

Nima Alkhorshid with Amb. Chas Freeman: Negotiations... or the Brink of All-Out War?

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[Nima Alkhorshid]

Hi, everybody. Today's Friday, February 6, 2026, and our dear friend, Ambassador Chas Freeman, is here with us. Welcome back, Ambassador.

[Chas Freeman]

Glad to be with you, Nima.

[Nima Alkhorshid]

Let me start with one of the saddest, you know, moment in my, you know, when I came to Iran, I was in contact with Graham Fuller, because he was concerned about the future of the region, how the region is changing here in West Asia, and we were talking about these things, but he was one of my closest guests on this podcast. Every time we were talking behind the scene and after the talks, we were talking on many issues, and he passed away. You informed me that he passed away.

It was so sad to hear that.

[Chas Freeman]

Well, he, I knew Graham Fuller for many years, only slightly. We ran into each other when we were both serving in the government. I was well aware.

He wrote several novels, and in those novels, thinly disguised, the disguised autobiographical elements in those novels made it very clear that Graham was a man of conscience. He, in the CIA, he served for a time as a case officer, meaning he was managing agents, and of course, the purpose of a case officer in any intelligence service is to persuade people in another society, a government, to commit treason, to be disloyal to their own society and government for one reason or another. I mean, there are many reasons that people commit treason.

Some just want money. Some have a faith in some project or some ideology that they want to advance. Others just disagree with policy and want to change it, and imagine they can do that in association with a foreign intelligence service.

But Graham had, Graham came to the conclusion, Graham was a very ethical man, and he came to the conclusion that his conscience would not allow him to perform this role. And he was then an analyst. He was a brilliant one.

He had, as you indicated, he had a widespread set of interests, they extended from West Asia, where he was a Turkish language officer, to China, where he also had some role. And in his last years, he left the United States, he moved first to Vancouver in Canada, and then to Montréal in Quebec, and he was enjoying that life there.

He became ill. I think his daughters were with him when he passed away. But it was all a surprise and a great tragedy, I think.

But I agree with you, he was someone who deserves to be remembered, and remembered with respect.

[Nima Alkhorshid]

We know that one of the main concerns on his part, he loved the United States of America, he wanted the United States to be a better country, to be better, you know, in terms of the economy, in terms of the, you know, as a superpower to be in a better position to deal with other issues, with the geopolitical issues. And one of the issues that we talk about, you know, before he passed away, you know, before this happening, he was concerned about the West Asia. We know that today, as we talk, we have these sort of negotiations happening in Oman.

On one side, you see, they're talking about the negotiation, and something happened this time, as Jared Kushner has joined the team, the Trump team, with Steve Witkoff, as the same happened in the case of Ukraine. And on the other hand, the Israeli media says, this may be a trap, a new trap to, you know, somehow convince Iranians that the United States or Donald Trump is trying to negotiate with Iranians, and then attack Iran. What is your perception?

What is your take on what's going on right now?

[Chas Freeman]

Well, I think Donald Trump does not know what he wants, and why he's doing what he's doing. There is no policy process in Washington. There's no strategy that is developed.

He has surrounded himself with yes-men. It's not clear to me that even the military, who have a habit of speaking truth to power, still do that. So, he has committed himself to an armada aimed at Iran.

And I don't think that armada can do anything useful, one way or another. But let me go back. What are the stated objectives?

One is to, in effect, restore the JCPOA, to have a deal on nuclear matters. Well, there was one. He tore it up.

I don't know why anyone in Iran would believe that if he signed another JCPOA, that he would keep his word. He changes his mind and his word with uncommon frequency.

The second consideration. Obviously, what is behind this is, well, one of the stated objectives is somehow to help the protests in Iran, the protesters, confront the government, and either force reform or the overthrow of the government. I'll come back to that. There is no way that a military force can do that, except to do more of the same.

What does more of the same mean? It means make Iranians so miserable that they feel they have no alternative to changing the regime, either by reform or by overthrow. But the track record there is very clear.

If you confront Iranians like that, they rally behind their country. You mentioned Graham Fuller was a very patriotic American. He was a dissident.

