

Chas Freeman: If Troops Enter Iran... Israel's Entire Strategy FALLS APART

#Nima

Hi everybody, today is Friday, March 27th, 2026, and our dear friend, the...

#Nima

I said, "Professor."

#Guest

He's a professor too. I'm not a professor.

#Nima

No, I think we have an ambassador here on this channel, and you're turning into our professor when it comes to international relations between countries. But welcome back, Ambassador.

#Guest

Thank you. Glad to be with you, Professor.

#Nima

Yeah. Ambassador, let me start with what Steve Witkoff said, you know, because as time goes by with the war against Iran, it seems that people in the United States are asking, "What's going on with the war? What were the main objectives of this war?" And here's what Steve Witkoff said to help inform people in the United States.

#Speaker 03

You directed Jared and me to pursue a diplomatic resolution with Iran prior to Operation Epic Fury, which we did. However, it became quite clear during these meetings with the Iranian negotiating team that we could not make a deal that fulfilled your objectives, which were as follows: no enrichment whatsoever, no chance of weaponizing whatsoever, decommissioning of Fordow, Natanz, and Esfahan—which you'd destroy in Operation Midnight Hammer—no stockpiling of any material, which they had flagrantly violated, turning all enriched material over to us, and a cutback in Iran's

missile inventory and the range capability of those same missiles. Throughout our meetings with the Iranians, we heard the following from them: the Iranians have the inalienable right to enrich. Then we heard they possessed enough 60% enriched material—460 kilograms—to make eleven atomic bombs. Finally, we heard this statement: they would not give up diplomatically what we could not win militarily.

#Guest

Well, that is self-explanatory. Basically, the demands were for unconditional surrender on the nuclear front, and contrary to the Iranians' right under the Non-Proliferation Treaty to enrich uranium, they were to be deprived of that right. No bomb. No bomb. You know, the interesting thing, Nima, is that now all the focus is on opening the Strait of Hormuz. But the Strait of Hormuz was open before this stupid war began. Iran has basically turned the Strait of Hormuz into a toll road. So, you want to go through, you pay—just like on the highway. It was a freeway; now it's a toll road. And if I understand the Iranian position correctly, Iran might be prepared to share the management of that toll road with other countries.

And of course, it would use the funds collected from that toll road to repair the huge damage it has suffered from American and Israeli bombing. But a demand for unconditional surrender is not a negotiated—it's not a serious negotiating proposal. And I would say, it's interesting to watch: Mr. Witkoff and Jared Kushner, the president's son-in-law, who have been the point persons in these interactions with Iran, are no longer acceptable interlocutors for Iran. Why would Iran agree to talk to them? Every time they do, it turns out to be a deception followed by a surprise attack. And I think, actually, the gyrations in Washington at the moment have all the earmarks of yet another surprise attack in preparation.

You know, talk about negotiations that aren't happening—postponing deadlines to relax Iranian vigilance and so forth. We can talk about that. But I find that a remarkably inept understanding on the part of Mr. Witkoff of what is possible in a negotiation. You can't just go in and demand that the other side capitulate. And actually, in this war, Iran—not the United States and Israel—has escalation dominance. That is to say, Iran can do a lot more to hurt Israel, the United States, and the Gulf Arabs than we can do to them. So this is just very unrealistic, and it suggests to me that the Trump administration really doesn't understand diplomacy at all.

#Nima

Ambassador, what's your understanding of the battlefield right now? What's actually happening? Because Donald Trump came out on Monday and said that we're negotiating behind the scenes to influence the market. Then we've seen him talking about a great present, a gift from the Iranians—they're giving us something. It's all, you know, he's making things up. I don't know why he's doing this, but what's the reality, in your understanding, on the battlefield?

#Guest

Well, I think, first of all, it's perfectly understandable why he engages in flim-flam—making stuff up that isn't true. He's doing it for multiple reasons. One is, of course, to manipulate the capital markets, the stock market, which he sees as the main indicator of American prosperity. And he's been reasonably successful at that; the market does seem to be very gullible. It believes him when he says things that are manifestly not true—less and less, however, as market volatility is going up, not down. The second reason, I think, is that he wants to show he's in charge. A third reason is that his own MAGA movement has split, and there are those—including, I believe, his vice president—who favor diplomacy over the use of force.

