

# TRANSCRIPT

A VICTORY COALITION BRIEFING

## Help the Iranian People Prevail, Not Their Enemies – and Ours

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Media File: Webinar\_Iran\_Uprising.mp4

BEGIN TRANSCRIPT:

[00:00:00] **Frank Gaffney:** Welcome to a very timely and very time-sensitive briefing by the Victory Coalition, sponsored by the Institute for the American Future, of which I'm proud to be the president. This coalition's founding principle is that victory—decisive victory—over Sharia and the supremacists who seek to impose it upon all of us is the only basis for an enduring peace, whether in the Middle East or anywhere else.

Our purpose today is to talk about a place [00:01:00] which is, as we speak, on the cusp of quite possibly handing Sharia supremacists their greatest defeat in perhaps a millennium: the nation of Iran. We're going to discuss the counterrevolution that has emerged in recent days in Iran—whether its original impetus was the collapse of the currency, lack of water, power scarcity (certainly unreliable power), and the host of attendant problems that flow from all of that, or whether—

Today, [00:02:00] the sentiment widely felt by the people of Iran seems to be that the regime that has brought them such horrors—along with the repression it has inflicted on its people since it came to power in 1979—must go. Millions of Iranians have put their lives on the line in street demonstrations in recent days, making that demand. They have been met with brutal repression: live-fire [00:03:00] ammunition used against them in large numbers.

It's unclear how large. Estimates range up to perhaps 20,000 or more killed by their own government simply for seeking freedom. Over the course of this hour, we'll discuss what is animating the people of Iran, what has brought them to this point, why what they're striving for is not only in their vital interest but ours—and indeed that of the Middle East, and I think the world writ large. We'll also discuss what the [00:04:00] United States should be doing to help the people of Iran finally liberate themselves from a regime that has brutalized them for nearly 50 years and threatened us.

Are we doing what we should be? If not, why not? What are the chances of rectifying the situation while there's still time?

We'll be talking with several of our duty experts, and I couldn't be more pleased that we have the participation, first, of a man who is a familiar contributor to these Victory Coalition briefings: Dr. David Wurmser. He rose through the ranks of the United States Navy to lieutenant commander, specializing in naval intelligence. He has had extensive experience in senior positions in the U.S. State Department, the National Security Council, and the Office of the Vice President.

These days, he is the director of the Middle East program at the Center for Security Policy. We caught up with him in Israel earlier today and have taken advantage of an important interview he gave me for our television program, *Securing America*, on Real America's Voice. With his permission, we're sharing an excerpt for the purposes of [00:06:00] giving you his insights about what has been transpiring and what the implications are of this still-unfolding drama. Let's go to the videotape of my interview with Dr. Wurmser.

[00:06:17] **Dr. David Wurmser:** The United States, I think, did encourage these demonstrations a bit. Obviously, the Iranians were motivated by their own condition—their hope and their despair. But this time, they got a tailwind from the United States rather than the headwind the United States has traditionally presented to these freedom seekers in Iran.

They took it to heart. And I think there's a sense of disappointment in Iran because they feel the moment is being lost. Literally, the silence of the grave is descending on the streets of Tehran, and that was one of the biggest assets the United States had.

This was not only a humanitarian gesture that President Trump was indicating. This was actually a potential solution to one of the gravest strategic problems the United States and the West have faced for 50 years: the Iranian regime and the haunting specter it has represented in international politics ever since—along the way, with a lot of death and a lot of damage.

This was a real opportunity. And unfortunately, I don't think it's gone. I think President Trump intends to do what he needs to do. The problem is, we had the Iranian street—worth 10,000 bombs—able to help us bring down the regime. We had people on the ground: the Iranian people, willing to do the heavy lifting.

Any action by the United States in the last two weeks [00:08:00] would have electrified an already dangerous-for-the-regime uprising. Unfortunately, even if we circle back in 48 hours, a week, or two, I think the Iranian street has been slaughtered into submission at this point. They can't—and won't—be there as our strategic asset. They'll be sympathetic, but they're bleeding into submission.

So we will have to do this, or Israel will have to do this—somebody will have to do this, eventually and soon—because Iran will now be emboldened and will seek weapons again. It simply will. It will do what it needs to do to threaten the West.

