

Amb. Chas Freeman: Israel's Agenda Is Falling Apart

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#Nima

Hi, everybody. Today's Friday, May 8th, 2026, and our dear friend Amb. Chas Freeman is here with us. Welcome back, Ambassador.

#Chas

Glad to be with you, Nima.

#Nima

Let me start with what happened last night. We've seen that the two sides, the United States and Iran, are firing at each other. Here is the official announcement from the Iranian Foreign Ministry. It says that we strongly condemn the aggressive action of the U.S. Army against two oil tankers belonging to the Islamic Republic of Iran near Bandar Jask and the Strait of Hormuz, as well as the attacks on several points in the coastal areas overlooking the Strait of Hormuz, which took place late Thursday night. These attacks were met with a powerful response and a heavy slap from the armed forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and the aggressor failed to achieve their illegitimate goals.

And the other point is that the Iranian foreign minister, moments ago, tweeted that every time a diplomatic solution is on the table, the United States opts for a reckless military adventure. Is it a crude pressure tactic or the result of a spoiler once again duping policymakers into another quagmire? Whatever the cause, the outcome is the same: Iranians never bow to pressure. Looking at what has happened, Ambassador, it's so amazing what is happening. We are having a ceasefire. There is no ceasefire. They're attacking each other. We had Project Freedom before this madness happened. Your understanding of what is happening?

#Chas

Well, I think what we have is what I call a ceasefire with Israeli characteristics. That means that the aggressor reduces fire but continues to fire, while the victim is supposed to cease fire. And so this is

what we have here. And I noticed that the CENTCOM statement, in response to describing the incident that the foreign ministry described, said that the Iranian attack was unprovoked. And yet it was preceded by American attacks on two Iranian tankers. So this word "unprovoked" is absurdly abused these days in many contexts, not just the Ukraine war context. It basically says, we're right, you're wrong, no matter what you do, we have the right to act as we wish.

We're not constrained. I think the problem here is basically this: Donald Trump would like to get out of this. There are some exchanges going on through the Pakistanis about, apparently, a one-page memorandum of understanding, which would give Donald Trump something so that he could claim he'd achieved something, because up to date he has achieved nothing. And right in the middle of this, we get a report from the intelligence community in the United States saying that, in fact, Iran's missiles were not destroyed — 70% of the inventory remains intact — that Iran has an abundant supply of drones that it can use, and so forth and so on.

And this makes it politically even more difficult for Donald Trump to back down, because it demonstrates that his claims that he achieved something are false. So this is a dynamic, a very interesting dynamic. In the middle of it, I was reminded by the Iranian negotiating posture of an article that Chairman Mao Zedong of China wrote during the civil war with the Kuomintang. It's called **On the Chongqing Negotiations**. And in it, he points out that not talking is also a form of communication and negotiation — an obvious point, but one that Iran has used to good effect. Basically, it's the United States that is demanding negotiations, not Iran. And Donald Trump tries to finesse that by saying, well, I don't care if they come to the table or not. But he obviously does.

He wants to get out of this war, which is damaging his presidency very fundamentally, both domestically and internationally. So I think what we have here is a breakdown of diplomacy and a phony ceasefire. And it's interesting to me, and I think very significant, that the reason that this Project Freedom was terminated abruptly, after about a day and a half or so, was that American client states, so-called allies in the Gulf, particularly Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, said, we're not going to facilitate this. You didn't consult us. You're hurting our interests. You're making us vulnerable. And so you may not use our air bases or our airspace to conduct this operation.

So what does this tell us? What this tells us is that something is going on in terms of recognition by the Gulf Arabs, other than the UAE, which is a standout in terms of eventual posture, which is why it gets hit all the time by Iran. The others are obviously all in communication with Iran and trying to work out some kind of post-war relationship with Iran, which would not include an American military presence on their territory. And so suddenly Project Freedom emerges, and this screws up whatever's going on quietly between Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Iran, and probably also Qatar.

