The Israel-Iran War is Here. Now What?

June 18, 2025
Featuring Eyal Hulata
Hosted by Mark Dubowitz

HULATA: We've just seen tweets from President Trump today calling for “unconditional surrender”, all in caps. One might think that that means very clearly you either surrender or else, and that or else could mean a military strike made by the Americans.

DUBOWITZ: The Israel-Iran War is no longer in the shadows. It's out in the open. Israel struck deep inside Iran, taking out top IRGC [Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps] commanders, heads of the military, the intelligence services, hitting nuclear facilities, even launching daring Mossad sabotage operations from within the regime's own borders.

Khamenei is in a bunker. Tehran is rattled. Iranian people are watching. In many cases, cheering. But the job isn't done. The regime is fractured, wounded, and hiding, but still standing. I'm joined by my FDD colleague, my dear friend, Eyal Hulata who previously served as Israel's National Security Advisor. He spent 23 years in Mossad, heading up the technology division, the Iran division, the strategic division. He knows something about Iran. I'm Mark Dubowitz. This is “The Iran Breakdown.” Let's break it down.

Eyal, my friend, my brother, it's so good to have you back on the show. And wow, the world has changed since you were on “The Iran Breakdown” a few weeks ago, so let's dive in.

HULATA: Thanks, Mark. So happy to be here again and with you just weeks before I go back to Israel. I think it's just appropriate to be on “Iran Breakdown” again.

DUBOWITZ: Yeah. And so, yeah, I mean I want to dive right in. The viewers have been introduced to you. I've told a little bit about your bio. I hope you don't mind, I said that you spent 23 years in Mossad, leading the Iran division, the technology division, and the strategic division, because two decades working on Iran, and we're seeing just incredible capabilities from your old organization, as well as the Israeli Air Force and Unit 8200 of Israeli military intelligence.

So let's dive into this remarkable decapitation campaign and go inside Israel's shadow war. Tell us what went down and how this happened and give us some highlights that may not be out there in the public.

HULATA: Well, we live in an era where everything is out there in the public, but I'll try to give some highlights on what I think is crucial to follow from June 12th, when they started, and in the last few days coming from it.

This started in a surprise attack. Now, just being able to say this is important because the context we’re in the war in Gaza, everything that happened around it, Israel is so often surprised by our enemies, unfortunately. The ability of the IDF [Israel Defense Forces], of Mossad to jointly start and embark in the middle of the night in a decapitation operation, which is extraordinary.

You know, footage of that has been put out already in the media of Mossad operatives launching drones, very surgically entering the apartments, the bedrooms of scientists, of senior commanders of the IRGC, of IRGC Air Force, and others simultaneously with no collateral damage and doing just exactly what we wanted. We're talking about nine, maybe more, of the top nuclear scientists, of weaponization nuclear scientists–

DUBOWITZ: I think they're reporting 14 now, so that’s still developing.

HULATA: Well, yeah, I mean there are few – we've been careful about what we're able to do. The top weaponization nuclear scientists and the top commanders of the IRGC, we'll get back to that in a second, because this has a lot of impact on what we did in Iran.

In simultaneous, almost simultaneous to that, the Air Force, which has attacked Iran back in October and took away most of the strategic air defense capabilities of Iran, not all of it, and some has been replenished, were able in several hours not only to clear the way for a large group of attack force coming from the Air Force, but also to simultaneously attack so many places, most of it from afar, to be able to hit nuclear sites, but also command and control sites of IRGC and of their missile capabilities. Very, very significant.

And then over the course of the last few days, Israel has been conducting a set of things, first to do more as we can on the nuclearization part, but also to deal with the Iranian counterstrike, with their missile. They've been firing, I think the count is more than 400 ballistic missiles that Iran has fired in almost 20 rounds or waves of attacks over four nights. That's a lot of missiles. That's a lot of ammunition thrown at Israel's major populated areas.

So the Air Force had to deal with that, to deal with the rest of their air defenses to a point where we have aerial superiority over most of Iran, over Tehran. It was nice to see President Trump tweet today that we have gained aerial superiority over Iran. I mean it's great. It's like an elephant and a mouse running together in the desert, except this time I think the mouse did more of the work, I think gaining–

DUBOWITZ: Well, as Ronald Reagan used to say, “If you want to get anything done in Washington, give somebody else the credit.” So I think it makes a lot of sense for the Israelis to give President Trump the credit and have him embrace this operation in the way that he's done, and to underscore the potency of U.S. military equipment and to basically buy in and go all in. So, yes–

HULATA: That's all true.

DUBOWITZ: –let's use we not I.

HULATA: Oh, definitely, definitely. Again, it's always good to be with the United States of America. So that's totally fine, I think, for all of us back home in Israel. But the importance of that is that we can have continuous aerial coverage over Iran, which is significant to be able to go after the missile launchers. We'll talk about the missiles, I'm sure, later.

