

Amb. Chas Freeman: Trump's ESCALATION — Israel's Strategy COLLAPSES

#Nima

Hi, everybody. Today is Friday, April 3rd, 2026, and our dear friend, Amb. Chas Freeman, is here with us. Welcome back.

#Chas

Thank you, Nima. Glad to be back with you.

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Ambassador, I want to start with the latest news about one of the fighter jets. But something more important than what Donald Trump said yesterday is his address to the nation. In that speech, what he said wasn't really new. But one thing that stood out—especially in the Persian media—was the part about "hitting Iran back to the Stone Age." We also saw yesterday that he published a video showing what he claimed was a strike on one of the largest bridges in the Middle East. That bridge was still under construction; it hadn't been used yet, they were just finishing it. What's your understanding of what's going on?

#Chas

Well, let me say first that the problem with this war from the beginning has been that it's had no clear or achievable objectives. The Secretary of Defense—self-styled "Secretary of War," now more widely known as the "Secretary of War Crimes," Pete Hegseth—has basically defined the purpose of war as death and destruction. That means the war has no strategic or other purpose except destruction. So Donald Trump is quite consistent with that when he says that before he ends the war, which he plans to do, he will ravage Iran and bring about more death and destruction.

That speech he gave is widely regarded as pathetic—he didn't say anything new. But actually, he did say something new and important, in my view. He said that the United States understands we cannot use military means to open the Strait of Hormuz, and we will not do that. Those who depend directly on the Strait of Hormuz for oil, gas, or other products—fertilizer, aluminum, sulfur, and so on—must therefore find their own way to open the Gulf, the Strait. Basically, just a bit of logic here: you can't open the strait by military means. Everybody agrees on that. We've all heard Macron say the same thing. The only way you can open the strait to traffic is by agreement with Iran.

You have to get an agreement with Iran, and you have to pay a toll—a fee. And you have to pay that fee in either Iranian rials or Chinese yuan, apparently. So basically, what Donald Trump has just done is tell the world: you have to negotiate with Iran, you have to do a deal with Iran. And Iran, of course, at the same time this is happening, is saying, “We plan to manage the Strait in cooperation with Oman.” Now, Oman has been a scrupulously neutral party, not involved in—well, there are some ironies with Oman that I could mention. You know, back during the abortive attempt in the Islamic Revolution to rescue the hostages from the American embassy, the United States staged that special forces operation from Oman without informing the government of Oman or seeking its permission.

And the result was about a decade of complete non-cooperation between the U.S. and Oman. Now here we are again, with Oman playing a central role—but in this case, potentially working with Iran and others to find a diplomatic solution to the closure of the Strait of Hormuz. So Donald Trump did something very important. I don’t know that he understood he was doing it, but he basically incentivized everyone to use diplomacy with Iran. The final point here is that yesterday, I believe, in London, there was a meeting of some thirty or so countries to talk about opening the Strait of Hormuz. That group of countries did not include, as far as I know, Saudi Arabia. It did include Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates.

And basically, if you look at the list of countries, with a few exceptions, they’re almost vassal states of the United States. That is, they have excellent relations with Israel and the United States. They don’t have any relationship with Iran—or if they do, it’s not a happy one. So that was an exercise in fluidity. It just illustrates that this war has left countries with no alternative but to work out arrangements with Iran for the transit of their vessels or their cargoes. And finally, of course, the way this works is you apply to the Iranian Revolutionary Guard, and they then send an inspector to look at the cargo on your ship and determine whether that cargo comes from a hostile country—that is, a country that has put sanctions on Iran or is cooperating with the American military in attacking Iran.

And if the cargo is from there, you don't get permission. They look at the ownership of the ship, the crew and its connections, the destination, and where it loaded the cargo. Then they make a decision and give you a code, which you can use to prevent your ship from being fired upon when you transit the Strait. This is how it works—it's all being regularized. The Iranian parliament is, in fact, in the process of legislating these arrangements, putting them into law. So that was important. Really, from the point of view of the government in Tehran, this is a victory.

