Chas Freeman: New Great Power Order & Europe's New Dark Age

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 My article discussed in the podcast (based on my speech from Kaliningrad at Kant's 300th birthday): https://glenndiesen.substack.com/p/the-limits-of-reason-individualism 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 Introduction and Context of Global Power Dynamics 00:59 The Significance of the Xi-Putin-Trump Meeting 02:30 Implications of Global Power Shifts 04:09 Europe's Absence in Global Diplomacy 06:32 The Role of the United Nations in Current Conflicts 08:01 Potential for a New Global Order 10:00 Challenges Facing European Unity 12:08 The Need for Reform in European Institutions 14:19 Historical Context of European Relations 16:42 The Importance of Security Architecture in Europe 17:54 Human Nature and Political Realism 20:36 The Decline of Enlightenment Values 28:25 Conclusion: The Future of Global Order 28:52 Freedom of Speech and Political Ostracism 30:42 The Enlightenment and Modern Political Challenges 37:07 The Illusions of European Power 39:17 Disillusionment and the Need for Strategy 45:01 The Dystopian Shift in Society 46:13 Navigating Global Changes and Opportunities

#Glenn

Welcome back, everyone. Today is November 23rd, 2026, and we are joined by the great Ambassador Chas Freeman, a former U.S. Assistant Secretary of Defense and ambassador to Saudi Arabia. Thank you for coming back. It's great, as always, to see you.

#Chas Freeman

Wonderful to see you. And I very much appreciate your having this conversation after your very moving statement about why you're leaving Europe.

#Glenn

Well, thanks. I appreciate it. Actually, what I want to talk to you about is a bit related to that, because I think what's happening in Europe is, to a large extent, a very bad reaction to how the international system is changing. European leaders are not really sure how to respond, and they're responding in a very self-destructive way. But I guess, to start at the logical starting point, I wanted to start off with the recent meeting we had between Xi, Putin, and Trump, because it seems that international institutions no longer reflect global power realities. And as you know, the UN system was established after World War II and reflected the distribution of power that existed after World War II, eighty years ago. Then, of course, after the Cold War, the international system was reorganized.

We built a hegemonic system. The US and its allies would make the decisions and impose them upon the rest of the world. And this essentially meant NATO expansion. It unavoidably, I think, weakened the UN system and multilateralism. But yet again, we see a shift in world order now that the world has several centers of power. And, well, Europe doesn't seem to be one of them. But we've reached the end of this period where the West could merely negotiate among themselves. And we now need great-power diplomacy. I wanted to ask if that's what we are now seeing with this meeting in Shenzhen, in China. Given that these three great powers—the US, China, and Russia—just met, I wanted to get your takeaway. What is the wider significance here of, I guess, just the meeting taking place at all?

#Chas Freeman

Well, it is important that the meeting took place because it establishes a precedent for this kind of ad hoc gathering of the leaders of powerful countries. And it is pregnant with possibilities. This particular meeting, however, really accomplished nothing of substance. It was psychologically gratifying to Donald Trump, who had suffered a major defeat in the midterm elections in the United States and welcomed the show of kindness and courtesy that Xi Jinping put on for him. For Vladimir Putin, it was an important moment because it completely rebutted and refuted the Western effort to isolate him and to ostracize him in international circles. There he was, sitting in China with two very powerful leaders with whom he had a great relationship.

And I think, at least for the Global South—that is, the global majority—this was a vindication of the Russian leader's importance and centrality to global affairs, which the West has consistently denied, calling Russia an insignificant country because of the relatively small size of its gross national product in relation to China or the United States. But Russia is important in many other ways, in other contexts, and I think this demonstrated that. Finally, for Xi Jinping, this was a celebration of the rise of China to the global prominence it has achieved. It is clear that you cannot do anything anywhere in the world now without taking Chinese interests and views into account. And that is the definition of a world power.