So what we've seen in over four or five days in Iran is the ability to touch any point very surgically, very precisely to get the right people, the nuclear scientists, the chiefs of IRGC, and also to signal to the Iranians, as they should have known before, but now they know for sure, we can hit anyone in any point, whoever that is. If we want to, we can attack their infrastructure. We can hit, we've already signaled that we could hit energy infrastructure in Iran.

I think the Supreme Leader needs to know himself that if this goes out of hand and this messaging has been delivered also publicly, if it continues to hit civilians, because all they hit back is civilians. We, unfortunately, had several dozens of casualties already.

The Iranians fired their ballistic missiles. About 90% of them are shut down by our air defenses. But if, you know, they fire a hundred missiles and we intercept 90% of them, that means that 10 will fall and some of them will hit apartment buildings and residential areas. And we have several dozens of casualties, all civilians, because this is what they do while we go after very surgically their nuclear program and their military capabilities.

DUBOWITZ: Okay. So I'm going to steer away from the Israeli Air Force for a second, because when our good friend is back from flying his F-35, I'm going to have him in the studio on “The Iran Breakdown” to talk about what it means to be an F-35 pilot up in the skies. But since you spent 23 years in Mossad planning the most sophisticated operations, I think our viewers would be upset if we didn't drill down a little bit into the details of how you began that answer, and that is Mossad operatives were on the ground and then dot, dot, dot.

I mean maybe you could unpack that a little, Eyal. I mean obviously I understand the need for some delicate explanation here. You don't want to be exposing Mossad operations. But there's been quite a bit of public reporting.

I mean it seems to me, based on public reporting, that the Mossad operatives or the agents and the IDF or some spokesmen from your government differentiated between operatives and agents. It was the first time I've actually heard them say agents, which suggests that their Mossad has recruited Iranian agents, which is probably the worst kept secret. I mean the fact that they've recruited from a pool of Iranians who despise this regime is probably no secret.

But the operatives and the agents on the ground, and then these extraordinary operations where they were smuggled in through commercial trucks, drones that just sat there for months, maybe years. And then at the right time, those drones flew up and started striking at targets, surface-to-air missiles, surface-to-surface missiles, and then going after these IRGC commanders and other high-level targets literally in their beds.

I mean those are some of the details that have been coming out publicly. It just says to me that this is an extraordinary operation in its planning, its precision, and its patience. Would you agree with that?

HULATA: Mark, you've described it so well, as if maybe it was you who served for so many years.

(Laughter)

No, of course not. So I'll be careful for various reasons, and I think one of them – and this is something that, I mean you've known me for many, many years. I think that one of the best things about the Israel shadow war with Iran and with others is that when everyone has to use their imagination to try to think what it is that we can do and what it is that will surprise them next, that has an added value to it by way of making them fearful of what is happening.

When I heard today that there were people in Iran who were saying that they were afraid that a pager operation is next in Iran and that they shouldn't use their cellphones, that's the kind of intimidation that we want our enemies to hold when we do this. Sometimes when we give too many details, we also help them shape their thinking into it.

But I think what is important to say is that the Mossad specifically, but the Israeli intelligence community, has been engaged in various aspects of activities in Iran for more than two decades. It started even in the days of Efraim Halevy as head of Mossad, when the first kind of thinking of how do we use technology, how do we use operations, how to operationalize intelligence, not just to know what's happening in Iran, but also to do target and start it.

This has been going on and ramping up very extensively, and, you know, some of those things have already been exposed. I think the audience already understands and knows that we used cyber capabilities and worms, and this is not the first time that scientists have lost their lives in Iran. This is things that happened before.

You know, I'm not taking credit, Mossad has never taken credit, but a lot of things have happened to the Iranian nuclear program over the years. When we talk about what's happening here, and I think you're exactly right, this is not something that is done over a week or over a month. The understanding then when the time comes, we need to be able to do something that is very high impact, very precise, and very surprising to the Iranians so that we can actually get all of those simultaneously, as you said, while they're in bed at night when they cannot move and not hide and then and only then.

Yes, that's a long planning process, a lot of bravery, a lot of ingenuity on all ranks of things. I'm very proud to call Mossad a home and, if I may say so, I'm very proud of David Barnea, the head of Mossad, and all the people who took part in allowing this to happen. It is very extraordinary.

DUBOWITZ: Yeah. I mean it's interesting. I mean it's certainly the legendary Meir Dagan. I think maybe he's considered by many to be the best Mossad director. There certainly was a time, and I think he still ranks high, Yossi Cohen, who did extraordinary things when he was Mossad director. And David Barnea, whose name is not as well known in the West, has been in Mossad for many years, but has shown just extraordinary operational leadership.