This is a victory in the sense that the world is basically accepting that, de facto—not de jure—they have control of the Strait of Hormuz. And now, if you’re a Gulf country like Saudi Arabia, there’s a lot of Israeli disinformation, I believe, claiming that Saudi Arabia is like the UAE. The UAE has been egging on the United States to do more militarily against Iran because its basic development model is being trashed. Saudi Arabia is not in that position, and everything I know about Saudi Arabia suggests that they actually want this war to end. Obviously, they’re very upset about being hit by

Iran—angry—but there are people in Saudi Arabia who are thinking about it long term and realizing they have to coexist with Iran.

Now that the situation in the Gulf has turned violent, they can't afford to have a completely hostile relationship with Iran. So I think we're going to see the Gulf Arabs, if they're not already doing so, opening channels of communication with Iran—perhaps through Oman, which is, after all, a member of the Gulf Cooperation Council, or perhaps directly. And they'll have to find ways of pacifying their own publics, who are very angry with Iran and don't tend to think about the long-term need to get along with Iran. So I think that's the only part of the speech that I thought had any long-term significance or was, in any respect, new.

#Nima

Ambassador, moments ago the IRGC reported—just before we came on live—that the attacks on the desalination plants in Kuwait were not carried out by Iranian missiles or drones. They were hit by the Israelis. They said, "We don't need to go after desalination plants, especially in Kuwait." And it seems that we're seeing a lot of these false flag operations, because the war has become a kind of chaos where you can manipulate many things.

#Chas

Right.

#Nima

And what's your understanding of that?

#Chas

Well, I tend to doubt that Iran would have attacked the desalination plants in Kuwait. I think it's more likely a false flag operation. There are several elements here. If you look at the relationship between Israel and the various Gulf Cooperation Council countries, the worst relationship has been with Kuwait, which has been very supportive of the Palestinian cause. So, if you were an Israeli picking a desalination target to try to agitate the Arabs in the Gulf against Iran, bring them into the war, and discredit Iran, this is the target you would choose. Of course, we don't know—everything is speculation—but I think it's very plausible this was, in fact, a false flag operation.

#Nima

You mentioned the case of Europe. We know that Europe is trying to find a political solution, not a military one, when it comes to the Strait of Hormuz. Do you think the tone or the policies in Europe are moving in a direction that's more sane, more independent from the United States? Are they on that path?

#Chas

Well, I have to answer that in two contexts. First, that meeting in London illustrates the absolute poverty of European diplomatic thought. What they talked about was everything military and nothing diplomatic. This mirrors their approach to Ukraine, which is all military and not diplomatic. So they're true to form in that respect. On the other hand, if you talk about the degree of respect for American policy—the willingness to follow American directives, the closeness of Europe to the United States within NATO—the answer is that there is a decoupling going on. First, we saw Spain refuse to allow the use of American bases on its territory or airspace to support the war against Iran. Now France has joined Spain, as has Italy, in banning the use of their airspace.

In Italy, the base at Sigonella has been told it may not launch support operations for the war. The mood in Germany has also shifted. Alternative für Deutschland, the right-wing opposition party, has now demanded the removal of American bases from German soil, saying that eighty years of occupation—eighty-one years—is enough. So the rift between the United States and Europe is being aggravated, and its growth accelerated, by this war. You hear statements even from Britain, which is complicit in this war—I mean, it is allowing the use of its bases for attacks on Iran. The F-35 squadron that Iran claims to have downed an aircraft from is normally based in Britain. But even Britain has said, "This is not our war; it's your war."

