

"Gaza's Genocide & the Shifting World Order"

**Transcript of a conversation with Amb. Chas W. Freeman, Jr.,
conducted by Just World Ed President Helena Cobban on Sept. 17,
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[Helena Cobban]

Hi, everybody. I'm Helena Cobban. I'm the president of Just World Educational, and I'm really delighted today to be able to share with you a conversation that I had on September the 17th with Ambassador Chas W. Freeman, Jr., who is a long-time friend, colleague, and mentor of mine. Chas describes himself as a Burkean conservative, and he has this amazingly long diplomatic record. He is probably the only person in the world who has interacted in a diplomatic way with Mao Zedong, Fidel Castro, and many rulers of Saudi Arabia and other countries.

You can go to his Wikipedia page or his own website, which is chasfreeman.net, and learn more about many of his amazing diplomatic achievements. Anyway, Chas, it's great to be talking with you again. How are you doing?

[Amb. Chas Freeman]

Pretty well, thank you, and thank you for the exaggerated introduction.

[Helena Cobban]

So, today it's going to be like, my sense is that we are sitting at the crest of a wave of global change. That is, some of it we can see in front of us and underneath our feet, and some of it we can't. So, a lot has been happening, obviously, in Gaza, primarily with the continued U.S.-Israeli genocide in Gaza, which I see as having spurred a huge global change, and I want to explore that with you. What can we realistically hope the current session of the UN General Assembly to achieve for the people of Gaza?

[Amb. Chas Freeman]

Very little, I expect. The countries of the Arab and Islamic worlds, the members of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, are, I think, going to be more proactive rather than passive. They may very well move in the General Assembly to suspend the membership of Israel, as was done to South Africa over the issue of apartheid. I don't think they will get to a uniting for peace resolution, even though that is within grasp, which would override the inevitable American veto of any serious action to rein in Prime Minister Netanyahu and the fascist zealots that surround him from both the genocide in Gaza and the less well-publicized ethnic cleansing of the West Bank.

But, you know, I think, if I may, let me just go back to your basic premise that we are seeing a sea change in global order and politics, and I think economics as well, and let me just say

that we've known for some time that the five-century-old domination of the world by the West had come to an end. The "rest" have risen, to use Fareed Zakaria's phrase, that is to say, civilizational states, China, India, Russia, at least in its own perception, have either resurged or risen and are rising.

And it's well to remember that prior to the discovery of America, or since I grew up in the Bahamas, we always believed we had discovered Columbus on the beach, it was the other way around. But anyway, prior to the Columbian opening in 1492, for millennia, India and China were respectively each about one-third of the global economy, and by far the best, you know, the most brilliant civilizations on the planet. Western Europe was a backwater, basically, after the fall of the Roman Empire.

But that era that began around 1500 with Vasco da Gama going around Africa to Asia, and Magellan making a global transit, and Columbus discovering America, and the opening of so many things to the creation of a global order, if you will, that was dominated by the West, that's gone. And we didn't know what would follow it. And there have been a series of traumatic events, among them the genocide in Gaza, which are beginning to show us what the future is going to look like.

Let me start with one, which is the expansion of NATO and the objections of the Russians to the emplacement of Western weaponry, Western European or American weaponry on their Ukrainian border. An objection which is quite understandable. Americans didn't allow the Soviet Union to put such weaponry in Cuba.

And we've mainly forgotten that after our civil war, we expelled the French who'd done the same thing in Mexico. So, that is a challenge within Europe, now that Europe is no longer the dominant force on the planet. And it is having transformative effects on the transatlantic alliance.

And I think particularly the double standards that have been evident in Western concern about casualties in Ukraine, public castigation of Russia for what the world regards as having a fairly legitimate security concern, even if perhaps making the wrong response to it. The contrast between the anguish of the West over Western casualties or European casualties, and the indifference of the West to Arab and Muslim casualties. Remembering that since 9-11, and now quite a long time ago, since 9-11, the United States has been directly or indirectly responsible for the death of about 4 million Muslims by starvation, violence, deprivation of medical care or whatever.

