

TRANSCRIPT

A CPDC WEBINAR

The CCP's Threat to Arctic-Hemispheric Security: The Securing Greenland Imperative

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BEGIN TRANSCRIPT:

[00:00:00] **Frank Gaffney:** Welcome to a briefing by the Victory Coalition concerning the most recent developments with respect to the Islamic Republic of Iran—the internal turmoil taking place there at the moment; the implications of such turmoil for both the region and the wider world, including arguably the United States of America; and not least the prospects that, at long last, the people of Iran may be liberated from this odious, tyrannical theocratic regime that has brutalized them [00:01:00] for almost 50 years—and throughout that period has sought not only to bring death to Israel, but death to America as well.

The question is: the people of Iran, having in recent days demonstrated with incredible courage and intensity their opposition to this regime, have once again been killed in large numbers by the regime—and by imported henchmen whom it could rely upon to kill Iranians when its own security services might not be willing to do so.

President Trump, witnessing what the Iranian people were doing, expressed his solidarity with them. He talked about, well, punishing the regime if it physically assaulted those demonstrators—and more to the point, called on the demonstrators to bring about the end of the regime. The problem, of course, was that the president's statements clearly encouraged the demonstrators, but have to date not been fulfilled. And at issue is whether the Iranian people, having yet again felt—if not actually betrayed, certainly greatly let down by the United States—will muster out again, and if so, under what circumstances.

All of this is by way of backdrop to the present apparent [00:03:00] preparation of military operations against the Iranian regime by the United States—presumably by Israel as well. In the course of this program, we're going to talk a little bit about evidence that troops or equipment—or, in the case of the USS *Abraham Lincoln*, a carrier strike

group—have been positioned by President Trump to give him military options that he hasn't had, in recent months at least, for dealing with this abiding threat from the Iranian regime—again, both to its own people and to ours.

We're going to hear from several distinguished colleagues who have, to varying degrees, been studying—or even working directly against—the Iranian regime; who have a deep appreciation for the character of it: the sharia-supremacist character of it, which is made even more alarming because, in addition, it is adherent to the Shia tradition known as **Twelverism**, which holds that the 12th Imam—the **Mahdi**, the Messiah—will be summoned out of a well in which he has resided for some 1,200 years, in the holy city of Qom, by an outpouring of grief and lamentations and appeals for mercy. That sounds an awful lot like the apocalypse—and the belief of the leadership of Iran, including the Grand Ayatollah **Khamenei**, is that on his watch, the Mahdi will come back; the apocalyptic preconditions will have been put in motion. And that's particularly alarming because he is all of 86 years old or so, and in very bad health, we're told—so his watch may not be all that long. It is therefore all the more urgent that efforts be made to shorten it even further, to prevent him from being able to inflict the kind of—perhaps cataclysmic—damage on, among others, the people of Iran, but also perhaps others in the region and even in our own nation.

For all these reasons, we're going to start with a [00:06:00] bit of an intelligence briefing—relatively short—from our colleague, Captain **James Fanell**, United States Navy (Retired). He worked for decades during his time in uniform as a naval intelligence officer, rising through the ranks both to that of captain, but also to a position as the Chief Intelligence and Information Operations Officer for the U.S. Pacific Fleet. And the U.S. Pacific Fleet, of course, during his tenure, extended into what is now Central Command territory—that is very much at issue in the Iran context.

We visited with him on our television program earlier in the day today as we speak—**Securing America** is the program; it airs on Real America's Voice. And with his permission, we were able to extract a bit of that interview, which covered a lot of other topics, by the way—and I hope you will check it out at Real America's Voice or at securingamerica.substack.com. But let's go now to the excerpt of the interview with Captain James Fanell.

[00:07:23] **Capt. James Fanell:** What we're seeing—and what the president said on Air Force One last night—just reinforces the importance of Iran and the change that's happening there, with the people rising up against the mullahs and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, and the oppression that they've suffered under for 47 years.

So his reference yesterday of sending the *Abraham Lincoln* strike group—which actually has probably been underway for a week now, so it could possibly be in the region—he

referenced it and called it a flotilla. Then a few minutes later he called it an armada, and then he called it a fleet. So I was very pleased to see the president describe it in so many different ways, which is to say that the naval aspect of this is on his mind.

And given what we did last summer with the nuclear facilities, the ability of the Department of Defense to bring, you know, holy hell to Iran's leaders is very clear. And so what will happen, we don't know. But I can tell you from experience that on that transit—from Singapore or the South China Sea to the Gulf of Oman—everybody on that carrier who's involved with strike planning—all the squadron commanding officers and executive officers and department heads, and the staffs—that's all they were doing: in consultation with Central Command and the Pentagon, working on their portion of what could possibly be a targeted strike against the leadership—not just political leadership, but the military, the Revolutionary Guard Corps—that would take out the ones who've been accused of terrorizing the people and killing them—murdering the people of Iran.

You mentioned earlier there was a report of the United States flying out a large number of aircraft into the United Kingdom, and then maybe other follow-on flights that got the attention of the leadership of Iran, and they went scurrying into their holes. This is before Davos. Clearly that was something that was initiated to find out and target—find the targets of where these leaders, and military and political leaders, would go in the event that they thought a strike was coming from the United States. Now we have that information. So at every turn, given what President Trump has done in this administration—not counting his first administration—if I was an Iranian government official, a mullah, part of the Revolutionary Guard, I'd be trying to get out of Iran, because my days are probably numbered—either from the people themselves or from the United States. We'll just have to see what happens.

But the impact for China is: this is another ally—a proxy for them—in the region of the Middle East. We saw Venezuela in Latin America. Now we're seeing it in the Middle East, where they're gonna lose access to oil—that's something that they desperately need—so it's gonna put them in a bind in terms of their own planning for their military aspirations and their national agenda with their Global Governance Initiative and Global Development Initiative and the Belt and Road, and all that goes into that. So losing Iran will not just be a symbolic gesture.

