Chas Freeman: US, Russia & Ukraine Meet - Europeans Kept Away

Ambassador Chas 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. Read Chas Freeman's Substack: https://substack.com/@chasfreeman662157 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 Buy Diesen merchandise: https://diesen-shop.fourthwall.com/en-nok 00:00 Negotiations in Abu Dhabi: A New Approach to European Security 08:30 The Role of Geography in Russian Security Concerns 15:29 Understanding Russian Fears and Historical Context 20:25 The Impact of Domestic Politics on Foreign Policy 26:49 The Future of U.S.-Iran Relations and Regional Stability 29:39 Regional Dynamics and Iranian Influence 35:28 Shifting Alliances and Israeli Politics 41:09 The Evolving Nature of Warfare 44:49 Global Power Shifts and Strategic Autonomy 52:55 The Future of American Influence

#Glenn

Welcome back, everyone. We are joined today by the great Ambassador Chas Freeman, a former U. S. Assistant Secretary of Defense and also the former ambassador to Saudi Arabia. Good to see you again, my friend. Indeed, good to see you. So it appears a common theme these days is that Washington is losing some control, not just over domestic politics but also over its foreign policy—the U.S. war with Iran, Russia—while relations with Israel are also becoming increasingly problematic. Again, things change, but it seems the ability to control these changes is going away. And I thought a good place to start would probably be the current conflict with Russia. For the first time since February, if I'm not mistaken, we now see that the U.S., Russia, and Ukraine have resumed direct negotiations in Abu Dhabi. The Europeans obviously stand on the outside. And I was wondering, how do you assess what is happening there now?

#Chas Freeman

Yes, Sergei Lavrov is quoted as saying of the Europeans, “Let them stay in their hotel in Abu Dhabi.” I think the point there is that Jared Kushner and Steve Witkoff, one assumes—although it's Jared Kushner who has spoken on this—seem to have embraced Vladimir Putin's suggestion or demand in

December 2021 for a broad discussion of European security architecture to ensure that Russian concerns are integrated into the structure. We've seen Kaja Kallas, as usual, say, "Well, there's no need to consult the Russians about that. We have a security structure, and they can just accept it. You know, that's what they should do." But it does appear that tomorrow's discussions in Abu Dhabi between the Ukrainians and Russians, moderated by the Emiratis and Kushner and Witkoff, will indeed address the broader question of European security architecture without the Europeans being present.

The Europeans have apparently been consulted in advance. I doubt they had anything useful to say. All of the commentary that I have seen from Europeans is divided into two parts. One part is, "Oh my God, maybe the Americans and Russians are going to do a deal and impose it on us." There's great apprehension in that regard about the possible tripartite meeting in Guangzhou on November 18th and 19th between Vladimir Putin, Donald Trump, and Xi Jinping—that somehow there will be a triumvirate that will impose something on Europe. That's one concern. And the other is, "Oh my God, they're actually talking to the Russians, and they shouldn't be doing that."

And what if they actually do embroil us in a discussion of alternative security structures in Europe? What are we going to do? And of course, the backdrop to all of this is that, in the United States, the November 3rd elections were a day of reckoning for policy on many issues—not particularly Ukraine, but certainly the war with Iran, certainly the Israeli war on the Palestinians. In Europe, we see a similar reckoning unfolding in the face of budgetary austerity driven by donations to Ukraine. And 90 billion euros was supposed to last two years. It got spent in one year by Ukraine. Ukraine now demands 45 billion euros. And the direct connection to Western Europe is that Europeans don't have the money. The European populace does not want to pay.

So we have protests turning violent in France. We have the AfD in Germany also joining in. And in the Netherlands and other countries, there are also protests over budget austerity and donations to Ukraine. So it's clear that the Americans, the Europeans, and, of course, the Ukrainians are in a mood to explore new ideas. They don't have any, as far as I can tell. Today, Tuesday, November 10th, the talks in Abu Dhabi were said to be productive. That is the readout from both the Americans and the Russians. I haven't seen a Ukrainian readout, but the talks appear to have focused mainly on issues of territory and that sort of thing. I suppose that the Russians will also have pressed the Ukrainians for recognition of Russian cultural and linguistic identity within Ukraine. But I don't know. So there's not much that we know about this.

