

Amb. Chas Freeman: Israel's STRATEGY in TATTERS - Trump TAKES OVER

#Nima

Hi everybody, today is Friday, April 10th, 2026, and our dear friend Amb. Chas Freeman is here with us. Welcome, Ambassador.

#Chas

Thank you. Glad to be back.

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Let me start with an update, the latest news about what's going on right now, because time is moving fast and we need to understand the situation. About an hour ago, we heard from the head of the Iranian parliament. He said that two of the measures mutually agreed upon between the parties have yet to be implemented: a ceasefire in Lebanon and the release of Iran's blocked assets before the start of negotiations. Then, just within the last hour, the South Korean representative and a Qatari bank announced that Washington has authorized the release of \$7 billion of Iranian assets held in Qatar in the South Korean account.

They authorized that. The other good news, which I think is much more important, is about Lebanon and Israel. Donald Trump—well, according to *Israel Hayom*, an Israeli media outlet—they reported that there will be an immediate ceasefire between Israel and Lebanon, and it's going to be announced tomorrow. This ceasefire will be about the full implementation of the 2024 ceasefire conditions, something along those lines. Another outlet reported that it's happening because of Iranian pressure related to the negotiations.

But Axios reported that Lebanon and Israel both prepared a ceasefire as a gesture of goodwill from the Israeli side, not as a result of Iranian pressure. This was reported by Axios. And it seems the Iranian delegation is on its way to Islamabad, Pakistan, for some sort of negotiation. As we mentioned, the other important news is that the Iranians are going to negotiate again, indirectly. They're not going to have any photos with J.D. Vance because they don't see that as a viable option for them. You're understanding the message.

#Chas

Well, that's all very interesting and up-to-the-minute news, and I'm very happy to hear that the talks in Islamabad are going to go forward. It's obvious that the White House, quite desperate to get this war finished, has done some very useful things. Authorizing the release of frozen assets in Qatar—maybe elsewhere, I don't know—is a major step forward in demonstrating the goodwill that's been completely lacking in previous negotiations. More importantly, if there is indeed a ceasefire in Lebanon, building on the 2024 agreement, which Israel has never really implemented, we'll have to see whether they actually implement it now.

But if there is a ceasefire, that's vitally important, because Iran has not only been the protector of Lebanon and the sponsor or backer of Hezbollah—which is the only effective defense force in Lebanon—but I think Iran clearly regards the American ability to call off Israeli aggression as a decisive indicator of whether the United States is really serious about ending this war. And if, as appears to be the case, the White House has leaned on Mr. Netanyahu, that's very good. I think Iran goes into these talks, if they happen—and I surely hope they do—not with a very strong hand. It controls the Strait of Hormuz, and the Gulf Arab states cannot survive in fiscal terms.

They don't have the money to carry out their development programs if that strait isn't open to them. And while they're very angry and demanding revenge at the moment—especially people in the UAE—I think in the long run they'll have no choice but to recognize that, since the strait can't be opened by force, it will have to be opened to them through diplomacy. And that means agreements with Iran, which will include the disposition of the American bases on their territory. So this is all very good. Iran really doesn't have to do anything more in terms of attacking them again to keep the pressure on. Iran has shown that it can attack them; it's done huge damage to the American bases on their territory and has damaged some of their energy production facilities.

In the case of Kuwait, Iran denies that it struck the desalination plant. That may have been an Israeli false-flag operation, but the Gulf Arabs are all faced with a need to accommodate Iran in the longer term. That's true also of the United States and others. And it's very significant in that regard that the government of Spain has opened its embassy in Tehran. This is a break in European unity on the subject, and it's probably the first of many, I think. So this is a very momentous set of developments. Let's hope they hold until Saturday morning, Pakistan time. I guess I should say one word about Pakistan. Pakistan was authorized to become the mediator after consultation with Egypt, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia.

This group of four has a lot of potential—we've discussed that before. But clearly, there was a broad regional desire for a peace plan. Pakistan's foreign minister flew to Beijing, and there was a joint Pakistani-Chinese announcement. That appears to have been a very important factor in enabling Pakistan to achieve a so-called ceasefire. I'll say here that I think this is not a ceasefire, but a make-believe ceasefire. It's not real—it's a lull in the fighting. It's not an end, or even a decisive pause.