It will have a devastating impact for China as well. China will lose face because it'll show that they're not really the world's leader, which they tell everybody that they are. And secondly, they'll lose access to precious resources, and they'll lose access to other areas of the Persian Gulf and other resources from other Arab countries. So it'll have a devastating impact for China as well.

And so we need to be concerned about what China's flying into Iran to help them defend against any kind of attack. But I think at this point, China's probably gonna think twice about that. Given the failure of their weapons or radar systems—at least in Venezuela—they probably can't afford to be exposed again for weapons systems that don't perform as advertised, at least in the air defense and electronic warfare arena. So that'll be interesting to watch.

But right now, I think it's really a matter of how much non-kinetic pressure President Trump could bring to bear to get the leadership—you know, the leader—what is he, 84, 86 years old? I mean, he's hardcore. He is not gonna give up—but maybe he will. And maybe the people around him say, "Okay, it's over."

And what I think is most important for Americans to understand is that my strongest impression—and my discussions with people—is that President Trump has no intention of putting boots on the ground. This is all about using deterrent power to stop the murder of people. And as President Trump said—like he said on the flight into Davos—I don't want to see people dying in Ukraine. I don't want to see 25, 30,000 people die a month in Ukraine. And he doesn't want to see mass executions by the leaders of Tehran against their people. And if that were to come out—or any more validated information—stand by, because he will react on that, I believe.

[00:12:34] **Frank Gaffney:** I have the feeling that he's had enough evidence to act on it already, and that may be what we're going to see in the days immediately ahead. I certainly hope that's the case, and so appreciate Captain Fanell's assessment of the lay of the land that sets the stage for our further discussion of what might be coming next with specific regard to the regime in Iran.

[00:13:00] **Frank Gaffney:** And I couldn't be more pleased that we have with us a man whose insight into all these matters I respect tremendously. His name is **Daniel Greenfield**. He has been, for quite some time, associated with the David Horowitz Freedom Center. He is now its CEO. He is also, as I recall, a **Shillman Fellow** in the mix there. He is certainly a leading essayist, as far as I'm concerned, at *FrontPage Magazine*, and an author—among other works—of *Domestic Enemies: The Founding Fathers' Fight Against the Left*.

Daniel Greenfield, thank you for the great work that you do, and specifically for your command of the facts and the geopolitical trends that operate in the Middle East—and your ability to synthesize that information, connect the proverbial dots, and make it accessible to the rest of us mere mortals. It's deeply appreciated. And we're so glad that you were able to join us for the program, for the purpose of helping us understand what you think is both happening at the moment in Iran and what may be coming next, and why it should be of such great concern to every American that it come out right for the people of Iran, as well as for our own.

[00:14:34] **Daniel Greenfield:** Well, the important thing to understand about the regime in Iran—the Islamic regime—is that it is not natural. It is not organic. It was always artificial. The Islamic takeover of Iran was artificial. It was backed by various forces. I mean, Khomeini was hanging out in Paris. The Carter administration chose to enable this takeover, and subsequent administrations chose to help prop up Iran and keep it in power—even while at the same time deploring some of the abuses.

So the existence of the regime is not natural, and the efforts to remove it by its own people—we've done very little besides impose sanctions—but their efforts by their own people to remove the Iranian regime from power have been stifled repeatedly by leftist governments, including the Obama administration, which responded to the Green Movement with pro forma condemnations, but nothing meaningful.

And really, this had to be contrasted with its response to the Islamic—leftist—protests in other parts of the Muslim world, the Arab world, with the so-called “new Middle East,” with the push toward the Muslim Brotherhood takeover. Obama was fine intervening in Libya; he was fine pushing for regime change in Egypt, which is something that he proposed a while back. He did not want regime change in Iran. Instead, his negotiators—whom he enlisted to prop up the Iranian regime—argued that Iran was feeling very victimized by the United States and that we needed to be more understanding of that rhetoric. By the way, similar to what we're hearing from Tucker Carlson recently.

So this has always been an artificial entity, and there are a lot of people invested in keeping it that way—which is why there's so much resistance, not from within Iran, but from within various political forces, including in our own country, to maintaining the Islamic regime—whether it's the Koch network that is very aggressively operating; it's managed to place a lot of its people within the Pentagon, within the National Security Council. And they have financial interests in the oil industry, which is an abiding issue.

You have some of the Muslim countries that are friends and enemies with Iran at the same time, like the Saudis, and that entire bloc which, at the same time, is threatened by Iran but also really wants Iran to stay the way that it is fundamentally—because it sees both Iran and us as the enemies. And they want to see us and the Iranian regime at loggerheads; they want to play us off against each other. They don't want actual regime change because an Iran that is liberal, that is democratic, that is free, that is prosperous, would be a huge threat to them. So they absolutely do not want that.

So we've got this assortment of forces aligned at keeping this regime in power. Organically, the people of Iran want the regime gone. They've wanted it gone for a very, very long time. Much like the situation in Venezuela, where we seized Maduro—and it turned out that his security people were all Cubans, something that had been said for a while by anti-communists, and the usual apologists for the regime insisted, “No, the

Venezuelan people want the regime to remain in power.” They wanted him to remain in power so much that Maduro could only trust the Cubans to prop up his regime.

Similarly, Iran is increasingly dependent on the **Basij**, increasingly dependent on various Arab jihadist groups to keep the regime in power. They’re the ones who have been suppressing the uprisings—the political protests—killing thousands of people. So at this point, much of Iran has turned on the regime. It doesn’t necessarily mean that they want a particular outcome. It’s important to emphasize that, because we have a lot of these people arguing for the Shah. There’s a very divided opposition. But what they want is this regime gone, which is why we’ve seen this corrupt, totalitarian, brutal system pushed out of power.

Now, there were opportunities where we could have really altered the regime without resorting to military force, but we had governments like the Obama administration that neglected that.