But it is better than people not talking. And they do seem to be at least trying to discuss the fundamental issues with which this war began, namely the neutrality of Ukraine, its non-membership in NATO, and the issue of minority rights within Ukraine, now transformed into a question of territorial concessions by Ukraine as a result of the war. And finally, of course, there is the broader question of a European security architecture that would reassure the Russians that there would be no repeat of the Napoleonic or Nazi invasions of Russia from the West, and reassure the West that Russia does not have the intention or the ability to take Western Europe. So this is what is going on.

In that context, we see there's been a leak from, I guess, a Belarusian opposition group that hacked records in the Russian Federation, indicating that some 400,000 Russians may have died in this war.

That's probably about a third as many as the number of Ukrainians who have died. But the carnage has been terrible. And Ukraine is now facing winter with no electricity, no power. Subways are coming to a stop in Kyiv and Kharkov. People are shivering in the cold. The Russians are clearly advancing slowly, despite denials of that. I saw a very telling juxtaposition of a Western journalist's report saying the Ukrainians were holding their own or even advancing, followed by an Al Jazeera report which showed the Ukrainians evacuating a good deal of Slovyansk. So I think we are still in a mire, a fog of disinformation and information warfare. And it's very hard to know what is going on, but it does not appear to be anything but more difficulty for Ukrainians, who have suffered greatly by being used against the Russians in the way they have.

#Glenn

A weird thing with the security architecture, though, is that over the past 35 years, we essentially built a European security architecture based on the idea that Russia, as the largest country in Europe, shouldn't have any say in Europe. That is, we said Europe is represented by NATO, and Russia doesn't have a veto over NATO. They just kept repeating this over and over as if it made any sense as a foundation for stability. I always thought it was a mistake because if the Russians aren't given a voice in international institutions or the European security architecture, they're not just going to go away or pretend they're not there. The only thing they're left with then is hard power. And that's essentially what we saw.

They ran out of diplomatic means, and then they reached for the gun. I mean, it should have been predictable. But now we're in this strange place where the rest of the Europeans are not taking part in the talks about Europe. And I kind of understand why. I mean, as a European, I don't like to say so, but it's probably better if we're not in the room because our leaders will just sabotage it. But there is a problem because the Russians say we need a new European security architecture, but they can't have the Europeans in the room because they will just try to sabotage everything. But you do need the participation of the Europeans at some point. You can't just have Washington and Moscow determining the future for Europe. So what do you see a realistic deal here looking like?

#Chas Freeman

Well, I think eventually the Europeans will have to be integrated into the discussions. Perhaps this can only happen after the Rassemblement National has a showing in elections in France and the Alternative für Deutschland advances in Germany. Chancellor Merz appears to have accomplished the impossible. He's united all Europeans in their dislike of him, which is one form of unity, I guess, rather similar to the one that Trump has imposed in the United States. You and I have discussed this

issue before. I think it's very instructive to review what happened at the Congress of Vienna after the end of the Napoleonic Wars, when European statesmen came together and reincorporated the French into the councils of Europe. The United States was not there.

Rather than punishing them, they accepted their importance as a great power within Europe. And as a result, we had almost a century, I think, in which wars in Europe were very limited in scope. And they were swift and decisive. I'm thinking of the Franco-Prussian War, for example. But the lesson seems to have been lost. After World War I, instead of recognizing the importance of incorporating Germany and the newly established Soviet Union, as the successor to Tsarist Russia, into the councils of Europe, they were ostracized and, in the case of Germany, greatly victimized. And the result was World War II and, arguably, the Cold War.

So we should learn from this. You cannot have peace and stability in Europe without all of the great powers, including the Russians, the Germans, the British, the French, the Italians—maybe the Spanish count also—incorporated into some structure. And here I find it rather encouraging that Jared Kushner is now calling for the resurrection of the NATO-Russia Council, which perished in 2014 under the impact of a coup and the annexation of Crimea, which were connected. Anyway, it's clear that Europe cannot have peace and stability without participation by the Russians, and simply writing the Russians off in the manner that we have does indeed leave them with no alternative but to use force, which they have done at considerable cost to themselves.

