

Chas Freeman: Trump–Zelensky Conflict: U.S. Cuts Kiev Intel

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, everyone. Today is October 14th, 2026, and we have the great pleasure of being joined by one of the great American statesmen, Ambassador Chas Freeman, who was the former U. S. Assistant Secretary of Defense and also the ambassador to Saudi Arabia. So thank you for coming back. It's always great to see you.

#Chas Freeman

It's great to be back. I don't rise to the level that you elevate me to, but I'm happy to be here with you.

#Glenn

Well, what I did want to discuss with you today was this new, I would say, very strange quarrel emerging now between Trump and Zelensky. That is, it all appears to, well, of course, stem from this diesel deal. So Trump made a deal with Russia that they would begin to export some of their diesel oil. And Zelensky lashed out at Trump. And then now Trump has, well, called for elections in Ukraine. And also there's some reports that the U.S. has cut some of its intelligence sharing. I'm not sure if that's correct or not. But again, that's why we're speaking to you. So I guess we can start at the diesel. How do you make sense of this? That is, it didn't seem like a very significant deal. But is that what started the whole thing?

#Chas Freeman

I think this reveals a whole series of fault lines that have always been there. Basically, the Trump administration and Donald Trump do not share the Biden administration's ideological animosity to the Russian Federation, and therefore do not share the vision of using Ukraine as a way to put pressure on Russia, or even, as some Europeans like Kaja Kallas have argued, cause the breakup of the Russian Federation. They're not anti-Russian in that ideological sense. They're not imbued with the Cold War triumphalism that led to the effort to incorporate Ukraine into NATO. If we go back here, we'll see the Biden administration, the Obama administration before it, the Bush administration, the old one, that is, the shrub, not the Bush.

These administrations all followed a similar line of animosity toward Russia and saw Ukraine as a battering ram against Russia. And indeed, in the period before the actual war broke out, between 2014 and 2022, that decade, the United States and NATO totally reorganized the Ukrainian armed forces, re-equipped them to NATO standards, and watched as they arrayed themselves against the so-called People's Republics in Donetsk and Luhansk. And this was very much an anti-Russian effort, and it was responded to by the Russians in that manner. They saw this as an existential threat forming.

And the presence of foreign forces in Ukraine aimed at them, they considered to be completely unacceptable. But the Trump administration has abandoned this agenda. The Europeans now rhetorically support it, even though they have no ability to actually implement it. And so who is left high and dry in this? Ukraine. Ukraine has been used, abused, and it has suffered terribly as a result of its incorporation. In effect, it's not a NATO member, but it was treated in every respect as if it were, and armed as if it were. And the Russians have, from the beginning, seen this as a proxy war by NATO and the United States against them.

#Glenn

The United States has basically dropped out of this.

#Chas Freeman

All of this is the backdrop, and what it reveals is that there's no longer any consensus at all between the United States, the Europeans, the Ukrainians, about what this war is all about. Sorry, that update on my phone going off. So, what happened was basically Donald Trump is desperately concerned about the probable shellacking he's going to get in the midterm elections on November 3rd, which is now about three weeks away, and desperate to bring down diesel prices, or at least show that he could do that. In fact, diesel prices will not subside to any degree because of this deal. But the deal to release a small amount of diesel fuel from Russia and to tell Ukraine to stop hitting Russian refineries in order to facilitate that obviously is pulling the rug out from under Zelensky. His reaction, which was intemperate, drew the appropriately—or entirely predictable, I won't say appropriate—entirely predictable

#Chas Freeman

Response from Donald Trump, and the result is a rupture.

#Chas Freeman

And as for the question of intelligence support, it appears that Elon Musk's Starlink system has been deliberately degraded and no longer functions effectively to guide Ukrainian drones over long distances, thus ensuring that Ukraine has greatly reduced capacity to strike deep into Russia or at Moscow. It also appears that intelligence support in general has been withdrawn. By the way, that is apparently not limited to Ukraine. It's also been the case with the Republic of Korea, South Korea, on an entirely different issue that is connected to Ukraine, namely breach of protocol and secrecy with regard to the disposition of two North Korean prisoners of war taken by the Ukrainians. That has produced a rupture with Ukraine, and it's produced some sort of rupture with the United States.

