

Chas Freeman: Israel Now Prepares for WAR with Egypt & Turkey

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#Nima

Hi, everybody. Today's Friday, May 29th, 2026, and our dear friend, Ambassador Chas Freeman, is here with us. Welcome back, Ambassador.

#Chas

Glad to be back with you, Nima Alkhorshid.

#Nima

We're so lucky to have Ambassador Chas Freeman introducing his Substack account here. Ambassador, you just opened it up. It's been, what, the last two weeks?

#Chas

Something like that. I mean, I'm not quite sure how I got on Substack. I didn't do anything with it, but I've decided to put up some material—prepared texts that I've used over the years on different subjects. And it seems to get quite a significant readership. Some nice comments. I'm glad for those. And thank you for mentioning that.

#Nima

Yeah. I just put it in the comment section. You can see the link there. You can access that. You can subscribe to the Substack of Ambassador Chas Freeman. Let me start, Ambassador, with what's going on with the case of Hezbollah and Israel. Yesterday I was watching one of the Israeli commanders. He said that the FPV drones for Israel were some sort of technical problem. Right now it's turning into a strategic problem because they're hitting a lot of the air defense systems, communication systems, the gathering of Israeli soldiers in trucks, outside of the trucks. So this is basically turning into a new problem. And he said, we haven't found any sort of solution for that.

We are trying to find a solution for that, but it's difficult because these FPV drones—they try to use some sort of protection, some sort of nets to prevent them—but that wasn't possible. It's so difficult for them to control that. And what is your understanding? Because if Israel wants something in the southern part of Lebanon, they have to leave the territory of Lebanon. They cannot stay there forever. They defined a yellow line in the southern part, and they're crossing that line. They're trying to destroy. Smotrich said, for each and every drone, we're going to bring down ten buildings in Lebanon. That's the reality. How desperate is the situation for Israel? Your understanding of that?

#Chas

Well, I think, first of all, on the drone warfare aspect, this is yet another example that the Russian-Ukrainian war has changed the nature of warfare very fundamentally—the technology of drone warfare. Of course, Ukrainians and Russians dispute who invented what, but it doesn't matter. Between the two of them, they have come up with a very formidable way of immobilizing troops and vehicles on the battlefield, and everything is transparent. And the Hezbollah drones, apparently, are fiber-optic guided. They're not guided by wireless signals, so they basically can't be disrupted or diverted. And they are apparently taking quite a heavy toll on Israeli troops, Israeli vehicles, tanks, armored personnel carriers, and so forth.

And it's a reminder that Hezbollah, unlike Hamas, which is basically a lightly armed guerrilla force, has developed real military capabilities. Its fighters are battle-hardened from their time in Syria, and it has a record of defeating the Israelis in their various invasions of Lebanon. That said, it's very clear this invasion, which is aimed at taking everything south of the Litani River, is intended to annex Lebanon, effectively, and to turn southern Lebanon into the equivalent of Gaza. Now, while we speak, Netanyahu has issued a directive—apparently yet another directive—violating the so-called ceasefire agreement about Gaza.

Initially, I think 53% of Gaza was to be under Israeli control. That expanded to 60% informally. Now he's given a directive to expand it to 70%. And meanwhile, his defense minister, Israel Katz, is saying that the Gazans will, quote, voluntarily exit Gaza, leave, and Gaza will be ethnically cleansed and resettled by Israelis. And the same thing is contemplated in southern Lebanon. Of course, the phrase "voluntary departure" or "voluntary removal" or "voluntary emigration" is like saying that Jews who got on the cattle cars in Nazi Germany were voluntarily leaving Germany for what? For Auschwitz? For a death camp? This is Orwellian—a language beyond belief.

And the fact is that whereas this kind of obfuscation may once have worked to deceive the people of the world, it no longer does. Nobody believes anything Israel says now, because it transparently violates every agreement that it makes or is said to have made. It's never quite clear what Israel has signed on to or not. And the situation in Lebanon, you know, basically Israel is trying to create conditions similar to those of the Nakba or Gaza—no structures to which the people who've been

made homeless can return. And over a million Lebanese are displaced by all of this. Hezbollah is holding its own, but I'm not sure that I would call the use of drones a strategic victory yet. It is a tactical victory, of course. It's made things very difficult for the Israelis.