But I think it is important to remind ourselves from time to time that it is the West that has invaded Russia, not the other way around. Russians have pursued Western armies, Napoleonic and Nazi, into Europe, making terrible sacrifices in order to do so: 27 million dead in World War II, the burning of Moscow and the devastation in Russia during the Napoleonic Wars. It seems to me that there's a requirement for people, historians in particular, to remind people that their fears are hallucinatory in many cases. I understand Russian fears as a geographic phenomenon. If you look from Moscow to the west, there are no physical obstacles to the advance of armies until you get to the Pyrenees. And if you look to the east, you see tundra and plains, which were not a barrier to the Mongol armies when they conquered Russia.

So if you are Russian and you are centered in Moscow, and you're trying to protect your capital and your sovereignty as a nation, you naturally are very concerned about the political-military orientation of your neighbors. That is not unreasonable. I think the West made a huge mistake when, in December 2021, the Russians put forward a draft treaty and proposals for the reinstitution of the Minsk Accords, the neutralization of Ukraine, and the opening of a conference on European security architecture. Instead of dealing with those proposals seriously, Europeans as well as Americans dismissed them as irrelevant and impossible. And the result is a lot of dead Ukrainians and dead Russians, and not much else.

#Glenn

Yeah, what you said about the geography is a good point, though. I mean, a few years ago, I think it was the former head of MI6, John Scarlett, who was making the point that Putin, as a religious man, probably goes to bed each night praying to God, asking why he didn't put any mountains in Ukraine. Throughout history, this has been the open flatland across which Europeans have marched on Russia. And again, they see this continuity in history. And it's not really paranoia. This NATO obsession with Ukraine is surely, if you listen to how a lot of the officials have been talking, about exploiting a vulnerability, using Ukrainians as a bulwark against the Russians. So it is interesting that our intelligence chiefs and military leaders kind of recognize the role of geography here and why this was always intolerable for the Russians. Yeah.

#Chas Freeman

I think one of the key characteristics of anyone involved in intelligence is the ability to have empathy, to put yourself in the position of the people you are analyzing. And it's remarkable how indifferent European politicians seem to be to any effort to really understand the Russian perspective on things. You don't have to agree with it, but you should at least understand it. There's a famous phrase, of course, that before you go to war with anyone, you should put yourself in their shoes and walk for a mile. That way, you're a mile away from them, and you have their shoes. Then they can't do very much about it.

But you will also have understood, perhaps, why they have the problems with you that they do. This hasn't happened. There's been an avalanche of very damaging propaganda emitted from the West, some of it quite absurd. And, you know, I'm living, as I have told you before, in a geezer warehouse in Exeter, New Hampshire. The warehouse managers, who are fine people, have a contract with a cybernetic defense company, and they have a firewall that will not allow me to look at Chinese or Russian websites because they believe, you know, I'm old and therefore addled, and this might pollute my brain somehow with unwanted knowledge. And even a VPN is difficult to use to get around this thing.

So the West has basically cut itself off from perceptions of reality that don't accord with its propaganda. And, you know, this is no basis for policy. So perhaps Witkoff and Kushner, for all of their defects—their lack of experience, lack of knowledge, lack of professional support—have one merit, which is that they didn't know very much. And they've had to listen to Vladimir Putin and Sergei Lavrov and others present their case, and maybe they have understood it. It sounds as though the structure of the talks in Abu Dhabi does reflect some understanding of the dilemmas that forced Russia into the very tragic situation it has been in for the past five years.

#Glenn

Yeah, no, I think the thinking, the rhetoric, this strange consensus in Europe is a big part of the problem. That is, the whole idea of having empathy for the opponent, or at least recognizing where they are, what position they're in—I mean, this idea of putting yourself in the shoes of the opponent

is something we don't do anymore. And I always make the point: it's not just the Russians, but the Iranians, the Chinese. It's seen as immoral, essentially, to put yourself in their shoes, as if you're legitimizing them and undermining the whole premise that we are a force for good in the world.