As a result, we're going to have to go back and do it—whether it's Israel, the United States, or others. But this time, unfortunately, we've lost a major opportunity and strategic asset with the [00:09:00] Iranian street.

[00:09:02] **Frank Gaffney:** So, David, is your view that the street is now, in fact, vacated—and that the people there, as you say, have been murderously assaulted to the point where they're not willing to be in the street at this point?

[00:09:19] **Dr. David Wurmser:** I think it is going to quiet down now, somewhat. There are some cities still under the control of the uprising, and that's going to be bloody. That will be a serious problem. But by and large, in most cities—Tehran especially—you're going to see a deadly quiet descend.

They feel they're alone now. They can't do it alone anymore. There's no point in throwing another 5,000—10,000, 15,000, 20,000—people into the streets when, in five or six days, so many have been slaughtered. They can't go out every day and lose another 2,000 to 5,000 people without any hope they'll get anywhere. It's demoralizing.

So I think it has quieted down. Now, if President Trump gets out there and says, "They promise they will not attack any demonstrators," and the demonstrators test it and go out, then the regime is in a problem: either they let the demonstrations continue—and they grow again—or they respond, and then Trump can say, "You're killing demonstrators again."

But I don't think we're in that kind of situation. I think we're now in a negative resolution: the street has been slaughtered into silence.

[00:10:45] **Frank Gaffney:** And David, as you look at this sort of status quo, shall we say, is it likely that the regime will quietly go about murdering [00:11:00] those who were in the street—now that they're no longer out there, and therefore not visibly defying President Trump—but in a way that's less visible than when people were being killed en masse during the demonstrations?

[00:11:14] **Dr. David Wurmser:** Exactly. They are a regime that relies on the image of omnipotent brutality to survive. They know it's in their interest. The currency of regime rule for them is slaughter.

They'll kill people who have been arrested—there are over 20,000 people arrested—and they've said they would execute them. My bet is they'll have show trials, and the show trials will take a quarter year, half a year. They'll let this die down, and then they'll execute people in large numbers.

We have to remember: before this uprising took place, Iran had executed over 2,000 people—political prisoners, essentially—over the last year. This is a murderous regime. This will now happen again, and on steroids.

But they're going to do it carefully. Quietly. Waiting a few weeks. They'll try to play President Trump against himself—so he can say, "I stopped the killing. I stopped the executions. They understood I'm serious, and they're backing down, and we can move to a deal."

Then they'll trap him in that process again, which allows them to return to building weapons and killing people.

[00:12:48] **Frank Gaffney:** Yeah. And this is not speculation. This is the playbook the Iranian regime—and, for that matter, Sharia supremacists—practice all the time. We're seeing it in Gaza as well, are we not?

Correct. Correct. Yeah.

Thank you, Dr. Wurmser. This sets the stage for the conversations we're going to have now with two guests who are with us live.

I'm very pleased to introduce once again a dear friend and valued colleague of many years: Dr. Harold Rhode. He was for most of the past 30 years, I believe, a senior member of the Office of the Secretary of Defense staff, a duty expert on two countries in particular: Iran and Turkey, and the Middle East more generally. He has served with distinction—not only in that capacity, but as a valued resource to our program *Securing America* and others.

He is also an author, notably of *Modern Islamic Warfare: An Ancient Doctrine Marches On*, published by the Center for Security Policy Press. Dr. Rhode is a distinguished senior fellow of the Gatestone Institute. He's coming to us, also, from Israel, and we're delighted to have a chance to pick his brain about the backstory here: the nature of the popular mood, the direction it has taken of late, where it is likely to go from here, and what our policies should be. Dr. Rhode, welcome back, my friend, and thank you for joining us on short notice. The floor is yours. [00:15:00]

[00:15:01] **Dr. Harold Rhode:** Thank you, Frank. Always nice to be with you.

A few things. Number one: during the previous revolution, in 1978, I was studying at a university in Iran—in Mashhad—about 17 hours east of Tehran by bus, not far from the Afghan border. Why? Well, I'm a bit nuts, and I wanted to find a way to make peace with the Muslim world. I'd done this with Sunnis, and now I wanted to try with Shiites.