And this is crested in the case of Gaza, where the West is completely complicit-- in fact, part of the genocide effort, as you indicated, and not doing anything effective to protect the Palestinians from pogroms and Israeli army depredations on the West Bank. So, the result of this is that the West has not only lost its commanding power in every sphere but the military, but it's lost its moral standing.

It's no longer the formulator of rules. Now, we went through a strange period under the Biden administration, when the G7, the group, the Western citadel, if you will, proclaimed that it was defending a rules-bound order. But that order was nothing like the post World War II consensual rules-bound order that the rest of the world had signed up to.

It was an order in which the West proclaimed the rules, decided who they should apply to and who should be exempted from them, and very routinely exempted themselves. This is utterly unpersuasive. I think we're now seeing a backlash, blowback to that from the so-called Global South, or perhaps more accurately, the global majority, who insist on resurrecting the post-World War II order.

They're not trying to pull it down. They see us as having done so, and they're trying to pull it back together. And interestingly, what we're seeing, and I have to say with some sorrow, pretty much everywhere but the Arab world, that may not be changing, I don't know.

What we're seeing is regional associations reformulating, trying to restore the rules, for example, of the World Trade Organization, which the United States sabotaged, trying to develop funding mechanisms, regulatory mechanisms for development, the most recent of which came out the Shanghai Cooperation Organization meeting at Tianjin, which is a new bank to fund Belt and Road developments, and to coordinate the development plans of those in Central Asia and Southeast Asia with the Chinese and the Russians.

So, we're seeing new institutions arise, and the contrast between that institution building by the rest of the world and the highly personalistic politics that the United States now has, where we essentially have a dictator who does not care about the Constitution, probably has never read it. I mean, there's no evidence that he's ever read it. He's surrounded by people who are radical reactionaries who wish they're not conservatives, despite their usurpation of that name.

Elsewhere in the world, they're building institutions. We are picking personalistic fights. So, we see the Ukraine war described in terms of a personality conflict between Vladimir Zelensky, the first world president of Ukraine, still in office beyond his constitutional term, and Vladimir Putin, the president of Russia.

We see the same pattern in the Middle East or West Asia, where what we're told is that this is an interaction between Donald Trump and Benjamin Netanyahu, and so there weren't more serious issues and other personalities at stake. And in the midst of all this, we see the United States having abandoned diplomacy, meaning the use of persuasive means to solve problems, sometimes a little bit coercive, but mostly incentivized solutions in favor of military solutions. We don't seem to have any imagination other than to send in the Marines or bomb somebody.

We've just seen that with Iran. So, where is all this leading? I think, first of all, the world of the future is clearly going to be led not by the transatlantic alliance, but by others, mostly in Asia, including possibly in West Asia, because one way you could interpret the recent gathering in Doha by Arab and Islamic countries in solidarity with the aggrieved Qataris having suffered an unprovoked attack on their sovereignty, and indeed, a violation of their role as peacemakers and mediators from Israel.

That meeting did very little in terms of concrete action. But as I indicated, it may lead to an Islamic bloc in the UN General Assembly that is actively pursuing a resolution of the Palestinian issue within the UN rather than passively denouncing Israeli actions and doing nothing. It may lead also to the building of institutions in the Islamic world beyond the few

that exist. And I find it very interesting as a former ambassador to Saudi Arabia, when I was there, the Saudis treated the United Nations with Islamic disdain.

They didn't like secular institutions, much like the Israelis don't like them. And now it seems to me that they are indeed open to institution building and cooperation and affirmation of the UN Charter and its principles, which brings me back to the point that it is the rest of the world, the global majority, that is conservative and the United States that is now radical, joined by Western Europe. And here, let me end by saying that I consider the Europeans to be pathetic.

