

Freeman: U.S. & Iran Resume War; Israel Attempts to Instigate Civil War

Ambassador Freeman was a former Assistant Secretary of Defense, earning the highest public service awards of the Department of Defense for his roles in designing a NATO-centred post-Cold War European security system and in reestablishing defence and military relations with China. He served as U. S. Ambassador to Saudi Arabia during operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm. 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>

#Glenn

Welcome back. We have the great privilege of being joined today by Ambassador Chas Freeman, one of the great American diplomats who also served as the U.S. Assistant Secretary of Defense. Thank you for coming back on the program.

#Chas Freeman

Great to see you, Glenn. Likewise.

#Glenn

We know that the US and Iran are now striking each other again. Trump is yet again threatening to eliminate Iran. We see that Israel and the government in Lebanon signed an agreement, which at least the Israeli media are celebrating as essentially setting the stage for a civil war within Lebanon. This all happened very quickly after the Memorandum of Understanding, which we were told was going to put an end to this war and bring peace to the Middle East. So what is it that has gone wrong, and where do you see this heading?

#Chas Freeman

Well, I think it should be called the Memorandum of Misunderstanding, because it's very clear that there is no understanding underneath it. And Donald Trump either has forgotten what's in it—I mean, he did sign it—or he didn't understand it to begin with, or he's simply doing what he usually does, which is renegotiating what he has apparently agreed to. So we see all sorts of new terms

being added by the United States, and the United States basically continuing to contest the outcome of the war, which is the establishment of Iranian control of the Strait of Hormuz. The Memorandum of Understanding says that ships will be permitted out of the Strait under arrangements managed by Iran.

And Iran will not charge tolls for 60 days, until August 21. That's in the agreement, along with, right up front, that this agreement depends on the elimination of the war in Lebanon and the withdrawal of the Israelis and a ceasefire. So every single element of this, the basic premises on which the Iranians were to open the Strait, has been violated by either Israel or the United States, or both. So what we've seen in the Strait of Hormuz is an effort to pretend that the United States and the British Navy can control it by bringing tankers out without regard to the procedures that Iran has established, which the MOU appeared to acknowledge. And Iran has naturally then enforced its control of the Strait by attacking these ships.

That has led to retaliatory strikes by the United States, first on a basically symbolic level, and then more recently on a more savage level. And that, in turn, has led to Iranian strikes on U.S. bases in Kuwait and Bahrain, which appear to have been quite serious in the amount of damage they've done, although, as usual, censorship and the servile nature of the Western press have kept the facts obscure. So we're basically seeing an illustration that this so-called memorandum of understanding, which is basically an agreement to seek agreement, not itself an agreement of any sort, is not in effect. A tit-for-tat retaliatory process is in progress. The survival of the MOU is in doubt.

Israel has successfully defied the American agreement with Iran, the Lebanese government—this Lebanese government—which has now acknowledged Israel's right to be in southern Lebanon and agreed that Israel will withdraw in accordance with Israel's own judgments on a gradual basis. And that Israel and the Lebanese government, the Lebanese army, will cooperate in smashing Hezbollah, which is the only effective resistance to Israel. This government is going to be remembered with all the affection that the French bestow on Marshal Pétain. So I think what we're seeing is—I'm not sure you can call it unraveling, because I'm not sure there was anything knitted together in the beginning.

But certainly what is happening is a return to chaos rather than order in the whole of West Asia. I haven't even talked about Syria, which Israel has also been bombing. And Gaza, of course, continues to be subjected to a genocidal squeeze, and the West Bank is in the grip of pogroms and expulsion orders, ethnic cleansing. So ethnic cleansing is going on in southern Lebanon. Basically, the Lebanese government, which is hostile to the Shia population majority in Lebanon, is cooperating in ethnic cleansing in southern Lebanon. And we're seeing everywhere the denouement of 78 years of Israeli dedication to the Greater Israel Project and expansionism to borders beyond whatever de facto borders exist. Israel has no agreed borders or frontiers.

So this is quite a mess. And I should add that the reason Donald Trump fantasizes about the MOU containing provisions which it doesn't, or tries to add them, and is served by Secretary of State

Rubio, who basically went to the Gulf to affirm Donald Trump's fantasies about the Strait of Hormuz with a mostly cooperative GCC—not entirely, mainly with Bahrain, Kuwait, and the UAE—although I gather there were representatives of Saudi Arabia and Qatar present for the meetings. I don't think there was an Omani presence. Basically, this is a classic effort to renegotiate what has been established on the battlefield and at the negotiating table. And it's not working. So Iran is not going to give up control of the Strait of Hormuz.