So China has moved from being an economic world power to becoming a political world power. And in many respects, it is regarded as a military world power as well. Notable in this gathering was the complete absence of Europe. Why was Europe not there? Well, Europe does not have a coherent policy of any sort on any major issue. It has a lot of rhetoric with respect to the Ukraine war, for example. It repeatedly expresses delusional views about what is happening and refuses to engage in any diplomatic process that might resolve this major conflict in Europe—the first major violent conflict, really, since World War II. Europe is absent from diplomacy. And, of course, as you mentioned or implied, the United Nations was also absent. Why is that?

Because, as you said or implied, the United Nations power structure reflects the victors of World War II and does not reflect the current constellation of power in the global order today. So the United Nations is blocked by disagreements, basically by the United States. The United States had a great deal to do with conceiving the United Nations and promoting its establishment. It was established in San Francisco at a conference presided over by Americans. And for a long time, the United States was a leading force in UN affairs. But we have forfeited that, and instead, we have become obstructionist. So the United Nations is unable to address global conflicts or to make rules for regulating various issues as it traditionally did.

Its subordinate agencies, like the World Trade Organization, have been deliberately sabotaged—in that case, by the United States. And we have the odd situation in which the Russians and the Chinese frequently cite the UN Charter and UN rules, and the Chinese, at least, wish to restore this kind of multilateral institution. Meanwhile, the United States is opposed to its own creation and what it does. And all of this was reflected in that meeting in Shenzhen. Quite aside from the immediate psychological benefits to Xi Jinping, Vladimir Putin, and Donald Trump, this does set a precedent for others with a more purposive agenda, perhaps having worked out such an agenda through Sherpas, as is normally the case for summits.

This summit was concocted really at the last moment and had no fixed agenda. Perhaps in the future, more purposive leaders and more systematic processes can lead this to become what some people are arguing it should become, namely, the nucleus of a new concert of global order to parallel the Concert of Europe that managed the balance of power in Europe during the 19th century after the Congress of Vienna. That may be a pipe dream. It may never happen, but it is certainly not an impossible result of the precedent that these three men set by meeting in Shenzhen.

I think it is clearly the case that other countries were absent, including India, a rising superpower resuming the role in the global order that it had in the pre-European imperial era. Namely, India, like China, always accounted for around a third or two-fifths of the global production of goods and services. It's not there now, but it is climbing back, and the widespread expectation is that by the end of the century, it and China will both have greatly exceeded the United States, but India will be in the lead. So India was not there. Brazil was not there. People joke that Brazil has a great future and always will, meaning it never catches up to its future. But at some point it will.

There are also Japan and Germany, Germany being the great power in Europe, much to the dislike of the British and French, who are on the Security Council but who were not present at Shenzhen in any role. Germany was not there. The Japanese were not there. And so it's clear that the existing system established after World War II is breaking down. This is a possible precursor to a replacement for it, but that's all it is at this point. And it did not establish anything new. There was a declaration of an intent to reform the United Nations, but there was no detailed plan. And it's very unlikely that what these three leaders meant was anything coherent.

There was a statement about nuclear war, a repetition of Ronald Reagan and Gorbachev's statement that a nuclear war can never be won and should therefore never be fought. But the import of this was belied by the fact that at least one of the three countries there, the United States, continues to assert the right to use nuclear weapons before anyone else does, and even against non-nuclear states. The Chinese have the strongest no-first-use policy. The Russians have a heavily qualified no-first-use policy. So I don't think that we can count this as a substantive achievement in any respect, but I don't think it is right to deny its potential importance.

#Glenn

Well, that's how I interpret this. Yeah, perhaps baby steps, or at least normalizing diplomacy. But I had the same thought about Trump signing this statement that nuclear weapons shouldn't be used. Of course, we do know that, at the same time, he told his military to look at the options for using nuclear weapons. He casually remarks that he might wipe out the Iranian nation. To what extent these signed deals mean anything, of course, can be contested. But again, I think it's a messy period because institutions must reflect reality to be effective.