HULATA: And you skipped another head of Mossad, Tamir Pardo, between Dagan and Yossi. I mean I had the privilege of serving in Mossad in my early years when Meir Dagan was there, who I think literally transformed Mossad to be the modernized organization that we know today, that kept focus, that made sure that we all understand that we have a mission. It's not about what we do, it's about what's the impact of what we do. If it is the responsibility of an organization to ensure that our enemy does not get to nuclear capability. That means that we need to do so many things. And I think Mossad has been able to buy a lot of time over those years, delay, degrade and do other things to the program. At the end, we needed a military strike, which means that this is never just a one-organization task, another one-way or one-tool solution.

And you know, if I may, I think that we're always at our best when we're able to do this jointly. You know, for years, Israel has said that we have a long arm. Let's say that's our right arm, that is the Air Force that can reach any point at any time and deploy ammunition and a bomb on any given point. And for a good reason, Israel takes pride in its long arm and its Air Force.

I think we have two long arms. One is made of steel and flies high in the sky. And the other is one is more deceptive, more creative that can penetrate into it, which is our Mossad, our intelligence community. And when this works in sync, the way we've seen in June 12th, and the ramping up of it, this is Israel at its best. And I'm so proud of that.

DUBOWITZ: It is incredible, the integration you've seen between Mossad, between the Israeli Air Force and between Israeli military intelligence, *Aman* in general, and Unit 8200, which is Israel's equivalent of our NSA [National Security Agency] with both cyber offensive capabilities, but also incredible intelligence collection capabilities.

And you've really seen that since October 7th. It collapsed on October 7th, and it got back on its feet and it really came out since October 7th. And extraordinary capabilities and impact in Gaza, in Lebanon, in Yemen, inside Iran, and now in October and April of last year, but now inside Iran in just the past few days. Really an incredible integration of potency.

I remember, I think I read a quote that former Prime Minister Ariel Sharon had told Meir Dagan, "Build me a Mossad with a dagger between its teeth." There are famous quotes, and you can imagine Sharon would've said that, and really rebuilt Mossad into, you know, both the lethal and incredibly creative and sophisticated organization it is today. We've really seen that play out.

I want to switch from operational capabilities and successes, and I want to ask you a little bit about the United States. And of course, you know, you're Israeli, not American, but you've been in Washington for two years and you've certainly worked with the U.S. administrations in various roles as a senior of Mossad leader and as well as a National Security Advisor. Give me your assessment of what's happened on the U.S. side.

It's been a pretty extraordinary turn of events. I've been saying that President Trump has been part of a remarkable deception campaign against the Islamic Republic of Iran over recent weeks and months. I mean, I think he was genuinely committed to a nuclear deal. I think after realizing that regime was not, I think he began to embrace the possibility of more coercive action and really seemed to participate in some of the moves in order to throw the Iranians off balance and find them sleeping in their beds, and then give the Israeli Air Force, and Mossad, and the intelligence community in general that capability that you've talked about.

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What's your assessment of where we are from a U.S. perspective in terms of the rhetoric, the red lines, Trump's recent call for the full evacuation of Tehran, and U.S. military positioning in the region? Where are we heading? Are we heading for military strikes? Are we heading for a deal? Are we heading for military strikes and then a deal?

It sort of, it still remains a bit of enigma, which it should be, because the Iranians, if we knew it, then the Iranians would know it and they wouldn't see it coming.

HULATA: So Mark, I'll try to be more descriptive than prescriptive. Right, I mean, not to propose necessarily what I think should happen. But I can definitely talk about how it's viewed, I think, from an Israeli standpoint. And this two years here in Washington I think really helped me understand some of the nuances. There are many Israelis who think they understand Washington. Most of us do not understand this enough. It's way more nuanced than viewed from the outside. And I think that being here in the last two years helped me understand some of also the unspoken things related to that.

But as we go to this administration, sometimes you just need to read what's in the tweets and to look at what's written in capital letters. And this gives you a very good, I think, understanding of where the mindset of President Trump really is. I wouldn't say it's that simple, because if it was simple, everyone could predict what he would do. And I think that Trump tries to be unpredictable, maybe predictably unpredictable, yes, but at the end he keeps them guessing. It's just from the art of the deal to make sure that nobody really understands where he's going and keeping everyone else on their toes all the time.

I'm saying this because we've just seen tweets from President Trump today calling for “unconditional surrender,” all in caps. One might think that that means very clearly, you either surrender or else. And that or else could mean a military strike made by the Americans. Will it happen tonight? It might, it might not. We can flip a coin as far as I'm concerned. I really don't know.

But I think what is important is firstly to say, you spoke about Trump being part of the deception operation. That's your words. I don't want to go there. What I’m sure, I think it's important to say is that if President Trump didn't want Israel to attack on June 12th, Israel wouldn't have been attacked on June 12th. And we know this because when President Trump made sure that Prime Minister Netanyahu knows that he doesn't want him to attack back in April, Israel didn't. And Prime Minister Netanyahu said it itself.