In circumstances in which Israel itself is in quite bad shape, deteriorating economically, the military apparently increasingly unwilling to serve, emigration up—we don't know how many Israelis are managing to get out—the divisions between Israelis, between the ultra-Orthodox and other Israelis, exacerbated. And, of course, Israel having lost virtually all support in the world other than that of its paid agents in the US Congress. As we speak, the US Congress is exploring legislation to essentially fuse the American and Israeli militaries, to remove the barriers between them and to make everything joint between them. This at a time when the American public emphatically wants less and less cooperation with Israel, less and less support for Israel.

It's a measure of how alienated the American political elite, in large measure because of their co-optation by Israel, has become from the American public. The American public no longer trusts the American political elite, in large part because of this manipulation by Israel, which I think is becoming less and less effective. We're seeing members of Congress, of the United States Senate—for example, Senator Chris Van Hollen of Maryland—speaking out in the New York Times in a very forceful way, saying this relationship with Israel is unhelpful to the United States, is damaging to the United States, and it has to be brought to an end. So I think there's a lot going on beyond what's happening in the battlefields of southern Lebanon. But that is not going well for Israel either.

#Nima

They're not happy about Syria as well. I don't know what they want from Syria. And what is the problem? Do they want to annex the southern part of Syria? Yes, it was the Golan Heights. Right now they're going further. And...

#Nima

Nobody seems to understand that. And look at Israel today—the population they have, something like 8 million people before this sort of chaos happening right now, less than that. Of the Israelis, more than 20%, 21% of the Israeli population, are Arab Palestinians. So, the situation is so dire in Israel, and they want to occupy, they want to annex other lands.

#Chas

Well, they have the ambitions of the religious Zionists for a greater Israel, extending as far as the Euphrates and the Nile, and that does not go away. And it's very clear that they have an intention of annexing additional tracts of land in southern Syria. They have tried to come up with various explanations for why that would be an appropriate thing, protecting the Druze being a major element in that. The Druze, it doesn't appear, want to be that protected by Israel.

And so you have people now, like the convicted Israeli spy Jonathan Pollard, who spent 30 years in an American prison and then was received with a hero's welcome in Israel, became an Israeli citizen, is now running for the Knesset, the Israeli parliament, and he's talking about Syria in terms of preventing the Turkish presence from coming to Israel's borders. That is one problem. The other is, of course, that Israel continues to bomb Syria. That creates enemies rather than friends or subordinates. And the Turkish policy is not clear, but it is clearly against the annexation of any part of Syria beyond the Golan Heights by Israel. Pollard even mentions attacking Egypt again.

I guess he is basically voicing a very common opinion in Israeli circles, to the effect that Israel cannot tolerate anyone with the capacity to injure it. And therefore it demands absolute security and the subjugation of all of its neighbors. Where does this stand? I remember many, many years ago, as the Israelis expanded their settlements in the lands they had illegally taken from Arabs, there was a cartoonist who had a cartoon of Israeli settlers taking land in Nepal. You know, where does this stop? There is no border of Israel. It continues to expand in its own mind. And in fact, I think the tolerance of the world for this is wearing very, very thin.

#Nima

Here is what Jonathan Pollard said in his interview yesterday.

#Speaker 03

We don't think geostrategically. Forget about Jolani. Forget about Donald Trump. I am principally worried, first of all, for the welfare of our Druze brothers across the border, but secondarily, if Jolani and his Islamists actually occupy that area, we will have the Turks right on our border. We eventually will. We eventually will, and I'm not so sure that we will have as easy a time with the Turks as we've had with the Iranians. I've been following Turkish military doctrine, and the storm is coming in the Middle East.

The storm is coming. Yes, of course. And they're a member of NATO. And even worse, they're a member of NATO. So I look at Iran as a problem we absolutely have to finish. And I'll explain what I mean by that. Gaza, same thing, and the Hezbollah. Why? Why am I fixated on this now? Because we have to be prepared for the next war, which will probably be against Turkey and Egypt. I hope not, also, but you know, hope—you remember—it was the last demon out of Pandora's box, and there's a reason for that.

#Chas

So there you have it. There you have it. And he's representing a majority of Israeli opinion. You know, he's running for the parliament, for the Knesset. That is a campaign stance that he's taking.

He's voicing the fears, the ambitions of ordinary Israelis. And, you know, basically what we have is a society in Israel that has become totally sociopathic. It has no empathy for anyone other than its own constituents. It is paranoid. It believes everyone is out to kill Jews.