They are what I call the coalition of the deluded. They are operating on the basis of inadequate economic power, inadequate unity, inadequate willpower, no resolve. They make statements which are frankly preposterous, that they don't have the ability to carry out, they promise things they can't deliver, and they don't seem to have a global vision anymore.

So, if the United States has become a villain, internationally the Europeans have become feckless dupes of the system.

[Helena Cobban]

Yeah, or a laughingstock indeed, almost.

[Amb. Chas Freeman]

They should be laughed at. On the other hand, if you believe, as I do, that Western civilization was a great achievement, it's very sad to see it not only lose its global impact, but again, at cross-purposes with itself, become less than the sum of the parts, as it were.

[Helena Cobban]

Yeah, I mean, I think we could, at another time, have a good discussion about Western civilization. Just, you know, remembering Gandhi's great line, when somebody asked him, what do you think of Western civilization? He said, well, it would be a good idea, or something like that.

[Amb. Chas Freeman]

Yes, with relish. Well, you know, I think...

[Helena Cobban]

I want to come back to the geopolitics more. You kind of implied that the West is already defeated. I don't see that as the case.

I mean, we still have, for example, you talked about people in the Global South, the global majority, wanting to revive or, you know, give life support to the United Nations. But this is a United Nations that still has vetoes from, you know, the United States and three European

powers, and just one power that is not European, which is China. So that's just an example of, you know-- if you want to revive the United Nations, then it's going to be a difficult task.

But the West still controls it. The West still, you know, has immense financial power in the world. Even though its economic heft is diminishing, it has not yet diminished. You know, if you take the West as being like all the countries of European origin, like including the United States and Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and that's about it, you know, and then there are, of course, all the tiny little islands that the US and Israel always bring in for their votes. But so those, what I call the "White "nations, constitute something like 12% of global humanity in demographic terms. But they actually wield a hugely disproportionate economic heft, although China and other ASEAN countries, I mean, China and the ASEAN countries, are definitely coming up very rapidly.

In many, many respects, including the Chinese companies, just leaping up the value chain, you know, they're no longer making little plastic parts for dolls, they're actually making very advanced five-axis computer controlled machine tools, and outselling the Germans. So, you know, this is a changing world, but Western hegemony has not yet been defeated, I think. You know, I grew up in Britain, when the British Empire was decaying. And it is an era in which the decaying power kind of lashes out.

And we've seen that, I think that's a way to explain what the US-Israeli axis is doing in Gaza, you know, they're desperate to reestablish the credibility of Israel's deterrent, which is such a weird way to frame the genocide and other acts that you have, that you have identified.

So do you think, well-- Okay, next week, we're going to have the UN, the serious part of the UN General Assembly, I suppose. Is it worth speculating on whether the Arab and Islamic bloc will do anything useful there?

[Amb. Chas Freeman]

Yeah, I think it is. But you know, Helena, I basically, let me clarify something. Of course, the institutions that were created after World War Two, to the extent that they have not been disempowered, like the World Trade Organization, are still in the hands of dominated by the West.

That is a problem, indeed, as you say, because the UN Security Council does not represent the contemporary constellation of global power and influence. And therefore, when I talk about resurrecting the post-World War Two order, I'm not talking about preserving its institutions. They may have to be reinvented, just as the League of Nations had to be replaced by the United Nations to reflect radically changed global realities produced by World War Two, and the failure of the League of Nations to head that off.

So we may see, and we are seeing, in fact, as I said, others, largely led by the Chinese, as it turns out, creating new institutions which take over many of the functions of the United Nations.

So what is the United Nations? Well, on one level, it's a set of international laws and rules that have been established by global consensus, a consensus from which the United States has now departed.

I don't believe the Europeans have departed from them, although a lot of their behavior is pretty hard to square with those rules. And those rules, those principles of law, of how to manage a global order, don't depend ultimately on the existing shell within which they're lodged. They can be transferred to a new organization or organizations.

