Israel and Iran at War: Emergency SITREP

June 15, 2025
Featuring Nadav Eyal and Barak Ravid
Hosted by Mark Dubowitz

GOLDBERG: They're working on the delivery system, not just to hit Israel or Europe, they want to hit the continental United States. Can't allow that to happen.

TALEBLU: The Islamic Republic means what it says when it says, “Death to Israel.”

LAPID: Eventually, we will attack Iran's nuclear facility because there's no other choice.

HULATA: Israel cannot allow Iran to go nuclear. Israel is committed to defend ourselves, by ourselves, and we will do whatever it takes, with whatever we have, so that Iran does not become a nuclear power.

DUBOWITZ: This is “The Iran Breakdown,” so let's break it down.

So, welcome to “The Iran Breakdown.” I'm your host, Mark Dubowitz. The war in the Middle East has entered a new and very dangerous phase. Israeli strikes have directly targeted the Islamic Republic's nuclear military and security infrastructure, and decapitated key figures in the IRGC [Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps] high command, as well as nuclear weapons scientists. Iran has responded with what it has long threatened; direct ballistic missile attacks on Israel, including multiple strikes on densely populated city centers. While Israel is issuing warnings for Iranian civilians to stay away from military and nuclear sites, in contrast, Khamenei has given direct orders to fire on Israeli civilians. This is no longer a shadow war, it's open confrontation. On this special SITREP, I'll be joined by two leading journalists to help break it all down.

First, joining me live from Washington is Barak Ravid. He's the global affairs correspondent for *Axios*, and a CNN analyst. We're going to focus on the U.S. angle. Where does the Trump administration stand? How is the war impacting their nuclear diplomacy? And what would it take for the United States to join Israel in a direct strike on Iran's most fortified nuclear sites? We're going to then turn to Nadav Eyal. He's a senior columnist at *Yediot Ahronot*. We're going to go deep on the Israeli side. What's the real damage assessment inside Iran? How far did Israeli infiltration go to enable such surgical operations? And what is the IDF's current freedom of movement, and what's next? And how are Israelis processing a night of mass missiles fired on their homes? So, with all of that, let's break it down.

Hey Barak, welcome.

RAVID: Hey, Mark. How's it going?

DUBOWITZ: Good. Barak, thank you. I know how busy you are, you're a journalist in demand, breaking lots of great stories for *Axios*. I want to go after the story on the U.S. side. You've got great sources in the U.S. government, and you're monitoring what's going on with the Trump administration, and you've broken some really interesting stories in recent days. So, let's jump right in. Where is President Trump right now on this war between Israel and Islamic Republic?

RAVID: Well, we always need to look at what President Trump said last, and the last thing he said, which was seven hours ago, he posted on his Truth Social account this comment, "The US had nothing to do with the attack on Iran tonight. If we are attacked in any way, shape, or form by Iran, the full strength and might of the U.S. Armed Forces will come down on you at levels you've never seen before. However, we can easily get a deal done between Iran and Israel, and end this bloody conflict." I think at the moment, it seems to me – I don't know at the moment. As of seven hours ago, it seemed that Trump doesn't want the US to get actively involved in the war, even though the Israeli government is putting, I would say, quite extensive pressure on the Trump administration, especially on parts of the Trump administration that are more favorable to getting involved in this war, to join in.

Especially in order to take out the Fordow nuclear facility, nuclear enrichment facility, the heavily fortified facility inside the mountain, that Israel can maybe try and damage, but it can't really destroy because it doesn't have either the huge bunker

buster bombs that are needed for such an operation, or the strategic bombers to carry them. The US has both, and they're in flying distance from Iran in the Diego Garcia Airbase in the Indian Ocean. So, I think this is what's really happening behind the scenes over the last 24 hours, significant pressure from the Israelis on the Trump administration to join in, and the Israelis are basically saying, at least what I hear from Israeli officials, are saying, “We think we don't have a lot of time left,” they think that it's between 24 to 48 hours before maybe Donald Trump will say, “That's it, I had enough.”

So, what they're saying to the Trump administration, "Okay, if it's 24 to 48 hours, and if you want the Iranian nuclear program to go away, then in those 24 to 48 hours, we need to do something significant, or more significant than we did so far. And in order to do that, we need you to join in." So, basically, the Israeli argument is, as, by the way, we saw in previous cases, like Hezbollah in Lebanon, is escalation for de-escalation. Meaning the US goes in, take out the Fordow nuclear facility in order to basically after that say, "All right, we're done. Now, let's negotiate." I don't know where Donald Trump is going to land on this thing, I'm waiting anxiously, I'm refreshing his Truth Social account by the minute. We'll see.

