she's acting now on behalf of the Venezuelan state and the government, not out of her own greed or personal ambition, it appears. So, you know, you take out the top of the government, and Hezbollah is a perfect example—Israel applied this theory to Hezbollah, that if you take out the leadership, the movement will go away.

Well, it doesn't, because it has a solid basis emotionally, politically, and in terms of issues. And the same is true of Iran. It may be that personalities do matter, but you'd be hard-pressed to find anyone more compromising, more moderate than Pazeshkan in that context. So why try to assassinate him? You think that's going to produce a more moderate government that will look with greater affection at Israel and the United States? I doubt it. So I think this is a fallacy. Now we have, of course, the application of that in the Ukrainian attack on Novgorod, at the presidential palace there—which, of course, the West denies ever happened. Apparently, the drones were aimed at some facility near the palace, but not at the palace itself.

And the Russians, of course, have captured the guidance systems and apparently are able to prove that, in fact, the target was the palace. Whether the Ukrainians—who have a history of terrorist attacks on Russian officials and military people—believed that Vladimir Putin was there or not is an interesting question. But it's very clear that that attack could not have been carried out, whatever the target, without an American programming the drones. And so we have a re-evaluation of Ukraine policy going on in Moscow, and a re-evaluation, I think, of relations with the United States and Europe more generally. And I don't think that re-evaluation is going to produce a more moderate, conciliatory Russian approach to matters on its borders.

Um, so, you know, I guess finally I would say the other irony here is, of course, that by the logic of the U.S. case against Venezuela—which was almost entirely fictional—the so-called *Cartel de los Soles*, the "Cartel of the Suns," which supposedly was this mighty drug-smuggling organization, has now apparently been admitted not to exist. This doesn't figure in the court hearings in New York. So, assuming that any of that were correct—that in fact Venezuela or Nicaragua or Cuba represented a threat to the United States—then, by the logic of what we've done in Venezuela, a country like Mexico would be, since it's been put in a position of anarchy by imports of American guns that fuel

the cartels and create an untenable situation for the security of Mexican citizens, particularly in the north of Mexico.

Mexico would be perfectly justified in bombing gun factories and depots in the United States—maybe even kidnapping President Trump and putting him on trial for possessing machine guns, which is one of the charges against Maduro. I guess if you possess a machine gun and somebody invades your country, and you use that machine gun against them, that's a crime for which you can be charged in the Southern District of New York. Anyway, I mean, this is all Alice in Wonderland. And it's the end of any pretense of adherence to the UN Charter, to international law, and so forth. It's also the end of any adherence to constitutional order in the United States. Here you have the Speaker of the House saying, "Well, we were notified after the fact about this operation in Venezuela." Well, that's fine.

The President didn't have to do anything with us. Well, the constitutional authority of Congress is gone. So why do we even have a Congress? Maybe we should just get rid of it and admit we have a dictatorship, that everything's under the authority of the executive. We have a king—like before the 18th century—someone who can do whatever he wants. And while we're at it, we might as well get rid of the Supreme Court too, because they don't seem to be any barrier to dictatorship anymore. And internationally, why do we have the UN? What's the purpose of the UN Security Council? We had a hearing the other day; there were many eloquent statements made. I thought Jeffrey Sachs' statement was brilliant. I hope there's enough disturbance in the minds of people in European governments.

I say this because you're European, because you're in Europe—so that governments, instead of NGOs, will start defending international law and the UN Charter, and demand that if the UN is useless, an alternative organization be created that isn't. In other words, we're at a point where you either put up or shut up on international law, and nobody's putting up. You and I may be—but you and I are, you're a professor and I'm a retired diplomat. I'm not Merz, I'm not Fredriksson, I'm not Macron, I'm not Meloni, who actually seems to have her feet most firmly on the ground. And I note that Spain joined a statement by Brazil, Uruguay, Chile, and other countries demanding action. So there's one European country that's been willing to step forward. Is that the only one?

#Glenn

Possibly so, yeah. Well, there's something surreal about how international law has collapsed—and, as you said, domestic law as well. When you see President Maduro in court in New York—the president of a country who was kidnapped after his bodyguards were all killed—and now he's on trial, it just seems absurd. I mean, the whole reason he's there is because, against international law, it's a desperate effort to dress this up as something legal. And again, I saw that notes had been given to BBC reporters saying that, for consistency in reporting, they should not refer to it as a kidnapping—just say he's been captured, as if he were a criminal avoiding justice. It's the manipulation of language, the fake legality. It's...