It has, you know, there's a legal department of the Israeli Foreign Ministry that famously declared that international law advances through violations, that violations of law establish new bases of legal norms. And Iran has established such a norm potentially in the Strait of Hormuz. And this is not a good thing because it means that other straits, whether they are the Bab al-Mandeb, Lombok, the Strait of Malacca, Sunda, the Strait of Taiwan, and so forth and so on, all potentially face control by littoral states who will then charge administrative fees for transit. So the freedom of navigation, which is enshrined, by the way, in early Islamic law as well as by Hugo Grotius, the great Dutch legal scholar who wrote **Mare Liberum**, **The Freedom of the Seas**, in 1619 or so, you know, all this is collapsing. So quite a mess.

#Glenn

Yeah, that's a good way of defining it. But I think most people realize that the MOU wouldn't necessarily be followed. That is, Trump expressed his need to get the oil out, and he agreed to terms which seemed very unlikely he was going to fulfill. Indeed, he was contesting these points even as it was put down on paper. And so I guess ignoring the rest was predictable. But so how do you understand then the resumption of attacks on each other? Would this be the United States trying to—yes, you said renegotiate—that is, to punish Iran if it tries to, well, follow the parts of the MOU which it wants and hope that they won't retaliate? Or do you just think this is now—they're not going to be able to put an end to the war? Or is there a path back to the ceasefire?

#Chas Freeman

It's just very hard to... You know, we have an assumption that all wars must end, but sometimes they don't. Basically, if you look at West Asia, Israel has been at war with everybody on an intermittent basis, but still it's all one great war, really, since before its establishment. I mean, the earliest Zionist settlers had a plan for ethnic cleansing, which they carried out in 1947–48 and which they've repeated on other occasions, including after the 1967 war when some 300,000 Palestinians were driven out of their homes. So this area has basically been at war, I would say, since the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the European carve-up of it in the Sykes-Picot Agreement that has been basically conflict.

And the only question is, what is the intensity of the conflict? So we may be going back to that situation that is more of the same, that in fact there will be no agreement to end the war. This is a contest of stamina, a war of attrition. How long can the United States continue to blockade the

blockade? The wear and tear on ships and personnel is very considerable. The wear and tear on the American global reputation is very considerable. Basically, what unites everyone who is at war with the United States—whether it's Hamas, Hezbollah, the Russians, the Iranians, the Venezuelans, the Cubans—what unites them all is the conclusion that the United States is agreement-incapable.

It is not able to do a deal. Well, deal is the wrong word because a deal is inherently transactional. And as you know, in diplomacy, in foreign relations, every negotiation is not just negotiating a transaction but negotiating a relationship. The United States apparently doesn't understand that and therefore imagines that it can approach foreign relations in the same way that real estate developers approach property owners or buildings in New York. And so if you want to redevelop a property, you evict the tenants.

#Glenn

You know, that's ethnic cleansing.

#Chas Freeman

In effect, you want to do a deal, you read *The Art of the Deal* written by Donald Trump, not the one that Andy Borowitz has attributed to Mustafa Khamenei. I don't know if you saw that, but Andy Borowitz, who is a comic genius in the United States, happens to also live in New Hampshire, although I've never met him, said, tongue-in-cheek, that Mustafa Khamenei had won a major literary prize for a new work called *The Art of the Deal*, the main premise of which was that in order to win in a negotiation, you must always negotiate with a moron. And maybe that is exactly what is happening. Maybe it's no more profound than that. Because there is no constancy. The American word doesn't count for anything. The signature of Donald Trump, ornate as it is, with a Sharpie pen, heavy-duty ink, might as well be invisible ink.

So this is, for me as an American, I find this deeply disturbing. And we have succeeded with the Israelis in trashing international law, in destroying the basic trust in our diplomacy that is essential to advance our interests. We have destabilized situations everywhere. And in the middle of this, Donald Trump, having been frustrated in his pursuit of a notable victory in West Asia, seems to be pivoting back to Ukraine. And I think that issue is becoming very, very dangerous, with European countries now deprived of American supplies of weaponry, developing their own means of assisting Ukraine to conduct long-range strikes into Russia, on the assumption, which I think is going to be proven wrong, that they have immunity from retaliation.