I found that it's a little different, but in many ways it is the same. Unfortunately, Islam—whether Shiite or Sunni—holds, according to classical Islamic Sharia, that Islam must

rule the entire world. There's the part of the world it already rules: the world of Islam. And the part it does not yet rule is called the world of war.

Sometimes there are countries that, from this perspective, "go crazy" and leave the world of Islam for the world of war—Israel, for example, and also Spain and Portugal. The Islamic world must "get them back."

Now, the Iranian constitution makes it clear that everything I just said is the way the Iranian regime sees itself. These are its goals. This is what it wants to do. And America, by that definition—not just "the big Satan," with Israel "the little Satan"—America, as the center of the non-Muslim world, must be destroyed. That's the inference in the Iranian constitution.

But we have chosen not to see things like this. "Oh, they don't really mean it." We take our constitution seriously, so why shouldn't we take theirs seriously? It's right there.

I'd like to do two things: compare what I saw in the early and mid-stages of the Iranian Islamic revolution back in 1978—before the Shah left, before the end of what we might call a more secular-oriented Iran—with what is going on today.

The context is two essential parts of Iranian culture. These help explain why the Iranian people today have had it with this regime—[00:18:00] and especially why women have been hurt the most.

If you look at pictures of life in much of Iran under the Shah—under the previous ruler whose son many are now calling on to return—you see modern, Western-oriented women. They could wear what they wanted. They lived modern lives. Today, that's impossible. Women are reduced, in effect, to faces framed by cloth.

Now, back then and throughout Iranian history, there's a concept that "the world is out to get us." In Persian, it's the *tote'e-ye bozorg*—the "grand conspiracy." It cuts across society: educated people, peasants, everyone. They come up with fantastic stories about what's going on.

I'll give you one from 1978, and then a few from today. In 1978, in my interactions with fellow students in Mashhad, from their point of view: who runs the world? America. And who runs America—who is behind everything? The Jews.

They knew I was a Jew. I tried to convince them it was absurd, but I knew I wasn't going to disabuse them. So I told them a story.

I lowered my voice and said: "We Jews are technologically far superior and far more advanced than others." This was before we used a word like nanotechnology. I said: "Look at my forehead. All Jews are born with a tiny zipper"—today, you might even call it a nano-zipper. "Every night when we go to bed, the zipper opens, and we're beamed up

to Conspiracy Central, where the Elders of Zion sit, program us, and then beam us back. The zipper closes, and that's how we know what to do."

Since they believed in conspiracies, why not? You're not going to convince them otherwise.

And I ended it this way: "There's only one problem. I'm 28 years old. I'm among those being programmed—I'm like a robot. I want to be among the decision makers. Maybe when I'm older, they'll allow me to sit on the panel that programs others, so we can continue to control the world."

This sounds bizarre to us, but it was totally believable to them. I wanted them to be afraid of America, and I thought it might help keep them from doing bad things to us.

Now, what's happening now—again, as part of this "grand conspiracy"—is that President Trump has been speaking, from their point of view, out of all sides of his mouth.

One moment: "We're going to come after you. If you kill people, we're going to take you out, and that will be the end of the regime." We don't know how many people have been killed, but I'm getting reports. Iranians are ingenious. The internet goes down, but every hour or so there may be a two- or three-minute window when messages can get out. We are getting reports from all over the country of large numbers of people being killed.

Can we prove it? No. Iranians also have a tendency to exaggerate. The numbers could be anything from 2,000—Frank, you mentioned 20,000—[00:25:00] and it could be more. We don't know.

Then President Trump says, all of a sudden, that they "stopped the killing"—which I don't believe for a moment. And people think: "Why should we go out into the streets? We don't have a great figure we can trust."

That brings me to another aspect of Iranian culture: they need a strong central leader—someone to bow down to, like a great statue. It's a kind of idol-leader dynamic.

Back in 1978, I asked fellow students about the *marja'*—the Grand Ayatollah—because in Shiite Islam, families follow a senior clerical authority. I asked: "Who is your family's Grand Ayatollah?" They looked at me and smiled as if they didn't understand. It was like asking a devout Christian about Jesus and being told, "Never heard of him."

I knew that couldn't be true. I had studied the history of the ayatollahs, and I knew the names of several Grand Ayatollahs. One of them was Khomeini—exiled by the Shah, first in Iraq and then in Paris.

But they insisted they didn't know.