#Chas

I call the Israelis so-called Jews because they don't bear any resemblance at all to the ethical people that I know who are Jews in the United States or Western Europe or Iran, for that matter. Those are very decent people who espouse humane thinking and who are not paranoid. And yet you just heard this idea that everyone's against Israelis, everyone needs to be subordinated to Israel, everyone needs to be kept under control. And by the way, he starts off by saying that first and foremost, he's concerned about his Druze brothers. Well, that is ridiculous. Do you think he has any care at all other than to try to exploit the Druze distaste for and distance from the Assad or Al-Jolani government in Damascus? Absolutely not. That is cynical and duplicitous and manipulative, but it's the line. So Turkey's going to be in Syria on the border. We've got to fight the Turks, and they're terrible because they're members of NATO. Well, that doesn't sound like anything that anyone in the West should be very comfortable with.

#Nima

The point he has mentioned about Iran says we're not going to have as easy a time as we had with Iran. Oh, yeah. I don't know what sort of mindset that is, because without the United States, what are the capabilities of Israel in fighting other countries?

#Chas

Of course, that is a fundamental point. Israel has benefited, if that's the word I would use, from the unconditional support of the United States. That support for Israel and everything Israel does has created a moral hazard, and Israel has walked right into it. Israel does all kinds of things which, if it were sober-minded, rational, and concerned about its long-term interests, it would not do. It puts itself in danger because it assumes the United States will always be there to save it from the consequences of its own actions. And that is clearly the assumption underlying Mr. Pollard's statements.

Mr. Pollard is one of the most damaging spies in the entire history of the United States. He gave almost truckloads of very sensitive material to the Israelis, some of which they resold to the Soviet Union. So he has no credentials whatsoever as a patriot of any country. And now he's posing as an Israeli patriot, and he's doing what the Israeli government and establishment want, which is to downplay the damage Israel has suffered both strategically and physically in its war with Iran. The war with Iran has done huge damage to Israel. I normally focus on the damage it's done to my own country, which is considerable, but Israel's on the front line.

It's suffered quite significant physical damage from Iranian missiles and drone attacks on it. It has basically lost the support of every Gulf Arab country other than the United Arab Emirates. And it seems to me that the Emirates is wobbling at the moment, trying to hedge on this issue. It has lost its ability to deter an Iranian attack, even with the backing of the United States. I think it has lost the backing of the United States in the long term. Whatever the Trump administration may do, it's not going to be in office forever, and the American people clearly want an end to this unconditional support of Israel.

I think most Americans want Israel to continue to exist. But as they discover what Israel does, what Israel stands for, what it plans, their support for Israel's continued existence diminishes. And many people would argue now that Israel has forfeited the right to exist by the way it has behaved. It's conducted a genocide. It is still conducting a genocide. It plans ethnic cleansing, not just in Gaza and in Lebanon, but in the West Bank. It seeks expansion beyond. When Jonathan Pollard speaks about the Turks on Israel's borders—where are Israel's borders? No one can tell you.

This is entirely as great a mess as those who opposed the establishment or recognition of the State of Israel in 1948 imagined it would be. I mean, famously, George C. Marshall, a great man who was Secretary of State as well as the head of the American Armed Forces, counseled Truman not to do what he did because he said—and he was joined by others of great stature like Dean Acheson—that the establishment of the State of Israel would poison the Middle East. It would create instability, turmoil, and suffering for everyone. But Truman, for domestic American political reasons, went ahead. So we are seeing what is clearly a tragedy in the Greek sense.

That is, the outcome has been obvious from the beginning, and it's tragic. And Israel marches to its doom, unimpeded by the advice of those who foresee the future. So anyone who has counseled Israel over the years that it was setting itself up for its own demise was immediately smeared as an anti-Semite rather than as someone who cared about not just Israel, but the relationship that their own country had with Israel. And so Israel basically has lost more and more friends and supporters, not gained them. And this is almost inevitable. And as in the case of a Greek tragedy, there is a chorus warning Israelis about where they're going, but they are deaf to the warnings.

#Nima

I think as time goes by in the Middle East, with this behavior of the Israeli government attacking each and every country around them and trying to annex Syria and Lebanon, I am sure when they're talking about fighting Egypt, they're talking about some lands of Egypt to be annexed to Israel.

#Chas

Of course. Let's remember that Israel not only jumped the gun at the Declaration of Independence, which coincided with the withdrawal of the British colonial regime in Palestine. Actually, a month before that moment of British withdrawal, they began their attacks and their campaign of terror

against Palestinian Arabs with a view to taking territory and driving the population out of Palestine. That created the Nakba. We know that there were at least 70 massacres of civilians during that so-called War of Independence. In 1956, Israel connived with the British and French to attack Egypt in the Suez War. The United States at that time took a principled position under Dwight Eisenhower, and the Israelis and the British and French were forced to give up their attempt to control the Suez Canal and take Sinai.