He did not believe in what the government in the United States is now doing, either domestically or abroad. Many Iranians probably are in the same position vis-à-vis the Iranian government. But you can't do anything useful by bombing Iran, so that is wrong.

Then we come to the unstated but obvious purpose of all this, which is to level every country that opposes Israel in West Asia, to make Israel the unchallenged hegemon of West Asia. And Iran is the principal obstacle to that. This is basically the United States being used by Israel for Israeli purposes.

Or maybe it's the United States being used by Zionists in the United States to support Israel's objective. Or maybe it's the United States using Israel somehow. I don't know.

But the fact is, this is the real objective, regime change. And you can't do it with an armada off the coast of Oman, where the negotiations are taking place. That brings me to the negotiations.

The people on the American side of those negotiations, Witkoff, Kushner, etc., have an unblemished record of failure. They have not accomplished anything in any negotiation that they have entered. There is no ceasefire in Gaza.

There is no Israeli withdrawal. There is no Hamas disarmament. There is no government in Gaza.

The idea of a real estate development in Gaza, which Jared Kushner has proposed, is absurd. It will never happen. The international force that's supposed to be in Gaza was a fiction.

No one wants to join a force that is aimed at preventing Palestinian self-determination. The Ukraine war, same team, same result. You know, if this were baseball, I would say they're batting zero.

They have no achievements at all of any consequence. So there they are in Muscat. The last time they were to go to Muscat, of course, this was cover for a surprise attack on Iran.

And you're quite right. The Israeli press remembers that, I think, with approval rather than disapproval. And they hope something like that will happen.

But let me come at last to what I think may have happened. There was an agreement at Mar-a-Lago between Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Trump about a number of things. One of them was an arms sale package, six billion dollars, of basically equipment which is relevant to ground combat.

It is not relevant to the Iran situation. They agreed also to attack Iran, I think. And then, wait a minute, Netanyahu probably went home and talked to his military, who are intelligent people.

And they said, if we do this, we're going to pay a terrible price. We could not stop Iranian missiles at the end of the so-called 12-day war in June. And the Iranians will devastate Israel with a missile counterattack.

This, of course, is exactly what Iran has been saying. And I know you are still in Iran and you have had contacts with Press TV. Press TV has been very clear in its propaganda that Iran would respond to an attack on it by the United States with a huge barrage of perhaps as many as 2,000 missiles all at once to overwhelm Israeli defenses and devastate Israel.

So, faced with this, they agreed to delay things. They brought the Abraham Lincoln from the South China Sea. They put THAAD, the Theater High Altitude Air Defense System, in Israel.

They beefed up Israel's defense capabilities. And there they are. But they haven't altered the fundamental equation.

And so, I suspect, I go back to the point, I think Donald Trump painted himself into a corner. There's no obvious way out of this for him. He's threatened to attack Iran.

If he does, the results will be terrible for him and for the Israelis whom he's basically serving with his deployment and these threats. So, how does this end? I don't know.

I hope something comes out of the meeting in Muscat. But there I have to say the American side is making demands which are absolutely infeasible. Iran is not going to zero enrichment of uranium.

Iran is not going to dismantle its missile force and make itself defenseless against Israel. Iran knows very well what would happen if it did that. It might ask the Syrians what happens if you are disarmed and you are next to Israel.

So, Iran is not going to sever its ties to various elements of the resistance in the region to Israeli hegemony, whether it's Hezbollah or Hamas or Yemen or, you know, the Houthis or whoever. So, I think Mr. Trump has created a dilemma for himself. And now, the fact that this is occurring while the Iranian leadership has huge problems with domestic unrest and ferment in Iranian society, there is no consensus in Iran anymore about anything.

And so, this is a very fluid situation. But I think if Mr. Trump attacks, he will clarify the situation, not against the government, but in favor of it. So, I don't see how any of this makes sense.

I'm just puzzled. How do we get out of this? What is the result of what has already happened in Iran, around Iran, with Israel, between the United States and Israel?

And of course, we have the Gulf Arab countries, all of whom have sided basically with Iran. Do not attack Iran, they have counseled. Do not use our airspace.

