

Amb. Chas Freeman: Israel's Strategy Just COLLAPSED – Trump Steps In

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#Nima

Hi, everybody. Today's Friday, April 17th, 2026, and our dear friend, Ambassador Chas Freeman, is here with us. Welcome back, Ambassador.

#Chas

Thank you. Glad to be with you, Nima. Maybe you can help me understand what's happening.

#Nima

Then let me play a clip of Donald Trump talking about what's going on. Maybe that will somehow help us understand.

#Speaker 03

It's booming, you know. You don't read about it, you don't see it so much because of what's going on in Iran, which is really, you know, it's been two months. I mean, two months. You've been in other wars for 18 years, four years with me. I'm in there for a month. Well, he said he'd get out in a month. Did you see where I did a list last week? Seventeen years in Vietnam, five years in Afghanistan, and more, much more than that. All these different places. And I said, we were in there for two months. And you know what? We're going to have victory very shortly. This is not...

#Speaker 03

And against a very tough, smart country. These people were fighters. And, you know, I don't want to claim it before the fact, but they have no navy left. 158 ships at the bottom of the sea. 158. Think of it. 158. I got angry. I said, why didn't you save them? We could have used them, you know. They would rather shoot them than save them. I said, what the hell? It's only money. But some of them

were good. They had one named Soleimani. You know Soleimani? We took him out. He was the worst, one of the worst terrorists in the history of this country, this world. They killed many of our people.

#Nima

Is that going to help us understand what's going on?

#Chas

I'm afraid it doesn't help at all. It's rambling, incoherent, delusional. And it's more and more apparent that President Trump has lost touch with reality. And so we see now increasing demands from both sides of the political aisle in the United States, asking to invoke the 25th Amendment and remove him from office on the grounds that he's unfit for office. Some of the things he says are so totally detached from reality that it's quite unnerving to hear him. But anyway, he keeps implying that there is about to be some further evidence of victory. He defines victory as the destruction of Iran's almost non-existent navy and its almost non-existent air force, and the huge amount of damage that the United States has done to civilian infrastructure in Iran, which is a war crime.

He doesn't seem to be bothered at all, as he said, by international law or other constraints. There is a sort of ceasefire now in effect in Lebanon. And I say it's sort of a ceasefire because typically, when the Trump administration tries to do deals, they don't agree on the terms of the deal. They just make an announcement that something has been agreed, and there's been no meeting of the minds under it. And it's very clear that the original ceasefire proposal by Pakistan included Lebanon. It's also clear that Israel had no desire to respect that. It's apparent that the current so-called ceasefire in Lebanon is not respected by Israel. Israeli politicians have apparently been outraged by Donald Trump's premature announcement of that ceasefire. We don't know what is backing it up. Israel is still occupying southern Lebanon.

What's left of it? It's turned southern Lebanon basically into a wasteland, applying the same technique it applied in Gaza. So I'm not sure what sort of victory this is. Iran has not capitulated. It will not capitulate. Hezbollah has not capitulated. It will not capitulate. Hamas has not capitulated. It will not capitulate. What victory are we talking about? A very strange idea of the purpose of war, as though the sole purpose of war is to kill people and destroy buildings. I thought the purpose of war was to make an adjustment in relations or policies on the part of the enemy. In other words, to break the will of the enemy and to have the enemy do what you want. But not a single stated objective of either Israel or the United States has been achieved so far. No victory. It's very hard to know what he's talking about.

#Nima

We had Reuters reporting from a Pakistani source. They were involved in the mediation. They told Reuters that the back-channel diplomacy has made progress, with an upcoming meeting potentially leading to a memorandum of understanding and a broader deal within 60 days. This is what is happening. On the part of the Iranians, when you look at the Persian media, domestic media, you don't see any sign of optimism. They know what's going on. They're getting ready for a new round of the war, and they feel that it's going to happen anytime soon. And on the other hand, when you look at what the United States has done so far since the ceasefire started, we've had more than 75 U.S. logistic flights going to the region.

#Chas

Right.

#Nima

And together with 10,000 soldiers and all of them, we have the USS aircraft carrier George H.W. Bush heading to the region, not going from the Red Sea but the other way. And what does it mean to you?

#Chas

Well, you know, there are many people who predict there will be some kind of military action this weekend. That is the phony ceasefire. There is no ceasefire, really. There's a claim of a ceasefire, which is convenient for Donald Trump. But this phony ceasefire will be broken by an American attack of some sort on Iran, to which Iran, as you indicate, will respond. Iran is far from depleting its missile arsenal, and it will resume bombing Israel and possibly the Gulf Arabs too. Although there is communication going on between the Gulf Arabs and Iran. We know the Saudi foreign minister, Prince Faisal bin Farhan, has been in touch with the foreign minister, Amir-Abdollahian, or his deputy.

