

The Iran War: Day 1 | With Michael Rossi & Chas Freeman

Updates on the US-Israeli War with Iran

#Pascal

Welcome, everybody, to another livestream and update about what's happening in Iran. I'm very, very pleased and grateful to be joined today by two wonderful analysts and one former diplomat — Ambassador Chas Freeman, former U.S. ambassador to Saudi Arabia and Assistant Secretary of Defense back in the 1990s. Ambassador Freeman, welcome. We're also joined by Michael Rossi of Rutgers University, who teaches political science there. Gentlemen, welcome. Thank you, Pascal.

#Chas Freeman

Good to be with you, Pascal.

#Pascal

Well, thank you for doing this. Maybe let's start with you, Ambassador Freeman. This new war with Iran is not even a day old yet. What do you make of it, and what have you learned over the course of the day? It's now 8 p.m. on the U.S. East Coast, and the whole affair started around 1 a.m. this Saturday, your time.

#Chas Freeman

Yes, it's too early to really tell much about what's happening. This is the opening round in what's clearly going to be a war of attrition. There are several obvious points to it, I think, that have been made by the U.S. military—apparently not persuasively, because the president went ahead and did this. First, whatever the outcome, it will greatly deplete American stocks of armaments and munitions relevant to other challenges, and therefore it will weaken the United States. Second, we're already seeing the severance of east-west communications. The Strait of Hormuz is closed. Insurance companies will no longer insure ships going through there, which ensures that they won't try to break the blockade.

The Houthis are back enforcing a blockade in the Red Sea, apparently. So both the Persian Gulf—through the Strait of Hormuz, which accounts for about 20% of the global oil supply—and the Red Sea, as the passage from Asia to Europe through the Suez Canal, are closed. Third, of course, military censorship is in place in Israel, which means there's no reporting on what damage is being

done there. We know that in the June so-called 12-day war, about 480 buildings were destroyed in Israel. There's a *Haaretz* editorial today that mentions this, though not the figure. And many Israelis are still homeless as a result of that. Here we go again.

So we know there's damage in many cities in Iran, and that an apparently mistargeted missile in Minab, in southern Iran, killed a lot of schoolgirls. We've seen claims from President Trump—though not quite from Prime Minister Netanyahu—that the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, is dead. Netanyahu said there were indications he was dead but didn't claim he was. The Iranians have denied that and said he's very much still in command. So there's a lot we don't know. We're going to have an opportunity to find out a great deal more in the coming days. And I think it's fair to say there are several legacies from this, regardless of what happens.

The first is that I don't think anyone is going to be very eager to negotiate with the United States. This is the second time we've used negotiations as a ruse, as a way to distract attention while planning an attack. And the fact is that someone indiscreet in Israel revealed that the time of the attack—the date—was agreed on December 29th, already at Mar-a-Lago. These negotiations, as I suspected, have been an empty exercise meant to support a surprise military strike. And that makes it a little more understandable why the Russians are apparently losing enthusiasm for dealing with Messrs. Witkoff and Kushner, who have, to use an American baseball term, a batting average of zero.

They've entered many negotiations. They've produced wealth for themselves and for the Trump family on occasion—at least potentially—but they haven't produced peace. Not in Ukraine, not in Gaza, not between Israel and Iran, not with Iran and the United States. And so, um, there's a legacy here of disrepute for the American diplomatic establishment that's going to last and make it far more difficult for the United States to be taken seriously internationally. Of course, we are taken seriously as a serial violator of international law and as a militarily potent country. Let me just address that last point. If this war ends, as I suspect it may, with the devastation of Israel, great damage in Iran, and some serious American losses, we'll see a loss of prestige.

That is, prestige is the shadow that power casts, and it's a very important element of leverage internationally. We'll see a reduction in that for the United States military. Even if the U.S. military is successful, we'll nonetheless, as I indicated earlier, see a reduced capacity due to shortages of munitions and other weaponry, which reflect the decay of the American military-industrial base. So all this is not good, and it, one way or another, promises to increase the danger of war. I guess I should say one last thing, and that is that the American objectives in this war, for a long time, were unclear. There was a whole laundry list—one being to stop the so-called nuclear program, which the intelligence agencies have never verified to have existed.