Do not use any base on our territory to attack Iran. So, the net result of all this is to drive a further wedge between the United States and its Arab partners in the Gulf. I don't think it strengthens relations with Israel, and it does not appear to offer Iran anything.

So, where do we go? I don't know. Sorry about the long ramble, but I am very perplexed.

[Nima Alkhoshid]

Yeah. Here is the same, Ambassador, because the government doesn't know what's, they don't know what's happening in the mind of the Trump administration. After all, the military and the intelligence, whatever they're talking in the domestic media, they're not optimistic about any sort of talk with the Trump administration.

They say nothing is going to come out of this sort of talk. It's just wasting the time, wasting everything to negotiate with. On the other hand, you see the government, you know, they want to let the door open.

They want to talk. They want to negotiate. This is a political posture on the part of the government.

And these are diplomats. This is the way that they communicate. That's why they have so far, they try to convince, you know, people, mostly the people that who feel that the United States would attack again.

And this sort of negotiation doesn't change anything. Then instead of talking with the Trump administration, you have to be prepared as much as you can to respond to any attack. And the other thing, Ambassador, is what is in the mind?

What are the main points on the part of the Americans, on the part of the Trump administration, these people? Today, actually, we've seen not only Jared Kushner, but the US CENTCOM commander also joined the delegation in Muscat. And one of the things that it seems that they're asking for is that Iran should limit the export of oil to China.

Al Jazeera reported on that. What is that? You know, when you put, what has happened in Venezuela, because they, I think everything they're doing to Venezuela will not get to China.

And right now, it seems that in these negotiations, they're seeking that on the margins of their plans, they're seeking that. But Iran is not going to, as I see here, talking with officials, with the media, they're not going to give up on the enrichment on the Iranian soil. Ballistic missiles, they're not going to negotiate on ballistic missiles.

That's the real, dependent on the existence of Iran, because if they give up on their missiles, they're going to be, you know, they're going to destroy everything here in Iran. And these are issues, non-negotiable issues on the part of Iran.

[Chas Freeman]

Right. I think we agree. But, you know, **there is another underlying purpose here on the part of the Trump administration, or which is a personal purpose of President Trump.**

He wants to be the global dictator. He basically wants everybody to do what he tells them to do. And anybody who doesn't should be punished.

And, you know, the rhetoric surrounding Venezuela is all about this. Now, he's proposing to overthrow the government of Cuba, which is something that successive American administrations have wanted to do. Not easy.

He wants to overthrow the government in Iran. He believes, you know, the Baby Shah, who has gone to Israel and has basically become an openly declared agent of Israel. You know, why anyone would imagine this would appeal to Iranians.

Those Iranians who have called out his name, basically are just saying they don't like the government, and they want something different. They don't want him. So, there's no...

[Nima Alkhorshid]

And it's mostly, Ambassador, sorry for interrupting you, when they call, you know, these sort of, you know, motives, and they really, they're talking about the situation with the economy, the economic difficulties that they're facing.

[Chas Freeman]

Of course, and they're entirely right to protest. But I don't see what, well, first of all, it's pretty clear that the government in Tehran does not have an answer to reviving the economy under current circumstances. That is a reason to meet in Muscat to try to get some relief from the sanctions.

The idea that Iran would cut, would accept American dictation about where it sells its oil is ridiculous. I mean, you know, I mean, that would reduce Iran to the level of some kind of satellite of the United States. It would establish, it would negate Iran's sovereignty as much as Venezuela's sovereignty has been negated.

And so, the one thing, the supreme interest of any country is to protect its national identity and its pride in itself. And Iran is in terrible condition, but it's not prepared to bend its knee to Donald Trump. So, I don't know what will come out of these discussions in Muscat.

But I think the Trump administration has put itself in a difficult position. I don't think it can win coming out of this. On the Iranian side, also probably can't win.

Israel can't win. I think this is a lose-lose situation that we have created. And I'm not particularly a fan of the government of Iran, but I feel sorry for them.

They have very few choices, not many options. And clearly, as you said, if they can't address the economic issues, then there's very little basis for peace at home in Iran. So, anyway, at this point, I don't think we know what's coming out of Muscat, if anything.

But it isn't going to be another JCPOA, I don't think.