We know that Qatar has been trying to do some sort of deal with Iran. It's very interesting that in mentioning problems with American basing in the region, Kuwait is not mentioned by Iran. That suggests something is going on under the table. We don't know. The UAE has actually reestablished communication with Iran. Iran and, of course, Oman never broke it, so there is local action. I think the Pakistani claim of progress in the back-channel messaging doesn't have a great deal of credibility. I can understand why they would want to say that and why the Trump administration would like that. And let me lay out a theory. One is, of course, that Pakistan does deserve a great deal of credit for bringing the warring parties together.

Not Israel, of course, but the United States and Iran. And even more credit for engaging, getting them into a direct meeting rather than the kind of proximity talks or indirect talks that have been the case in the past. Pakistan deserves credit, yes. Pakistan is continuing to try to play a mediating role.

Why not? This is very good for Pakistan. It is backed by China, which is Pakistan's backer in many things. It is exploiting the personal relationship between Hassan Mounir and the head of the Pakistani Armed Forces and Donald Trump. And it makes Pakistan the center of attention in a positive way, whereas, I understand, it had been pretty isolated.

As far as the Trump administration is concerned, you know, whether there's an attack this weekend or not, the mention of 60 days is significant, it seems to me, because what Trump wants to do desperately is get out of this war. And if he can claim there's a negotiation going on, somehow there's a peace process, and we beat the Iranians and so forth, and they're defeated and now they're having to talk to us and all kinds of other nonsense, then he can posture before the American electorate: I won the war, they're talking to me, and we're trying to work out a deal. Progress is being made, as the Pakistanis claim.

There doesn't have to be any reality to that at all. It's a bit like the mines in the Strait of Hormuz. We don't know if there are any mines or not. There may be no mines at all. Imaginary mines are just as good at scaring insurance companies as real ones. And imaginary peace talks are just as good at fooling the stock market and the American public as real talks. This is really, you know, a supreme instance of the strange world we now live in, in which absolutely nothing is verifiable. We don't know what is going on. We don't even know, by the way, how this so-called blockade by the United States Navy is going.

They have not apparently boarded any ships. They have been successful in redirecting, I think, 12 ships. It's not clear whether the Chinese-flagged vessels pay any attention to them or not. Clearly, the US doesn't want a war with China. And what the Navy is doing is not legal. It is essentially an act of piracy and has been called out for that. So what is going on? We don't know. The appearance is that there's a blockade. Now, let me just finish on the blockade issue. You know, before this war, the Strait of Hormuz was open, and it was an international waterway, and nobody controlled it. It was under international law. Now it's under Iranian sovereignty and control. So it's closed, partially.

Think of it like a door. The door is partly open. There's somebody behind it who looks out. If I like you, I'll let you in. If I don't like you, you can stay away. So what does Donald Trump do? He shuts the door and locks it. This is absurd because basically what it does is maximize the impact on the global economy, hurt virtually every country in the world one way or another. And it's so nonsensical that it appears to be insane. So it does nothing for the United States. It also does nothing for Israel, by the way, because Israel is now completely isolated diplomatically. And it just lost its main, you know, it had a veto in the European Union through Viktor Orbán, who is now retired from politics, probably.

He's still young enough to continue, but I don't think we'll see him again in a position of authority. And so this war, which has not stopped—it's in a lull, that's all—may sputter out with phony peace talks, phony ceasefires, you know, which people follow if they want and don't follow if they don't want. It's very clear that Israel does not want an end to this war, because Mr. Netanyahu will be in

jail if the war is over. And he's quite determined not to be in jail. And if you know anything about Israeli jails, you would understand why. He would not want to be in an Israeli jail. So I'm not sure where we are. I guess we just have to, as Donald Trump often says, wait and see, you know?

#Nima

Yeah. Ambassador, with the blockade, as you've mentioned, we had some sort of data coming out of what has happened, coming out of this situation. And we have TankerTrackers' database, and we saw that since the ceasefire started, Iran has exported more than 11 million barrels of oil, which wasn't receiving any sort of challenge from the United States, any sort of difficulties from the United States.

#Chas

That's why I say that, you know, we don't know whether this ceasefire is anything but the manipulation of perceptions, you know, not real. Apparently, modern warfare, whether it's in Ukraine or in West Asia, is full of the manipulation of perceptions. And, you know, you just don't know. You know, it's not the fog of war; it's the fog of the manipulation of opinion deliberately that we're seeing.