DUBOWITZ: Well, Barak, you also broke a story that Trump had a conversation with Vladimir Putin to get Russia's involvement in trying to convince Iran to come back to the negotiations, and essentially it seems to me that there's sort of a choice between Oman and Fordow. Either Khamenei decides to send his lead negotiator, Araghchi, back to Oman for another round of negotiations or something has to get done at Fordow, as you said, in really destroying this last remaining major element of Iran's nuclear weapons program. Is that how you see it, and what have you been reporting on the chances of renewed diplomacy in Oman?

RAVID: I'll tell you what I heard, and I think it's very interesting because it's not what the Iranians are saying publicly. Publicly, the Iranians are saying, “no point of negotiating with the US, the US is part of this attack, therefore, negotiations are futile.” In private, the Iranians have been telling people, especially foreign ministers from other countries, that once they feel that their retaliation to the Israeli attack is over, then they will resume negotiations. And if that's the case, then the Iranians can decide at any moment that their retaliation is over and resume negotiations. And I think that in some ways, the only way for Iran to stop the Israeli strikes is to resume talks with the US. At the moment, I don't know if that's the only way, but it's definitely the best way.

So, if the Supreme Leader or President Pezeshkian or Foreign Minister Araghchi want to stop spending their night in the bunker, getting reports about how many of their assets have been targeted by the Israeli Air Force, the best way to do it, in my opinion, okay, I'm not saying it because I know, that's really just my opinion, is to call Steve Witkoff and tell him, "You know what? We can meet in 12 hours in Rome," or in, I don't know where, Vienna, or Muscat, or wherever. And I'm pretty sure that Witkoff would then call President Trump and say, "Listen, the Iranians want to meet immediately." And Trump, I'm pretty sure would tell him, "Okay, go on your jet and get over there." And the next thing Trump will do is call Netanyahu, and tell him, "Witkoff is meeting the Iranians, so I expect you to stop."

DUBOWITZ: Right. You had reported before all of this began that there had been a U.S. offer to Iran, it was quite, in my view, quite a generous offer, it allowed Iran to continue enriching uranium at least "temporarily," while there was some idea about building this consortium, this joint enrichment facility. I thought that was kind of a diplomatic fiction, that it would never get built, and that Khamenei would actually be able to retain enrichment capability, wait out Donald Trump, in three and a half years time, be able to use that nuclear enrichment capability to really expand it, and go for a weapon. It's quite a generous offer that Khamenei actually turned down. Do you expect if there are renewed talks in Oman, that that offer will be revised significantly, given the fact that Iran is much, much weaker than it was just a week ago?

RAVID: I just think that practically this offer cannot be on the table anymore because what this offer talked about is basically shutting down, or, I don't want to say shutting down because that's not the language in the proposal. The

proposal spoke about making the underground enrichment facilities non-operational, and keeping only the above-the-ground Natanz enrichment facility.

DUBOWITZ: Which has been destroyed.

RAVID: Exactly. So, even if you want, you can't really put it back on the table because it's just not relevant. So, you need to somehow redraw the proposal, and I think that at the moment, I find it hard to believe that the US will allow Iran in any deal to continue operating underground enrichment facilities. Especially because the JCPOA [Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action] did not allow that. And Trump is not going to agree to something that is worse from the JCPOA.

DUBOWITZ: To be fair, the JCPOA did allow it over time once the restrictions came off, but your point's well taken, which is, at this point, President Trump would, I think would be hard-pressed to agree to anything that looks like JCPOA in any way, that gives enrichment facilities to Iran after they've rejected his generous offer. The Israeli Air Force and Mossad have devastated his nuclear infrastructure, military command, security officials, this is his opportunity with now maximum leverage. But Barak, let me ask you this.

RAVID: But by the way, I disagree with you. I think–

DUBOWITZ: Good. Disagree away.

(LAUGHTER)

RAVID: No, no. I think that I do not rule out at all that the basic principle of allowing Iran limited temporary enrichment, I think this would still be in any proposal, but I think what will be revised is the caps, meaning it will really become this symbolic thing and not something that could be practical in any way. Meaning it would be something like, we'll allow you to retain 50 centrifuges and five kilograms of 3.67% low-enriched uranium, just in order for the Iranians to be able to say that they did not give up on the right. So, if you ask me, that's the scenario I'm seeing, something which is very, very, very small enrichment operation and basically shutting down everything else.

