

Chas Freeman: US-Israel Divorce, End of NATO & Sea Power

Ambassador Chas Freeman discusses how the relevance of sea power decline in terms of controlling transportation corridors and energy, while the relative decline of the US will result in the end of NATO and US-Israel divorce. Ambassador Freeman was a former Assistant Secretary of Defense, earning the highest public service awards of the Department of Defense for his roles in designing a NATO-centred post-Cold War European security system and in reestablishing defence and military relations with China. He served as U. S. Ambassador to Saudi Arabia during operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm. Books by Prof. Glenn Diesen: <https://www.amazon.com/stores/author/B09FPQ4MDL> Follow Prof. Glenn Diesen: Substack: <https://glenndiesen.substack.com/> X/Twitter: https://x.com/Glenn_Diesen Patreon: <https://www.patreon.com/glenndiesen> Support the research by Prof. Glenn Diesen: PayPal: <https://www.paypal.com/paypalme/glenndiesen> Buy me a Coffee: buymeacoffee.com/gdieseng Go Fund Me: <https://gofund.me/09ea012f>

#Glenn

Welcome back. We are joined again by Ambassador Chas Freeman, the former U.S. Assistant Secretary of Defense. Thank you for coming back on the program.

#Chas Freeman

Great to be with you, Glenn.

#Glenn

We often see that maritime dominance is tied to hegemonic power, or at least it's always been a key component of great power rivalry. And you can argue that the so-called hegemon of the British in the 19th century, and then the American hegemon from the 20th century, was largely dependent on controlling the world's seas. Indeed, after World War II, the U.S. Navy having key control over main maritime corridors was a key component. And this can have positive effects as well — if you have one hegemon controlling, then often they have an interest in keeping the waterways open, as long as it's under their administration, of course. But for the first time in a very long time, it appears that this is no longer the case — and nowhere is this more evident than in the Strait of Hormuz.

Of course, we know that there's been pushback in other areas as well. But how do you assess what's going on now, given that this is such a difficult war for the U.S. to walk away from? And I say this because it does appear that the Strait of Hormuz is the main problem. This will prevent Trump from going home and declaring victory.

#Chas Freeman

Well, let me go back in history a bit. I think, you know, the Columbian Exchange, when Christopher Columbus stumbled onto the beach in the Bahamas and set off a revolution in cuisine, among other things. Well, the Columbian Exchange that happened led to a huge battle, a set of naval battles, over the course of centuries to determine dominance. The Dutch, the French, the Spanish, the English in particular contested, and the Portuguese before them. Actually, the Portuguese took the Strait of Hormuz briefly and were dislodged by the Iranians. But I think what's happened is that the Anglo-American hegemony over the seas — you know, "Britannia rules the waves" — was the song of a time in the 19th century.

This is gone. And let me trace that back a bit. In 1763, at the end of the Seven Years' War, Britain decisively defeated French naval power and became the dominant power on the seas. And that lasted through the 19th century. And I think we can date with some assurance when the global dominance of the seas passed to the United States. And it happens to be my birthday — March 2nd, 1943. The Battle of the Bismarck Sea began on that day, lasted three days. It marked the extreme extent of Japanese naval power in the South Pacific, and it was the moment at which historians date the transition from British to American dominance of the seas. I think that's 163 years ago.

And what's clear is that evolution since then has progressively reduced the impact and the scope of that control of the oceans. And let me start by—in the early 18th century, the range of a cannon was about three miles. And that enabled states to establish a three-mile limit for their territorial waters. As artillery improved, that became essentially meaningless. And finally, in lengthy negotiations for the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, there was a political compromise on 12 miles as the limit of the territorial sea, but that had no basis in fact as the three-mile limit had. In other words, the range of shore-based artillery, missiles, and the like expanded progressively.

The 12 miles was a purely arbitrary thing. We had, in the preamble to this, countries—particularly those in the Eastern Pacific, South America, Peru, and others—attempting to establish 200-mile limits. And that figure found its way into the Law of the Sea, but not as a territorial limit, as the limit on seabed control. Anyway, the range of missiles and so forth has steadily increased. We now have Chinese missiles that are terminally guided, ballistic missiles that can apparently strike out to about 2,000 kilometers away from the Chinese shore and kill a carrier, kill a carrier battle group. And what we've seen in the battle over the blockade of the Strait of Hormuz is a new enforced limit.