#Nima

And as you've mentioned, they have managed to force some of the Iranian vessels to go back. But that phone call that you mentioned between the Iranian foreign minister and the foreign minister of Saudi Arabia, I think, was mostly related to the blockade. And they were telling Saudi Arabia, because Saudi Arabia is using the pipeline, sending their oil to the Red Sea and then getting out of the region, the complication of the region. But Iran is sending a message to the GCC countries: if something is blocking our trade, you're going to face the same. This is the message.

#Chas

Exactly. And at least Iran claims that. I think Ansar Allah, the Houthis, are actually quite independent, but at least Iran claims that the Houthis are prepared to close the Red Sea again—that is, to close the Bab al-Mandab—in which case the exports from Yanbu and the Saudi Red Sea coast north of Jeddah will be stopped. Because at the moment, I think they are exporting almost 7 million barrels a day. And so, you know, their revenues are continuing to accumulate. But Iran did strike a pumping station on that east-west pipeline, and it's shown that it can take it out. So I think you're quite correct. A discussion between Prince Faisal bin Farhan and his counterpart in Iran would have had several elements to it, one of which is an Iranian warning.

But also, I think the Saudis must have made it clear they do not support the American blockade. They said that publicly. They oppose it. And I think, to go back to an earlier discussion we had some

time ago, there has been a very intensive Israeli effort to portray Saudi Arabia as favoring the war when it didn't and doesn't. And Saudi Arabia has too much at stake. It wants peace. It does not want war. Of course, everybody in the Gulf, the Arab side, is very angry with Iran because they've been struck and they would like revenge. But they're beginning to understand that's not possible. You know, Iran is not going to go away. If they can't make peace with Iran, they will be under constant threat.

The United States has now convincingly demonstrated to them that it doesn't care very much about them, that it is not able to defend them, and certainly not willing to make the effort really to do so. So they are in a quandary. They need to reconsider their geopolitical position. Their problem is there really isn't anyone to replace the United States as a projector of power into the region. And here, let me go back quite a bit. After the Gulf War of 1990–91, the war to liberate Kuwait, the United States, unaccountably under the Clinton administration, in the interest of Israel clearly, not in the interest of the Gulf Arabs, abandoned the balancing act that we had played in the region. Previously, we had been over the horizon.

We did not have much military presence in the Gulf, and we used Iran and Iraq to balance each other. So the Gulf Arabs lined up with Iraq to ensure that Iran could not dominate them. And vice versa, Iran, of course, opposed Iraq for that same reason, wanting to maintain its independence and freedom of action. And in January 1993, February 1993 perhaps, as the Clinton administration came in, Martin Indyk, the Australian-Israeli-American person responsible in the National Security Council staff for West Asia, imposed what he called dual containment. That is, we would no longer try to balance Iran and Iraq on the Gulf Arabs and Iran; we would try to balance them both by ourselves. That led to a huge military presence in the region, which has continued to this day.

And it is that dual containment policy which contained the seeds of the disaster we now see. And it doesn't serve, it has never served, the interests of the Gulf Arabs. And so I suspect that we're going to see a lot of geopolitical dynamics unfolding in the year to come in the region. Perhaps a 60-day extension of the ceasefire, as Pakistan has hinted might be the case, is the most graceful way for Donald Trump to exit the region. And here again, as I've said before, I'd just say his bargaining technique is bullying. That's what he does. He tries to destroy you, or he threatens to destroy you — very mafia-style negotiating position. His habit, however, when he fails, is to declare bankruptcy and walk away. You know, so, okay, I failed.

I don't have any further obligations. I won. I won. Here I am. You know, sort of a little bit like the history in the region itself. If you think of Gamal Abdel Nasser after the Suez War — you know, he was badly defeated in that war militarily, but he said, hey, I'm still here. They threw everything they had at me. Look how strong I am. You need me. Pay respect to me. Saddam Hussein did the same thing. You know, they tried to get rid of me, but they didn't get rid of me. And here I am, so on and so forth. And what's more, if you want to have medicine or food, you better be nice to me, because

I'm controlling all of the imports. So maybe Donald Trump is doing the same thing. Hey, you know, whatever happened, I'm still here. I'm, you know, powerful and wise and strong, and you better pay attention to me.

And so on. Maybe that's what's going on. I can't think of any other explanation, frankly, because it's very clear that this war has not been kind to the United States. It has weakened us globally in many ways — militarily, politically. It's about to take a big toll economically. And it's been very unkind to Israel. But because of the blanking out of satellite coverage, we can't tell how bad the damage in Israel is. Some Israelis apparently are going home. I don't know whether they are, because a lot of them relocated abroad during the war. I don't know what they'll find. Maybe they'll find something like the Lebanese who are ignoring the instructions of the Israeli army and their own government and returning to southern Lebanon to check out what's left of their homes.