DUBOWITZ: Well, I think that would be insane, especially since most Republicans in the Senate and the House have said to President Trump, and President Trump has said himself, as have many of his top advisors, zero enrichment, full dismantling. That was before the Israeli Air Force and Mossad did such significant damage to Iran's nuclear infrastructure and command infrastructure. But let me ask you about Fordow because you mentioned it, and I think it's worth taking another look at that. Fordow heavily fortified, under a mountain, goes hundreds of feet, has an enrichment facility, Iran has started to install advanced centrifuges in that, that would give them a breakout capability, the enriched material that they still probably have enough enriched material for 17 to 20 bombs. That, best of our knowledge, is still standing. So, it gives Iran that breakout.

But I think, Barak, what I want to talk about is because Fordow is so heavily fortified, it seems the Israelis have done significant damage to Iran's nuclear weapons program by killing at least 10 of the 12 high value targets weapon scientists, and that seems to me a significant blow. We're going to talk to Nadav about that in the next half hour, but what are your thoughts on that? Where Iran's nuclear weapons program stands today, given the damage that's been done, and what is still left standing?

RAVID: No, definitely significant damage, but I don't think that – I'm not trying to downplay the killing of the Iranian nuclear scientists, it's very significant, especially that those were the architects of the Iranian nuclear weapons program. But as in other – It's not exactly the same, but it rhymes. Israel assassinated over the years, many terrorists, usually it takes sometimes a few days, sometimes a few months, sometimes two years, there's somebody else. So, what it did now is that it bought, in my opinion, a few months to think about, okay, what do we do going forward? Because if the solution now will

be that once a year, we'll have to do it again, I'm not sure that's the best solution. So, what I think is needed right now is a serious discussion between Israel and the US about an exit strategy, so that we will not find ourselves in a Gaza scenario with Iran.

Because while we can get bogged down in Gaza, and it's a serious, serious problem, an irritant, the country can still handle it. But if you get bogged down into the same Gaza scenario, where you just don't know how to reach a solution at the end, then it's something that I'm not sure Israel can handle. So, right now is the time to start this discussion about what's the exit strategy what do we want to have on the day after? And we can't have in the same thing as Gaza, as Netanyahu saying, "Oh, the day after is after we destroy everything, and then we'll start discussing," because we're not close to destroying everything.

DUBOWITZ: Well, let's talk about the Truth post that President Trump put out because he's put out some interesting Truth posts over recent weeks, it seems to me from reporting that he was really leading a significant deception campaign, coordinating with Netanyahu, the IDF coordinating with the U.S. military, particularly CENTCOM, in really lulling the Iranians into a false sense that they were safe, and that Israel would not strike without a U.S. green light. And Israel literally caught, and figuratively, caught the Iranians asleep in their beds in the first night of strikes on Thursday, taking out some significant high value targets. I guess a couple of questions. One is, do you think President Trump was leading and part of this deception operation against Iran? Second is, tell us a little bit, from your sources, the debate inside the administration about this key question of actually using U.S. forces to finally destroy the hardened Fordow facility using B-2 bombers and 30,000 pound Massive Ordnance Penetrators. What is going on inside the administration with respect to that debate?

RAVID: So, first, as far as I know, and I spoke about it with several White House officials, the US or President Trump and the Trump administration were not part of an Israeli deception campaign. What I heard from at least three White House officials is that they told the Israelis several times during the days leading to the operation that they will not be part of it that they don't think it's the appropriate time to do it. Those messages were given both in private and in public–

DUBOWITZ: But Barak, just to interrupt there for a second, isn't that what exactly what they would tell you in order to have plausible deniability in order to lay the predicate for potential negotiations in Oman, in order to make it clear? That's what they would tell you–

RAVID: They would, but–

DUBOWITZ: –as part of a deception operation, they'd be looking to deceive you too as a reporter?

RAVID: They would, but the only problem with that is that they said the same things in the days leading to the operation to the leadership in Congress, the exact same thing. They told both Senate Majority Leader Thune and other Senate and House leaders like Jeffries that they told Israelis that they're against an attack in Iran in the current timing that they're not going to get involved-

DUBOWITZ: But wait a sec, are you breaking a story here right now on “The Iran Breakdown,” that the Trump administration gave Netanyahu a red light, do not attack, and Netanyahu defied that red light?

RAVID: No, they did not tell Netanyahu do not attack. They told Netanyahu, “We do not think this is the right time to do it.”

DUBOWITZ: That's interesting.

RAVID: They did not tell him don't do it. Nobody – President Trump did not tell Netanyahu, "I asked you not to do it." He told Netanyahu, "I think it would be a mistake to do it now. I will not be part of it, and I will not – I'm not supporting it."

