



American Military and Political Power and the Iran File

August 6, 2025

Featuring Bradley Bowman

Hosted by Mark Dubowitz

Transcript edited for clarity.

BOWMAN: It's going to be really important going forward that Israel enjoys America's full support to go back as much as necessary to protect their interests and finish the job. When I look at the sources of conflict in the Middle East, they all come back to Iran.

DUBOWITZ: Welcome back to "The Iran Breakdown." Today, we're joined by Brad Bowman, one of the FDD's – and Washington's – sharpest analysts of Tehran's strategy, its proxy networks, and the great power patrons that have emboldened the ayatollahs. In the last weeks, we saw Iran's forces engage U.S. and Israeli military assets in the so-called 12-Day War. They launched missiles at Al Udeid and tested the limits of its ties to Moscow and Beijing. Brad's work – from exposing America's munition shortfalls and the arsenal of democracy, to charting the Russia-Iran-China-North Korea Axis of Aggressors – puts Iran at the center of every debate in Washington. Today, we'll dissect the tactics on the battlefield, the unresolved drivers of Tehran's regional ambitions, our ironclad partnership with Israel, and how U.S. policy must evolve to meet the Iranian threat. I'm your host, Mark Dubowitz. This is "The Iran Breakdown," so let's break it down. Bradley, great to have you.

BOWMAN: It's great to be here. Thank you so much for the opportunity, I'm actually really looking forward to it, thank you.

DUBOWITZ: Yeah, no, me too, Brad. It's been wonderful working with you all these years. So I always start with your personal story, I'm very interested, how'd you get to what you do? Where are you from? Tell us a little bit about your military background. Also, you are old and enough to remember 9/11–

BOWMAN: I am, yeah.

DUBOWITZ: –and you were certainly at the heart of it. So tell us your personal story.

BOWMAN: Okay. I'll spare you the three-hour version and try to make it somewhat succinct. But yeah, no, I was born in California, raised in rural southern Oregon. Went to a country elementary school of 120 kids, first through eighth grade. Middle-class kid looking for a way to pay for college and admired the military and applied to West Point and got in. So went and attended West Point and it changed me for the better, challenged me in passing those math and science classes. But eventually, graduated and got commissioned in the U.S. Army and chose to be an army aviator and went to flight school. This was 1995, so this was pre-9/11, a very different time for our country, a very different time for the U.S. military.

And then, after a number of army aviation assignments, I was commanding Charlie Company 12th Aviation Battalion on the night of 9/11 here in Washington DC, and can talk more about that. But after that, those two years there, I went to grad school and studied international relations at Yale. And then, I taught for three years at West Point, taught courses in American foreign policy, created a new course, Studies in Grand Strategy, after learning from the great Donald Kagan and John Gaddis and other people at Yale, so foreign policy, American politics, grand strategy, and then worked on the Hill, on the Foreign Relations Committee, as a Council on Foreign Relations fellow.

I'll speed this up. And then, two years in the Pentagon and then deployed to Afghanistan, which is where I met H.R. McMaster and was in Afghanistan helping to stand up task forces there, focused on tracking the money to prevent American contracting money from going to our enemies, and also reducing corruption in the Afghan government. We can discuss how that went. Came back, got out and started to work on the Hill. Unusually got out after 15-and-a-half years, and ended up working all six years for Senator Kelly Ayotte of New Hampshire, a Republican, the lead Republican on the



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Readiness Subcommittee of the Armed Service Committee. That was just a break of a lifetime, six consecutive National Defense Authorization Act bills. So, just really learning how to get laws done on Capitol Hill.

Then she lost her re-election by 0.1%, so I was looking for a job and went over to Todd Young, was his national security advisor, supporting his work on the Foreign Relations Committee. And then, thanks to you and Cliff and Jon, came here to FDD. The reason I came to FDD, and I say this a lot, because I'm happy to say it because it's true, is that when I was advising members of the Armed Services and Foreign Relations Committees, I learned very quickly who's who in the Washington D.C. think tank zoo, and I admired how FDD didn't take money from foreign governments and had moral clarity about our friends and our enemies and America's role in the world, and was more focused on outcomes than hearing ourselves talk.

And so, I was so honored to join the team in 2019 and stand up our center here, and I've been doing it, what, six-and-a-half, seven years now. I'm even more a fan of what we do here at FDD, and I think the work of FDD, this sounds like a Hallmark card or a paid brochure, but it's coming from my heart, I feel like we're at an inflection point in our country, I feel like this is the most dangerous geopolitical moment our country has confronted since 1945, and working in an organization [that] has moral clarity and an outcome focus and measures ourselves not by syllables pronounced or op-eds published, but damage to our adversaries, it's just a real honor to be in a place like that.