This is an analogy we've been using a lot. What color of signal did President Trump give the Israelis? Was it green? Was it yellow? Was it yellow with green spots in it or stripes?

DUBOWITZ: I call 50 shades of green.

HULATA: Yeah, you call it 50 shades of green. And my line on this: We're Israelis, things are very simple. It's either a red or green. Either we can't or we can. And all this in between is important maybe for political reasons in the United States, sometimes it's important for political reasons in Israel. But at the end, if President Trump didn't want Israel to attack on June 12th, Israel wouldn't have attacked on June 12th. And the fact that Israel attacked, I think means that President Trump gave his blessing to it, either by saying that it doesn't contradict with U.S. interests or maybe more than that.

And I think this is very important. This was important when Prime Minister Olmert attacked the reactor in Syria in 2007, just as much. President Bush wouldn't do it. But if he did not want the Israelis to attack that reactor, probably the Israelis wouldn't have attacked that reactor. There is a conventional understanding between Jerusalem and Washington that is important in this sense. Because at the end, again, either we take off and bomb, or not. There is no in between. There are no shades in between attacking and not attacking. It's a very binary thing.

And I'm saying this because it's hard to know what the Americans will do. Israel has decided to go for it even though, as everyone understands, we did a lot. I think the damage we did to the weaponization group is the most important and the most under-reported or maybe least understood. You talk about this a lot, Mark, and you tweeted about it and wrote about it, and op-eds and so forth. And we'll get to that in a second, because we have to talk about Fordow when we talk about the Americans.

Israel did that. And Israel probably took out Natanz from being able to carry its purpose as an enrichment facility, underground, heavily fortified underground, but not as Fordow. And there is Fordow. There is this underground facility that was created as part of the weaponization group for enrichment purposes from the beginning. Israel can do a lot of things to its auxiliary infrastructure, but to get it inside 70 meters into the mountain. I remember 13 years ago in one of the visits in Washington, when the American commander of CENTCOM at the time showed director of Mossad at the time, I think it was Tamir, the MOP video for the first time, showing us how it can go down through the pier and take out the facility. Magnificent.

DUBOWITZ: Just for our listeners. This is the M-O-P, the MOP, the Massive–

HULATA: Massive Ordnance Penetrator, yes.

DUBOWITZ: 30,000 pound bomb that can only be dropped, well, can be dropped from our strategic bombers, preferably a B-2 because it's stealth. Could conceivably, theoretically I guess, be dropped from a C-130 cargo plane, obviously much more difficult. C-130 is not stealth, that flies relatively slowly, have to be right over target, and it would be a sitting duck if those air defenses that have been ringing Fordow were still operational. But I guess it's a theoretical possibility.

But, let's talk a bit about Fordow, because I think it's obviously in the news a lot. You're right, there's been much made of Fordow, much less made of the fact that Israel seems to have taken out the top echelon of nuclear weapon scientists. It is important I understand, they're not just scientists, they're nuclear weapon scientists. Israel's not killing chemists and physicists and biologists at, you know, willy-nilly. They're going after the men who are capable of developing this weapon of mass destruction.

HULATA: Not just capable, the men that were part of what was called the AMAD Program, that we've kind of peeled the intelligence around the weaponization group year after year. A lot of this information was exposed also publicly with a nuclear archive that Israel, Mossad – these are the years of Yossi Cohen – brought in the beginning of 2018 and exposed the Iranian weaponization program that the Supreme Leader continuously claims they never had, never intended to have. Oh yes, they did. And Iran lied about it.

That archive allowed us to understand who are the people, who are the key people who actually did things with their hands and their computers, with their minds, mostly until 2003, but kept the knowledge to that point where the Supreme Leader will say, all right, go ahead, start dashing, running, or creeping towards a nuclear weapon. Those are the people that were targeted on June 12th night.

DUBOWITZ: By the way, it has been reported, I don't know if it's been confirmed, that Israel has captured or destroyed the backup copy of that archive that Mossad had taken. Of course, everybody had speculated there was a backup copy, but it sounds like it either in Israeli hands or it has been destroyed.

So, taking out the weapon scientists, very important. Presumably there are other weapon scientists in Iran who have been trained and mentored by these most senior scientists, and so this is not a knockout blow or at least not a permanent knockout blow. You would agree with that?

HULATA: Yeah. In general, there's nothing that is a permanent knockout blow. The only thing that will be permanent in the Iranian context is, first, if it ceases to be a revolutionary Islamic Republic. And the second thing, of course, is if they, according to the Libyan model, give away all of their program, surrender it all, dismantle it all under inspection. These are the permanent things.