I was just reading something by a brilliant Israeli-American analyst, Leon Hadar, who said this is like an arsonist calling the fire department to put out the fire he started—and then sending them a bill for doing it. You know, this just doesn't work. The absence of any kind of diplomacy on the part of the United States, any empathy for its so-called allies, any regard for their interests, is proving fatal to the Atlantic alliance. But for the moment, the Europeans don't seem to have rediscovered the value of diplomacy—or at least they're not talking as though they understand it. One wonders about that meeting in London, whether it was really intended to do anything other than appease Donald Trump by appearing to talk about his agenda. Maybe it was just a pseudo-event, not a real thing. I don't know.

#Nima

Israeli media reported that the government in Israel is trying to pressure Donald Trump. It's trying to convince him that the way to bring down the government—the so-called regime—in Iran is to attack its infrastructure. They know this. But who's giving Donald Trump information right now? Is he taking advice from Israelis? Many people are asking what the objective is.

#Chas

Well, I think we don't know, but we do know that, going back to the origins of this war, it's an Israeli-instigated war. Israel, through Benjamin Netanyahu, persuaded a gullible Donald Trump to join it, and that happened on December 29th at Mar-a-Lago—that much we know. Israel's approach to war is always the same, and it very much resembles what the United States has now adopted as its own approach: the utter destruction of the enemy—no negotiation, no peace plan, no way to end the war except by killing everybody on the other side.

We're seeing this now in Lebanon, with the Israeli effort to annex southern Lebanon and the refusal to respect either international law or international peacekeepers, or to engage in any kind of negotiation with the Lebanese authorities. So this is entirely consistent with the Israeli playbook. The mentality is based on the fact that Israel, for all of its existence—or at least since 1967, because the United States actually had an arms embargo on Israel until 1964—has had the veto of the United States to protect it in the United Nations against the wrath of the international community, along with unflagging logistical support and equipment from the United States to assure Israel's "qualitative edge," meaning its absolute military superiority in the region.

This has accustomed Israel to a very strange notion of war in which, as with Pete Hegseth, the objective is death and destruction to such a degree that the other side has no alternative but to surrender. This hasn't worked. It hasn't worked with the Palestinians over decades. It didn't work in Gaza— Hamas has not capitulated. It hasn't worked with Iran, and it will not work with Iran. It's a theory with no evidence to support it. And yet Donald Trump has evidently embraced it. Why? Well, we don't know the details of his relationships with Israel, or for that matter, with other countries like the Russian Federation.

It's widely believed that the Epstein files—and Epstein's activities as an agent of Israel, along with Ghislaine Maxwell's similar actions on behalf of Israel—have compromised Donald Trump, and that there's material suitable for blackmail in those files. Ironically, Trump has just fired his Attorney General, Pam Bondi, because she wasn't sufficiently protective of whatever is in those files about him. So he may be subject to blackmail. He may also, of course, be captive to the plutocratic Zionist donors who put him in office—Miriam Adelson and others who have bankrolled his political career. So he basically takes his orders from Israel. "America First" is a bit of a joke in the Middle East anyway.

#Nima

You know, Ambassador, you mentioned Pam Bondi. The guy who's going to replace her is General Todd Blanche. He said on Fox News that he doesn't think Jeffrey Epstein spied for anyone.

#Chas

Well, you know, there you have it. I mean, the evidence that Jeffrey Epstein spied is unassailable—it's irrefutable. And this is, of course... you know how the Trump administration has managed things. They tell big lies and repeat them endlessly. When you see something, they deny it exists. They tell you you're mistaken. I remember in law school, in a criminal law class, the professor staged something. A guy came onto the stage holding something in his hand, there was a loud bang, and the professor fell over as though he were dead.

And we were all asked, you know, what did you see? Well, we all saw a gun. But in fact, the guy had a banana in his hand—he didn't have a gun. So if you stage things skillfully enough, you can make people see things that aren't there. You can also make things that are there invisible, or turn into something else. I think that's the standard practice now, unfortunately—not just in the United States, but in many democracies. Even in your own country, Brazil, you had a bit of this too.

#Nima

Yeah, exactly. Ambassador, what's going on with Pete Hegseth and the Pentagon? Yesterday, CBS News reported that U.S. Army Chief of Staff Randy George was asked by Pete Hegseth to step down—to resign.