In fact, they've been quite sure that it didn't. So it's a fiction, like Saddam Hussein's nuclear program, which led to the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Second, there was the need to respond to protests that the Secretary of the Treasury claimed credit for instigating through the collapse of the Iranian rial, which impoverished huge numbers of Iranians and brought them into the streets—where,

reportedly, 50,000 Starlink receiver sets were in place to coordinate the escalation of the protests into riots and violence. Third, that Iran has developed a formidable deterrent in the form of its missile force, and that should be eliminated. So we've been saying in these negotiations, apparently, "You must eliminate your defense capabilities, or we will bomb you. If you do eliminate your defense capabilities, well, you're on your own."

And fourth, Iran has been in these talks because it wants relief from sanctions, which have crippled the Iranian economy and led to the protests and their aftermath. That has not been on offer in these negotiations. What has been on offer is no new sanctions—but even that was phony. So we have a situation in which a series of demands in the negotiations, clearly calculated to make those negotiations fail, has in fact produced nothing but a deception for a surprise attack. I don't think anything good is going to come out of this for anyone. I suspect Israel will regret having put Trump up to this. I suspect Trump is in a box politically. And I think the Iranians are once again suffering the consequences of the dynamic I've just described. I'll stop.

#Pascal

Yeah, thank you very much for this assessment. And Michael, I'll let you react to it. I just want to point out that we're being told that Ali Khamenei, the Supreme Leader, is apparently dead. I mean, this is now making the rounds on Twitter and in the establishment media.

#Chas Freeman

Let me interrupt. He's been declared dead on at least six previous occasions by the Israelis. I think the Iranian government has denied that he's dead and said he's still in charge. I think it's an open question. Anyway, here's a question: if the Supreme Leader is dead as a result of an assassination attempt carried out through a military attack, what's wrong with trying to assassinate Donald Trump?

#Pascal

Yeah, precisely. I mean, why wouldn't they try to do that? Do you actually think, Ambassador Freeman, that this could be on the cards? Could an assassination attempt on Donald Trump be attempted now?

#Chas Freeman

Well, it's possible. Of course, there's been what I think was a false claim that there was already an Iranian assassination attempt on Trump. But, you know, this goes back to the unlearned lesson of 9/11: if you bomb people, they'll bomb back. If they don't have an air force, they'll repurpose passenger planes as cruise missiles. They'll find some way to retaliate. Reciprocity is the name of the

game internationally. So if you have no respect for international law, morality, or decency, and you assassinate your counterparts, you should expect them to follow the rule of the mafia and pay you back.

#Pascal

And of course, until now, this is exactly what Israel has been doing. It always went after the leadership of its enemies— Hamas and Hezbollah. But this is the first time the enemy is big enough that it could actually try to carry out a successful counterstrike. Michael, what do you think this situation will produce politically, and in terms of war?

#Michael Rossi

Um, well, I'm glad we waited until the end of the day to talk about this. You know, to paraphrase a famous line from Sophocles, one must wait until sunset to see how splendid the day has become. I wouldn't dare say there's anything splendid at the end of this day. But to add a few things to what Ambassador Freeman mentioned—just within the past hour, Iran confirmed the deaths of four of Khamenei's family members: one of his daughters and a grandchild. As for Khamenei himself, his whereabouts remain unknown. People within his family are denying the rumors that he was killed. And until I get confirmation from Iran itself that Khamenei is dead, I'm going to take all of this with not just a grain of salt, but with a salt mine.

The United States and the Israeli leadership have already lied—multiple times. It's a bold lie to make, if it is one. So we're effectively, within the first 24 hours, dealing with a lot in the so-called gray zone. I mean, that's ultimately what we're dealing with here. One thing before I get to the issue of assassination and international law: again, gray zone here. Iran has managed to successfully hit a number of American military targets within the Middle East, including Bahrain, where a major radar station was destroyed. Locations in Qatar, the UAE, Kuwait, and Dubai—we're seeing pictures of missiles flying over Dubai itself. Various targets have been hit. This raises the question of whether the United States and Israel have bitten off more than they can chew.

Or is this something the U.S. was prepared to take as retaliatory strikes—hence the reason there were orders for military personnel to evacuate these bases—as a way of then turning to the willing audience that eats this stuff up? As a way of saying, "You see, Iran is declaring war haphazardly on a number of countries." And we won't mention the bases, but we will talk about how Iran suddenly struck Bahrain, Kuwait, and the UAE, getting all these other countries to possibly join the conflict between the United States and Israel. Images of Dubai—of the Burj Khalifa almost being hit—are going to be played up in Western media as a way of showing the brutality and belligerence of this regime. So this is what we come away with within the first day.