All the rest is buying time. Buying time is important. Pushing them back is important. One of the things that are at the core at the moment, and I'm sure more and more of this will come out, is that it so seems that the Supreme Leader has indicated to his nuclear weapon scientists that he wants them to start creeping towards a bomb. And that means that the clock starts ticking. And this is why time is so important, because in that action, and you are right, they can teach other students, they have taught other students. And there is nothing that can't be done. The first nuclear bomb was built in the '40s by very smart people, the most creative and capable physicists of the '40s, but with technology of the '40s. And 80 years later, of course it could be done, but it will take time.

DUBOWITZ: It does remind me of when you watch the movie "Oppenheimer" and you think of Robert Oppenheimer and that group of, whatever it was, a dozen, two dozen top nuclear weapon scientists working at Los Alamos. It's very interesting to me because, it's sort of, I think it's like January, February 1945 and all of them are killed. And this is three, four months, five months before the Trinity test that we saw in that movie where they actually test the nuclear device. That would've massively set back the Manhattan Project. Now, I'm sure they would've recruited others and brought them back and reconstituted them, but these were particularly skilled individuals, not only scientifically, but I think in the movie they demonstrated that they had the leadership skills to run programs as opposed just to experiment. And it sounds like the 14 that have been taken out, or nine or 10 or whatever the number is, these are men who just not only have the technical skills, but they actually have the management, bureaucratic, and leadership skills to run what it is a very sophisticated program. Would you agree with that?

HULATA: Yeah, definitely. And we need to add to that Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, which was considered the Iranian Oppenheimer that found his death a few years ago in Tehran, and yes. And I think that this is important, especially when we talk on Fordow. Of course, I'll say this very clearly, I want this to end when Fordow is completely destroyed just as much as Natanz is destroyed. I'm not in a position to call for American action, and I'm not trying to drag the Americans in. I wish the Israelis could have done it and maybe we'll be surprised and they will. I don't know.

But even if Fordow stays intact, God forbid, and you know what, even if Fordow was taken out, Iran has a stockpile of enriched uranium, 60%, 20%, 3.5%. That's very hard to take out by a bomb. Even the MOP cannot do that. Iran has advanced centrifuges that they have produced, and they can produce more. Iran would be able, God forbid, to take a large set of centrifuges, put it somewhere in Fordow or elsewhere, and enrich to 90%, which is the weapon grade uranium. But even if they did that, if they don't have the people, the facilities, and the equipment to turn this into a bomb, then they may have the 90% enriched uranium. But this is not going to blow up anywhere.

DUBOWITZ: I want to ask you about that because I had one of those wow moments a few days ago when I learned about an Israeli destruction of a very key conversion facility in Isfahan. And I tweeted about this, and then the *Wall Street Journal* picked this up and ran the story, but also it hasn't got a lot of attention in all the discussion, in that this key facility in Isfahan that converts 90% enriched uranium into uranium metal. And you need uranium metal to develop a warhead. My understanding is there's only one such facility. It's been destroyed. It may take six months, it may take 12 months, it may take longer to rebuild, but it seems like another critical node in the nuclear weapons process that Israel has been able to neutralize. Can you talk a little bit about that?

HULATA: So, Mark, you're exactly right, because what's important is not just the scientists, it's also their facilities, their laboratories, their equipment, their documentation. If indeed the backup of the archive was lost, there are things there that I'm sure they will need to go back and read because their design and how to turn all of their capabilities into a warhead that can fit in a tip of a Shahab or an Ashoura missile, a long range ballistic missile. We call it long range. In American terms, it's medium range, because for you long range is intercontinental ballistic missiles. But all this, without this knowledge, without this data, without these facilities, it will not work. Now, there are many things that are potentially in dispute between the Israeli intelligence community and the American intelligence community, but by and large, everybody had agreed that if Iran decides to dash for a bomb and they do this in full force with all of their capabilities, it will still take them a year, maybe two, to build a bomb that could fit in a warhead that could threaten Israel or any other area that is within the range of a missile.

But if they now need to rebuild some of those facilities, and also to train scientists that could do this, because this was definitely built on the perception or the premise that as skilled people as Iran have and experience that have done most of this work or some of this theoretical work or maybe some of the experimental work until 2003 when they put this on hold, would be participating in this because that's the fastest way for them to do this. And they cannot do this in this fastest way. It's difficult for me at this point to say how longer this is now put from a year to two, maybe three, maybe more, maybe to a point where a reasonable Supreme Leader cannot believe that he gives this order and they will be actually able to do this. And if he's not sure that they're able to do this, he's going to suffer the consequences of making that decision.