#Chas

Well, this is an extraordinary development. Here we are in the middle of a war, and apparently there's now going to be some ground component to that war. I mean, the 82nd Airborne, which is part of the Army, has been deployed. So have the Marines, a separate branch of the infantry under the Navy. And you choose this moment to get rid of the top guy in the Army? I mean, this is—if you remember our politics during the Civil War, in the election of 1864, which was between Lincoln and his opponent—Lincoln's campaign slogan was, "Don't change horses in midstream."

You know, you just don't do this—and Hegseth did it. One has to assume that General George objected to whatever the plan is for the use of ground forces, or wasn't prepared to support it, or that there was some other policy disagreement. There's been no explanation from Hegseth. So we have a situation where a TV talking head, who's clearly unfit to be Secretary of Defense—I think everyone recognizes that now—has fired the top general in the U.S. Army. This is not something that will go down in history as an appropriate move.

#Nima

We had a report from The Intercept. It says there's a casualty cover-up—the Pentagon is hiding U.S. losses under Trump in the Middle East. There's something going on. These sorts of disagreements have to have some kind of basis—what's happening in reality, what's being reported, what's being reported to Donald Trump as president. I think there's something big going on in the Pentagon that's creating this kind of chaos.

#Chas

Well, we're told that the hospitals at Ramstein and elsewhere in Germany are full. This is where the wounded are evacuated from a war zone, usually from the Middle East. And yes, I think there's obviously been a cover-up of some kind regarding the number of casualties. You know, casualties include, of course, the dead and the wounded, and the figures one hears are in the many hundreds—not the minimal figures the Pentagon has admitted. I've noticed there have been some statements by the Pentagon about casualties, followed by silence and a refusal to answer questions. So yes, this does look like a cover-up. I don't think we'll find out what the truth is until much later.

#Nima

The other point that was repeated in Donald Trump's address yesterday was that the Iranian air defense and missile programs—everything—were destroyed. But CNN reported last night, if I'm not mistaken, that U.S. intelligence assesses Iran still maintains significant missile-launching capabilities. They say, at best, the U.S. achieved maybe 40 or 50 percent damage to Iran's systems. So the new assessment shows that it's nowhere near what Donald Trump was telling us.

#Chas

Well, he makes things up, and he's variously said, you know, 90% of the Iranian missiles have been destroyed—82%, 70%, 100%. So let's assume it's 100%. The remaining 0% is doing a lot of damage to Israel and the Gulf.

#Chas

You know, I mean, this just has no credibility at all. He'd be far better advised not to put out this kind of false information, because it just underscores his lack of credibility as a commentator on this. And of course, the people around him are sycophants. We see these televised cabinet meetings that look like Saddam Hussein's cabinet meetings. You know, I mean, at least Donald Trump, as far as I know, hasn't pulled out a pistol and shot any member of his cabinet—which Saddam Hussein did with his Minister of Water. But otherwise, it's all, "You're the greatest." You know, my goodness. This morning, the sun came up in the east. What a surprise.

#Nima

When you see Israel somehow advocating for the continuation of the war, even though we know they're running short of interceptors, what's the agenda? What do they want? Do they really want to destroy everything in Iran?

#Chas

Well, I think the Israelis are quite divided on this war—not apparently on the war in Lebanon, which they see as expanding their territory. It's part of the Greater Israel Project, and that project is probably the main reason they advocated an attack on Iran and carried one out. That is to say, the principal obstacle to the Greater Israel Project has turned out to be Iran, and they want to annihilate Iran. But the Israeli populace is getting awfully tired of living in bomb shelters and seeing buildings destroyed. There are protests in Israel now—substantial ones—against the war. I think the majority of Israelis, all the polls show, remain bloodthirsty and behind the war, but clearly that support has eroded. So the real answer to your question is that the war is essential to keep Benjamin Netanyahu in office and out of jail.