So what we see is the BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, which now seem to be, to some extent, merging. We see them providing the forum for policy discussion that the UN no longer provides. So they can discuss issues like the genocide in Gaza in terms that the American veto in the UN prevents.

And I think we're going to see more and more of this. When I talk about new institutions, it's not just the BRICS, the SCO, ASEAN has a grouping which, by the way, is a formidable economic grouping indeed, about to be joined by Timor-Leste. We've seen the collapse of the traditional Western foreign assistance effort.

USAID has been eviscerated and not even the guts remain of it. So that there was recently a meeting on global development in Seville, in Spain, and the United States did not attend. We're no longer at the table when rules are made.

And that opens the possibility of other new fora for dialogue and decision making. There's nothing that says that ad hoc conferences cannot make rules for those who care to accept those rules. And so if the United Nations and World Trade Organization and the World Bank and the IMF are not able to make rules anymore that have support from their members, then the members may be free to organize something else.

So I think that is the direction in which we're moving. Let me make a few comments about the economic situation. The United States has, for reasons which remain obscure, decided to embrace the economic philosophy of Peter Navarro, who is, I believe, alone among economists in his beliefs.

This is a man who made his career on bashing China. He wrote a book called *Death by China*, but he'd never been to China until 2018.

[Helena Cobban]

And he also extensively cited somebody who nobody else had ever heard of, and it was an anagram of his own name.

[Amb. Chas Freeman]

Exactly. Exactly. Ron Varra was the name. He interviewed Ron Varro, which was to say himself, on numerous occasions.

But the idea that somehow or other you can reindustrialize the United States by cutting off imports, by disrupting supply chains, by alienating the entire world, by declaring economic

war on the world, essentially, and doing it in an arbitrary and capricious fashion. There's no methodology behind it.

That you can preserve American hegemony, make America great again, by destroying all vestiges of an organized policy process in Washington, by replacing it with sycophancy toward a great leader who holds three-and-a-half-hour cabinet sessions, which resemble nothing so much as the "Death of Stalin" movie. You know, this is just nonsense, and it is doomed to fail. And I think we are beginning to see, finally, the tariffs that President Trump has put into place are beginning to have their effect in the market.

There was a suspension of them, because during the various suspensions of them, wholesalers and retailers stocked up heavily on goods which were tariff-free. We saw a surge in imports as a result. Those stocks are now being exhausted.

So the next time you want to go out and buy some shoes, expect a sticker shock from the price. Anyway, the theories that you can preserve or restore hegemony through entirely coercive means are just false. So, I think economically, what we're seeing is not only a shift in wealth and power.

The two places in the world that are capital-rich are China and the Arab Gulf, not the United States. We run a perpetual deficit, and our debt is mounting. It is mountainous now and getting higher, and is ultimately unsustainable.

The only answer to how to pay it off is the one that Larry Summers came up with, which is having hyperinflation. So, you basically inflate the debt out of existence. And we're headed for something, for a break in the global currency system.

The dollar is not going to be replaced by a single currency, not the Chinese yuan or the European euro or any such thing. It will be replaced by multiple currencies, including cyber currencies, stablecoins, which have a relationship to either a basket of commodities or a particular basket of currencies or a currency. And we're seeing now the beginning of all kinds of trade settlement mechanisms that avoid SWIFT, the Brussels-based, Western-dominated, American-dominated currency transaction center.

You know, we have a Russian system, we have a Chinese system. Other systems are coming to play. And the credit swaps, currency swap arrangements are proliferating.

And so, we're clearly going to enter into something that is post-Bretton Woods in its design and operation. And this too will empower others at the expense of American power. I mean, the exorbitant privilege that the United States has enjoyed as a result of dollar centrality is eroding.

It's not gone. You're quite right. The West still remains financially dominant, but it is becoming manifestly less so.