So if you fear us or you think we've done something wrong, then it challenges the underlying ideology of the hegemonic era we just left. But, you know, that era is over, so I think they have a hard time letting go of that ideology as well. But I was curious about Trump, though. There are a lot of variables at play here, a lot of moving parts. But now we've had this election in the United States, which was quite disastrous for the Republicans, to the extent that Trump has now even contested the legitimacy of the election.

#Chas Freeman

He's back at that.

#Glenn

Yeah, I noticed that. But it is important, though, because he has eight weeks before he becomes more or less impotent by losing Congress. It seems as if the Democrats are not on the same page. They sound more like the Europeans in terms of their eagerness to continue the war with Russia. So he has eight weeks to push for peace, if that is what he wants to do. How do you see the next eight weeks playing out? Will this be a closing window? Because the Europeans, the Ukrainians, or anyone else may want to drag their feet because Trump becomes a weakened man in January.

#Chas Freeman

Well, there was a brief period of hope that Donald Trump would react to his humiliation by focusing on building more monuments to himself—the ballroom and the wonderful arch and so forth. But he has appointed Stephen Miller as his chief of staff, which is pretty much equivalent to giving the American electorate a salute with the middle finger. And it does not bode well for a conciliatory foreign policy. We're going to see in the next little while. Today, actually, there's a vote on the bill of impeachment that Thomas Massie, an outgoing Republican congressman from Kentucky, introduced, with eight charges of violations of the Constitution and the rule of law by Secretary of Defense, so-called Secretary of War, Pete Hegseth.

Hegseth has given an almost hysterical sort of press conference in the press briefing room from which he evicted the press a while back. But I guess there were people there recording this. Anyway, we're going to see what happens. And the importance of this, in terms of the question that you posed, is: how much have the Republicans separated themselves from the Trump cult? How independent are they willing to be? Thomas Massie is a Republican. He's a maverick, to be sure. But the Republicans are in a very difficult position. If they vote against impeachment of Hegseth, they appear to be endorsing the very policies that the voters have just rejected.

If they vote in favor, they have the ire of Trump and Stephen Miller to deal with. The Democrats are in a very good position. All they have to do is vote for impeachment, and they're on record as respecting the will of the voters in the midterm elections. And in any event, when they take their seats as the majority in both the House and Senate on January 3rd, they can impeach Hegseth on their own. And so they're in a good position. But we're about to find out something about the degree to which the American parties have split. There are fights going on within the Republican Party about leadership.

There are fights going on now in the Democratic Party as well, mostly over the issue of Israel-Palestine. Both Chuck Schumer, who is an avowed Zionist, and Hakeem Jeffries, who is a supporter of Zionism, but less intensely so than Schumer, who is Jewish, are being challenged in their leadership positions. Many of the newly elected progressives want them out. All this bears on what sort of foreign policy we're going to have. We're now seeing, in the context of Iran as well as in the context of Ukraine, an effort to set these issues aside. I assume this reflects Trump's desire for some sort of legacy other than war-making. And in the case of Iran, you can argue that much of what Marco Rubio and others are now saying, and what Trump is saying, is, "Well, look, we've done everything we needed to do. We've got Iran under control."

We've destroyed their navy. They don't have many weapons left. That's not true, but anyway, that's the claim. We've destroyed their air force. Of course, they didn't have one, but we've destroyed their nuclear weapons, which they didn't have either. And those nuclear weapons, according to Trump, are buried under thousands of tons of rock and can't be exhumed. And we have control, according to Trump, of the Strait of Hormuz. So what is there to be done? Marco Rubio says there's no point in a major military advance. We've really accomplished everything we needed to accomplish, and Iran is just going to be left to suffer under economic sanctions. To that end, CENTCOM, the Central Command, has organized a 20-person cell responsible for closing the land borders of Iran.

I consider this a classic exercise in fantasy foreign policy. The Treasury Department of the United States has retained control of the proceeds of Iraq's oil exports and therefore is in a position to bully Iraq. It has, in fact, directed Iraq to close its borders with Iran, and Iraq has closed all but two crossing points, I hear. This is enormously unpopular in Iraq. It will result in unemployment for many people, and I don't think it can last. But more to the point, the Russians are not going to cooperate. The Chinese are not going to cooperate. The Pakistanis are not going to cooperate. I don't think the Turkmen in Turkmenistan will cooperate. I don't know what will happen with Azerbaijan. Anyway, you heard talk in CENTCOM: "Well, we'll enforce this," presumably meaning through special operations forces, commandos.