So not Bahrain, not the UAE, I guess. But what is happening is this ceasefire with Israeli characteristics. The same thing is happening in Lebanon. The Lebanese are supposed to stand down. Israel continues to force the evacuation of villages, raze them to the ground, kill people with bombs. He's back bombing Beirut after having stopped. What kind of ceasefire is this? No ceasefire at all. It

is what it is. But the implications of the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, or more accurately, the assertion of Iranian control over the Strait of Hormuz, are really quite enormous. And I think we ought to talk about that.

#Nima

The Iranian foreign minister said every time we have a serious sort of negotiation talk, something like this happens. And what is that? Can we say anything about the negotiations? Because I don't see any seriousness.

#Chas

The negotiations are not serious. They are performative. And if you doubt that, just look at who was appointed deputy to Stephen Witkoff—an avowed Zionist from the Israeli front organization, the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, who's on the public record opposing any negotiations with Iran at all. And he's been made the deputy negotiator. So these negotiations are for show only, and they have to do with the effort to manipulate capital markets, stock prices, oil prices, and the like, which has been remarkably successful. Billions of dollars have been made shorting oil prices when some false hopes are raised of a breakthrough. We've seen this repeatedly.

So they're not serious. And the problem for Donald Trump, and the reason for the contradiction that you pointed out between opening a dialogue and bombing Iran, is simple. He continues to believe that the key to success is maximum pressure on Iran. He continues to believe that the best way to achieve an agreement is through coercion. And so when he perceives a setback or inflexibility on the part of Iran in the negotiations, he reacts violently with an attack on Iran. So Nima Alkhorshid is right to pose the question, of course, but I think the answer is this is part and parcel of the Trump policy, which resembles that of the Emperor Caligula in the late Roman Empire.

Caligula's policy in Latin was "oderint dum metuant," which means "let them hate us as long as they fear us." No effort to reach out a hand of friendship, to reach for common ground, to set aside differences for later resolution, or just to pursue common interests. No, it's all pressure, pressure, pressure. This doesn't work. And I think the intelligence community, again, to its credit, has said so. That is what the intelligence community is supposed to do. They are supposed to correct misperceptions on the part of leaders, give them accurate information and analysis, and they've done so, but it has been ignored.

And here we come back to the fact that Stephen Witkoff and Jared Kushner, both Zionists, both real estate moguls, both ignorant of the history and of the region, both seeing it through an Israeli perspective, both in effect subservient to Israeli interests, which they identify with American interests. These two men have had no professional support at all. There has not been a single professional American diplomat involved in these talks. And so we have people who are ignorant and incompetent conducting these negotiations. And again, I come back to what is the purpose of the

negotiations? It is not to reach an agreement. It is to parade possibilities before a gullible American electorate and a stock trader.

#Nima

I think if there are no serious negotiations happening, then what would be the alternative? As we were witnessing in the case of the blockade on Iran, which caused this problem last night, the two sides are firing at each other. And it's not just about Iran. We had it before with the case of Venezuela and Russia. And then I'd say somehow he's trying to control Iran, the tankers, and everything that is happening. It has everything to do with international law. What is happening considering that, and how is the United States changing its own policies that it had before?

#Chas

Well, international law now has no status at all in American foreign policy. The United Nations Charter, the Geneva Conventions, the Law of the Sea — that is, the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, which the United States sponsored but has never ratified — all of these things are essentially dead. And so here is where the control of the Strait of Hormuz by Iran is a gross violation of international law. There's no doubt about that. But the United States doesn't respect international law.

And the result of this is that 263 years of Anglo-American dominance of the seas and the rules-based order imposed by the Anglo-American hegemony is dead. And let me give you a little history here. In 1763, which was the end of the so-called Seven Years' War between France and Great Britain, the British decisively defeated French sea power. They consolidated that victory in 1805 at Trafalgar, the famous battle where Horatio Nelson prevailed over the French and Spanish. Ever since 1763, as the saying goes, Britannia has ruled the waves.