The aircraft carriers, the Abraham Lincoln and others, had to stay at a remove of about 1,000 kilometers, 600 miles away from Iranian shore batteries. The other ships stayed 200 kilometers—sorry, 200 miles, 300 kilometers—away because that's the range of Iranian cruise missiles and drones. And what we've seen is something we had not really seen before in history, and that is a repetition of what Ansar Allah, the Houthis in Yemen, were able to do—namely, a land-based sea blockade. They managed to blockade the Strait of Bab al-Mandab into the Red Sea without having a

navy of any consequence at all. They did this from the land. And Iran has now done the same with the Strait of Hormuz.

So we hear accounts of, well, you know, yesterday Central Command said they sank six small Iranian speedboats in the Strait of Hormuz. But that's essentially irrelevant because the control of the Strait is not from those ships, those small boats. It's from shore installations, which the Iranians spent decades preparing for. And essentially, there is no military manner to open the Strait of Hormuz—checkmate. So this is a very important change. Traditionally, we thought of war as taking place in various domains on the land, but the sea surrounds the land, and you can access the land from the sea, so the sea was a superior domain before the land began to be able to keep the ships at sea at bay.

The air over the land and the sea is a superior domain because you can control both the sea and the land from the air. And space, which is above the atmosphere, is a fourth domain, which is now very much contested between nations. But what we're just seeing with the blockade of the Red Sea and the blockade of the Strait of Hormuz is a sea change—not to make a pun. It is a real sea change. And so the Anglo-American dominion, which, as you indicated, had many positive effects—in effect, it established a rules-based order. It decreed it. It managed it. It controlled it. It punished those who violated it.

So we have so-called freedom of navigation operations now, designed to sustain the order. But these are no longer viable. And so this is really an important historical development. I mean, going back to Columbus, we've seen sea power, as Admiral Mahan argued, as a central influence on history. Now land power is back as a dominant factor. So I think this is very interesting and worthy of consideration. I'm not going to write a book called **The Influence of Land Power on History**, but thinking about this, I'm really quite struck by the geopolitical and strategic implications of what is happening.

#Glenn

The whole effort of contesting the dominant maritime power has been a key component of geopolitics for more than a century now. Many people often refer to, when they want to contrast Mahan, they would look towards Mackinder, for example, this idea of controlling, being a land power. And indeed, if you see some of the infrastructure projects of the Russians and the Chinese over the past years, it's largely about connecting this larger Eurasian landmass by land to deny, essentially, the maritime powers this dominance. But again, this is based mostly on transportation and energy routes by land.

But the technologies, especially with the drones and all of this, are also, of course, minimizing the strength or the relevance of dominating the seas considerably. But there's another aspect to this, though. I mean, when you look at the British, for example, their control over the sea was also to deny access to trade routes to rivals, as the Germans would experience in any war. They could have

their ports blockaded and they would have famines. But in the present era, we see that the control of the seas has also had some benefits for the United States. How do you see this now linked up to the energy trade?

Because the petrodollar now is quite central, and you can't really maintain the petrodollar without the Strait of Hormuz. Some of the news coming out over the last few days has been about the US and UAE, for example, doing these swap lines, currency swaps. I'm not sure how to read this. I'm thinking that the UAE can't really make dollars anymore, so they might have to start selling their dollar bonds and assets, which is not great for the US. I'm not sure if this is the reason behind the currency swaps. How do you see the larger energy game, I guess, tied into these transportation corridors?

#Chas Freeman

Well, as usual, you've raised a lot of questions.

#Glenn

Sorry, that was too much.

#Chas Freeman

No, it's not a problem. But let me try to disentangle that a bit. First, it is very interesting, I think, that the traditional land power of China, the only country that burned its navy and destroyed it in order to sustain a military based on the land—I'm talking about Admiral Zheng He in the Ming Dynasty and the decision in Beijing to abolish the navy and leave the foreigners to their own devices, I guess—China is now a major sea power. It has a larger navy than the United States. That doesn't mean, in the new context that I described, that China is going to inherit the Anglo-American maritime hegemony. It will not. But it does indicate an alteration. Second, you're quite right.