So anyway, I guess, you know, this is like the end of an ice age. Snow and ice covered everything. We thought you couldn't see what was going on below the snow and ice. Now we can. And it's a complete breakdown in common purpose with respect to Ukraine. And therefore, it is, I think, properly viewed as a diplomatic opportunity for Europe to find an end to this war. And I know there was a very interesting article by David Ignatius in The Washington Post outlining a plan for peace based on the rupture between Trump and Zelensky, which, of course, recognizes that one way to end the war, the most efficient way to end this war, is to remove Zelensky, who is entirely dependent on the conduct of the war to retain his leadership position in Ukraine. Now, that isn't easy.

But what's most interesting about Ignatius' column, recognizing that David Ignatius is a reliable echo of the national security apparatus in Washington, is that he basically proposes what the Russians proposed in December 2021. That is a re-neutralization of Ukraine, writing neutrality into the Ukrainian Constitution, restoring elections and democracy, giving up what remains of the territory in the Donbas that the Russians have not yet taken, and calling it all off. Something which apparently would, with the exception of the sacrifice of territory, which people are unwilling to contemplate in Ukraine, very much satisfy Ukrainian opinion, which is greatly in favor of a negotiated end to this war, having been battered by it for so long. So I think this is really very important. The Diesen element is minor.

It's brought about by other factors. Donald Trump blames Ukraine and the Ukraine war, for its long-range strikes at Russian refineries, for this shortage. But that is a complete canard. The cause is the war with Iran that he inaugurated at the instance of Benjamin Netanyahu, and the somewhat different and dissociated war that Ansar Allah in Yemen is now conducting against the Saudis, which is trashing the Saudi energy infrastructure and running up a repair bill which is probably numbered in the \$2 trillion range for Saudi Arabia, and which guarantees—very good for Norway, I guess—

guarantees very high prices for oil for quite a while to come, maybe indefinitely. Anyway, I'll stop here, as usual. Well, and I didn't give you a chance to ask a really complicated question, which you usually do. But I gave you a complicated answer anyway.

#Glenn

Well, I'll keep it simple. I just have one thought, though. The comments of David Ignatius in his article, I mean, the fact that the security state now kind of suggests what the Russians were suggesting before the invasion. I mean, like people like yourself, this is what you've been arguing all along, that NATO expanding into Ukraine is seen as an existential threat by Russia. It's not going to happen under any circumstances. Either one puts an end to it, restores Ukraine's neutrality through diplomacy, or the Russians will use force.

They will strip Ukraine of the territory it can't afford to see in the hands of NATO. It will destroy the rest, which can be used as a front line. I mean, this was very predictable. And I remember trying to make that argument back in '21, '22, and it was impossible because people presented an alternative: now either we let Russia say no expansion, or we do it. But that was never the option. It was either we accept neutrality through diplomacy, or it will happen through force, in which hundreds of thousands, if not millions, will die. And, I mean, we will end up at that situation. And that's why it's so frustrating to see that still the narrative is, well, though. Sorry.

#Chas Freeman

This is, of course, the narrative in Norway. It's also the narrative in the United States. And Donald Trump and company, who really, I think, would like to end the war in Ukraine and seem to be quite prepared to see Zelensky retire to one of his villas abroad in order to do that, are confronted by the successfully propagandized opposition of many Republicans as well as Democrats. The Democrats, of course, see this as a betrayal of Ukraine. I have a friend here in Exeter, New Hampshire, who yesterday cited Volodymyr Zelensky as the indomitable leader of the free world. Well, I'm not sure there is a free world, but anyway, I'm not sure what it's free from anyway.

But there is this Churchillian image of Zelensky, and incredible sympathy for him, for Ukraine, and willful misunderstanding of the security issues that NATO extension to Ukraine presented to the Russians. So we're back where we started, apparently, or we're moving back toward it. I wouldn't say that one article by David Ignatius is dispositive, but basically what the Russians demanded in December of 2021 was either the implementation of the Minsk Accords, that is, protections for the Russian speakers in eastern Ukraine, and the acceptance of the annexation of Crimea, plus no NATO troops or Western troops in Ukraine.