#Chas

The day I was born, March 2nd, 1943, 83 years ago, was the date of a three-day battle in the Bismarck Sea, north of Australia. That marked the farthest advance of Japanese power in World War II. There were six convoys, troop convoys, Japanese troop convoys, which were sunk — a huge loss to the Japanese forces. And that began a counterattack which eventually defeated Japan. That moment is cited by historians as the moment in which the hegemony, which had been British, passed to the United States Navy. And the United States Navy, ever since then, has made and enforced the rules internationally. Now, there are a number of things that happened which are interesting in the context of the Iran war.

One is that in the 18th century, when the laws of war began to be formulated, mainly Dutch thinkers, Grotius and others, began to codify international law, the range of a cannon was three miles. So that meant that the ship that came within three miles of the shore could theoretically be

struck by a shore battery. And that led to a three-mile limit for territorial sea. Well, as time went on, the range of cannons, missiles, and everything expanded. And we now have missiles with terminal guidance that can strike ships at a distance of 2,000 kilometers or 1,500 miles — a pretty big distance. In American terms, it's the distance between Boston and Winnipeg or Boston and Omaha, Nebraska.

You know, so this is a long, long distance. And so the three-mile limit became absolutely meaningless. And there was an arbitrary compromise on 12 miles. And some countries like Peru were arguing for a 200-mile limit. I think Brazil joined that same argument. That ended up not as a territorial limit, but it was a limit for seabed resource exploitation. So the so-called salt oil that Brazil, that Petrobras produces, is in that zone. So anyway, all this is history. And what it illustrates, and what the war with Iran illustrates, is that one of the main provisions of the rules was that the Strait of Hormuz is unimpeded — freedom of navigation through straits.

Well, that's gone. And so has the rest of it. And so basically we're in a new era of anarchy — there are no rules. And so we see American warships kept at a distance of 300 kilometers because that is the range of the Iranian cruise missiles and drones — 200 miles. Aircraft carriers at a farther distance — 1,000 kilometers, 600 miles. And when warships approach Iran to do what the American warships did on Thursday, namely attack Iranian tankers and later attack Iranian shore installations, they come under fire. And in this case, apparently, they were able to deflect or intercept the drones and cruise missiles that were fired at them. But that's a chancy thing.

And I think it's very good, actually, that Iran did not succeed in sinking an American warship, because that would have created a further complication. But my point is, what Iran has done is not something that should be a surprise, because we've been watching the rules decay for decades. And they're now gone, and the American Navy is no longer ruling the waves. There are other powers, Iran being one, China another, that are able to defend themselves at great distances from their shores. And so the rules don't apply, which means that when this war is over — which it has to be someday — maybe it will not be over. Maybe it will never be over. Maybe we'll just go back to where we were before it started.

That is, the current phase started. That is, there will be a low-intensity conflict between Israel and Iran. The only difference being that the United States won't be part of that because we won't have any bases in the Persian Gulf, and because the American people are fed up with joining wars on behalf of Israel. So Israel and Iran will be on their own. And maybe the Israelis will continue to do what they did, which is occasional assassinations of Iranian officials, of Iranian scientists, efforts to bomb Iranian-related resistance movements in the region, and so forth. And maybe it won't. Maybe Israel will finally come to its senses and realize that if it wants to be secure in the Middle East, it has to make peace and friends.

It cannot always be shooting at people and murdering their leaders as a means to secure its own survival. So I think this is a very big moment. And Donald Trump has a problem. He wants to get

out, but he needs to show that he accomplished something. But he has accomplished nothing. On the nuclear front, which he claims to be mostly concerned about now — I mean, he's been concerned about one issue or another over the years — but on that issue, he has basically pushed Iran into the development of a nuclear weapon. And when Iran discusses a hiatus, a five-year pause maybe, in nuclear enrichment, let's not forget that Iran has enough uranium hexafluoride to produce 10 or 11 bombs already. It doesn't need more than 10 or 11 bombs.

