

US Plans Iran Invasion. Devastating Consequences | Freeman

Donald Trump seems to think that "signalling deescalation" by announcing that hits on Iranian gas facilities have been further suspended until April 6 would lull Iran into believing they are safe for now. But we know that the US is finishing its troop amassment in the region. The logical conclusion: the US is planning another sneak attack over a weekend with the hope that once markets are closed the troops would have two days to capture either some important economic infrastructure that will calm the oil traders or even create the fundament for gaining control over the Strait of Hormuz. What a folly! I'm discussing today with Ambassador Chas Freeman, a former top official in the Department of Defence and Ambassador to Saudi Arabia. Ambassador Freeman's many valuable essays: <https://chasfreeman.net> Support us on substack: <https://pascallottaz.substack.com> Shop and Donations: <https://neutralitystudies-shop.fourthwall.com>

#Pascal

Welcome back, everybody, to Neutrality Studies. I'm Pascal Lottaz, and I am joined today again by Ambassador Chas Freeman, a former U.S. ambassador to Saudi Arabia and top official in the U.S. government for many years. Chas, welcome back.

#Chas Freeman

Thanks, Pascal. Good to be with you.

#Pascal

Chas, we're speaking today, March 27th. We're one day short of a full month of war with Iran—or the U.S.-Israeli attack on Iran. It started on February 28th, a sneaky surprise attack while negotiations in Geneva were still ongoing. Can you give us an update and your assessment of where we stand after four weeks?

#Chas Freeman

Well, I think it's pretty clear that Iran has what is called escalation dominance. It has adopted a policy that I've likened to Ali's rope-a-dope strategy—meaning, stand there, take all the punishment the other side delivers, and let it exhaust itself. I think this war has now gone through a series of phases. Iran had been waiting until the United States and Israel exhausted their self-defense

capabilities against missile attack. It kept its more sophisticated missiles in storage for that moment. And, you know, I think the level of ferocity of the American attack has been a huge demonstration of the ability of the United States to project power halfway around the world with enormous intensity.

But, you know, in the first five days of this war—which, as you indicated, is almost a month old now—800 Patriot missiles were fired. The annual production rate is 750. So in five days, the whole year's stockpile of these weapons was used up. And we've now come to the point where it's pretty clear that neither Israel nor the United States has the capacity to defend effectively against Iranian missiles. So Israel is taking quite a beating. We don't know how bad that is because Israeli military censorship is very effective, and the mainstream media respect that censorship. TikTok, which was once a source of direct information, has essentially been bought by the Zionist lobby in the United States and no longer provides the insights it once did on this matter.

Meanwhile, Israel is, of course, taking advantage of the cover of the war to pursue its long-term objective of annexing southern Lebanon up to the Litani River. It's also carrying out programs and ethnic cleansing activities in the West Bank with a new level of intensity. So I'd sum all this up by saying that Iran has suffered enormous physical damage, but its strategic plan—its overall strategy—is intact. Its capabilities to carry out that strategy seem to be intact, and it's standing its ground. The United States, under Donald Trump, appears increasingly desperate to get out of this war, while Israel wants the United States to continue it because the Israeli objectives are very clear.

They are to expand Israeli territory, to pursue the project of Greater Israel—meaning an Israel that extends from the Euphrates to the Nile—and in this process to annex lands adjacent to the current Israeli state in Lebanon, in Syria, and so forth. Basically, Israel is trying to annihilate the Iranian state. The American objective began with regime change, which hasn't happened. In fact, the United States' objectives in this have been very muddled and incoherent. But they've included a whole variety of particular items—for example, preventing Iran from developing a nuclear weapon. Yet the actual effect of the attacks has been to ensure that Iran will now build a nuclear weapon.