Now we’re caught between some challenging situations. Now, when people talk about intervening in Iran, they assume that we’re talking about some sort of large-scale—troops on the ground. That’s absolutely not the case. What we are, in some cases, talking about is a decapitation strike. And we had a little bit of a test of that in Venezuela by showing that we could go in, capture the leader of the regime, and exit without actually taking any casualties. And it was a smooth, smart operation—something we have not exactly become known for over the years, which is unfortunate. The Israelis have shown us smooth, smart operations.

When people think about the United States, they think about this kind of regime-building, nation-building stuff—where we send in 10,000, 20,000, 30,000 troops; we do some bombing of targets that are really not at all relevant; and then we try to build democracy. That’s the opposite of what we should even be considering doing in Iran.

The primary issue in Iran at this point is not even the political leadership. It’s the fact that you have these various jihadist groups—some from Iraq, some from other places, some from Lebanon—operating on the ground, able to impose their will. And really these groups are fundamentally terrorist organizations. A lot of this is operating under the IRGC, which we’ve actually named a terrorist group. It’s the hub for Iran’s various terrorist efforts. When we fight Iranian-backed terrorists around the Middle East, we’re fighting really the IRGC.

And when President Trump approved the takedown of Soleimani, it was a major strike against the IRGC. And the IRGC has tried to assassinate American officials in the former Trump administration. They’ve repeatedly threatened to go after Trump. So we would really be dealing with taking out terrorist groups that are operating in urban areas. If we were able to do that, I think it would significantly diminish the ability of the regime

to stay in power, because the regime at this point has lost even the support of much of its military forces. It never really had much support from its so-called military forces. It depended on the Basij, which were a kind of thuggish organization adjacent to the IRGC, who would use plainclothes outfits and assault protesters—very similar to what the Chinese were doing in Hong Kong during the protests.

And you know, there obviously are arguments against any kind of military intervention, but those arguments have been weakened. We've seen that Iran is not nearly as strong and dangerous as we've been told. We've had the Tucker Carlson narratives that anything we do with Iran will lead to World War III. Well, we took out Iran's nuclear facilities; there was no World War III. Iran is not nearly as strong or as dangerous militarily as we've been led to believe.

The danger lies in their ability to command these terrorist forces that operate as insurgencies, that can attack Americans. We have a significant Iranian-linked terror presence in the United States, which is definitely something to consider. Hezbollah, for example, has built up a major presence in the United States. They use that largely for financial reasons—for smuggling, for making money from the United States. You know, maybe they're running their own daycare centers here; it wouldn't hugely surprise me. That is definitely a factor.

But at the same time, the perception that Iran is a major player in regional world affairs has been really smashed. The moment Israel was able to operate freely with impunity in its airspace was the point at which this idea that Iran is a world power just really fell apart. This is really a jumped-up terrorist organization—one that Democrats, the leftists, collaborated to allow to take power over Iran.

People in Iran are very, very sick of it. The question is: what are we going to do about it? The easiest thing is to do what we're doing, which is to do nothing—to maintain some sanctions, to issue some press release, which is what we've been doing; to scramble some assets but not really use them in any kind of fashion. Previous administrations have done similar things, and nothing leads to nothing.

The problem is that while it's completely understandable that people are resistant to any kind of military intervention—especially with the examples of Iraq and Afghanistan in the rearview mirror—we should remember that we have an opportunity here to remove a terrorist regime. One whose armament of the Houthis in Yemen created a crisis in which we spent years deploying the U.S. Navy to fight them, and really only kind of exited from that with some sort of dubious agreement that threatens to resume the fighting at any time.

We should remember that the entire conflict in Israel is generated by Iran through its funding and backing and training of Hamas and Hezbollah. Iran has the ability to do a

lot of damage, especially around the region. They fund terrorist groups that pose major threats to our forces around the region. Their military as a whole is not a serious threat to us. But at the same time, when you have weak Democratic administrations—and we had one not all that long ago under Barack Obama—we got the spectacle of Iranian jihadists taking our troops and holding them hostage and humiliating us.

Because the bottom line is: at some point we are going to get a Democratic administration. It might be as soon as the next presidential election. And at that point, that administration will reverse everything that President Trump has been doing—which means it's vital for this administration to build as many facts on the ground as possible.

So if we topple some of the regimes that they support—like Venezuela, like Cuba (there's been talk about that), like Iran—they're going to have more trouble undermining America. Because what the Democrats have done over and over again is sell out America, diminish American power, and empower enemies. That's what Obama did with his Iran deal. If they don't have countries to sell us out to—if these enemies don't exist—they're going to have trouble undermining us.

So we could, by 2030, very well be looking at a Democratic administration that is eager to partner with Marxist and narco-socialists in Latin America and once again with Iran. And they're going to do it more aggressively than even Obama did, because the Democrats are now going to double and triple down on all the terrible policies that they formerly adopted.

So the Trump administration has the option here—the possibility here—to help in toppling the regime. There are no guarantees. There are no guarantees that if we take out some of these forces and encampments operating in Iran, that the revolution will succeed. Much is going to depend on facts on the ground that we don't control, and we should not push too far into any kind of regime-change operation. Certainly we should not engage in nation-building, which I don't imagine will be an issue.

But at the same time, if we can cheaply take out some of these pro-regime forces—much as President Trump showed that we could very quickly take out an Iranian nuclear facility with no loss or risk to the United States—there's really no reason not to do it. We're sending a message that these regimes are weak, that they're vulnerable, and we're also sending a message that despite all the brinkmanship posturing, China and Russia cannot actually protect them. They cannot keep these regimes in power.

It's an assertion of American power, and there's really not much of a downside to it. So the potential upside would be that we would weaken the left, would weaken America's enemies, including China, and we potentially could eliminate the biggest problem that the left created in the Middle East, which is the creation of the Islamic terrorist regime of Iran.