I think the other thing we need to take into consideration is that if the so-called rules-based order had any credibility up until today, it's gone. It's just absolutely gone. You and I had this conversation

yesterday, Pascal Lottaz, which in a way I'm almost glad we did—because we talked about Russia-Ukraine yesterday, and I think after today, Ukraine is going to be... well, it's no longer top news. But we were talking about Canada's Prime Minister Mackey and the importance of the rules-based order, to which he automatically stands behind the United States today in its attack against Iran, without any congressional approval—unless you consider the Knesset to be the congressional approval that Trump was looking for.

#Pascal

Ambassador Freeman, how do you think this is going down now in the United States? I've heard there are protests in the U.S. I mean, Donald Trump, in his speech, even used the word "war." He said casualties will happen in war. But under the U.S. Constitution, the power to make war—which he obviously acknowledges—should rest with Congress. How is this going to go down in the U.S.?

#Chas Freeman

Well, I think this is, in fact, a further extension and the ultimate proof of the collapse of constitutional order in the United States. This is the end of the American Republic. Here you have a president who, without informing Congress until the very last minute—let alone consulting them—without offering any explanation or set of war aims that is coherent or feasible, takes the United States into a major war. He deploys half of the U.S. Air Force halfway around the world in preparation for this, sends two of the three operational aircraft carriers. I don't know if the Gerald R. Ford is really operational, since no one can take a dump without getting off it in Crete. But anyway, he did all this, and Congress was inert. He has a cult in Congress that will support him regardless of what he does.

There are historical parallels to be drawn with various moments in the history of the Roman Republic, and they're not encouraging. The second element is that this is undemocratic. Something like two-thirds—sorry, three-fourths—of the American public, according to polling data, is opposed to this war, or was opposed to it. One never knows whether polls have anything other than ephemeral value, because when people go to war, they take sides and their attitudes change. But here you have a failure to follow the basic principles of the Constitution, disrespect for the separation of powers, complete indifference to public opinion, and, as Michael said, in effect, substituting Benjamin Netanyahu for the approval of the U.S. Congress in making war.

I want to make a couple of other comments, if I may, about Michael's intervention. The first is this: the members of the Gulf Cooperation Council—Saudi Arabia aside—have American forces on their territory. Saudi Arabia apparently has a beefed-up Patriot missile presence. It also has F-35s at Prince Sultan Air Base. Although it's been quite definite that it does not want to be involved in this war, that's a little perplexing. But the other four of the five GCC members have American forces at

bases on their territory. The largest is Al Udeid in Qatar, which has been struck, and also the Fifth Fleet headquarters in Bahrain, which has apparently been struck, I gather quite devastatingly. The regional headquarters of CENTCOM in Kuwait has been hit.

And as Michael mentioned, we've seen drones striking Dubai, and the airport there—the largest in the world—is shut down. So all of this is a dilemma for the Gulf countries. They don't want this war. They've gone to great lengths over the last two months to try to head it off. They worked with Turkey, which is equally disturbed about this war and which now may be forced into supplying technology and weaponry to Iran in order to protect its sovereignty against Israel and the United States. So we don't know which way the Gulf Arabs will turn.

They were in the process, in Kuwait, of a not very well thought-through, gradual effort to form a coalition to balance Israel with Iran. They've normalized relations with Iran there; they were talking to them. I think the fact that the Saudis have not been struck so far, as far as I know, indicates that there's some kind of communication going on between Riyadh and Tehran. In any event, they have a dilemma. They cannot support Israel in its attack on Iran, and they cannot easily take Iran's side. But they also don't want to get at cross-purposes with the United States, which has, however, ignored their interests.

In fact, it violated those interests by inviting attacks on them. And they may very well find a way out of this, because the attacks are on Americans at American bases, not on them. They are violations of their sovereignty, much as Israel violated Qatar's sovereignty when it attacked the negotiators for Hamas. But they are not attacks on Qataris, Kuwaitis, Emiratis, or Bahrainis. And therefore, they may very well find this a good reason to distance themselves rather than become closer to the United States. So this raises serious questions about whether we're seeing a kind of fundamental, final erosion of American influence in the region.