And if Iran builds a nuclear weapon, we can expect the Saudis, the Turks, the Egyptians, and others—like Iraq—to follow their example. We can also see knock-on effects as far away as Pacific Asia, where you are. I think this will stimulate an active reconsideration by Japan of its policy of nuclear latency. It will certainly stimulate South Korea, where the public is strongly in favor of building nuclear weapons to counter the North Korean nuclear arsenal. So I think we're about to see a major wave of proliferation. The second effect is, of course, that having fired off a huge percentage of existing munitions stockpiles, the United States has weakened itself internationally, at the global level.

#Pascal

So if there were a Taiwan contingency, for example, the United States wouldn't have the ability to deal with it effectively.

#Chas Freeman

We've actually begun stripping weaponry out of Pacific Asia—moving THAAD batteries out of South Korea, pulling out Patriot batteries, scavenging wherever possible. And now, of course, a further knock-on effect is that weapons originally destined for Ukraine are being considered for diversion to this war. So this has been a disaster in terms of the overall American situation—its global military posture. It's also done huge reputational damage to the United States because of many factors, including its obvious subservience to Israeli direction. It's a very odd thing that the United States now has a policy effectively outsourced to Israel. The tremendous application of force hasn't accomplished its purpose of breaking Iran's will. Iran remains defiant, and the administration, I think, is quite desperate domestically.

It sees the consequences in terms of fuel prices at the gas station. It sees inflation. We're discovering that the Persian Gulf is not only a major source of oil and gas, but also central to the production of all sorts of agricultural and industrial inputs—for example, about 60% of plastics, about half of the world's fertilizer supply, sulfur, helium—things that are essential for modern industry and modern agriculture. And this is the planting season in the Northern Hemisphere, and there will not be enough fertilizer to sustain crops at the normally expected levels. So the long-term effects are considerable, but even in the short term, we're seeing the consequences of Iran's transformation of the Strait of Hormuz from a freeway to a toll road. Basically, if you do a deal with Iran—as China does, and as India, Japan, Turkey, and possibly others, including Russia, have done—you're fine.

If you do a deal with Iran, when you go through, you're basically going through a toll booth—you take a ticket, hand over some cash when you get through the strait—and interestingly, the payments are now in Chinese yuan, not in dollars. That's a signal of another problem: the impact on the global currency market and reserve currencies, particularly trade settlement procedures, which are moving away from the dollar now at quite a rapid pace. So there's a lot going on, but I'm not finished. This is Friday morning for you in Tokyo, Thursday night here in New Hampshire. And Donald Trump has basically canceled his program for tomorrow. He's also said that he's postponing the deadline for attacking Iranian energy production and transport facilities.

This has all the signs of previous uses of deception to mount a surprise attack. We know that the Marines will be in place tonight or tomorrow morning in the Arabian Sea. The 82nd Airborne has moved. The Special Forces are in place. And I think we can probably anticipate some kind of assault on Iran tomorrow—well, your time today, but I would say Saturday, over the weekend, in Pacific Asia. Perhaps Friday, perhaps Saturday here in the United States. So this is coming to a dangerous point. And the Iranians seem to be quite prepared for an infantry assault. They've said this is what they've been waiting for—"Y'all come, come near," said the spider to the fly. So we don't know what's going to happen, but it's obviously some sort of turning point.

#Pascal

Hey, very brief intermission because I was recently banned from YouTube. And although I'm back, this could happen again anytime. So please consider subscribing not only here but also to my mailing list on Substack—that's pascallottaz.substack.com. The link will be in the description below. And now, back to the video. I talked yesterday to Mohamed Marandi, and he told me exactly this: "Look, they're probably going to invade us—one of our islands, probably—and in that case, we know exactly what we're going to do." Why would the U.S. contemplate something like this?

I mean, do you think the rationale of some of these people is that, in the best-case scenario, we actually capture and keep that place? In the worst-case scenario, we have a mass slaughter and a lot of body bags coming back. And then we'll all have a rally-around-the-flag moment where people at home go, "Oh no, the Iranians killed our innocent soldiers." Do you think something like that is the motivation? It seems so foolish, because obviously the Iranians can just shell these people if they come.