And the talks tomorrow morning in Islamabad will determine whether this becomes a real ceasefire—that is to say, whether the United States and Israel join Iran in stopping the firing in Lebanon as well as elsewhere.

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I think the fight Donald Trump is in right now is a fight for his survival, because if he goes in another direction—if he tries to somehow follow Benjamin Netanyahu's agenda—that's not going to work for him.

#Chas

No, I think it's very clear. Nobody has won this war, but two countries have lost—and their leaders have lost. Donald Trump and the United States have lost this war. Netanyahu and Israel have lost this war. Netanyahu's effort to redeem or gain a victory in the midst of defeat by invading Lebanon has also failed, not just because Iran clearly demanded that Lebanon be treated fairly, but because Hezbollah has put up a very good fight. There have been very heavy casualties on the Israeli side. And this is a reminder that while Israel is very good at beating up unarmed civilians or bombing people who have no air defenses, it's really not very good at infantry operations when there is serious opposition. We understand that many Merkava tanks—the tanks that Israel has designed and fielded—have been destroyed.

Each one has a crew of four. That means if there were 100 tanks, as we're told there may have been, that's 400 dead or seriously wounded people on the Israeli side. And Israel's plan to annex southern Lebanon will not work. So I think, at this point, we can say Iran has gained control of the Strait of Hormuz, and it cannot be dislodged from that except through negotiations, which will preserve Iran's role in operating the toll booth with Oman, apparently. Oman has a small governorate on the Strait of Hormuz, surrounded by Fujairah, I believe, in the UAE. The Strait is controlled. Iran has gained relief from the sanctions on its oil exports. It has actually doubled its revenue from oil during this period—a great increase, about a 40% rise in oil production—and prices are double what they were.

Third, Iran's missile force has not been destroyed—it's been preserved. Iran doesn't need to fire it at Israel anymore. Israel is in political turmoil. Many Israelis are very angry at Netanyahu for getting them into this war, while others blame the United States for having backed out of it. Iran is now in a position to sit back, wait, and maybe use international diplomacy to increase the isolation of Israel and the United States. Talks can continue, assuming there isn't a blow-up. I mean, the basic problem in the talks is that there's no agreement about what was agreed—the two sides have very different versions of what was actually decided. And in that regard, it's important to refer to the statement by the prime minister of Pakistan, Nawaz Sharif. He made it very clear that Lebanon was part of the deal—it was on the agenda.

His announcement of the so-called ceasefire included a specific reference to Lebanon, and it is disingenuous for the United States—obviously under pressure from Israel—to now deny that. I'm glad that apparently the United States has put serious pressure on Israel to retreat from its aggression in Lebanon. I don't know what the nature of that pressure was, but I'll just say a few things. First, Israel cannot conduct any war of any kind without American support—logistical support, weapons, ammunition, and so forth. Israel has run out of the interception capability it had to deal with Iranian missiles, so it's essentially naked to any Iranian resumption of the war, if Iran decides to do that. That's a lot of pressure.

People in Israel—we don't know the nature of the damage there because of military censorship, including the blinding of satellites that would normally report on conditions on the ground in Palestine. But it's clear that Israelis have endured six weeks or more of danger from flying warheads and having to duck into bomb shelters all the time. I don't think morale is very good in Israel. The war in Lebanon, as I said, even before the Iranian demand that it stop, was not going well for Israel. The United States has the capacity to resume bombing Iran. Iran, however, has absorbed much more damage than it has inflicted, and it has shown that it can stand up to that. So we're reminded of North Vietnam's ability, for example, to absorb huge damage from American bombing but not capitulate.

So Iran goes into these talks—indirect talks, as you said. I think they're indirect in part because they can't stand the sight of Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner, who have completely discredited themselves as envoys through their amateurishness, incompetence, lack of empathy, propensity for deceit, willingness to serve as cover for surprise attacks, and inability to deliver a deal. So I think Xi—if I'm correct, the foreign minister of Iran—actually asked the United States not to send them. Apparently, they're with J.D. Vance. But okay, we're back to indirect talks, presumably mediated by Pakistan. I don't know what role China will play—probably none that's visible—but it's in the background.