[00:25:47] **Frank Gaffney:** Daniel Greenfield, thank you. Let's go to **Charles "Sam" Faddis**. Sam is, of course, no stranger to these programs, as well as the larger body of work of the coalitions that our Institute for the American Future sponsors—among them, the Victory Coalition. The work that Sam has done over the years, including against the Iranian regime as an undercover operative in the Central Intelligence Agency—some 20 years of service to our country in that form—plus some time in the uniform of the United States Army, plus as an Assistant Attorney General out in Washington State, is all extraordinarily important public service, as is the work that he is currently doing as an editor of a wonderful online resource at andmagazine.substack.com. Please check out some of his published writings elsewhere, notably in a very important book, *Beyond Repair: The Decline and Fall of the CIA*.

Sam joined me by video as well for our interview with him on *Securing America* this morning. Let's go to the videotape with him.

[00:27:12] **Charles "Sam" Faddis:** I mean, my assessment is, you know, reading the tea leaves that everybody else is looking at, that in fact, yes, we are getting ready to hit Iran—and it is going to be major. And increasingly it looks to me like the center of gravity of this is not going to be so much infrastructure. I'm not suggesting infrastructure will be immune, but the leadership—those folks who actually keep these folks in power—I'm all for that, if we are serious. That would be the caveat.

I mean, these guys are monsters. They have held that great nation and a great civilization hostage for decades. This is long overdue, right? It is unfinished business to me. We have always had two choices: you can either just accept that these monsters are gonna stay there, wall them in, and sort of hope that one day they collapse of their own weight; or we can actually go remove them, end the suffering, and restore the nation. I'm all for the second option—again, assuming we recognize the magnitude of the task.

It will take more than just a handful of strikes on leadership to do this, because they are resilient—and they are more brutal than most people can imagine. I worked against them in Iraq for a long time. Back in the bad old days, they were much worse than the Iraqis, because they were every bit as bloodthirsty, and one hell of a lot more efficient at what they did. And there were no limits on the level of violence they would use.

Look, I worked with a tremendous number of very brave Iranian men and women in my career, many of whom died. These are patriots who were fighting to get rid of the ayatollahs. Nothing but high regard—the highest regard—for the Iranian people: their courage, their willingness to fight this. And God knows they want to get rid of this.

These regimes are willing to do anything and kill as many people as they have to. So it will take more than a series of strikes. We will have to get rid of the leadership, but we also have to have a sustained effort to pressure them.

[00:29:21] **Frank Gaffney:** I want to thank Sam Faddis for those insights, particularly on the very much pending question of whether President Trump will pull the trigger on bringing down the regime of Iran itself, in support of the people of Iran, who clearly have yearned for that for a very long time and have been willing to sacrifice grievously to achieve it—but need our help, not with an invading army, but with the kind of military capabilities that we have been discussing here. [00:30:00] And we will, we hope, discuss a bit further in a moment with a final guest, but we are working to get him on the program.

So I'm going to come back to Daniel Greenfield. Daniel, the issue that we hear a lot about—and I think you've touched on it in your remarks, but just to draw you out a little bit further—is the old line from Colin Powell that “if you break it, you own it,” which has been used to argue for immense buildups of military forces and then formal invasion and occupation of countries. That hasn't always worked out so well, as you know—notably in Afghanistan and Iraq.

But talk us through how you see this question of whether or not you can, in this specific circumstance, contemplate a hopefully fairly precise, fairly limited, principally aerial strike on the Iranian leadership, and create conditions under which the people of Iran—the boots on the ground, to be clear—can finish the job. Is that in prospect, first of all, sir? And if so, do you think it can work in this instance?

[00:31:22] **Daniel Greenfield:** People hate regime change—and they're right. They hate regime change, but what they hate is the brand of regime change where we took the World War I “war for democracy,” the World War II war-against-tyrants model, and tried applying it to the Middle East, which of course was absolutely disastrous, because the model assumed that the problem was dictators—Saddam Hussein.

Even though we started with this in Afghanistan, we should have realized that's not actually the model there. But we conveniently applied it to Saddam Hussein: we're gonna replace this dictator with democracy.

The problem in the Muslim world is not dictators. That was very much a liberal idea—one that Obama eagerly adopted to be able to topple these so-called tyrants and replace them with the Muslim Brotherhood. That was never actually the problem. The problem in the Muslim world is—to put it succinctly—Islam. It's Islamic rule. It's the Islamic ideology that calls for conquest and war. I'm not gonna get into a lengthy lecture about Islam, but the fundamental issue has been what is actually driving conflict, which is Islam.

So if you replace a dictator with democracy, but the democracy runs through Islam, then you just get more jihad, you get more violence, you get more terrorism—which is what we ended up getting in Iraq and Afghanistan, and Syria, throughout the region—where we played this “replace the dictators” game.

This is not about replacing dictators now. Nobody’s talking about regime change in Iran simply because there’s a lack of democracy. Obviously the Persian people deserve to be able to rule themselves, but if the alternative were Islamists coming to power, then only a lunatic would propose that—only a lunatic, or Barack Obama, which is much the same thing. This is absolutely not what it’s about.

The protests overall are actually anti-Islamist. We’ve had a whole lot of mosques that were actually burned in Iran—presumably out of the Islamophobia of the population. The people there do not want more Islam. They don’t want more Islamic terrorism—which, for our purposes, is really the most important thing that counts from the perspective of the Saudis and others.

Chaos in Iran is not necessarily good for them. They don’t actually want chaos and instability—and of course, they do want Islam, which is part of the problem there in the first place. From our perspective, the current regime is worse than any alternative regime that is going to rise. ISIS is not gonna take over Iran. It may be some mix of leftists, some mix of Shah supporters; there may even be potential conflict on the ground over this. But that frankly is a much better situation for us.

Even if Iran remains in a state of chaos for the next 30 years, it’s a much better situation than having basically a terrorist regime—one that harbors, by the way, al-Qaeda among others—in power there. It’s much better than having jihadists who finance and back terrorism around the region and around the world. Pretty much anything that happens in Iran would be an improvement—an improvement over what is there right now.