#Pascal

I said this yesterday in my livestream, but this is exactly why countries choose to stay neutral—to avoid inviting strikes from the enemy of their friend, right? Which is exactly what's happening right now. And I'd just like—Michael, I'll give you the floor in a second—but I'd like to show you this very short recording. Not so much because of what was hit, but because of the reaction you can hear in the background. Wait a second... here it is. This one here. And I'll turn on the sound as well. I don't know.

#Speaker 1

And a car. And a car. And a car.

#Pascal

So if the description here is correct, then this would be a radar station in Qatar—U.S. forces in Qatar. And you can hear how the people who were filming this there were actually happy about the strike, or at least it sounded like they were. Michael, do you also think this is going to, you know, end the relationship the United States has with the Gulf states?

#Michael Rossi

I mean, ultimately, the big thing we need to understand about the Arab states is that their governments are largely vassalized within the U.S.-Israeli hegemonic order. The people are not—and they know this, and they hate it. The governments also understand that, in this day and age, two years into the worst state-sponsored genocide against a people since the Holocaust, Israel is toxic. Israel is a toxic country that's enormously costly to have warm, friendly relations with, especially if you're a Muslim country in the Middle East. The governments can paper this over through various agreements and diplomatic niceties.

But the ambassador said something very important here about Saudi Arabia. Last I checked, I don't know whether they're officially siding with the United States or if they want to stay out of this idea of neutrality. What we've seen in the last year or so—take it as you will—is that Iran has become a member of BRICS, the larger economic partnership. So has the UAE, so has Egypt, and so has Saudi Arabia, although Saudi Arabia has not yet formally approved its membership. But what we can draw from this is the warming of relations between Tehran and Riyadh over the past couple of years. Both have re-established diplomatic relations, and this was brought about by the Chinese.

It was Chinese foreign policy that brought these two countries together. And in this regard, this is a red alarm for Israel. Israel is notorious for sabotaging negotiated agreements when things seem to be moving in the right direction—toward mediation or the resolution of a potential protracted conflict. If it doesn't meet Israel's interests—security interests, economic interests—Benjamin Netanyahu is almost always the main source of throwing a wrench in the cog. So we need to understand that the dialogue between the United States and Iran—some people will say this was little more than rhetorical cosplay to gear up for a military intervention. That may very well be true.

Yesterday, when we were talking about the four-year anniversary of the war in Ukraine, I recalled that on the day the attack was launched, four years ago, Vladimir Putin referred to the United States as an "empire of lies." In that sense, they pretend there's a need to talk something out, but in the meantime, they're gearing up for action. It's stall, distract, and then, you know, tell Ukraine afterward, "Forget Minsk—we'll give you the arms, the ammunition, the green light. Go and take Donbas," in the way that Aliyev retook Nagorno-Karabakh, or Tuđman took back Krajina in ex-Yugoslavia.

#Pascal

But...

#Michael Rossi

The talks were fruitful, at least as far as the Gulf states were concerned, and this was very much a concern for Israel. It also harkens back to an earlier attempt at finding a negotiated solution to Iran's nuclear energy pursuits. You may remember the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, largely supported by Barack Obama in the last years of his term. It was producing the results everyone had hoped for—UN weapons inspectors were going into Iran, they had unfettered access to all the sites, and they came back with very positive news that Iran was cooperating. One of the big things that came out of the JCPOA—though I know it's dead in the water now—was that further cooperation would result in the elimination of sanctions and the release of frozen assets around the world.

So it's what we would call positive sanctions—right? It's more carrot than stick. And this was a major incentive for Iran to cooperate because it gave them access to frozen overseas bank accounts they hadn't been able to touch since 1979, but which had been accruing interest ever since. You can only imagine what a massive pile of money that was. And Netanyahu once again said this was unacceptable: we were effectively giving money to a terrorist state that wanted to wipe Israel off the map. When Trump ran for president the first time, he got right behind that and said that if he were elected, he would absolutely pull out of the JCPOA—which is exactly what he did.

And then, with the 12-day war that ensued last summer between Israel and Iran—I mean, this, I think, was the death knell for whatever was left of Iran's negotiated pursuit of some settlement for its nuclear energy policy. So, you know, in a way, conflict resolution, at least in theory, seeks to avoid the actual outbreak of conflict. But one of the major obstacles is always an extremist element—one hardliner. As I say in my conflict resolution class, the most insane person in the room defines reality. And Benjamin Netanyahu has been an excellent "insane person" for years, scuttling any attempts at finding some degree of agreement or cooperation with many of the Muslim states.