So he's appealing to domestic interests—financial and otherwise. And by the way, before he announced his alleged suspension of bombing Iranian energy production facilities, there were huge trades made on the oil futures market by someone unidentified, but clearly someone who knew what Trump was about to announce. Probably Trump himself—it's entirely possible. So corruption is a big factor here too. Those are the motives. What's the situation on the battlefield? Basically, Iran had a multi-phase strategy and battle plan, and it has followed that plan. We've now reached the point where Iran has essentially overwhelmed and depleted the defense capabilities of the United States and Israel against its more advanced missiles.

The more advanced missiles are coming out of the underground facilities where they were stored. There are exchanges of fire—Israel and the United States continue to bomb Iran, but Iran is bombing Israel very severely. We don't know exactly how severely, because Israeli military censorship is very effective, and the Western media follow it. Moreover, TikTok, which was formerly a source of information, has been essentially incapacitated after being bought out by the Zionist lobby in the United States. So the situation on the battlefield reflects one thing: for example, in the first five days of this war—which is now, today, 27 or 28 days long—the United States, Israel, and the Gulf Arabs expended 800 Patriot missiles.

These are interceptors aimed at Iranian ballistic missiles, drones, and so forth. The annual production of Patriots is 750. So, in the first five days, an entire year's inventory of these missiles was expended. That has continued, and now the United States is scavenging Patriots, THAADs, and other missile defense systems from Pacific Asia. The ones that were supposed to go to Ukraine are very likely being diverted to West Asia. And that, of course, is having an impact on Russian plans, since why should they launch an offensive when all they have to do is wait, and Ukraine will be partially disarmed because the missiles it was supposed to get via the Europeans will be going to Israel, the United States, and West Asia.

This war is taking a terrible toll on Iranians. There have been maybe 10,000 targets attacked in Iran—huge damage to buildings, many people killed, many wounded, a lot displaced. But Iran is on course; it hasn't wavered from its battle plan, and that plan is slowly succeeding. So, um, what's about to happen? We don't know. The United States has very ostentatiously deployed—allegedly

deployed—U.S. Marines to the Arabian Sea, and the 82nd Airborne and special forces to Israel, Jordan, and the like.

And, um, there are multiple possible targets for these forces. The Marines, perhaps, Abu Musa and the Lesser Tunb Islands, which are in the Strait of Hormuz and in dispute between Iran and the UAE. Iran took them under the Shah. When the UAE became independent, the British left and no longer protected the Emirates' possession of those islands. So those islands are in dispute. Attacking them with the Marines would arguably gratify the UAE. And we have evidence that the Iranians expect that, because we've had statements from officials and others that a neighboring country is colluding with the United States in a proposed attack on Iranian islands.

And that can only be the UAE. So Iran is probably well prepared to deal with a Marine invasion. Before I leave the Marines, though, I'll say there are now reports that they may not, in fact, have been deployed to the Arabian Sea. This may all be a deception. The Western media have been reporting on Marine movements, but the Marines may not have moved at all. Apparently, some of them are still in Japan, and the others are at Diego Garcia, which is about 4,000 kilometers from Iran. Anyway, we don't know whether this is real or a deception. The other major target under discussion is Kharg Island.

Kharg Island is, of course, very far up the Gulf. It's closer to Kuwait than to the Emirates. Iran has been fortifying it, bolstering its air defenses, and preparing for an invasion. The Israelis want the United States to take Kharg Island because they believe that if the U.S. took it and held it, that would advance their goal of collapsing the Iranian state by depriving it of crucial revenue. But, you know, who knows what will happen? What I think is, Donald Trump put himself in a corner. He cornered himself. He's combative by nature, and the logical thing to do, frankly, would be to declare victory and leave.

But I don't think he's going to do that. I think he's going to attack, probably as early as this weekend. So we'll see what happens—whether the result is a repeat of Gallipoli, or Iwo Jima, or something easier than that. We don't know. War is always a gamble, and you never know who's going to come out on top in any particular battle. But the key point here—you asked how the war is going. Battles are one thing; wars are another. You can win every battle, as the United States has done in every war it's fought since Vietnam. We won every battle in Vietnam, but we still lost the war.