And we can already see a future in which markets elsewhere are the key ones. And in this regard, just to end, we see global growth now driven not by the United States, which is actually not growing at all in real terms, but by markets like China, like India. And again, I

come back to a lament that whereas the Indians are pulling their civilizational background together in a single state, the Chinese have done so, the Japanese did so earlier.

Europeans are confused, so we'll leave them out of the equation. Donald Trump has managed to unite Brazilians in support of Brazilian sovereignty against the United States. African countries like Nigeria are emerging as major factors in the world.

I mean, look at the UK and who's prominent in politics. A lot of Nigerians have risen to very high positions. They're very smart people, and given a chance, they can do wonderful things.

So, we're seeing regional powers develop independently of the United States, except in the Arab world. There's a lot of talk about a renaissance, but I don't see it. I mean, in fact, one of the more interesting elements of this is that the Qatari emir, the father of the current emir, and this emir, have both had as an objective the creation of an Islamic renaissance.

And I think that will happen, but it hasn't happened yet. And I think this meeting at Doha and the common focus on balancing the depredations of Israel and the obvious requirement to review defense dependency on the United States, since the United States has not risen to the occasion-- it is in fact colluding with Israel in attacks on Arabs rather than defending Arabs against anything. This is going to produce, first of all, an accelerated rapprochement between Iran and the Gulf Arabs.

Second, it will probably bring the Iraqis back into the equation, since they have a good relationship with Iran and they also have a growing relationship with the Gulf Arabs. And this will have an effect. Turkey is a factor as well, a big one, and very clearly recognizes the opportunity that a bit of more cohesion in the Islamic world presents.

The one sad case is Syria and Lebanon, which in the end are one cultural bloc. French colonialism created Lebanon as a Christian enclave. It's now a Shiite enclave ruled largely by Hezbollah.

And the effort to disarm Hezbollah is going to go nowhere. But we have disorder in Syria. A lot of atrocities being committed by the jihadis who have not reformed to the extent that Western propaganda and Israeli propaganda have claimed they have.

We have Israel annexing land, which is an affront to every Arab, not just Syrians. We have Israel enlarging itself again in southern Lebanon and declining to leave. We have Israel vying for supremacy in the Levant with Turkey in a way that is very pregnant with peril for both.

And the United States is sidelined on all these things. Despite our ambassador to Ankara, who is a Lebanese of Lebanese origin and Christian Lebanese origin at that, and is pushing a policy which coincides with both Israeli and Christian-Lebanese interests at the expense of the Shiite and Sunni interests that are probably more better represented demographically in the region. So, things are happening.

And I think the idea of resurrecting the rules of the institutions, creating new institutions to improve or enforce the rules, is the theme of the day, not restoring the institutions themselves.

[Helena Cobban]

Interesting. I guess I'm still more attached to the institutions, who knows why. But obviously, you mentioned Lebanon and Syria and the depredations there being undertaken, I would say, by the US-Israeli axis, not just by the Israelis.

And this idea that in both these cases, you have UN forces that have been on those borders, UNIFIL in Lebanon and UNDOF in Syria. And the US-Israeli axis just busts right through them as though they are like nothing, as though they are chaff. And the UN does nothing in response to hold US and Israel to account.

To me, that is very telling. And it happened under Biden, as well as under Trump, but even worse under Trump, I guess.

[Amb. Chas Freeman]

Well, I think the Trump administration has nothing but contempt for international institutions.

[Helena Cobban]

Or national institutions.

[Amb. Chas Freeman]

Oh, well, that too, but that's a domestic issue. I mean, we are in a lawless state. We have an incipient police state in this country.

[Helena Cobban]

Yeah, I have a little idea for a movement called Make America Constitutional Again. What do you think?

[Amb. Chas Freeman]

That would appeal to me greatly.

[Helena Cobban]

Anyway, sorry.

[Amb. Chas Freeman]

Although, I have to say that I think enough damage has been done to our republic in terms of the destruction of checks and balances and the rule of law that I don't think it probably will be reconstituted in the original form. We too may have to reinvent our institutions. And clearly, to go to a different part of the world, both the Arab world and Europeans need to reinvent their institutions.