There's often a lot of panic in the media that the old system is breaking down. But, well, of course it's breaking down. We didn't reform it. Again, even with the European structure, you can argue that in the '90s, as Bill Clinton's defense secretary, William Perry, said, whenever anyone in the administration would ask, you know, whether or not it was a good idea to alienate the Russians in this way by expanding NATO, they said, "Well, Russia's weak. It's getting weaker. Who cares?" But yes, okay, I can see that. But now it's different. Thirty years later, they're strong, and they're seemingly getting stronger. So if we want a stable Europe, we have to reform it. We can't try to create a Europe without the Russians if, you know, it's going to end in war. So my point is: either reform it or it falls apart. And we don't seem willing to reform it, yet we still seem surprised it's falling apart.

#Chas Freeman

Well, it's interesting. The British finally recognized that they were in error when they went through with Brexit and left the European Union. But it's not clear what they're attempting to rejoin, because the European Union has become progressively less effective in coordinating policy. I don't know

about your experience, Glenn, but mine has always been that committees cannot make decisions. If you have not precooked the decision before you go into the meeting, it will immediately descend into the weeds, and people will be squabbling over trivia and missing the main point. No decision will be made that makes any sense. And that appears to be an apt description of the European Union's internal discussions.

At least we're past the moment when Europeans were discussing what the European man of the future would look like. I do remember, you know, that according to an interim European Commission report—since they never do a final report, they're always interim—the European man of the future would have the discipline of the Italians, the tolerance of the Spanish, the work ethic of the British, the sense of humor of the Germans, and the humility of the French. And somebody said, "Oh my God, it's a Belgian!" But anyway, we're past that. We're not past the need to find a new mechanism for coordinating policy, and there are some proposals out there which might make some sense.

We're also beset, I think, in Europe by a difference between what Donald Rumsfeld called the old Europe and new Europe. The independent states of Eastern Europe and the Baltics are, you know, feeling their animosity toward Russia and feeding into a Russophobic dialogue in Europe, but also charting their own policies, with Hungary and Poland being very different in their reactions to the evolving situation. You can't any longer ignore two things. One is the historical reality that a Europe which does not include all of its great powers in its councils, is divided, or ostracizes part of its constituency is a Europe that will be at war rather than at peace. This is the mistake made after World War I, with the exclusion of Germany from polite company and the Bolshevik Revolution producing the Soviet Union as a replacement for Tsarist Russia. And that led exactly to World War II and arguably to the Cold War.

So that point is being driven home. And there is a positive development there. The meeting in Abu Dhabi between the Russians and the Ukrainians, under the tutelage of the dynamic duo of real estate brokers from New York, Kushner and Witkoff, did produce a positive development: we began to talk about the need for a new security architecture in Europe. This was something that the Russians had been insisting upon repeatedly, and most forcefully in December 2021, before the rejection of that by the United States, NATO, and the EU led to the Russians doing what they had threatened, namely intervening in Ukraine. I think the realization, at least in some quarters, that you cannot solve the problem of Ukraine or Georgia, or other problems that have existed, without addressing the overall security architecture in Europe is a very positive development, even if it has so far borne no fruit.

So I think, you know, there are gradual adjustments being made mentally. They're too slow. They're too confused. We don't seem to have decisive leaders, people with a vision. I think of Charles de Gaulle, for example, with a vision of European order, whether you agree with it or not. You know, he had a very clear strategy for achieving the objectives he foresaw in order to reestablish Europe as an

independent actor in global affairs, alongside or in opposition to the United States and Russia, as the case might be. So here we are. I think there are things going on, the exact import of which we can't yet foresee.

#Glenn

I like what you said about the European man or the Belgian. But this is a key thing in Europe. They're very taken by the idea of constructivism—that is, you know, we can create a man divorced from his own past, socially constructed. For me, this reminds me a little bit of the efforts to develop Soviet man, you know, this Marxist idea that human nature could be transcended, history could be transcended, that we could essentially uproot the past and start from year one. And, you know, I think there are some things you can't transcend: some basic traits in human nature, group identity, collective consciousness. I mean, I think the experience for the Soviets eventually was that nationalism couldn't be transcended.