So from the perspective of some people in the region, yes, they don’t want chaos, they don’t want instability. From our perspective, chaos and instability is actually not a bad thing, and we can really look to the way that Obama viewed it. Obama viewed chaos and instability that brings the Islamists to power as a good thing. We view chaos and instability that takes down the Islamists as a very good thing.

If there’s chaos and instability, yes, maybe some terrorism would be in the mix. But right now there’s state-sponsored terrorism there. Even isolated terrorism would be better than state-sponsored terrorism.

So while I am not remotely proposing nation-building in Iran, we should not do the same stupid things we were doing in Iraq, where we go in and show them videos about the Founding Fathers and expect them to get that. We should not expect that.

I mean, Iran—the Persian people—are far more advanced, far more civilized than the Arab nations around them, the Arab Islamic nations around them that have these really Islamic systems. Nonetheless, whatever happens in Iran will be a notable improvement.

Even if it is a state of chaos, we should not get involved in direct nation-building. What we should actually do is remove the Islamic terrorist groups that are running Iran, that we helped put into place in the first place—which is the missing piece of the puzzle there.

Without Western intervention, the Islamic regime would not be in power in Iran. Western nations harbored Khomeini—harbored these jihadists—supported them, defended them. You can see a New York Times editorial defending the Islamic regime back when it first began its takeover. We made this happen. We can undo this.

We don't have to undo this by going into Iran. We don't have to undo this by doing regime change through direct intervention on the ground. But if we take out some of these guys that we are responsible for putting into place—even if the result is chaos—it will be so much better. And nation-building can't fail if we don't nation-build in the first place.

[00:36:09] **Frank Gaffney:** Daniel Greenfield, thank you for a very provocative set of insights. We'll discuss those, I'm sure, momentarily with our next presenter. I'm so glad he's been able to join us. He had some personal issues and technical challenges that have been overcome—praise the Lord.

His name is Dr. **Walid Phares**. He is a man I've regarded with the utmost respect for his acumen and his clarity about the Middle East, and in particular the threats that emanate from it, including very prominently that of Iran. Walid is, in addition to being a very prominent foreign policy expert and popular commentator on these matters, the author of a relevant book, *Iran: An Imperialist Republic and U.S. Policy*. It is a pleasure to have him here. He's, in addition to his other capacities, the Co-Secretary General of the Transatlantic Parliamentary Group and a professor.

We are delighted, as always, that you have been able to find a few minutes for us. You have, of course, only just plugged in, so you have missed what preceded the conversation. But I think the stage has really been set for your insights into both the opportunities that are still present to change the character of the regime that has long brutalized the people of Iran, as well as threatened ours—and of course the people of Israel as well. And that despite the many failures of American policy over the years, this may be the moment when, with the addition of military might of the United States possibly in the near future being brought to bear—hopefully decisively—against this regime, the liberation of the Iranian people is at hand.

Your thoughts on all of that, sir—and the implications, of course, not just for the region, but for us, that lie ahead.

[00:38:31] **Dr. Walid Phares, PhD:** Frank, thank you so much for this invitation. Yes, I had to rush, therefore I'm not even shaved.

[00:38:40] **Frank Gaffney:** It's okay. It's a warlike look.

[00:38:40] **Dr. Walid Phares, PhD:** Yes, it is a warlike look—seeking peace. Let me dive in immediately, because I'm always happy and honored to be with your audience, and your individuals are very talented in terms of analysis, in terms of connections and projection. It's always a pleasure to be in this forum.

Let me dive straight into what I consider the ongoing battlefields that are emanating threats, concern, but also hope. I'll speak only about one, because that's what you are debating right now, but I need to name two of them. One is definitely Iran, and all the battlefields moving in and around Iran, including what's happening on the inside, including what's happening in terms of our policy—that doesn't appear yet ready, but it may be.

What are the scenarios on the one hand—but I need to mention that there is another battlefield in Syria where there is a major fight. And as far as we're all concerned, the Kurds are being threatened and other minorities, and the jihadists are on the offensive. That's how I read it. Others may not read it the same way. And there is a connection between both battlefields, but let me concentrate on Iran first.

The nature of this current revolution—I call it a revolution. It started as protests, and then it moved into uprising, and now it is a revolution, a full-fledged revolution. I explain why.

First, in the genesis that led to this movement, which is now a revolution, we all know—and you and I have had these conversations, with many of your partners here for many years, and I have, as you mentioned, published a book projecting that what is happening right now would happen.

It's connected to the regime from the beginning. So after what I call the Islamic coup—not the “Islamic Revolution,” as the far left and the Islamists define what happened in 1979—it was a coup. It may have started as protests against the Shah government at the time—that's true. And in many countries you have protests; even the Shah could have abdicated and left, and his government could have collapsed—but not replaced with Islamists. That's a big difference.

Historically speaking, the force that took over—like what happened with the Bolsheviks in 1916–17 and beyond—the original coalition was multi-party, mostly on the left,

Islamists as well, liberals at the end. The financial sector moved in Iran—the equivalent of Wall Street for us—under the name of the bazaar.

So from a large coalition that was anti-Pahlavi, anti-Shah, the Khomeinists—who are the Shia Islamist jihadist school, schooled in Iraq—started by an Islamic party in Iraq, then back to Iran—we don't want to spend too much time on that, but it's important to understand the nature of the regime.

And that regime basically destroyed all their partners. The Communist Party was in it in the beginning—the Tudeh Party—destroyed after the Shah left, after Khomeini destroyed also the upper level of the old Iranian army, used to be called the Artesh. So they had an architecture that ended up with one-party rule, and they have multiple institutions. It became a totalitarian regime, eliminating the opposition. They started with the communists, then the socialists, then the liberals—then their own partners, Islamic leftist organizations.