We bombed North Vietnam as thoroughly as we could, and it didn't yield—it won the war. In Afghanistan, we won every battle with the Taliban that we fought, but the Taliban defeated us. In Iraq, we also won every battle with the Iraqi insurgents, but we weren't able to defeat them. So, I think the battles are one thing. I think there will be one, possibly over this weekend. But the war is another, and I think we're losing the war. The United States and Israel are losing the war. Iran is winning it by simply surviving and doing more damage to Israel than ever before.

#Nima

We've learned from Iranian sources—one of the generals speaking on Persian media said that U.S. casualties are somewhere around six or seven hundred. And he's talking about kills, not just wounded. But when it comes to the Trump administration's numbers, there's a huge gap between the two sides. If they go on the ground on one of these islands, I'd assume those numbers are going to rise beyond what we've seen so far. Because, you know, they couldn't really fight in Saudi Arabia, the UAE, or Bahrain—they pulled soldiers out of those Arab states. Now they want to get closer to Iran. What's the point of that? Is there any kind of strategy behind it?

#Guest

No, I think contemporary wars—for example, the war in Ukraine—are information wars as much as anything else. Psychological operations are very important. In Ukraine, the casualty figures have been totally misreported, while both the Russian and Ukrainian numbers are unreliable and exaggerated for effect. I don't know how many American casualties there have been; I suspect it's many more than the United States has allowed the Western media to report. Whether it's six hundred or not, I doubt it. But, you know, both sides are exaggerating or minimizing casualties depending on what's in their interest. An assault on Kharg Island, many military experts believe, would be very problematic for the United States and would probably result in huge casualties. But we don't know what the American plan is, and we don't know what the Iranian resistance plan is—or even whether Kharg Island is the target.

So, you know, some people have suggested Qeshm, the island off Bandar Abbas, which I think would be even worse, frankly, in terms of American casualties. But Donald Trump doesn't seem to have much understanding of military affairs, although he went through a military academy for high school. So I have no idea what will happen. I think the American concern at the moment is not casualties—that could change very rapidly—but right now the concern is about the price of gasoline at the pump, the prospect of inflation, the chaos in Washington, and the gridlock in American politics, which may be on the way to partial resolution with the Senate having passed a bill to restore funding to much, if not all, of the Homeland Security Department.

#Speaker 03

So I think we just don't know.

#Guest

Again, you know, no plan survives contact with the enemy—that's the trite phrase, and it's true.

#Nima

Here's what J.D. Vance said yesterday. He was literally talking about Iran using nuclear vests on people to blow up somewhere in the United States. I don't really understand the way he's talking about it. What's so strange is J.D. Vance going that far to convince people. Why did the United States decide to go against Iran?

#Speaker 04

I think it's important the American people know—options for what? It's options to ensure that Iran never has a nuclear weapon. You talk about people who walk into a crowded supermarket wearing a vest, and they blow up the vest and a couple of people get killed—that's a terrible tragedy. But what happens when what's on the vest isn't something that can kill a couple of people, but can kill many, many tens of thousands of people? That is the most important American national security objective for any administration at any time: you don't want the worst people in the world to have a nuclear weapon. That's why the president is doing this. That's why the president cares so much about this particular issue.

#Guest

I'd make a couple of comments. One is that this is the familiar boogeyman of terrorism being brought out—suicide bombers and so forth. There is, by the way, a perfect, 100% correlation between foreign occupation of countries and suicide bombing. That's where it happens. Now, there are people in the United States who are deeply disturbed, who have relatives who've been killed in Palestine, Iran, Lebanon, and so forth. And they may very well engage in acts of terrorism for revenge. But that is a controllable problem. The notion of a nuclear attack from Iran is really rather preposterous, because Iran doesn't have a nuclear weapon. Iran may very well build a nuclear weapon.

In fact, I think the result of the war is that Iran will certainly build a nuclear weapon. And if Iran builds nuclear weapons—Steve Witkoff said it could build eleven warheads—then Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Egypt will all go nuclear. Iraq will probably go nuclear too. And we'll see further proliferation as South Korea joins North Korea in going nuclear, and Japan possibly drops its ban on the production of nuclear weapons. So the whole point of this war, if it was to prevent Iran from going nuclear, has been entirely reversed. The effect of the war has been to make Iranian nuclear weapons inevitable. And so this is nonsense.