[Nima Alkhorshid]

Yeah. How did you find the position of the Arab states? We know that all together, they tried to do something to bring the United States and Iran together.

On the other hand, we had Turkey, as well, doing the same.

[Chas Freeman]

People in the region understand very well how easily another war between Israel and the United States and Iran could affect them. And the Turks have redefined their sphere of attention to include West Asia and the Red Sea and the Horn of Africa. And of course, they have a historic relationship with Iran.

Araghchi was just in Istanbul and Ankara. And so, Turkey has played a very active role with the Arabs, despite the fact that the Turks and the Arabs have a lot of differences, ideological differences, political differences. They all agreed, you know, we don't want another Israeli attack on Iran, either directly from Israel or indirectly by the United States.

And so, I mean, they understand very well. Of course, part of this is Iranian threats to do things to them that they don't want to have happen, destroy their oil facilities or bomb their bases or something like that. But I think it's less the fear of that than just generally, you know, they recognize, as the foreign minister of Oman, Bousaidi, said, you know, Israel is the source of instability in the region, not Iran.

Iran might once have been the source of instability when the revolution was young and people in Iran wanted to export the system of government. But that's long in the past. Iran is not trying to export its system of government now.

And if it did, domestic difficulties it's experiencing in Iran would make that a very difficult task. I mean, who wants to be like Iran? Iran is miserable.

So, I guess the final irony here is that Pezeshkian, the president, actually wanted a very different opening to the West and reconciliation with neighbors. He's got the reconciliation with neighbors, mostly because of the threat that Israel and the United States have posed to them. And so, I think you saw the coalition of Iran and its Arab neighbors across the Persian Gulf basically coming together.

Let's not have a war. But, you know, you're right. In the end, Iran has no choice.

It has to prepare itself for the possibility there will be a war. And it has, apparently, a credible deterrent. Of course, deterrence is not weapons.

Deterrence is the mind of the actors involved. So, if Israel understands that Iran could maim it, wound it very seriously, then Israel may be deterred. If the United States understands that in a war with Iran, it could lose many, many lives, not just on bases in the region, but maybe even only Abraham Lincoln.

You know, the question here is, is Iran still prepared to do what it has been doing? What it has been doing is responding in a very restrained way to attacks and provocations from Israel. It has not targeted civilian installations in Israel.

It targeted military and intelligence facilities. It has not carried out a strike on an American-occupied base, except in a symbolic sense, when it fired a missile at Al Udeid in Qatar. But it did that in a way that ensured that no one was killed.

Is it prepared to continue to do that? I think the question is, has patience run out in Tehran? And maybe it has, because it's beset by protests which, justified as they are, have been successfully manipulated by foreign forces.

And now an American armada is sitting in the Arabian Sea, or the Gulf of Oman. So, this is all pretty tense and difficult. And I think it's very easy to understand why Turkey and the Arabs tried very hard to prevent a war.

[Nima Alkhorshid]

How about China and Russia? You know, during the war in Ukraine, there was a moment, you remember, you and I talked about it when the Russian president went to China and they hugged each other. And you've mentioned that has a particular meaning in the relationship that Russia and China have.

And when you see the Iranian, the head of Iranian Security Council, in my opinion, which is the closest, closest person right now to the Iranian supreme leader, going to Russia, talking directly with Vladimir Putin and sending the message, he was transferring, he was sending, he was giving the message of the supreme leader of Iran to the Russian president. What is happening in your opinion, in terms of the relationship between the two countries?

[Chas Freeman]

Well, I think they are very different, even though they have a common interest in supporting Iranian territorial integrity and independence. So, in the case of the Russians, you know, they had offered to the government of Iran, before the last war, they had offered to bolster Iran's air defenses. Iran, for its own reasons, decided not to accept that offer.

I think it has now accepted it. And so, the Russians are an important supplier of weapons to Iran. Iran has become an important source of technology, drone technology, for the Russians.

So, there's that partnership there, which is historic, because historically Iran and Russia were always competitors. Now, they have been driven together by the combination of American and Israeli policies.

China is a little different. China is mischaracterized in the Western press. It's said that they are supporting the Russians in Ukraine, because they're providing drone parts and technology of one sort or another. And people don't realize they are also selling the same stuff to Ukraine.