Some Russians added a rollback in the Western military presence after 1997 in Eastern Europe, but it was clear that was negotiable. And they demanded the re-neutralization of Ukraine, on the basis of which they had accepted the independence of Ukraine within the former Soviet borders. And finally,

they asked for a discussion of European security architecture that would reassure Western Europeans about their intentions and capabilities, and do the same for them with regard to Western Europe, which has repeatedly invaded Russia. World War I, World War II, Napoleon, you know, Germans, Frenchmen—Europeans in the West have a record of invading Russian territory. Russia does not have such a record with regard to the West.

So I think the Russian position, which was an attempt to start a negotiation, was totally repudiated by not just Antony Blinken, the Secretary of State at the time, and Joe Biden, the president, but by the NATO leadership, by your own Jens Stoltenberg, who was then the Secretary General of NATO, and who has been succeeded by Mark Rutte, who is, if anything, even more solicitous of Donald Trump's favor and interest, and hardline in his approach toward the Russians. So here we are. Basically, if we want to have a peace, not just in Ukraine, but in Europe, if we want a Europe that is whole and free, as we have declared, we have to deal effectively and with some empathy with Russian security concerns. And it's the failure to do so that perpetuates this war.

I know that there are trends in Europe as a whole, maybe not in Norway, but certainly in Germany and in France, major countries, and perhaps a little bit in the UK, although it remains a mainstay of Russophobia. There is a trend toward the expression of individual rights, the dissociation of these countries from the European whole. And someone has just done a study which, I noted, indicated that at the individual level, European politicians, there is a great deal of realism. But in the collective, they are utterly unrealistic. So the psychology of crowds, about which my great-grandfather wrote in his doctoral dissertation at Heidelberg, what, 120 years ago, is very much in operation.

#Chas Freeman

And those of us who have danced to a different tune have been called out for that, or worse, as you know more than I.

#Glenn

Well, this country here, Norway, is kind of unique on this because I think it's the only country in the world where every single member of parliament is for sending weapons. And to the best of my knowledge, not a single one has called for ending the boycott of high-level talks with Russia. You know, anyone who challenges this golden consensus will be ruthlessly attacked. So it's zero opposition. You do see opposition, though, in Britain and France and Germany, the big countries. But the Scandinavians, they turned very, very hawkish during this conflict.

#Chas Freeman

What I did want to ask, though: you are, you know, Americans condemn you for being socialist. Ridiculous. Anyway.

#Glenn

Yeah, I was called a warmongering fanatic. Yeah, something is coming back there. Well, but here's the interesting thing with Trump, though. Like, he had, in the beginning, or during the election, he was very explicit that, you know, he was making the point that NATO expansion had triggered the war. He called for ending the war. He would do it in 24 hours. Immediately after he took power, we had all those events, like the big spat in the Oval Office between him and Zelensky. And then something happened. He pivoted the other way. And then he seemed to, instead of ending the war, want to outsource it. And he never spoke about NATO expansion again or addressing these underlying causes. Indeed, you saw Marco Rubio as well.

He made this interview with Megyn Kelly in the beginning of the second administration that, you know, the unipolar moment is over. There's multiple areas we have to adjust. Well, that kind of means you have to make peace with the Russians. And now they're kind of just back to, oh, look at the successes of this four-day strike deep into Russia, which is obviously supported by the United States. So now they're pivoting back again. Is this a negotiation tactic, like making all sides feel that there's uncertainty, that they have to make concessions before the Americans switch again? Or is this just recognizing that the situation is hopeless? Or is this just Trump being angry at Zelensky for being rude about the mineral deal? I just have a very hard time interpreting Mr. Trump.

#Chas Freeman

Probably all of the above encapsulated in the idea of a mentally defective president who is not in touch with reality and who makes up stuff. Look at the way this was announced. You know, Donald Trump announced there was a deal between Putin and Zelensky. There wasn't any deal. This is something he imagined. Who are his intermediaries? Two real estate moguls from New York who have a batting average of zero in terms of diplomatic accomplishment anywhere. I mean, when pushed on that, Donald Trump says, "Well, look at Gaza. That's a great success." But I think he's the only person in the world who regards it as such.