And from the beginning, from October 7 on, we've known that his principal purpose is to keep the war going so he can stay safely in the prime minister's office. I think Israelis are pretty tired of all this. I've speculated—and I'm pretty sure—there's not going to be any regime change in Iran. In fact, everything the United States and Israel are doing is strengthening support for the government, for the regime, at least in the short term. But there could be regime change in Israel as a result of this mistake. I mean, very clearly, I think Netanyahu recognizes he's not going to be able to collapse the Iranian state. There will be no regime change; his purposes won't be achieved. He's even now very concerned—and should be—that Donald Trump will drop out of the war. Quit. You know, "quit while we're behind" seems to be his motto.

So now that we've lost the war, let's quit. You know, I think this is of grave concern to Netanyahu, and there are commentators in Israel and in the Israeli community press who recognize this and are calling Netanyahu out, because his big claim to power has been the assertion that he knows how to manipulate the United States—that he's uniquely able to do that. And, in fact, there's a good deal of evidence that he is uniquely able to do that. But he seems to be losing that capacity, or at least it's in danger. And we come back to: why is Donald Trump so deferential to Israel? The suspicion has to be that it has something to do with what the Russians call *kompromat*—meaning blackmail based on evidence that turned up in the Epstein context or somewhere else.

#Nima

Yesterday they assassinated Kamal Kharazi, who was, you know, somehow communicating with the Pakistanis. He and his wife were killed in an assassination planned by the Israelis. Is there anybody, Ambassador, who is concerned? Because Donald Trump, even when he published that video attacking a bridge in Iran, said, "You have to make a deal."

#Chas

So how can you talk this way when you're assassinating everybody in Iran? Well, this is a prime illustration of the difference between American and Israeli objectives. I don't think the United States has an objective of collapsing the Iranian state. I think the United States wanted regime change within the state—did not want to bring down the Republic—might have preferred something that

wasn't called the Islamic Republic, but, you know, basically had quite a different agenda than the Israelis, to the extent the United States had any agenda at all. Now we come to the question of the sanctity of envoys—the immunity of ambassadors to assassination or other mistreatment. This is something that goes back many thousands of years.

The earliest records of political interaction between empires and states all note that ambassadors should be immune from attack. Diplomatic immunity, in other words, long predates the invention of modern diplomacy. So now we have two things. First, the Israelis are systematically assassinating anyone who might be able to make a deal with Donald Trump. They're directly undercutting his claim that he wants a deal. And on the other side, the Iranians have concluded that there's no point in talking to Mr. Witkoff or Mr. Kushner because they don't know what they're doing. They're not competent. They may be sharp businesspeople, but they don't understand peace and war.

They're not negotiators in good faith. They're very much in the mold of Donald Trump's favorite sidekick in earlier days, Roy Cohn—a lawyer in New York with a reputation for utterly unscrupulous behavior and coercion of others. So they—Kushner and Witkoff—you know, when Donald Trump asked Steve Witkoff, "I put all this huge force up against Iran and done huge damage. Why hasn't Iran capitulated?" Witkoff doesn't know how to answer that question. I do. This is not how you get an agreement. And if you cheat, if you deceive in a negotiation, trust is lost for all time, and you can't get it back. This is why J.D. Vance has been offered up as a potential negotiator instead of Witkoff and Kushner.

But, you know, here we have—now, let me make a comment about Washington in the United States at the moment. There is no diplomacy. There's no structure to produce diplomacy. Marco Rubio does not do diplomacy; he does mafia-style coercion. The Department of State hardly exists. The Foreign Service, which I served in proudly for 30 years, is a shambles. The whole place has been subjected to ideological purges in the name of getting rid of an imaginary ideology called "wokeness." And we just don't have the competence. We don't have the team to field in this context. So the prospects for a negotiation are very poor, because either Israel will assassinate the Iranian interlocutor or the United States will put somebody incompetent up against him.