I think particularly the British have been boasting about their development of new weaponry for Ukraine that does not have American components and therefore is independent of Donald Trump in the United States, but will enable Ukraine to strike again deeper into Russia. I think, you know, they're going to have a mafia moment. You know, nice factory you have here. Too bad if something happened to it. I suspect sabotage is the first step. I don't think we'll see a Russian missile strike on

that factory. But who knows? I think at this point NATO is in sufficient disarray that Article 5 is not a very credible deterrent. So I'm very concerned about the dynamic that has been set up. In the meantime, the Europeans continue to debate. Actually, they are beginning to discuss — that's positive — the idea of actually talking to Russia.

#Chas Freeman

Well, I mean, obviously, talking to Russia.

#Chas Freeman

According to some Europeans, it's a sellout. You shouldn't do that. Why should you talk to the devil? Well, the answer is that if you don't talk to the devil, the devil may do devilish things to you. And you have no influence whatsoever over what the devil does. So we're seeing an escalation and counter-escalation cycle reach a higher level in the case of Ukraine. And that is very dangerous.

#Glenn

I also thought, well, it's becoming impossible for Russia now not to respond. And I always thought that the retaliation would either come against the Baltic states or Germany, but the UK obviously is on top of that list as well. And if you look at last year, the attacks on Russia's nuclear deterrent, the FSB attack — well, they confirmed that MI6 had been involved in it. So it wouldn't be impossible for Russia to do something like this with plausible deniability, something similar — drones within the UK, which would strike critical infrastructure, military targets, but most likely production facilities — the mafia method.

Exactly. But overall, though, the comparison between Russia and Iran is that they're both being set up by the West now for what seems to be a forever war. That is this low-intensity — well, not so low in Russia — but they want to lower it to the extent where time is on NATO's side. That is, the ability to gradually degrade not just Russia, but also the Iranian economy. That is, in any war or war of attrition, you measure how much pain each side is taking. But here I'm thinking, how much is Iran willing to cede this kind of control to the United States?

Because I think they know what they want to do. Indeed, the hawks in Tehran, the reason why they opposed this memorandum of understanding was because they quite sensibly, I would say, predicted that it wouldn't be implemented on the U.S. side. And indeed, you don't really need a crystal ball or, you know, a phone call to Nostradamus, if he was still around. But, you know, Trump was already contesting the idea that there would be any money transferred to Iran, even as the memorandum was being signed. So, you know, why would they trust this idea?

#Chas Freeman

Well, there is no trust in any of these dynamics. Let me make a few comments, if I may. First, I don't think forever wars are a strategy. I think they are an inadvertent result of the lack of strategy. That is, there are no clear objectives. Those objectives that are stated are not feasible. They are fantasy objectives. The objectives are contained in the kaleidoscope, which shifts with every moment that it turns. So there's no priority set in them. Therefore, the goalposts are moved during the war. You can always find an excuse for continuing the war. There's no war termination strategy because there are no clear objectives and no benchmarks for measuring progress.

#Glenn

And so you've got a forever war, and it goes on and on and on, and it doesn't end.

#Chas Freeman

And so you have the classic recent example, of course, Afghanistan, where no one could ever explain why we were there after the initial punitive raid on the Taliban as the hosts of Al-Qaeda. So forget, you know, we've all forgotten that. We went to war for women's education or something. No, it wasn't clear. A noble cause, no doubt, whatever it was. But it went on for two decades and produced nothing except the return of the Taliban to control in Afghanistan. So this is a forever war. I mean, I think it requires a definition, and I think I've just provided one.

And it is indeed what seems to be happening with both Ukraine and Iran, which brings me to my second point. The United States Armed Forces and those of Israel, and perhaps NATO as well—meaning the combination of European forces with American forces—these armed forces are all structured for short, victorious wars, not for wars of attrition. And we've seen the consequences of the debilitation of the military-industrial base everywhere except Russia and Iran, which seem to have figured out how to sustain production of relevant weaponry. And the war, of course, has produced some interesting new twists. You know, as the global order, the world order, falls into disarray, we see things like Ukraine, which has developed, with Chinese components, an extremely effective drone production industry.