That's in the days before. In the day after Trump went on the bandwagon, but that's why I am telling you that the US was not part of any deception. I'll tell you something more. An hour before the bomb started falling in Tehran and other places in Iran, the U.S. government, through official channels, sent a diplomatic notes to several of its allies in the region and around the world. An hour before, and I'm telling you this because a person that received this note called me immediately. I was at my daughter's graduation party, okay? And somebody called me immediately and said, "The U.S. government notified us that Israel is going attack Iran on June 12. The US is not involved, President Trump wants peace."

DUBOWITZ: Yeah, that's exactly what you would say to your Gulf allies if, number one, you were part of a deception operation, number two, you wanted to make it clear to them, because you know that they're going to make it clear to the Iranians, that you weren't part of any kind of offensive operation, which is clear the United States was not, there were no U.S. pilots bombing Iranian infrastructure, and you want to make sure that the Iranians understand there's still a diplomatic option. But I think, anyway, we can talk about, and I'm sure history will write this, and you'll write this book one day

RAVID: Mark, I don't know. I'm talking about myself, I do not have one shred of evidence that says that the US was part of a deception campaign, and I have a lot of evidence that it was not.

DUBOWITZ: Okay.

RAVID: So, that ceases my knowledge.

DUBOWITZ: Okay. It'll be interesting as history is written. But in the last remaining minutes, Barak, I want you to focus on this, what is the internal debate going on right now inside the administration, inside the Pentagon, about whether the United States is prepared to finish the job? B-2 bombers, Massive Ordnance Penetrators, destroy the heavily fortified facility at Fordow, take it out, and end Iran's nuclear weapons program. Because if it's left standing, and President Trump is unable to negotiate a diplomatic resolution to this, the Iranians will have a heavily fortified facility, 17 bombs worth of enriched material, I'm sure surviving centrifuges, and they can actually turn this into weapons grade uranium. Now, whether they've got enough nuclear weapons scientists alive to actually fashion a crude nuclear device or a warhead is another question. What is the debate that's going on right now?

RAVID: As I think we talked about it in the previous episode that we discussed this thing, it's a one-man decision, at the end of the day. What a very senior U.S. official told his Israeli counterpart, after he gave him a formal request that the US joins, so the answer was, “We passed on the request to President Trump, he will make this decision.” I don't know what he's going to decide, I think this is a – the jury is still out. I think the decision will have to be made pretty soon because from my understanding, Trump wants this war to be over within days, and he doesn't want Iran to have a nuclear weapon.

So, if he wants this war to end, and Iran not have a nuclear weapon, it means two things. Either he can get a deal in few days, which sounds to me not very likely, or he'll take out Fordow in order to make sure that Iran doesn't have a nuclear weapon. Those are the two options that Trump will have to decide. From his last Truth Social post, it seems that he's still not there, meaning he still wants to try and pursue some sort of a deal, but those things can change within minutes, as we all know.

DUBOWITZ: Okay. Well, Barak, listen, thank you so much for being on the show, I want to wish you a happy Father's Day in these difficult times. I hope your family and loved ones are safe in Israel, and we look forward to great scoops and great reporting from you and *Axios*. So –

RAVID: Thank you, Mark.

DUBOWITZ: – appreciate you being on.

RAVID: Thank you.

DUBOWITZ: Thanks, Barak.

The U.S. side. So, Trump's team has stayed quiet, but they've positioned U.S. military assets in the region, the President needs to make this decision that Barak talk about. Either to get the Iranians back to Oman to negotiate the full dismantlement of their program, or order the U.S. military to launch B-2 strikes against the heavily fortified Fordow facility. Now, those Israeli strikes over the past couple days have definitely given the President added negotiating leverage for these negotiations, but they've also are potentially forcing a military decision. The message seems to me, to Tehran, it's clear, your skies are no longer safe, the Israeli Air Force dominates them, they can come after anybody, anytime, including Khamenei himself, the supreme leader, as Khamenei has directly ordered ballistic missile strikes against Israeli civilians. Israel cannot sustain that kind of civilian loss for much longer, and Khamenei is truly playing with fire. So, let's turn to the Israeli front, we're going to introduce Nadav, who's doing fantastic reporting for *Yediot Ahronot* out of Israel. Nadav, welcome to "The Iran Breakdown," glad to have you.

Hello Nadav.

EYAL: Thanks for having me.

DUBOWITZ: Hi, how are you?

EYAL: I'm fine.