#Nima

We've learned that the Japanese liquefied gas tanker has passed safely through the Strait of Hormuz. It was flying a Panamanian flag, but it was a Japanese vessel.

#Chas

Well, again, you know, there have been a number of countries that have anticipated Donald Trump by doing a deal with Iran—a diplomatic deal, not a militarily enforced one. They include China, India, Japan, and Turkey. I believe Bangladesh has done the same, and there will be many more. Even the Europeans have been negotiating. I think the reason the Italians have banned American use of the

base in southern Italy—Sicily, Sigonella—is because they're talking to the Iranians under the table. So, you know, sooner or later, everybody's going to do a deal, because they can't economically afford not to. And they all understand that talk of using force to secure the Strait against Iran is impossible. There's no alternative—they either go bankrupt, collapse economically, or they do a deal.

#Nima

I think the region needs a new security architecture. They have to think about it—if they want prosperity, if they want security for the region, there has to be some sort of understanding between Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the Arab states in the Persian Gulf.

#Chas

Yeah, I think the basis for that is being laid, and it will take time, obviously. And it's not certain what will come out of the various processes that are opening. But let me first note that the Chinese, the Russians, and Iran have all proposed a cooperative security architecture for the Persian Gulf. That has not been accepted by the Gulf Cooperation Council countries because of their alliance with the United States. I say "alliance"—they actually don't have an alliance; they have a client-state relationship. That is to say, they've accepted no obligations to the United States.

But they are, in effect, very deferential to the United States. I don't agree with my friend—and yours—Mohammed Marandi, that they lack agency. They have the ability to make decisions; they've shown that in the past—for example, in the 1973 oil embargo. But anyway, they are now in a difficult position. I think they're coming to realize they have to negotiate a modus vivendi with Iran. How could they do that? Well, it's very significant that Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey met in Islamabad with Pakistan to discuss how to bring the war to an end and what to do when it ends.

I don't know the precise details of those discussions, but we do know they resulted in the Pakistani foreign minister flying to Beijing. He obviously has the permission, or at least the authority, from Beijing to act as a mediator in ending this war. We know that Pakistan is passing messages between Iran and the United States. That's not a negotiation—I think Iran is quite correct to say it's not a negotiation—but it is communication through Pakistan. And Pakistan, therefore, is playing the sort of role it played in 1971 in facilitating the American opening to China. It wasn't a mediator, but it passed messages, and that, in the end, produced a geopolitical change of great moment. So Pakistan is there.

Now Pakistan, the other element in this, is very clearly looking at the countries that were involved in that meeting in Islamabad. Building on the Saudi-Pakistani defense agreement, these are countries that together have the capacity to produce a military-industrial complex that could liberate the region from its dependence on foreign arms sales—the United States being the primary vendor of arms in the region. That would free these countries from American dictation to an extent they otherwise cannot achieve. So this is a very important meeting. The joint statement between Pakistan

and China proposing various principles for ending the war is significant, not so much because of its content, but because it's clear now there is an intermediary available.

And that intermediary, Pakistan, has the backing of China. Why Pakistan? Well, Pakistan has a big border with Iran. It has a complex relationship with Iran. Pakistani culture is heavily Persian-influenced. Pakistan also has a very good relationship with Saudi Arabia, which is the giant among the six members of the Gulf Cooperation Council. So I think we have two potential mediators here. One is Oman, which has traditionally played that role. Now we have Pakistan, backed by China. There's a record of success in mediation—not by Pakistan, but by Iraq, by Oman, and by China—in bringing Saudi Arabia and Iran together in an earlier agreement. So I think this is the beginning of something important. What sort of security architecture might emerge?