The Arab League has always been a major emitter of hot air and not much else. I remember when I was in Riyadh, there was a minister of state, a very entertaining fellow with enormous prejudices against everyone, which he wore on his sleeve. So, we called him Archie Bin Bunker after the famous Brooklyn-based Irish racist of television fame.

His specialty was being sent to Arab League meetings to throw the monkey wrench into them, so they couldn't accomplish anything if the Saudis didn't want something accomplished. And he was marvelously adept at that, very, very good at it. And so, the Arab League needs to be reinvented.

There is no collective will in the Arab world that is evident. It comes and goes in flashes. The Arab world needs reintegration.

The Islamic world and the Arab world may now be fusing, as the OIC presence in Doha illustrated. Europeans, for their part, clearly are less than the sum of the parts, divided among themselves. Interestingly, the only apparent realist in the group is an avowed fascist, Giorgia Meloni.

She's got her feet on the ground. And in a normally chaotic Italian political system, she's in charge, quite remarkable. But I think, you know, all of this comes down to the failure of the existing institutions.

In many cases, for example, the World Health Organization, the United States is now absent. And that offers an opportunity to reinvigorate the institution. If the United States wishes to isolate itself, I think I've met numerous foreigners who say, hooray, let the United States do that.

Then maybe we can get on with some kind of useful work. The same thing is true of UNICEF, UNESCO. Obviously, the United States is not part of the UNCTAD, the UN Development Agency, constellation anymore.

And the Human Rights Commission, the United States is basically absent, even though that was, of course, a major plank of an American administration headed by Jimmy Carter. So, again, you described me as a Burkean conservative. I am.

I don't believe things that work should be interfered with. I don't believe that it is conservative to wreck things. I don't believe that it is anything but radical to propose major alternatives to what has worked.

I think building on what has worked is what is conservative, not tearing it down. And we're in an era in which the United States is radical and reactionary. And it's having a major impact in the world.

It is, in fact, driving all of the trends that I've been talking about. Now, that is, let me end up with this one obvious note, and that is the United States may have divorced itself from globalization, but the rest of the world is carrying on with it. Not Europe. It's confused, of course, and ambivalent, which reflects its weakness, but everywhere else, globalization is alive, well, and advancing.

And so, this too is a consequence of American policy, which is misguided and which is going to raise, lower our standard of living and raise the cost of everything in our economy.

[Helena Cobban]

So, Chas, you have very expertly described kind of the growth of new coalitions in various places, and especially the growing role of economics and economic integration through the BRICS or the Belt and Road Initiative, or in other ways, including, as you said, the SCO, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. But it's notable that all these things have been happening in places other than the United States with regional integrations and cooperation and so on and so forth. And that's all great, but the core function of the United Nations has always been the prevention of war.

And the one area in which-- well, let's look at Gaza. The only way, I think, to end the genocide in Gaza is through the dispatch of a capable and legitimate and empowered UN protection force with a clear mandate. You may or may not agree with that, but, you know, economic this or economic that is not going to do it.

[Amb. Chas Freeman]

No, I agree with you about that. But I would not describe the core function of the UN as preventing war. I think that's its core aspiration.

The only occasion on which I have seen the UN function in accordance with that aspiration was the first Gulf War, where the UN Security Council united against an attempt by Iraq to annex a neighboring smaller country, Kuwait. And we mounted an effort to liberate Kuwait, which was very, very seriously multinational. I was in the middle of that.

And I know very well how radical that transformation of the UN was. It did not last. And so, again, I come back to the need to reinvent institutions.