And we are not, by the way—even if this make-believe ceasefire becomes real—we are not out of the woods in terms of the knock-on effects. Energy prices continue to skyrocket. Iran, at the moment, has not opened the Strait except to very carefully selected ships. There's huge pressure on oil and gas prices. There was a rumor that Qatar had done a deal with Iran, but then there were two natural gas LNG carriers from Qatar that aimed for the Strait and then turned back, obviously warned by Iran that they were not to be permitted through. So there's a lot going on, much of it under the surface. It's very hard for us to discern what that is, but I think the world will be watching tomorrow to see whether, at a minimum, these talks in Islamabad establish some sort of process for reconciliation following this disastrous war.

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CNN reported that a single oil tanker passed through the Strait of Hormuz today after paying Iran a fee. That's what was reported on CNN. Ambassador, when it comes to the Middle East, I don't see—

or I've never heard, in the Persian media or in conversations with politicians and decision-makers—that they want to humiliate anyone in the region. They want good relationships, partnerships in the Middle East. Do you think that, from what's going on and what has happened so far, that sort of relationship or partnership—or some kind of mutual understanding—could come out of this?

#Chas

It's going to take quite a while. It won't happen overnight. You can't hurt people, injure them, destroy their property, reduce their livelihood, threaten them, and then expect a big smile and a hug from them. That's not going to happen. In the end, though, the logic of the situation—as I mentioned—is that they really don't have any choice. The Gulf Arabs, in the end, will have to reach an accommodation with Iran. What that accommodation looks like, what the details are—whether they join Oman and Iran in managing the Gulf, the Strait of Hormuz, or remain just consumers of that transit—how many, what the amount of the fees they pay might be, all of that remains to be seen.

Do they pay the same rate as someone outside the Persian Gulf, or do they get a discount? I understand Iran is charging about \$2 million per tanker, and about \$1 for every certain number of barrels of oil in those tankers, and asking that the payment be made either in cryptocurrency or Chinese yuan. That's another knock-on effect. The dollar—the petrodollar—which has been the mainspring of the global economy and the chief source of strength for the dollar as a medium of trade, transaction settlement, and reserve currency, is in real trouble because other currencies are now being used: the rial, the Iranian rial, the Chinese yuan.

The Russians have been using the ruble. Others are using their own currencies in trade. So now there's a great deal of uncertainty about the world's financial structure. We're going to see oil and gas prices go much higher than they are now, for the simple reason that the ships that left the Persian Gulf before the war have now arrived at their destinations—and there are no follow-on ships because of the war. So whatever happens, there's going to be a big impact on inflation. There'll probably be a global recession, and the long-term reordering of the energy trade will be considerable.

China has just gained a huge market for renewable energy—wind, solar, nuclear, and electric vehicles that use power from these non-conventional sources. It's a big winner in that sense. It has managed to handle this change very well. Russia has gotten a huge windfall now that the sanctions on its oil exports have been lifted. India, which used to get a discount on Russian oil compared to the global price—I think it was paying about \$47 a barrel when the global price was in the sixty-plus-dollar range—is now paying \$110 a barrel. So the burden on Indian finances is very considerable, and that's true for others as well. The knock-on effects of this are going to persist regardless of what happens tomorrow in Islamabad.

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I think that could be. When we look at Iran's ten-point proposal, basically they're talking about putting an end to the war on all fronts. They're talking about Lebanon, Iran—all together. The other point is the sanctions, both primary and secondary, which are important. The Strait of Hormuz, by the way, is one of them. Looking at the points, they're basically talking about the sanctions imposed by the UN Security Council—the kind of problem Iran has been dealing with for such a long time, since Ahmadinejad, the former president of Iran. I think it doesn't seem that the proposal is all that radical to be agreed on. What's your understanding of that? Well, it's consistent with an Iranian position that goes back many years. By the way, your mention of the snapback provision of the Security Council is an illustration that the Europeans have something to answer for here too—those who went along with the American desire to reimpose sanctions.