#Chas Freeman

The BBC can describe anything the Russians do in Ukraine as brutal, but they can't use that word when it comes to the Israelis. Um, so we live in a world where untruths, euphemisms, and lies prevail—and if you speak the truth, you're out of line. I think you may have some personal experience with this in Norway. Yeah, no, it's not popular here to dissent anymore. It's, uh...

#Glenn

Well, that's one of the things—if you can't dissent, what's left of the rule of law? Nothing. But again, I think our language is twisted, because they say, you know, if you criticize U.S. policies, then you're anti-American. But that's a very strange assumption, because what's good for American security is up for discussion. For example, criticizing the attack on Venezuela doesn't make one anti-American if you think it's actually very damaging to the United States. But the thing is, they try to monopolize concepts, and that's a very big thing in Europe.

They've come up with this concept that everyone likes—like, who doesn't want to support Ukraine, or be pro-Western, or like democracy? But these are hollow concepts, because they start from something that unites everyone, then fill it with content that's completely contradictory. And if you suggest, for example, that maybe we should have diplomacy with Russia instead of fighting to the last Ukrainian by sending weapons, then suddenly you're not supporting Ukraine. So... even though you know the country is losing—losing territory, manpower, infrastructure—none of that seems to matter.

#Chas Freeman

I mean, I couldn't agree with you more. We have a systematic replacement of facts with "alternative facts." Ukraine is winning the war—it's just not immediately evident to you and me. But if we don't see it, then obviously there's some mental defect on our part that's being expressed. If we're concerned that Ukraine may well lose Odessa and its access to the Black Sea, and become a rump state dominated by ultra-nationalist Ukrainians who can't qualify to get into the EU despite all the talk about that, then there's something wrong with us, not the situation. The same thing is true in Venezuela—there was a brutal dictatorship.

Okay, maybe there was a dictatorship. How brutal it was, I don't know. Certainly, the sanctions imposed on Venezuela over 25 years were brutal. They had their intended effect—they made life miserable for eight million Venezuelans, who were miserable enough to flee the country. You know, we were talking about Moldova and elections, but what about elections here, there, and everywhere? I mean, how about Romania? How about Georgia? And so on. There's no consistency at all. Double standards apply everywhere, and no real judgment is applied anywhere.

And I couldn't agree with you more. The invasion of Venezuela and the attempt to control it from afar through a quisling is very unlikely to work. And even if it does, it isn't going to do us any good. By the way, since you live in an oil state—Norway, one of the best endowed with oil in the world—you'll be aware that all this talk about the strategic importance of Venezuela, that if you're going to attack Iran you have to have Venezuelan oil to protect you against the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, is nonsense. This kind of pseudo-strategic reasoning just doesn't hold up. It would take years for Venezuelan oil production to be ramped up, if it ever is.

And at the moment, the price of oil is low, and Venezuelan crude is very heavy and expensive to refine, so there's no real demand for it. I don't see ExxonMobil or others rushing to get back into Venezuela. Chevron is there, of course. They didn't want this war—they were perfectly happily producing Venezuelan oil and selling it to China. Now, of course, this supposedly deprives China of a source of oil, and it does raise questions about Venezuela's ability to repay the loans the Chinese extended to them. But then I think the same questions arise with regard to Argentina's ability to repay the loans the Trump administration made to Argentina.

This isn't a compelling national interest in either case. I think there's a lot of nonsense being talked about, and we've set a precedent that will very likely be turned against us. You know, I suppose that if Frederiksen now has to be afraid she'll be kidnapped and forced to sign the annexation of Greenland—or there will be a Greenland independence movement concocted which, once it succeeds, is overthrown by people who demand American statehood for Greenland—rather on the model of the overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy at the end of the 19th century. Anyway, this is a crazy, crazy situation.

#Glenn

I think the reason the language has been twisted so much, at least in Europe, is that anyone studying EU politics learns very quickly that the EU elites are obsessed with speech acts and constructivism. The assumption is that language isn't just a tool to describe objective reality—language creates new social realities. That's the whole idea: we should all call each other Europeans, because then we're not Germans or French with all that historical baggage, and we'll create a common identity—a kind of social engineering. But the problem is, there might be something to this, yet if you have any criticism of NATO expansionism, you're accused of undermining the alliance. And if you say, "Well, Ukraine obviously can't win," then you're undermining the war effort.

