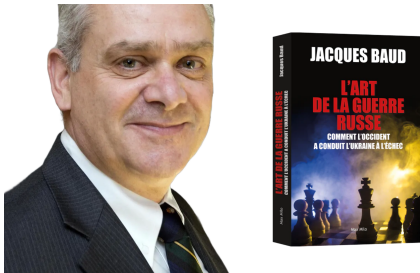


The End of Western Dictatorship and the Rise of Sovereign Multipolarity

By Frank , 5 May 2026



In a recent conversation on Dialogue Works, former Swiss Army Colonel and intelligence analyst Jacques Baud joined host Nima Alkhorshid for a probing discussion on the transformation of global power structures. Their exchange offers a crystalline articulation of a thesis increasingly echoed by strategic thinkers worldwide: the era of unipolar Western dominance is over, not by declaration, but by the irreversible rise of sovereign, technically capable states that refuse to be coerced.

This article analyzes Baud's arguments, contextualizes them within the broader intellectual framework of Ambassador Chas Freeman's concept of a "multi-nodal" world order, and supplements the discussion with verified sources on the legal, historical, and strategic dimensions of this profound geopolitical shift.

Colonel Jacques Baud is currently subject to EU sanctions (December 2025) that include an asset freeze and Schengen area travel ban. As a Brussels resident with financial ties to Switzerland, these measures have restricted his access to funds and movement, a personal dimension that underscores the very dynamics of administrative coercion analyzed below.

I. The "Multinormal" World: Interconnection Over Domination

Baud opens with a concept attributed to Ambassador Chas Freeman: we are moving into a "multinormal" or, more precisely, multi-nodal world. In this architecture, power is not a simple hierarchy with a single apex but a complex, three dimensional network of interdependent nodes, states, regional blocs, economic zones each with distinct capacities and spheres of influence.

"You don't see that much of dominance militarily or somehow economically because they are all connected to each other. They need each other. Instead of confronting each other, they work with each other."

This is not idealistic wishful thinking but a description of material reality. The Sino-American relationship is the paradigmatic example: strategic rivalry coexists with deep commercial ties. This complexity defies the simplistic "democracy vs. autocracy" narrative that has dominated Western foreign policy discourse for decades. The consequence is a fundamental constraint on traditional power projection. As Baud notes, "a superpower like the United States is not able to dictate its terms militarily on a country like Iran." This is not merely a tactical observation but a structural one: in a networked world, military superiority does not automatically translate into political compliance when the target state possesses asymmetric leverage, regional alliances, and the capacity to impose defeat.

II. The Thirty-Year Detour: How Post-9/11 Hubris Undermined the "Rules-Based Order"

Baud's most searing critique targets the period following the September 11 attacks. He argues that the attacks, while tragic, were mischaracterized as an assault on universal values rather than a specific response to prior U.S. foreign policy actions, a distinction with profound political consequences.

"The 9-11 was already the result of the bad behavior of the US. It was an attack on the US because they behaved previously poorly. Period."



This perspective finds support in retrospective analyses of the post

9/11 era. Historian Emma Sky notes that the U.S., in its "obsessive hunt for terrorists," undermined the very civil liberties and human rights it claimed to defend, tarnishing its reputation as the standard bearer and global defender of democracy and freedom. The invasion of Iraq in 2003, launched without explicit UN Security Council authorization and based on faulty intelligence, was declared illegal by then UN Secretary General Kofi Annan.

The strategic consequences were catastrophic and cascading:

- **State Destruction:** The dissolution of Iraq's state apparatus led to civil war, the rise of al-Qaeda in Iraq, and eventually the Islamic State. Hundreds of thousands died; millions were displaced.
- **Regional Power Shift:** The removal of Saddam Hussein, a secular bulwark against Persian influence, inadvertently empowered Iran, altering the Middle East's balance of power.
- **Migration Pressures:** The destruction of societies and regions created conditions where "people migrate to Europe," generating political and social challenges that continue to shape European politics.
- **Opportunity Costs:** Trillions spent on "wars that were totally useless" were diverted from domestic investment, infrastructure, and technological development—areas where rival states like China focused their resources.

The core failure, Baud argues, was the West's unwillingness to exercise critical friendship: "the West has never got the courage to tell the Americans, well guys, you are on the wrong path." This uncritical alignment, he contends, was a political choice, not a moral imperative.

III. Sovereignty as the New Frontier: The Case of Iran's Uranium Enrichment

The discussion then turns to a concrete illustration of the new paradigm: Iran's nuclear program. Baud makes a crucial legal and philosophical distinction:

"The problem is not the enrichment of uranium as such. The problem is that the ability to enrich uranium is a sovereign right."

This position is grounded in international law. The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which Iran joined in 1970, explicitly recognizes "the inalienable right of all the Parties to the Treaty to develop research, production and use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes without discrimination."

The West's resistance, Baud suggests, stems not from legal technicalities but from a deeper discomfort with the principle of sovereign equality. For centuries, Europe, and later the US, operated from a paradigm where "the rest was underdeveloped," a framing that implicitly denied other civilizations the right to self-determined technological and economic advancement.

"We never realized that those countries have, in fact, the same rights as we in Europe. Those countries who have made a lot of effort to raise themselves to the level of the Western countries, they say, well, we are also powers." Iran, China, Russia, and increasingly India, have invested in indigenous technological capacity partly because of Western sanctions and trade restrictions. This "forced innovation" has yielded capabilities that now challenge Western assumptions of superiority in engineering, digital infrastructure, and strategic autonomy.