So a pause in enrichment doesn't solve the nuclear weapons program problem at all. Iran, as the intelligence community just reported, is fully armed and ready to go with missile attacks on Israel, as well as any Arab Gulf country that aids the American assault on Israel or the Israeli assault on it. Iran has not had regime change. It's had a kind of regime calcification, a hardening of the regime. And the Iranian people, who I think many of them were very pro-American prior to this, are now greatly disillusioned with the United States. The United States, meanwhile, has split NATO. We have the dissolution of NATO in progress over the issue of genocide in Gaza and the war with Iran, Spain being the first to break, others now breaking with Israel and the United States.

Great demonstrations in Italy, where the mood is very much like that in Spain. But the government in Italy, as is the case in Germany, ignores popular opinion. Only 17% of Germans have a favorable view of Israel now. But this is ignored by the establishment. And that can only go on so long. So Israel's foreign support is decaying. American alliances are disintegrating. And for what? Nothing. Before this war started, the Strait of Hormuz was open to everyone. There was free navigation. Now there isn't. There's no way to alter that fact without Iranian agreement. And Iran is not going to agree to apply the law of the sea rules that are defunct and that appear to enable the United States to attack Iran whenever it pleases, even during a so-called ceasefire. So this is where we are.

#Nima

You know, Lula had a meeting with Donald Trump, and he said after that, and there are basically not many reports on what happened, but he said he doesn't understand what Donald Trump is thinking because he says the war is over while the war is not over. The way he was describing Donald Trump, it was as though Donald Trump is living in an alternative universe. He doesn't live in reality and what's going on. Because Brazilians, Lula said, we don't feel that anything is over. The war is happening, and the conflict is going to hit us hard—everybody on this planet. And it doesn't seem that the United States is understanding the scale of difficulties that all these countries are facing and feeling right now.

#Chas

Well, I think, you know, that meeting apparently took place behind closed doors. Originally, it was to be open to the press, I believe, but it was good that it was behind closed doors because I suspect there was very little meeting of the minds. And Lula is absolutely correct. Donald Trump is living in an alternative universe. It's a universe in which wishful thinking prevails. He wants the war to be

over; therefore, it is over. There is a mental disease, part of psychosis. Of course, you know, these medical terms have been changed and so on, but traditionally, psychosis was defined by an inability to perceive reality and to separate fantasy from reality.

And there's a form of it called solipsism, from solo, you know, meaning alone. Solipsism is a philosophical theory that the world exists only in your head, and if you change your mind, you can change reality. Well, unfortunately, reality doesn't change when you misperceive it. It continues. You know, I quoted before, I believe, the observation of Philip K. Dick, a science fiction writer in the 1950s, a very brilliant one, who said that reality is that which, when you cease to believe in it, doesn't go away. It's there. So the fact is that the ceasefire with Israeli characteristics, which is a one-sided ceasefire, doesn't mean anything.

And the United States initiated a blockade, counter-blockade, under the so-called ceasefire. But a blockade is an act of war. So there's no consistency here at all. And, you know, this is very much like Alice in Wonderland. If you remember Alice in Wonderland, Humpty Dumpty said that words meant what he wanted them to mean whenever he wanted them to mean something. Well, Donald Trump's words mean nothing. In reality, they mean a great deal to him. And the world is whipsawed by constant gyrations on his part. I think it's true that Donald Trump simply doesn't care what is happening to the rest of the world or even to Americans as a result of his foolish joining with Israel in this war.

He just doesn't care. But he's going to be made to care because the political consequences of this are international isolation for the United States, pressure on the United States from so-called allies, including the Gulf Arabs. You know, they're distancing from us, the dissolution of NATO, alienation of Japan, and so forth and so on. And at home, you know, gas is now—what is it?—\$4.70 or so a gallon and headed upward dramatically. When it hits \$6, which it will before long, there's going to be quite a backlash. And despite Donald Trump's efforts to disrupt the midterm elections in November, they're going to happen.

So I think Donald Trump may not care at the moment about what his decisions are doing internationally or domestically. But he's going to be made to care because the pressure is mounting. This war is not going to end anytime soon. One of the judgments of the intelligence community, which I think was probably understated, is that Iran has another three or four months before it has a problem with reservoir pressure in its oil fields. So I think that's an underestimate. Can the United States sustain a blockade with the wear and tear on the ships and the men and women aboard them for that period? I don't know.

