



The Iran Nuclear File

March 19, 2025

Featuring Rich Goldberg

Hosted by Mark Dubowitz

GOLDBERG: You think that we're extorted today with the threat of nuclear weapons. What happens what they actually go boom? I mean, and then they say, "Oh, you really want to come after us? We might be able to go boom again."

DUBOWITZ: Welcome to The Iran Breakdown. Let's break it down. Welcome to The Iran Breakdown, I'm your host Mark Dubowitz. If you know me, you know I live and breathe one mission: Stopping a nuclear Iran and ending the Islamic Republic. Back in 2018 the New York Times put it this way: "Mark Dubowitz's campaign to draw attention to what he saw as the flaws in the Iran nuclear deal has taken its place among the most consequential ever undertaken by a Washington think-tank leader." That was an excerpt from a New York Times hit piece on me. They blamed me for President Trump's decision to withdraw from the Obama Iran deal. They had to print a major correction to the piece, by the way, because it was riddled with so many errors.

A year later The Atlantic dubbed FDD: "D.C.'s ground zero for research and policy recommendations aimed at highlighting and fixing with Dubowitz saw as flaws in the nuclear agreement." Even Tehran took notice. In 2019, the Islamic Republic sanctioned FDD and me personally, accusing us of being the designing and executing arm of the U.S. administration on Iran policy. Guilty as charged. Why? Because in nuclear, Iran isn't just a threat, it's the threat. The regimes race for the bomb is the most dangerous challenge coming out of Tehran. In this episode, we break down why.

Joining me today is someone who knows this file inside and out, FDD's Rich Goldberg. When it comes to Iran's nuclear program, Rich matches my obsession step for step, and maybe even outpaces me. Rich served in the National Security Council as the director for countering Iranian weapons of mass destruction. He helped architect key parts of President Trump's maximum pressure campaign, a campaign that aimed to block Iran's every pathway to nuclear weapons, or as the regime calls the campaign, "economic terrorism." Rich also served in the Senate and in the House where he drafted many of the key pieces of legislation sanctioning the Islamic Republic. And yes, like me, Rich is proudly sanctioned by the Islamic Republic, as are six of our other FDD colleagues. Eight in total. I've known Rich for decades. A friend, a colleague, and hands down one of the sharpest minds in the space. There's no one better to walk us through the threat and the strategy to stop it. I'm Mark Dubowitz, and this is The Iran Breakdown. So, let's break it down.

DUBOWITZ: Rich Goldberg, great to have you on the podcast.

GOLDBERG: It's great to be here. I feel like we know each other and now we're on a podcast together. It's amazing.

DUBOWITZ: Well, it's amazing. It occurred to me, Rich, I think I've known you almost two decades. I worked with you on Iran policy, beginning when you were a young staffer working for then Congressman Mark Kirk, and then obviously, in the Senate we're working for Senator Kirk. And then Rich worked in the White House as the Director in charge of countering Iran's nuclear program. So big jobs. Also, I think he took some detours as Chief of Staff to Governor Rauner of Illinois and obviously served our country with distinction in the U.S. Navy. So first of all, thank you for your service. Thank you for all you've done. I can think of no better person to talk about Iran policy under the Trump administration than you, Rich. So, let's break it down.

GOLDBERG: Let's do it.

DUBOWITZ: All right, let's begin where we are. Trump has come in. He's facing a serious threat in terms of Iran's expanding nuclear program. Where are we? Position us with respect to the nuclear threat that we face and then we can talk about the way forward.



The Iran Nuclear File

March 19, 2025

Featuring Rich Goldberg

Hosted by Mark Dubowitz

GOLDBERG: So I always like to make analogies that translate this to people at home listening. And if you're somebody who's watched the Super Bowl recently and you're thinking about football analogies, I think the Iranians are sort of on the one-yard line right now of the nuclear threshold. Remember the three key legs of the nuclear stool for the Iranian nuclear weapons program, you know this Mark. They need fissile material, right? So they need the nuclear material that we always hear about in the news. They're enriching uranium. They're at 60% high enriched uranium. They were caught at 84% high enriched uranium by international inspectors. They're obviously are producing also a 20% high enriched uranium. They're producing low enriched uranium. We know that weapons-grade uranium threshold is 90%. They're there. They're not actually producing it, just to clarify. They've come really close to it and been caught there in the eighties.

But understanding that with all the advanced centrifuge technology that they have developed and deployed over the last four years, they have reconfigured those centrifuges, put them into what we call cascades and designed their ability to produce weapons-grade uranium when they choose to do so. That's my view. I think they've proven to us the technical capacity. And if you look at some of the estimates that are out there of how long it would take them to take their current stockpiles of 60%, 20% and move to that 90% to have enough fissile material for one bomb's worth, we're talking about a long holiday weekend. And then you add on days and weeks after that to get two bombs' worth, three bombs' worth, four bombs' worth and so on. And so from the fissile material threat, it's sort of in the rearview mirror.

There was a time at which we would say, "Oh, they just have this much stockpile. They don't really know how to get the weapons grade. They're still working on it. They still doing R&D [research and development] on advanced centrifuges." I think that time has come and gone and we should talk what that means prospectively for any sort of arrangements that you would negotiate with them because it changes the dynamic fundamentally. But that's one leg of the stool. Second leg of the stool, delivery systems, right? If you had a nuclear weapon, how would you deliver it? Well, they have ballistic missile. They have cruise missiles capable of carrying nuclear weapons, and they've proven that they know how to use them and they will use them, in fact. Twice last year, we saw them use ballistic missiles against the State of Israel for the first time in history. So the delivery systems are there and continue to be tested. And by the way, we know that they have a space launch vehicle program that's a cover for an ICBM program, Intercontinental Ballistic Missile Program.

They're working on the delivery system, not just to hit Israel or Europe. They want to hit the continental United States. Defense Department, our Intelligence Community has been telling us that for years, and they continue working towards that goal. So the material, they're already there. Delivery system certainly against Israel, against Europe is there, soon to be potentially against the United States. And then the last question is the weapon itself. That's the part that we've never been able to say, "Got you. You're doing the weapon." We had the Intelligence Community telling us that they halted the formal weapon program back in 2003.

We had evidence from the International Atomic Energy Agency showing that at least it went on in different ways through 2009. The nuclear archive that the Israelis found, Mossad brought out of Iran back in 2018, shows us details and then some of these sites that the UN has tried to get into and has taken soil samples to certain places, finding evidence of nuclear material, all sort of has alarm bells going off, saying, "We think something's still happening somewhere, but nobody can say, 'Here it is. Smoking gun. You're working on the weapon here.'"