The connectivity that the Chinese in particular pursued—railroads, roads, airports, free trade zones, transit arrangements, in-bond storage at frontiers, and so forth—has a maritime dimension, but it is mainly land-based. And in fact, the Iranians are now reliant on railroads to take some of their oil to China overland. The US and Israel have been bombing the rail lines, but it turns out that railroad workers are very good at repairing bombed rail lines. We should have learned that in Vietnam, where there were 300,000 Chinese soldiers, military engineers who kept the railroads operating for the Vietnamese and defended them with their defenses during the Indochina War.

I think you're right to point to the fragility of the petrodollar at present. Quite correct to say, I think probably the UAE told the U.S. Treasury, look, we don't have any revenue in dollars anymore. And if you don't give us dollars to use for our trade, we're going to have to move primarily to the Chinese yuan. And this, of course, would be a direct strike at American global financial hegemony, and it

explains the swap arrangement that you mentioned. I do think there's a final element here, and that is that the Chinese evidently judge that the United States has caused such confusion internationally in financial markets that instead of passively resisting sanctions against the purchase of Iranian oil, they can actively oppose that.

And there's now an order, the equivalent of an executive order in the United States, an order from the central government in China to Chinese banks and oil companies not to respect the newest American sanctions. So this is a direct attack on the weaponization of the dollar by the United States. I don't know what the outcome will be. Not all attacks succeed, as we've just seen in the case of Iran. You can attack Iran, but that doesn't mean Iran must capitulate. So what is going on is—and to go back to the word checkmate—is a checkmate or a stalemate. And there are no negotiations. There is no military means of opening the Strait of Hormuz at acceptable cost. Ships trying to run that gauntlet would be destroyed.

It may be that the cruise missiles that the Iranians fired at American ships, which allegedly did no damage or were shot down or diverted somehow, did not strike those ships. That's what Central Command declares, contrary to the Iranian claim that they struck them. But it really doesn't matter. They keep these ships at bay, which is all that is required. And there are no negotiations. So, well, I just basically say there are two ways to open the strait. One is military, and that won't work. And the other way is to negotiate with Iran and reach a compromise. And there is no negotiation at all.

In fact, Stephen Witkoff, the misbegotten envoy of the United States, with a perfect record of failure in every international negotiation he's entered, now has a new deputy called, I think, Nick Stewart, who is from the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies, which is a Mossad front in Washington. And he is on record publicly as opposing all negotiations with Iran on the usual Zionist grounds. So I think the negotiations that have taken place have essentially been performative, intended to manipulate capital markets and manipulate public opinion and oil prices to the benefit of somebody—a large benefit to corrupt officials in the United States and elsewhere. So, what does this mean?

This means that, contrary to what you and I have often discussed, there will be no negotiated resolution of this war. It will probably subside into something resembling the previous situation, where we had a low-intensity conflict ongoing between Israel and Iran that went on for decades. Prime Minister Netanyahu has openly stated that he spent 40 years trying to find a president he could talk into joining Israel in attacking Iran in the manner that they have. But I think this has been quite a disillusioning experience. For the United States, it was opposed by the U.S. military, clearly. Civilians are always more bloodthirsty than the military, who recognize that they could get killed if they get into a war.

Warriors are always more enthusiastic about diplomacy than civilians for that reason. But there was no diplomacy. There was only a war, and it hasn't worked out. And so I think the implication is, if we're talking about no resolution, we're talking about a return to a lower-level intensity conflict, perhaps illuminated from time to time by explosions, then Israel will not have the United States with

it to renew an attack on Iran. That puts Israel in a very different position than it has been, and I think it's something to watch. Will the United States, with respect to Iran, continue to have Israel's back militarily and politically? And I suspect the answer is going to be ambivalent and ambiguous, not clear.

#Glenn

Well, if there is no diplomatic path, as you said, there's no real negotiations. And also, there's no way of forcing the Strait of Hormuz by military force unless the U.S. is able to just pound on the Iranians until they essentially throw their hands up and give up. But that also doesn't seem like a possibility because, for good reasons, they consider this to be an existential threat. So they just have to absorb all the pain, no matter how horrible it is. So there is no peaceful solution. There's no military solution. But as you suggested, being able to just push this over a long period of time doesn't seem like an option either, because the U.S. has problems with the military equipment.

There's limits on how many interceptor missiles it can come up with. And also, of course, this is a key economic choke point. That is, we're looking at a massive economic crisis. So given that this is a difficult situation, one of the reasons suggested why other presidents besides Trump, you know, they all refused to go down this path for good reason. But now that we're here, do you see this as essentially explaining what Trump has done over the past two days now? Because he announced he would force open the Strait of Hormuz and, you know, if Iran dared to do anything, he would wipe them off the map. This kind of thing is... Is this just desperation, or do you see a plan here?