Then riots began—broken windows, unrest—and those same students were out in the streets yelling, “Death to the Shah,” alongside Khomeini’s name. I was furious. In America, you don’t lie like that. If you lie, you look away. That’s how we think of it. I came back to the dorm.

There was a knock on my door. I opened it, and there were five or six guys: “Harold, can we talk with you, please?”

I wanted to say, “Get out—you lied.” But I let them in. Then they asked: “Who is Khomeini?” In spoken Persian it sounds a bit like “kiyā,” “who is...” They were asking me—after having been out in the street chanting his name.

That’s when I realized something else was going on. Why did they ask me? Because they sensed power shifting. The Shah wasn’t doing what was necessary—or wasn’t willing or able—to keep himself in power. And in their view, that means weakness.

If there’s a leader, you must be with the leader. If you’re not, you can get hauled off to jail, interrogated, killed. So you align with power. Khomeini’s cassettes were already all over Iran. He was yelling and screaming from exile, and the Shah couldn’t—or wouldn’t—stop him. So Khomeini looked like the new “statue” to bow down to.

Now look at these demonstrations today. The Islamic regime calls the protesters “terrorists”—which, in their logic, gives the regime the right to kill them. That’s the excuse for killing massive numbers of people—possibly more than 20,000—but we have no way of [00:31:00] really knowing.

What are the people yelling? From the videos we can see, early on it was “Death to the dictator.” Now it is “Death to Khamenei,” by name. And they’re also saying that the son of the Shah—whom they once chanted “death to”—is going to save them. They need a savior. That’s how they interpret the world.

So, going back to what President Trump is saying: on one hand, he said he would take them out if they kill people. There’s no doubt the regime has killed many people. Then Trump says, “Now they’ve stopped killing people”—which becomes an excuse for doing nothing.

Then, at 10:30 this morning Eastern time, the Secretary of the Treasury released a video lambasting senior Iranian officials, sanctioning them by name—cutting off banking access and more. Then the Treasury announces 25% tariffs, I believe, on any country trading with Iran.

Imagine you’re an Iranian trying to understand this. One moment you hear support for freedom. Then you hear, “They stopped killing.” Then you hear sweeping sanctions and tariffs. It’s confusing.

What we're seeing is that neither side—the American side, the U.S. government—understands how Iranians are thinking, or how the Iranian people are reacting. The American government seems clueless about what's going on inside.

I don't know where this leads. I can tell you that the similarities between what I saw in 1978 and what's going on today are real. If you read Iranian history and look at previous revolutions and upheavals, the framework is pretty much the same.

So where does that leave us? I can't tell you how the Iranian people interpret all of this. It's like my story about the tiny zipper: they were confused because no one has a zipper on his forehead—or do they? They didn't know how to understand me. That confusion was useful.

Now they don't know how to understand the people out in the streets, President Trump, and the Secretary of the Treasury, because the messages seem to shift day to day.

What they need—what the Iranian people are looking for—is a figure to follow: an idol, a king, a Shah. “Show me the way so I can follow you.” They need to know they won't be punished for stepping out of line.

When they think about Reza—the man they're now chanting for—that is Reza Pahlavi, who has been out of the country for almost 50 years. Does he really know what's going on? Do the people of Iran know much about him? He's a very nice guy, by the way.

All I can say is: they don't really know who he is or what he would do. But they do know this: as awful as things have become, their parents remember how life was under the Shah, how much better it was, and how much freer they felt. And since Iranians tend to exaggerate, whatever parents and grandparents tell children and grandchildren about life under the Shah becomes even more amplified: that things were unbelievably fantastic.

And those same parents and grandparents were once out in the streets yelling against the Shah. I know it's confusing.

[00:38:10] **Frank Gaffney:** Yeah, thank you. That was quite a narrative, and I hope it was illuminating about the character of the people we're talking about—and, hopefully, helpful as we seek to free them from the tyranny that has so brutalized them and continues to threaten us.

I'm delighted to say we are joined by Dr. Walid Phares, another highly regarded expert on the Middle East. He hails from Lebanon originally and has been a leader in the Washington policy environment for decades on Middle East issues—particularly Iran, which has played such an outsized role in this country's national security policy, and in the region as well.