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Frankly, those sanctions aren't effective anymore.

#Chas

They're not effective because the grip of the dollar on global trade has been weakened. There are now alternatives. They're not effective because the war itself has changed the economic dynamic. And there's now great concern about the price of oil and gas in the West. The Europeans still, foolishly, do not avail themselves of cheap Russian oil and gas. It will be much more expensive when and if they ever do reach out to Russia for that. So this is, as you said at the outset, a lot in motion. And I don't know how much will be clarified in the meeting tomorrow beyond, as I said, the obvious point that on some things we're not going to be able to agree. The United States and Israel are not going to pay reparations to Iran. I can say that is politically impossible. However, Iran stands to gain huge revenue from the tolls on the Strait of Hormuz.

I don't know what the Omani share will be, but Oman hasn't been a very wealthy country either. And, of course, the fact that Oman is in this arrangement with Iran means that Oman has broken with the other five members of the Gulf Cooperation Council. It's made a deal with Iran; it's separated itself from them. We'll have to see which one of them follows Oman first. As I said, Qatar may be the candidate for that. Meanwhile, the thirteen American bases in the region have all been trashed. They're essentially unusable, uninhabitable. And it's all very well for the United States to say it will keep the Navy and troops in place, but it can't do that indefinitely. As time goes on, the pressure on the United States to remove those forces is going to rise. And as that pressure goes up, American leverage in the negotiations goes down. So time is really on Iran's side here.

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I believe, Ambassador, that J.D. Vance can somehow change the nature of the negotiations. You mentioned Steve Woodcock together with George Bush, and we've seen them involved in Ukraine, with the war there, and now with the war in the Middle East. I think we have to consider their

important role in what's going on in the Middle East, because they were part of the negotiations. As you mentioned, twice they deceived the Iranian side to start a war. The first was a surprise attack, and the second time the Iranians somehow knew the attack was coming. But that's not a good record on their part. How do you see J.D. Vance being part of the new round of negotiations?

#Chas

Well, let me make a number of points. First, the only person who trusts Witkoff and Kushner is Donald Trump. That counts for something. But nobody else trusts them—not the Ukrainians, not the Russians, not the Palestinians, not the Israelis, not the Iranians, not the Pakistanis. You know, Pakistan has been embarrassed by the arguments over what was agreed. And this is very amateurish. I mean, it's very typical, frankly, of American diplomacy under Donald Trump. That is to say, broad statements of principle are exchanged, but there are no details, no agreement on how anything will be implemented. There's not even an agreed process to manage the implementation of the agreement. This is the sort of agreement that Napoleon referred to.

He said, you know, I don't believe in agreements in principle. They're not agreements; they're just statements. So why are they there? Well, they're there because Donald Trump trusts them. He probably doesn't trust J.D. Vance, who was opposed to the war and is also his successor in waiting. You know, there's more and more talk in the United States about impeachment or the use of the 25th Amendment because Donald Trump is mentally incompetent. The vice president is the key to both processes. So I think Witkoff and Kushner are there to watch J.D. Vance, not to meet with the Iranians. And I don't envy J.D. Vance in this role. He has tried very loyally to defend the president—President Trump, his boss—but it's very hard. I mean, a lot of what Trump says is clearly not true.

And J.D. Vance is an intelligent man—well-informed, not thoughtless—and yet he has to defend a boss who is the opposite. So why is he there? He's there to show the Iranians that the United States means serious business. You don't send the vice president to this kind of thing lightly. We've never done this before. There's never been a vice president appointed as the head of a serious diplomatic delegation on an issue of war and peace in our history, as far as I'm aware. So this is quite something. As I say, I don't envy J.D. Vance. He's got a very hard role to play. If he can extract from this meeting some agreement on a process of negotiation to resolve the many issues that the Iranian ten-point proposal raised, then I think he can feel satisfied he's done good work.