#Nima

Let me bring up an article in Haaretz in Israel. And here is the article, Ambassador. It says, Netanyahu will go, but the state will die with him. And basically, they're talking about the chaos and the problems that this administration has caused so far. They're winning nothing on the battlefield,

the chaos that is coming out of these endless wars for Israel for decades to come. And the state is in some sort of turmoil. The economy is not working, and they're basically totally dependent on the United States. And the Trump administration doesn't seem to have a robust sort of strategy, and it's all about making money.

And because, Ambassador, just another point — according to data from Unusual Whales, a trading surveillance platform that monitors unusual market activities, it shows unknown traders placed something more than \$900 million, yeah, yeah, yeah, in short positions on crude oil on May 6th, just minutes before Axios published a report saying Washington and Tehran were nearing a memorandum of understanding to end their two-month war. You know, this is the manipulation that is happening — one side is making money, the other, nobody seems to care about diplomacy, you know, putting an end to war. And how do you see the way that, just starting with this article in Haaretz, how do you see that?

#Chas

Well, let me make a couple of comments. First, I think that futures contract manipulation occurred at 3:40 in the morning, which is pretty interesting. You know, a lot of people are asleep at 3:40 in the morning. Evidently, somebody knew better and did this. Second, I'm glad you cited Haaretz. It's probably the greatest newspaper in the world now. It is a constant reminder that there are decent people in Israel. There are thoughtful people. It's not just the group of fanatics and fascists around Netanyahu, but there are people who need to be taken seriously and held in high regard.

And I think the article, however, is spot on, that Netanyahu said really what he shares in common with Trump is malignant narcissism. He really doesn't care about his country, although he claims to. He cares about himself. And he's in power because he's been able to stay in power by starting wars or continuing wars. But he has no real... You know, he has an objective set of goals, which we talked about before. He wants to go down in history as the man who made Greater Israel possible. He's going to go down in history, I think, as the author of that piece, Carolyn Lansman, points out, as the man who destroyed the state of Israel.

And, you know, a lot of people in Israel have no confidence in the future of that country. Not just because of Netanyahu, but because, you know, it's been there for what now? What is it, 78 years? And it has not made a single friend in the region. It has a cynical partnership with the UAE at the moment, but that's very unlikely to last. It has a cold peace with Egypt. It's a hostile peace, a rather strange phenomenon. Jordan cowers in fear before Israel. It has no affection for it at all. And the other countries in the region, all of them have been damaged, been basically raped and had murders committed on them by Israel. Syria has been trashed.

Lebanon is being trashed. Gaza is the site of the worst crime against humanity ever, not just in this century. Because it's, you know, it is that tragedy, that genocide is live-streamed. And people who claim to represent decency do nothing. They watch it. The Holocaust was invisible to most people.

This is visible. And there is international law, a genocide convention that demands positive action by its signatories to punish genocide or prevent it. And nothing has happened. So this is truly disgusting and a sad commentary on the era that we're entering, in which there is no law, there is no protection from law, and everyone must arm themselves against the possibility of the use of force.

Even your own country, Brazil, is having to increase its defense expenditures in order to be sure of its own security. So we're entering a dark age. We can see it. And it is in some other respects a dark age, because it's characterized by opposition to science. As happened in the Dark Ages in Europe, when the church opposed Greek and Roman science, and we lost technology, engineering capability, the knowledge of mathematics. It was only restored by the Bayt al-Hikma, first in Damascus, then in Baghdad, and eventually brought back to Europe, where it created the Renaissance. But, you know, we're entering a similar age in which science is dismissed in favor of superstition. You know, an ethic, the core of religious belief, which is ethics, is dismissed.