#Chas Freeman

Well, we never know. You never know what will happen in war or in a battle. The possibilities range from a repetition of Gallipoli to something more successful for the United States. It very much depends on what the targets are. For example, I've thought from the beginning that the logical target for the Marines would be Abu Musa and the Lesser Tunbs, which are islands in dispute between Iran and the UAE. They were seized by the Shah in 1971 for Iran from British control, as the British relinquished their control of what became the United Arab Emirates. Taking them would gratify the Emirates.

It would provide a foothold in the Strait of Hormuz for an American challenge to Iranian control of the Strait. So that's one possibility. There are others—there's been a lot of talk from Israel, in particular, about taking Kharg Island, which is well up the Gulf, actually much closer to Kuwait than to the United Arab Emirates, and is the principal export station for Iranian oil. I think Israel has given up on its idea of regime change. It's busily murdering all the people, however, who might speak for Iran in a negotiation. It doesn't want a negotiated end to this; it wants to collapse the Iranian state.

And it imagines that if the United States were to seize and hold Kharg Island, this would incapacitate the Iranian state by depriving it of its principal source of revenue. So that is, I think, the Israeli reasoning in proposing that target. There are other possible targets that have been mentioned: Qeshm Island, which is off Bandar Abbas, the main port in the Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz; and Chabahar, which is outside the Strait and the main port city—ironically, part of the north-south corridor that the Biden administration proposed to bypass China's Silk Road east-west corridors. This would be a transportation corridor from Bombay through Chabahar, overland to St. Petersburg.

Anyway, there are plenty of potential targets, none of them easy to deal with. The Iranians are probably prepared for all of these, and we'll see what happens. I think Donald Trump is talking about fictitious negotiations with the Iranians. The Iranians have been very clear that they will not negotiate; they're not interested in a ceasefire. They're interested in achieving their objectives—those objectives being the incapacitation of Israel, or at least the restoration of deterrence for Israel by inflicting sufficient pain to ensure it won't contemplate attacking Iran in the future—and the removal of the American military presence from the Persian Gulf.

Another objective, of course, had been the removal of American sanctions on Iranian oil fields. Ironically, they've achieved that. Because of American concern over oil prices, the Treasury Secretary, Mr. Besant, has lifted the sanctions on Iranian oil—and also on Russian oil, by the way. I didn't mention another knock-on effect, which I should, and that's in Ukraine. I think the Russians have paused their offensive. They're waiting for the weapons that would have gone to Ukraine to be diverted, and Ukraine, therefore, to be weakened. There's no point in pressing an attack when the enemy is about to be partially disarmed. So I think there are those implications as well in what's going on, which is certainly bad news for Mr. Zelensky, and he appears to understand that.

So I guess I should conclude by mentioning one other thing, and that is that it's very obvious that Mr. Witkoff—Stephen Witkoff—and Jared Kushner are no longer considered worthwhile interlocutors by Iran or by the Russians. Basically, the Russians will open the door and listen to them, but they have no expectation that they'll be able to deliver anything other than deception. The same with the Iranians, except they won't even listen to them. What appears to be going on is texting by Witkoff to Araghchi, with Araghchi not replying except to say, "No, no negotiations." More recently, a fifteen-point proposal has been passed through Pakistan to the Iranians. It's a ridiculous proposal—it actually demands that Iran accept everything it has consistently refused to accept.

And it reflects Donald Trump's very mistaken notion, voiced by his spokeswoman Caroline Leavitt, that Iran has been defeated. But the opposite is true. Iran has been badly battered, but its will has not been broken. It has not been defeated. And as we all know, wars do not end until one party admits defeat. Iran does not admit defeat. In fact, as I indicated at the outset, the party being defeated is Israel and the United States, as the objectives we set for ourselves are met with counterproductive results and as we exhaust our munitions. We can attack Iran, we can do great damage to Iran, but we can no longer defend Israel effectively. And that is an Iranian objective that has been achieved.