The Iran Nuclear File

March 19, 2025

Featuring Rich Goldberg

Hosted by Mark Dubowitz

We know that there's a secret nuclear military organization called SPND with nuclear weapons scientists still employed, which was headed until his death by the godfather of the nuclear weapons program, Mohsen Fakhrizadeh. But we haven't been able to say, "You're doing weapon work." And the IC, the Intelligence Community never changed its position since 2007 that the program had halted and there was no formal weaponization activity going on, until recently. And we know now in the last few months that has changed. Now, you have people caveating and saying different, "Well, we don't think they're making a nuclear weapon today." But no longer can the Intelligence Community tell us that Iran is not engaged in a weaponization activity. And in fact, we have leaked unclassified reports saying that they are working on computer modeling towards a weapon, which the UN itself, the JCPOA [Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action], the old Iran nuclear deal called a weaponization activity. It's obviously one of the first steps as you're testing, as you're thinking about how—by the way, the United States doesn't test nuclear weapons today. We haven't done it in many, many, many years. How do we test our nuclear stockpile?

DUBOWITZ: Right. So computer modeling.

GOLDBERG: Computer modeling.

DUBOWITZ: Right. What are they doing?

GOLDBERG: So it's not like nothing. This is a real part of weaponization activities that they're working on. Why are they doing that? What else are they doing? Who's working on it? Where? We don't have answers to those questions. One last thing I'll leave this topic with is what if they're not working towards a warhead? What if they're not working on the miniaturization aspects that we all saw in the nuclear archives and what we think they were working on back in 2003 in the Amad Program and fitting a nuclear weapon on a missile to deliver in a traditional sense and then building up a stockpile of these nuclear weapons. Or do they just want to go boom in the desert? A crude nuclear device to do that. Well, that's a lot shorter amount of time, probably a lot easier to accomplish.

DUBOWITZ: And Rich, give us a sense, of how long this will take, the estimates of the US and Intelligence Community about building a warhead versus a crash program and a crude nuclear device. What are we talking about in terms of months, years?

GOLDBERG: The public estimates that you've seen are a year, 18 months, depending on Israeli estimates, American estimates.

DUBOWITZ: To build a warhead.

GOLDBERG: On the warhead. A few months, six months or less on the crude nuclear device. And we don't know where they're at right now. Maybe they're already working on it.

DUBOWITZ: Right. And just to put a final point on that, because there's been so much discussion about building a warhead that they could have fixed to a missile. But why would Iran decide to short-circuit it through a crash program and just merely do a crude nuclear device in four to six months?

GOLDBERG: Well, you declare yourself a nuclear power. You show that you are in nuclear power. You cross the threshold. And you don't actually know what else they're doing. You don't know where else they've built certain things. Where did the material come from? There's a lot of hypotheticals built into this, right? If something goes boom, there was fissile material involved. Did it get diverted in the known sites where the IAEA [International Atomic Energy Agency], the UN inspectors go, and see things? Did they close them down for a certain amount of time? Did they say there was a fire in a facility while they start diverting nuclear material? Is there some other place they're enriching uranium that we don't know about? Is there a crash program somewhere?

The Iran Nuclear File

March 19, 2025

Featuring Rich Goldberg

Hosted by Mark Dubowitz

That would be involved if that ever happened, you would have to wonder what steps led to that moment. But the minute it happens, the intel picture just gets flooded with reports of rumors of this is going to happen. "Oh, Hezbollah has a suitcase bomb now. Oh, there's a dirty bomb potential now to terrorist organizations." Just the whole strategic paradigm shifts, buying Iran more time. Everybody's a little more afraid. You think that we're extorted today with the threat of nuclear weapons. What happens when they actually go boom? And then they say, "Oh, you really want to come after us? We might be able to go boom again. Maybe we got more surprises for you in a couple of months."

DUBOWITZ: Rich, there's two things I want you to address. First of all, you've laid out today that Iran is a threshold nuclear weapons power, right? Has the fissile material that produced multiple bombs. It's got long-range missiles to deliver it to Israel, Europe, and one day to the United States. And it's begun initial weaponization work, which puts it on a pathway to develop a warhead or a crude nuclear device. So two questions come out of that. The first is, when did all this nuclear expansion occur? We had a nuclear deal in 2015. President Trump withdrew from that deal in May of 2018.

And so give our listeners just a view of when all of this expansion occurred. Did it occur under Trump? Did it occurred under Biden? When did this actually happen? And the second thing to address is the JCPOA. Is it not fair to say that this is exactly what the JCPOA was designed to do, was to prevent all of these pathways to nuclear weapons, in which wouldn't we have been better off if we had stayed in the JCPOA and not withdrawn in 2018? Would Iran be much further away from having nuclear weapons than they are today? So, I think we need to address that before we talk about the way forward.

GOLDBERG: There are two fundamental fatal flaws in the JCPOA that directly result in the threat in front of us today. And that threat was inevitable because of the JCPOA. Two fundamental ones. I know a lot of people talk about sunsets [clauses] and, "Oh, they should have been longer sunsets." Honestly, I could care less about sunsets because it's just being held to the promise of a radical, Shiite, mania dictator in Iran who just wakes up one day and says, "Yeah, I have a sunset. It's today." So thank you for whatever the JCPOA says.

Two things. Number one, verification and number two, dismantlement. Neither occurred. The first thing you would do, you would think in a business negotiation, in any negotiation, is to say to the other party, "Show me everything you've got. Declare your program. I want maximum information on everything you currently are doing and have done so that I know if you're making a concession. So I know the extent of your activities and knowledge and advancement and who's worked on what and what facilities you have and how many things you put away somewhere."

They [Iran] never came clean in the JCPOA. They never were forced to declare all their past nuclear weapons activities and show a chain of custody from 2003 onward to 2018. In fact, when you see satellite imagery emerge in 2018 of sites, unexplained warehouses with containers being moved out of buildings, soil being thrown up and down to try to hide things from inspectors. Multiple other sites inspected in 2019, 2020, showing the presence of nuclear materials completely unexplained. Yet somehow we think tracing back to that nuclear weapons program, you have a fundamental breakdown in verification, which means anything they assured us in JCPOA, anything they conceded or said there's a restriction, you have no idea of knowing if it's a restriction.

DUBOWITZ: So when then Secretary of State John Kerry was the lead negotiator for the United States on the JCPOA, said at the time, "Iran doesn't have to come clean because we know everything we need to know about Iran's nuclear program." What's your reaction to Kerry's source here?