Maybe they'll find the same thing. This is not good for anybody. It was a very bad decision to get into this war. And it all was on behalf of perverse, I think, ill-considered and erroneously defined Israeli interests. And, you know, one has to hope that at some point Israel will decide that, far from conquering all its neighbors, far from subjugating them, it needs to make peace with them. Maybe it will, after 78 years, for the first time make a proposal for peaceful coexistence. If it did, I suspect Iran would gladly accept that, and so would the Arabs. But anyway, it doesn't seem to be in the cards. In fact, Israel is going the opposite direction at the moment.

#Nima

Here it is, Ambassador. I think to understand what Israel is today, we have to know what is happening, for example, in Lebanon. Donald Trump, just hours ago, said that it may have been a historic day for Lebanon — good things are happening. You know, we had this sort of ceasefire in 2024 between Israel and Lebanon, and Israel was attacking over and over. Is that the same?

#Chas

I suspect it is. I mean, you know, we've had a definite statement from Prime Minister Netanyahu that Israel is not going to withdraw from southern Lebanon. His objective is to annex southern Lebanon. That is the objective of members of his cabinet, and they've been quite vocal about that. That is why they didn't like Donald Trump's proclamation of a ceasefire. I don't think the ceasefire has any grounds to it for several reasons. Let me just say, the United States has arranged a talk between the Lebanese ambassador to Washington and the Israeli ambassador to Washington, who is a woman, by the way.

And those talks serve the interests of the Lebanese government because it has no legitimacy in Lebanon. It is the product of the French-contrived constitution, by which the president is always a Maronite Christian, the speaker of the parliament is always a Shia, and the Sunnis, you know, have their position. So this is not legitimate because those arrangements were made when there were far

more Christians, relatively speaking, and far fewer Shia than there are now. So the Lebanese government, you know, is a nominally effective government, not really effective. And the effective authority in much of Lebanon is Hezbollah.

And the only defense force capable of defending Lebanon is Hezbollah. The Lebanese army can't do it, even if it wanted to. So we have a meeting of the minds here between the Lebanese government, which would love to use the Israelis to destroy Hezbollah and reestablish its authority. So basically, the Lebanese government is saying, you know, we used to be under Iranian influence. Now we want to be under Israeli influence. So the hegemony of Iran is replaced by the hegemony of Israel from their point of view. From the point of view of the Israelis, of course, this is dividing and ruling Lebanon. And they are using the Lebanese government as a tool by which to disarm Hezbollah, in theory.

Of course, the Lebanese government does not have the capacity to disarm Hezbollah. And anyone who's been to Beirut or other parts of Lebanon and watched what's happening in that country knows that. And so this is yet another fantasy foreign policy exercise by the Trump administration. Something good is happening in Lebanon? Exactly what is that? One million people are displaced. The southern part of Lebanon is being reduced to a wasteland. You know, Israel considers any Lebanese in southern Lebanon to be a legitimate target for assassination, murder, massacre, or genocide. What is good about that? Nothing.

And it all brings home the fundamental problem here. You know, we live, even in Brazil, you live in an ocean of Western media. And the Western media repeat various things. So, Iran is the world's greatest sponsor of state terrorism. No, it isn't. Israel is a terrorist state. Iran hasn't committed genocide. It hasn't committed mass murder. It has shot some protesters, yes. Not 45,000 or 30,000 or 20,000 or 7,000 or whatever the number of the day is, because these numbers are all made up. Iran—I'm not a fan of the Iranian government at all—but the statement that it is the champion of terrorism is absurd. Israel is the world champion. How many thousands of people has it assassinated?

How many hundreds of thousands has it bombed or starved to death? What is it doing in Gaza under the so-called ceasefire? What is it doing in the West Bank? Settlers burning houses, shooting people, beating up women, raping people. You know, this is all going on in the West Bank as we speak. And so, what is Israel doing in Lebanon? More of the same. So the fact that the Western media label Iran as the sponsor of terrorism and exempt Israel is quite remarkable. But that is coming to an end because people are now speaking out and, you know, reality is beginning to reemerge from the miasma of propaganda in which it has been submerged.

So, you know, I think, yes, important things are happening in Lebanon, and they include the exposure of Israeli atrocities, Israel's lack of any vision for peace, Israel's covetousness with regard to the land of its neighbors or the co-inhabitants of Palestine, and its lack of any kind of diplomacy. And unfortunately, Israel has contaminated the United States with similar thinking. So we have an administration that has gutted the diplomatic capacity of the United States, is using real estate

agents as diplomats, and has a record of complete failure in diplomacy, and therefore relies on self-styled Secretary of War Hegseth to, you know, bomb, strafe, murder, and inflict suffering on anyone opposed to it. So this is a very, very bad scene. I don't know how the president can claim something good is happening in Lebanon.