In 1967, Israel launched a surprise attack against Egypt and Syria, and in 1973 it was taken by surprise, but it invaded Egypt as a counter to the Egyptian crossing of the Suez Canal, and it took land from Syria. In the middle of all this, it has not hesitated to kill foreigners, including Americans. There is this case of the USS Liberty, which Israeli jets—unmarked jets, by the way, attempting to impersonate some unknown force—attacked and killed many of the crew members. They machine-gunned crew members who were in lifeboats. And there was a cover-up by Lyndon Johnson and others in the United States entirely for political reasons. So this is not a history that suggests that anything Israel is now doing is unusual. It's more of the same. The difference is that people now see it.

They're not blind to it. They hear it. They listen to it. They listen to what Israelis are saying. Israelis are very unguarded in their comments about their own intentions and their own view of the future. So you have Ben-Gvir, for example, echoing Jonathan Pollard. By the way, Pollard apparently is a great supporter of Ben-Gvir. And Ben-Gvir demonstrating the sadism of Israel toward anyone who is not Israeli or Jewish. You know, there is apartheid inside Israel between the 20% of the Israelis who are of Arab origin, Christian or Muslim, and Israeli Jews. Beyond the pre-1967 borders in the occupied West Bank and Gaza, there has been everything from genocide to mass murder, to pogroms, to military-assisted persecution of people, of Arabs who are not Jewish.

Of course, let's not forget many Arabs were Jewish, are Jewish, that Jewish Arabs, the Mizrahim, are a significant element in Israeli society, and they too suffer discrimination by the European-descended colonists. So this is not a pretty picture, and it has been obscured by very skillful propaganda, by censorship by the Zionist-dominated press in the United States and Britain. But those barriers to the perception of reality by ordinary people outside Israel are crumbling, and more and more people now see what Israel has become, which is a terrorist state that rules by terror, that has no respect for the rule of law, no respect for human life, no respect for the dignity of other human beings, and continues to behave in a manner that can only be described as evil.

#Nima

Benjamin Netanyahu said yesterday that we must complete the mission in Iran in a way that constitutes a final solution. And I speak with Donald Trump almost on a daily basis regarding this. And what is the final solution when it comes to Israel? What do they want from the conflict in Iran? What else can the United States do for Benjamin Netanyahu?

#Chas

Well, I think, first of all, the phrase "final solution" is something that comes directly out of the Nazi lexicon, and it referred to the extermination of European Jews. What does he propose? The extermination of Muslims, of Christians in West Asia? What is the final solution? I think Henry Kissinger was once quoted as saying that absolute security for one country equals absolute insecurity for all the others. And I think that is exactly what Israel proposes: absolute security for itself, subordination, subjugation, or extermination for everyone else. What can the United States do beyond what it has done? Absolutely nothing. The best thing the United States could do would be to cut Israel off from its arms supply, to pull the plug on its conquest of Lebanon, to pull the plug on its genocide in Gaza, to pull the plug on the funding of settlement activity and pogroms in the West Bank.

In other words, end the moral hazard that Israel has walked into. And that is not what Benjamin Netanyahu has in mind, although he clearly understands that the writing is on the wall when it comes to American support for Israel, which is why he periodically suggests that Israel should wean itself from its dependence on the United States, logistically and politically. That is a pipe dream because he and other Israelis have created circumstances in which there is not a single country in the world that will step up to support Israel once the United States fails to do so. So what can the United States do with regard to Iran? Nothing that is compatible with Netanyahu's vision of a final solution. In fact, as I've said before, the Trump administration has maneuvered the United States and Israel into a situation where any move that either makes results in defeat and no success.

And we now have the Trump administration, once again, in my view, lying about progress in discussions with Iran, putting words in Iranian mouths that I don't think any Iranian would ever say — about the Strait of Hormuz, about the regional politics, about the war in Lebanon, about the nuclear issue, to the extent that it's still an issue. So we have some sort of memorandum of understanding being negotiated. That's all it is — a framework for negotiations. And obviously very vague, obviously not agreed at all, despite the claims that agreement is imminent. We've heard that before, and every time it has the same result. That is, oil prices go down. You want to bet somebody didn't cover that fall with short sales? I bet they did. They've done it every other time.