You know, they get their components from the Chinese, just like the Russians. The Russians also get the Iranian components. Yeah, maybe North Korea now as well, I don't know. Anyway, the Ukrainians have become masters of drone warfare, which turns out to be the sort of warfare that the day requires. And so they are now developing military relationships, support relationships with countries like Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf countries, which means that they're becoming part of a substitution for these countries' previous reliance on American technology, which turns out to be unable to cope with hypersonic missiles and drones and the combination of the two, as shown by Iran.

So that is an interesting twist here. And of course, Marco Rubio's visit to the Gulf notwithstanding, basically in an effort to redefine the MOU to conform to Donald Trump's fantasies about it, this does

not halt the ongoing discussion between the Gulf Arabs and Iran about the post-American blockade future of the Strait of Hormuz, which is going to remain under Iranian control. There's no way to dislodge it. So, one other thing about forever wars is that they turn out to be pointless. And that's pretty much the case here.

#Glenn

All of these wars are very much entangled with each other, so it's very hard to discuss one without touching on the other. I did want to switch a bit, though, to the Israeli component here, because, as you said before, they're also very heavily involved in Syria. And I thought this is an interesting development. That is, before, Iran was a key backer of Syria, which, you know, obviously shaped Israel's foreign policy. Now that Iran is out of Syria to a large extent, the new enemy of Israel appears to be Turkey. And the rhetoric there is also becoming increasingly aggressive towards Turkey. I think Naftali Bennett spearheaded some of the more hawkish, or most hawkish, rhetoric. How do you see this developing? Because, again, that's a different dynamic. Now, at least with Iran, the US and Israel both consider Iran to be one of their main enemies. But now, Israel is switching their main enemy to Turkey. Now you have a NATO state. It complicates things a bit.

#Chas Freeman

Quite a bit. Well, Syria is a country in multiple transitions. Under al-Shahra, the former al-Jilani, who's now the self-declared leader of Syria, he is accommodating the Turkish demand that Syrian Kurds be integrated into a national army on terms that avoid a challenge to Turkey from those Kurds. Meanwhile, of course, in Turkey itself, Abdullah Öcalan, the leader of the PKK, has made his peace with the authorities, and the Kurds are relatively quiet. The Kurds in northern Iraq are very much under Israeli influence and played a role, apparently, in the attack on Iran. Anyway, or at least the region did. But Syria's great asset is its geographical location. You know, it is between the Mediterranean and the interior of West Asia, Central Asia, and not too far from the Black Sea. And it's a transit point. And historically, the Chinese Silk Road debouched at Aleppo and on the Syrian coast.

And this is returning. And so a very interesting thing is you have an Iraqi government, which is very closely aligned in many ways with Iran, Shiite-dominated, which is making its peace with the Syrians. Why? Because the Strait of Hormuz closure deprived Iraq of 90% of its revenue, which depended 90% on oil exports. And those oil exports stopped. So now how does Iraq export its oil? It does it overland through Syria. And eventually there will be a pipeline of some sort, as there was in the past, that enables a much higher volume of Iraqi oil to exit that way. Of course, Iraq is also exporting through Turkey. And in the meantime, you have, as you indicated, an ongoing rivalry, a strategic geopolitical rivalry, between the Kurds, the Israelis, and the Turks playing out in Syria, not so much in Lebanon.

And so this is all in ferment, and nobody can tell you at the moment where it's going to end up. But it's clear that Israel intends to keep the Syrian territory that it has occupied, just as it intends to keep the Lebanese territory that it has occupied. And you mentioned quite correctly that this Israeli calculation in Lebanon is that what they've just signed with the Lebanese government will produce a civil war, because it basically makes the Lebanese government illegitimate in the eyes of a very large part of the Lebanese population. They have sold out Lebanese sovereignty to Israel. They propose to cooperate in the ethnic cleansing of Lebanese Shia. And they have agreed to join Israel and the United States in open enmity to Hezbollah. Of course, Hezbollah is part of that government, represented in the Lebanese parliament.

And this is indeed a very clever Israeli formula for starting a civil war, which will, of course, aid Israel's consolidation of its position in Lebanon and bring even more misery to the Lebanese. It also, by the way, may very well result in a resumption of refugee inflows to Europe, which have depopulated Europe in the case of Syria. But now we may see Lebanon producing much the same result. So this is all very bad incentive developments. And on top of it, we have not quite a rupture, but an open break in some respects between the United States and Israel. This is the first time that has happened since the George H.W. Bush administration pulled the plug on subsidies for Israel over the issue of its settlement activity in the West Bank. But this is much more serious. It's not clear exactly what the United States has withheld from Israel.