And what does that mean? Well, I think he knows now what that means. Because according to the Israeli intel, Prime Minister Netanyahu said this very, very publicly, “We already picked intelligence suggesting that the Supreme Leader has ordered or approved to his people to start making those steps towards weaponization.” I think this is one of the fundamental reasons we've seen the strike happening right now. And if we have the intel to know this, and he should have known that we will have the intel to know because we know whatever is that is necessary, we've been able to know on time, and I think now he knows what it means, that we also act upon it. Because we've always said, I said this, I mean, this is just me, many have said it, but in the previous time I was here in “Iran Breakdown,” Israel meant it seriously, that we will never let Iran get a nuclear weapon, that we will use all of the means in our disposal to do this, which means a military attack.

And Israel was making preparations and readiness, and then it did it. And the Supreme Leader must ask himself right now, was it worth it? I think he should answer, probably not.

DUBOWITZ: And the Supreme Leader should also ask himself, “How deeply penetrated am I? I mean, I must be penetrated everywhere.” And in fact, if Israel decided, for whatever reason, you can imagine numbers of scenarios to take out Khamenei, I hope the Supreme Leader is asking himself today, not can they do it, but when will they do it given the incredible penetration of his top security military nuclear echelon? And, of course, one must foot stomp this because millions of Iranians hate this regime, and there is a very large pool from which to recruit Iranian agents who could be sitting anywhere and everywhere.

So, Eyal, I want to pivot from the nuclear, and I want to move to this question of quote, “regime change,” because there's a lot of concern in Washington that Israel's hidden objective here was really regime change, is to collapse the regime and bring down the Islamic Republic, which, of course, I think FDD and the Iran podcast here, we've been talking about a lot, the notion that we need to support the Iranian people. That the ultimate goal, the ultimate solution to this is a new government in Iran that is not building nuclear weapons, that's not repressing its own people, and that is not sowing terror through the region and building ballistic missiles and the sleeper cells everywhere. Is that the objective, the clear military objective, of the Israeli government today, as you understand it?

HULATA: Well, I think it's not and, I have to say, I don't think it needs to be the clear objective of a military attack in Iran. And I'll get back to that in a second. But let's start with something that I think is very fundamental that I hope that most, maybe even all the viewers and listeners agree to. We shouldn't shed a tear if the regime of Iran collapses and changes and the people of Iran, of whom about, I don't know, 70%, 80% of them oppose this regime, will get their rights and their ability to live their lives properly. No one should object to that. We should all agree that people deserve freedom and rights wherever they live all the time.

And in that sense, I think everything that we do, every course of action that we take, everything that either weakens the regime directly or makes it obvious to the people of Iran that their regime is weak can potentially contribute to the weakening of the regime and could provide inspiration or the support to the people of Iran to say, "You know what? Maybe this regime is not as strong as we thought and we can do something about it." This can be a consequential outcome of any action that we do in Iran. My position is that Israel should not, definitely not declare, but also not assign an objective to a military campaign along the lines of something like regime change.

Israel has its memory from '82 in Lebanon when we decided to put a ruler of Lebanon, Bachir Gemayel, as head of Lebanon in the First Lebanese War. This did not turn out well. We're scarred to our bone on this even though it's been more than 40 years since. You just talk about the words regime change here in Washington and everybody starts shivering and thinking Iraq and Libya and all those instances that in your recent memory does not turn out well. And we need to be cognizant of that on all of our accounts. It's up to the Iranian people to decide what country they have and what leader they have. But I truly believe, and I've spoken about this in the previous time I was here and elsewhere, the Iranian people need the support. I think we need to support the people of Iran, and as FDD calls it, maximum support to the people.

DUBOWITZ: Eyal let ask you this, because it's very interesting to me in terms of the target set that the Israeli Air Force and Mossad and others have gone after, clearly, military, nuclear, security, intelligence, key leadership, but there've been some other targets that are interesting. I mean, the one that was yesterday, I believe, it was the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting, which is the propaganda arm of the regime. We wrote a big piece on this a number of years ago called "Torture TV" because this is where there were being forced confessions of Iranians broadcast on this television station. And it's certainly the state TV that's running every day that Iranians really have little choices in terms of their channel offerings being forced to watch. But also, IDF came out very clearly and said this is not just about this propaganda arm of the regime, but this was housing some very key communication networks, fiber networks that were being used by the regime for its own military coordination and communications, and that's what made it a military target.

There's also certain people that have been taken out who are really part the regime's internal repression apparatus, and these are some of the people that are responsible not just for external aggression, but for internal repression. And also, would you agree that there's a missed messaging opportunity? I mean, I was a little dismayed by your Minister of Defense Katz, who I think came out a couple of days ago, and I can understand the emotions of it as ballistic missiles are landing in Tel Aviv and killing and maiming Israeli civilians intentionally on the direct order of Khamenei. But I think he said something about the importance of retaliatory strikes against Iranians, and he didn't make the distinction between civilians and combatants.