#Pascal

Ambassador Freeman, would you like to respond to that?

#Chas Freeman

Several comments. First, I think we need to be clear about what Israel's aims are, since the United States has no coherent set of objectives. We have a laundry list, as I mentioned, and we resort to that list periodically—what's on top depends on the time of day. But Israel is quite clear: they want to eliminate Iran as a competitor, as a source of threat in West Asia. Therefore, their objective is the destruction of Iran. They might very well echo Cato in saying, "Carthage must be eliminated." And I think this is their fundamental objective, and they're unvarying in their pursuit of it. They have an idea of what they want. Trump doesn't have any idea of what he wants, except glory and the approval of the Zionist lobby. Let me make a couple of other minor comments.

First, the use of diplomacy as deception was also apparent in the case of Venezuela, where negotiations were going on with Nicolás Maduro right up to the moment when he was kidnapped in the criminal assault on Caracas. Second, a comment on the rules-based order. This is a great concept—one of the pillars of Western civilization, a great achievement. It probably took three centuries for us to come up with a system based on the consensual acceptance of international rules of law. And we did that, and it was a great American achievement right after World War II. However, in the Biden administration, the rules-based order was redefined to mean rules we make, from which we exempt ourselves, but which we insist others follow. And when we were in a generous mood, we included the G7 in the rule-making role.

But generally, it was unilateral. And I think that order disappeared completely with the rise of the Trump administration. In fact, in that first administration, I remember there was an article in **Foreign Affairs** that denied there was any such thing as an international community. There was no international community. And we asserted the right to behave unilaterally, and that's what we continue to do. So now, I think the "law of the jungle" is sometimes used as an analogy—but even the jungle has rules. I'm not sure there's any rule that applies now. So I go back to my thesis: the constitutional democracy we created 250 years ago—well, actually 234, I think—but anyway, that period long ago is dead.

Whether it can be resurrected or not is an open question. I don't think the chances are good. But equally important, domestic chaos, policy chaos, and disrespect for the law have now been exported to the global order. We are in a period of global disorder, in transition to something we don't quite know how to describe. But clearly, one very large possibility is that we will so discredit ourselves and so isolate ourselves with protectionist ideas, measures, and the abuse of our power—for example, taking down the dollar by using it the way we do to weaponize it against other countries—that we will so thoroughly remove ourselves from the decent company of the rest of the world that we'll end up in a world where we are all by ourselves.

Everybody else is engaged in globalization. The universal order of the UN that we created after World War II will be replaced by a series of regional orders that may or may not reflect local hegemony. And we are transforming the world in a way that we just don't understand. So I think there's much more at stake here in this assault on Iran than many people realize. This really is, as Chancellor Scholz once said, an epochal change in progress. And we're in the middle of it—and of course, we don't understand it.

#Pascal

Sadly enough, it's usually wars that mark the change of eras. And it feels very much as if this one will be just as big a change as what we saw four years ago—almost to the month—with Russia. Just to mention one thing here: we're already seeing different narratives emerging. For example, Kamala Harris made a statement today that she would oppose this Iran war. I have to say, I don't believe her. I think it wouldn't matter much who is at the helm of the U.S. government; it seems that

whoever gets elected, it's Israel's policy that ends up being followed. We also see the Europeans rallying together at the moment.

Where is this? Yeah, I hear Ursula von der Leyen saying, "Following the ongoing situation in Iran, I am convinced—I will convene a special security council in the EU for regional security and stability. It is of the utmost importance that there is no further escalation through Iran's unjustified attacks on partners in the region." Of course. Yeah, I mean, it's laughable, right? It's utterly laughable. And you see now the rallying around the flag of the satellites, right? Actually coming together. They didn't exactly know how to react at first, but now it seems to be clear. Maybe let me give the word first to Michael, and then back to Ambassador Freeman.