#Nima

Ambassador, the big picture that you mentioned moments ago about how the United States has been weakened during this war against Iran, in terms of the bases—American bases in GCC countries—and the toll, you know, in the Strait of Hormuz and everything, that was something else before this war happened. But when you see the broader picture, you see everything that has happened with the case of the bases is directly influencing Israel's capability to defend itself. And Israel, in terms of the offensive force and the defensive force, is not anywhere close to what it was before the war started.

Sure. And how do you see, because in my opinion, the case of Lebanon somehow shows that the United States knows that if Israel continues with the war against Lebanon in the southern part of Lebanon, they're not going to be able to defeat Hezbollah. That's why they have to come up with a second plan, a backup plan, which means making some sort of civil war in Lebanon, making all these parties fight each other while Israel is grabbing the southern part of Lebanon.

#Chas

Well, I think that's exactly the Israeli plan. And the United States, once again, is being led into support of this plan. As far as I know, we have not cut off military sales and assistance to Israel. If we were serious about something good happening in Lebanon, we would pull the plug on the Israeli invasion and occupation of southern Lebanon. You know, Israel's tried this before. It's been beaten by Hezbollah. This war has apparently taken quite a toll on the Israelis. And, you know, I want to end up by talking a little bit about the balance between Israel and Iran. But I think it's fair to say that among the grave damage that this war has done is the loss of morale and moral commitment by Israelis to their army. When they call the reserves up now, they get 40, 50% response.

A lot of people don't respond as they should. In the United States, the US armed forces are decaying. That is, retention rates—meaning reenlistment by people in the military—are way down. Lots of people are saying, you know, I don't want to be part of a military that murders schoolgirls in Minab. That's not what I joined for. I didn't join to be at sea for 11 months and bombing someone who did nothing to the United States, fighting a war on behalf of Israel. So on both sides, in Israel and in the United States, there is a collapse of military effectiveness. Of course, technology and training account for a great deal in the military. Israel is not very good on the ground, evidently. It keeps getting beaten whenever it goes up against Hezbollah.

And the United States is very good on the ground, has been. But I think, you know, morale counts for a great deal in warfare. And the morale of both the United States and Israel is way down. So that's one thing. Let me go back to the balance between Israel and Iran. Iran, you said Israel does not really have the ability to defend itself effectively anymore. That's correct. I don't think there are any quick fixes for that because what is called the magazine depth—the level of supplies of crucial weapons and defensive systems—is very low and not available really to bolster Israeli defenses effectively. But Iran, on its part, you know, Iran tried to defend itself, but it was prepared to take great punishment. That was the whole strategy.

It was the Muhammad Ali rope-a-dope strategy. I'm going to let Israel expend all, and the United States do everything they have at me. And when they run out, I will then attack them. And that is pretty much what Iran did. It fired old missiles, drones, and depleted the defenses of its adversaries, the United States and Israel. And then it began to use its more effective hypersonic missiles and systems with better guidance. And it has demonstrated effectively that it can strike anything in Israel. So the question is, what is it going to target? If we get back into—let me just end up by saying—if, in fact, those people who predict more kinetic action, military action this weekend or next week, or when the two-week ceasefire runs out, if they're right, Donald Trump has a problem.

He's claimed victory. If we were victorious, why do we have to restart the fighting, you know? If he accepts Iran's terms, he also has a problem with any of Iran's terms. He would then be admitting defeat. So what he's done is basically prepare for bankruptcy and walking away, in my view. This is not a long-term solution. Iran has just set some precedents in the Strait of Hormuz which I think are very bad news for the world. If Iran can close the Strait of Hormuz, why can't China close the Strait of Taiwan? Why can't Malaysia or Indonesia close the Straits of Malacca or other straits through Indonesia? There are actually three straits, two in addition to Malacca. If that's the case, where is freedom of navigation? Where is foreign trade? Where is the security of shipping?

I don't think this is a good precedent. And I very much hope that when this war is really over, Iran will have the sense to convene an international conference and create a legal framework for what it's doing. Rather like, if you think of the Dardanelles Treaty, the treaty governing the Bosphorus passage from the Black Sea into the Mediterranean and vice versa. In the age of imperialism, as the Ottoman Empire was decaying, European powers—the British and others—closed that strait. They would not allow Turkey to have any role in managing it. But in a later treaty in the 1930s, they agreed that the Turks should have a management capability. But there were certain rules that were agreed. Something like this has to happen in the Strait of Hormuz. But we're a long, long way from that.