DUBOWITZ: Good. I want to wish you first of all, a Happy Father's Day, I hope your family is safe, I know it's difficult times in Israel, and I want to turn to the Israeli front, and you probably heard the last few minutes of Barak's comments, but certainly some real takeaways that Israel has really shaken the pillars of Iran's nuclear and military infrastructure, and the United States has a, I think, a choice, leverage this moment or miss it. So what are you seeing on the Israeli side and where do you think things are going to go from an Israeli decision-making point of view?

EYAL: So, the Israelis do not deny that this would end with a decision by the President, either to force Israel to end the war, or join the war or at least be part of the final blow to the Iranian nuclear program. And the Israelis are absolutely clear about this. As to Fordow, the question mark that you asked Barak, Israel doesn't have a good and effective way to actually tackle the challenge in Fordow in a short period of time. It can use its own air force and bombs to dig away into the mountain, it will be a slow process, it will take time, and it'll be more than a few days to do so. Israel already achieved, as you mentioned, tremendous military achievements, it's flying over Iran right now, as it is flying over Gaza or over Lebanon.

This is pretty amazing as of itself. But the focus and keeping our eyes on the ball is not fighting an entire war against Iran, Iran has many, many military targets, it's been an arch enemy of Israel for many years, the IDF and the Israeli Air Force can spend at least six months just bombing away in Iran, and I don't think that's the idea. Because as you mentioned, it also is taking a heavy toll. Just this night, 10 Israelis who died at least four that are unaccounted for, and the kind of devastation that we have never seen in this country before, in missiles in the first Gulf War, or Hamas or Hezbollah missiles, this is a completely different story. So, if the Americans decide to do this and to join Israel in the final blow, that will be super important, and then the Iranians are not going to say, "Okay, now we agree to negotiations."

Mark, you know the Islamic Republic probably better than I do, it's never going to work that way. It's going to be sort of cessation of hostilities and then a few months of thinking, of thinking within the Islamic Republic, higher echelons, and then if everything goes well, they'll turn into the negotiation route. It's all about, and this was told, Israeli generals were saying that to me a year and a year and a half ago, it's all about what's going to happen after we attack. It's not about our attack. And by saying that they meant the US. It's either going to be carrots, or sticks, or both of those to make sure that

the Islamic Republic doesn't turn to, for instance, breaking into a bomb. They just announced today that they're stopping the reporting to the IAEA [International Atomic Energy Agency]. That's a major negative development. If they keep up with this, they're signaling that they might break for a bomb.

And then, should the US join, will the US join? So, all eyes right now are in Washington, and specifically on the White House and President Trump to make that decision, but there are still stuff that Israel wants to do and is doing across Iran right now, as we are speaking, mainly ballistic but also nuclear, and this is an ongoing effort.

DUBOWITZ: Nadav, are you hearing from your sources about Mossad's and the Israeli Air Force's killing of these top 10 nuclear weapons scientists? When I think about this, I think about the movie “Oppenheimer,” and I think if Oppenheimer and his top 10 nuclear weapons scientists had been killed in, let's say, February, March of 1945, right before the June Trinity test of the atomic weapon, that would've been a devastating blow to the Manhattan Project. What are your sources in Israel saying about that operation? And if you could give us even some more detail and insight into, it's a pretty extraordinary intelligence and military success, how did it happen and how significant is it?

EYAL: So, first of all, most of the credit goes to Israel's intelligence branch this time and not the Mossad. I know that the Mossad took a lot of headlines right after the attack began with those incredible stories, I'm not downplaying those, of Mossad agents flying drones within Iran, attacking air defenses in Iran, but this time this was the work of the Israeli intelligence branch, and they did a tremendous amount of work there. I can't share every detail that we have, we are in a state of war here, I can say that this is really the stuff of movies, the kind of intelligence that Israel needed. Not only to hit these apartment buildings, but to hit them in the right place, in the right angle, in the right room, sometimes trying not to hit other family members who are in the house, trying to differentiate between the rooms and the family members while you're not seeing them, this is the kind of work that you need to do when you want to take out, as you said, the people responsible possibly for breaking to a nuclear warhead.

Now, here's the thing, Mark, we didn't get all of them. There are some names that I know of, I was looking for these names, and they weren't there, and that means that the IDF didn't get them. And also, there's always a question of how much is it of an institutional kind of information, and data, and skill that was built over the years, and how much is it really dependent on a specific person? And the general assessment with intelligence branch and the IDF is quite pessimistic, they're saying, “Yes, this will pull them back, it will definitely help, but we don't think that this is more than together with the actual damage to their nuclear infrastructure, we are thinking about this as between a year and a half,” Mark, “and more.”