I don't believe that anyone will want to run a commando operation against the Russian Federation or the People's Liberation Army of China or the Pakistani military. So this seems to me to be part of a kind of strategy to fade away while claiming victory. There is a precedent for that, because that is what was done when the United States tried and failed to break the blockade of the Red Sea by the

Houthis, Ansar Allah. And this is the famous Aiken formula that Senator Aiken advocated for Vietnam: declare victory and leave. And it may be cunning. At least it's plausible that some of the straws blowing in the wind indicate that there's a haystack of that kind somewhere upwind. We'll see. It is a very confusing moment, but then we've lived in confusion for quite a while, so there's nothing unusual about this.

#Glenn

Well, I heard some reports that Trump postponed or cancelled new strikes on Iran, which you would think would follow if they're actually going to have this land blockade, at least partly due to pressure from the Gulf states. They realize that if there are strikes on Iran, they will not be like before. They will be quite severe, and Iran will then essentially abandon all red lines and burn down all the critical infrastructure in the Gulf states, and those states might collapse. So apparently, they put some pressure on Trump.

Again, I'm not sure if that's why he postponed it. But how do you see this regional dynamic? Because, again, you were the ambassador to Saudi Arabia. They must have a lot of concerns at the moment. They're struggling with Ansar Allah, or the Houthis, in Yemen. They, of course, don't necessarily want escalation with the Iranians. And even if the U.S. were successful at knocking out Iran, that could make the Saudis very vulnerable to Israel, I assume. So I just have a hard time seeing them being fully committed to yet another round of war with Iran.

#Chas Freeman

I don't think they are. I think quite the contrary. They argued against this war, the February 28th attack. They have been battered by the Iranians and now by Ansar Allah. And I'm sure they have very forcefully counseled against the resumption of the bombing of Iran because, as you say, they know that they're very vulnerable to an Iranian counterattack. Of course, there's also the fact that Foreign Minister Farhan was in Tehran representing the Saudis, with Asim Munir of Pakistan and the intelligence chief from Turkey. And some of that was about arguing for Iranian mediation with Ansar Allah, or for Iran to use its influence on Ansar Allah to discuss some kind of exit from the war that is now in progress.

Some of it was about trying to get insurance against an attack by Iran in the event that the United States did something irresponsible. There is also an Israeli element here. The principal advocate of an attack on Iran was Netanyahu. He was calling Trump daily, apparently, even advocating, according to some, the use of nuclear weapons against Iran. And he is now sidelined. The results of the elections in Israel discredited him. He didn't lose by a big margin, but he definitely lost. And Gadi Eisenkot, who is the leader of his opposition, is trying very hard to form what he calls an emergency government in Israel to exclude Netanyahu from power. He's made a symbolic offer to Netanyahu: “You can serve in my cabinet, but I will be the prime minister.”

It's very unlikely that Netanyahu would agree to that. And Eisenkot seems to want to have a vote in the Knesset to establish this emergency interim government with him as prime minister. And there's a chance he can do that. And we hear that Donald Trump is now favoring Eisenkot for prime minister in Israel, reflecting the fact that he probably has nothing but grave dislike for Benjamin Netanyahu, who has jerked him around and gotten him into the problems that he's now in in West Asia. So the Israelis, through Eisenkot, also do not favor the grand assault on Iran that Netanyahu did.

And Eisenkot, who is, by all accounts, a very seasoned and imaginative strategic thinker, is quite ruthless. He is the inventor of the obliteration doctrine applied to Gaza. He is the author of a number of very aggressive policies toward Israel's neighbors. So he's not a pacifist, but he argues for hostile policies toward Iran that are more sophisticated, that do not involve hammer blows aimed at some fruitless vision of regime change—the idea that, you know, if you hit Iran hard enough, it will capitulate. This is the sort of thing that Hitler thought about Stalin and the Soviet Union: hit them hard enough and they will give up.

#Glenn

And no, they didn't.