#Pascal

What do you make of these statements by Donald Trump that Iran must open the Strait of Hormuz? I mean, it sounds to me again like the "Iran must never build a nuclear weapon" line, which is something Iran always said at the time: we are not building a nuclear weapon, we don't have it, we don't want it, we've got a fatwa against it. So we're in agreement on that one. And the United States

kept talking about it—talking, talking. And now it says Iran must open the Strait. But we know ships can go through the Strait. If you're a friend of Iran, you can go through—for a fee, yes.

#Chas Freeman

For a fee. And, you know, one of the issues the Iranians have raised is the long-term control of the Strait of Hormuz and operating it like the Suez Canal, with a fee for transit. At some points, they've indicated that the legal framework for such a toll arrangement could be multinational. That is, presumably, the Gulf barons could share in the revenue as well as pay the tolls. So it's not clear how that might work out. But Donald Trump appears to be under the impression that the Strait is closed. There's a lot of talk about mining the Strait. I don't think that's happened. Why would Iran mine a passageway from which it's making money and through which its own ships transit?

This, of course, has become an issue in U.S.–Japan relations because Japan possesses the only really effective mine-sweeping force among America's allies. As the United States wanted it to do after the 1990–91 Gulf War to liberate Kuwait, once the combat was over, Japan did send minesweepers to clear the mines from the Persian Gulf that Saddam Hussein had laid. But, you know, Japan is in no mood to do that now. And of course, Donald Trump is railing against NATO as completely useless—which is entirely consistent with his mistaken notion of NATO, not as a defensive alliance to protect Europe with American support, but as a group of auxiliary forces to be called on by the United States whenever we need them for expeditionary use elsewhere.

Afghanistan, now the Persian Gulf. No European country has accepted this invitation. In fact, one of the main effects of this request—and the other mad gyrations of Donald Trump—has been that some Europeans are beginning to say, "We should leave NATO. We should expel the American bases." The clearest voices are those of Spain, which has, in fact, banned the use of bases on its territory to support American power projection against Iran, and where there have been large demonstrations calling for an exit from NATO and the closure of the American bases.

Elsewhere in Europe, I mean, the French and the British have accommodated American demands. The French are apparently negotiating behind the scenes with the Iranians about free passage through the Strait, as are the Italians. The Italians are in a better position to achieve that, given their relatively moderate stance on this war. The French have very little prospect, I think, of getting Iranian permission for their ships to go through the Strait. Anyway, I mean, there's a lot going on, and it's not moving in any direction that should please either Israel or the United States.

#Pascal

No, I was wondering, though, about the Gulf states. Professor Morandi, who, of course, takes a very Iranian line in his interpretation of things, says, "Look, the Gulf states—they're monarchies, little

dictatorships, and they're 100% dependent on the United States. They don't have their own will; they don't have agency. Qatar, Kuwait, the UAE. Saudi Arabia is a little bit different, but still under very heavy U.S. political control." Do you share that assessment?

#Chas Freeman

I don't agree with my friend Mohammed at all about that. I think these are countries that do have agency. They're quite independent. They've made a bad bet—they bet that having American forces on their territory would enable their defense. Instead, it has invited attack. And I think, in the terms we were talking about earlier—possible seizure of islands in the Strait of Hormuz that are claimed by the UAE—the Iranians have said there is a "neighboring country" colluding with the United States in a proposed attack on them, and that they will devastate that country. So I think the retaliation against the UAE, if there is such an attack, is going to be quite fierce. The Gulf states have a terrible dilemma. They made a bad bet. It's turned out that the United States not only cannot defend them against Iran.

And by the way, that's something that's not going to change after this war. That's a lesson that will persist. There is no defense against Iran except a diplomatic defense. Diplomacy can reduce threats—that's one of its main purposes. Rapprochement can eliminate threats. As Abraham Lincoln said, when I befriend an enemy, I lose an enemy and make a friend. This is the appropriate approach. But it's very hard for the Gulf Arabs. They're under attack at the moment. The only feasible defense for them is from the United States. So you hear some of them talking quite fiercely about the need to do major damage and reduce Iran to impotence. That is a fiction. It is a fantasy. It will not happen. And they're going to have to come to grips with that. In the end, they do have agency. They can—they do have alternatives. Those alternatives are, however, diplomatic, not military.