You know, 90% or more of Ukrainian drones are made from parts originating in China. And so, on any given day, there is a Ukrainian delegation in South China, there's a Russian delegation, and they're both buying technology. So, China is basically affirming that it is not a belligerent.

It is not going to get directly involved. The same is true with Iran. China will not extend its protection to Iran.

It will be happy to support Iran to the extent Iran wants its support with technology, with weaponry, and politically in the Security Council. But it is not going to send troops or counterattack the United States or Israel. So, Iran has friends, but they're not allies.

They are not committed to defend Iran. And so, there we are. But now we have, of course, quite a bit of tension in the US-China relationship because of the American desire to cut China off from different supply chains and so forth.

You mentioned the apparent effort to bring Iranian oil sales to a halt. So, the United States is conducting an economic war against China and then some Americans wonder why the Chinese don't think that's friendly. So, I mean, the Chinese probably can sympathize with Iran in terms of the application of sanctions and very unclear purposes.

What is China supposed to do? I suppose it's supposed to crawl back into the caves of Yan'an and, you know, give up its modern weaponry. Same thing that seems to be asked of Iran, you know, disarm yourself so we can do what we want with you.

No, this is not an appealing posture. Donald Trump is going to Beijing, supposedly in April. There's been no confirmation of that from the Chinese.

But I think they, like Iran, want to keep the door open, even if they don't think much will come of it.

[Nima Alkhorshid]

And every time he talks to Xi Jinping, he says that the phone call was excellent. But, Ambassador, if we put ourselves in the shoes of the Chinese government and you see what's going on in Latin America with the case of Cuba, with the case of Venezuela, right now everything is happening in the West Asia, the Ukraine case. It all shows that... [unclear]

[Chas Freeman]

That's right. And it's very clear. But then you see, this goes back to what we were talking about in the beginning.

There is no policy process. There is no strategy. So various people in the administration are very hawkish about China.

President Trump seems to see, he wants to show that he can manage the relationship with China, that he's, you know, a strong man like Xi Jinping. Actually, they're quite different, of

course, both their personalities and the political system. Xi Jinping is, he's a president, he presides over a Politburo.

He is first among the members of that Politburo. But he does, he's not a dictator. He can't just snap his fingers and have everybody fall into line.

And China has politics too. We've just seen that in the purge of some generals in China. You know, you get rid of generals for one of three reasons.

One is, they're not doing their job effectively. They're not delivering the military force or the training or whatever that you have directed them to produce. Another is that you think they are too big for their britches.

They are. They're perhaps building a following with which they can try to unseat you. So they're disloyal.

And you suspect that and you want to disarm them. And the third reason, of course, is that they are corrupt. But here, I'll just say, you know, President Trump has a problem and it's related to the Armada of Iran: the Epstein files. He has to distract people from those files. And much of the discussion about those files strikes me as ridiculous. And, you know, "It's all about Trump."

Well, no, it isn't. This is the entire political elite of the Western world who are shown to be depraved, corrupt, irresponsible, amoral, immoral. You know, this is, the Epstein files are a reproach to the entire Western democratic system, which is now, you know, basically what they say is, if you're a plutocrat, if you have a lot of money, you're an oligarch, you can get away with anything.

There is no accountability. And Trump is the ultimate oligarch. So he's a sort of a symbol of everything that is wrong with the West at the moment.

And, of course, whether he himself did some of the things that the files suggest he did is another question. But we don't have, and here, I guess I come back to, there is no policy, there's no framework, there's no strategy with respect to Iran.

Now, there is no debate in the United States about war with Iran. None. Congress is not on its job. Supposedly, before the United States goes to war, there should be a discussion and authorization from Congress.

But the Republicans behave like a cult. They don't do anything their leader suggests. They just salute and don't question him.

Of course, they're beginning to a bit, because the United States has its own issue in places like Minnesota with legitimacy. You know, if Iranians were Minnesotans, perhaps the violence would not have happened. But anyway, we've been, I think the people of Minnesota have been magnificent in their restraint, as they object to policies that are clearly unconstitutional and authoritarian.