But at least in principle, the Trump administration has declared that Israel no longer has a blank check in Lebanon, is no longer free to do whatever it wants, that the United States intends to control this. And Israel, for its part, has retorted that the United States will not control this. Israel will do what it pleases. And I think we have here an Israeli assumption that the basis of Zionist support in the United States will be sufficient to prevent Donald Trump from actually carrying out his threats to rein in Israel. And we'll see what happens there. One other point, which is very relevant, is not only is the traffic through the Strait of Hormuz disrupted, but there was supposed to be a negotiating meeting in Switzerland today between the Americans and the Iranians.

#Glenn

I don't think that happened.

#Chas Freeman

I don't know whether you have other news, but I think the Iranians may be back to saying American violations of the MOU mean that there can be no discussions based on the MOU. And if that's the case, then we're seeing the compounding of a problem that's going to exist anyway, even if there are negotiations and the MOU is somehow—its sanctity is somehow restored—and that is, the United States is running out of stored oil, and the world is running out of stored oil, and there is a gap between the emergence of supplies from the Strait of Hormuz under the most optimistic

assumptions and the supply of oil in refineries throughout the world, with the result that all of the dire predictions about major price increases for oil, the collapse of crop production due to fertilizer shortages, and other consequences of the cutoff of the Strait of Hormuz traffic are all about to hit us pretty quickly. And this before the midterms in the United States.

#Chas Freeman

Which Donald Trump is fixated on.

#Chas Freeman

No, he's making a big effort to use his oversight of the U.S. Postal Service to deprive American voters of their right to use mail-in ballots, having created a myth that there's some sort of major fraud associated with mail-in ballots, for which there's no evidence. But that is a matter of faith now for many of the followers of Donald Trump in the MAGA movement. So he's under huge pressure from his donors, from his base, from the international community, from the Russians and Ukrainians and their interaction, and from Iran and from the Gulf Arabs and from Israel. And one cannot envy his position at all. On the other hand, he put himself in that position. No one else did.

#Glenn

You would think that with all the domestic problems, the Middle East on fire, the resumption of war with Iran, that perhaps this would not be the best time for the U.S. to deepen its involvement in the proxy war against Russia. But yeah, apparently, yeah, that's a decision also being taken. About Israel, I agree with your assessment. I think what they did in Lebanon was quite clever. That's not a normative statement, but only in terms of essentially outsourcing the destruction of Lebanon. Why put this on the shoulders of the Israeli army? Why not instigate a civil war? Indeed, part of this deal between the Lebanese government and Israel essentially meant that the Lebanese government and the soldiers then began to pull away from the south. And as the protests began to erupt in Lebanon, those soldiers, instead of protecting their own country from Israel, are used now to silence their own citizens.

So it's, yeah, you can see, again, it's not guaranteed yet, but you can see that this is one, if not a very likely scenario. But, you know, while this is, I guess, a victory for Israel, you also have other problems. As you said, you have the U.S.-Israel split, which is quite significant. The Israelis are still exhausted by the wars. They have their own economic problems. There's some political instability. It looks like Netanyahu might be forced out, but again, he's not really the most hawkish person in Israeli politics, who would likely be replaced with someone like Naftali Bennett, which, again, we might end up missing Netanyahu. So where is Israel heading here, though? I mean, what is the strategic thinking? How does it get out of this victorious? Well, first of all,

#Chas Freeman

Israel is now engaged in a multi-front war of attrition, and Benjamin Netanyahu, who is not stupid—he may be evil, but he is not stupid—has declared that Israel is fighting on seven or eight fronts, and he's quite correct. How does a state survive under these circumstances when it has alienated its foreign support and still has the United States as an unreliable patron—but a patron—but it has lost its support largely in Europe and is alienated from everyone in the region? Various Israeli achievements, whether they are, for example, the Camp David Accords, which were actually an American diplomatic achievement forced on Israel, have produced a cold peace with Egypt.