Dr. Phares is the co-secretary general of the Trans-Atlantic Parliamentary Group and the author of *Iran: An Imperialist Republic and U.S. Policy*. We could not be more pleased to have him with us, especially on extremely short notice. Thank you for joining us once again. We're delighted you can add your insights at this point.

[00:39:34] **Dr. Walid Phares:** Thank you so much, Frank. I always value the projects you launch and your commitment to supporting freedom and democracy across the greater Middle East. You've worked diligently—both while you were in government and afterward—to make sure U.S. policy corresponds to the realities of the Middle East and helps move events toward better outcomes for everyone: Israel, the Arabs, Turkey, and in this case now, Iran.

The revolution we see in Iran now has evolved from protests into a full-fledged revolution. It did not happen overnight.

Let me start by defining what it is *not*, because there is a battle in the media and public discourse over how to describe it. Many try to frame it as purely economic: economic disparity, economic collapse. Economic conditions matter—every war and revolution has an economic component—but in the videos I've seen coming out of Iran, across many cities and towns, I did not hear slogans like “We want bread,” even though people may need bread. I did not hear “Fix the economic relationships.” What I heard were slogans demanding freedom. I heard chants of “Death to the dictator” in Farsi.

This is about freedom. And one of the results of having a free country would be a better economy and a better situation for all communities inside Iran.

So where are these other arguments coming from? They are meant to deflect from the main issue: freedom for the Iranian people. They also come from regime lobbies that do not want to disappear. If the United States—and other parties in the region, including Israel—help the Iranian people, the result will be the fall of the regime. And with the fall of the regime, many interests will be impacted.

We can discuss what comes after, but to borrow an example from World War II: when Charles de Gaulle was asked what government he would form after France was liberated from the Nazis, he essentially said, “Let's get to D-Day first.” Let's get to liberation first. Then we can deal with politics.

We are in a comparable situation now. The debate is going in all directions, but the only direction that makes sense today is: what kind of effort should we, the United States and our allies, put forward—where, with whom, and at what timing—to empower the Iranian people, with all of their communities, to make that change. We won't have this kind of opportunity every six months. These moments come every decade.

For context: in 1979, what academia in America calls the “Islamic Revolution” was not a revolution. It was a coup—a Khomeinist Islamic coup. It began with an alliance between the Islamists and the left and far left, not only against the Shah but also against the liberals inside Iran. That history has been rewritten. Once the liberals were defeated and the Shah was out, they turned on the army, beheading senior generals. Then they moved to control the “Wall Street” of Iran—the bazaar. Then they came after the Communist Party that had helped them fight the Shah: the Tudeh Party. Tens of thousands were killed over the following years—then they went after other former allies, including Islamo-Marxist groups.

That coup established the Islamic Republic—effectively a jihadist Shiite regime. The rest we know: four decades in which the Iranian people have repeatedly tried to free themselves.

The first major effort we can remember is 1999: a nationwide student uprising on campuses—isolated and crushed. A wave of exiles followed; some became leaders of NGOs in America, France, and elsewhere. The second major effort was the 2009 Green Movement: about 1.2 million people on the streets of Tehran. It was the largest assembled in one place—until now.

The problem then was that the U.S., with newly elected President Obama, did not encourage them. Instead, he sided with the regime by sending a letter to Grand Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, promising engagement. That became the genesis of what later became the Iran deal.

The Iran deal was, in effect, a transaction: roughly \$150 billion was transferred back to the regime. It was Iranian money, but it was not “regime money”—and the regime used it. A portion went into real estate and transactions, but a significant amount was used to lobby in Western Europe and the United States—building influence over time.

Then came the most recent waves: a wave in 2019; then the biggest one after the killing of Mahsa Amini in 2022—sometimes called the Mahsa Amini revolution. From 2022 until recent weeks, the movement surged and receded.

This last wave accelerated after the end of the 12-day war between Israel and the Islamic regime of Iran. As Americans, at first the administration framed it as Israel retaliating. Marco Rubio was very clear, but there was uncertainty early on. During those 12 days, the president and the administration realized the regime was not going to give up on the nuclear program. They had been asked for months, and they did not. President Trump then, within a few hours, was able to destroy almost the entire nuclear capability or system of the Islamic Republic. That shows we have the power to change history once we are committed and understand the importance of the act.