The Iran Nuclear File

March 19, 2025

Featuring Rich Goldberg

Hosted by Mark Dubowitz

GOLDBERG: John Kerry did not know that there was a secret nuclear weapons archive sitting in a warehouse in Tehran, certainly never knew the contents of it, and I don't think anybody else did until the Israelis revealed it. And we've learned a lot about the program from those documents. And then you could go down the list of sites like Turqzabad and others that have been visited by the IAEA. John Kerry probably can't even spell it, doesn't— never heard of him.

So how does he know all about the program? Never heard about these sites. Why is there nuclear material there, Mr. Kerry? He has no idea because they've never fully come clean. He's never been inside of a military site. By the way, neither has the IAEA. They've never visited SPND offices, couldn't even tell you where they are. No one's interviewed a nuclear weapons scientist and sat down and said, "Tell me what you did." Nobody could tell me in accounting of exactly how many nuclear capable missiles they have and where they are. So the program is completely unverified. There are aspects that are subject to verification, but in totality, the program is unverified. Therefore, if I were conducting a negotiation and I don't even know what the person on the other side of the table has to give up, and I'm saying, "Sounds good. You're making a really good concession here." How do you know? You don't even know everything you've got.

DUBOWITZ: Right, so you can't verify what you don't know.

GOLDBERG: So that's one piece.

DUBOWITZ: Right, and dismantlement?

GOLDBERG: Dismantlement. The minute we decided that we were just going to take Iran's promise to not do certain things for now, for the moment, or for 10 years, or for 15 years, I don't care how long they promise for. If you allow them to keep R&D on centrifuges, if you allow them to keep facilities open, they will just wait around for that moment where they turn a key and they whip it back out, and then they deploy more advanced centrifuges and then they figure out— and then they can just enrich uranium. So that's exactly what's happened. The only piece of the JCPOA where you had like a sort of dismantlement was that the Iraq heavy water reactor, which dealt with the plutonium threat, the plutonium pathway to a bomb. And even then what happened was they poured concrete into the core to render it dysfunctional until such time under the JCPOA, they were supposed to retrofit the facility away from being one that could be a plutonium threat.

Somebody can explain that one to you, but there's all these architectural models of how you're going to work it so it can't actually be used to be a plutonium threat in the future. It never happened during JCPOA, it never moved forward. They always had delays.

And they announced after we got out of JCPOA, during the Trump administration, that they had hidden from inspectors pipes that are needed to rebuild the core and could do so at a moment's notice if they wanted to. So they had no intention of abandoning that facility. We didn't destroy the facility. It was just we poured concrete into some pipes into the core, which apparently they could just rebuild. The key enrichment facilities that we know about, we're talking about, Natanz, Fordow, they weren't dismantled, they weren't destroyed. They were retrofitted. In certain cases, we actually legitimized enrichment to continue, like at Natanz. And in Fordow, we said, "Yeah, you can keep this massive under a mountain facility that is completely dangerous and could one day be a nuclear weapons threat to us, yeah, you can keep it open and not destroy it, and we'll have the Russians come in and do radioisotope research in there and it'll be wonderful. What a great use for this nuclear weapons facility." I mean, are you insane? So no dismantlement, no verification. So what happens?



The Iran Nuclear File

March 19, 2025

Featuring Rich Goldberg

Hosted by Mark Dubowitz

DUBOWITZ: And by the way, Rich, I want you to talk a little bit about this because the deal was reached in 2015. A number of restrictions that were temporary that would sunset. We're now in 2025, and talk a little bit about where we would've been had we stayed in the JCPOA and where we were heading in the next five years. And if you could also talk about the other side of the deal, because a lot of folks focus on nuclear physics, but they forget about the economic sanctions relief side of the deal and the tens and hundreds of billions of dollars that Iran would otherwise have gotten as part of the deal.

GOLDBERG: Yeah, so if you go from 2015 to 2030, let's use this 15-year timeframe, you're going through a process where Iran gets everything. They get massive sanctions relief. All of the tools, that economic pressure, get put into a lockbox under the deal. They can sponsor terrorism, they can build their long range missiles. They can foment wars throughout the Middle East. They can plot assassinations in the United States. Anything you want, all the sanctions that you would use against the regime are off the table. Central Bank of Iran, oil, sector based sanctions, everything. Gold, precious metals, everything just gone. Okay, so now you've handcuffed the United States with sanctions pressure across non-nuclear threats, by the way, in addition to the nuclear threat, in exchange for what? Well, in 2020... Oh, they get more, by the way. Oh, that's right, it's not... In exchange for what? We give them more in 2020. The UN Arms Embargo, the Conventional Arms Embargo will go away. Now they can-

DUBOWITZ: Right, and it went away.

GOLDBERG: Yeah, it went away.

DUBOWITZ: Yeah.

GOLDBERG: Oh, and then a couple of years later—

DUBOWITZ: 2023.

GOLDBERG: ... —2023, a missile embargo will go away too.

DUBOWITZ: Yeah, and it went away

GOLDBERG: And it went away. Oh, and by the way, guess what they waited for until that missile embargo went away, transferring ballistic missiles, transferring drones to Russia. After the arms embargo went away, drones went to Russia. After the missile embargo went away, ballistic missiles went to Russia. Totally predictable. So wait a second, so what are we getting out of this again? Okay, so they've refrained from enriching uranium above a certain amount, above a certain stockpile at one facility while the other one's still open as well doing weird scientific R&D or something on radioisotope, supposedly. The Iraq reactor has been temporarily disabled for a certain amount of time until they would choose to rebuild it, which is a good thing.

But all the sudden, 2024 comes around, 2025 comes around. Their work on advanced centrifuges is legalized. They can start deploying more and more of these advanced centrifuges and figuring out how to make weapons-grade uranium the way that they did over the last four years. And then as you get to 2030, basically everything's legitimate. They've figured out how to make the weapons-grade uranium using the sunsets for advanced centrifuges. Now they can. They're actually allowed under the deal in year 15 to make weapons-grade uranium. The one thing they can't do is make a nuclear weapon. But by the way, over that 15 year period, I mean, what is that \$1.5 trillion? I mean, how much money have they reaped into their coffers?



The Iran Nuclear File

March 19, 2025

Featuring Rich Goldberg

Hosted by Mark Dubowitz

DUBOWITZ: I think our colleagues at FDD had estimated, certainly, over a trillion dollars in sanctions relief to fortify the economy, have a massive slash fund to finance their proxies. So basically just by being patient and taking patient pathways to nuclear weapons, they get a massive economic windfall. And you end up in 2030 essentially where we are today, except for the fact that today the economy's on its knees, the rial is collapsed, it's lost 99.99% of its value since the revolution.