Egypt is now actively engaged in a cooperative military relationship with Turkey, the very same Turkey that Naftali Bennett says is the enemy. And in fact, Egypt and Turkey are involved with Pakistan and Saudi Arabia in a four-party coalition, which aspires to be the core of a new security architecture in West Asia, and also to produce a military-industrial base which would wean the region from its dependence on imported weaponry. Israel's weapons, two-thirds or more, come from the United States. The vaunted Israeli missile interception systems—Iron Dome, David's Sling, Arrow—are all co-developed by the United States and paid for by the American taxpayer.

I know because I used to authorize, David, the Iron Dome payments when I was at the Defense Department. So Israel cannot easily wean itself from its dependence. It doesn't have the weight of the four-party coalition I referred to in terms of developing an independent military-industrial base. I don't think the Russians, who are an alternative source of supply, or the Chinese are going to step in and replace the United States for Israel. Europe itself is much less than the sum of its parts. Even the Germans are beginning to wobble in their support for Israel. There is widespread emigration. We don't know how much from Israel. You're in Crete at the moment, I gather, and you may hear a lot of Hebrew being spoken if you put your ear to the window.

And so what is the future of this apartheid state, which has now picked a fight with absolutely everyone, not just in its region but in the world, and which is an international pariah—not welcome in polite company anywhere? Are there trends toward greater support for Israel, either within Israel or abroad? I don't think so. On the other hand, I just want to make a point going back to your very correct observation that replacing Netanyahu doesn't necessarily accomplish anything—quite the opposite. Seventy-five percent of Israelis support the genocide and the aggression. This makes them very different, even from Nazi Germany.

Most Germans were willfully unaware or maybe genuinely unaware of what their government was doing in terms of the Holocaust and the slaughter of Slavs in the East and so on. And the Israelis are willing accomplices in this, supporters of it. And that so thoroughly discredits the Israeli state that you have to assume that eventually there will be a day of reckoning for Israel on this. And I note in that regard that the Mujtaba Khamenei, identified now as Sayyid Khamenei, meaning Khamenei, a genetic descendant of the Prophet Muhammad, that he is now calling for legal warfare, you know, lawfare, if you will, on Israel and the United States for violations of international human rights law and humanitarian law.

And so we're seeing, you know, we may actually see a funny thing happen, and that is the world unite around the World Court and the International Criminal Court against those who have sanctioned these bodies, threatened their judges and their families, and otherwise engaged in really despicable acts of contempt of court. So, you know, where does Israel go from here? At the moment, one would have to, you know, if you were asked to write a life insurance policy on the place, you wouldn't do it, because all the indications are that it's in the process of doing itself in. Suicide is not being done in by others; it's being done in by its own malicious, sadistic actions.

#Glenn

I'm worried about the escalation of the chaos here, because I keep making the point that it's the illusion of escalation control — that we can somehow manage this chaos, this conflict with the Russians, with the Iranians, that we can keep the peace, we can escalate at will, and we can de-escalate if necessary. I think this is what's going to invite disaster, because it's going to be proven wrong. And I saw in the New York Post — well, they cited the Iranian media linked to the IRGC. I didn't check with the original media, but it mentioned that those Iranian media outlets were arguing that, you know, we do need a nuclear weapon now. Of course, the Americans aren't going to accept that. They're not going to accept any peace.

#Chas Freeman

All of this diplomacy... Yeah, no, I mean, that is an obvious consequence of this war, and we've discussed it before, because the United States and Israel murdered the leaders who were most opposed to weapons of mass destruction, leaving in place leaders who are in favor of them because they see their necessity, just as North Korea did in response to maximum pressure on it. That's part of this, but I want to make a more fundamental point, agreeing with you that the prospects for pulling the chestnuts out of the fire in this case are not good. And that is, there is no policy process in Washington. Washington has been the global hegemon which held everything together, which stabilized the world. Many would argue that the United States did that in highly objectionable ways, but it was astride the world like a colossus.

And that colossus has now suffered a frontal lobotomy. You know, there's no brain there. There's no policy process that renders considered judgments about how to deal with all these issues. There's no setting of priorities. Everything is determined by the gut of the president — rather large gut these days, actually. And it's all very unpredictable and chaotic and destabilizing. So the prospect that wise or clever policy, even clever in the sense that the Israelis are clever in Lebanon — devious policy — that something like that will rectify the mess is not good at all. And that should be a grave concern to all of us. And I suspect that it will have a major impact in the midterm elections in the United States. But the idea that elections can curb Donald Trump's whimsies has yet to be proven. We shall see.