#Nima

Because there are no serious talks between the two parties, and nobody's capable of doing it. And even with J.D. Vance and Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner, you see the level of negotiation. You see

the way that Iran is talking about it, how prepared Iran was for those negotiations. And you see, on the part of the United States, nobody's there to negotiate, to talk. They're basically there to, you know, force their terms on Iran, which doesn't make sense. We have to have the context of what you're talking about. They didn't have it there.

#Chas

It was not a negotiation. It was a performative meeting, a meeting that was intended to influence public opinion, not to accomplish anything. I'm talking about the American position. And it was an opportunity for the United States to present an ultimatum. But the ultimatum had no reality backing it because the United States has not defeated Iran. I agree. The Iranian delegation—apparently there were 70 people in it—was very well prepared. It had experienced diplomats and experts, technical experts. They were prepared for a serious negotiation if one happened. I don't think they expected one to happen, so I don't think they were particularly disappointed when it didn't.

But J.D. Vance, they knew they had the authority from Tehran to conclude an agreement if one was possible. I mean, they would have had to refer a final agreement back to others in Iran, especially the IRGC. But they had authority. J.D. Vance had no authority. He was on the phone 11 times with Donald Trump. He was on the phone several times with Benjamin Netanyahu, who was on the phone with Donald Trump telling Donald Trump what to do. Benjamin Netanyahu controlled the American agenda. J.D. Vance did not. He had no authority to make an agreement. So this was a farce. It was a theatrical performance, not a real effort to resolve the problems at issue. And I'm afraid you're absolutely correct.

Passing messages through the Pakistanis—you know, God bless the Pakistanis—but that is not a substitute for serious engagement on the issues. And what are the issues? The issues are Iran's right under the Non-Proliferation Treaty to enrich uranium; whether Iran will now, as I believe it will, build a bomb. Iran now has been convinced, I'm sure, that its safety lies in having a nuclear deterrent. So it will reach the same conclusion that North Korea did and follow the North Korean path. Now, that is a disaster. It didn't have to happen at all. Number two, the question of the Strait of Hormuz. Closing the door and locking it, as the United States has done, is not an answer to how to open that strait. That strait needs to be open for everybody's reasons.

That's why the Saudis presumably made a phone call to Tehran. They need it open. Everybody needs it open. Iran needs it open. The UAE needs it open. It can be open, but, you know, nobody's making a proposal that would make sense. Everybody's talking about what? A fantasy of military action to open it, but it can't be opened by force. We have a group of 40 countries meeting under the auspices of the French and the British trying to come up with a formula for the Strait of Hormuz. I suggest they look at the Dardanelles Treaty because, in the end, they're going to have to recognize an Iranian management function in the Strait of Hormuz. So that's the second issue. The third issue is the confrontation between Israel and Iran.

Israel has been attacking Iran for decades. It was assassinations, through bombs, through occasional wars, not only against Iran's clients in the resistance to Israel—Hezbollah and Hamas and others, the Houthis—but directly against Iran more recently, with the backing of the United States. That has to stop. There has to be mutual deterrence. Israel has to recognize that it has finally come up against an enemy in the region that can match it and make it suffer, and it is no longer unaccountable, nor does it any longer enjoy impunity. And by the way, the political impunity and legal impunity that Israel has enjoyed are entirely dependent on the United States government.

And the opinion in the United States on this is shifting radically. When Israelis put forward the canned arguments they have for why the United States should favor Israel over everyone else, why Israeli privilege should be augmented, not destroyed, not removed, this has no credibility anymore. People shake their heads in disbelief. They still are making these arguments. How can they say, you know, that they're on the right side when they're killing women and children, blowing up hospitals, doing double-tap executions of medical personnel and humanitarians, and starving people of medicine and food? They can't. So Israel's in a very difficult position now.

It's going to have to change its mind. It's going to have to have regime change. Iran has not had regime change; it's had regime consolidation. That isn't the way it will work in Israel. Unfortunately, I think at the moment the best observers of Israeli politics believe that whoever succeeds Benjamin Netanyahu will be the same, without the corruption that Netanyahu has demonstrated. So there's not a lot of reason to hope in the short term. But in the long term, anyone who cares at all about Israelis should persuade them they need to make peace, not make war. They can't be secure in their neighborhood if they are shooting at everybody all the time.

#Nima

We've learned today, Ambassador, that Starmer, moments ago, arrived in Paris to meet with Macron to discuss the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz. And the question is, how capable is Europe, or what is the path forward for Europe? We had a report on CNN which suggested that, based on their assessment, Europe didn't join the United States in the Strait of Hormuz not because it was a political decision—it was somewhat political—but mainly because of their capabilities when it comes to their military. They're not capable; they're so much weakened. And that's why they decided not to join in the Strait of Hormuz.