Billions of dollars have been made by the manipulation of the stock market by the Trump administration. We don't know exactly who has been reaping those benefits. But I think in due course, we'll find out. And we certainly will find out if, as expected, control of the Congress passes out of the hands of the Republican cult of Donald Trump in the midterm elections and the Congress resumes its constitutional role in the exercise of oversight over executive action and investigates war crimes and crimes against American law and the Constitution. We will certainly find out who made all this money. I don't think we need actually to investigate very far. If we think of the principle of *cui bono* — who benefits — it's very clear who benefits from this.

So I would very much like to see an end to this war, which has done huge damage to everyone — including Iran, including Israel, including the United States, the Gulf Arabs. Nobody has benefited from this. The United States has lost the war. Iran has not won it. But Iran has survived, and its bargaining position has been greatly strengthened, which is one reason I don't believe these claims of imminent victory at the negotiating table. I am sure that Pakistan and Qatar, who are acting as intermediaries and mediators, are doing their best to produce some kind of true ceasefire rather than the phony ceasefire that is currently in place and regularly violated by the United States, which Iran then responds to with a tit-for-tat reprisal.

Everybody would be better off if this ended, including the world's economies, which are being badly hurt by the loss of free navigation through the Strait of Hormuz. I'll just make a final comment, and that is on the Strait of Hormuz. It's very clear that Iran has redefined the tollgate. Iran now talks about administrative fees, navigational fees, fees for services, not arbitrary tolls. So this is a bit of flexibility on the part of Iran. It does not mean Iran is going to give up control of the Strait of Hormuz or cease to cooperate with Oman.

And I don't think Oman is going to be a friend of the United States under circumstances when Donald Trump says that he will blow it up, whatever that means, if it cooperates with Iran. Iran has one side of the Strait of Hormuz. Oman has the other. So does the UAE. The UAE is eventually going to have to come to terms with that reality. But to talk about blowing up your former diplomatic mediator, Oman, your friend, Oman, your neutral party, the one that has played a historic diplomatic role in composing differences in the region, to blow them up because they won't sign on to your belligerent stand is self-incriminating and enormously damaging to the reputation of the United States, not to the reputation of Oman at all.

#Nima

Because we haven't heard anything from the Omani government. And they tried every year. Remember, before the second round of war, the Omani foreign minister went to the United States, went to Washington, talking. He was so optimistic about the results. He said, we are on the path to achieving some sort of agreement. And coming back and attacking them this way, it was just amazing to watch.

#Chas

The Omanis have a well-deserved reputation for realism in their foreign policy, for neutrality in the quarrels of others, for a diplomatic role in composing differences. Foreign Minister Busaidi is an excellent diplomat. He was humiliated by Donald Trump and the use of negotiations under his auspices to conceal surprise attacks on Iran. So I think the United States has lost a very important diplomatic asset with the President's, Donald Trump's, intemperate attacks on Oman.

#Nima

Ambassador, here is what Donald Trump said about the situation between Iran and the United States.

#Speaker 04

That they would cross for you to go on the offensive again, militarily?

#Speaker 05

Well, a deal that wasn't going to be good for us is the line, ultimately, because, you know, I'm playing it out and we're going to see. And that's what I do. I negotiate. They negotiate. They're very good negotiators. They're crafty. But in the end, we have all the cards because we've defeated them militarily.

#Chas

This is, of course, the major problem — that Iran understands it has defeated the United States militarily because the United States has not achieved any of the objectives for which it used force. And you can only measure the success of war policy by whether it delivers the desired results. None of the desired results have been achieved by the United States. On the other hand, Iran has gained control of the Strait of Hormuz. It has apparently lessened the internal divisions in the leadership of Iran. Now the leadership seems to be quite united, stalwart, and supportive of a united position.

This business of Iran being divided and so on is, you know, wishful thinking on the part of the United States, probably fueled by Israeli intelligence, which always seeks to divide its adversaries. You know, the idea of putting Ahmadinejad back in power is childish, really. And so I would say, you know, looking at the performance of the Trump administration, that *The Art of the Deal* should be retitled *The Art of the Shakedown*, because Donald Trump does not know how to close a deal, apparently. He only knows how to bully and coerce and impose conditions on the other side. And in this case, the United States is not in a position to impose conditions on Iran. And what we've come down to is a contest to see, you know, both Iran and the United States are, in effect, underwater.