IV. The Obsolescence of Gunboat Diplomacy: From Coercion to Negotiation

Here, Baud introduces the central metaphor of his critique: gunboat diplomacy. Historically, this referred to the use of naval power to coerce weaker states into compliance, a hallmark of 19th-century imperialism.

"The relationship so far between the Western world and the rest of the world has been always, if you don't do what we want, then we bomb you. That's exactly what Trump is doing today. And when we say Trump, we could say Macron, we could say Keir Starmer."

The critical point is that this model is failing. Modern gunboat diplomacy has evolved into a hybrid toolkit: sanctions, cyber operations, diplomatic isolation, and limited

military signaling. Yet, as the cases of Iran and Russia demonstrate, these tools no longer guarantee compliance. Sanctions can foster resilience and alternative economic networks; military threats against nuclear-armed or regionally entrenched states risk catastrophic escalation.

Baud's warning is stark: "if you bomb us, we'll bomb you. And this starts to be a counter revolution." This is not a threat of symmetric warfare but an assertion of deterrence and the capacity to impose unacceptable costs. The West, accustomed to operating with impunity, now faces "uncharted territories" where formerly subordinate states can say, "no, we don't. If you want that from us, talk to us." This shift reflects a broader crisis of Western diplomacy.

V. The Personal Cost of Dissent: Sanctions as Modern Political Coercion

Baud's analysis gains profound personal resonance when viewed against the backdrop of his own situation. In December 2025, the European Union designated him for sanctions under its "Russia destabilizing actions" regime, accusing him of "implementing or supporting actions or policies attributable to the Government of the Russian Federation which undermine or threaten stability or security in a third country (Ukraine) by engaging in the use of information manipulation and interference."

The broader implications remain stark: an individual was subjected to economically paralyzing measures based on executive designation alone, without indictment, trial, or judicial review. This personal dimension underscores Baud's central thesis: the West's reliance on coercive instruments, whether military, economic, or administrative reflects not strength but an inability to engage sovereign equals through dialogue. When dissenting voices are silenced not through debate but through financial strangulation and movement restrictions, the claim to defend "rules-based order" rings hollow.

Freedom of Expression in the EU: Where Does the Line Fall?



The most contentious dimension of the Baud case concerns freedom

of expression. Article 11 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights guarantees the right to "hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority." The Council of Europe has explicitly warned that "criminal sanctions [for speech] risk silencing voices that are critical, dissenting, or simply unpopular—voices that are essential in a healthy, pluralistic democracy."

Yet the EU's sanctions framework does not require a criminal conviction. Designation can rest on administrative findings of "information manipulation" or "support for destabilizing actions"—categories that are inherently interpretive and politically charged.

This raises profound questions:

- Who defines "propaganda"? In an era of contested narratives, does the executive branch possess the epistemic authority to designate analytical dissent as disinformation?
- What is the threshold for "support"? Does publishing analysis that aligns with a foreign government's perspective constitute actionable support, or is it protected commentary?
- How are competing rights balanced? The EU seeks to protect democratic integrity and security while upholding free expression.

But when administrative sanctions are used to penalize speech, the balance may tilt toward suppression. The Council of Europe's recent guidance urges member states to "limit the use of criminal law to restrict freedom of expression" and to ensure that any restrictions are "necessary in a democratic society" and proportionate. Administrative sanctions that impose civil death, freezing assets, restricting movement, criminalizing economic relationships, arguably exceed this threshold, particularly when applied without judicial oversight.

VI. The Leadership Deficit: Why the West Struggles to Adapt

Baud concludes with a sober assessment of Western political capacity. He expresses little hope for the Trump administration and disappointment in European leaders, whom he describes as "as childish as Donald Trump." The core challenge is cognitive and strategic: Western governments must "realize that the balance of force is shifting in the world" and develop "different words" and "different tools" for engagement.

This requires:

1. Acknowledging Strategic Parity: Accepting that other civilizations possess legitimate interests, advanced capabilities, and the right to sovereign decision-making.
 2. Reviving Genuine Diplomacy: Moving beyond coercive measures to patient, empathetic negotiation based on mutual interest—a principle encapsulated in the Chinese concept of *zhī jǐ zhī bǐ* ("knowing yourself and knowing your opponent").
 3. Protecting Pluralism at Home: Ensuring that domestic institutions preserve space for dissenting analysis, even when inconvenient, rather than resorting to administrative sanctions that bypass judicial due process.
 4. Investing in Domestic Renewal: Recognizing that global influence stems not only from military power but from economic vitality, technological innovation, and social cohesion—areas where Western nations face significant challenges.
- The alternative, Baud implies, is continued decline: a West that clings to outdated modes of coercion while the rest of the world builds the networks, technologies, and institutions that will define the 21st century.

Conclusion: Toward a Diplomacy of Mutual Respect

Colonel Jacques Baud's analysis, amplified by the conceptual framework of Chas Freeman and supported by historical and legal scholarship, presents a compelling case for a fundamental recalibration of Western foreign policy. The emerging multi-nodal world is not a threat to be managed through containment but a reality to be engaged through respect, dialogue, and recognition of shared interests.

The choice is not between dominance and submission but between a diplomacy of coercion and a diplomacy of cooperation. As nations from Tehran to Beijing to New Delhi assert their sovereign rights and technological prowess, the question for Western capitals is whether they can evolve beyond the gunboat mentality, including its modern administrative variants. The future of global stability—and of the West's own relevance—may depend on the answer.

For further reading:

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Disclaimer: Sources are cited for verification and further research. The inclusion of Jacques Baud's personal circumstances is intended to contextualize his analysis, not to adjudicate the merits of the sanctions imposed upon him.