Bottom line: they established this totalitarian system, which, as my book explains, became imperialist because they were not just interested in what's happening inside Iran, like Albania under communism or North Korea. They started to expand and extend: into Iraq, controlled by their militias; into Lebanon, with Hezbollah alliance; with Assad at the time; obviously the Houthis in Yemen; and a little bit of investment in Gaza with Hamas.

Then we fly over all these decades: there were multiple revolts. The first prominent one was in 1999—the students across the campuses—crushed. The second one, which could have saved the Iranian people, was called the Green Revolution. We discussed that at length. It was led by reformists who were offshoots from the regime. And 1.2 million Iranians demonstrated in the streets of Tehran. Unfortunately, they did not expand beyond that urban zone, but yet they were very close to toppling the regime. The problem was that a former president—President Obama—whom the population thought was going to side with them, as we did throughout the Cold War under Reagan, et cetera, sided with the regime. Without going back to those details, that created deep frustration among Iranians in general. That could have been the D-Day. It was not. They had to struggle another decade, and a series of smaller-size revolts—2018, 2019—but the biggest one came in 2022: the Mahsa Amini revolution.

Now, that revolution never ended. It was up and down, low and high, until after the war—the 12-day war between Israel and Iran. During those 12 days, I'm going to finish this and go into the scenarios: what was happening at the end of that war could have also given the Iranian revolution an opportunity.

So after the massive strike by President Trump, who destroyed in three hours a nuclear project and infrastructure we were negotiating about for the previous 15 years—three

hours, done—the problem was not just the Iran deal. It was the money of the Iran deal. What the Obama administration negotiated and signed on in 2015 was \$150 billion—with the brokers. Those who negotiate, those consulting companies and media companies who profit, got about 10%. So we're talking about \$15 billion.

So now we understand the influence that the Islamic regime in Iran has deployed in Western Europe—and here is a result: a floating \$15 billion that helped them maintain that influence, and of course oppose President Trump in his first term when he removed or canceled the agreement and then designated the IRGC, and so on and so forth.

So now we are in the second term of President Trump. And from the beginning of the year, the regime—who was backing Hamas—tried to do their best to make sure that the Trump administration is not going to face them off. But then, of course, their arming and missile support for Hezbollah, Hamas, et cetera, led to this clash. After the Israelis destroyed a lot of strategic weaponry systems of the regime, then the Trump administration destroyed the nuclear program.

And some of the envoys—or negotiators—made it a mission to inform the American administration that there is a chance—there is still a chance—with that regime to get to a deal. But then the regime did not get to that point, because they thought: if we start the negotiations, we may get to a point where there could be a revolt against us. So they did not offer anything, and the administration destroyed the program.

At the end of that destruction, the Israelis were going after the militias—the Basij militia. I call them the lower SS—those who are in control of the streets, et cetera—versus the IRGC, the higher SS. And there was probably a space of five, six business days—had the Israelis continued—that's a theory, obviously; many would say no, could be different. But from my observation of 30 years, I can affirm that what was happening over the past weeks could have happened six months ago.

Six months ago, Qatar moved in, convinced Washington in general: give them one more chance, and they will come with a deal. They took six months—the Islamic regime in Iran—six months. And they were arming themselves. They were re-equipping their ballistic missiles. They were doing many of the things that Israelis and our agencies know about.

One of the things they've done: they retriggered the revolution by trying to crush the revolt after their deal—for a ceasefire. They tried to crush it for multiple months. By doing so, they finally triggered this wave.

So this wave that is happening right now—casualties are about, some say 12—I go with 12,000. Some say 17,000 people killed. That's enormous. Even in Budapest during the Soviet reign in Eastern Europe, it wasn't that many.

So now that revolution is unstoppable. They cannot stop it. And what the regime has done was to offer not to execute—look at where they are, at what level—not to execute the thousands of detainees and prisoners they have, if they stop. But what they've done was to invade Tehran with their own forces. And what happened is that they arrested even more people. Now we're talking about 30, 35,000 arrested.

So where are we right now? Now there is one option or two options for the administration—and Israel in the background. We'll see how the U.S. position will happen. Nobody knows what President Trump has in front of him on his Resolute Desk—how many scenarios. But we can project a few.

The most important and focused scenario is, in addition to sanctions—at this point, in my view, they're inefficient. They're gonna take six months to six years. It's only a psychological message sent mostly to those in the region who are denying U.S. and Israel access to their airspaces. That's a different question.

If you want to help the Iranian people to rise and win, the targets are those two militias—about 150 headquarters and positions of the IRGC and the Basij. The lists are known. If the U.S. would lead a wave of strikes, they don't need to go after the remnant of the nuclear sites, or the ports, or inflicting pain to the economy. All of that is irrelevant at this point in time.

If they target those two militias, even in Tehran alone—although I would suggest in more cities—what is gonna happen is that the population right now has morphed into a resistance movement. It's not just demonstrating. They are still demonstrating, but they're throwing Molotov cocktails on the armor that has been sent to occupy the streets—not just the main avenues. The population will march on the police stations, get the weapons, and—as the tweet of the president suggested—take over the institutions. It's gonna be bottom-up.

And I keep hearing that, “Oh, we don't want to be involved on the ground.” Who said we're gonna be involved on the ground? Zero involvement on the ground. No troops on the ground—not even landings, no paratroopers. It's airpower: destroy those two militias, and you let the Iranians do their own job. And of course we can discuss what will happen after, but I am more interested in what should happen between now and D-Day than D-Day plus one week or six months.

Sorry I was long—but that was to encapsulate what I think is important to consider.

[00:51:36] **Frank Gaffney:** Well, it was long, but it was extraordinarily rich. And I think one of the reasons why we so value your contributions to this program is the corporate memory that you bring to it that is necessary to make sense of the snapshot we are seeing at the moment.