#Michael Rossi

Well, I mean, I can sleep slightly better at night knowing that Kamala Harris has taken such a hard position on this war in Iran. You know, I think American officials, as you pointed out quite well, can speak their minds when they're not elected or not presidents. But once they do get elected, they're sort of handed the driver's manual about what actually is being done. I mean, I can recall when Barack Obama was running for president—he had promised to close Guantanamo Bay within the first week of his tenure. And, well, that obviously didn't happen. As far as Europe is concerned, I mean, look, Pascal, you and I have had this conversation multiple times about our good friends Kaya, Ursula, Paul Staub, Macron, and others. Europe is a patchwork of American vassals. That's it. Europe is irrelevant at this stage of the game.

And I'm very sorry to say that. I say it with no glee in my eye here. But, you know, Ursula's statement is as bland and predictable as it gets—and that's why she's in the position she's in. It's absolutely unjustified and unprovoked. Iran's ambassador for foreign affairs was interviewed on—I forget which news outlet—and one of the questions was, "How can Iran justify attacking these military bases in the Middle East?" And, I mean, it was almost like, "You attacked us." But this misunderstanding—the way the question was asked—was not, I think, meant to be unbelievably stupid. I think it actually reflects the viewpoint of how the West perceives countries like Iran. And Iran has been cast as public enemy number one in the Middle East since the Iranian Revolution.

#Pascal

But at this point, it's so laughable. Ambassador Freeman, I mean, how many people do you think, even in the West, will still swallow this after seeing that the U.S. and Israel attacked Iran? How many people are going to say, "Oh yes, actually, this is proof now—since they're firing back—that they always posed a threat?"

#Chas Freeman

No, of course, the majority will accept that. We're all brainwashed. And here I give great credit to the Ministry of Strategic Affairs in Israel, because they've very effectively used Zionist control and influence over the Western press, which dominates the global media apparatus and pervades various narratives—those we're hearing from Benjamin Netanyahu daily, and now from President Trump. So, Iran—you know, there's apparently this thing going around on the internet, which I love—that shows a cuneiform stele from 3000 BC, supposedly stating that Iran is only two or three days away from building a bomb. You know what I mean? You can't make this—well, you can make this stuff up—but we are a parody of ourselves. And so, yeah, you can say anything you want, and you'll find people who believe it. We live in an age where everything is plausible and nothing's true.

#Pascal

Yeah. Does it even still make sense—just a question, Michael—to think of our countries as separate? You know, as France, Germany, the United States, and Israel as separate entities under international relations theory, which act based on interests. At this point, it seems like it's all one big pie of elites—elite bureaucrats—who form a kind of collective that's ultra-violent toward the outside. It's colonially violent and now even reuses the colonial language to talk about its project to “civilize” the rest of the world. I mean, does this IR theory of nation-states being the actors—the realism—still make any sense as an approach?

#Michael Rossi

We can call it a hive mind. We can call it groupthink. If we link this with IR theory, I'd say this is the Achilles' heel of liberalism—with a capital L. That's because liberalism abides by an ideology of which the rules-based order is a part. Liberalism adheres to, in my opinion, quite optimistic and commendable philosophies and morals: the understanding that there's a set of universal human rights that must be protected, and that states have a moral responsibility to protect their own citizens as a way of justifying sovereignty. All of this has been embedded within the U.N. Charter. And I'm not here to knock any of that.

But what ends up happening, unfortunately, is that liberal states like the U.S., the U.K., France, Australia, Germany, and the like end up believing they have this moral right—this moral crusade—to intervene in states they see as enemies of these universal values. And oftentimes, these states embody different ideologies. So whether it's, you know, Islamic theology in Iran—and please, let's not get the Iranian regime off the hook here; we're not talking about a wonderful, harmonious government, okay?—but to criticize it doesn't necessarily mean we have the right to overthrow it. Cuba, being communist, is, in the minds of the United States—not only that, but also because it's located just 90 miles off Florida's coast—an absolute affront to American security, as well as to the understanding that it violates the Monroe Doctrine.

Russia, China, North Korea—you know, you name it. Interestingly enough, this is not so much liberalism anymore, but that democracy. A wonderful little modification that I always bring up: constructivism. Constructivism is a phenomenal way of explaining how one state perceives another state to be, and that perception—based on narrative, embedded, path-dependent foreign policies, or just simply the idea that if you're going to be the head of state of one of these countries—you have to march in lockstep with your allies. And in that regard, you see this country as a particular violator of international human law. Of course, this is all laid bare when Europe is once again condemning the actions of Iran or Russia.