But the bare minimum is a year and a half, and if you are a decision-maker in Israeli cabinet and you hear that, you would say, okay, so I need to assume that this took them back a year and a half. But it's not only about that, it's about drawing a line in the sand. And I agree with my colleague, Barak said earlier, the question is what's going to happen now? How do you make sure that they don't try to rebuild their abilities, and you need to do this again? Because you wouldn't be able to do this again. And for that you need international community, you need United States, you need some type of an agreement, or you need this regime gone. Now, the serious people I'm speaking with in Israel don't think that they can manufacture or engineer a regime change in Iran through aerial bombardments, basically.

They do think that they can threaten the stability of the regime, forcing it to an extent, to agree to an agreement, knowing that they have too much to lose. And when they do this agreement, they'll have much less centrifuges, much less abilities, infrastructure because that was hit by the Israelis, and that's the idea. So, this is a limited scope operation, at least until, and if the US would decide to join it.

DUBOWITZ: Yeah, certainly, setting back the nuclear weapons program by a year and a half is quite an accomplishment, particularly because you were reporting on this, or at least I saw this public reporting, that Israeli intelligence had gotten

evidence that Khamenei had now made a decision to actually green light the nuclear weaponization program. A huge debate, over 20 years in Washington, in Israel, and European capitals that Khamenei himself had never made the decision to move forward on weaponization, he had moved forward on other aspects of the nuclear weapons program, but actually on the warhead design, he hadn't actually given that green light. And that had been the position of the U.S. intelligence community for years. Can you tell us a little bit about what has come out publicly from the Israeli government and the intelligence community about Khamenei's decision to actually instruct these weapons scientists to move ahead with this Iranian Manhattan Project?

EYAL: I want to say what they're saying and what they're not saying. At no point did they say that Iran decided to break for a bomb. Okay? I want to be absolutely clear, I don't want to mislead anyone. It's not an argument that the Israelis are making. The argument that they were making is that decisions were made, probably as you said by the supreme leader, to start acquiring, aggressively, the abilities for the weapons group, which you only need in order to assemble a nuclear warhead or a nuclear bomb. And the type of ingredients that the Iranians were either developing or trying to purchase around the world, you need them only for that. And they were doing this aggressively. I was reporting this at the beginning of 2024, based on a senior military official in Israel, that said, “this is highly troubling,” and it was about at this point that the IDF started really beginning drills towards a possible strike against Iran.

As months went by, two other things started developing. The first one was this notion that was captured through documents and other data during the war that showed that the Iranians are actually serious about destroying the state of Israel, that they have a plan for the destruction of the State of Israel, it's not just a slogan cried out in a mosque, "Death to Israel, death to America," but they have an actual plan. It basically involves a joint attack against Israel, they thought about this plan together with Hamas prior to the war, Hamas was pitching parts of their plan to compensate the parts of the Iranian plan, but it's a serious thing. So, this wasn't a slogan-ish kind of trying to do this for domestic consumption politically within Iran, within the Islamic Republic, or to lead Muslim *ummah*, it was about really destruction of Israel, and Israel learned much about that.

The second element is the one I already mentioned, they started basically running towards the weapons group, something that they didn't do for many, many years with indications that were public, that the FDD published again and again, that they started playing with the idea that actually they need to cancel the famous *fatwa* by the Imam Khomeini and allow the development of nuclear weapons. And this was sanctioned by the supreme leader, nothing like that could be done without the supreme leader. And the third thing which is interesting is the ballistic missiles issue. They discovered, basically at the October attack against Israel in 2024, that there's a limit to what the Arrow and the THAAD anti-missile systems can do, and considering the size of Israel, the population centers, et cetera, that this could be actually a soft spot, a weakness deficiency of the Israeli defense apparatus that they can use.

By the way, Mark, they still didn't use their bigger missiles, their bigger ballistic missiles, which is warheads of over one ton sometimes. And if they'll use them, we'll see much more devastation in Israel. And all of these three elements led the intelligence branch and the operation branch to go to the political level in Israel and say to the government, look, we are entering an area in which we won't be able to tell you in a short while, which should be weeks, where are they headed. Because the plan is so dispersed in terms of enrichment, it's going to be so dispersed in terms of the weapons group, we're going to lose control. Our intelligence grip over what's happening is going to weaken, and it's going to weaken in a way that we simply would not be able to tell you exactly where they are. And it's now your decision.