Is Israel missing an opportunity, A, to take out more elements of the regime apparatus responsible for repression, and, B, explaining in its messaging campaign to the Iranian people, that this is not about you, it's about your regime, and we're going after the targets that are responsible for not just brutalizing us, but for brutalizing you?

HULATA: Yeah. All very good and valid points, Mark. First, is Israel missing an opportunity? Yes. Israel's strategic thinking has always been more about the hard power uses of force and elements than others. And Minister of Defense Katz has clearly made a mistake and I think he tried to walk back from it, but no one has looked at his walking back tweet. Everyone remembers when he said, and he did say, and I think he shouldn't have, that we're going after the people of Tehran, or something along those lines.

Clearly, his audience was not the Iranians. It was the Israelis trying to give some sense of strength, of resilience in the Israeli public. I'm not sure it also gives this to the Israeli public, but definitely we need to be more careful. By the way, Prime Minister Netanyahu was way more careful. Prime Minister Netanyahu comes out and does speak to the Iranian people and tells them, "The things that we do could allow you or help you continue the work and take back your country." And he's right. It doesn't need to be, as I said before, the direct military objective, but if we're creating conditions for them to use, this could happen.

Can Israel do more of those issues? Probably. I think it is important that Israel makes sure that when we do hit a target, it has a purpose that can serve the direct objectives, as we said before. And even when we took the people who are oppressing the Iranian people, those are also the people who are responsible for CI [counterintelligence] operations in Iran, going after our assets and agents in Iran that we operate. It's always mixed in this. And you know what? As we talked before about a shadow war, there are things that could be done without us exactly explaining why we're doing them and talking about them publicly. There are things that we just sometimes just need to do and not talk about, and I'll leave it at that.

But in basic principles, I think that when the people of Iran look at what's happening now, they must ask themselves, "Why are we still supporting this regime? This regime has given us nothing but failure. The economy doesn't work. There is not enough water, there is not enough food. They've promised us that they're using all of this money, instead of giving us all of those basic needs that we need as people to bolster our defenses and to deter our enemies and to be able to dismantle them." And the Supreme Leader promised them that he will eradicate Israel by 2040. And just a few days ago, we said this can happen way before that. How did this all play out? In what way? The Ring of Fire–

DUBOWITZ: Not to mention funding terror armies all over the Middle East.

HULATA: Exactly.

DUBOWITZ: And responsible for slaughtering hundreds of thousands of Middle Easterners.

HULATA: Right. And the Ring of Fire has collapsed. The defenses of Iran have collapsed. The strategic allies that Iran may have thought would come to its rescue, Russia and China, I don't see them there defending them, supplying their weapons, or even really condemning Israel and telling us to stop. You don't see that. Iran is in solitude, all alone, and we're able to incur all of this damage. I'm sure that they're trying to show the pictures from the damages in Tel Aviv and try to look as if there are destroying Tel Aviv. There are dozens of casualties in Tel Aviv and in Petah Tikva and in Bat Yam and in Rehovot and in Haifa, but this is not putting Israel anywhere close to its knees. Whereas now, they're fleeing from Tehran and trying to think of how they should escape. President Trump told them to leave Tehran, otherwise they will be damaged.

I just hope that for the people of Tehran and the people of Iran, they must ask themselves, "Why are we still supporting this regime? What is good for our future, for our children's future, for our grandchildren's future with this revolutionary regime that is doing all of these things to us?" I hope they ask that. And if they do, maybe they'll do something about it.

DUBOWITZ: Yeah, I think it's really important that you're focusing on 20% support base of the regime. There's a lot of talk. We've talked a lot at FDD. I think there's been a lot of progress on this issue, but how do you support the 80% of Iranians that hate the regime, many of whom have been on the streets since 2009, yelling, "Death to the dictator. American president, are you with us or with a dictator?" I think more is being done to think about ways to support the Iranian people, but on the 20%, it's as you talked, I thought about, we in the United States have been the target of massive influence operations run against us in order to intensify the fractures and fissures in American society.

I'm reminded of FDD studies we did around the election when the Chinese, the Russians, and the Iranians were running these influence operations in order to change election results. And what was interesting is that the Iranians were trying to get Harris elected and the Russians were trying to get Trump elected and the Chinese didn't care. They just wanted to create chaos and weaken American society and turn Americans against each other, and yet we do little to defend ourselves against these influence operations. We do very little to run offensive influence operations against our enemies, and it just seems to me that at this moment when there are clearly fractures and fissures inside the support base of the regime, inside the 20%, inside the 1% of the elite who are asking these questions that you've posed, that this would be a good moment not just for studying and analysis, but for action.

So Eyal, tell me, it's been a great conversation, but I want to end with this. What are the strategic risks of not finishing the job?