GOLDBERG: And what does Yemen look like in 2030 under that deal? What does Syria look like? What does Iraq look like? What does Gaza look like? What are all these places— totally entrenched. The region is owned by Iran that's very wealthy. The missile program has advanced unfettered, can't do anything about it. They probably have ICBMs at that point, and they know how to make weapons-grade uranium.

DUBOWITZ: So Rich, let me ask you this because I remember, I mean, we spent a lot of time criticizing the JCPOA. You spent a lot of time advocating for President Trump to withdraw from the deal. You and I, I remember writing a piece in the first week of the new Biden administration, and it was advice to our friends on the Biden administration to Jake Sullivan and Brett McGurk and others who were coming in about a new Iran policy. President Biden obviously had spent a lot of time on the campaign trail criticizing maximum pressure, saying that the maximum pressure campaign of President Trump had failed and that he would come in with a new policy. Talk a little bit about what that policy became and what we had advised them to do, which clearly they decided not to do. And really what happened in four years under President Biden to Iran's nuclear program.

GOLDBERG: We end 2020 with Iran, basically broke from an accessible foreign exchange reserve perspective, right on the verge of a balance of payments crisis, they're running low on cash.

DUBOWITZ: Down to what, their last \$4 billion?

GOLDBERG: \$4 billion of accessible foreign exchange reserves.

DUBOWITZ: Right, oil exports, that—

GOLDBERG: Oil exports, that's a moving target. Let's call it 300 to 500,000 barrels per day, which is mostly illicit.

DUBOWITZ: Down from what?

GOLDBERG: It had gone down all the way to, let's say, 100,000-150,000 at some point, bounced a little bit back up. Now, there is a COVID impact going on. Granted, you assume that as you come out of COVID, there might be a little bit of a bump up, but if you have active enforcement of sanctions and the Chinese still fear you and all, it's not bumping up that much. This is where it's plateauing. And by the way, a lot of it is illicit oil that we saw in press reports going to Syria with IRGC [Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps] smuggling, it wasn't the general—

DUBOWITZ: The bottom line is the economy's on its back.



The Iran Nuclear File

March 19, 2025

Featuring Rich Goldberg

Hosted by Mark Dubowitz

GOLDBERG: It's on its back. And by the way, Soleimani's been killed in the past year, Fakhrizadeh has been killed in the past year. You have not seen the program jump on the nuclear side throughout the year, very interestingly. Going back to one of your previous questions, in 2019 when President Trump halted oil sanctions exceptions for countries that were importing Iranian oil and tried for the first time to drive Iranian exports towards zero and succeeded, we saw the Iranians for the first time violate the JCPOA in response. Because they realize, "Oh boy, this is not good. This is going to be destabilizing. We have to do something. We got to scare people in Washington and Europe and [Mohammad] Javad Zarif's going to do his press tour and we'll see who can talk to President Trump and scare him enough into backing down." So they start breaking slowly through the caps of how much they're enriching the stockpile and advanced centrifuges being rolled out, and—

DUBOWITZ: Incrementally.

GOLDBERG: Incrementally.

DUBOWITZ: Small steps, right?

GOLDBERG: Once Soleimani was killed, a lot of people focused on, were there rocket attacks and what have... That's not actually—

DUBOWITZ: So this is President Trump's decision to kill Qasem Soleimani, who's formerly the head of the IRGC Quds Force. Probably Iran's most successful strategic battlefield commander, probably the world's most notorious terrorist that no one had ever heard of. President Bush refused to take him out. President Obama refused to take him out. President Trump decided to kill him.

GOLDBERG: Correct.

DUBOWITZ: And shock the Iranian system. And what was the response from the Iranians with respect to their nuclear escalation after they took out the supreme leader's most trusted advisor?

GOLDBERG: It froze where it was.

DUBOWITZ: Because?

GOLDBERG: They continued this low-level enrichment, incremental expansion of their low-enriched uranium stockpile.

DUBOWITZ: But why? I mean, you would think at that point they—

GOLDBERG: They did not jump to the next level.

DUBOWITZ: ... they would massively escalate. And they didn't escalate because?

GOLDBERG: The one thing I remember clearly is President Trump coming out, everybody was wondering, he did a press conference, everybody was wondering what is he going to do in response to the ballistic missile strike that the Iranians had almost symbolically to respond to the Qasem Soleimani strike. The first words out of President Trump's mouth were, "They will never be allowed to develop nuclear weapons." And I think people missed it. I didn't miss it. I thought it was very intentional. And later he started talking about, "We have dozens of targets, if they try something..." The message was pretty clear, I'm willing to go after Soleimani. You escalate on the nuclear program, you threaten us, we have your sites. We know where they are. We can destroy them and we will.

DUBOWITZ: And my recollection at the time—

GOLDBERG: They did not—



The Iran Nuclear File

March 19, 2025

Featuring Rich Goldberg

Hosted by Mark Dubowitz

DUBOWITZ: They did not escalate.

GOLDBERG: They did not escalate to a point where they would trigger that red line. They didn't go to 20% high-enriched uranium. They certainly didn't go to 60% high-enriched uranium. They weren't caught making uranium metal— key components of a nuclear weapon. They didn't throw the IAEA out of facilities or withhold videotapes. You know, when they did all of those things that I just said, starting in 2021 when Iran's on its knees and you and I wrote a piece and said, "Please, please, please, understand, you are inheriting just a historic amount of leverage."

DUBOWITZ: This is advice to President Biden.

GOLDBERG: Correct. See how I go full circle here? It takes a while but we get back. And we said, "Don't squander this, add to it. Use it. Get everything that President Trump would've gotten out of it. Surprise them." I know Joe Biden said he wants to go back to JCPOA during the campaign, it would be a disastrous idea. Do not signal that. Don't go harder on pressure. Use the pressure. Get all the concessions we can now. They didn't do that.

DUBOWITZ: Right, and in effect, I mean, do what they then promised they would do, which is negotiate a longer—

GOLDBERG: A longer, stronger deal.

DUBOWITZ: ... and stronger and broader deal. But of course, negotiating a longer, stronger, and broader deal requires leverage. And your point is they were diminishing leverage as they were demanding a better deal.

GOLDBERG: Now, my perspective on this is that they ended up with a split personality where half the administration wanted to just go full on appeasement. Let's be the first to go back to JCPOA, that's what the Iranians are demanding and then they'll come back into compliance. Let's just lift all the sanctions and show that we're there. And the other half were like, "I think this is a lot of leverage and maybe we can get something out of it. So we'll say we want to go back to JCPOA, we won't go heavily on enforcement, but we won't relieve any sanctions." And you end up in this muddle. And of course they appointed the appeaser-in-chief, in my view, in Rob Malley to be the special envoy and every single— and what do the Iranians do in response? It's so predictable. It's just outrageously predictable.