There is now, because the United Nations Headquarters Agreement, which requires the United States to provide visas and access to the General Assembly in New York to any delegation of interest, because we have now prevented a Palestinian delegation from receiving visas and entering New York for that purpose. There are growing calls to move the UN out of New York, maybe to Geneva, where much of the UN is already located. That is the legacy of the League of Nations, which was launched in Geneva, but maybe not in Geneva, maybe somewhere else, maybe given the direction of the center of gravity in global economics and politics, maybe to somewhere in Asia.

[Helena Cobban]

Maybe Singapore, actually.

[Amb. Chas Freeman]

Maybe Singapore would be a good choice. That is a formidably effective city-state, which marches to its own drummer and is not beholden to any great power, except to the extent it

wishes to be. So, at any rate, this is an indication of what I predict, which is that the institutions will be reinvented and they may be relocated as part of that.

And then Donald Trump can redevelop Turtle Bay instead of Gaza.

[Helena Cobban]

But if the UN is relocating, that is not going to save the people of Gaza.

[Amb. Chas Freeman]

No. And I agree with you completely, having participated in the organization of a posse to expel Iraq from Kuwait, that that is indeed the only model that can effectively halt the abuses that... Abuses is too mild a word: the horrors that Israel is inflicting on innocent people in Gaza, or in the West Bank for that matter. You know, I think basically what has happened, and let me just make a point. Well, as you know, optimism is to diplomats as courage is to soldiers.

You have to believe you can accomplish something in order to persevere sufficiently to accomplish it. The horrors that Israel has revealed to the world, visible to everyone, have now become so obvious that there is a huge backlash. We saw this even with the assassination of Charlie Kirk recently, where apparently he, having been on the Israeli payroll essentially, bankrolled by prominent Zionist plutocrats, first received warnings from them that he was not sufficiently loyal to Israel, got an offer from Netanyahu to re-fund him if he would just shut up about what was going on in Gaza, became concerned for his life when he made that appearance at the university in Utah. He was in the company of ex-special forces and the like as a bodyguard, and yet he was assassinated.

And of course, in right-wing circles, there's now a conspiracy theory that this was done by Mossad, sufficiently ubiquitous that Prime Minister Netanyahu has had to go publicly and deny it, which of course, since no one believes anything Netanyahu says anymore, just adds credibility to the charge. But my point is, the American youth in Europe, not us old fogies, well, perhaps there are a few of us who have our heads screwed on right-- But the majority of the population now is well aware of what Zionism is and what it is doing.

And I think, I see more and more American Jews, I don't know about what's happening in the UK or France, which are the other major Western concentrations of adherents of Judaism. I see more and more of them saying, look, Zionism's got the rituals of Judaism, but that's all. It's the negation of Judaism.

It is the violation of every ethical principle that has been worked out over millennia within the Jewish faith, and I do not want to be, in any respect, identified with that. That Jewish form of Daesh, the equivalent of ISIS, that is to say, a heretical, zealous, murderous creed that bears no resemblance to the basic faith from which it sprang.

It is, in fact, a perversion, deviation that should be condemned. And I hear this from more and more conscientious Jewish friends. So, I'm convinced that, you know, misdeeds create their own antipathies, and that the Zionist excesses are doing just that.

But it won't come in time to save the Gazans. I'm sorry to say, they're already on the brink of perishing. I mean, when you look at the figures on food shortages, when you see the emaciated bodies, when you watch people scuttling around under bombardment, you're murdered by snipers, when you see the absolutely atrocious Gaza Humanitarian Foundation operation serving as a mousetrap in which to catch human mice and kill them, it's very hard to see how this ends in the short term in time.

And in fact, one of the concerns I had originally about the Saudi-French declaration on these issues was that there might not be many Palestinians left by the time it was proclaimed. I thought the delay in recognizing Palestine until the UN General Assembly assembled in New York, it was a cynical political maneuver, very similar to things we've seen before, like the invisible non-existent peace process, which always had to be protected even though it didn't exist. An excuse to kick the can down the road, allow Israel to establish more facts on the ground, in this case, paving the way for some absolutely morally grotesque redevelopment of Gaza, free of Gazans and full of plutocrats from other places.