#Chas Freeman

So I think everything now rests on these symbolic efforts to strangle the Iranian economy. But the effort to strangle the Iranian economy is also strangling the global economy and the American economy. And, you know, if you compare Iran with the United States in terms of tolerance for pain, I would say the Iranians appear to be much more stoic than Americans. So I think the thesis that time is on the side of the United States in the economic strangulation of Iran is highly questionable, even if this effort to close Iran's land borders weren't the farce that I think it is.

#Glenn

Yeah, well, it does look like a farce. But with Israel, though, you point out that Netanyahu's political position is not just weakened. Of course, Eisenkot will take over as prime minister. That whole government is now on the way out. But you also see that U.S. support for Israel is weakening, or at least it seems that way. And what does this mean for the Israelis? Will they need a dramatically different foreign policy from here on? Or will this go beyond changing policy? Do you see Israel learning and adjusting to a world without America? What are the pathways here for Israel? Because they seem to be a key variable in all the conflicts in the region.

#Chas Freeman

Well, they definitely are, because Israeli expansionism and Israeli cruelty to the co-inhabitants of Palestine are the principal destabilizing factors in the region, as the foreign minister of Oman, al-Busaidi, has pointed out. So, yes, it makes a great deal of difference. Prime Minister Netanyahu, reading the handwriting on the wall, has tried very hard to sneak a parasitical Israeli relationship with the Department of Defense and the American military-industrial complex into the National Defense Authorization Act, which basically melds the Israeli and American armed forces for certain purposes. This has enabled Trump and Netanyahu to announce the end of the $3.8 billion subvention for Israel that the United States is committed to providing annually.

It's not at all clear how this payment of tribute, perhaps, to Israel can be avoided, because it's part of the law, and the decision to end it is an executive order. On the other hand, the Democrats who are coming into power on January 3rd clearly have no desire to write that check again. And in fact, part of the leadership struggles that are going on involve an effort by progressives to appoint Chris Van Hollen, the senator from Maryland, as the majority leader in the Senate to replace Chuck Schumer, precisely because he favors cutting off arms sales and subsidies for Israel. So I think we're in a new era, and I think the Israelis understand that.

If the National Defense Authorization Act doesn't pass—which it has to do by tomorrow, November 11th, or there may be a government shutdown again—then that provision establishing Israel as a component of the U.S. Armed Forces is not in the law. And I think Israel is quite justly perplexed by what's happened. You know, a lot of Israelis have focused on the election of the first Muslim senator, Syed, in Michigan. But it is the case that more and more progressives who are openly opposed to Israel's Greater Israel project and to the oppression of the Palestinians are coming into power. So it's very likely that there will be a cutoff of some sort, or at least a severe reduction in support for Israel.

Everybody recognizes that without American support—logistical support, intelligence support, and so forth—Israel could not conduct the genocide in Gaza, reduce southern Lebanon to the condition of Gaza, or carry out the pogroms in the West Bank. So the United States has the ability to bring Israeli depredations in the region to a halt. It has not been willing to do so. It's not clear that the Democrats will have the courage to do it either. Certainly, Schumer and Jeffries are not in favor of that, but we just had an election that went the other way. So we'll see whether, in this case, popular opinion in fact changes elite positions and changes the policies of the United States.

Israel has no realistic alternative to dependence on the United States. That is unfortunately true of Saudi Arabia as well. That is to say, the United States is the only country with the heft, the power, and the ability to project power decisively to the Persian Gulf and West Asia, as we showed in Desert Shield and Desert Storm, and as we are failing to show now. Because I think, very clearly, Israel is going to face a post-war situation. You know, the war with Iran may go on, but only in the sense

that Iran adopts the same posture that Israel has had. Namely, it is not inhibited by international law and feels free to conduct preemptive strikes against the Israelis or others in the region who threaten it.

That has been Israeli doctrine, but now it seems to be Iranian doctrine. And ominously, in this connection, Iran has ended the self-imposed limit on the range of its ballistic missiles. Ayatollah Ali Khamenei had restricted the range to 2,000 kilometers, which meant that southeastern Europe could be struck—Greece, Bulgaria, Romania perhaps—but not western Europe. That limit is being lifted, and Iran is saying there will be no geographical limitations on its military action if it is required to take action. And I think the extension of the range of these missiles is, from an engineering point of view, fairly simple.