And who can hold their breath the longest? This is what we're down to. You know, this is not holding all the cards. There's a very—there's, I don't know if you ever follow him, but there's a very clever American humorist named Borowitz, and he writes fake stories about what happens, which are very entertaining. One of them was that Zelensky had offered to supply cards to Donald Trump, since Donald Trump was out of cards. Everybody sees this, so the posture that we have all the cards just doesn't persuade anyone of anything. Iran is very realistic, so are the Gulf Arabs, and so are the Israelis, which is why there's now a lot of difficulty between Trump and Netanyahu, and they're arguing.

Netanyahu responded to Donald Trump's most recent effort for a memorandum of understanding by inserting two impossible conditions. One, freedom to continue the war in Lebanon. Two, the full opening of the Strait of Hormuz with no charges. And of course, the export of all the enriched uranium in Iran. These are poison pill proposals. They're designed to make sure that there's no agreement. Israel doesn't want an agreement. It wants the war to continue. It openly says so. You just heard Jonathan Pollard say that. We've heard Benjamin Netanyahu say that: pursue the final solution with Iran. He doesn't say what that means, but that phrase is something that should send chills down the back of anyone who hears it.

#Nima

Do you think that the GCC countries, because we've seen how the communication is happening between Iran and Qatar, for example, maybe Saudi Arabia—what is the calculation on their part as time goes by and they see the continuation of the conflict is hurting their economy more drastically? I don't know what else they can do because they're in a desperate situation. Their economy has been influenced by the war because of the blockade of the Strait of Hormuz. And they're not producing; they're not self-sufficient countries. They're mostly dependent on everything they receive from outside because of their energy. You know, they sell their energy, they're importing everything from outside. That's why the problem is growing basically in Qatar, in my opinion, more than in Saudi Arabia.

#Chas

Saudi Arabia is actually the least affected of all the countries because it has an exit for its oil, a way of exporting its oil through the Red Sea ports—not just one port but several ports, but mainly Yanbu. And so it is actually able to sustain oil exports, and of course the price of oil is very high now. So it is not suffering as much as the others. Kuwait is basically completely cut off. Qatar also. Bahrain has been badly damaged physically because of the Fifth Fleet headquarters that was bombarded in Manama, the capital. Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates have suffered terribly physically, but more importantly, their model of economic development, which was exemplary—that is, it had open frontiers, open trade, an open investment regime, and a very pleasant environment for the wealthy to make their home in.

Because basically they offered security and freedom of transit for everyone. These have both been badly damaged by the war, and once again, in the long run, the UAE has no alternative but to make peace with Iran somehow. But you asked what are their attitudes. I think they're not stupid. They are good negotiators. Unlike Donald Trump, they don't blurt out boastful claims of this or that. They are realists. They have a long history of—I mean, their political models are based on tribal models in which the sheikh or the emir, in the case of a state, the leader, has two responsibilities: one, to provide for the welfare of the needy through zakat, through charity, through the redistribution of wealth.

And the other is to shape, form, or discover a consensus for policy. Well, I think the consensus for policy now among the Gulf Arabs, first of all, completely rules out any kind of normalization of relations with Israel. So the Abraham Accords are living on borrowed time. And, you know, the UAE may be doubling down in some respects on its alliance with Israel. Israel has come to the UAE's aid. The United States has not been effective in defending the UAE, but this is a temporary condition and it can't last. So, to use the metaphor of cards again, the Gulf Arabs are holding their cards close to their chest.

They don't want anybody to see them, but they know very well that in the future they have to have a working relationship with Iran. It may not be, you know, a love affair. It may not be anything very friendly, but they need a working relationship with Iran. That requires them to distance themselves from the United States and Israel. And so that is what is going to happen once the conditions allow. In the meantime, they've been very clear. They don't want this war. They didn't want this war. They feel exploited. They feel they were abused by being made part of this war. With the exception of the UAE, it appears that none of them did anything on their own against Iran, although they allowed the United States to do things from their territory. And they've been punished for that. They've learned a lesson. And so, what are they going to do?

They're going to bide their time, hope that the discussions between the Pakistanis, Qataris, Iran, and the United States produce some backing away from the current tit-for-tat military confrontation, and that a workable arrangement for the transit of their exports through the Strait of Hormuz is worked out with Iran. Uh, and you know, some of them may, in fact, eventually end up asking to be part of the management system for the Strait of Hormuz. Uh, whether Iran will allow that or not is another question. But, um, uh, in the meantime, uh, you know, they're biding their time. They're hoping something will happen. Um, they're not as gullible as the oil traders appear to be, but every time the Trump administration leaks all kinds of disinformation about progress in talks with Iran, the oil price immediately goes down, the stock market goes up. I don't think the Gulf Arabs believe that nonsense.