You know, we have Pete Hegseth praying for the murder without mercy of anybody who opposes the United States. We have the President of the United States engaged in an argument with the Pope about morality. We have the Vice President of the United States in an awkward position. The Secretary of State, who's a Catholic, going to Rome to patch things up with the first American Pope and with Giorgia Meloni, the Prime Minister of Italy, who, although she defers to the United States and Israel in many things, is well aware of the sentiment of the Italian people, which is now very anti-American and very anti-Israeli. So this is not a good moment.

What's to be done about it? Well, people are talking about changes of leadership, regime change, if you will, in the United States as the only cure for this. But part of the madness that has seized us is the loyalty of a cult. The Republican Party has become, for most purposes, a cult, not a thinking body engaged in serious discussion of policy issues and formulating policies that serve the interests of the United States. They're all about serving the interests of one Donald Trump. So, you know, here we are. Good thing that Lula kept his—Lula seems to be a more or less honest man, and good thing he stayed in a closed room with Donald Trump rather than in the open.

#Nima

Ambassador Smotrich says that this war must end with a change in the borders of Gaza, Lebanon, Syria, and of course, the West Bank. You know, they're talking about the borders. He's basically talking about the expansion of Israel as some sort of outcome of these wars, these wars that they're having. I don't see anything of that sort happening in the case of Lebanon. The West Bank, the situation, we know what is happening. Even with HTS in Syria, they said that, you know, Al-Jolani said they cannot capture the southern part of Syria. We want that back. I don't know what is happening in the minds of these people in Israel, but so far, from what we've seen, Hezbollah is fighting back. They're not going to back down. And the government in Lebanon is not that powerful, by the way. They're trying to talk and negotiate, and they're not helping the situation.

#Chas

The government in Lebanon is both lacking legitimacy because it doesn't represent all of Lebanese society. It's based on the confessional division of Lebanon by the French, you know, with a Maronite Christian president, a Sunni prime minister, and a Shia speaker of the parliament. But the majority now in Lebanon is not Christian or Sunni, it is Shia. And the majority of the Shia are very much in support of Hezbollah, which is therefore an authentic representation of Lebanese nationalism. I think, you know, the basic point you're making, however, in the article that you quoted from the newspaper—the basic problem is that Israel has yet to meet its Stalingrad.

Stalingrad is where the Nazi empire died. The effort to expand the borders of Germany, like Israel's effort to expand its borders for what the Germans called Lebensraum, room to live, is going to fail. It will come up against an immovable resistance. Maybe that is what it is encountering in Lebanon. But Israel is succeeding in uniting the entire region—not just the region, the entire world—against it. If Israel were now to disappear, you know, no one would weep abroad except the Zionists, or the armchair Zionists who are living abroad but defending Israel's depredations. And in the region, you know, 50 years ago, if Israel had disappeared, I would have wept. I would not now.

I think, you know, Israel, by its behavior, is delegitimizing itself so thoroughly that when Netanyahu goes, as Lansman said, the state is also likely to go. So, this is a tragedy for everybody—for the Jewish people who established Israel with Western help at the expense of Arabs, Muslims, and Christians—in order to create a safe haven. But there's no place on earth less safe for Jews now than Israel. And that lack of safety is almost certainly going to be internationalized. So, I don't know what to say. I mean, the tragedy, as in Greek tradition, is caused by hubris—overweening pride—and the inability to see what the consequences of that pride, that hubris, are. And in the Greek tragedy, you have a chorus in the background that is trying to point out to the protagonist, "You are going to your doom."

Something really bad is going to result from your behavior and your blindness. But of course, the protagonist never hears the chorus. Only the audience does. And here we have a similar situation where there have been people, myself included, who've tried to save Israel from itself. And we failed. And the moment when Israel meets its doom is approaching. And I am not a Christian Zionist, so I do not see anything good about Armageddon happening. I do not believe that the world's Jews will be forcibly converted to Christianity or sent to hell. I do not believe that the demise of Israel will have any good effect at all. And so I'm very—I'm not the only one who is deeply apprehensive about where all this is heading.