Well, in fact, it was predicted. We predicted it. That's right, it is predictable. We said if you offer appeasement in response, they're going to escalate because that's always what they do. They push, push, push until they see if anything pushes back.

DUBOWITZ: Right, they sense American weakness, they escalate. They feel American steel, they stop.

GOLDBERG: So what do they do? They go up to 20% in January during the transition. Biden comes in, does nothing. Says, "No, we're going back to JCPOA. We want a deal. Kumbaya." They go up to 60%. What do we do? We tell the Europeans, "Don't even center them at the IAEA. Stop what you're doing. Appeasement across the board. Just tell them we love them. We want to go back to JCPOA, Kumbaya." They're found manufacturing uranium metal. They're limiting IAEA access. They're doing all these things. No consequences, no economic consequences. Quite the opposite, we start loosening restrictions. You start seeing oil exports starting to rise in a very considerable way. More than you would account for just coming out of a COVID boom. Like a very significant rise in exports that's due to non-enforcement of sanctions and the Chinese understanding they can get away with it.

We're loosening bank accounts to pay for more things, humanitarian channels being loosened to have more transactions that could be under the cover of humanitarian trade, because who's going to be opposed to humanitarian trade? If we just call things humanitarian trade, now we're able to give you more things Iran.

DUBOWITZ: So these are the billions of dollars released in frozen oil funds?



The Iran Nuclear File

March 19, 2025

Featuring Rich Goldberg

Hosted by Mark Dubowitz

GOLDBERG: Well, this is before that. This is just allowing them to make debt payments out of oil funds and just pay for things more and process more transactions than maybe otherwise wouldn't have been done during the Trump administration. None of it works. They try to do a mini deal the Russians helped them broker in 2021 into 2022, an interim nuclear deal, that falls apart right around the invasion of Ukraine, where the Russians pull the plug on it at the time. They wait out a couple of months. "Oh, what's going to happen?... Hey, let's go, you know what? It's okay you're sending drones to Russia now to use against our Ukrainian allies. We want to pay you for it actually." Let's do a worse deal than the JCPOA even. They go to the table in late summer of 2022 and offer the JCPOA minus, which is to say, you can, by this point, Iran has been racing forward in its nuclear enrichment capabilities and production of enriched uranium. That the breakout timeline that we always talked about, right? Breakout timeline, how long would it take for Iran to produce enough weapons-grade uranium for one nuclear device had gone from the year under JCPOA, at this point, I think it was down to six months. It was getting to a four to six month window. I mean, today, it's a long weekend as we talked about, but at the time, in 2022 it was still around six months.

So we started seeing reports of the breakout time under the deal being offered by the Biden administration would be about six months. I was like, well, how is that possible? The JCPOA was a year. You're now saying there's a deal on the table for six months? Yeah, because they weren't going to require a single centrifuge that had already been manufactured and deployed be dismantled. They just let them put them in a locker for the time of the deal, which means you have to account for that capability that's in storage. They could still, if they wanted to, break the seal, bring the centrifuge out, install them, and in six months have your bomb, or bombs worth of uranium, at least. And then you say, "Oh, we'll give you more sanctions relief than you got under JCPOA. All of the new sanctions that the Trump administration had put on after leaving the JCPOA, we'll take those off too. So now you're actually getting all the JCPOA sanctions relief plus."

Oh, there was a negotiation to remove the IRGC, the Revolutionary Guard Corps from the terror— [sic, Foreign Terrorist Organization], you remember, Mark, that whole campaign on this to say, I mean, this is crazy. Gold star families were writing letters to President Biden, please don't do this. Why would you take the IRGC off the ter— [sic, Foreign Terrorist Organization]? Now, he relented on that under heavy pressure and Congressional votes and Senate votes. It was pretty clear to him that he was going to pay a price in the Senate if he went there and he took it off the table. But they looked, by the way, let's be honest, they also looked for ways to still give sanctions relief to the IRGC on an economic sense, and one of their largest conglomerates were going to get sanctions relief. So it wasn't like they weren't giving IRGC sanctions relief in the deal.

Didn't matter. They couldn't still go enough to the Iranians. The Iranians said, "Wow, you're willing to give us all of this. You're so desperate now after we're already sending drones to Russia?" Let's see what happens next time. And the deal collapses late 2022. They didn't get to a next time yet because what happened? Mahsa Amini is killed by the morality police. There's a national uprising in Iran, and it's no longer politically correct for the president in the midterm election to give sanction relief to Iran.

DUBOWITZ: This is the Woman, Life, Freedom uprising?

GOLDBERG: Yeah. As it turns out, you can try to build a nuclear weapon. You can plot assassinations and kidnappings on U.S. soil, which was going on for those first two years. You talk about Iranian Americans in a crazy movie-like plot of trying to kidnap somebody from New York.

DUBOWITZ: Right. And this is Masih Alinejad?

GOLDBERG: Correct.

DUBOWITZ: Right.

The Iran Nuclear File

March 19, 2025

Featuring Rich Goldberg

Hosted by Mark Dubowitz

GOLDBERG: We had already learned about the plots against [Former United States Secretary of State, Mike] Pompeo, against [former United States Ambassador to the United Nations, John] Bolton and others, there are indictments already. I mean, none of that inhibits you from giving billions of dollars to the Islamic Republic. But when women celebrities start going on social media standing with the Iranian people, then as you're nearing the midterm election in 2022, the White House realizes this might not be a good thing. We can't do this deal right now. So they wait. The midterm passes. You go into 2023, they're looking around. Is the national uprising still going on? Is Iranian women still a thing?

DUBOWITZ: Right. And the protests get crushed. Iranian women get killed, thrown in prison, raped, tortured. They eventually break the back of Woman, Life, Freedom by launching chemical weapon attacks against Iranian schoolgirls. Okay, so basically they break the back of this uprising and now the space opens for more opportunities.

GOLDBERG: Correct. Now, they still kind of feel weird about doing a deal. And by the way, the politics in Congress have completely shifted. That fundamentally changed. Remember, there's a law that if a president does a nuclear deal with Iran, it has to get submitted to the Congress and they get a month basically to look at it and maybe vote to disapprove it. That's getting disapproved in 2023 because of the Mahsa Amini uprising. No matter what, you try to give Iran sanctions relief, Congress is voting on a bipartisan basis to reject it. So they can't do a deal that gets submitted to the Congress. So Brett McGurk, at the time the Middle East coordinator for the NSC [National Security Council], goes to Oman, and you can see it charted out in the press reports. Some sort of overture, something that's still not very public, where there's almost like a gentleman's agreement being offered.