The recommendation was to strike, knowing that Israel does not have the absolute capability to be effective in tackling the entire nuclear program. So, saying, we're going to take the Iranian air defenses, we're going to take much of their surface-to-surface missile abilities, we're going to take some of their ammunitions, we're going to take much of their nuclear

installations. We don't know how to do Fordow effectively enough, we hope that the US would join. The US knew about these plans, this is the reason President Trump ordered non-essential diplomats out of the region beforehand, and Israel would've never done it if the US would've said, “Don't do it, don't do it. Don't do it at this point because we have the conversations in Oman on Sunday.”

And in that regard, the Israelis feel certain that they didn't break any sort of, I don't want to say even a red line, but any sort of line that was drawn in the sand by President Trump, and according to the public statements made by the president right afterwards, and I would say the more than quite content that he has shown to this attack, I think it's very clear that there was a coordination here. Now, that doesn't mean that the US committed to be part of this strike, I don't think they committed.

DUBOWITZ: Yeah, well, you probably heard my debate with Barak about whether President Trump was in on this deception operation that Israel was running against the Iranians, that really caught them literally and figuratively in their beds. My view is he was, based on the signaling, and the leaks to reporters, that he wasn't in on a offensive operation against Iran, there were no military, there were no U.S. pilots obviously operating in this, but he certainly knew about it, he didn't red light it, he probably green light it, because knowing your prime minister, Prime Minister Netanyahu would not have gone forward without some kind of green light. I kind of call it 50 shades of green. There was some shade of green that I'm sure that President Trump provided to Netanyahu, and then as you said, he seemed very happy in that Truth post on Thursday or Friday, really taking credit that this was U.S. military equipment doing devastating damage to the Islamic Republic.

But talking about devastating damage, I want to focus a little bit in on this ballistic missile question, because I saw some reporting, and our research has shown that Iran has probably 3000 ballistic missiles, I know the official numbers are more like 2000, but we've run the numbers. 3000 ballistic missiles, quite an inventory. There was also reporting, and I'm wondering if this is confirmed by your Israeli government sources, that Iran had plans to quadruple at least to 8, 9, 10, 11,000, the number of ballistic missiles in a few years, and take it up to 20,000 within six years. That would've given them devastating capabilities, where they wouldn't even have to use nuclear weapons to destroy Central Israel, they could relentlessly fire ballistic missiles in the hundreds at the State of Israel and do massive damage. Is that consistent with what you've been reporting or what you've heard, and was that one of the key triggers?

EYAL: Yeah, it's absolutely, that's the second ingredient that I mentioned in my previous answer, and I would specifically as to coordination with Israel, look, I never bet against America, and I never bet against Barak in Washington D.C., okay? He's just a fantastic reporter. I can only talk about what my reporting has shown, and I'll just give you two examples. One example is that I remember myself at least twice in recent months, calling good sources that I have within the Israeli government, asking about a tense conversation between President Trump, or at least this is how it was described by one or two media outlets in Israel. And the response I would get from my sources is what was described in the media is untrue, and that is not the description of the conversation, it was actually a great conversation specifically on Iran, and I would say, "Hey, but I've heard otherwise from some of my Israeli colleagues here."

And they would say, "We know you did, and there's a reason to that." And so, I don't know if that deception was also towards journalists, I don't want to say. I do want to say, and you don't need sources for that, you just need to Google Steve Witkoff's speech in a fundraiser on Wednesday night in New York, I think it was a Hatzalah fundraiser, and I would advise anyone who wants to understand how coordinated the US was just to listen to Steve Witkoff's speech. Steve Witkoff is probably the closest person in the world in terms international relations to the president, I think it would be fair to say, and what Witkoff said there, I found quite amazing. It was not only that the enrichment of uranium in Iran is a risk to Israel's existence and a risk to the U.S. security and the world security, but also ballistic missile program is a risk to

Israel's existence, something that, by the way, the Israelis didn't really say before that. Now they're saying it. Today, Netanyahu is talking about this.

Today, he went to Bat Yam, to the place in which an Iranian ballistic missile landed and destroyed several apartment buildings, and he said, “Just imagine that they would've had 20,000.” But Steve Witkoff said that beforehand, and he said that in New York, on the record, it's on Twitter, I saw that that night. It's not after the fact, after the attack. And I was marking this, I was doing, it was a mental note, by him positioning himself there, it was absolutely clear that the administration understands the worries of Israel, but more so that it understands that any operation against Iran is not only focused on nuclear enrichment, it's also focused on their ballistic abilities. Very in line with what Israel thought about this ballistic program. By the way, supervising, trying to prevent a nuclear program is difficult, trying to do so with ballistic missiles is almost impossible.