#Nima

We're living in an era of AI, where everything, you know, people are asking the question, "Grok, answer this question. Is that right? Is that wrong?" And the only—my understanding of AI is they're providing data. They don't have—AI is not a brain. It's some sort of tool to provide you with data.

#Chas

And what's—well, it can do a little more than that. But it basically says, logically, usually, this word, word A, is followed by word B, which is followed by word C. But how does it know that? It knows that from analyzing the stupidity of human beings on the internet and elsewhere—anything digitized. What does it know? It knows what the collective human species knows. The human species is fallible. We make errors. So what it can do—yes, it can provide you with facts. If you ask it, what

was the date of Herodotus' publication of his history, it can tell you, more or less, as much as we know. It can't tell you anything we don't know. And if you ask it, however, was Herodotus right or wrong in his theories, it will tell you what the majority opinion is. Or maybe it will tell you both the majority and the minority opinion. But it can't make a judgment independently.

So you're quite right. Utility is great. If I write a speech and I want to check a fact, I find it very useful. If I want to have an opinion, a judgment, I will look at it maybe, but I reserve my own judgment to be made by me, not by it. And I don't see any reason to believe that the search for superintelligence on the part of AI, general intelligence as it is called, is actually going to happen. This seems to me to be like the search for the Holy Grail, the cup from which Jesus drank his last cup of wine at the Last Supper. Does it exist? We don't know. People have been looking for it forever. Maybe it's like the Hidden Imam. Who knows where the Hidden Imam is or when he will reappear? These are theories. They're hypotheses. They're not facts. You can't rely on them. I apologize to anyone who expects the Hidden Imam to turn up immediately in Minas Gerais in Brazil.

#Nima

The reason I mentioned that, Ambassador, is that every time we're talking about Israel, the Middle East, Palestinians, Muslims, Jews, there is a huge problem in understanding the differences. Because when we talk about Islam, they're talking about ISIS, Daesh, Al-Qaeda—these are the face of, this is Islam. When it comes to Judaism and Jewish people, they're talking about what Israel is doing as Jewish. You know, this sort of distortion of reality. When it comes to Christianity, they call it the so-called Christian Zionists. You know, this is not the reality of what is happening in the case of Judaism, Islam, and Christianity.

#Chas

The analogy you draw is correct. ISIS, the Islamic State, Daesh, is for Islam what Zionism is for Judaism. Zionism is a heresy. It is an idolatry. It is a deviation. It is a perversion of Judaism. Here, let me tell you a story. After I retired from the government, I didn't want to have anything to do with what is called the Middle East. I was talked into heading the Middle East Policy Council by George McGovern, who was then the head of it, and Frank Carlucci, and a couple of other people. And I agreed to do it basically for nothing because I thought that the American people were ignorant and needed to have access to facts about Islam, about West Asia, and so on.

So, as part of the exercise of sharpening the message of the Middle East Policy Council, we arranged a program—a struggle session, if you will—with some very well-educated, well-known television personalities. How can we simplify our message so that it connects to our audience better? And we did a whole-day seminar with two very famous people—one close to President Carter, one a well-known journalist. When I said, you know, Islam regards itself as the summation of Judaism and Christianity, as God's direct advice to human beings to whom He had previously sent messages through prophets—Jewish prophets, Jesus, the greatest Jewish prophet in the opinion of Muslims.

And the recipients of these messages ignored them or forgot them or didn't follow the messages, the directions. He finally said, this is God. God finally said, take this down. Memorize this. I'm speaking directly to you, Muhammad. Take it down. And so one of the participants turned to me and said, you mean Islam is related to Christianity and Judaism? This is the level of ignorance that we're dealing with. The Islamic tradition builds on the Judeo-Christian traditions. It is part of it. One of the interesting things when you learn Arabic, as I did, is that by contrast to a language like Chinese or Tamil, which I also learned at various points, you encounter the same figures of speech, the same parables, the same stories.

In fact, the Holy Quran has the most beautiful account of the virgin birth of Jesus from Mary and the angel Jibril, or Gabriel, that you can find. It's much clearer than anything in the Christian documents. So I think we're dealing with an enormously ignorant audience here. And they just think, well, Islam must be totally unrelated to our ethical traditions. No, it isn't. It is entirely consistent with those traditions. It also, of course, reflects life in the 7th century, which was different from the 21st century. And it seems to me that there is the beginning of some kind of Islamic renaissance going on. But I won't live to see whether I'm right or wrong about that.