#Glenn

It seems that all the conflicts we're heading into now are so predictable. We all learned in school how we sleepwalked into World War I, but it seems like the path is charted quite clearly. Again, those Iranian media outlets, the hawks in Iran, were just saying there is no diplomacy to be made with the West. They're not... They haven't won this. Well, they haven't been able to transition from the argument to the policy. But you obviously see that they have wind in their sails. They're the ones being proven right. And I also get the same impression from Russia, where you see some Kremlin hawks arguing, why are we even talking to the Americans? This is pointless while we're trying to talk to the Europeans.

They're essentially saying, let's kill Zelensky, let's carpet bomb the government district of Kiev, let's use a tactical nuclear weapon or two against some of the Europeans. I mean, again, they haven't won it over yet. They haven't won Putin over in terms of turning this into action. But I'm not sure anymore what Putin's restraint is. I think that this is— is it a concern, or are they building up an arsenal, a stockpile, you know, in preparation for a conflict which seems unavoidable? I— no, it's just— is there anything, I guess that's the last question, something that gives you a source of optimism that there might be some course correction? Because I don't see any of these main issues being discussed in the media at all. It's just how good we are, how bad everyone else is, and, you know, we just have to defeat everyone. That's all or nothing. That's essentially the solution.

#Chas Freeman

No, I think a rational examination of the record would demonstrate that the exclusive use of force, military means to achieve objectives, is counterproductive. And with specific reference to the nuclear issue, basically Iran agreed that for 60 days it would not detonate a device. I mean, that's the way I read that part of the MOU. It didn't say anything about what happens after 60 days. And the notion that somehow or other Iranians are going to conclude that the United States will keep its distance from Iran and not threaten Iran is daily violated by our president and his assistants.

Which brings me to a final point, and that is, you know, very ironically, every time Ukraine strikes deeply into Russia, it validates the Russian argument that a hostile presence in Ukraine is a major threat to the Russian state, that the Russian Federation cannot safely tolerate a foreign force under NATO or under any other rubric in Ukraine, that this is, in fact, an intolerable threat. And that is, of course, what started this war, that Russian perception, which was fed by... And, of course, I remind people that historically, the Russians have a reason to worry about attacks from their neighbors.

Both the French and Germans have invaded Russia, in each case with terrible results for Russians, and in the end, terrible results at least for the Germans. You know, the Mongols did that earlier. Russia seems to have made its peace with the Mongols and with the Chinese, who were part of the Mongol Empire at the time. But to claim that history demonstrates a Russian desire to invade Western Europe, as opposed to pursue retreating armies into Europe, is really quite remarkable. And that seems to be the functioning myth in European diplomacy at the moment. Oh, foreign policy —

they don't have any diplomacy. So, no, I don't see any ray of hope for a satisfactory resolution of the various instances of chaos that we have unleashed. No, I do not.

#Glenn

Yeah, that's an important distinction here, what you pointed out, that most of the Russian military incursions into Western Europe have been following retreating armies as opposed to having instigated these conflicts. That's quite important, I think, especially today, because... Well, when I was teaching security strategy, I always made the point that, you know, the point of departure is the security competition from the international anarchy. This is, you know, why more weapons isn't always more security. And if you see what we have achieved now, I mean, we took Iran, we didn't want it to get nuclear weapons. It didn't want to have nuclear weapons. Now it does.

We talk about Russia wanting to attack NATO. It's absurd. It never had that goal. Indeed, it's gone to great lengths over the past four and a half years to avoid widening the war to NATO. Well, now they might because of NATO's direct involvement in attacks on Russia. It's just the absence of strategic thinking. I think this is what shocks me the most. Any call for restraint is seen as, you know, a Russian conspiracy, and somehow this is the patriotic thing to do — just go after adversaries as hard as possible. It doesn't matter if it failed spectacularly in Iran, how it's going to fail and bring disaster in Russia. But yeah, this is the only path, it seems.

#Chas Freeman

Part of every forever war is an effort to reinforce failure. That is, to double down on the failure, do more of the same, pour more money into it, as though somehow doing more of the same is going to produce a different result. And so, forever wars have a built-in escalation clause, and we're seeing that.

#Glenn

Definitely, that's been the experience in the post-Cold War era. Anyway, Ambassador, as always, thank you so much for sharing your insights.

#Chas Freeman

Enjoy, Craig.