It could only be ignored. And I feel you see the same thing now in the EU. And I think that's some of the frustration many of the countries in Western Europe have with Central and Eastern Europe. That is, when they wanted to join the EU, they essentially had to do as they were told. And, you know, they were playing second fiddle. But once they were inside, you know, they started to demand an equal say, and the Western European countries aren't quite comfortable with that. And now, of course, you see, Eastern Europe is also a bit strange. You have some of the most Russophobic, hateful countries there—or governments, at least—but you also have now Slovakians, Hungarians, Bulgarians, all of them starting to pull back a bit, saying, "Well, we don't want to partake anymore in this war with Russia." So it is fragmenting a little bit. But sorry, you were?

#Chas Freeman

No, I was just going to react to your deep conservatism, which is impressive. You're making the classic conservative argument against the ideological mutability and transformability of human nature. This is a charge that is leveled against liberals in the United States. It was correctly leveled against the Soviet communists. It was embedded in Marx and Engels' dream of a world with no alienation, a sort of kingdom of God on Earth that I think is really a Christian heresy. It's a very Western idea, by the way, quite a contrast with, let's say, Buddhist tradition or Confucianism. You know, I sort of treasure the reported remark of Confucius when he was asked by his disciples, "Is there a God? Is there life after death?" And he replied, "Well, you know, those are really very good questions, but I've been too busy dealing with reality here on Earth to have had time to get to those."

And, you know, the Confucian tradition derives principles of social organization from logic, not from divine inspiration, not the Holy Quran, not the Old Testament, certainly, not even the New Testament. And Buddhism similarly accepts that human nature is what it is and has limited ambitions to tame it. So I like what you said because I think it is central to the issues now bedeviling Europe

and its very ideological approach to an increasing number of issues. I like also that the Pope intervenes in these now, once in a while. It's an accident of history that it's an American Pope at this moment, or maybe he's a Peruvian Pope, really, at heart. But he does seem to inject a remarkable degree of common sense into discussions of war and peace and human nature and its alleged mutability. So I like what you said, and I often do.

#Glenn

Well, thank you. I should say I am a bit socially conservative, also an economic nationalist, I guess, along the lines of Alexander Hamilton and Friedrich List. But I do think there are possibilities for human progress. I just think if one pursues it, one should also recognize the constraints imposed by human nature. If you are completely rational, you have to accept that human nature is not entirely rational. We have...

#Glenn

Other instincts, too.

#Glenn

But I think it’s the same with politics: the idealism of human rights and democracy is a great thing. It just has to be built on the foundation of political realism. I always liked the American scholar John Herz. In the 1940s, he wrote about idealist internationalism, where he warned that, from the French revolutionaries to the Bolsheviks, they had all these ideas, but in their efforts to transcend political realism, they instead ignored it. And when trying to overcome power politics, they just made it so much more brutal and vicious. I see the same now with Ukraine, where they all speak in the language of values: Ukraine should be allowed to do this, should be allowed to do that. But again, if you try to, you know, suggest that Russia should have no say on its own borders, it’s going to destroy Ukraine. It’s like coming in with the idealism that Mexico doesn’t have to take into account what America thinks. Well, yeah, it’s going to be burned to the ground. It’s not a positive development. So I just think those things have to be balanced. Not a popular thing to say in Europe these days.

#Chas Freeman

It's very realistic, and it reminds me of the continuing fallacies that various ideological groupings don't attack each other. Communists don't have wars with communists, but tell that to the Soviets and the Chinese and the Eastern Europeans. Christians don't have wars with Christians, but European history refutes that fairly definitively. Muslims don't fight Muslims. You know, all Muslims are devoted to God and peace and so forth.