We're going to find money, we're going to relax sanctions, and you're not going to go farther than you are today. You're not going to go to weapons-grade uranium. And we'd like you to knock off some of the things you're doing with Russia, attacks on U.S. forces in the Middle East. That would be nice too. Money starts materializing for access to the regime. \$10 billion in Iraq that had been tied up under U.S. sanctions for years suddenly becomes available, transferred to Oman, available for what the Biden administration says, humanitarian transaction purposes. We do a hostage deal where we pay \$6 billion for five hostages in Iran. Has anybody ever heard of that as a ransom? It's crazy. \$6 billion, \$1.25 billion per person. That's nuts. That's not a hostage deal. That's a way of packaging more money moving for the regime's access. And so money that had been trapped in South Korea under our sanctions, oil revenue, gets moved to accounts in Qatar.

And over the summer of 2023, we see oil exports to China skyrocket to the moon. Cannot be explained by sanctions evasion. It is an active policy, clearly with the consent of the United States government. We're talking crossing two million barrels per day at one point in August, 2023. Massive windfall for the regime. By the way, a great deal for the Chinese too. They're sucking up Russian oil cheap because of the way our sanctions were designed for Russia. Now they're sucking up Iranian oil at discount because we're allowing them to do it. They're just basically filling their SPR [Strategic Petroleum Reserve]. I mean, what a crazy policy for the United States at this point on every level. And what happens within a few months? October 7th. And we saw reports that Hamas' budget tripled in 2023. I wonder how that's possible. Well, of course, if you start allowing all kinds of sanctions really for the regime, their budgets go up, their terror budgets go up, et cetera.

DUBOWITZ: Okay, I want to ask you now, I mean, our listeners have certainly been following events since October 7th [2023]. I think you've done a very eloquent critique of Obama administration Iran policy, Biden administration Iran policy. We are where we are today, which in some respects it's a mixed place. Right? On the nuclear side, Iran's a threshold nuclear weapons power, on the other hand, their so-called Axis of Resistance has taken a beating thanks to the Israelis who've really done severe damage to Hezbollah and to Hamas and to Iran's own strategic air defenses and some weaponization activities. So we are where we are today.



The Iran Nuclear File

March 19, 2025

Featuring Rich Goldberg

Hosted by Mark Dubowitz

But here's the challenge to you, Rich, because again, easy for you and I, and we've done it often and I hope eloquently to critique what has happened in the past. But now President Trump is in office. He just put out a presidential memorandum to reinstate maximum pressure, and we've seen some of that already taking place, some of the enforcement actions under that. So it's clear we're going to get more economic pressure, hopefully a return to what President Trump did in first term Trump. But he is facing an Iranian nuclear weapons program that is at the cusp. So where do we go from here?

GOLDBERG: So I think there's several things going on here. Number one, this is still the same president who killed Qasem Soleimani, still the same president who talked about having all kinds of sites in Iran, and that the regime was clearly afraid of crossing nuclear red lines. It would be, I believe, a grave mistake for the regime to cross nuclear red lines believing that they think better, that they think this is a different president, that maybe he won't act or something. So there is a credible military threat, in my view, always attached to President Trump being president, particularly towards the Iranians because he proved to them that he maintains a credible military threat if they cross red lines that he perceives to be a threat to the United States and our interests. Plus-

DUBOWITZ: But let me stop you there-

GOLDBERG: But wait-

DUBOWITZ: Yeah. Yeah.

GOLDBERG: Here's a big plus. Here's a big plus. Even if you said, "Oh, I'm not sure, or if I'm in Tehran, well, I don't know, I saw this news report and I saw this leak and I saw this statement", and I'm going to assign a 30% chance, a 20% chance that maybe he would use force, okay? And I don't speak for the president, I don't speak for the White House. This is my own view analysis. They have no strategic air defense today. You're taking that chance? You're really going to take that chance either with the Israelis or the United States? You're going to cross red lines? And by the way, not just nuclear red lines, other red lines? Knowing that you have no strategic air defense. The Israelis have wiped it out, and clearly you can try to get the Russians to replace the system. You can try to remanufacture one of your knockoffs of the Russian systems.

The Israelis clearly have shown they can just take it out again. Really? That seems like a high-risk calculation for the supreme leader. Now, maybe he would, he'll pay a price. We'll see. Can't predict the future. But you have to have a credible military threat in the back. You don't have to talk about it. You don't have to threaten it. It doesn't have to be what you lead with. Right? I mean, the idea of speak softly and carry a big stick, I think actually is appropriate and actually is sort of how I see President Trump speak about things and conduct himself. He can say he would like to have a good relationship with Iran. That's appropriate. We should want to have a good relationship with Iran. It should break our hearts we don't have a good relationship with Iran. It's crazy. It's unnatural. The people of Iran are pro-American. We know that.

We should— they want to have a good relationship with the United States. Their regime is completely detached from normalcy and they do crazy, radical things. And if they were to change, and not be crazy radicals, and try to produce nuclear weapons and sponsor terrorism, and try to kill the President of the United States, perhaps we would have a normal relationship. We should aspire to that. We should let the Iranian people know that is our aspiration. While, by the way, you sign a national security presidential memorandum, his second, NSPM-II, the first one was just organizing the National Security Council. The second one was declaring maximum pressure on Iran, and in that document, he is stating it's the policy of the United States to prevent Iran from getting a nuclear weapon and from extorting us with nuclear extortion by being on this threshold status and continuing to shake us down and threatening us in non-nuclear ways while threatening that they could be a nuclear weapon power.

March 19, 2025

Featuring Rich Goldberg

Hosted by Mark Dubowitz

Can't allow that to happen. Diverting our resources, keeping us bogged down in endless wars in the Middle East that they're starting. Right? We can't allow that to happen long-term for our national security. And by the way, God forbid, they actually got the weapon with long-range missiles, right? Can't allow that to happen. He's articulated the exact right policy. He's told the Secretary of State, the Secretary of the Treasury, to turn on every light switch of sanctions pressure they can find. Anything that's been turned off by the Biden administration, turn it back on. Any money that was opened up, close it. Oil that's been allowed to freely flow to China, shut it down. He's told the Attorney General, in this order, I want you to crack down on all the Iranian influence networks in the United States, all the cyber attacks against us, all the assassination plots, all the terrorism plots that might be going on.