So this is just confusion, ineptitude, incompetence, diplomatic incompetence. And it is... it is not leadership. It is followership. And as I said, you know, if you inhale your own propaganda and become giddy over it, then you do stupid things. And this is a chain of stupid things. I don't know how else to explain it. I mean, there's no real purpose or strategy to all this. As I indicated, the idea of the strategy in the beginning was to use Ukraine to take down Russia. And Lloyd Austin and the Biden administration said the purpose of the war was to weaken and isolate Russia. That was a bit out of line to admit that, but that was the actual purpose that led to the outset of the war.

We don't know what the war is about now. Is it about arms sales to Europeans so they can pass on the arms to Ukraine? Is it about, you know, supporting an ideological crusade against some mythical Russian ideological menace? Does anybody really imagine the Russians, who have bogged down in Donbas, could actually invade Western Europe? They could devastate it, yes, but they could not

occupy and control it against any serious opposition, and there would be opposition. What is this about? Nobody can tell you really at this point. It's about democracy. But Ukraine is not a democracy. It's about Ukrainian nationalism.

But Ukrainian nationalism will not accommodate the nationalism of others, or the linguistic and cultural autonomy of others. It's about punishing the Russians for a war of aggression. But the Russians started that war because they were denied the opportunity to negotiate. None of this makes sense. And as I said earlier, the United States basically, under the Trump administration, has now broken completely with the earlier strategy of going after the Russians through Ukraine. Europeans are still on that kick, but mostly with empty talk and no real capabilities, and confronting a threat that is exaggerated and far more imagined than real.

So, you know, the only thing you can say about all this is, the big loser is Ukraine. Ukraine has been turned into, and is being turned into, a failed state with limited territory, probably limited access to the sea. It may end up as a last landlocked bastion of revanchist ultra-nationalists who are the poorest and most corrupt in Europe. What is the future of Ukraine at this point? Zelensky or no Zelensky, I don't think anyone knows. So this is—Ukraine is a tragedy for everyone: for the Ukrainians, for the Russians, for American relations with Europe, for statecraft generally, which you accused me of at the beginning of your broadcast. Unjustly. I deny that I'm capable of statecraft.

#Glenn

Well, I was thinking, though, well, the Russian strategy now, I mean, whether they pursue diplomacy or military victory, it doesn't really matter. It will be the same actions, I guess. That is, a Ukraine without air defenses and at least temporarily without the same level of U.S. support, the approach will be essentially to continue what they were doing. That is, this massive escalation, these heavy attacks against bridges, railroads, energy infrastructure—essentially, all the things that you need to shut down the country. I mean, again, this can be used for pressure to force the Europeans and Zelensky to negotiate. But if they don't, it's also the pathway to victory. So, you know, the actions, I think, would be the same now, irrespective of what they want.

But what is the pathway to—do you see any pathway to diplomacy? Because surely—I know that when Trump had this Alaska meeting with Putin—sorry, I'm working on a big question again. When Trump had this big meeting with Putin in Alaska, then the Europeans all got on a plane to Washington and tried to explain, you know, we can defeat them on the battlefield, we can at least make the bargaining power more favorable. Let's just keep on going a little bit more. Surely the Europeans must now see that there's no rescuing the situation anymore. Surely Zelensky must see the same as well. You would think that diplomacy would, you know, that option would be becoming more appealing.

#Chas Freeman

No, Anchorage was theater, not diplomacy, and so was the sycophantic gathering in the Oval Office with European leaders after it. You should review the video of that and look at the face of Giorgia Meloni as this vaudeville show proceeded. Again, you know, some Europeans are realistic in private, even if in public they adhere to a united front that is impossible to implement. No, I think you're right. Let's remember who started this business of blowing up infrastructure and whatever. I mean, this was a Western-inspired Ukrainian escalation, aided and abetted by American and British intelligence, by weaponry that was supplied by the UK and others, by Ukrainian ingenuity in support of this policy, by Chinese parts for the Ukrainian drones.