And the one group that really stands out from this is Jews, who imagine that everybody's after them and are therefore prepared to fight everybody to save themselves from what they regard as inevitable persecution. But I think very important things are going on now—transitions that affect Europe particularly. In 1492, an Italian adventurer in search of India stumbled onto the beach in the Bahamas where I grew up, and the people living there then discovered him on the beach. But this led to the creation of a single world order for the first time, with Columbus opening the Americas and Vasco da Gama opening Asia to Europe.

#Glenn

And that ushered in 500 years of European and Atlantic dominance of global affairs.

#Chas Freeman

And that's gone. And this gathering in Shenzhen symbolically represented some of the new forces that are not European-based or even American-based. That era is over. The era of the rule of law internationally began, I guess, with Grotius at the beginning of the 17th century, trying to formulate laws for the sea, freedom of navigation, and the like. It extended to a very extensive law-building effort in the 20th century. That, too, is gone. The United States, at least, the principal sponsor of the rule of law internationally, now disdains that. And we've even had Marco Rubio, the Secretary of State of the United States, quoting Pompey—or actually misquoting him, but close enough—saying, "Don't cite laws to people with swords."

In other words, might makes right. Well, this is a repudiation of everything the United States ever stood for in its 250-year history. And this brings me to what I think is a fundamental issue, one that's affected you personally: the European Enlightenment, which created a series of values that became the basis for European assertions of moral superiority. This began, I think, perhaps with Sir Isaac Newton's Principia Mathematica in the 17th century, and, of course, Francis Bacon, inventor of science and empiricism in Europe, in Britain. It extended to a very vigorous opening of ideas called the European Enlightenment, in which people like Voltaire in France said very pointedly, "Look, I don't agree with everything you say."

#Chas Freeman

In fact, I don't agree with any of it.

#Chas Freeman

But I will defend to the death your right to say it. And we began to have concepts of equality before the law that violated class structure. We had concepts of freedom of speech, which violated the ideological dictates of religious authorities. We had the idea of freedom of assembly, which violated

the imposed order of monarchies. We had the idea of democracy, meaning all men, and eventually women, were equal before the civil authorities. We had the concept of the right to petition the government for a redress of wrongs or changes in policy. And we had a system that valued tolerance of dissident opinion and protected it: freedom of the press, freedom of journalists to write what they felt was important.

A very slow process, but one that I think can honestly be said to have culminated in the American Revolution of 1776 to 1783 and to have found full form in the Constitution of 1787 with its ten-part Bill of Rights. All of this is going away. It's being shredded as we speak. And you are the latest example of that, unfortunately: not being heard, being ostracized, being threatened, being intimidated—apparently not very successfully—but being driven out of your own country for no particular reason except that you don't agree with the government. And the government, in fact, is operating on two different levels. On the one hand, the Norwegian government and Norwegians like Stoltenberg, who headed NATO, have been vociferous exponents of Russophobia and a security order in Europe that divides Europe between Russia and everything else.

On the other hand, your own government, this government that you have now, joined with Finland to reach out to Moscow in recognition that some sort of diplomatic dialogue with the Russians needs to be conducted. But you are condemned for having advocated dialogue with the Russians. So I think I could cite many examples, but, you know, I hate to do so in the presence of someone who embodies all of the examples that I would otherwise cite. And I hope you find a haven somewhere where freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, respect for democracy, respect for individual rights, and tolerance of differences of opinion continue. There are such places. They don't happen to be in Europe or the United States at the moment.

#Glenn

Yeah, no, it's interesting you would mention that. You know Immanuel Kant. He was one of the leading, defining figures of the Enlightenment. Exactly. Two and a half years ago, it was the 300th anniversary of his birth. He was born in Königsberg, which is now Kaliningrad, and I went there in April of 2024. And again, my arguments then, in terms of the Enlightenment, were about liberal ideals. You have to uphold these; otherwise, you'll have a crisis in modernity. And I also gave a speech about the limits of reason and the limits of secular morality and all this stuff.