I understand why Vice President Vance might make that argument. He's clearly very ill at ease with this war. He's an advocate of restraint in foreign wars, and here he is—he's vice president. He has to loyally support the president, and therefore he has to make an argument in favor of this war that I think he probably found quite painful to make. And, you know, I mean, officials in governments—if they're not the supreme leader—don't have the freedom to advocate their own policy positions. They're meant to advocate the official position. That's what Vice President Vance just did. But I think, to my mind, not very effectively for anyone who knows the facts.

#Nima

The new assessments in Iran show that more than 80% of Iranians believe they have to stay in this fight against the United States, and more than 89% believe that the Strait of Hormuz should remain in Iran's hands. The Strait of Hormuz is literally becoming a new front for Iranians, because they see this as—well, it's not just a new issue in how Iran thinks about the Strait of Hormuz. It's been in Iranian media for, I would say, 20 years. They've discussed it many times, asking why we let these people use the Strait of Hormuz while we're under tremendous sanctions from the United States. What's the point of that? But right now, everything is changing. How do you see the direction Iran will take with the war, considering the Strait of Hormuz and the Arab states?

#Guest

Well, you know, that's a very difficult question to answer because, of course, Iran can't unilaterally decide everything about the Strait of Hormuz or the Persian Gulf.

#Nima

Just to mention—sorry for interrupting you, Ambassador—in Iran they're saying it's going to be between Iran and Oman, not other countries. Iran and Oman managing the Strait of Hormuz.

#Guest

Well, yes. No, I think, as I said, I hear statements from Iranian officials that some sort of new legal status for the Strait of Hormuz needs to be established. It doesn't necessarily have to be solely Iran; it could be shared with other countries. I guess Oman is, in fact, the key one there. But the point I was going to make is—well, first, let me return to the subject of psychological warfare and disinformation. About two weeks ago, Donald Trump claimed that 90% of Iranian missile launchers had been destroyed. More recently, he said 82% had been destroyed. So this is an indication that he's making up numbers on no basis whatsoever.

Iran has said that it will respond to an attack by the United States—the kind we were discussing a few moments ago—by redoubling its attacks, especially on the UAE, because it believes the UAE is colluding directly with the United States. But it has also singled out other countries. Apparently, Saudi Arabia has opened the air base at Taif, a King Khalid air base, to American bombers. Therefore, the Gulf Arabs are in a very difficult position. The United States cannot clearly defend them; it doesn't seem to give them priority. It gives Israel priority. Their own public will not allow them to join the fight with Israel because of its hatred for Israel and what Israel has done to the Palestinians.

The Gulf Arabs hope—I think there are two things happening there. One is an immediate desire for vengeance, because they're being hurt by Iran, so they want to fight back. Second, they don't have

the capability, so they look to the United States to do that. And the second thing is, they have a fantasy that somehow Iran can be disabled, and that after the war they'll be exempt from pressure from Iran. But Iran cannot be disabled. It cannot be moved. It is geographically there, and it has been there for 2,500 years. It's not going away. So when the war is over, they're going to have to come to grips with the reality that the only way they can reduce the threat from Iran is through diplomacy.

They have to deprive Iran of any reason to attack them. That means they have to pursue a rapprochement with Iran. That's very difficult emotionally, because anti-Iranian feeling is now at a fever pitch in the Gulf Arab countries. So they're in a tough position. And in the midst of this, Iran has said, "If the United States attacks our energy facilities—Farsi Island being a key one—we're going to take out the production facilities of the Gulf Arabs. We may even take out the desalination plants." These are countries that cannot survive without desalination. There isn't a single river in Saudi Arabia, which is about 70 percent dependent on desalinated water from the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea.

Kuwait is about 90% dependent on desalination. The others are less so—perhaps the UAE, maybe 40%. But Iran has the capacity to destroy these societies, to do to them what Israel proposes to do to Iran: cause state collapse. And dangerously, we may be heading in that direction. Meanwhile, Iran's factory facilities—building and storing missiles deep underground—appear to be essentially invulnerable to American bombing. And we're hearing loose talk now, in some quarters, about a nuclear weapon being used to take out these facilities. That would be a threshold the world cannot tolerate being crossed. So this is a foolish war.

It's going badly for those who started it—namely Israel and the United States. Iran is hanging in there, suffering great damage. But as you indicated, the public in Iran seems to be behind the war at a level comparable to Israel. The American public is not in favor of this war—in fact, quite the contrary. So the weak party in this contest, the one that might give up first, is the United States. Donald Trump is looking for a way to get out—some sort of big military victory, you know, on Kharg Island or something—that would enable him to declare victory and leave. The Israelis are very concerned about this because, like Iran, they don't want a cease-fire.