You know, I mean, so... What would stop this war? A different leadership in Kiev, one that is willing to return to the negotiating table, one that is willing to renew what was agreed at Istanbul in March of 2022. Basically, you know, a peace that respected Russian security concerns and therefore led to an end to the onslaught. But in the absence of that, the onslaught is going to continue. And Ukraine, as you suggested, is being systematically devastated and deprived of its future by this war. So maybe, in his own inept way, Donald Trump's suggestion that it's time for Zelensky to step down has some merit. It opens a diplomatic opportunity for somebody. But who?

The United States is diplomatically incompetent under this administration. Who in Europe, under the current leadership, who in Europe would take on the task of negotiating the three things that have to be negotiated? The neutral status of Ukraine, the guarantees for minority rights in Ukraine, and the broader question of European security architecture. Who? You know, we're right back to Kissinger's infamous question: if I want to get European agreement, who do I call? The EU is more an excuse for the lack of decision than it is a vehicle for making decisions on fundamental questions like this, apparently. So maybe Mark Rutte should come forward and be the peacemaker. More improbable things have happened.

#Glenn

Well, I think the problem with the European Union, as I said, is 27 countries, all with different political, economic, security interests. How would they all reach consensus? I think that this very hardline narrative they captured everyone with—that is, Russia is an unprovoked invasion, this is the new Hitler. Once you establish that narrative, there's no room for dissent anymore. And if you would start now to talk with the Russians, even a compromise, I think the Europeans will begin to fragment because that was the only consensus. I mean, in the literature—well, academic literature—they refer to it as a rhetorical trap. They did the same with NATO enlargement.

They say, hey, it's EU enlargement. They say, EU are all about democracy and freedom. It's like, yes, everyone agrees. And then, okay, well, we kind of have to bring in some of the Eastern Europeans, and then anyone who would oppose it, they would essentially oppose spreading democracy. So it was a way of getting everyone on board. Well, we did the same this time, but now it's Putin is Hitler. They want to restore the Soviet Union. No one quite explains exactly if the Russians are going to march on Paris. Forget about the capabilities to do so. What are they going to

do with Paris? It doesn't make any sense. So I guess my point is they just got trapped by these narratives.

#Chas Freeman

It does make sense, though, in terms of post-World War II history. I mean, what happened at the end of World War II? The Soviet Union had lost 27 million people. It had been devastated in its farms. Its industry had been devastated. It was highly dependent on the supply of weaponry and equipment from the United States. And yet, a narrative immediately emerged that it was about to march on the rest of Europe. You know, was this realistic? You know, one can argue about that, but I would say that this overestimation of Soviet ambition or Russian ambition and capabilities has deep roots.

That was '48, '47. And, you know, various things were done by the United States at the time in Europe, for example, interfering heavily in the Italian elections against the Communist Party there, which, interestingly for a communist party, was contesting the elections. It was locally based. It wasn't subservient to Moscow, as far as I know. I mean, probably sympathetic, but not subservient. Anyway, there's deep roots to this. That's the first point. The second is that we've converted a normal sin of military geopolitical analysis. Normally, the problem is that we examine the capabilities of a potential adversary and then extrapolate from that and say, well, we have to match and be able to confront those capabilities.

We don't look at the intentions. So therefore, we get into things like security traps, where one side is the security dilemma, where one side is arming to defend itself, and the other regards that military buildup as offensive because we discount intentions. In this case, everything depends on intentions. Nobody really claims the Russians have the military capability to do what we're allegedly defending ourselves against, or Europeans are defending themselves against. So this is very strange. And you have to, I think, you know, forget statesmen. We need psychiatrists and psychologists to deal with this because it's not rooted in some external reality. It's in our heads.

So, you know, Zelensky is the indomitable leader of the free world, the free world being the world not controlled by the Russians. You know, whether it's free or not is another issue. And the Russians are 12 feet tall even when they're military midgets. And Vladimir Putin is the devil incarnate, also known as Adolf Hitler. And, you know, at least in World War II, the British had the sense of humor to have a song, which I can't sing, unfortunately, because my singing voice is not very good. But it starts off, "Hitler only has one ball. Hitler has two, but they are very small. Goering..." I forgot. Anyway, you know, at least they had a sense of humor about things.