I'm still working on a book on that issue. But anyway, there was this conference. It was all about Kant. I mean, even the pens were Kant-themed. Everything was just Immanuel Kant. They kind of adopted him as their own. Apparently, now he's Russian. But anyway, that was the theme. We put flowers on his grave, all of this. What I found interesting, just to show the paradox of where we are now, is that more than a year later, I ran for parliament in Norway because I thought it was a bit remarkable that every single member of parliament was for sending weapons, and no one wanted to talk to Russia. I thought, "That's very strange. It goes against what we've always said."

And anyway, I was purged immediately. I had to quit, drop out. But I thought it was interesting because then they had to find something to shut you down. So they found my attendance there, and they had a picture of the invitation list, in Russian, of course. It said "foreign guests," and I was on the list. And they said this was a list of participants in an influence operation, right? So they actually put this in a newspaper: that I had participated in an influence operation and attempted to undermine NATO in the Baltic Sea. And I had literally posted my speech about Immanuel Kant on my Substack. It had been up for a whole year. And apparently all of this was just to distract, you know what I mean?

#Chas Freeman

Well, we're seeing this kind of thing all over the place. You know, I'm very conscious of watching the saga of Jensen Huang. Jensen Huang was clearly a sexually needy nerd who had a surplus of hubris and thought he could get away with behavior that other people know is likely to work out badly. And one of his lovers apparently was a Chinese woman whom he met in Taipei, by the way, and not on the mainland. She was engaged in helping Chinese AI enterprises circumvent Chinese policy by establishing data centers in Southeast Asia using NVIDIA chips, which the Chinese government had banned from use in China on the grounds that the ban would stimulate Chinese semiconductor companies to produce equivalents of the NVIDIA chips and thereby avoid Chinese dependence on American-controlled supply chains.

She and her husband are engaged in this. The warehouses in Southeast Asia are full of NVIDIA chips that they bought for this purpose. The warehouses in Hong Kong are also full of NVIDIA chips, which Chinese customs won't let into China. And yet, Jensen Huang has been tarred with what is called sexpionage, I guess. That is to say, he slept with the equivalent of Mata Hari. And the fact that he slept with her was not wise, but she strikes me as archetypical of Chinese wheeler-dealer businesspeople, of whom there are millions, very much out to make money and achieve prominence and so forth. Now, we're told—and this is where the slander comes in, or I guess in your case it's libel because it was written down, but slander anyway—that China's Ministry of State Security was in touch with her.

#Glenn

Well, wait a minute.

#Chas Freeman

Would the Ministry of State Security have been derelict in its duty if it had not gotten in touch with her? I mean, here she was, first of all, doing an end run around Chinese policy by building data centers in Southeast Asia with NVIDIA chips that the Chinese government had said its AI companies shouldn't employ. And second, she was in touch with Jensen Huang, who was a friend of Donald Trump, very influential, and such a genius as a company leader that the board has now, as of today,

had to reinstate him, notwithstanding all this scandal. Maybe you will be reinstated to the Norwegian parliament at some point.

But, you know, this kind of victimization of people on the basis of no evidence whatsoever—trial in the press, not in the courts, with nothing you can do about it—is all too common. I've experienced it myself, being portrayed by Israel and its acolytes as a ferocious anti-Semite when I'm anything but that, probably philo-Semitic rather than anti-Semitic in inclination. Anyway, all of this is a breakdown of what Voltaire and others of that age, including Immanuel Kant at a slightly earlier moment, argued for. So now I'll have to go to your Substack and read what you said about Immanuel Kant and perpetual peace and all those things.

#Glenn

Actually, I'll link it to this video, and I'll email it. All right. But on the one hand, I do understand Europe's difficult position, because not long ago, during the hegemonic era, it seemed that we had a seat at the table with the United States, almost exclusively, to decide how the world should be run. I mean, we told ourselves, I think, that there was a collective hegemon, but in reality, of course, the US was running the show. But at least there was a seat at the table. Now, only a few years later, the distribution of power has shifted so rapidly. There have been so many changes on the ground that the Europeans do not even have a seat at the table anymore.