They don't want this war to end without the destruction of the other side. Iran wants to destroy Israel now, and Israel wants to destroy Iran. Neither seems likely to be satisfied until that happens. I'll just conclude by saying that, to the extent this war was about collapsing the Iranian state or changing the regime in Iran, it's at least as likely that Israel will collapse—or that there will be regime change in Israel—as it is that that will happen in Iran. We don't know how this war is going to end, but it shows no sign of ending in a few weeks, as Donald Trump would prefer.

#Nima

Before the war started, Israel thought they had neutralized Hezbollah in Lebanon. Right now, it seems to me they're mostly focused on Hezbollah. You know, even though the United States is fighting Iran, Israel is mainly focused on Hezbollah, and they're taking significant casualties. And in terms of the tanks and equipment, they just don't know how to handle it. I mean, I'm talking about significant casualties—not in terms of numbers, but because they're not used to this kind of fighting. They've been bombing and killing people in Gaza without facing a serious force fighting back. Now Hezbollah is turning out to be something very different from what they expected.

#Guest

Well, I think you're absolutely right. Hezbollah is the only Arab army that has ever defeated Israel, and it's done so on several occasions. It's fighting fiercely as Israel advances into Lebanon. Israel has called up 400,000 reserves—I don't know how many of those will actually show up, because the reserves in Israel are pretty exhausted. But I think you're not right that this is about Israel disarming Hezbollah. This is about annexing southern Lebanon—about taking everything south of the Litani River and making it part of Israel, to be settled by Israeli Jews.

This is an aspiration of the Israelis that goes back to 1918. David Ben-Gurion, the founding leader of Israel, wrote an article that year describing southern Lebanon as a natural part of the Palestinian state of Israel he proposed to establish. So this is an old dream. We're hearing now in the Knesset many arguments for it. Bezalel Smotrich, the fascist, fanatic finance minister, has declared that this must be Israel's objective in Lebanon—to clear out all the Lebanese from southern Lebanon, first establish a free-fire zone like Gaza, and then settle the area and make it part of Israel.

And by the way, while we're talking, some people are aware of what's happening in Lebanon. There are equal horrors happening in the West Bank—pogroms, people being murdered, houses being burned, cars being incinerated, people being evicted from their farms and homes, and a very intense campaign of ethnic cleansing underway. So Israel is taking advantage of this war. Netanyahu is delighted that he's finally been able to persuade a president of the United States to do Israel's dirty work for it, and he's taking advantage of that to try to expand the borders of Israel in accordance with the Greater Israel project, which aims at putting everything from the Euphrates to the Nile under Israeli control.

So I don't think that's possible. I think Israel has made a very foolish mistake. I'm sorry for Israelis that they have the leadership they do and have been gulled into a war that I think is likely to prove a disaster for Israel rather than a triumph. I guess one final point on Hezbollah: Israel convinced itself that it had devastated Hezbollah. Clearly, Hezbollah has rebuilt itself. It is a formidable defense force for the Lebanese, and in effect, it's the only defense Lebanon has. So it's not going to give up. And Iran has now listed, as one of its conditions for ending this war, that the attacks on Lebanon cease, that Israel recognize the territorial integrity of Lebanon, and act accordingly. Iran's terms are pretty constant.

Sanctions relief—they've actually achieved that, because the United States has lifted the sanctions on Iranian oil exports out of concern for global oil prices. We've also removed some sanctions from Russia. Note that India has just bought twice as much Russian oil this month as it did in previous months. The Russians are doing very well financially from this. Iran's other terms involve establishing effective deterrence against further Israeli attacks, ending Israeli assassinations of Iranian officials, restoring and recognizing Iran's rights under the Non-Proliferation Treaty to enrich uranium, and removing American bases from the Persian Gulf. These are very ambitious objectives. I don't think they're entirely infeasible. We shall see.

#Nima

On Tuesday or Wednesday, I talked with Leith Marouf, who's a reporter in Beirut, Lebanon. He mentioned that the Iranians are hitting Israeli positions in the southern part of Lebanon. You know, they're gathering their forces and striking targets there. The war goes beyond Israel—it's spreading into southern Lebanon. And there's some kind of cooperation we're seeing between the two sides, Iran and Lebanon, working together.