#Chas

You know, I think, yes, they're very weak militarily in terms of their ability to project beyond Europe. They're not weak in Europe. You know, if the Russians actually had the ambitions that they attribute to Moscow, they would be able to stand their ground. But what they don't have—and this gets to the political issue—is unity. They don't have unity of command militarily. They don't have unified military industries. They are each nation out for itself. They don't have the ability to coordinate foreign policy effectively. No, they're all cock-a-hoop. They're all happy Viktor Orban is gone. But Viktor Orban's

departure does not alter Hungarian interests. And Hungary has an interest in maintaining a cordial relationship with Russia, and it will continue to do so, even under Peter Magyar, the new prime minister.

So obviously the second issue, the political issue—the ability to coordinate a common position and stick with it—is a big problem for Europeans, which is why, as powerful as it is economically, as effective as it is in assimilating countries on its periphery, producing reform in places like Turkey through the accession process to the EU, major reforms, changing the complexion of politics in places like Bulgaria and Romania and so on—as effective as it is in that realm, it is utterly ineffective as an international actor. It doesn't exist. Despite having two seats on the Security Council, it does not exist as an effective international shaper of events.

So, no, I think there are many reasons that, in the end, the Europeans who invented modern diplomacy need to rediscover it. There's no evidence they know how to do it at the moment. And so, again, I come back to the long-term solution in the Strait of Hormuz: recognition of a managerial role for Iran and Oman under agreed rules. And that will require a serious negotiating process, which we don't see at the moment. And it will require a bit of imagination, and it will certainly require diplomatic ability, which is not in evidence anywhere these days, except in Iran. I mean, Araghchi is very impressive as a diplomat. So is Sergei Lavrov. So is Wang Yi. Where is the counterpart in the West? I don't see anyone.

#Nima

Ambassador, I think the point that you've just raised is so important, so crucial right now, because the United States' foreign policy under the Rubio administration—under Rubio—where is Rubio? Who's Rubio? And he's not part of the talks in Ukraine. He's not part of the talks with Iran. I assume he's not doing anything of that sort vis-à-vis Taiwan and China. He's so hawkish about Latin America. Whatever comes to Latin America, he's just 100% into regime change, whatever, military operation. But there is no big picture of Marco Rubio and who this guy is in the Trump administration.

#Chas

Well, I'll make a couple of comments. First of all, he's obviously a right-wing Cuban-American politician, first and foremost. And if you live in Brazil, you probably understand what that means. He's a militarist in the Western Hemisphere. He doesn't understand diplomacy. He's not the Secretary of State. He's also the supposed head of the National Security Council, a job he's not doing. There's no policy coordination, no policy process operating. He has other jobs—national archivist and all kinds of things. And, um, basically he's serving in an administration which is, uh, run by a strongman, Donald Trump. And he, you know, so that's the first thing. Uh, by the way, that strongman is now mentally unstable, if he ever was stable. So, um, this is not a good thing. Rubio is not a check on Donald Trump.

Uh, he is a sycophant. He sucks up to Donald Trump. Um, why? Because he wants to be president. And Donald Trump just gave him a big gift by humiliating JD Vance, sending JD Vance to interfere in the Hungarian election in a manner that failed spectacularly, and sending JD Vance on a fruitless mission to Islamabad to fail as a diplomat. So Marco Rubio is probably feeling pretty good at the moment. He is apparently joining the discussion the Europeans are having about how to open the Strait of Hormuz. I don't know whether he has any ideas at all. I suspect he doesn't. So that's that. But effectively, you know, we're in a world in which strongmen prevail. And so we have Asim Munir in Pakistan, who is very clearly in charge, not Shehbaz Sharif, although he has his functions.

We have Vladimir Putin in Moscow, very much in charge, a strongman, very clever fellow, and very much in control of his mental capacities, unlike our president. And then we have Xi Jinping, who is first among equals in the Politburo in China—not a dictator, but a very powerful director of affairs. We had Khamenei in Iran. It's not clear whether Mostafa Khamenei, his son, has anything like that, any real authority at this point. We don't even see him. He's apparently badly wounded by the assassination of his family, even though he was in the garden at the time. And so we think the IRGC is in charge, but we don't really know who is making the ultimate decisions in Iran. So here, and then we can look at India—Modi. We look at Netanyahu, you know, in Israel. These are individuals with entourages, cronies.

They're not the head of an institutional framework. I guess the Chinese may be the exception in that regard, because the Chinese Communist Party, which has almost 100 million members—think about it—so, you know, I mean, this is not a one-man show. And I think the actual number is something like 93 million, about the same population as Iran. But we're in a world in which international law is dead. Nobody is paying much attention to it. People defend it if they're Chinese—they defend it, but they don't do anything to enforce it. And the United States ignores it. And Israel never paid any attention to it. And, you know, Israel's broken every UN Security Council resolution there is, and done so with great pleasure. So, strange world. It's not the world that we were used to. You know, even the Cold War was a good deal better than this.