I'm so delighted that we have a chance to have you and Daniel Greenfield interact a little bit at this point, because I believe that the two of you are among the finest intellects on these issues in the country today. And to get your thoughts, respectively, on this question is what I very much hope we can add to the various elements of this problem that we've discussed so far.

Both of you have made reference to terrorism and the role that the Iranian regime has played in fostering it, underwriting it, enabling it literally around the world, including in our own hemisphere. And there is reason to believe—mention was made of assassination squads operating inside the United States. I believe they're IRGC or maybe Hezbollah—but the presence here of cells that are presumably both in a position to do considerable harm and awaiting orders for that purpose.

How do you factor in that piece of what the Iranian regime may be able to do if it is allowed to persist and execute doomsday scenarios, if you will—even in the absence of the kind of nuclear weapons that they were seeking? Shall we start with Daniel first and then Walid?

[00:53:28] **Daniel Greenfield:** The hard lesson that we've learned is that when we don't take the opportunity to shut down terrorists, the result certainly is not peace. The result is that a regime feels emboldened, the terrorist group feels emboldened, and it's actually going to escalate.

It may seem a bit rational in the Western context where we think, "We survived the close call; at this point we should be more cautious." But in the Islamic mindset, you have to understand that when you're a jihadist and you survive a close call—one where you seemed doomed—you feel invigorated. You believe that this is a sign that Allah is with you.

For example, we see this in Hamas in Gaza. Rather than attributing the fact that they survived to Western liberalism and refusal of Israel to do everything it needed to do, it views this as an affirmation. This is why pretty much every time a Muslim country loses a war, they celebrate it as a victory.

It may seem irrational that Saddam Hussein was celebrating the original Gulf War as a victory, or that the Egyptian regime was celebrating the Yom Kippur War as a victory. But if you understand this mindset, you understand that it actually emboldens them: they feel Allah is with them.

So every time the Iranian regime has survived political protest, including the Green Movement, they feel emboldened to double and triple down. They feel Allah is with them, and that they actually now can escalate their campaigns.

When Obama failed to do anything about the Iranian protest, Iran significantly escalated its investment in terrorism in the region. The result is that if they survive this particular moment—everything that’s happened to them: the nuclear program being taken out, their proxies—Hezbollah and Hamas—being beaten on the battlefield very decisively, and now these protests—another regime would feel vulnerable, weaker. Even fanatical regimes like communist regimes would respond to that kind of thing with a sense of vulnerability.

But they’re actually gonna have a sense of invulnerability. What they’re gonna do is come out of it and say: we’ve proven the domestic opposition is weak; the Great Satan—the United States—is weak; Israel is weak; all these other countries are weak; we have Allah with us. And at this point, the thing we need to do is escalate further.

Which means: ramp up their current operations that have been somewhat weakened—in Lebanon; go back to attacking American targets using the Houthis out of Yemen; set off another war in the Middle East by attacking Israel; and of course go after and target American bases, which they’ve been able to do effectively in the past.

We’ve had the anniversary of the bombing of the Marine barracks. We’ve had bombings in Saudi Arabia—the Khobar Towers. So at that point, they’re going to feel very empowered to take the conflict to another step.

So if they survive this moment, people are afraid that if we pressure Iran, they’re going to attack us. It’s the other way around. If we fail to do that—if we fail to act—if we show weakness, they are going to come after us. It’s paradoxical to the Western mindset where it’s, “I leave you alone; you leave me alone.” In the Islamic mindset, you leaving me alone while I’m attacking you means you’re weak; Allah is with me; I am going to attack you now.

So if we don’t want to be attacked by terrorists, paradoxically, the best thing to do is to attack the terrorists—to hurt them enough that they actually are not in a position to strike us. Because if the Islamic regime comes out of this intact, if it retains control over Iran, it is going to attack us—not because we did something to it, but because we failed to do something.

[00:57:21] **Frank Gaffney:** Daniel, thank you. This is so helpful. I want to just insert before coming to Walid: my own feeling is that in addition to what you’ve said—where you see an element like the Revolutionary Guard Corps surviving an attack, perhaps because of what they perceived to have been not just a failure of military arms, but of resolve—there’s a special kind of contempt that further intensifies this idea that they need to demonstrate that they are very much still in the fight, because the greater power has signaled weakness.

Walid, your thoughts on this piece of the equation: should we be deterred from acting against this odious regime in Tehran out of concerns about this possibility of a fifth column operation inside our country, or at least cells?

[00:58:21] **Dr. Walid Phares, PhD:** First of all, I agree with Daniel. What he has advanced is very accurate: they don't deal with the West like the West deals with itself. They have a plan—at least they convince their supporters that this is the will of Allah. And that is basically the equivalent, probably, of some far-left Trotsky type of ideology—but they don't say Allah; they say “the will of the people,” and “we should continue no matter what the defeats are.” So there is an equivalency between the two.

I used to give preparation seminars to our agencies about seven years ago—six years ago—for a previous 12 years. And we have used models of scenarios based partially on information and partially on expectations and projections. There is a plan that the regime has—I don't want to call it rigidly a plan, but there is a set of strategies, a set of moves that the regime would do automatically just before they sense that the regime may fall or may lose a lot of power inside Iran.

So it's not just a philosophical assumption. And the plan—among the many things they could do in the region, inside Iran, and probably regarding the economies of the region—is in the homeland, the U.S. homeland.

So let me summarize it, because it has a lot of details. They have enough—the Islamic regime—I'm not even mentioning the Muslim Brotherhood, al-Qaeda extensions, and other jihadists who have a similar galaxy. So there are two galaxies.

One takes orders from the IRGC—mostly the Quds Force—while the Basij are inside Iran. And compare that with al-Qaeda of the Salafi Sunni and the scenarios that they have: it runs from the highest possible, meaning targeting leadership—the highest possible. And they have spoken about it. They're not shy about it. There were threats made to Congress and the president and members of the cabinet. And there are threats also against our military command.