#Nima

I think, Ambassador, when it comes to the bases, basically in GCC countries, do you think that the Israeli strategists, or those people in the military part of Israel, understand what they've lost so far with the war against Iran? Because they have lost these early warning systems, these radars that

were communicating with the air defense system. When you have someone like Smotrich talking about capturing Lebanon, Gaza, the West Bank, Syria, you have to understand your capabilities. You cannot go beyond your capabilities. That capability has been reduced drastically by the simple fact of the American bases being hit by Iranian missiles during this war—not only in GCC countries, but also in Israel as well.

#Chas

Right. Well, there aren't any American bases in Israel, but there have been.

#Nima

No, I'm talking about radars. No, exactly.

#Chas

Exactly. Exactly. I think, you know, politicians like Smotrich are famously capable of fantasy foreign policy and fantasy aggression. But the military in Israel is very realistic. They are not prisoners of fantasy. And I guess Israeli intelligence, Mossad, had a very good reputation for decades because of its realism. Same thing with Shin Bet, the domestic security apparatus. Netanyahu has politicized these. He's put people in charge of them who, like Donald Trump's intelligence community leaders, will tell him what he wants to hear. They will not speak truth to power. So that is part of the reason that Israel is losing its intellectual edge, and its survival is more and more at stake.

So Smotrich, like some American politicians—I think of Lindsey Graham, for example—does not understand that we are living in a world that is different from when the United States was omnipotent. The unipolar moment is gone. The Cold War is gone. The ability of the United States to demand fealty, loyalty from other countries is gone. Other countries, including our so-called allies—I say so-called because they had no obligation to the United States. We had an obligation to them, which we assumed. But several of the allies, like Saudi Arabia, like Kuwait, like Qatar, like Bahrain, like the UAE, are now doing their own thing. They're not following American direction. The UAE appears to be following Israeli direction. But how long can that last? I mean, the UAE is nothing if not a practitioner of realpolitik.

And sticking with Israel in this context is not a formula for anything but more trouble. So I don't know how long that will go on. Anyway, we are likely to see—and we have seen, actually—the Israeli chief of staff, the military leader, say the Israeli army, the IDF, is falling apart. It's overstretched, it cannot continue like this. And so at what point do you get, if not a mutiny, at least sufficient pushback from the professional military, not just in Israel but in the United States, where people are very disgruntled? They're very unhappy. People in the military have very low morale. They're not behind this leadership. At what point does that have an effect on the leadership and change policies? I don't know, but pretty clearly we're coming to some kind of tipping point.

#Nima

In six days, we're going to have Donald Trump going to China. And we already had the Iranian foreign minister going to China and talking with his counterpart. How do you see Donald Trump and his sort of cards? Because he loves this sort of game of cards. What are those cards that he possesses before going to China or having some sort of, you know, ground to work with China?

#Chas

Well, he had a meeting in Busan, South Korea, with Xi Jinping a while back, which was notable because it was a meeting between equals. And the United States has not been accustomed to that since the Cold War, when Moscow was an equal in many ways. So I think there are several dimensions here. Donald Trump thrives on pomp and circumstance. The Chinese are able to give him a grand welcome that flatters his ego. He respects power and prestige, which is the shadow that power casts in the world. And Xi Jinping is powerful and has great prestige. So what we're seeing now is a trip by the American president to Beijing, really not as someone in a position to dictate terms, but as a demandeur, someone who seeks. You mentioned several times that American foreign policy seemed to be largely about making money.

Yeah, so Donald Trump has dreams of selling more Boeing aircraft on this trip, that kind of thing. There may be some tactical adjustments in trade policy. After all, he's just lost another law case and his tariffs have been thrown out as illegal. I mean, the whole scheme he had earlier was invalidated by the Supreme Court. Now the lower court has declared that his effort to reimpose tariffs was also illegal. And so he started a trade war with China. He doubled down on a technological containment policy. Neither has worked. China called the American bluff on the trade war with its control of rare earths and its ability to defend its supply chains. China is now very clearly the dominant economic force in Pacific Asia. It is expanding its market everywhere.