But turning a blind eye and a deaf ear to the kidnapping of a head of state in Venezuela, to the full-on blockade of Cuba by the United States, and to anything that Israel does—well, that's the pattern. In fact, in some cases, criticism of the state of Israel within these countries by ordinary civilian protesters is seen as a bigger threat to internal security than what the Israeli state has actually done. And look, this is not conspiracy theory; this is not some rabbit-hole right-wing talk. This has been thoroughly documented by John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt in their book **The Israel Lobby**, which was very controversial when it came out. But everybody's looking at it now and saying, you know, Israel has done its work—absolutely owning as many political officials as possible to get them to agree with its actions in the Middle East.

#Chas Freeman

It's a very boring book, in which every sentence has a footnote. Yeah, that's true. I think there's a—Pascal, your question is a good one. I think it's my great-grandfather, Robert Ezra Park, who was a founding sociologist, who claimed there are communities defined by communication networks—or, in his case, he argued newspapers—that a newspaper was the sign of a community. Of course, that was before they became corporate and oligopolistic. But the West is a community. We communicate with each other. We have certain common values that we assert. And we are superior hypocrites. We follow double standards with great abandon. I just read a **Haaretz** editorial this morning—or this afternoon, I guess—and I can't remember the exact quote, but it was quite wonderful. It said, with regard to Iran, we cannot deal with, and there's no reason to negotiate with, a country that has nuclear weapons, oppresses the people in its charge, murders and assassinates people, and otherwise shows a disregard for international law. And I thought, what a wonderful description of Israel. Yeah.

#Michael Rossi

Can I jump in? I just wanted to mention—sorry, Pascal—but I wanted to bring up something related to your question about, you know, how many people actually believe this. The ambassador was a little more pessimistic than I am; I'm a bit more optimistic about how many people truly believe the rhetoric that's coming from these so-called political officials, whether they're in Washington, London, Paris, Brussels, Berlin, Tel Aviv, or elsewhere. Older generations probably do.

And that may be because they adhere to legacy media, which effectively just spins the narrative the state approves of. Younger generations, on the other hand—and here, when I say “younger,” I’m talking about people largely 40 and under—they’ve largely abandoned that. They’ve cut the cable; they don’t subscribe to *The New York Times* or *The Washington Post*, or watch CNN and MSNBC. They don’t do that. They get most of their media, their information, from social media—from Telegram, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, Substack, podcasts, whatever. And so when state leaders say one thing and older generations just say, “Okay, we have to march in lockstep,” younger generations know that this is some of the worst lying out there.

I mean, this is just what it is. It's absolute lies. Now, I think the sad thing is that we know they're lying—they know that we know they're lying—but there's nothing we're going to be able to do about it unless we somehow organize, raise awareness, hold rallies. Which may explain why, when TikTok becomes too inconvenient for the Ministry of Truth, it just has to be bought out. CBS bought out, even CNN bought out—it's going to be bought out by basically the equivalent of the editorial staff of *Pravda*, 1988. Nineteen eighty-eight, mind you, okay? So this is full-on bureaucratic decay.

#Pascal

Yeah, it's even worse. I mean, TikTok is basically being forced to be sold to the Israelis. You can't put it any differently. It's like you can see the empire trying to strangle anything that would change what you talked about, Ambassador Freeman—the way we discuss these things.

#Chas Freeman

The other phenomenon, of course, is Carolyn Leavitt and company. These people resemble no one so much as Soviet apparatchiks—you know, in terms of their tortured distortion of facts and logic, and shamelessly so. I think the shamelessness of a great deal of this is its distinguishing characteristic. Anyway, I think we were starting off on Iran, and now we've gone off on the sins of Western civilization and its period of decrepitude. I think the Iran story is just beginning, as Michael said. We do need to wait for the sun to rise tomorrow to see what it all means. Some things are apparent already, but we're going to hear a lot more, we're going to learn a lot more, and it's probably not going to be very good news for anybody.

#Pascal

Maybe a last question. One of the reasons the optimists say the Iran war won't start—and I was on that side for the longest time—is that the United States doesn't have enough missile capability in the region. One prediction was that the U.S. and Israel could only sustain a bombing campaign for about two weeks. Do you believe that too? Maybe Ambassador Freeman first, and then Mike. Sure, sure.