That's one side. And then they have threats they could execute against our civilians—“October 7ths,” many October 7ths. This country is open—wide, large—to actions and strikes by the Islamic regime, led directly or indirectly, or using extensions. Meaning they could recruit. They have recruited already elements from the far left converted into Khomeinism to take action. So it's not gonna be only Iranian ethnics doing this, but all the militias they are working with, such as Hezbollah in Lebanon; Hamas; and Houthis significantly—which also helps us understand what the immigration response by the administration is trying to do.

We are in the genesis of the reaction, but they have been here penetrating, infiltrating for the last—at least effectively since 2009—when there was a relaxation by the Obama administration on jihadism coming here.

The other network—the other galaxy of Islamists and Salafists—this is my own reading. The first one is the reading of our government. But the second one, I do anticipate: if they set a lot of damages—if they cause a lot of damages—then all of the Salafis will join. It's almost medieval: if one Islamist army is successful and creates enough chaos, the other one will join. And the other way is right.

So I wrote about it in a couple of my books: they have a whole front that could damage. They used to say they can hide inside the belly of the dragon—we are the dragon. So they're already on the inside, and they can cause more damage to the belly of the dragon here than in the region. And they will use that card—that card for a ceasefire, quote-unquote—so we stop acting against them. That's in a very summarized way.

[01:02:55] **Frank Gaffney:** Well, I guess the bottom line is this: given what is in prospect here and the likelihood that if we are signaling weakness, they will double their efforts to make us feel subdued—I believe the Quran passage relevant to this is we best get on with it, and deal decisively with this regime and help the people of Iran bring about—hopefully not chaos, though I think Daniel's right, that's probably a less bad threat to us than is the present regime, even in its weakened state.

But we've got, unfortunately, to decide now, it seems to me, whether to take advantage of what remains of the willingness of the people of Iran to act on their own behalf, with our help.

And just a final closing comment on that from both of you, if we could—we're a little bit over time—but I did want to ask you: is there any doubt in your mind that if the United States does step up—especially joined by Israel, and I think that's desirable and probable—the people of Iran will respond and do their part on the ground, those so-called boots on the ground?

Walid, to you first on that one.

[01:04:23] **Dr. Walid Phares, PhD:** That question was valid before this revolution. People would ask: what would they do? Will they come—would they meet us halfway? They are three times halfway. They are fighting.

The real choice is going to be: will we leave them alone to conduct their resistance—and there will be polarization—or then it'll be chaos, because the population now is going to respond. They started to respond. They cannot go backward. Thirteen thousand, twelve thousand people is not something they're gonna absorb—and the regime as well.

So the only option I think strategically rational is to hit the mothership. Once you hit the mothership—those two militias—I have little doubt, or I have no doubt, that the Iranians will establish something. It doesn't have to be like Beirut in '75.

There is a chunk of the Artesh military; there is almost 80% of the police. They will put some sort of order. It's not gonna look like Sweden and New Zealand the next day, but at least it'll be on its way to acting like a normal country. But they will have issues with secessionism, with all kinds of other stuff that will look like chaos—but in fact there are normal countries in the Middle East who are facing this.

So I will recommend that our administration shorten the time of thinking and hit those two militias.

[01:05:44] **Frank Gaffney:** Act decisively. Thank you—especially for summarizing that so distinctly. Daniel, to you: is there any question in your mind that the people of Iran will take matters into their own hands if given an opportunity to do so?

[01:05:59] **Daniel Greenfield:** I think Walid has provided a good summary of the situation on the ground. Bottom line is, there are— even the regime is admitting thousands of deaths, and the protesters are estimating a far larger number of deaths.

These people are taking things into their own hands, but there's only so much of a realistic expectation of people being able to fight against a heavily armed regime. So there are discussions about what we could do to cripple the regime's ability to massacre the people.

But the people have shown that they're willing to die by the thousands to remove this regime—to overthrow it. And yes, there might be chaos in the aftermath, but it would be a democratic chaos as opposed to the totalitarian evil that exists now.

I can't think of people more decisively demonstrating that they do want to be free. This was very different than, for example, what we were told about the Iraq protests against Saddam, which were very much coming out of Shiites—in many cases coming out of Islamist organizations.

This is very different. It is really coming from the kinds of people who would be far more compatible with the United States—people who want a secular government, people who want more conventional freedom of the kind that we describe. It's very different than anything that we saw in Iraq.

Can these people single-handedly overthrow a government? Not as long as the government has various jihadist forces that it can throw at them. And really this is where we have the option to come in or not come in.

[01:07:26] **Frank Gaffney:** Well, gentlemen, I thank you both for participating in real time, as they say, in this program, as well as those who were joining us previously by video.

I think we've very helpfully shed light on the extent to which there is an incredibly important opportunity. It should be seized, and I believe President Trump is convinced that it must be seized at this juncture, and that if it is, it has the potential—and I think it's a very real potential—not only to enjoy the strong support of the Iranian people and their help, but also to set the stage for a transformation of the Middle East that has been heretofore unimaginable.

And there are still going to be challenges. Let's be clear. Walid, you made mention of the Syrian situation. That will be a subject for a future program of this kind, because it is horrific what is taking place there at the hands of so-called Syrian government forces, who wear under their patches signaling that that's what they are—their ISIS and their al-Qaeda and their HTS identifiers. It is truly jihad against not just these minorities, but Western civilization. And that will almost certainly abide, at least for a time, once things are settled with Iran.

But we must get that settled and done as urgently as we possibly can. Time is not on our side, and we need this kind of conversation to be taking place, as I believe it is inside the government of the United States. And hopefully it will be informed by the very important insights of our friends Jim Fanell, Sam Faddis, Walid Phares, and Daniel Greenfield.

Thank you to you all for your participation, my friends. We'll look forward to having this conversation, hopefully continue, on the other side of a very important course of action on the part of our government against the Iranian regime.

God bless you all. God bless America. Over and out.