Well, Iran clearly is not going to accept a continued American military presence in the Persian Gulf. And the Gulf countries must realize that if there is such a presence on their territory, it will be subject to Iranian attack. Iran is not going away. It's been there for thousands of years, and it's the great power in the region by virtue of population, talent, territorial extent, and history. So what could be put in its place? I've thought—and perhaps this is just a fantasy on my part—that there are certain basic principles of Islamic statecraft that are common to both Sunni and Shia. The religion itself is common. I mean, there's no way you can declare yourself to be Shia or Sunni and then convert; it's not like converting from Protestantism to Roman Catholicism or something like that.

It's just that these are schools of thought with much in common. And Pakistan, incidentally, is the second-largest Shia country in the world. That's another tie to Iran. Or maybe it's the third—anyway, it's one of the most important Shia populations. So could you craft an Islamic cooperative framework? Maybe bring in the Organization of Islamic Cooperation as a framework, so that you also brought in mediators from Indonesia, from Malaysia, and other countries within the Islamic world but not in the Gulf—people who want a solution to the issue and have diplomatic skills that could be very helpful. I think there is a possibility here. And I would argue that, you know, Saudi Arabia is where the OIC is headquartered.

And Turkey is an important player in that. Pakistan now has a much stronger relationship with Saudi Arabia than before, and it also has good communication with Iran. I think there's something to be done here. The question is whether there's the diplomatic imagination to do it. Whatever happens, I think if Israel ever decided to put forward a plan for peace itself—it's put forward no plan for peace in its entire existence—it equates peace with military pacification, not peaceful coexistence. If Israel had a change of regime, abandoned the Greater Israel project, and accepted the need to live in peace with its neighbors and with the Palestinians, then it could be brought into this architecture.

Otherwise, this architecture is going to be fundamentally hostile to Israel, and it will not include the United States. It will be directed by Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Turkey, backed by China. So I think there is a possibility here for something. But at the moment, it's still in Kuwait—you know, it hasn't become concrete. Details need to be worked out. But I think there is now a grouping and a

process that could potentially produce the cooperative security architecture that's really required to manage the Gulf. And let me just finish by saying that the world has a stake in this, because we're seeing the consequences of instability in West Asia, and they are devastating the global economy.

They're also producing nuclear proliferation. Once Iran goes nuclear—and it now will—Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Turkey will all do the same. That will affect countries like Korea, Japan, and others, and maybe even Brazil, which once had a nuclear weapons program but gave it up. Now your country, Brazil, is in a defense arrangement with South Africa, which also had a nuclear program, produced six bombs, kept the material—not the bombs—and has the technology to jumpstart a Brazilian program if it wants to. Anyway, I think the global consequences of this ridiculous—no, not ridiculous, absurd, tragic—war are just enormous.

#Nima

Ambassador, you mentioned the issue of nuclear weapons. I think many people in Iran—I'd say the majority—believe they have to do something about it, because the situation in the Middle East is so complicated, with Israel having nuclear bombs and threatening other countries with being bombed almost every day. If those countries respond, Israel says it will hit them back with nukes. They even talk about using nukes in Gaza, but...

#Chas

Yes. Well, you know, this is the neutron bomb effect—just murder all the people, leave the structures intact. But the structures are all gone in Gaza. And Israel is now applying to southern Lebanon exactly the same strategy it applied to Gaza. The only difference is that the Lebanese are able to get out of the region, whereas Palestinians in Gaza were stuck in Gaza. So, I mean, Israel has become an utterly unacceptable source of instability and evil—murder, mayhem, destruction, and death—in its region. And if you want peace in West Asia, the principal change that has to occur is not in Iran, it's in Israel. I think people now realize that. And a lot of Israelis—intelligent Israelis, thoughtful Israelis, and there are many of them—also realize it and have watched with horror as Israel has become what it has become.

#Nima

Because the argument is that Iran acquiring nuclear weapons would shift the Middle East toward a balance of deterrence. You know, the argument in Iran right now is that they can't—because of the war. Iran wants to end this war permanently; they don't want it coming back again and again. That's the main question. Exactly.