#Guest

Well, Hezbollah has actually been firing drones and missiles as far south as Tel Aviv and is conducting quite an effective bombing campaign in northern Israel. I'm not surprised that Iran is assisting this from a distance—that is to say, targeting Israeli troop concentrations. Because, you know, Hezbollah has been largely deprived of its supply lines to Iran by the collapse of Syria, which means Iran can no longer supply Hezbollah with what it would need to increase its attacks on Israel. But it can fire missiles from Iran and strike targets in Lebanon or northern Israel. Anyway, I come back to the fact that this is a war that's extremely important.

We really don't know how many casualties Israel is taking, how much damage there is, or how many people are being killed. What we do know is that Iran is now able to get missiles through the three layers of Israeli missile defense—the Arrow, David's Sling, and the Iron Dome—and has managed to strike right next to the nuclear reactor at Dimona. That clearly shows that if it decided to attack the reactor, it has the capability to do so. If the reactor were struck, many estimates suggest there would be a cloud of radioactive gas affecting much of Israel and even Egypt. So, let's hope that doesn't happen.

If Iran did attack the reactor, I think Israel would be very tempted to respond with a nuclear strike on Iran. And Iran does not yet have nuclear weapons. So this is a very, very dangerous situation with all kinds of implications. The effects are now global, because it turns out that the Gulf Arab states are not just sources of oil and gas—they're also sources of fertilizer, plastic inputs for

manufacturing, sulfur, helium, and a wide range of industrial and agricultural materials. And of course, it's planting season in the northern hemisphere now. There are going to be crop failures due to the lack of fertilizer, and a food crisis coming later this year.

So the implications are increased proliferation of nuclear weapons, a global recession, and a decline in industrial production. I think we're beginning to see a reaction in capital markets, with bond prices and shares deteriorating in response to the rising risk. And the political impact will be considerable. You know, Europeans are going to run out of fuel in about two weeks. India is already out of cooking gas because of the obstruction of Qatari gas through the Strait of Hormuz. This has widespread global implications, and I think Iran calculated all of those when it prepared for this.

#Nima

Donald Trump is desperately asking Europeans. He said yesterday that NATO is not helping us with the Strait of Hormuz, and that's why we're not going to help them in the case of Ukraine. But there was an interview with a French general—it was in French—but he basically said that a few months ago, the French, together with the United States, simulated an attack on the Strait of Hormuz: how to capture it, how to hold it. And all the simulations led to the total destruction of the Navy. Their assessment is—and he added that all the information we have shows the United States is basically underestimating Iran militarily, in terms of both intelligence and the power they have in that region. And this continues to be the case with the Trump administration.

#Guest

Well, the French have a base in the UAE, a naval presence, so it's very plausible that they would have run such a simulation. I think it's not a surprise that the probable result of an effort to take the Strait of Hormuz and control it from abroad would be a disaster. And, you know, I'll repeat something that I think is pretty obvious: Yemen and Sanaa—the Houthis—basically pioneered a sea blockade from the land. They've blockaded the Bab al-Mandab and the Red Sea from the land. The Yemeni Navy is a very minor force. So the United States claims that we've sunk almost all of the Iranian Navy. So what? Iran has artillery and missiles emplaced on the north shore of the Strait of Hormuz, with which it can command the strait. And I can, you know, I would say, let us be clear.

Iran has not closed the Strait of Hormuz. It has closed it to its enemies. It has opened it to China, to India, to Japan, to Turkey, to Russia, to its own vessels. They're going through. And so the only result of this war has been to deprive NATO and Europe of access to the resources of the Persian Gulf. One comment on NATO: President Trump clearly does not understand that NATO was established—and remains, in the eyes of Europeans—a defensive alliance intended to maintain order in Europe. It is not a supply of auxiliary forces to be deployed on American military expeditions abroad, Afghanistan notwithstanding. NATO did deploy to Afghanistan, but NATO is not an offensive alliance in the eyes of the Europeans. It is in the eyes of the United States, evidently.