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I think in the future, many people will study the Trump administration. It's quite amazing, looking at it. You have a secretary of state who is not part of the negotiations in Ukraine—nobody trusts him in Iran or in Russia, and nobody wants to negotiate with him. You have two envoys of Donald Trump participating alongside the vice president of the United States. It's quite amazing what the administration is doing.

#Chas

Well, what has happened in the United States is the collapse of constitutional government and orderly policy processes, as well as the rule of law, which has also collapsed for most purposes. So what we have is what the Latin Americans call caudillismo. I don't know what that word is in Portuguese, but a caudillo is this typical South American dictator. Everything is personal. He doesn't have any professional staff; he has cronies around him, and nobody dares tell him the truth. They tell him what he wants to hear. You know, this is not a good way to run a government. And so I think this kind of system, which is very alien to the tradition of the United States, is now what we have. I mean, you could compare us with the government of Ecuador, where the president is apparently involved in all kinds of corruption and is very dictatorial.

#Nima

You could compare us with that now.

#Chas

So people talk about the United States as, you know, becoming yet another banana republic. If you have this kind of system, then your diplomacy is off-kilter. First of all, look at what's happened. You don't start a war without setting objectives that are feasible. There were no clear objectives in this war. You don't conduct a war by firing generals in the middle of it because they don't agree with your theories about gender and race. We've had female and Black officers of great ability dismissed for no reason at all, except for the descriptive characteristics they have. You don't enter a war without some idea of how you're going to end it. What is your war termination strategy?

You don't conduct a war in violation of the norms of warfare, because whatever you do to others, they can do to you. We have a Secretary of Defense—self-styled Secretary of War—whose idea of strategy is that whoever bombs the most wins the war. That's his theory. But this is not true. It was not true in Vietnam. It was not true in Afghanistan. It's not true in the West Asian war we've just experienced. How do you win a war? You win it by exploiting geography—which Iran has done, with the Strait of Hormuz. You win it by showing fortitude, the ability to persist under pressure—which Iran has done. And you win it by having a strategy and sticking with it. Then you win it by including very feasible objectives in that strategy. So, what has Iran wanted to do?

It has wanted to end the constant harassment, attacks, assassinations, and bombings from Israel, and to ensure they do not happen again. It has wanted freedom from American collusion with Israel in such attacks. It has wanted relief from the sanctions on its oil exports. It has wanted respect and dignity—and it has gained that. Everyone in the world who uses the Strait of Hormuz is now going to have to be nice to Iran. They may not like the Islamic Republic, but they'll have to hold their nose and deal with it. So, what has Iran achieved? Of course, it has suffered great damage. It has lost a whole echelon of leaders, and the new leaders are harder-line. Iran will now build a nuclear

weapon—it would not have if Ali Khamenei and his fatwa had continued. Iran will not abandon the Palestinian or Lebanese causes.

And in the end, if there is ever to be peace in West Asia, we've just once again seen that the basic requirement is for Israel to make peace with the Palestinians, recognize their right to self-determination, and make peace—not a cold peace, not a truce, but genuine peace, with mutually advantageous relationships with its neighbors. It has done none of those things in the seventy-eight years of its existence. And we come to a final point, which is that Israel came into existence because the suffering of European Jews in the Holocaust was so awful, and the sense of guilt in the West that nothing had been done to stop it generated a kind of obligation to the survivors of the Holocaust—that they should have a state of their own. It didn't necessarily have to be in Palestine, but that's where it ended up.

So Israel constantly asked, "Do we have a right to exist?" I think most people would have said yes—because of your suffering, you deserve some compensation in the form of a state. But if you ask people now, "Should Israel continue to exist?" I think almost everyone in the world would say no. It has behaved in such an evil and barbarous fashion, with such indifference to the life of anyone but its own citizens, that it has forfeited the right to exist. And if it wants to exist—which I'm sure it does, and hope it will—then it must make peace with the Palestinians, with its neighbors, including Iran, and also including Lebanon, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt. So we've come down to one more reminder that everything in the Middle East, in the end, boils down to the Palestine problem.

#Nima

The problem is that they don't bother to define their borders. How can we call them a country if they don't want to define their borders?