#Chas

So basically, what Israel and the United States have done is prove that those people in Iran who argued that Iran, like North Korea, needs a nuclear weapon to continue to exist—to survive in peace—were right. Nobody can now effectively argue that there's no need for a nuclear deterrent. If there had been a nuclear deterrent, what has happened would not have happened. And that's why I say it's now certain that Iran will build a nuclear weapon. I don't know where the canisters of uranium hexafluoride are—the enriched, 60% enriched uranium gas. I don't know where that is. But I think, incidentally, there's talk, of course, about special forces doing some kind of really preposterous military operation to recover that uranium. You're following this as I am.

Iran has come up with a very ingenious way of ensuring its military survival, which is to decentralize its command to the 31 provinces of Iran. You want to bet that that uranium hasn't been distributed to multiple sites? I don't think it's held in a single site. You know, Iran is not stupid—why would it leave such a big, fat target in one place? So the chances that that uranium can be recovered are near zero. The chances that a ground attack will do anything other than result in huge American casualties are also pretty poor. I know that Iran is calling up volunteers on a huge national basis to resist. In fact, there's some criticism that even 12- and 13-year-olds are manning checkpoints. You know, when I was 12 or 13, I was a pretty tough guy.

I wouldn't have minded doing that. But anyway, I don't see this going well. It's pretty clear that, in order to have any claim at all to having accomplished something, Donald Trump has to blow up bridges and other things in Iran—which is a war crime, by the way. And yet he boasts about it. Civilian infrastructure that's not connected to the military is not a legitimate target of war, and that's a matter of treaty and international legal convention. But the United States is no longer inhibited by international law, which is why everybody's going to want to get a nuclear weapon. Because, you know, there's a reason North Korea is probably the most odious regime in the world—almost nobody likes North Korea.

In fact, I can't think of anyone who likes North Korea. They may have a relationship with it, as Vladimir Putin does with Kim Jong-un, and Xi Jinping has a relationship with him too—less intense. But nobody likes North Korea, and nobody would shed tears if that regime collapsed. But it doesn't collapse, even though everybody is either its enemy or a false friend, because it has nuclear weapons. So there's a lesson there. And the lesson goes deeper than that. I once had the experience of a private meeting in the desert with the late Colonel Gaddafi in Libya—a very strange man. He wore the—well, I know sometimes when Larry Johnson is on, you wear Hawaiian shirts—but he had the worst-looking Hawaiian shirt I've ever seen, which he had designed himself. You know, he really, secretly, I think, wanted to be Versace.

He didn't want to be the leader of Libya; he wanted to be a dress designer. But anyway, he paid a price for giving up his weapons of mass destruction program. He was murdered—not just murdered, but sodomized and murdered. So I think the lesson is pretty clear. I find it amazing that religious scruples on the part of the late Ali Khamenei actually kept Iran from developing a nuclear weapon

for as long as they did. And not just nuclear weapons, but chemical and biological weapons—all of these were argued for by the IRGC at one point, and all were rebuffed. Not now. And here I would remind everyone that the famous fatwa prohibiting the development of weapons of mass destruction had a provision stating that if the existence of Iran were directly threatened, then it would not be haram—it would not be forbidden—to build these weapons.

And certainly, what's happening now meets the requirements of that escape clause in the fatwa. So I take it as a given that Iran is going to have a nuclear weapon. I don't think that's a good thing for the world, because it will uncork the genie of nuclear proliferation and release it into the world. And, you know, I don't like what I see happening, and I don't think anyone should. I actually feel very sorry for the Israelis, who have been led into this war by very bad leadership, and with bad habits inculcated by the completely unconditional backing of the United States for any horror that Israel commits. We don't react—we support it. This has brought about, in my view, a lot of complicity on our part for the way Israel behaves. I don't like it.

#Nima

Thank you so much, Ambassador, for being with us today. As always, we learn a lot from you.

#Chas

Well, keep up the good work, Nima. Let's hope this conflict is over before too long, and that it ends in a way that can produce a lasting peace.

#Nima

Exactly. I hope so.