I'm not surprised that Europeans, the Japanese, South Koreans, and others—as well as, of course, the Chinese, who thought it was very funny that they were being asked to send their navy to help the American navy open up the Strait of Hormuz—all refused. I know that some Europeans, most notably Spain, appear to be seriously considering leaving NATO and expelling the American bases currently on their territory. Spain has prohibited the use of those bases in support of American power projection to the Persian Gulf. As a result, the United States is relying primarily on France and Britain. That means that while the French have reportedly been trying to reach an agreement with Iran to allow their ships to go through the strait, it's very unlikely they'll succeed, because Iran naturally regards them as part of the coalition attacking it.

#Nima

Yesterday we had Ambassador Chas Freeman and the IAEA Director, Rafael Grossi, talking. Grossi said that no war can destroy Iran's nuclear capability unless it's a nuclear war. And here's what he said.

#Speaker 05

This is why I say we still need to find a framework—an agreed framework—that will provide us with the necessary predictability and a clear sense of where they are and where they want to go.

#Speaker 06

Because this war will not destroy Iran's nuclear ambitions or capabilities.

#Speaker 05

I would say any war—any war—unless it were a nuclear war, and you went for destruction in an unfathomable way, which we hope, of course, will not happen.

#Nima

Iran's foreign ministry issued a warning, saying that Grossi's statements have been unhelpful and have worsened the situation. Of course, he's trying to respond diplomatically to what has happened. But in Iran, they're saying he's a Mossad and CIA agent. Basically, that's why they think he's saying what he's saying.

#Guest

Well, the relationship between the IAEA and Iran has been a very unhappy one, because the Iranians believe that many of the Israeli assassinations carried out during the June 2025 twelve-day war were based on intelligence provided to Israel by the IAEA, either deliberately or inadvertently. I

would say that what Grossi is saying is, however, correct. The Iranian nuclear program can be destroyed in only one of two ways: either through diplomacy—and that was the case with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, the nuclear deal of 2015—or with a nuclear attack, because Iran has built facilities deep underground, protected by huge layers of granite and other stone, not assailable by anything but a nuclear weapon.

But I would not say that Grossi was advocating the use of a nuclear weapon against Iran at all. I think he was trying to make another point—that diplomacy is really the only alternative. If you want to end the Iranian nuclear program or control it more reasonably, diplomacy rather than a nuclear attack is the only way to do it. So he's right about that, I think.

#Nima

It seems Donald Trump is going to China in mid-May, and he wants, as far as we've learned from his administration, to put an end to the war before then. Nobody sees that happening. What's your understanding of that?

#Guest

I haven't seen any confirmation from Beijing of those dates. I think they were put forward by Donald Trump—sort of saying to Beijing, "If I can end the war, I'll be there." But I don't think he's going to be able to end it. In fact, I've noted that internally, the administration has apparently talked about the war continuing into September. You know, clearly there are some people in the administration who understand that wars don't end just because one side decides they should. And of course, in this case, there's not just one side. There's Israel, which doesn't want the war to end yet, and Iran, which doesn't want it to end yet. Israel and Iran have very clear, contradictory objectives.

They're going to pursue those regardless of what the United States does or says. But, you know, I believe, as I said earlier, popular support in Israel and in Iran for the war is very high. Popular support in the United States for the war is very, very low. Donald Trump's popularity is declining as a result of this war. He's being hurt politically. Therefore, the probability that he'll find a way to pull out of the war is going up. I don't think it will happen by those dates, though, given the way things are going. I know that Iran's production of advanced missiles—Khorramshahr-4, for example—seems to be going up, not down. So when will Iran run out of munitions? I think long after the United States and Israel act.

#Nima

Ambassador, what you've mentioned is a key issue in the United States. Many people are asking, "Why are we doing this in the Middle East again?" One of them is Joe Kent, the director of counterterrorism in the United States. He recently gave an interview in which he talked about U.S. policy in the Middle East and suggested that Israel is running everything there. Here's what he said.

#Speaker 07

It's forming that crescent, that land bridge—Iranian supplies going right into Israel's backyard. So the Israelis, at the end of the Iraq war, were like, "No, no, this is not going to work at all. We have to break this up. We have to go to war in Syria. We have to take down Assad." The Arab Spring happened; there was some energy from the people—I think it was somewhat organic—but then, in short order, we came in and said, "We're going to work with the Israelis, but we're also going to have to work heavily with the Sunni population on the ground in Syria to create an uprising." And that's where ISIS came from. We worked directly with al-Qaeda. Hillary Clinton's emails confirm this.