After that, Israel shifted to striking positions of the militias that control the streets: the IRGC and, in this case especially, the Basij. The Basij are the neighborhood enforcers—the ones who crush demonstrations. The Israeli strategy—after the nuclear sites were hit by the United States—was to go after those positions in the hope that the Iranian people would rise.

Then, the regime ran to Qatar. Qatar ran to us. They promised the regime would send a serious offer: end programs, rejoin the international community, and so on. The president and his administration waited. Meanwhile, with cash coming in from China and Russia, the regime began to rearm. Israel warned. Our agencies warned: instead of offering peace, the regime was rearming.

Then the last wave of demonstrations was driven by this: once the regime believed there would be no more Israeli strikes, it moved immediately to break the backbone of the revolution—arresting hundreds and thousands between July and most recently. With so many in jail, the pressure reached a critical level. The masses—across many sectors—moved.

This is a different composition than before. Yes, women, youth, and students were in the front lines. But you also had workers. A few weeks before this last episode, truckers across Iran had paralyzed the country. And then—importantly—the bazaar shifted. For the first time, the “Wall Street” of Iran flipped toward the opposition, which encouraged many in the middle class to move forward.

Some in Washington misread this as uniquely economic. Economics were a segment of it, but the masses wanted freedom.

As the demonstrations became more organized and disciplined, we even began to see indications that former officers of the regular army—the Artesh—were present in neighborhoods. The regime realized it was no longer dealing with dispersed groups. Then it escalated executions and killings, which prompted an international reaction. Here in the United States, a majority will not accept what is happening in Iran.

The president crossed a line and issued that first message—then second and third—making clear: you are the patriots. Semantics matter. He called them Iranian patriots. He urged them to take their institutions. He moved toward delegitimizing the regime and legitimizing the opposition. He went further by telling them, “Help is on the way.”

Now, he did not define what “help” means. We will see what was proposed and what scenarios were discussed. But the logic was: you can apply economic pressure, but that takes six or seven months. This was not about six or seven months. This was a message to other countries in the region: we are serious.

We are not going to put troops on the ground. We do not need to, because the troops are already on the ground: the Iranian people.

Now, around Iran, there are regimes—some friendly to us, others not. Some, including the Taliban and militias in Iraq, have pressured the administration: “Don’t end this regime.” They say: you can continue sanctions, but do not end the regime. Why? Because if the regime collapses, it won’t be the Taliban taking over. It will be forces of change—the forces we see from Los Angeles to Shiraz—forming a different government.

We cannot guarantee a smooth transition. The day after the regime falls will not look like New Zealand or Sweden. It will take time, and it will not be pretty. But it is better than having a genocidal regime that wants to eliminate Israel and eliminate any opposition inside Iran.

I’ll stop here, because we are still in process. The president today mentioned there were no executions and no killings at this point in time. But I posted in that direction: imagine you are in World War II and the Nazis—after killing a million or two million Jews and others—tell the Allies, “Today we’re not killing anymore.” What would the Allies do?

The point is: after killing 12,000-plus Iranians, the regime cannot continue ruling Iran. There needs to be pressure by the United States. If the regime will not relent, there should be action. If the regime asks, “What can I do now?” the answer is simple: transfer power to a transitional government. We need an answer—not, “We’ll see what God will do.” We need to tell the regime: after killing thousands of Iranians, you can’t keep ruling Iran. Thank you.

[00:53:51] **Frank Gaffney:** Well, indeed—thank you so much. That was a very important contribution in a lot of respects.

Let me put a couple of questions to you and to Harold that will hopefully tease out some of the important points you’ve made.

Qatar, as you mentioned, is clearly playing a significant role with the Trump administration, and it appears, as you said in your closing remark, either it has prevailed upon other nations in the region—or they have independently come to the conclusion—that the devil you know is better than what you might otherwise get, even though the devil you know has been, in some cases from its inception, a serious threat to these nations.

How do you square that? Is it a function, say in the case of Saudi Arabia, that they’re more concerned about the precedent of a popular revolt bringing about the end of a regime than they are about what this particular regime might do if it remains in power?

[00:55:05] **Dr. Walid Phares:** That's a very delicate question, and it's still ongoing. But I'll make a distinction between Qatar and Turkey on the one hand, and Saudi Arabia on the other, which is very critical and delicate.