We have lost that. You know, Putin is the devil. He isn't. He's an intelligent, hard-boiled son of a bitch, but he's somebody that you can deal with. And if you look at the—you were in Valdai and somehow made it back to Oslo without being arrested at the airport, unlike Ian Proud, who was detained for, what, three and a half hours or so, and had his laptop and phone confiscated. Anyway,

did you hear, at Valdai, when Putin spoke, did you hear an unintelligent, deluded man? Or did you hear a nasty realist? I think he's a nasty realist. And I spent much of my life in diplomatic service dealing with nasty realists. You can deal with them. God save us from ideologues.

#Glenn

Yeah, it's this switching positions which I find exhausting. As you said, Russia is always, you know, hopelessly weak, backwards, you know, a gas station masquerading as a country. But it's also all-powerful. It can, you know, it's, you know, you have the Russiagate. They can take any country. They're behind all this hybrid war. I mean, there's no limits to it, you know. And then, but same with the, you know, we'll say all the Russians are weak. They're stuck in Donbas. They can't move forward. But they will march in Paris. So we have to prepare for war.

#Chas Freeman

Or Berlin, at least.

#Glenn

Or Berlin, at least. But also, yeah, Ukraine is, you know, they should have joined NATO. Then Russia would never have attacked Ukraine. But, oh, after they're done with Ukraine, they're going to attack NATO. So even Rutte, the NATO Secretary General, he kept making this point for weeks now that, you know, we're facing an imminent Russian threat. And then today he stands on stage going, "Ah, well, there is no imminent Russian threat. You know, if there is a danger that appears in the future, we'll address it." So I'm assuming Trump made a call saying we need to dial it down a bit.

But as soon as Starmer, he was, you know, the prime minister of Britain, he wants to go back into the EU, so he's making statements, "Oh, Brexit was Russian interference." And then you have some pushback, I think, from Boris Johnson, Nigel Farage. They're all saying, "What are you talking about? Where's the evidence? We already had the investigation. It came up with nothing. What is this new evidence?" Oh, well, okay, well, maybe, you know, and then they start to walk it back. They're all over the place, though. There's no reality anymore. It's all spinning, it feels.

#Chas Freeman

You have put your finger on a particular problem that we have, and that is the politicization of the intelligence services, their willingness to supply spurious claims based on no evidence of behavior that we find objectionable. You know, this is a disgrace. I mean, MI6 has had a reputation for objectivity, which it is diluting in the face of expediency, basically political expediency. So what is Mark Rutte's motive in doing what he does? I think his whole purpose is to keep the United States

involved in the defense of Europe and protect the transatlantic relationship. And he's willing to go to extraordinary lengths, brown-nosing Donald Trump to do that. He's also willing to zigzag doctrinally, change his rhetoric to suit that cause, regardless of what happens.

I wouldn't see him as a serious analyst of politics, a serious analyst of a Russian threat or any other threat. And from a European point of view, the instability of American policies toward Europe is a far greater threat than anything emanating from Moscow, which has not changed its tune since this war was brewed up. It has been consistent. It has not expanded its objectives. It's created some problems for itself. For example, constitutionally incorporating Donetsk and Lugansk, as well as Zaporizhia and Kherson, was a mistake, because now the Constitution of the Russian Federation binds the Russians to war objectives that probably are unattainable, or, if they are attainable, are attainable only at exorbitant cost.

But nobody's claiming that Russian policy has been sensible on this. But certainly the opportunities for diplomacy, to go back to your question, have been almost infinite, constant, and yet repudiated by the West, which won't even talk to the Russians. And we now have a trial going on in Germany of some Ukrainian who is accused of having carried out the Nord Stream 2 sabotage, which is very improbable. But I guess the good news from a Norwegian point of view is it lets Norway off the hook in terms of involvement in it. So Norwegian divers were not there, I guess. That's good. And we should all be happy. But, I mean, basically, we're living in a world in which theater rather than diplomacy is the modus operandi of more and more governments.

#Glenn

Yeah, everyone seemed to forget about Seymour Hersh's article. And, well, not for me to remind everyone. I did want to ask you, though, where is this headed now? How do you see this? Are we entering the endgame here? Because, I mean, I've been surprised. I thought that the Ukrainians would have folded a long time ago. I did not expect that resilience, but also the willingness of Zelensky and NATO to continue to shovel men into a war that couldn't be won. But also, you have the introduction of new technologies, the drones. I mean, all of this has extended far beyond what I thought. I mean, I thought around year three that they would begin to break.