#Chas Freeman

No, I don't think there's any plan. No, there's never been any evidence of a strategy connected. But let me make a few points. I think we're in an economic war of attrition. And as I put it, it's like two men wrestling, each trying to strangle the other and wondering, you know, we don't know who's going to be choked to death first. But I would say the odds are good that Iran can outlast the United States in such a contest. For one thing, they're at home. They're churning out missiles, presumably in their underground factories. They're not weakened. The blockade that the United States has imposed is far from perfect. Ships do get through, so revenue is accruing now at much higher prices for oil. And, by the way, the price is on its way up quite a bit in the near future. This means that Iran does have revenue.

But the American blockade is very fatiguing in terms of operational tempo and, as you mentioned, the equipment, but more particularly the sailors aboard these ships who've been at sea for interminable periods. There's some reason to believe that some of the problems that have happened on these ships are the result of sabotage by the crews expressing their anger at being essentially abused and not taken care of in any effective manner. So at some point, the American blockade becomes unsustainable. I think Trump is recognizing that, which is why he proposed that there be an attempt to open the strait with force or escorts, which doesn't work, and I'm sure his own military

told him it wouldn't work, but he doesn't seem to take advice very much, so he went ahead. But what I'm expecting is some kind of violent gesture as he departs — the Strait of Hormuz.

In other words, he will give Iran the finger, the middle finger, and leave, muttering imprecations and hurling bombs for a day or two at Iran, claiming that he faced them down, he won the war, and all that. And unfortunately for him, I don't think this will work very well either, because his own legitimacy, his authority in American politics, is at an all-time low, and I don't think he has any authority or legitimacy anymore internationally. Now, when we're looking at the knock-on effects of this war, they're quite profound — not just the change in sea power that I've mentioned, but we see NATO flaking apart, with Trump responding in a petulant manner to criticism from Chancellor Merz, for example, trying to figure out how he can punish Spain.

He seems to be driving Spain into trouble, Prime Minister Sánchez into ever more strident opposition to the war rather than doing anything else. He's clearly at odds with Macron. I think Keir Starmer has pretty much had it. What we're hearing now in Britain is, in regard to the 250th anniversary of American independence from Great Britain, it's time for Great Britain to declare independence from the United States — an ironic result of all this. We're seeing, and you and I have discussed this before, countries like Germany and Japan, World War II enemies of the United States, edging by doubling their defense budgets and acquiring independent capabilities. That has huge implications for European security and the unity of the European Union.

It also has a lot of implications for people in Asia, in Pacific Asia in particular, where Japan is striking out on its own. So, knock-on effects — not to include the status of the dollar as the universal means of trade settlement, and therefore the prime component of currency reserves. So, lots of things going on. And all this taking place while the Russians reap windfall profits from oil and gas and deploy their ability to supply energy to Europe as a weapon, again influencing European politics. So it's a huge thing, and it's ongoing. Not only is there no war termination strategy with regard to Iran, there's no strategy for handling these various geopolitical shifts at all, as far as I can see. Perhaps you can differ with me on that. Can you see a strategy?

#Glenn

No, none. But when it comes to Iran, if I were asked to give advice, I wouldn't know where to start for the United States at this moment because the U.S. has really locked itself in here. I mean, as I said, there's no good negotiation path. There's no path to military victory. Trump's struggling with the military component and economic, the domestic issues. There's no good way out of this. I'm thinking, if Trump would want to do something grand, a bigger thing, then he would perhaps be able to take advantage of this to carry out what was initially the overarching grand strategy that we saw in the National Security Strategy of December 2017, when it more or less indicated that the U.S. would have to adjust to a multipolar world by, well, making priorities.

So go to the Western Hemisphere and go to East Asia. But if you're going to pivot there, you have to pivot out of Europe, out of the Middle East. It looks like this defeat could be an opportunity. If he wanted to go this way, he could argue that, listen, the Middle East is not our war. We don't use the Strait of Malacca. Let them worry about it. And also, the Europeans betrayed us. So we're going to leave them too and essentially make a great shift forward — make a victory out of the defeat.