With Qatar and Turkey, Harold, you know the game: it's the Muslim Brotherhood. The Brotherhood's strategy regarding Iran is this: if the outcome of removing the regime is a new multi-ethnic, secular, modernizing ally of the West—and even more, a government that would go after jihadists and Islamists—then Qatar and Turkey do not want that. Their literature suggests that the mainstream opposition would pursue that course.

So Qatar and Turkey would rather see this regime replaced by something else: a conservative Shiite structure, or fragmentation, where parts of Iran break away. They have their reasons. They don't want Iran to become a Western-aligned partner—an “Israel ten times bigger,” in their view.

Saudi Arabia is more complex. The MBS reforms and movements—Mohammed bin Salman—have been attacked by the Muslim Brotherhood. The journalist-killing issue in Istanbul was manipulated by the Brotherhood. Saudi Arabia labeled the Muslim Brotherhood a terrorist organization.

But it seems to me there is a break inside Saudi Arabia. We don't have much information, but we can see signs that foreign policy coming out of the foreign ministry is moving closer to the Muslim Brotherhood's posture, while MBS's direction has become more domestically focused—tourism projects, economic projects, and so on. In between, you have the king and advisors. I don't have enough information to define it fully, but the information I have suggests the Saudi Arabia we met with in May 2017—the Saudi Arabia that was a strategic ally to President Trump, moving toward an Arab coalition and later toward the Abraham Accords—has changed direction.

Those devising that direction now appear closer to the Brotherhood. That's why I can't make a blanket statement about all of Saudi Arabia. Something has changed inside it. Those pushing the line “We don't want the U.S. to end the regime in Iran” are closer to the Brotherhood's line than to the original MBS line.

[00:58:32] **Frank Gaffney:** Same question to you: what are we dealing with in the neighborhood? Is it indeed an increasingly Muslim Brotherhood-dominated neighborhood? And what does that portend—setting aside for the moment what comes next in Iran—for our vital interests in the face of what I call Sharia supremacism's seeming ascendancy?

[00:59:03] **Dr. Harold Rhode:** Let's talk about Turkey, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia.

Saudi Arabia has had a very bad relationship with Turkey and Qatar for very good reasons. Turkey and Qatar have backed the Muslim Brotherhood, which wants to destroy existing governments in the region that aren't pushing the Brotherhood's line.

Saudi Arabia and Qatar also have a long-standing historical dispute—two or three hundred years—despite distant family ties. As the late Professor Bernard Lewis used to say: “No. I'm right, you're wrong. Go to hell.”

What's happening today is this: President Trump is saying very nice things about Qatar, and some of his advisers are saying very nice things about Erdoğan in Turkey. The Saudis feel left out in the cold. And in the Middle East, if you can't stop something, you try to appease it. That's why the Saudis sent a delegation to Iran not long ago. They're trying to make nice with both Turkey and Qatar because they can't depend on the United States.

That's also why they seem to have backed away from joining the Abraham Accords and have criticized Israel in ways they didn't in the past.

If the United States had a clear policy against Sharia supremacists, it would oppose all of this. But at the same time, it's saying nice things about Turkey and Qatar, who are pushing that agenda.

The Saudis and others then have no choice but to make accommodations. And with Iran, it's even worse, because America is signaling that the Iranians have “stopped,” and that Trump isn't going to do anything. So now, from their point of view, you have Turkey, Qatar, and Iran all benefiting.

It's all up in the air. I just hope America comes out with a clearer policy, so others know how to react.

[01:02:43] **Frank Gaffney:** Let's go to that place, because I think that's where we have to conclude this conversation. What should the policy of the United States government be now?

David Wurmser set the stage for this conversation. Walid, you didn't hear it, but I think it's fair to characterize it as saying: we've missed this once-a-decade opportunity to enlist the people of Iran in liberating their country from this horror.

So what should the policy be if that's true? And if it's not true, is there another course of action we should be taking instead?

Let me start with you, Harold.

[01:03:26] **Dr. Harold Rhode:** Stop making excuses for the Iranian government. It hates its people. It hates us. Help the people overthrow the regime.

Right now, the people can't read President Trump. They can't read America. And we need to understand that these regimes—over the long run—want to destroy the non-Muslim world. America is the head. Europe is on its way to becoming Muslim. Israel is on the front line.