HULATA: I think that's the million-dollar question. Maybe the billion-dollar question, billions and billions. Look, we first need to think about what it is that will actually finish the job. I think as we spoke before, to eliminate all of the important pieces of the Iranian nuclear program is going to be difficult even if we take out Fordow. And I think that not taking out Fordow has a technical aspect to it, but also a symbolic aspect to it. This is one of those facilities that the Iranians will be able to say, "You've done all this. We created this site, dug so deep in the mountains so that you can't touch it. And guess what? You couldn't touch it." And this will have some kind of effect also, I think symbolically and morally, not just engineerically.

So yes, of course, I would want this to be taken out, but I think there's a limit to how much time Israel can or should wait for the United States to join. This decision will need to be taken, I would assume in a matter of days, this war or another. It could happen tonight, what we're recording in the evening. The president has convened his national security team in the Situation Room. Maybe they made this decision. Maybe by the time people listen to this, this has already taken, but maybe not. And even if it's not, this is as part of what we'll need to take care.

The other aspect we talk about is the regime. But again, as I said, I don't think that this should be a mission or an objective of the military issue. So what does it mean to get the job done in full? I have to say that one of the things that worries me is that while we have not good enough defined to ourselves what's sufficient, what's enough, we can find ourselves dragged in an endless conflict where we're still seeking, "What more could we do?" And enjoy the operational superiority that the Air Force has over Tehran and ask ourselves, "Okay, maybe we should also do this. Maybe we should also do that." What I would, if I was National Security Advisor today, what I'll try to make sure, as Israel knows, what's the threshold that we need to meet? So we'll tell ourselves and tell the world, and we'll be able to defend it that we've done enough in this round given our capabilities and given the situation in Iran.

It's always difficult to do when the goals are not defined well, and sometimes leaders want not to define the goals well so that they can wiggle around and play with it a little bit. But this is Iran. It's 2,000 kilometers away. This is not a continuous war in Gaza, or even in Lebanon with Hezbollah. In a point in time, this will need to end. And Israel must define to itself, "What are the things that we have to conclude before we finish this war?"

And then the answer would be, "Maybe we left things that we couldn't do. Maybe we left things for another round, but we've done enough." And whenever that will be, the question then is what happens next? And here, I want to be very hopeful that when President Trump, when we have a president like him in the White House saying, "Whatever happens and however this ends, Iran should never have a nuclear program. And I will demand, you didn't agree to negotiations before. Well, now let's see you not come to the table after you've seen what are the consequences that can happen to that?" Maybe he can do it that way. I don't know. I hope the conditions should definitely be better because Iran is weaker in all aspects than they were before June 12th when we started the strike.

DUBOWITZ: Well, I think the Israelis have demonstrated something really profound to me since October 7th, and that is the wisdom of the escalate to de-escalate doctrine. The idea that we can somehow persuade our enemies to abandon weapons of mass destruction. We can somehow talk them down the negotiating table by just being nice, offering confidence-building measures, creating dialogue, seems to me have never worked. And as we talked about Reagan earlier in the show, the “importance of casting a shadow of power across the negotiating table,” as President Reagan's former Secretary of State, George Shultz once said. That's critical, particularly dealing with Khamenei in order to break his nuclear will, and in order to get him to the negotiating table to agree to peacefully, fully and permanently dismantle his nuclear weapons program. The Israelis have had to escalate to de-escalate.

That's how you got the ceasefire in Lebanon. You didn't destroy Hezbollah entirely, but you severely degraded its capabilities. You got a ceasefire agreement, which by the way, is still being enforced by the IDF.

HULATA: Yeah, and we continuously operate in Lebanon every time we see Hezbollah trying to violate this agreement, as we should and probably will continue to do for years to come.

DUBOWITZ: Yeah, and you could see something similar in Iran with some kind of agreement at the table, but really important that President Trump comes to that table after having fully escalated in order to de-escalate and reach an agreement. And full escalation really means destroying these key critical nodes of Iran's nuclear weapons program.

Eyal, I want to thank you. I want to thank you for your service to the U.S.-Israel relationship, for really being on the front lines of defending not only democracies, but defending Western civilization against really evil regimes that seek to do us all harm. Thank you for the two years you spent with us at FDD. It's been a real pleasure to have you in Washington as a colleague and a friend, and we know you're going back to Israel. We wish you and your family and your loved ones safety and success. And I'm very hopeful about the future of Israel. I think if Israel was a stock, I'd be going long on it. If the Islamic Republic were a stock, I'd be shorting it immediately. I think Israel has an incredible future and we look forward to having you still working with FDD based in Israel. So thank you.

HULATA: Thank you so much. It's been a pleasure and I'm sure that good things will come.

DUBOWITZ: My thanks to Eyal Hulata for everything he has done for the U.S.-Israel relationship. For everything he's done to defend Western civilization. And for helping us break down this complicated topic. I'm Mark Dubowitz, and this has been “The Iran Breakdown.” Look forward to seeing you next time when we break it down all over.