#Chas Freeman

Yes. There are people in the United States who make that argument, of course. I suspect Marco Rubio might agree with that. Who knows? But he's absent from anything other than the project to take Cuba somehow. So, yes, that is a thought. You know, there are a couple of this, but I think this Iran war is our Syracuse expedition. We don't have Alcibiades yet — apparently the handsome, marvelous orator and intellectual who could hold his own with Socrates and the like. But we have an equally foolish military adventure that is going very badly. Or maybe we should think about, you know, what do you do when you are defeated? It's not as though we haven't been defeated. Think of the Indochina wars.

You know, sometimes you just have to accept humiliation and walk away. But we also have things going on in the United States which are relevant, and that is, it's very clear that Donald Trump is off his rocker. I mean, if you look at the posts that he puts on Truth Social in the middle of the night — you know, arrest Barack Obama as a traitor, accuse the Speaker or the Democratic leader in the House of the same, bomb this, bomb that, remove troops from Germany for no particular reason, without really understanding the importance of those troops. I mean, I think this war has clarified thinking on both sides of the Atlantic about the American presence in Europe.

It turns out that both sides understand that it's not really to defend Europe. It's to enable the projection of American power into West Asia. And so if you look at the pattern of American military activity, pay and spending, you will find that, you know, Israel dwarfs everyone else by many factors of magnitude. And budgets have something to do with what priorities really are. And American priorities, it turns out, in the old world, are the defense of Israel, not much else. But as I indicated, that has been gravely compromised by the failure of this war to produce any kind of reasonable outcome. So I don't know where we're headed, but I don't like what I'm seeing.

#Chas Freeman

So... I don't know where we're heading, but I don't like what I see.

#Glenn

No, I agree. I prefer gradual, incremental changes in the international system. These big shocks, I think they're incredibly destabilizing. So I'm watching with some concern even the decline of NATO. I

don't think pursuing NATO expansion as a hegemonic model for Europe was ever a good idea. That is to re-divide the continent. In my opinion, this is the reason why we have a war in Ukraine. But I would like to see it gradually being reduced, ideally reformed into an inclusive security architecture. That's the ideal scenario, but it doesn't look like that's a possibility.

So you could have the very quick unraveling of NATO. Again, I would have liked to see slower reforms. But I wanted to ask about... As you said, we have the decline now of sea powers. Due to some of the fallout now over our proxy war against Russia, we will now probably see the death of NATO. But if the US wants to really walk away from the war against Iran, could that also imply that the US would have to walk away from the relationship with Israel? You alluded to something along those lines before.

#Chas Freeman

Yes, I think that's the clear implication. And, you know, if you look at youth polling in the United States, you find that Israel is extremely unpopular. Maybe that's too weak a statement. Many people positively loathe it for what it does. And I'm not speaking just of Christian Americans or Muslim Americans. I'm talking about Jewish Americans as well. The many Jewish communities in the United States, the younger people in them, don't want anything to do with Israel. So the base of support, when you look at the Democratic Party, you've got 6% support for Israel. It's considerably more, some plurality, in the Republican Party, but it's declining.

And the evidence of, you know, the things that the people around Netanyahu are doing—for example, Ben-Gvir's birthday, his wife gives him a cake with gallows on it. We're watching the gasification of southern Lebanon. We're watching Israel commit acts of piracy off Crete, taking people off on a flotilla, beating them up badly, kidnapping some of them. A complete contempt for any decency or rules of law on the part of Israel, which is deeply disquieting to those people who have traditionally supported Israel, whatever it did, and very offensive to everyone else. So it just... No, I mean, I think, you know, as someone said—it's not my judgment—but someone said that Netanyahu is the single Jew who has done the most to promote anti-Semitism since the murder of Jesus Christ by Jews.

You know, he has taken the flag of Israel with its six-pointed star and made that the equivalent, in most people's minds, of a swastika, replicating the worst crimes of European fascism. So, does this end well for Israel? I can't imagine it does. I don't know how many people have left Israel for other cliques. I know that there are all kinds of discussions of Jewish colonies here, there, and everywhere. I mean, Milei, the rather odd president of Argentina, who is an ardent Zionist, apparently has been talking about a colony of 300,000 Israelis in Patagonia, which, you know, nothing wrong with that, I suppose, but it's hardly supportive of the continued existence of the Zionist state in West Asia.