And I think we're now going to see that if you operate a base like Ramstein or the various bases in the U.K. that are directly supporting American aggression against Iran, then you may get a salvo of missiles fired at you. And I note in this connection that you don't even need missiles. Apparently, refueling aircraft based in the U.K. have been dispersed to positions elsewhere in Europe, primarily Germany, because of a local threat in the U.K. We earlier saw the B-1 bombers withdrawn to the United States for the same reason. So I think there is a danger that this war could explode well beyond its existing boundaries. And so there are two ways that could happen.

One is that Donald Trump has a change of mind and recognizes that the war is not over, that we've not won, and decides to go out with a big bang against Iran, which then retaliates in the way that I've described. Or alternatively, since the supreme leader, Mustafa Khamenei, has apparently ordered his government to bring the situation of no peace, no war to a head, the Iranians may launch a preemptive attack, in which case they may strike Europe as well as Israel and the Gulf Arabs. So this is, again, a very uncertain time. And we must hope that Donald Trump is, in fact, implementing some sort of walk-away plan rather than risking a resumption of kinetic warfare that would not be geographically limited.

#Glenn

Let me ask one last question, a big question, if you will. The wider development in the world now appears to be that the US and Europe are drifting a bit apart, and the US and Israel are also experiencing a split. The Gulf states are pulling back a bit from the US-led alliance system. So, in short, all the old alliance systems of the hegemonic era appear to be at least partly breaking down. And behind this whole scene, we see that they're also exhausted now, militarily and economically. All of this is manifesting itself in a lot of political instability. I would even say a political legitimacy crisis.

Meanwhile, the common threats experienced by the Russians, Iranians, and Chinese—that is, proxy war against Russia, direct war against Iran, and economic war against China—mean they are all becoming increasingly important to each other, essentially creating Kissinger's worst nightmare scenario of all the Eurasian powers coming together. And you are pointing out that the Iranians are

essentially saying they won't have any more red lines. They won't have any more limits, even on missile range. They also made the point that if they're attacked again, anyone aiding their attackers will be a target, which you could argue could include the Europeans if they allow...

#Chas Freeman

I think it would. You know, there's been a very ineffectual European claim that, well, we're not involved in the war. We're just allowing the Americans to use our bases for defensive purposes. What are those defensive purposes? Those bases have been used to support offensives against Iran and continue to be so used. I think in the Gulf, most of the American bases have been thoroughly destroyed and become unusable, which the Gulf countries can claim means that they're no longer complicit in attacks on Iran. But I don't think Europe is entitled to an exemption in the minds of the Iranians. And looking at the world as you describe it, what is striking is not simply that alliances and hegemonic structures, if you will, like the transatlantic NATO alliance, in which the United States has been the central director of affairs, are crumbling.

We're increasingly seeing hedging in Europe. Europe is clearly engaged in a still very incoherent search for strategic autonomy. Europeans don't seem to be able to focus very clearly on the future, but one gets the sense that they're being forced to by the course of events. The Russian-U.S. relationship has remained tense and ineffectual, really. It has become an item of controversy in the context of U.S.-European relations. The Chinese relationship is cordial at the leadership level, but deeply antagonistic at the institutional level. India, which was courted by the United States as a swing state, has clearly given up on that agenda. We've talked about the war in Ukraine and the war in Iran, which continue. The relationship with Israel is in jeopardy. It is about to be significantly reduced in some manner by the new Democratic majorities in the House and Senate.

But the most interesting thing to me is that the changes are not limited to the hegemonic structures of alliances and so on. They are actually happening in the Western Hemisphere. We just had an election in Brazil, which sets Brazil up as a counter to the United States and has broken the trend toward right-wing militarist governments. We're seeing the president of Paraguay deposed for reasons unrelated to anything external, and he was a great Trump fan. Milei's experiment with Mileinomics, whatever that is, doesn't seem to be going terribly well. And, you know, Venezuela has been subdued, but the former Nobel Prize winner, Machado, has returned and is now in favor of the subjugation to the United States that acting President Rodríguez has cooperated with.