#Chas Freeman

But now, I don't think anyone has really distinguished themselves in terms of the military analysis of this conflict. Ukrainians have indeed proved far more resilient and innovative than anybody thought they would be. NATO has proved to be a bigger sucker than many people thought it would be in terms of backing the Kiev establishment. Zelensky and the people in power in Kiev have vested interests in this war's continuation. They have profited enormously from corruption, which is a normal consequence of war everywhere, but which has been particularly notable in Ukraine. They are in the rear.

They are not on the front lines. They have managed to do in the Russian Orthodox Church, the press, freedom, democracy, elections. All these things have been set aside in favor of authoritarian rule. You know, this is pretty good from their point of view. You know, if they, like Trump, care more about themselves than about the country they lead, things aren't so bad. So I think we need to acknowledge that there are vested interests that very powerfully support the continuation of this war. And probably on the Russian side, that's true too. The prestige of Vladimir Putin is completely invested in this war.

Those Russians who think the war was a mistake or believe it should be ended without taking the last bit of territory in Donbass are isolated, ostracized, or worse. There's a heavy toll on both sides, worse on the Ukrainian side, but still terrible on the Russian side in terms of dead young men, and now in Ukraine, women, since they've scraped the bottom of the barrel in terms of men and are now fielding women on the battlefield. Anyway, I mean, it's a horror. But you're right. It is a surprising horror. I don't think anyone could imagine it would go on for five years, which it has done.

#Glenn

But I'm thinking, you know, if also on the Russian side, even if I have the ability now to defeat Ukraine, push NATO out, to give 100% sure that they won't return, all of this, you know, all the military goals, get regime change, get the Banderas out of Kyiv, restore the human rights, political rights of Russian speakers.

I mean, all these objectives—there is still one key problem, though, that is the source of the whole war: the broken European security architecture. Is European security still going to be based on stability deriving from NATO's continuous expansion towards the Russian border? Are we still—because we have other problems we can fight over: Kaliningrad or Belarus, Moldova, Georgia. I mean, there's no—As long as this is the problem, we haven't figured out the new pan-European security architecture, that victory might be hollow. If we do accept that the Ukraine war is simply a symptom of a larger conflict, surely the Russians would want to address that larger conflict. I'm just thinking from a Western perspective, wouldn't we have some bargaining power if we can bring in the European security architecture into discussions there?

#Chas Freeman

I think we would. I think the Russians very much want that, and I think they reason strategically. The issue for them is not so much Ukraine. It's exactly the one that you described. That is the breakdown and the catastrophe that the absence of an effective European security architecture has produced. I think the real questions we should be asking ourselves at this point begin with: what sort of Ukraine is there going to be, and how is it going to fit into the future European security architecture? If it is a failed state full of revanchists, how do we deal with that? What are we trying to produce in terms of security for Western Europe, for Europeans generally?

We all should worry about the Russians. What is it that would keep the Russians from once again going to war over security issues in Europe? These are all the questions we should be asking, and the answer to them is not the one that is brooded about, which is Ukraine goes into the EU. Ukraine is not qualified to go into the EU. If it went into the EU, it would be the bad apple that spoils the rest. It is impoverished. It is corrupt. It is undemocratic. It is militarist. It is revanchist. It has no qualifications.

It has territorial disputes with others, latent or actual. I mean, actual, clearly, with the Russians, latent with the Poles, with others. What is the future of that country? And, you know, I mean, it was possible once to imagine it as a bridge and a buffer between Russia and the rest of Europe. It can't perform those functions now. So where does that leave us? And, you know, I don't think anybody's asking the right question. They're asking, how can we defeat the Russians? And the answer is we can't, because we're not willing to put up with the losses, financial and in terms of blood, that would be required to defeat the Russians in Ukraine, if we could. And fighting the last Ukrainian is hardly a decent answer to this mess.