So, anyway, I think that Israel's future is now very dubious. And the same thing seems to be happening to it that happened to the Christian Crusader kingdoms established in the same locale, um, what, 700, 800 years ago. They didn't last a century, neither of them. Israel's getting up there, but I think it's looking very dubious that it will survive, given its status as an international pariah and its loss of support among the people in the United States and some European countries that have ardently supported it.

#Glenn

The collapse of Israel's reputation is quite extraordinary in international affairs. That is, it's almost as shocking as the improvement in the image of Iran. But, yeah, because, well, at least when I grew up, the way one would look at Israel was always in the context of the Second World War. That is, what happened to the Jews in Europe during the Holocaust, the horror of it. And so the idea that the Jews would have their own homeland back, you know, in Israel, it was, you know, it was a nice, appealing idea. And the fact that it was also quite a liberal, secular Israel, you know, it was much easier to accept.

And yes, we know that the new homeland was at the cost of displacing the Palestinians. But because of the appeal of this, I think it was easy maybe to look the other way as long as it didn't take on too grotesque forms. I don't like to say it, but I think many people, like myself, did maybe look a little bit the other way. But now that it's been taken to these extremes, there's a distaste for what Israel has become. But you see it even inside Israel, you see it, as you said, among the Jewish population in the United States. So it's quite a horrible mistake that Netanyahu has made there.

#Chas Freeman

You know, I'm a certified antique. You get to be that when you cross 50 years, I guess, in the consignment shops. Anyway, I'm consigned to a retirement home. So I remember the 1950s very well. And I was a great admirer of what I thought Israel was. And we just didn't know about, we didn't think about, it wasn't reported that 750,000 Palestinians had been driven from their homes to create this pioneer state. And we all took it for granted. And I admired it. And this was aided by very skillful propaganda from Israel. I think of Leon Uris and the book **Exodus**, then a film with Paul Newman, a very handsome fellow, playing a key figure in the establishment of Israel. So you're right.

And even though I don't know what the basis for American guilt about the Holocaust is, I think, you know, we joined the Soviet Union in liberating the death camps. But, I mean, of course, we had anti-Semitism, I think a much milder form than the Europeans did. But anyway, we supported Israel emotionally, emotionally. That's all been stripped away by behavior that can only be described as evil. You know, killing babies, bombing hospitals, destroying churches and mosques, murdering people who are trying to get food, sniping at them, killing kids with shots in the head and the belly, and shooting people in the knee to cripple them, kidnapping, piracy, torture, sodomy in the jails.

We've seen every horror you can imagine. And it's not surprising that attitudes have changed. I spent a lot of time in my early retirement basically seeing what Israel was becoming and trying to save it from itself by speaking out against the evolution that it was undergoing. And, of course, that had no effect except to win ostracism for me. So I'm on blacklists and so forth, which I now take as a badge of honor, but I was rather annoyed at it at the time. So, yeah, I think Israel—and it's not just Netanyahu, by the way.

I mean, he's certainly guilty of many things. And his insistence on staying in power because he's a wartime prime minister is, frankly, enormously destructive to Israeli interests. But you have 80% of Israelis, apparently, according to polls, supporting the war with Iran. So this is not just an individual; it's a society that is sociopathic, not mentally healthy. And I don't know who wants Israelis who have been committing war crimes. You know, I guess there's an issue in Britain now with a dozen dual nationals who are known to have committed war crimes, and the British establishment is just leaving them alone, but the public is energized against them.

And so this has—you can foresee a future in which to be Israeli is to be unable to travel, to gain entry to any country because of the reputation that the world's most moral army, as they used to call themselves, has established for itself. We have things like the photo of a soldier in Lebanon chopping off the head of a statue of Christ. You know, I'm of Protestant background. I don't like statues of Christ particularly, but I find that truly sacrilegious. I can't imagine beating up a nun in Jerusalem—another video that's out recently—spitting on Christians. This is not wise if you're dependent on foreign support. Of course, as you indicated, Donald Trump is in a dilemma between the horns of the Epstein files and what they may contain, or what they do contain.

I should not use the subjunctive. They obviously do contain very damaging evidence against him. And on the other side, he has his Zionist plutocratic donors who could cut off support. And he has the example of Charlie Kirk, whose death has never been really explained, but who was assassinated. By whom? For what? There's a lot of reason to suspect it was because he was turning against his Zionist sponsors. Anyway, this is not a joke. This is pretty serious stuff, and there is no easy exit from it. Sometimes you just have to take the blow to the solar plexus, double over in pain, and walk away. And I'm afraid that is where we are with the war in Iran.