There is a danger that Trump will pick on Cuba because he thinks it's an easy target. Having watched the Cubans in action close up when I was involved in trying to get them out of Angola and get the South Africans out of Namibia, I would say that taking the Cubans anything but seriously on the battlefield is a grave mistake. They are very competent and quite committed to the defense of their country against the colossus to the north. Then, of course, we have the United States, which once existed in a zone of peace in North America, alienating both Mexico and Canada. I won't mention the Danes and Greenland. But, you know, this is quite a record of temper tantrums

destroying relationships. And whatever else one says about it, it is a grave weakening of American influence—the power to control events everywhere.

And the military are not an exception because they've been unsuccessful now in virtually every war except the one I was involved in, with Saddam Hussein. But there we failed to translate the military victory into a political victory. So we have no diplomacy because Marco Rubio doesn't have time for it, given all his other jobs, and the State Department has been gutted. We have a military that is very restive. There are a large number of people in the Pentagon who just can't wait to testify against Pete Hegseth when and if there are investigations of his conduct as part of an impeachment process, which may not happen in the interregnum but will certainly happen after January 3rd. And so this is not a pretty picture.

And when you add in the prospect of another three months of rising oil prices and rising natural gas prices if the embargo in the Strait of Hormuz continues, that's very good for Norway, but not much good for anyone else. That is the joint Iranian-U.S. blockade of the Strait of Hormuz—joint, in effect, with both countries trying to prevent oil from getting out and container ships from getting in. So, as I said, we're trying to strangle the Iranian economy, but as a result, we're strangling our own and the global economy. I don't think this can go on. So I don't think time is on the side of the United States in the war with Iran. I don't think it's on the side of Israel. I don't think it's on the side of anybody, really. But Iran seems to me to be better prepared to tough it out than we are.

#Glenn

We appear to be sailing into a big storm. I just wish we were in better shape. I cannot tell you how distressing it is.

#Chas Freeman

For me, as someone who, you know, believed in my country and served it for 30 years, it is distressing to see the irrationality, the chaos, the anarchy that we are producing in the world. You know, I always admired European statecraft historically. To see a total absence of statecraft is quite shocking. But that's what we see. And so who are the people who are diplomatically competent and militarily competent? The Russians, Sergei Lavrov. The Russian and Ukrainian armies are now the best in the world, the most battle-hardened. The Chinese are very good at diplomacy and statecraft. Iran seems to be very good. And I didn't mention Africa earlier, but I would note that Donald Trump has a way with words when he speaks about African countries, which does not endear him or the United States to them.

And we have a breach with South Africa that is apparently irreparable and driven by Elon Musk's distress at the end of apartheid, which he attributes in part to USAID's activities in South Africa. So here we are, and we're told by people that AI is about to supersede the human race, and, you know, it will all be operated in data centers in space because nobody, including the Finns, wants these

things on the ground. So Elon Musk is going to put them somewhere in orbit above the Earth, which means that they will be occupying a superior domain, a domain that is superior to the land, sea, air, and immediate space. Cyberspace is the supreme, all-enveloping military domain of the future.

#Glenn

All very cheery, as usual. I see the incompetence of the leadership we now have. I think about this expression from the ancient Greeks: "Whom the gods would destroy, they first make mad." Yes, that seems quite fitting now. Anyway, thank you. Any final thoughts?

#Chas Freeman

No, I think you encapsulated it. I mean, the world is essentially in a state of extreme irrationality, subject to hallucinations and delusions, and acting on them in ways that are self-destructive. And where is the vision? Where is the strategy to realize the vision? If you don't have a vision, I suppose you can't have a strategy intended to realize it.

#Chas Freeman

Where is the strategy to do anything?

#Chas Freeman

I keep looking. And where is the decorum, the civility that enables nations to get on with each other? I don't know if you saw the disgraceful sight of the American ambassador to the United Nations, Waltz, confronting the Cubans. But, you know, it was anything but dignified. And, you know, as an American, I feel obliged to apologize to the world for that sort of barbaric behavior.

#Glenn

As always, we end on a grim note. So thank you for taking the time. I appreciate it.

#Chas Freeman

Well, it's late where you are, and I hope you have a pleasant evening. Bye-bye.