It has just done the opposite of Donald Trump. It has ended tariffs for every country in Africa—tariff-free trade now, with the exception of one country, Eswatini, which still recognizes Taipei as the government of China. So this is not likely to produce very much. It will produce a good television show; it will enable Donald Trump to strut around and bathe in the attention that he's getting. But I don't see any breakthrough happening. And in fact, I would say the US-China relationship at the moment is now dominated by a common concern to maintain minimal stability. There are no aspirations by either side for a major breakthrough. China's content to continue doing what it is doing, which is developing technological superiority.

You know, the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, which monitors scientific and technological innovation, now watches 74 categories. Sixty-six of them are led by the Chinese, eight are still led by the United States, none by a European country, apparently. So China's making progress. It has problems—economic problems, a real estate bubble that popped, some demoralization as a result of the anti-corruption campaigns, and so forth. But it's on a steady course. And the United States is

wobbling all over the place. So China doesn't have to give very much. Just accepting Donald Trump and parading him in front of the People's Liberation Army will be enough, maybe.

#Nima

Yeah, we know that the Chinese government said to the refineries, those parts of their economy that are working with Iranians and Russians, they don't care about the American sanctions. They're not going to—"we're going to support you if the sanctions hit you." And how do you see that position? Do you think that Donald Trump would be able to change that position?

#Chas

I don't think so. China has a big stake in the restoration of the world order that the United States sponsored and has now overthrown. And that includes an international order governed by consensus and rules derived from consensus, not imposed by one country or bloc of countries. In the case of the Iran oil and gas supply, I think we're seeing several interesting developments. As you said, the Chinese have said that they will not respect American sanctions against Iranian oil and gas. They have just raised fuel prices in China, with effect from tomorrow, I believe. So they are taking a sensible means of conservation. Of course, they are the best prepared in the world in terms of alternative renewable energy sources—solar, wind, nuclear, and so on.

And they have been the refiners of oil and suppliers of jet fuel, diesel fuel, and so forth to neighboring countries. Initially, they banned exports of these things, but in response to requests from neighboring countries, they are now beginning once again to supply these fuels. That is gaining them even more influence and prestige in the region. So, you know, this war, while it is a problem for China in the sense that it is going to tip the world into recession, which will erode China's overseas markets, has meant some belt-tightening in the energy field. You know, the Chinese are taking two steps to deal with the long term. One is agreeing to the Power of Siberia gas pipeline from Russia. I think they will now double down on railroad and pipeline construction to Iran.

They can easily connect Iran to Turkmenistan, which they do have a pipeline to. And I think we'll see that. And in addition to that, of course, they will double down on renewable energy investment. And so they basically eliminated all subsidies for that, which raises prices somewhat. But prices are now very attractive for the installation of wind power and solar energy in particular. And the Chinese are the only country capable of building 50 nuclear plants at once. So this war is not having a deleterious effect on China. And I think, you know, people say, well, you know, China has been supportive of Iran. Well, yes, to some extent. It's been supportive of Iran to the extent that it believes that what Iran is doing serves its interests, including the interest in restoring world order.

It has not taken sides between the Arabs and Iranians, the Persians. It remains neutral. It's responsive to the Saudis as well as to the Iranians. Saudi Arabia now has no alternative but to make peace with Iran. And that is the significance of the suspension of the use of bases on its territory

and overflight rights for the United States. The same is true of Kuwait. I mean, this is a signal. It's an indication of the future. And it's one that the Chinese welcome. They have not believed in securing energy supplies in the Persian Gulf through military means. They've sought to do so through diplomacy. Well, diplomacy now looks as though it might finally have a chance to produce some kind of security architecture in the Persian Gulf that will suit the countries there as well as their customers abroad.

#Nima

Yeah. Thank you so much, Amb. Chas Freeman, for being with us today. Great pleasure as always.

#Chas

It's always a pleasure, even though it makes me, as a master guest, seem to enjoy all the suffering that we're inflicting on ourselves for no good reason. We'd really like to wake up one morning and see all this behind us. Maybe we'll have that day. In the meantime, keep up the good work. Thank you.