#Nima

Before wrapping up, Ambassador, the other conflict is in Ukraine, as we were discussing before coming to this slide, which is so important because of the war in the Middle East. Somehow we are distracted from the situation in Ukraine. And we know that Ukrainians are using drones to attack civilians in Russia, and Russia had to respond because there was a lot of pressure. You know, the Russian community, society, is putting pressure on the Russian president. He has to respond to that. He used... and other types of missiles to respond.

And it doesn't seem that anytime soon we're going to have some sort of solution in Ukraine because of the use of drones. It's not a battle. It's not a fight on the battlefield between two bodies of soldiers, two different armies. It's about drones, as you mentioned in the case of Hezbollah. They can use these drones to attack civilians. They did that. That's why Russia responded. And what is the priority of the United States today? It seems that Donald Trump doesn't have that priority to put an end to the war. He wanted to end it in 24 hours, which didn't happen.

#Chas

No, I think what we're seeing, the war in Ukraine has two dimensions. One is a Ukrainian-Russian war, which was basically inspired by Ukrainian nationalism and the desire of Ukrainian nationalists to forcibly assimilate Russian speakers and end Russian influence in Ukraine. There was a coup d'état, there was a prohibition on the use of the Russian language for official purposes and education, and so on and so forth. This is one dimension. The other dimension is a proxy war between various components of the West and Russia. The United States has essentially dropped out of that proxy war

for two reasons. One, we got tired of it. It wasn't going anywhere. Donald Trump didn't want to continue it. And so we basically handed our role off to the Europeans. The Europeans are engaged in a proxy war.

The British in particular, and the United States through its intelligence services, remain involved, doing the targeting for Ukraine to hit targets very deep inside Russia. So we have escalated into direct attacks into remote regions of Russia. That's one escalation. Another is things like the boys' school in Lugansk that was hit, with the death of, I don't know, two dozen students or so, and the resentment that this causes in Russia. This is seen by the Russians, rightly or wrongly, as an act of terrorism that deserves a frightful response. So the battlefield itself has bogged down largely because of the nature of drone warfare and the inability of troops to advance without being seen and attacked by drones. Each side is now firing more and more into the rear areas of the other.

The attack on Kyiv and the warning from Foreign Minister Lavrov to foreign diplomats to leave Kyiv are very ominous because they are a response by Russia to the Western assistance, either through intelligence for targeting or through the supply of weaponry to Ukraine to conduct attacks inside Russia. Attacks on Moscow, attacks on other places, oil refineries, and other installations. Russia is now counter-escalating. The use of the Iskander missile was a signal not just to Ukraine but to everyone that this could escalate to the nuclear level. In the end, Russia's protection from Europe is nuclear. And when you see the Russians mapping out the factories in Germany and the UK and elsewhere that are producing weapons for Ukraine, they're telling you something—that this could go into a full-fledged war, a war between Europeans, European members of NATO, and Russia.

The United States would be obligated to intervene in that war on behalf of the Europeans. It's not clear how seriously Donald Trump takes that warning. So we are on the verge of a further escalation. That has been the pattern in this war from the beginning. One side escalates, the other side counter-escalates. The Russians are now in a phase of counter-escalation. I'll just add that Vladimir Putin has several times said that he thinks the war is in its final stages. I think what he means by that is that there will be an all-out push to take that small part of the Donetsk Oblast that is still under Ukrainian control from the Ukrainians and transfer it to Russian control. So, one way to end the war would be, as Russia demands, for Ukraine voluntarily to withdraw from that, whatever it is, 10% of Donetsk that it continues to occupy.

Failing that, I think the Russians will mount a very costly offensive, a very bloody offensive, and try to finish the war with the capture of that territory. But meanwhile, they are going to wreak havoc deep inside Ukraine because Ukraine is attempting to do that to them. This is very dangerous. We should be paying attention to it, but we are distracted, as you said, by the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, the continued tit-for-tat fighting between the United States and Iran, Israel's invasion of Lebanon, Israel's expansion of its campaign of extermination and ethnic cleansing in Gaza, Israel's pogroms and ethnic cleansing in the West Bank. And so there's a lot on our plate, and we're just not paying the attention we should be to the looming crisis in Europe.

#Nima

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

#Chas

Well, I'm glad you do what you do, Nima, and keep it up.