#Glenn

I've seen interviews with Joe Kent, the former counterterrorism director under Trump, who resigned. And he was making this point that they wanted to investigate what happened to Charlie Kirk, and he was essentially shut down, told not to, which is kind of remarkable. Yeah.

#Chas Freeman

No, it's... well, you know, there are questions to be asked about many assassinations. If there's a lone gunman involved, probably he's not alone. And, you know, so... anyway. Another good moment in the history of the Euro-Atlantic community.

#Glenn

No, definitely not. But there will be, I guess, more of these massive changes coming our way. We can't really go from an international order with essentially one central power, this hegemonic system ruled by a maritime power based on the past 500 years of the dominance of Western maritime power since we then had the revolution of geography with the rise of the European maritime powers, and suddenly, after 500 years, switch this on its head and now have an actual global multipolar or multinodal system in which sea powers will no longer have the same competitive advantage. So I think there's going to be some massive changes. The death of NATO — I personally wouldn't mind it, but I would like to see it replaced with something, not anarchy. Ideally, we would have Gorbachev's Common European Home to replace it.

#Chas Freeman

I think that is the ideal solution. And, of course, that's been my concern really all along. I've favored the Europeanization of NATO, with the United States moving into the background as a resource, but not attempting to direct European affairs. But that had to happen in an evolutionary manner. And my main concern about Donald Trump and his disdain for NATO is the obvious implication that he did not understand how to make a transition and would instead deliver a death blow to the alliance itself. But anyway, you're Norwegian, which means that you're in one of the happiest countries in the world. Only the Finns outdo you, I think. So what are you worried about?

#Glenn

Well, Scandinavia doesn't look the way it used to anymore. It's become a difficult region. I don't see a very bright future, but we can save that for another time. But I always have considered... I thought it would be a good idea for Europe to assert more autonomy. However, that being said, I'm also aware that the U.S. has acted as a key pacifier. And also, when I look at who's going to represent this new autonomous Europe, when it's Starmer, Macron, Merz, I'm kind of horrified. And maybe the U.S. shouldn't leave so fast after all. But no, it's going to be a very painful transition. As you said, it should have been incremental to manage this transition. And ideally, this would have been done 35 years ago. But yeah, here we are.

#Chas Freeman

Final thoughts? No, I wish I did. I'd like to have answers to these conundrums, but I don't have answers. And the sad thing is, I don't see anyone else who has answers. And Europe is led by

intellectual and political pygmies at the moment. So, you need to grow some adults, and wise people used to have them. But where are they? Hiding in caves in the south of France, perhaps. I don't know. Anyway.

#Glenn

Well, that's another argument for incremental change. That is, we still have a political class who was raised in the Fukuyama era. They think they're living at the end of history, where the collective hegemony of the West, the liberal hegemon, would somehow transcend the power politics of the past and deliver a new history. Utopia — their dominance was essentially benign. They were a force for good. And now they find out that not only aren't they part of this hegemonic system, they're not even a pole of power.

So there's a lot of desperation, fanaticism, and just authoritarianism, warmongering. I mean, yeah, essentially all the things they thought they weren't going to be, but... Again, this is the problem. You need usually the international system to have a better time doing incremental change. But it looks and feels more like a pre-revolutionary era. That is, they're holding on to power, and only crazies like Trump are able to push them off the throne, which introduces a whole new set of problems, as the Americans have shown us.

#Chas Freeman

Yeah, you can actually analogize a lot of what's happening to the final collapse of the Roman Empire. Many elements — one of them that deeply disturbs me is the assault on science, the reversion to faith-based analysis which rejects empirical evidence and fosters denial rather than the direct addressing of problems, and also, of course, empowers strongmen to do things that probably are unwise. I mean, feudalism was essentially born from the collapse of the Roman Empire because strongmen had to protect communities. And I think we're headed back in some ways into an analogous era in which there is no theme and no respect for the values of the Enlightenment, which I continue to believe were wise. Anyway, you should enjoy Norway while you can.

#Glenn

Yeah, we might be on our way out. But again, we should save that for another time. It's always great to see you, my friend. I hope you have a great day. Thank you.

#Chas Freeman

Thank you. You too.