If you point out the massive losses they're taking and how horribly wrong it is—both on a humanitarian and strategic level—well, you're undermining the war. If you say the sanctions, well, obviously Russia can circumvent them, then you're undermining public support for sanctions. And it just keeps going. If you even discuss the security concerns of, say, Russia, China, Iran, Venezuela—whichever we're going after—then you're "legitimizing" them, and you can't legitimize them. So you can't even have diplomacy, because if you meet with them, you're giving legitimacy to that leader,

and we can't do that. So even diplomacy becomes a way of giving legitimacy to the other side. We can't discuss security concerns, we can't have diplomacy, because all of this might give some authority or legitimacy to the opponent. I mean, this is kind of where we've trapped ourselves.

#Chas Freeman

It's a masterful summary of where we are, and I was thinking, as you said it—as you ran through the various elements of it—that this is, in effect, the death of positivism. We made a great effort in European languages generally, with Moscow being the primary proponent of this, to scrub values and produce a neutral vocabulary. And now we're reversing that in another way. I remember having an interesting discussion during the Nixon visit to China in 1972 with the Vice Foreign Minister. We were sitting together on a plane from Beijing to Hangzhou.

And I said to him, you know, the interesting thing to me, as I was then functioning as an interpreter, is that whereas English has neutral terms that don't convey any judgment, in Chinese you don't. I used the example of the word "defect." Somebody defects to the other side. Well, in Chinese, you have to specify whether it's the right side or the wrong side—you defect to the right side, or you defect to the enemy. And I guess we're working our way back into that kind of inability to reason objectively about international affairs, in which case, may God have mercy on us.

#Glenn

Yeah. Well, I think we're going beyond that as well. That's all I meant. We have governments; they have regimes. It feels like we're creating two sets of policies, or languages, to make sure you can't compare our policies to any extent. So, just as a final question before we wrap up—what are the indicators you're looking for? Because I know some people are saying that the efforts to go after Lebanon, Gaza, and Yemen would be a good indicator that they're being dismantled before going after Iran. But how—what do you look at in terms of...

#Chas Freeman

I don't think I agree with that. They've been dismantled for all intents and purposes. What I'd look at are exactly the indicators we're seeing. First, statements of justification for an attack—like, "Oh my God, they're reconstituting their missile system," or "Maybe we didn't completely destroy their nuclear program and they're bringing it back somehow." That's a little awkward because, of course, Trump claims it was utterly destroyed, so Netanyahu has to walk a fine line on that. I'd also look at, as I said, C-5As—giant transport aircraft carrying weapons through Europe, through Frankfurt, Rammstein, to Israel. That's happening.

I think the pieces are being put in place. I'd look for additional movements of American naval craft now that Venezuela is supposedly under control—aircraft carriers moving to the Mediterranean or the Arabian Sea. And I think we're seeing all of these indications, you know, maybe movements of

aircraft to Diego Garcia. I don't know whether that's happening or not. But yeah, I think we're seeing the indications, the indicators, which is very ominous. And I don't think, as I said, this is going to go well for Israel, because I think Iran has the ability to penetrate and destroy the Israeli air defense capabilities in fairly short order. And Iran has been quite coy about what it would do in response.

It has simply said that its response would be far more lethal and extensive than it has been on previous occasions. And indeed, in the June War—the so-called Twelve-Day War—the Iranians aimed only at military and intelligence facilities in Israel. They did not emulate the parties in World War II by targeting civilians as a means of undermining national morale, like the air wars of the blitz against the British or the enormous bombings of Germany and Austria by Allied air forces. So, I think if there's another round, a lot of Israeli civilian facilities are going to be struck. And we'll see how much fortitude Israelis have under fire. They've been very privileged.

They've had occasional acts of terrorism in response to their atrocities against the Palestinians, but they haven't been subjected to bombardment for the most part. That's one reason October 7 was so traumatic for them—it was the first time they'd really paid a real price for what they were doing. Well, what they were doing to others, not what others were doing to them. I think the Iranians will expand the target list quite considerably, and there's every indication they have an extensive missile force in protected facilities. Some are talking about a barrage of thousands of missiles at once. I don't know if that's realistic or not, but it doesn't seem to deter the Israelis, who remain full of the hubris for which they're famous.

#Glenn

Well, you usually assess threats by both capabilities and intentions. I guess when Israel and the United States are building up a massive amount of strike power, and at the same time the intentions are, well, indirectly put forth in terms of the threat of ballistic missiles, it's very hard to misread Trump when he says we'll come to the aid of the Iranian people against the government, that we're locked and loaded and ready to go. I think that's a pretty good indicator. So, thank you very much for taking the time, as always.

#Chas Freeman

Well, thank you, Glenn, for what you do. Keep it up—it's refreshing, even if it's depressing, yeah, to look at the world square on.