And there's no clear relevance for Europe in the world. Again, the political model, the economic model, the social model—everything is up in the air. The political West seems to be gone. NATO is kind of dissolving. It's not clear what kind of economy Europe is going to have, what technology it will have in the future, or where its energy supply will come from. Socially, they're now talking about how we have to transition from welfare states to warfare states. It's polarizing. There's no end to the problems. And our politicians are suddenly realizing they're not sitting at the table moving pieces, but they have become the pieces.

So I can see why, if they look back at the hegemonic era as being value-based, they can denounce the current developments as dangerous great-power pragmatism, where values are thrown away. And again, I think that this demand to return to a position of power is expressed in very uncompromising language about our good values versus their bad values. Do you see anything along those lines as being the source of the panic, but also of the very dismissive attitudes towards basic stuff like diplomacy and the seemingly growing willingness to even fight a war against the Russian Federation?

#Chas Freeman

Well, I'll make just a couple of comments. First, in order to be disillusioned, you must first have illusions. And Europe has a lot of illusions. You mentioned one of them: treating subordination as an equal partnership. But in a broader sense, I think both the United States and Europe are suffering

from the same problem, which is the inability to craft a strategy to replace George Kennan's strategy. You know, we had a strategy during the Cold War. It was called containment. Everybody subscribed to it. And we had an institution that was designed to keep the Germans down, the Americans in, and the Russians out, as was said at the outset of NATO's formation. And so we didn't need to think about strategy very much. We had one. It was a grand strategy.

It was in place. And I think that just as muscles deteriorate when they're not exercised, strategic reasoning capacity deteriorates when it's not exercised. And we have no ability now to formulate a strategy, apparently. I'll make a confession that will probably annoy a number of people, but I have read a great deal of science fiction. And I read it because in the 1950s, when I was an avid reader—I'm not a boomer, I'm a pre-boomer—it was a literature of optimism. It declared that technology and science could make the world a better place, could vindicate the human spirit. It is now a literature of despair, with dystopia as the primary theme: environmental catastrophes and, you know, alien invasions and all kinds of nonsense.

Anyway, I think this evolution is not unimportant because it illustrates a loss of spirit, a loss of focus, a loss of optimism, a loss of the ability to imagine a better world. And what has replaced science fiction, which is empirically based at its best, is fantasy. And so we have all kinds of magic operating in literature. And, you know, we're talking about magicians. One of my very favorite books, the Tolkien trilogy, The Lord of the Rings, is a wonderful book, with beautiful English, splendid imagination, and it's all about magic. This is now the theme of the age, not science. We're back to the kind of condemnation of science that brought on the Dark Ages in Europe. Superstition rules. And we have a president in the United States who believes 150 impossible things before breakfast.

#Chas Freeman

But he's in an international competition with other champions of unrealism who inhabit the capitals of Europe. So I think we've turned away from focus, reality, optimism, concentration on how to improve things, and we're indulging in a kind of masturbatory fantasy. You know, onanism, if you will. This is a self-indulgent kind of approach to things that denies external realities, that reduces other people to objects and abstractions. It's exactly what Hegel and Marx argued against in their espousal of what I consider to be Christian heresies. Namely, you know, history moves teleologically to some end. The end is the abolition of alienation between individuals, the recognition by everyone that they're dealing with other people with equally valid egos and views.

That leads to tolerance and respect. It's all gone. It's all gone. And so we have no respect for someone who disagrees with us. In the United States, we see this. We're about to have Thanksgiving, which is a traditional American moment to convene families. And the problem now is that political polarization makes civil social intercourse impossible. We've lost the spirit that we once had, the spirit of the Enlightenment, the spirit of optimism, a devotion to empiricism as opposed to

fantasy. This is really very, very troubling, because the last time this happened, we did have dark ages. And I think it's not really easy to see the future as a very positive thing, given the current trends. So once again, we've talked about something grim, haven't we?