#Pascal

One of the points Mr. Morandi was making is that U.S. protection is not just against external threats; it's also internal, since these Gulf governments are ruling over populations that are quite unhappy with how they're running things. So it's kind of a double function that the U.S. has. What are your thoughts on that? In my view, this should actually increase the incentive for the Gulf states to, at some point, declare neutrality and say, "Look, we're politically not with the U.S. anymore. These bases are here because they're here, but they're not part of our sovereign territory. We're abrogating our military relationship with the United States." Do you think this kind of thinking is actually happening? And how realistic do you think it might be?

#Chas Freeman

Well, I would dispute the notion that the United States is the defender of the internal political order in each of these states. For example, in 1979, when extremists seized control of Mecca, while the

United States was in the background supplying intelligence, it was the French who came to Saudi Arabia's aid and evicted the extremists from Mecca. And I think, generally speaking, these states are, as Mohamed Morandi indicates, effectively police states. They have exhaustive surveillance capabilities, many of them derived from Israeli technology, which, ironically, was perfected in the suppression of the Palestinians.

But this is useful for their control. The United States is involved in intelligence liaison relationships with them that are focused on terrorism—both against the rulers and against the United States. So there's an overlap there. But it is not a military commitment to defend them against their own people. Each of these countries, however, is quite different. You have, for example, in the UAE—and in Qatar for that matter—a very small minority of native Arab rulers and populations, with a huge number of guest workers from all over the place: India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, and so forth.

Saudi Arabia has been reducing the proportion of foreign workers in an effort to build a work ethic and create jobs for its own people. The others haven't tried that and seem quite happy to operate with captive workforces on their territory. Kuwait, of course, has a very large population of stateless people—residents in Kuwait, the so-called Bedoon. Bahrain is majority Shiite, and many there are sympathetic to Iran, but it has a Sunni royal family. Oman is, you know, quite distinctive; it has much less oil and gas and therefore a greater work ethic, and it has scrupulously maintained neutrality toward Iran in terms of Gulf politics.

So each of these countries is different, and that belies the thesis that they're somehow under American control. Of course, they do have close relations with the United States, especially military relations. The United States has been the principal vendor of weapons to them. Some armed services among them have other relationships—for example, the Royal Saudi Navy is mostly French-supplied. The Chinese and the Russians have begun to make inroads in the arms markets there. But the main military relationship is one of arms sales and the maintenance of systems. Those systems, however, have failed in defending these small states against Iranian attack. They haven't been effective, and they've been very expensive.

But they don't effectively deal with the Iranian threat from drones or, for that matter, ballistic missiles. Now, the thing that's most dangerous for these countries—and that must lead them to the kind of thinking you suggested they would rationally have, about how to phase out the American military presence in their own interest—is that some of them are entirely dependent on desalinated water. Water is essential for life. About 70% of the water in Saudi Arabia comes from desalination, around 90% in Kuwait. I don't know the percentage in Qatar, but it's high. The UAE is lower, maybe 40–50% dependent on desalination. The Iranians have the ability to take out those desal plants very easily.

And they have an excuse to do so because they claim the United States took out the desalination plant on Hetchum Island, which is off Bandar Abbas, where about 30 villages are now without water.

So we've set a precedent. And this whole war is playing out as tit-for-tat—escalation by Israel or the United States is met with counter-escalation by Iran. So there's a bombing of Natanz, the main uranium enrichment center in Iran, and in return Iran strikes just outside the reactor in Dimona, in Israel, showing that it can hit the reactor but choosing not to, because doing so would be a drastic step that might invite a nuclear attack from Israel and would also create a cloud of radiation that would poison southern Israel and part of Egypt.