The operations we were running to support the so-called Free Syrian Army—there were some moderates there—but the most effective fighters at first were al-Qaeda, and then eventually ISIS. Obviously, ISIS got out of control. They started plotting attacks in Europe, then in America. They took over large parts of Iraq. So we had to go back and put out, once again, the brush fire we had started, and go after ISIS. That's where I lost my late wife. But Israel was the driving factor in all of that. We took down Saddam, who was a strongman against Israel. Then we had to go in and take out Assad, who was also a strongman against Israel. And now this is the third phase—we're moving into Iran to take out that strong government for Israel.

#Speaker 08

Who did we put in charge of Syria? Oh, we handed that whole—well, again, we screwed the whole thing up so much that we handed it to a leader of fucking al-Qaeda. Yep.

#Speaker 07

He was in ISIS initially—well, actually, he was in al-Qaeda in Iraq, fighting against us. We had him in jail; he joined ISIS, broke off from ISIS, and was hand-selected by bin Laden's right-hand man, Ayman al-Zawahiri, to lead Nusra. Then they rebranded. And this is the number one way to fool Americans: jihadists just put on a suit, get a good PR company, and apparently we'll just believe whatever they say.

#Speaker 08

There are videos of this guy holding the heads of people he cut off. Yeah, he's a thug. He's shaking President Trump's hand.

#Speaker 07

Yeah, horrible advice.

#Speaker 08

What the fuck are we doing? What are we doing?

#Guest

That was an interesting dialogue. I watched it before you aired it. Chas Freeman is remarkably articulate and absolutely correct about what's driving this misadventure. The interviewer is himself a former Special Forces officer. The two of them are militarists, but that doesn't prevent them from understanding the counterproductive nature of what we've been doing. So I agree with you—it's an interesting development. And Joe Cain, of course, joins Marjorie Taylor Greene, Tucker Carlson, and others—members of the MAGA movement, sympathizers with President Trump—in criticism of the administration's policies as subservient to Israel.

I think the interview itself—the one thing that really startled me, that Joe Kent said—was that he described Stephen Witkoff as a gifted diplomat. Stephen Witkoff is an inept diplomat. He's not a diplomat at all; he's a real estate transactional dealer, and he clearly doesn't understand how we deal with either Iran or the Russians. But aside from that, I thought those who have access to the interview would find it interesting to watch the whole thing.

#Nima

Before wrapping up, Ambassador, here's what Donald Trump said when he was asked whether the United States is going to leave the Middle East—leave the Arab states. They were basically talking about the American bases in those countries. Here's what he said in response.

#Speaker 09

There are some reports that Gulf allies are concerned about winding down the war too soon, potentially leaving Iran stronger.

#Speaker 10

Well, they'd probably like us to stay. But if we don't stay—look, the beautiful thing about airplanes that go 2,000 miles an hour is you can get back there very quickly. If we don't stay, we're still going to be protecting them. We know they've been very good—hey, Qatar, Saudi Arabia in particular.

#Guest

Well, I think that's interesting. My own guess, as I've said before, is that sober thinking, when this war is over, will result in the removal of those bases. By the way, they are completely uninhabitable at the moment. Iran has apparently destroyed them to such an extent that their personnel have had to be dispersed to hotels—they can't stay on base, can't work there. So the bases have essentially been reduced to ineffectiveness, and it wouldn't be a big step to have them closed. I'm interested in

the statement that, of course, we could get back there quickly. That is true. In fact, the traditional American policy was that we had no real forces in the region. That changed as a result of the Iraqi attempt to annex Kuwait—the first Gulf War.

The plan there was, again, to leave. And I know, as ambassador to Saudi Arabia, at least thirteen times we assured the Saudis that we would leave when the war was over—but we didn't. And we didn't, also because of Israel, because Israel wanted something called "dual containment," meaning the containment of both Iran and Iraq, rather than relying on a balance of power and an over-the-horizon capability to return and manage security in the Gulf. What we're seeing now is the consequence of the United States not leaving as we promised we would. You know, this has been a long time—we've been there a long time. The Gulf War was 1990 to '91. This is 2026.

#Nima

Thank you so much, Ambassador, for being with us today. We've learned a lot from you, as always.

#Guest

Well, thank you, Nima Alkhorshid, for what you do—and keep it up.

#Nima

Thank you.