#Chas

No, they're not peace-loving. They're war-mongering. They don't have fixed frontiers, as a state must, but they do have a monopoly on violence in the area they control—that attribute of statehood. The arrogance, the hubris of Israel, knows no bounds. The other day, the Israeli ambassador to the UN said, "We have a right to bomb Lebanon." Really? Who gave you that right? It's contrary to international law. Israel has been more responsible than any other party for the destruction of international law, which was one of the major achievements of humankind after World War II—the Nuremberg Rules. Israel has violated every one of them. And if we were actually following international law, the Israeli leadership would be in prison right now, not sitting in Tel Aviv or Jerusalem. So, if you judge anti-Semitism by who does the most harm to the Jews, Netanyahu is the biggest anti-Semite in history. He has done incredible damage to his fellow Israelis and to Jews everywhere.

#Nima

There was an article in the New York Times saying that the war is turning Iran into a major world power. They're basically talking about the Strait of Hormuz and what's been happening in that region. We've learned that Japan is talking with the Iranians, and South Korea has sent an envoy to Iran to negotiate with them.

#Chas

Well, this is the point I was making. I don't agree that Iran is a global superpower or anything like that. I do agree that it's a middle-ranking power that has shown that, in the emerging world order, middle-ranking powers can stand up to superpowers. They can hold their own. Why? Because if they meet the criteria I mentioned—using geography intelligently, preparing to defend themselves, and having a strategy that works—they can do it. In this case, Iran was able to keep the U.S. Navy 500, 600, even 700 miles away because of its ability to strike our Navy with drones or missiles. It's done huge damage in Israel.

We don't know how much damage, as I said—probably a lot, though certainly much less than what the United States and Israel did to Iran—but enough, perhaps, to make sure a future Israeli leadership won't attack Iran again. So Iran has shown that, in what I call a multinodal order, countries have varied relationships with each other in a network. Iran can have very bad political relations with some countries and yet maintain very good economic ones. Or it can have a military relationship with Russia while having a poor political relationship with Russia, and so on. Iran can shift—it's three-dimensional, not fixed.

It's not a pole at the end of some two-ended relationship. So Iran is showing, as Ukraine did before, that Ukraine has stood up very magnificently to an invasion from Russia, which is a much bigger and more powerful country. And it has shown that you can do that. I think what we're seeing is the emergence of middle-ranking powers as a force on the world stage, with agency in determining their own future. Your own country, Brazil, might well fit into this category. That is to say, Brazil has not been very assertive historically, but it could become so, because in the new emerging multinodal world order, Brazil is a major, major factor.

Brazil's economic relationships, its political relationships, its cultural relationships—for example, with Lusophone Africa—these are relationships that give Brazil influence and power beyond South America. And Brazil is a military power and will become a greater one now that the United States appears to threaten it with the use of force. So I think what we're seeing is a world in which there is no single power controlling everything. There's no bipolar order. There's no G2. The U.S. and China may be the two largest and most powerful countries on the planet, but that does not give either of them the ability to dictate to other countries.

So Iran has, in fact, shown something very, very important. And finally, I'd just say that, yes, Iran now has global reach. You mentioned that the Japanese and South Koreans are going to Iran to negotiate passage through the Strait of Hormuz and a decent relationship. Iran is going to have a lot

of money from the tolls it collects in the Strait of Hormuz. It can use that to rebuild. It's probably not going to invite American companies to help, but I wouldn't be surprised to see Turkish, Chinese, maybe Indian or Brazilian companies involved in this. So you're indeed correct—or the Economist is correct, I guess—that Iran has emerged as a global influencer.

#Nima

We had these ultimatums—48 hours, five days, 10 days, then another 48 hours. And the last one was, you know, Tuesday at 8 p.m., which was the announcement of the ceasefire. But during these ultimatums he was announcing, he was putting pressure on Iran; there were no negotiations behind the scenes. He had the 10-point proposal on his table, at his disposal. But it seems he just negotiated with himself and decided to go ahead with the ceasefire.