So we're poised at a moment when, if what I fear will happen over the weekend does occur, the Iranian retaliation will be fierce. Quite aside from whatever happens to any invasion force the United States fields, wherever it encounters the Iranians, there will be missile attacks on facilities in the Gulf states and in Israel. The targeting will be directly influenced by whatever is targeted in Iran. And I think when Donald Trump proposed blowing up Iranian oil and gas facilities, the Iranians told him, "If you do that, we will blow up the facilities in the Gulf states—and possibly the desal plants too."

I think that, you know, he basically doesn't give a damn about anybody but himself. But I think it's sobering enough for him to have issued a number of deadlines and then suspended them. I don't think those deadlines have any real value, by the way. I think they're part of his effort to manipulate the U.S. stock market by pretending there are negotiations in progress. The market responds to these claims for a while, and then reality sets in and the effect is lost. But he's also trying to show that he's in charge and to bolster his argument that Iran has somehow been defeated—which it hasn't been.

#Pascal

There's an argument out there that all this talk about the United States being deeply worried about the price of oil and natural gas is actually a ruse—that the whole situation, where Gulf production capacities are being taken out comprehensively, is really in the interest of the United States because it hurts China. It hampers China's economic development, raises prices, and increases Europe's dependence on U.S. LNG and oil. So overall, the whole "oh no, oh no, it's so bad, prices are going up" narrative is really just a way to incentivize Iran to keep doing what they're doing and shut off this very strategic supply of hydrocarbons. What do you make of that argument?

#Chas Freeman

I think that's a rationalization of the effects of what's happening—finding a justification for them that's really very unsound and not very credible. Yes, there are people in the United States who are fixated on competition with China and on holding China back and so forth. By the way, China's doing very well out of this, as is Russia. Oil prices have gone up. Russia's capacity to export oil has been damaged by Ukrainian attacks, but Russian revenue is going up, not down. And the Chinese, who are the global leaders in renewable energy, are much better positioned—not only because of their renewable energy sector, but also because of a huge strategic petroleum reserve. They're much better positioned than anyone else to survive the supply shock.

By the way, in about two weeks, Europe is going to run out of a lot of fuel. So Europe is definitely one of the places where the greatest collateral damage from this stupid war is landing. I mentioned Ukraine earlier as another victim of this. And no, I don't believe that. I think, yes, the United States apparently knocked out the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline. I was very amused to read something in **The Economist** magazine—which is normally a serious journal—to the effect that the Russians suspended gas sales to Europe. I don't think that's quite correct. I think Europe and the United States conspired to deprive themselves—deprive Europe—of gas supplies, with disastrous effects for the European economies, especially Germany's.

When you combine that with the suspension of nuclear power in Germany, it's been quite devastating. Anyway, there's a lot of revisionism going on. We're used to this. The war in Ukraine was, quote, unprovoked, unquote—nothing happened to justify a Russian invasion. It was a decision to invade, which they did—not legally, but with some political justification, I would say. Anyway, a lot of revisionism going on now. We have UN resolutions endorsed by Europeans that blame Iran for the attacks on Persian Gulf countries, forgetting that it was not Iran that started this war. Yeah, and retaliation is justified under international law and practice. But, you know, we're used to inverting the truth—black becomes white, up becomes down. You know, here we are.

#Pascal

No, the hypocrisy is, again, extreme. But the interesting thing is, of course, that it's becoming so transparent that even in Europe and the United States, it's really, really hard to keep putting a spin on it. I mean, it's getting so hard that you can almost see the desperation in some of the mainstream media. The Germans are trying to push the Iranians to say something. But may I just ask you about the nature of how we see this war unfolding? Because a very good analyst, Arnaud Bertrand, made the observation that the wars this one has been compared to are actually bad fits.

The Iran war is nothing like the proxy war in Ukraine. Afghanistan and Vietnam were guerrilla wars. Even in Iraq, you know, after five weeks there was complete superiority and Saddam was basically out, right? So this is a different kind of animal now in terms of how the fighting happens. And Iran is not only standing its ground, but the warfare is much more symmetrical than what we've seen in other cases. Do you have thoughts on that?