It's almost impossible because you can import those, you can manufacture them, they have no trace, unlike uranium and enriched uranium, you don't have an international agency or a treaty to prevent countries from developing these kinds of ballistic missiles, these are not inter-continent ballistic missiles, it's extremely difficult. So, that's another aim that's very ambitious.

DUBOWITZ: Yeah, there is actually an international missile control body and agreements that have been reached with multiple countries that limit the range and payload of these missiles. And I think one of the criticisms of the JCPOA, which I made back in 2015, others made as well, is that agreement was not only fatally flawed on the nuclear side, but it didn't cover ballistic missiles including ballistic missiles that were capable of delivering a nuclear warhead. So, it sounds like Israel has done significant damage both to the nuclear program and is working at trying to limit and degrade the Iranian ballistic missile inventory and ballistic missile production capability. We'll see how well that goes. What's your sense, Nadav, of how much time is left? I mean, what are Israeli officials saying with respect to the way forward? Is it literally days or is it potentially weeks?

EYAL: It's potentially weeks. I'm not sure that Israel has weeks. This also goes again to President Trump and whatever decision that he'll make . Sorry, this is what you just heard is the kind of stuff that you hear. Okay. So, basically, what the IDF is saying is “Don't go into the shelter now, but you might need to go to the shelter in the next few months.” That's the sound that you just heard. So, basically the IDF is telling me a few days, at least. A few days at least, to reach our initial aims. And my guess Mark, and I'm guessing right now, I'm speculating that they have a plan for Fordow. They have a contingency if the US says no. Now, I'm not sure that it is as effective, but my speculation, knowing the IDF, is that they have a contingency there, and Israel is also ready, or is sort of making itself ready to the possibility that the Iranians won't want to stop at a certain point.

And now, that's dangerous, that's dangerous because you don't want to have another Ukraine-Russia in the Middle East, and it's a very kind of, the Iraq-Iran war lasted for eight years, as you know better than me, it only stopped after Khomeini decided that it is crucial for the survival of the regime and the Republic to stop the war, and he drank the cup of poison, to quote the expression he used, the Israelis are quoting to me this expression, they are quoting to me this expression.

DUBOWITZ: Yeah. Well, it's very important because I think this is highly irrelevant to today. The reason that Khamenei drank the poison chalice is because... Well, actually Khomeini drank the poison chalice, it's because Khamenei went to Khomeini with former President Rafsanjani, and said to Khomeini, we have to end this war because the United States just shot down a passenger airline. They're claiming they did it by mistake. We know those Americans, they did it on purpose. This means the United States is about to intervene in the war. We can fight Iraq and Saddam, we cannot fight the United States of America because that is potentially regime ending. And Khomeini, after that bitter war and over a million lives lost made that decision to end the war because he believed the United States was going to intervene.

I think it actually underscores what the Israeli officials are saying, what many of the United States are saying, which is, if President Trump wants to end this war, the credible threats of military intervention is indispensable to that. Khamenei needs to understand President Trump is serious about unleashing B-2 bombers and 30,000 pound Massive Ordnance Penetrators to take down Fordow, but also may not stop there, may join the Israelis in going after leadership assets. And I guess, I know you probably may have to run to a shelter soon, I want to ask maybe a final question on that, Nadav. Do you think it's possible that if Khamenei decides to continue to escalate, that Israeli political leaders will decide to go after Khamenei himself?

Oh. I think we may have lost Eyal, the Wi-Fi may have frozen. So, I think with that, we will end the interview, hopefully Eyal is safe in the bunker. And I want to thank Nadav Eyal and Barak Ravid very much for joining us. We're going to be watching certainly for further signs of Israeli strikes, what are Trump administration red lines at the negotiating table? What would trigger a U.S. response? And also something that we haven't talked a lot about on this live podcast, but we certainly have talked about on many others, what are the escalation scenarios from Hezbollah, the Houthis, other Iranian terror proxies? I'm also very concerned about attacks against Israeli and Jewish targets abroad or in the United States. So, obviously, we'll be looking for that and discussing that in greater detail.

It's going to be more updates to come here on “The Iran Breakdown,” please look out for season two, we're going to be dropping it later this summer. Had an overwhelming response from our listeners and our viewers, we're top 3% of podcasts, which I think really confirms that 2025, as I expected, was going to be the Iran year. And we've had some wonderful guests who've obviously attracted a lot of interest and support. So, for deeper analysis, please stay plugged in, all of FDD's work across our policy, military and regional coverage, and until next time, please stay alert, stay informed, and join me when we break it down all over again.