#Chas

I don't think that's unfair. That is to say, as I mentioned, there's no agreement about what was agreed—because I don't think very much was agreed. Pakistan was passing messages; there was no active negotiation. Donald Trump, as I may have said before, has had two formative experiences. One is in New York real estate, where his assistant Roy Cohn—one of the nastiest people ever to live—helped him make deals through pressure, coercion, blackmail, and using the courts to bankrupt opponents. So coercion and bullying are Donald Trump's habitual manner. The second thing he learned is that when you fail, as he did on six occasions, you declare bankruptcy and walk away with no obligation to anybody.

And that's what he's been trying to do in this war. He realizes that he was misled—misled by Benjamin Netanyahu, by the head of Mossad, David Barnea. He wasn't adequately opposed by his own subordinates, the cabinet. I mean, I gather from that New York Times story that J.D. Vance said, "I don't, you know, I don't agree with this war, but I will loyally defend your decision." So he knew the military were opposed to it. The intelligence community didn't believe there would be regime change in Iran. He knew all that, but he went ahead anyway. And now he's learned that it was a disaster.

He may have finished his own presidency, because he no longer has the authority or legitimacy he had before he did this—including the intemperate, almost insane statements you cited from his postings on Truth Social over the week before the so-called ceasefire. He may also—Benjamin Netanyahu may also—have arranged for regime change in Israel, not in Iran, because many Israelis are deeply upset, as I mentioned. Iran has undergone a kind of consolidation of the regime, not a regime change, and the Iranian hardliners, the IRGC, are now in the driver's seat. And I suspect that Nima Alkhorshid, who I guess you confirm is headed to Islamabad, had to make some very persuasive arguments with others in Tehran in order to go ahead with this meeting.

#Nima

Exactly. There was a lot of pressure from people who thought there was no point in negotiating. But Kholibov, after all, did his best, in my opinion, to make it possible to go there.

#Chas

Well, the question is, again, Iran's main objective in this war is to ensure that it's not attacked again. There are other objectives, of course—rebuilding the country, restoring its prosperity, establishing its influence in the region, and forcing its neighbors to deal with it in a constructive rather than a hostile way. Iran has a very good chance of achieving all of these objectives. But the main question is: has Israel learned its lesson, as the United States learned its lesson, so that it won't attack Iran again? And I suspect the answer to that is yes.

#Nima

Ambassador, what do you make of the latest operation in Iran? I think that was important in terms of decisions made by the Trump administration. As Donald Trump himself mentioned, along with Pete Hegseth and General Keane, they were talking about an operation to rescue the second pilot of the F-15E. But what's your interpretation of what happened?

#Chas

Well, I think no one planned for the F-15 to be shot down. But when the weapons officer—a colonel, a senior officer in the squadron based in Jordan—was lost, had to parachute out, ejected, that became a very convenient pretext for an operation that would have gone ahead anyway. That is to say, the rescue of the pilot was basically cover for an effort to seize the uranium hexafluoride stored at Isfahan. My grandfather used to read me a book called **Haji Baba of Isfahan** when I was a kid. Anyway, I think that military operation was brilliantly conducted, but it was not successful. There was a loss of aircraft, loss of personnel, and helicopters and transport aircraft. The pilot was rescued—alhamdulillah, that's very good—but the overall operation failed because I think it had two parts: one was the rescue, and the other was the effort to penetrate the Isfahan storage facilities where the uranium was supposedly kept.

#Nima

I think, Ambassador, right now one of the main things—remember, before this war happened, everybody was talking about the Epstein files. And Donald Trump himself did everything to, you know, somehow distract people from the Epstein files. Yeah, we don't have Pam Bondi there anymore.

#Chas

No, no. Well, the more momentous development is that Melania Trump has broken with the president on this issue and said that there should be full disclosure. She had nothing to do with Epstein, because there's a story going around that she was one of Epstein's girls, which obviously left her feeling very angry and insulted. So Donald Trump has been—apparently, I haven't read the precise language—but he's reportedly foaming at the mouth about Melania's statement that the truth should be allowed to come out from the Epstein files. And, you know, if you try to go back to the main Iranian point on Lebanon—namely, can the United States restrain Israel? Is it capable? Does it have the willpower? Does it have the political acumen? Does it have the ability to rein in Israel? That was the key test. You mentioned *Israel Hayom*, the Israeli newspaper.