#Nima

Ambassador, we have a really formidable player in Europe, which is Spain, in my opinion. So far, Spain reopened their embassy in Iran. They went to China. They received Russian oil. You know, Russia sent Spain, as El País in Spain reported, its largest gas shipment in history during the first month of the war in the Middle East. This is a country that is somehow distancing itself from the official policy in Europe.

#Chas

Oh, very much so. I think, you know, in the context of the West Asian war, Spain took the first step to deprive the United States of the use of bases or its airspace. And it has refused to accept Donald

Trump's dictation of his defense budget. It does not accept the belligerent NATO policy toward Russia. You know, I think Pedro Sánchez, the prime minister, has been in China now four or five times during this term in office. Spain is obviously doing what a country should do—looking out for its own interests first. America first, España primera, Spain first, you know, and that is very notable. But Spain has started a trend after the Spanish.

The French closed their airspace to participation in the Gulf and the West Asian war, the war on Iran. Italy has told Israel it's not renewing its defense relationship, and it has closed down Sigonella, the big base in Sicily, to the United States. And so what we're watching is a gradual dismemberment, a dissolution of NATO, meaning the American domination of Europe. People no longer follow American direction. Now, all of them, not just in Europe but in Pacific Asia—for example, South Korea has taken a very direct course away from the United States, with really very strong criticism of Israel, very blunt statements that it doesn't want to be associated with countries that behave like Israel does.

Japan is going toward a defense budget of 2% of GDP, double what it was. Germany's doing the same. So it's possible, if you're Donald Trump, to imagine that these things are happening because you've said they should. You know, like he claims the Pope's position was arranged by him. You know, so anyway, he imagines a lot of things. But the fact is that these countries are edging—they are building their own defense capabilities. They are building their own capacity for independent foreign policies. They're building a capacity to follow their selfish interests rather than those of an external backer like the United States. And the same thing is true, by the way, in the Persian Gulf.

If you look at the Islamic Revolution from a geopolitical point of view, what it represented was Iran casting off Western tutelage. We are not going to be a country slave of the West anymore. We are going to be our own country with our own policies and so on. Maybe those policies were kind of annoying and not very effective, but you can't deny the fact that Iran began something which the Gulf Arabs and others are now following. Look at Egypt developing its own relationship with China and Russia again. And so we're seeing countries—middle-ranking countries, smaller countries—break out of the embrace of any foreign patron. You know, look at Turkey. I'm not a great fan of Mr. Erdogan these days.

I thought when he was mayor of Istanbul, he was quite impressive. Perhaps he should have stayed there. But anyway, you can't deny the fact that Turkey is now an independent force. And we're seeing new relationships crafting. That's what happened with the Pakistani get-together with Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey that started the mediation process. That has many implications, which we talked about before. So I think in the end, this war is accelerating a lot of trends that were already there. And we're moving—as you know, I like the concept of nodes rather than poles to describe the world—because the node is a three-dimensional thing that can turn. It can have a strong relationship in one dimension and a weak one in another. That can change.

You can have, for example, a very strong political relationship between a country—let us say the UAE and the United States—a strong military relationship, a strong economic relationship. But then you can have a weakening of all those. We're seeing certainly all of those three areas being moved. Saudi Arabia may be militarily close to the United States; politically, it's quite distant. Economically, it is far less engaged than it used to be. We can look at the U.S.-China relationship. It has a very strong economic component, a very weak, unstable political element, and military confrontation, not cooperation. So these are multidimensional things, and it's true. Iran has a relationship with China, as well as a relationship—not a good one—with the United States. It has a relationship with Saudi Arabia.

It has a relationship with India. It has a relationship with Pakistan. So we're talking about networks of relationships that change, which is why I like the idea of nodes—connectors in a network, connectors of relationships. And we're seeing that emerge now. Spain, to go back to your original point, is a primary exemplar of this. It has this very strong position on the issue of Palestinian self-determination. It has emerged as a much greater influence on Latin American policy than it was. It is charting an independent course in Europe, building its own relationships with other countries like China, like Russia. Um, and, uh, this is the future. We're watching the future. Spain is maybe first, you know, but it will come, you know, anyway, maybe, maybe.

#Nima

Yeah.

#Chas

Yeah.

#Nima

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

#Chas

Well, it's always a pleasure to speak with you, and I thank you for giving me the space to rant. Thank you very much.

#Nima

Thank you so much for being with us.