The minute you turn violent, the government answers with violence. And that's what happened in Iran.

So, yeah, no debate, no strategy. It's all about Trump. He wants to show that he can run the world. He can run Venezuela, he can run the world, he can run Iran.

I suspect he knows almost nothing about Iran.

[Nima Alkhorshid]

Yeah, absolutely. Ambassador, you've mentioned the case of the Epstein, and we know that the British media is trying to put the blame on Russia and the Russian president, linking Epstein to the Russian president. You remember when the sabotage of NordStream Pipeline has happened.

The British media tried to convince-- There was a, you know, military expert and the university professor called Michael Clark. I remember he was trying for five minutes convincing everybody how it's all in the interest of the Russian government to blow out, to blow out or to explode their pipeline to Germany. And right now they're trying to do the same.

Why is that? And how is that possible?

[Chas Freeman]

The campaign is not limited to the British press. This is an effort to divert attention from Israel. In other words, it's, you know, it's not about blaming Russia, it's about excusing Israel.

You know, Epstein was in bed with the Israelis. He was clearly being manipulated, maybe supported by Mossad. And the emails and other information that's come out clearly documents this.

So, this is an effort to whitewash Israel. So, how do you do that? Well, you find the all-purpose villain, Putin.

You know, he's, everything he does is terrible. So, therefore, you can blame this on him. I'm surprised I have not blamed it on Khamenei, but maybe that's cunning.

Anyway, no, that's what this is. It's not, and you see this in the US press, as well as the British press, and it's propaganda. And it's a sad thing.

And, of course, as we speak, the *Washington Post* has basically gone out of business. You know, a major US newspaper was just gutted. We see media, social media, like TikTok, being altered to avoid criticism of Israel.

And anyway, I don't, you know, the evidence of an Epstein connection with Moscow is very, very small. And the evidence of connection to Tel Aviv and Jerusalem is very, very large. So, this is the test.

You know, can you successfully lie and convince everybody about the lie? And I don't think it will work in this case.

[Nima Alkhorshid]

Do you think that Europe is still in that situation with the case of Ukraine?

[Chas Freeman]

What do you mean, telling themselves lies? Yes, of course.

[Nima Alkhorshid]

Yeah, and lying and somehow believing their lies.

[Chas Freeman]

They are beginning to recognize that the war has been lost, and that Ukraine is going to have to make compromises. And Ukraine cannot get back what it has lost, and it's going to have to offer something else on top of that if it doesn't want the war to continue. And if the war continues, and we know what the map of Novorossiya looks like, and it includes Odessa and the whole Black Sea coast.

And so, we're hearing now that the Russians are preparing to go for Odessa in the spring, once the mud has hardened. So, no, Ukraine is in grave difficulty, and people are beginning to recognize that.

[Nima Alkhorshid]

When you look at Europe and their and their policy considering Iran, do you think that Europe has tried to define its policy in West Asia? Are they in the process of defining that? We had the Chancellor of Germany going to Saudi Arabia, trying to somehow replace Russia by Saudi Arabia, by these Arab states in order to provide energy.

But I think that's quite impossible, and it takes a lot of time, if not forever, to replace that. And because they have their limits, I'm talking about the Arab states, and they're not like Russia to be next door, to be that close to Europe. But how do you see the policy of the Europeans in West Asia?

[Chas Freeman]

Well, I don't think there is a coherent policy, and I'm not sure that they're capable of producing one. I mean, the European Union seems to be structured in such a way as to frustrate rather than facilitate policy decisions like that. You know, basically, if you try to do anything bold, audacious for Europe, you're punished, you're not helped.

And European political leadership at the moment is very weak. The strongest is Meloni in Italy. Macron is, you know, he's almost gone.

Merz has got no great support. Starmer is also in grave trouble. You have right-wing populist parties everywhere coming forward.

The Alternative für Deutschland, the Rassemblement Nationale in France, and, you know, the UKIP group in Britain, Nigel Farage, and so forth. So, and of course, Meloni herself has a fascist background. So, the one government that seems to be enlightened at the moment and decisive is Spain, is Sanchez.

You know, he's just done something very wise about integrating immigrants into Spanish society. And he wants no part of the European war with Russia. So, but anyway, I mean, I think Europeans have come to one conclusion, and that is that they can no longer depend on the United States.