#Glenn

That's where I find this war to represent a shift in world order. Because for the Russians, they looked for a pan-European security architecture for a long time. You can go back to 1975, the Helsinki Accords. And then they had Gorbachev's arguments for a common European home. They had the Charter of Paris for a New Europe in 1990. Then the OSCE developed in 1994. And then, you know, once they expanded NATO, yes, this was all set back. But both Yeltsin and Putin suggested, well, we could join NATO. You know, Medvedev proposed during his presidency a new security architecture. Putin proposed a Eurasian Union. I mean, they tried over and over again. And something that clicked in 2014 was many thought in Russia perhaps incremental integration will work over time.

But with the toppling of Yanukovych, it kind of signified, no, that killed the dream, because Ukraine will not be a bridge. It will be a frontline. And why I call this a shift in world order is because ever since Peter the Great, over the past 300 years, they looked towards the West for economic development and modernization. But now, as China rises and we burn down that bridge between the West and Russia—that is Ukraine—now their whole economy is being reoriented towards the East, towards China. And there's not much reversing this. I mean, yes, they can diversify and rebalance, but it's a massive shift at the time when the U.S. is most worried about China. We hand them over, tie Russia over to their side of the ledger. I mean, it's their side of the ledger. It's just shocking.

#Chas Freeman

No, it makes no sense at all. And of course, as we've discussed before, a similar evolution has taken place with regard to Turkey, a very important Eurasian country which attempted to Europeanize itself and encountered opposition that was very off-putting, and is now reorienting itself toward the

West Asian region that it inhabits, the Horn of Africa, Africa, Central Asia, and, you know, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia. A Turkish entente to replace the American entente domination of Persian Gulf affairs is coming into being. So, from a strategic point of view, the post-Cold War era has been an absolute disaster from the point of view of my country, the United States, in my view. And we're compounding errors.

We applied a policy of no diplomatic intercourse and maximum pressure to implement North Korea, with a brief intermission during which Donald Trump did a bit of theater at Panmunjom. We pushed the North Koreans to develop a nuclear ICBM that could strike us. We're doing the same with the Iranians now. And we don't have any answer for any of the problems that involve us in combat with other nations. We tried to put down Ansar Allah, the Houthis, and we failed. And now they're back battering Saudi Arabia in ways that are absolutely disastrous for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, but also for global energy supplies, for inflation, for anyone who imports hydrocarbons from the Persian Gulf.

We don't have an answer to how to end a war with Iran. The West has discredited itself morally with its posture on Israel-Palestine. And the United States, which was the manager of Western unity and of global affairs, now has a word that has been shown to be valueless, whether it's with the Iranian nuclear deal, the Gaza deal, Lebanon, Syria, Ukraine. I mean, the United States has been utterly inconstant. And how Europeans can imagine that somehow this is of no consequence and does not require rethinking on their part is very difficult to understand.

#Glenn

Very, very difficult to understand.

#Chas Freeman

You're a European. Maybe you can explain it to me.

#Glenn

I don't. I don't understand. Like, I often make the point: I understand the Russians. They see this as an existential threat. I understand the Ukrainians as well, to a large extent. This is also an existential threat for them. I can get the American PowerPoint: we can use the Ukrainians to knock Russia out from the ranks of great powers. It doesn't work. Okay, we'll outsource it to the Europeans. I mean, this all makes sense. I don't understand the Europeans, though. It doesn't—you know, even if you're a cruel realist, you know, put that aside—I don't understand the Europeans. Just a last small question: the U.S. cutting off Ukraine's intelligence. Again, I'm not sure if that will be over tomorrow or next week or a month or whatever, but how significant is it in terms of Ukraine's capabilities to fight?

#Chas Freeman

I think it's very significant, but far more important in the sense that it tells the Ukrainian military that they need to get rid of Zelensky, basically. Zelensky is defined as the problem that has caused this rift. And what's been done is all a suspension, not an end of support to Ukraine. So that is the case with the Starlink Elon Musk systems. It's the case with the long-range targeting intelligence for Ukrainian weaponry to strike the Russian refineries. Basically, I would say that it puts Mr. Zelensky in a very dangerous position.

#Glenn

Yeah. Well, Ambassador, thank you very much for your time. I think we already ran out the clock a bit. So, yeah, thanks for your insights, and I hope you come back soon.

#Chas Freeman

Well, have a good day. Bye-bye.