Crack down on whatever they're doing in the US, and use all your tools to find their cash, freeze it, make available for victims of Iranian terrorism, and use your tools to impound the cargoes on the high seas, if possible, in addition to what our sanctions do. I mean, these are big—told, Secretary of Commerce, turn on every light you can on export controls. I mean, we're using all the tools of economic coercion here to try to recreate on steroids the trajectory we were at 2019, 2020. By the way, that's going to take a little bit. But it's already having an impact. I mean, the minute he signed that order, you saw the rial start to crater. Now, it needs to be a constant campaign. You and I know this about sanctions. A lot of this is narrative economics. A lot of it's psychological to the market, but also actual action and concrete action. Non-enforcement is sanctions relief. We know that.

And if you have every couple of weeks something happening, a warning to the market, a sanctions target, real action taken against the Chinese, and looking at who are the state-owned enterprises in China that might be one or two steps removed from the entities that they think we can't get to that are actually involved in the import of all this illicit cargo, you start creating real, real crushing pressure on a regime.

DUBOWITZ: I mean, Rich, I would add, I mean, I think it's very interesting that you talked about the rial, the Iranian currency, and the rial/dollar exchange rate. Eve of the Islamic Revolution, 1979, 46 years ago, 70 to one. After JCPOA 2015, I remember roughly around 35,000-38,000 to one. It is now approaching a million to one. It is remarkable. And that is, as you say, it's an expectation from the currency market that more and more pressure is to come.

So the regime is facing this economic pressure, they are seeing their currency meltdown. And now they're going to do what the regime always does, which is they believe they can rope-a-dope President Trump the way they rope-a-dope many American presidents, pull them into negotiations, prolong those negotiations. And in doing so, relieve the economic pressure, get some kind of deal, JCPOA+, agree to some temporary restrictions, President Trump calls it the greatest deal ever negotiated. This time around he submits it to the Senate for ratification as a treaty. Republicans line up, as they often do, in favor of President Trump's initiatives. So he gets 53 Republicans. 14 Democrats decide to join Republicans because they'd rather have this deal than war.

So it's 67, 70 senators, ratify the deal. It's a treaty with Iran. Now, Iran has a treaty. Much more difficult to withdraw from a treaty than from an executive agreement. Iran gets massive sanctions relief. The Iranian nuclear crisis ends. The Iranians wait out President Trump. In four years' time they hope they'll get a Democrat who's not willing to use American power or they get an isolationist Republican who doesn't want to confront Iran. Game, set, match Iran. Israel is done. Israel's military option is over. And Israel will now face a richer, empowered Iran that, again, is going to just take patient pathways to nuclear weapons and wait until whatever restrictions are put in place disappear. I worry about that scenario. Do you?

GOLDBERG: I don't.

DUBOWITZ: Good.



The Iran Nuclear File

March 19, 2025

Featuring Rich Goldberg

Hosted by Mark Dubowitz

GOLDBERG: I don't. There's a lot of straw men built into that hypothetical. Starting with the fact that I don't think Donald Trump is naive or stupid, and I think he's pretty clear-eyed about what the Iranians would want to get out of a negotiation and what the bottom lines are for what a good deal, whatever that might be, looks like.

DUBOWITZ: Yeah. Well, let's go there. What does a good deal look like in your eyes? What are the bottom lines with respect to-

GOLDBERG: In the nuclear realm?

DUBOWITZ: In the nuclear realm.

GOLDBERG: So I go back to my criticism of JCPOA. And remember, this is a deal that the president has called the worst deal ever, right? I mean, he believes that. He says it over and over again. One of the worst deals ever made. I agree with that. What did I say the two clear deficiencies, fatal flaws of the deal were?

DUBOWITZ: Verification.

GOLDBERG: Verification.

DUBOWITZ: Dismantlement.

GOLDBERG: And dismantlement.

DUBOWITZ: Okay.

GOLDBERG: I would start, number one, by saying to the Iranians today, if they were to try to use all their influence operations and all their networks, and their people say, "Oh, they want a deal. They want to do a deal," and you're afraid of them snookering you into some terrible deal, there is an easy way to know if you're serious. Provide us information about your program. Here's the list of things that we need from you to have a serious negotiation. You need to declare all the aspects of your past nuclear weapons activities, all your sites, your equipment—

DUBOWITZ: Up front?

GOLDBERG: Up front. Where material is today, stockpiles, nuclear-capable missile stockpiles. Tell us more about SPND. We want full understanding of all this. We want a full picture of what you have to negotiate over, and then we want to verify it. Because you can't just say, oh, yeah, yeah, no problem. Here's our program, right? Some piece of paper that the Iranians scribbled out being like, ha, ha, ha.

DUBOWITZ: Okay. So full disclosure on the program up front?

GOLDBERG: Yeah. Okay.

DUBOWITZ: Okay.

GOLDBERG: That is already fundamentally a massive change in behavior by the regime if they were to do that. If you could verify the full declaration, a complete declaration, of their program, you would at the very least, first of all, have tons more information about their program, eyes into the program in areas that we've never visited before. It would have to include military sites and have IAEA personnel go to those sites to verify what's in the document. And then at that point, you can then say, okay, step two, dismantle it. You don't get to just have a turnkey nuclear weapons program for the day of your choosing in the future. They do those two basic things— a lot of details there, but at a fundamental high level, you do those two things you have removed the existential danger.



The Iran Nuclear File

March 19, 2025

Featuring Rich Goldberg

Hosted by Mark Dubowitz

DUBOWITZ: And, Rich, people will say to you, "Rich, we totally agree with you." I mean, full verification, full transparency on the nuclear program, full dismantlement. I mean, take this program down to where it used to be under international law when there were multiple UN Security Council resolutions, right? Requiring the end of enrichment.

GOLDBERG: Right. Which by the way is one of the requirements in the order from President Trump is for the UN ambassador, Elise Stefanik, to work with our partners to snap back the UN sanctions as well. Which would, by the way, restore prior UN Security Council resolutions that order Iran to halt all enrichment activities and so on.

DUBOWITZ: Right. Okay. So we all agree that's where we need to be. We also have been tracking this issue for two decades. Tracking the Iranians, tracking their negotiators. And let's say for the sake of argument that that is a fantasy, that Iran says absolutely not. You're not getting into our military sites. You're not learning about our program. You're not interviewing our weapons scientists, and we are absolutely not dismantling our program. We have built this program. We've invested tens of billions of dollars in this program, both in direct investment and the cost we've paid. We need this for our national security. We need it for civilian energy. There is no way we are going to dismantle this program. So either you do a deal with us way short of that. Or we are a threshold nuclear power, in a long weekend we're going to develop a nuclear weapon. What does President Trump do?