That is something they all agree about. And the implications of that are that eventually they will have to develop independent policies. But I don't see how they can do it with their current structure.

They're too divided. And of course, they look to the Arabs because the Arabs have money. So, why wouldn't you look to, to, you know, this is something Iran should be doing, looking for Arab investment.

And so, that may in the end be the solution to Iran's problems, is more regional integration of some kind. And maybe that will happen.

[Nima Alkhorshid]

How do you see this? In my opinion, the position or the leverage the Arab states had in the last 30 or 40 years has changed somehow on the policies of the United States in the region. How is that going to influence the whole thing?

[Chas Freeman]

No, I think the American interest in West Asia generally have been greatly reduced. The United States once took responsibility for maintaining the stability of the global economy, or at least the economy outside the former Soviet bloc. And that meant protecting the oil production in the Persian Gulf.

We don't have, we don't take that responsibility anymore. Americans do not regard ourselves as the world economic regulator or policeman. And second, we're now competitors in the oil production area.

The United States is the largest producer of oil in the world. This means that instead of having a stake in supporting Saudi Arabian oil production, for example, we're competing with Saudi Arabia. There is, there's always been a contradiction between OPEC, which was established to raise prices, and American policy, which favors low prices for energy.

And we now have an administration that actually agrees with the oil producers that there should be no electric vehicles, everything should be the internal combustion engine. You know, this is ridiculous, but there you are up there. There it is.

So what we're left with, there are two interests that we're left with. One is transit. You need to overfly West Asia in order to get between Europe and Asia.

And therefore, as long as the United States can overfly the region or go through the Suez Canal with a ship, we are a world power. We can go anywhere on the globe. So we have an interest in maintaining freedom of navigation transit through the region.

And the other issue is Israel, which is rooted in American domestic politics. And the relationship with Israel generates a problem with terrorism, because the people who oppose Israel do not have air forces and advanced weaponry. And so they resort to unconventional warfare, which we call terrorism.

So American interests in the region have been greatly reduced. And we are actually being, as I said earlier, in my view, we are allowing ourselves to be used by Israel for Israel's purposes. And more and more Americans object to that.

You see this in the Republican Party with figures, nationalist figures like Tucker Carlson, who say, why are we doing all these things for Israel? What do they do for us? And of course, you see the democratic side of the house now very pro-Palestinian and not pro-Israeli anymore.

So the one thing they all have in common is nobody understands Iran, and everybody thinks Iran is terrible. So, you know, somebody sent me a discussion between some Iranians about setting up a lobby in the United States. And they were laughing, of course, you can't do that.

Because Iran says the United States is the great Satan. But the Americans believe Iran is the great Satan. So why would you let Satan establish a lobby?

You won't. And, you know, so that's just where we are. And so that's part of the reason you get this posturing from Trump against Iran.

You know, he needs an enemy to divert attention from various other things that are happening or not happening.

[Nima Alkhorshid]

I think one of these various other, you know, issues that he's facing is the domestic, you know, as Donald Trump's position on popularity is reducing in the United States. That's why many people are arguing, maybe this sort of behavior is coming from that part of the issue with the domestic policy.

[Chas Freeman]

It's part of it. I mean, you know, basically, you can't find a foreign policy rationale for we were talking about what's going on between the United States and Iran. It's all driven by Israel.

If there were no Israel, there would be no problem. You know, the United States wouldn't be very concerned about Iran. And to the extent we were concerned, we'd probably be looking for ways to strengthen relations with Iran rather than weaken them.

But, you know, Israel is in command of our policy. And so, you get the result you do. And I don't know what Iran can do about that.

The American people seem to be getting sick and tired of it. And that is how it will get corrected. We are still perhaps a democracy.

It's not entirely clear how much of a democracy we now are, but we may be enough of a democracy for the people to change the policies of the government. And we'll see.

[Nima Alkhorshid]

Yeah. Thank you so much, Ambassador, for being with us today. Great pleasure, as always.

[Chas Freeman]

Well, I wish you safe travels home. And I'm happy to continue our dialogue when you get there.