#Chas Freeman

Yeah, I think that's essentially correct. You know, as you know, I prefer the word "multinodal" to describe the organization of the world that's emerging. And it's very clear that a middle-ranking power like Iran now has the capacity to stand off the American superpower. It's planned for 20 years how to do this. It has a strategy. It has developed the technological capabilities required to implement that strategy—meaning underground storage for its factories and its inventory of weapons. It's prepared to take damage. In that regard, there's an analogy, I think, with the North

Vietnamese, who were also subjected to brutal bombing, stood their ground, and eventually won in Vietnam.

I agree with that. I know this is not analogous to Afghanistan or the invasion of Iraq. It's a very different thing. And I would say here that one of the most important elements, which shouldn't be overlooked, is that Israel has finally met a competitor that will stand up to it. You know, it's been fighting asymmetric wars where it had total air superiority—there was no air defense, no air force, no military with heavy weaponry, no conventional army to oppose it. And that's been true of recent American wars in Afghanistan and Iraq as well.

Um, but it's not true in this case. And we're also seeing, I would say, echoes of the drone warfare that's been pioneered in Ukraine. You know, Europe now has two very combative armed forces—one Russian and the other Ukrainian—and they outclass everybody else by virtue of experience and innovation. They're very similar people, of course—different, but similar. Brave, innovative, and steadfast, willing to take huge casualties in pursuit of objectives they believe in. So Iran is showing itself, in that regard, somewhat like Ukraine, perhaps, or Russia.

But there's another point here, and that is that, just as the Russians have concluded there's no point in negotiating with the United States for an end to the war in Ukraine—that it has to be settled on the battlefield because the United States is duplicitous, incompetent, whatever the word is—Iran has reached the same conclusion. It's not going to negotiate an end to this. It's been very clear about what its objectives are. And when it has substantially achieved those objectives, it will then be prepared for a discussion to reconcile the United States, and presumably Israel, to what it has accomplished—but not before that. And so this is something new for the United States. Here I'll digress a little bit.

The American way of war is basically shaped by three or four experiences: our Civil War, in which unconditional surrender followed by the moral resurrection and reform of the enemy was the plan; World War I, where again unconditional surrender followed by the reform of the enemy was the plan; World War II, where unconditional surrender followed by the reform of the enemy was the plan; and the Cold War, where unconditional surrender—though not followed by much of an effort at reform—was the norm. So this is the American way of war. It's very peculiar. Europeans and Asians understand that wars are fought to adjust relationships between states that can't be adjusted peacefully, and that they have purposes limited to specific objectives.

And when those objectives are achieved, the war ends in a negotiation that recognizes the changes made on the battlefield and reconciles both parties—if there are two parties—to the results. This is the norm in history. Wars are fought; territory is lost or gained. Then there's a negotiation that acknowledges the change, not unconditional surrender, the annihilation of the enemy, or the imposition of ideologically driven goals on the enemy. So here is the United States fighting Iran.

Israel has a very similar idea. Annihilation is the Israeli objective, not negotiation. The only negotiations that have produced even a modicum of peace for Israel have been forced on it by the United States.

Camp David—Jimmy Carter basically compelled the Israelis to accept a compromise with Egypt, which they greatly resisted and resented. In fact, Begin, the Israeli prime minister at the time, went into permanent retirement out of shame after he was forced to accept these terms, which contradicted the Greater Israel project. So Israel, too, has a sort of total warfare concept—no negotiation. And that is, of course, consistent with the fact that they are now assassinating anyone they can who might have the ability to speak for Iran in a negotiation. They don't want the United States to have a negotiation with Iran. They want to annihilate Iran. They can't do it themselves; they want the United States to do it for them. But I think Donald Trump is getting cold feet.