GOLDBERG: I think if you actually read what he's saying, here are the words that he's already stating. He's answering your question. He has said, "I don't want to have military conflict. I don't want to be bombing Iran. I don't want to have this confrontation." We should have a deal where you have "A verified nuclear peace agreement," he calls it. I see that as being something that is verifiable, full declaration, fully verified, we have that. And dismantlement so the threat does not exist now or in the future. Because remember, go back to the policy statement in the NSPM, nuclear weapons and extortion, end the nuclear extortion racket. How do you end the nuclear extortion racket? Those two elements take care of that. That nuclear threshold concern, which is a permanent extortion, is removed. I don't want to do that, I want to have a deal. And then he says, interestingly, "And I think if we have this deal, the risk of an Israeli military attack would be dramatically reduced." Which is sort of the nicer way of saying, if you don't do this deal, maybe there will be a military strike.

Maybe it's by Israel in the future. Now maybe it's by the United States too, that's a decision for the president and something that the regime can't discount. But he's not removing a military threat. He's not saying he's not going to back Israel, potentially, in the future with a military threat. He is leading with diplomacy. He's leading with pressure. And he's saying, "you cannot be a nuclear threshold state." Now, there's other elements here, right? The sponsorship of terrorism, proliferation of missiles, assassination plots, and all that. They're addressed in his order as the malign activity that we're still addressing. And listen, let's say there's another scenario here, which is that they don't negotiate and they don't cross a red line. They just sort of try to stay in the status quo for four years, right? Because there is a four-year clock.

DUBOWITZ: Or what the Iranians do, which is what they've done for 20 years, they appreciate that the U.S. red line today is 90% enriched uranium, weapons-grade uranium as you've described. They—

GOLDBERG: But I don't know that that is true anymore. That might have been—

DUBOWITZ: Under Biden.

GOLDBERG: —Joe Biden's red line famously made completely inane by saying, the reason why we won't snap back UN sanctions is because they might go to weapons-grade uranium. Which means, by the way, it's not even a military red line, it was a political red line at that point. So I don't even know 90% was actually a red line.

DUBOWITZ: Fair enough.



The Iran Nuclear File

March 19, 2025

Featuring Rich Goldberg

Hosted by Mark Dubowitz

GOLDBERG: But when you look at the policy, you look at the president's statements and you look at the language between he and the prime minister and the way he answered questions about would he support an Israeli strike. Again, I don't speak for him. I'm not putting words in his mouth or the White House's mouth, they speak for themselves. But I see a dynamic where you don't know what they really— they're working on weaponization right now? They're doing computer modeling? Who's to say that's not a red line at some point? Who's to say that more construction at an underground facility being completed that could be where they go to move and break out isn't a red line. One of the things I think we need to agree on is I've said at the beginning, we should concede the fact that they already have the 90% capability. They've proven it to us. If you're waiting for them to produce 90%, you're just waiting for them to be at the breakout because they can get all the way there right before they go to 90%.

DUBOWITZ: Yeah, I mean, they're 97% of what they need technically to get to weapons-grade uranium.

GOLDBERG: Correct.

DUBOWITZ: So they effectively are there.

GOLDBERG: So the red lines can't be that last step, which might be the hardest to prevent at that point. It has to be something before then.

DUBOWITZ: But then the regime's game is to build redundancy, right? It's to build, as you say, additional enrichment facilities even deeper underground. It's to build even more advanced centrifuges, next-generation centrifuges that can enrich uranium even faster. It's to build up their stockpiles of enriched material and actually bury that in deep tunnels underground in places like Isfahan. It's to have the weapon scientists working on warhead design, but doing it in a way where they can pretend that there's some dual use civilian purpose for this and create a big debate between the US and Israeli intelligence community over are they really working on weaponization or not? I mean, this is the game. This is exactly how they played it.

GOLDBERG: And by the way, going three years of not having eyes at a centrifuge manufacturing plant is crazy.

DUBOWITZ: Right.

GOLDBERG: And that's a crisis every single day that goes on.

DUBOWITZ: Right. So the question is, where is this administration going to set its red line? And the second question from, you may want to answer this or not. I mean, I'm of the view that we have a bit of a mismatch, and we've had it for many years. The Israelis have the will to bomb Iran's nuclear facilities. The Israelis have impressive capabilities, but limited compared to ours. We have impressive capabilities, but the Iranians have always questioned our will. So I think if you're going to actually walk into a negotiation where you're going to insist on full verification, full disclosure, and full dismantlement, then you have to give the Israelis the capabilities to match their will. And there, what I'd like to see as one example, is have Israeli pilots go to Missouri, get trained up on our B-2 bombers that carry these massive ordnance penetrators that are 30,000 pound bombs that are capable of destroying these deeply buried under ground facilities.

And essentially put them in the planes and then start the negotiation. And say to the Iranian supreme leader and his lackeys, "I am serious about a verifiable peace deal. I am serious about a verifiable nuclear deal. I want to make Iran great again. But if you don't and you don't comply, then the Israelis now have everything they need. They have the will, they've clearly demonstrated that, and now they have all the capabilities to destroy your nuclear program. So that's your choice. And by the way, when the Israelis are going in to destroy your nuclear program, they may go after other leadership assets. They may go after economic assets. At the end of the day, you may be left without a nuclear program and a regime. Now let's negotiate."



The Iran Nuclear File

March 19, 2025

Featuring Rich Goldberg

Hosted by Mark Dubowitz

GOLDBERG: I mean, listen, I think that they clearly know that President Trump has the will. If they don't, it's a miscalculation. They know we have the capability. They know Israel has the will. I think they're not sure if Israel has the capability. And built into all of this is the assumption that maybe they don't, and that's why we need to give them more capability. I actually think that's sometimes an assumption that works against us and against the Israelis. They've shown us an amazing amount of technological creativity— operational creativity in how they already responded inside of Iran twice. Once that wiped out their air defense and other critical assets. So I don't know that it's the right assumption that they couldn't do something today. But as you say, I think it's also helpful for us to make sure our ally has everything it needs to make sure it can, if it deems it in its existential right to exist and ability to exist to take out a threat like the Iranian nuclear program. That's a force multiplier for us to have an ally like Israel with the capabilities and the will to take out major threats.

DUBOWITZ: That's right. I want to end with that. Again, I think if President Trump wants a peaceful resolution to the Iranian nuclear crisis, if he wants a deal that will permanently prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons, then it's a question of leverage. Economic leverage, economic pressure, the credible threat of military power, both American and Israeli. Rich, thank you for your tour de force on Iran's nuclear program. We're going to be coming back to you. I think this is going to be a fascinating year. I think 2025 will be the Iran year, where big decisions will be made, and no one knows this better than you do. So thanks for joining us, and we look forward to speaking to you again.

GOLDBERG: Thanks for having me.