#Glenn

We are getting into it. I just have one last question. As you were speaking, I was thinking this is the worst possible time to see the spirit of the Enlightenment weakened or even die, because, you know, we're going through these very difficult times that have to be navigated. I mean, you can argue, yes, 30 years of global primacy are coming to an end. You can say it's the end of the whole 80-year postwar era. Or you can argue it's the end of the last 500 years.

#Chas Freeman

But clearly, many things are in the process of changing. And it's very disturbing and confusing, and we don't seem to be able to come up with the leadership to surmount the challenges that this produces.

#Glenn

That's the thing. At this point, I mean, we can kind of go in two directions here. We can fight to bring back a bygone era, which is probably going to doom us all. Or we can start to adjust and try to embrace changes. For example, the rise of China can be a great opportunity for the Europeans. It can be something that connects the entire Eurasian continent. Even Adam Smith, back in his day, recognized that capitalism and economic connectivity would be much more benign if there were a more even distribution of economic power. Even Marx recognized that.

#Chas Freeman

You know, if you read Das Kapital, it begins with a paean of praise for the ways in which capitalism has drawn the world together. Then he proceeds to explain why there are hidden dangers that will be revealed. Anyway, I agree with you. I think the example of China is important because they've come up with a different model. It's a model in which the state nurtures, protects, and guides market economics. They have a market economy with a ferociously competitive domestic set of industries and services. And, you know, where other countries have a national champion, they have multiple competing champions in every space.

They're undergoing some consolidation. For example, the electric vehicle market, where they had 100 manufacturers, is beginning to see mergers and bankruptcies and the like. The same thing has happened in renewable energy circles. They have multiple AI components. And interestingly to me, whereas financial capitalism in the United States is producing artificial intelligence with the objective of achieving some sort of general intelligence that is superior to human beings—what's it called?

Superintelligence, I guess Donald Trump calls it—the Chinese approach to AI is geared toward enhancing productivity in industry and services. It's not a national security competition.

Of course, it has that implication. But the principal objective is the application of practical measures to increase productivity in the economy. And it's working. And so what are we doing? We are trying to stop it. We're not considering how we might benefit from this, what we might learn from it. You know, a real common market in Europe, in which there was genuine competition regardless of nationality across borders, would be a very good thing. But it isn't there. And so I don't know where Europe is going to go. I think Europe is a sad case because it is essentially victimized by the United States, and it doesn't know how to deal with China or India or the Arab world and the other rising forces globally.

#Glenn

I can understand if there's a concern about the excessive concentration of power in China. But then, of course, we might want to try some different policies. That is, don't cut off India from Iran. Don't cut ourselves off from Russia. I mean, there are a lot of things we can do to encourage all the countries to seek a wider variety of international partners. Instead, we seem to do the exact opposite of what one would do. You would want, for example, Iran to have many partners, not just China. You would want Russia to have many partners instead of just China.

#Chas Freeman

Well, we don't have to embrace one-party government. You know, that may be essential in the case of trying to govern 1.5 billion people, which nobody has previously attempted. It's not working out very well in India at the moment, by contrast with China. But we don't have to accept that. I'm sure I've mentioned to you before one of my favorite quotes from the late Julius Nyerere, the president of Tanzania, who created a one-party regime in Tanzania, which I think was aided by Scandinavians and nobody else. He was criticized by the United States for having a one-party regime. And he said, "Well, the United States has a one-party regime too, but with typical American extravagance, you divide it into two." Well, you know, maybe you can have a one-party state divided into two. Maybe we are one. Anyway, we're not going to solve this problem today, Glenn. So I hope you keep doing all the good work you're doing, even if it's not appreciated in the newspapers of Norway.

#Glenn

We'll have a crack at solving it next time. Anyway, Charles Freeman, thank you so much for taking the time.

#Chas Freeman

Well, thank you, Glenn.