So, the horrors of this have stigmatized Zionism, have besmirched its reputation to such an extent that I don't think it can wash itself clean. I don't think the American and Israeli actions in Gaza will ever be forgiven by the world. I think they will live on in infamy.

And so, perhaps in the end, to put a mildly positive light on this, Hamas, which set out on October 7th to elevate the Palestinian issue to the top of the global agenda, has done so. It may be cowering in tunnels, but in the world of ideas and propaganda, it has won.

[Helena Cobban]

Well, that is a fantastic note on which to end, although I'm kind of reluctant to end. There's a whole lot more to talk about, especially, you know, if Zionism has been besmirched that far, and I agree with you that it has, worldwide, then the whole concept that the United Nations undertook in 1947, in, you know, the midst of, like, West European guilt and whatever over the Holocaust-- which was created, undertaken by West Europeans. The idea that, you know, they would somehow assuage themselves of the guilt for this by creating a Jewish homeland in Palestine, which they called Palestine, which everybody knew was Palestine, and creating a Jewish state there.

Maybe that is part of the UN record that has to be revised and overthrown. What do you think?

[Amb. Chas Freeman]

I agree. I agree with that, because the UN at that time had roughly 50 members. This was the era of colonialism still.

It had not begun to end. The winds of change had not blown through the British Empire, and the UN gratuitously, without any regard for the demographics of the situation, partitioned Palestine into two states, in effect. Israel violated that UN resolution immediately by taking much more of the land than it had been allocated, and its allocation was most unjust.

It included much of the more arable land and a disproportionate amount of it. Israel began its independence with the violation of the UN resolution. As far as I can tell, it's never heeded any UN resolution.

I think it was Ben-Gurion who used to say, Boum Shmum, you know, the Boum being the UN in Hebrew, evidently. And so, Israel began its life as an outlaw, and it's still an outlaw, but now it's recognized as such. And I think the UN bears a heavy responsibility.

Institutionally, of course, the United States and Russia at various points protected Israel from retribution, or left it to carry out acts of great criminal nature with impunity. And, you know, we have been the enablers for a long time. Now, we're actually participants, we're not just enablers.

We didn't just hand the car keys to the drunk. We got drunk ourselves and shared the wheel with the drunk. So, if there is redemption here, it is not going to come from within Israel.

I dealt with the South Africans. I watched F.W. de Klerk have a crisis of conscience, which led him to release Nelson Mandela and set in motion a shift to majority rule. Israeli apartheid suffers from no crisis of conscience, and it is fundamentally worse than the South African version.

The South African version was separate development, which meant divide and rule, but allow others to develop their own culture as they saw fit, and allow them to develop economically.

[Helena Cobban]

Yes, but while the whites grabbed all the best land, remember?

[Amb. Chas Freeman]

Well, of course, I'm not praising apartheid. I'm contrasting it with the Israeli version, which envisages no self-determination, no self-development, no role at all for the Palestinian population. It simply wants to evict them, and if it can't evict them, it will murder them, as we have seen.

So, is this better than apartheid in South Africa? I think it's infinitely worse. You know, apartheid is pretty awful, but this is worse than awful.

It's fatal for the Palestinians. Ultimately, it promises a dire future for that portion of American Jewry that is resettled in Israel. Judaism is not going to go away.

Jews in other countries may well repent of their knee-jerk support for the Zionist state. They have a glorious ethical tradition. They will rediscover it, but I don't see it happening in Israel.

So, I think we're looking at the end of days in Palestine, not just for the Palestinians, but for the Zionists.

[Helena Cobban]

Well, thank you. On that note, I think we probably need to wrap up, but I want to thank you very much, Chas Freeman, for giving all of us this amazing *tour d'horizon*, as the French say, a 360-degree view of world affairs, and I'm sure that we will get back and talk about these matters again someday soon. Thank you.

[Amb. Chas Freeman]

Thank you.