That is financed by the Adelson family—Miriam Adelson—and it's free in Israel. It's basically propaganda support for Netanyahu, so that's significant. But, you know, it looks as though, notwithstanding the pressure from Zionist donors like Miriam Adelson, and notwithstanding whatever basis for blackmail of Donald Trump might exist in the Epstein files, he actually put pressure on Israel. Or maybe Netanyahu, as he claims, just independently came to the conclusion that he should make a gesture of kindness toward the Lebanese. I think he could be fully justified in concluding that his war with Lebanon was also a failure. But I don't claim to know what went through his mind in any way. And it looks as though the United States, in fact, has to some extent returned to putting pressure on Israel—which we haven't done for this entire century, twenty-six years now.

#Nima

Before wrapping up, Ambassador, we've seen that the British Prime Minister went to the UAE to talk with them because he sees that many of the Arab states in the GCC are not happy with the situation. He's trying to engage with them. But how do you see the policy of Europe—not the European Union, I mean the individual European countries? It's a big issue.

#Chas

It's very confused. I think in the case of Britain—which has claimed a special relationship that some people have joked is so special it can't be found—well, anyway, the conclusion is openly stated that Britain can no longer afford to be dependent on the United States. It has to find its own place in the world. That's very difficult because of Brexit. You know, Britain gave up. Britain doesn't have the influence in Washington it once did, and it doesn't have the influence in Europe that it once did. It needs to find, it needs to redefine, its relationship with Europe and the world.

I think one thing that has come out of this war is that Europeans now understand they cannot rely on the United States to take their interests into account—that they have to act on their own, that they must revise the decision-making procedures in their groupings, the EU and so on, to ensure an effective defense of their interests. They won't be buying huge numbers of American weapons in the future, and they'll be trying to develop their own military-industrial complex, which will be more

effective and independent. And the same, by the way, is true in the Gulf. The meeting in Islamabad between Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Pakistan was in part aimed at arranging some sort of peace in West Asia.

But it was also aimed, I think, at providing a basis for expanding the Saudi-Pakistani Defense Pact—to develop a locally independent military-industrial capacity that would reduce, maybe even eliminate, but certainly reduce dependence on the United States and Europe for weaponry. And this is not easy. It'll take time. But if you look at these countries—Pakistan has abundant manpower, Chinese technology for its military, and quite a serious military tradition. Saudi Arabia has money, assuming that the Strait of Hormuz is once again open to it. And Egypt has heavy industry—the ability to produce tanks, artillery, and other infantry fighting vehicles very efficiently.

Turkey is a high-tech industrial economy that's building its own fifth-generation fighter, the Khan, which I understand means "king of kings." So I think putting the four of them together provides a basis for a military industry that is West Asian—Southwest Asian, perhaps. This is significant and something to watch. Again, it won't happen overnight. In the short term, though, let's remind ourselves that not only does the United States lack the ability to resupply the Gulf countries with defenses—because they were exhausted, our stocks were depleted—but we'll also have to prioritize rebuilding them for ourselves. And traditionally, we've assigned priority to Israel rather than the Gulf Arabs for resupply.

So not only is this the case—that is, they won't be rearmed by the United States—but Ukraine is being disarmed. The Russians are holding back their offensive on the battlefield in anticipation of Ukraine's weakening. And there are now rumors that, in fact, the Russians and Ukrainians are negotiating under the table for some sort of arrangement, because Ukraine has finally realized that time is not on its side. I don't know whether that's true or not, but certainly Ukraine is very apprehensive about the fact that it won't be getting the weapons it thought it would be getting from the United States via Europe. So a lot of changes are flowing from this, I think, utterly disastrous war. As I said, nobody's won this war—but we know who lost.

#Nima

Thank you so much, Ambassador, for being with us today. A great pleasure, as always.

#Chas

Well, nice to be with you, Nima. Keep up the good work.