If you want to worship God any way you want, that's fine. We don't care. But the moment you try to politically take over our cultures and enforce your culture on us—which is what the Muslim Brotherhood and Iran are trying to do—that is not going to work.

We are stronger, and we need to make that clear. If we're not prepared to do that, our partners will make accommodations with forces that, in the long run, will hurt the United States.

[01:04:50] **Frank Gaffney:** Let me come back to you, Walid. Do you concur with the idea that we've lost the window to enlist the people of Iran—and that, either way, Israel and/or the United States will have to confront the Iranian regime as it rearms and becomes a formidable threat again, but without the people of Iran alongside us?

On that question, what is your recommendation for U.S. policy at this particular juncture?

[01:05:26] **Dr. Walid Phares:** I agree with David's conclusion: we may have lost this cycle of the Iranian revolution, with serious consequences.

It is not simple. After losing 12,000—maybe more—people, the population will be shocked for a cycle, perhaps for a decade, because they have not experienced losses on this scale in such a short period in the modern era.

[01:06:07] **Frank Gaffney:** Could you clarify that? They would seem to have lost in 1979. They've not had much success since. Is that the point you're making?

[01:06:16] **Dr. Walid Phares:** In 1979 and afterward, the regime killed many Iranians, and that shocked the country. But since then—until these last few weeks—there have not been instances where, over a few days, 12,000 people were killed. That scale is unknown to the generations that have lived since 1979. That's what I mean.

Now, because you asked what we would advise the president and the administration to do: even at this stage—even if President Trump this morning said they "stopped"—we should act.

I was very clear. I posted almost directly to the president and gave interviews using the example of World War II. If we do not intervene to support the Iranian population now—Americans and Israelis together—the message afterward will be devastating.

Not only will Iranians be shocked and depressed, but every ally we have in the region—forget allies in Iraq, the Kurds, Syrian minorities, Lebanon, Darfur—will conclude that we cannot count on the United States. That would be a major loss.

Worse: look at the perception of those who “won.” The regime in Iran will act in ways we have not seen before. Qatar and Turkey will be convinced their lobbying dominates our foreign policy. They will be emboldened. We won’t just lose allies—we will empower adversarial Islamist forces. They will be on steroids.

If I were close to the president and to advisers who see this clearly, I would warn him: achievements and deals could evaporate in days. On 9/11, we paid for years of mistakes and relationships with Islamist forces. It cost us trillions.

We could lose everything we’ve gained if we don’t correct course. On Iran, our only viable choice is to support the Iranian people and dismantle the two militias and their instruments of repression. We can negotiate and shape what comes after, but we can project that the next Iran could be an ally to us and to Israel.

How can we let go of this opportunity? That surprises me.

[01:09:24] **Frank Gaffney:** I think that’s a perfect place to conclude this program. This is an historic opportunity, for sure. I pray it’s not too late for the course correction you’re talking about, Walid, because I believe—as I think you do, and certainly David Wurmser does, and Harold—that our future, as well as that of this volatile region, will be impacted by two perceptions: first, that Sunni jihadists—Qatar and Turkey—are exercising dominant influence in our decision-making circles; and second, that the Shiite jihadists will survive, recover, and become more dangerous yet again.

It’s almost unimaginable that we would allow that to happen. I get the sense the Israelis will do what they can to prevent it, perhaps with a clearer-eyed view of the downside risks of both Sharia supremacist communities feeling empowered and emboldened to pursue their jihad more aggressively—not just against Israel, not just Europe, not just the United States, but against all of Western civilization.

I want to thank Dr. David Wurmser, Dr. Harold Rhode, and Dr. Walid Phares for your wonderful contributions to this program. Walid, you are a brain trust, and I pray the U.S. government will be taking advantage of that, as well as the people watching this program now or in the future.

I pray they appreciate that the future of our world—Western civilization, its central underpinning and architecture—is on the line. We must not err in coming to its defense only when we face a terminal situation for ourselves as well.

God bless you all. Thank you for joining us. Come back next week, we hope, for another edition of our Victory Coalition briefings on critical matters of importance in the fight against Sharia supremacism.

For all of us here, this is Frank Gaffney. Over and out.