#Chas Freeman

Yeah, no, I think that's entirely correct. And there's another factor that's never really addressed, and that is—well, you know, I was the ambassador in Saudi Arabia during the Gulf War to liberate Kuwait. We took the entire Seventh Corps out of Europe and sent it home via Saudi Arabia. We had an army, a ground force, that was vastly larger than the one we have now. We don't have the capability to send a ground force into Iran, for which I thank God, because that would be a great mistake. But what we're talking about is an attack that's almost certainly going to fail, because air power, as an instrument of regime change, has no record of success anywhere.

We tried to do that in Germany in World War II, and we didn't succeed. I haven't seen any record of success since then. So I come back to the theory that what we're doing is actually counterproductive, in the sense that we're teaching Iran it must follow North Korea's example in response to maximum pressure—it must develop a capability to strike the United States with nuclear weapons. So Donald Trump's claim that this is imminent is nonsense, but his actions make it likely. We're increasing the number of threats in the world against us for no particular gain—none at all, as far as I can see.

#Pascal

And if Ayatollah Khomeini is dead—I mean, he's the one who issued a fatwa against nuclear weapons, right?

#Chas Freeman

I mean, you just eliminate all the reasons in the way. Sure. I mean, this is, of course, one of the great ironies—that he's been the cork in the bottle in Iran on this issue of going nuclear. We remove him, and very likely we get someone who's responsive to public opinion in Iran, which greatly favors a nuclear deterrent for reasons that are entirely rational. We've given Iran every conceivable reason to want a nuclear deterrent, and the fact that it hasn't built one is testimony to the sometimes disregarded effects of theology and religious faith.

#Pascal

Michael, do you have anything to add to that point?

#Michael Rossi

Yeah, I mean, we're at the end of the first day. Let's see what happens when the sun rises. I guess the one thing we can at least draw on is, you know, trying to figure out the thought process of our mad king, Donald I. I think if there's only one logical thing to understand about him, it's that he doesn't operate on logic. He doesn't operate on any long-term strategy. Whether it's Venezuela, Cuba, Ukraine, or now Iran, he might get bored and switch tactics to China at some point. He's going to go after Switzerland. Switzerland, Pascal Lottaz, please.

#Pascal

That one's easy. Cut us off from the U.S. dollar and we're dead. We die—all nine million of us. Yeah, agreed.

#Michael Rossi

Yeah, he kind of comes across as, you know, that great line from Heath Ledger's Joker character—he says, "I just do things." He's like a dog chasing a car; he wouldn't know what to do if he caught it. And I believe he can be swayed one way or the other, just to wag the dog, move distracted attention around. Somebody even said, what is this, Operation Epic Freedom? It's really Operation Epstein—anger, or Epstein fury, or whatever. So, in that regard, I think the one thing we need to understand about Trump is that he's very haphazard, and his inner circle is, at best, staffed with incredibly belligerent opportunists like Marco Rubio and J.D. Vance, and at worst populated by yes-men sycophants like Pete Hegseth and Stephen Miller. But guess what?

#Pascal

These are the insane people who determine reality today. Ambassador Freeman, the very last word goes to you, and then we'll finish.

#Chas Freeman

I have nothing to add to that. I think we need to engage a psychologist to describe megalomania, narcissism, and sociopathy. Um, which is what I mean—Donald Trump is a sociopath. Just do a search, uh, on an AI search for the definition of "sociopath," and you'll find a profile of the man. And so, this is not encouraging, and he's gotten himself—and us—into a great box from which there's no escape, I think. I mean, there may be a Houdini around somewhere, but I don't know where he is to get us out of the box that we're in. So, Pascal, thank you for convening this session. I think Michael's correct—this is the beginning, and not the beginning of the end, not even the end of the beginning. Beginning of the beginning. Beginning of the beginning, exactly.

#Pascal

You know, if anything positive comes out of this, maybe it's that it's the beginning of the end of the Ukraine war—because we've got the next one now, sadly. Only war ends war, unfortunately. It's insane.

#Chas Freeman

Poor Ukrainians. I feel so sorry for them.

#Pascal

The biggest victims—the million or so people who died, including the Russians and others. My friends, thank you very much for all your thoughts. It's greatly appreciated; it helps to get some clarity. Everybody online, if you want to support what we're doing, please go to Substack. I have this one here—[pascallottaz.substack](https://pascallottaz.substack.com). There you can also find a lot of updates, and we can stay in touch when things happen. And everybody, thank you very much for your time today. Thank you all. Thank you.