He's not enthusiastic about that anymore because it's not working, because it's going to cost him the midterm elections, and because his own base of support—the MAGA movement—is splintering over this. You know, there are prominent figures in that movement now who are really very critical of the Trump administration. And he has essentially shattered the American alliance structure, as illustrated by the refusal of allies to come to America's aid in the Gulf or in the Strait of Hormuz. So this is indeed quite different from the short, victorious wars, imposed peaces, and unconditional surrenders demanded of enemies. This can only end in a negotiation, and Iran will determine when that negotiation happens—not the United States or Israel.

#Pascal

It's a completely new constellation. Maybe one last point about the U.S. internal political process, which I wonder how you see, because one person has been, to me, remarkably silent. And it's actually the only one who is constitutionally safe from the wrath of the U.S. president—his vice president, J.D. Vance. I mean, he obviously doesn't like this. He's clearly not very keen on it. This is kind of ruining his chances of being Donald Trump's successor, right? The way Joe Biden made Kamala Harris absolutely impossible. But for him, even more so with the Republicans. What's your assessment of him at the moment—and of the vice presidency in general?

#Chas Freeman

Well, I think you're absolutely correct. He's very unhappy with all this—not on board with it, embarrassed to have to defend it. So he tries to avoid situations where he does have to defend it. I note that, in connection with Pakistan passing messages and offering a venue for a meeting between the United States and Iran, J.D. Vance is being put forward as the representative. That's in part because neither Witkoff nor Kushner are persona grata with the Iranians, for entirely understandable reasons. So I'm not sure that J.D. Vance's prospects for succeeding Trump have been damaged as much as you imply. I've seen polls where his principal rival, Marco Rubio, for the succession to Trump, is way behind him. It may be that J.D. Vance, who is evidently of the

“restrainer” school in terms of foreign policy, can just sit there and wait—and when this all goes down, pick up the pieces. So I’m not sure how that works, but he is clearly uncomfortable.

#Pascal

Constitutionally speaking, Donald Trump can’t fire him, because he’s directly elected as well. And secondly, if something happens to Donald Trump that incapacitates him, then it would be J.D. Vance who could convene the Cabinet in order to replace the U.S. president?

#Chas Freeman

Well, I think under the 25th Amendment, yes, the Cabinet has to certify the president as unfit. This Cabinet is itself unfit. It’s the most incompetent and politically rigid Cabinet—almost a cult-like Cabinet—that we’ve ever had. I don’t think you’re correct that J.D. Vance can’t be fired. We have a precedent in that Richard Nixon fired Spiro Agnew as vice president, and he did that by bringing an impeachment proceeding. So the Trump cult, if it were sufficiently alienated from J.D. Vance, could potentially dislodge him from the vice presidency. I don’t see that happening—it’s purely theoretical, just as I don’t see the removal.

I think many people have come to the conclusion that Donald Trump is clinically insane. But I don’t think that conclusion will result in his removal from office. I mean, we’re witnessing the imperfections of the 25th Amendment procedure and of the American republican administration—republican constitutional arrangements for the American Republic—which worked very well for 250 years and just don’t work now. If we had a parliamentary system, Trump would be out. And by the way, Israel does have a parliamentary system, and I can very well see that, you know, there may be no regime change in Iran, but there could be in Israel.

#Pascal

It would be one of those ironies of history—history is full of them. But Ambassador Freeman, you’ve given us, again, wonderful insights with a lot of really good points. So thank you very much for that. If people want to follow you, they should go to your website, chasfreeman.com.

#Chas Freeman

No, chasfreeman.net. But all that’s on it—that’s an amateurish website I made myself. And since I’m an ignorant geezer, it’s pretty clumsy. All it has are prepared speeches I’ve given; it doesn’t have anything else. So the best thing to do is just search on YouTube, and you’ll find all kinds of things, including, I think, your show. So thank you, Pascal, for inviting me, and I hope you have a pleasant day.

#Pascal

Everybody, find Chas Freeman online, also on the other shows, also on NEMA. Ambassador Chas Freeman, thank you for your time today.