DUBOWITZ: Wow, and it's an honor to have you, Brad. I remember working with you on the Hill and getting things done together, and it was really an honor to have you come and stand up our military center, where we just had a notion that somehow we would have a military center, and you turned it from a notion to an idea into a real battle center that has done really remarkable work. But remind me, you were a helicopter pilot, right?

BOWMAN: Yeah, I was. So I went to Army Aviation Flight School and was trained in Hueys and then Black Hawks. We had a classified mission that we always had to have aircraft on standby to conduct for our nation's worst day, and then our day-to-day mission was flying everyone below the president down, so members of Congress, members of the Cabinet, leaders at the Pentagon. And on the day of 9/11, as company commander, I made the decision to fly two of our standby helicopters down to what was then called Fort A.P. Hill for a nine-millimeter qualifying range, and that's where we were when we learned about the first and then the second tower being hit.

And so, when we got the news, we jumped in our Black Hawk helicopters and flew as quickly back to Fort Belvoir as we could, having ideas like, "Hey, maybe our base will be under attack." Those are the kind of crazy thoughts you have when you're getting the kind of news we were all getting on 9/11. And then, during that day, my unit spent most of the day getting top military leaders out of Washington, worrying that more attacks were coming, so that they could survive and continue to command our military, so getting them to hide sites in the area. And then, on that night, I said, "I want to get in on some of these flights," so I put myself on a mission to go pick up the Deputy Secretary of Defense, Paul Wolfowitz, at one of these hide sites.

We were told that he wanted to go to CIA headquarters, but when we picked him up, he said, "No, no, no, I want to go to the Pentagon." So there we were, flying to this hide site on the night of 9/11. Basically every aircraft in the country had been grounded by that point other than the fighter jet and the AWACS [Airborne Warning and Control System] and us, and so we were one of the few aircraft flying in the entire continental United States. The AWACS kept calling out our position, which for anyone who knows their military history and the Black Hawk that got shot down in Northern Iraq, that was an eerie thing. We were told to keep our altitude low, so to anyone who's home I flew over at an excessively low altitude in the greater DC region on the night of 9/11, I apologize. But I'll never forget the roads being empty, everyone being at home, the lights on, people watching their televisions that night, that's how low we were flying.



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And we went and picked him up, and he said, "No, take me to the Pentagon." So we flew down the Potomac River that night and circled to land, which I had done two, three times a week, dropping people off at the Pentagon, and the helipad where we were going to drop him off had been destroyed because it was at the point of impact. And so, we landed in the traffic circle of the freeway there. Of course, there were no cars, all the freeway had been shut down. Paul Wolfowitz knocked on my window, saluted and walked off toward the still smoldering hole in the Pentagon. And then, two days later, we took the Pennsylvania congressional delegation senators and congressmen to Shanksville, to where the heroes on that flight ensured that plane wasn't able to hit the Capitol building Congress or the White House, and just marveled at how a whole aircraft could just basically be gone.

And then, a few days later, we took the Army Surgeon General up to Ground Zero. And the story there is just a week or two before 9/11, I flew up the Hudson River to the Sikorsky plant in Connecticut to pick up two brand new helicopters at the Sikorsky plant in Connecticut, and in my photo album at home, I have a picture of me in the right seat of my Black Hawk leaning over, taken through the whir of the rotor blade, the two towers, and there I was two or three weeks later and they were gone. And we landed on the USNS Comfort, which is that hospital ship which was docked in Midtown Manhattan.

So I'm in no way saying that my experience was extraordinary or special, I'm just saying that was my experience on that day and it made quite an impression on me. And so, after that, I went off and studied in grad school a whole bunch of things, including who was it that attacked us, why did they attack us and what do we do about it? And started a long I guess multi-decade now process of understanding what we have here as a country, why it's worth defending, who hates us, why they hate us, why they're attacking us and what we do about it. And so, it was one of those formative experiences that I'll remember and take with me for the rest of my life.

DUBOWITZ: Wow, Brad, it gave me chills just listening to that story, and thank you for your service. So I want to shift from 9/11 and another enemy, al-Qaeda, to today, to the contemporary reality and the Islamic Republic of Iran, which has been at war with us since 1979, as you follow them very closely, and the recent 12-Day War, which I think for some people, some expression of enthusiasm was it was twice as effective as the original Six-Day War, and I want to dig into that and your assessment of the US and Israeli military campaigns against the Islamic Republic during that war, successes and also failures, missed opportunities. What's your assessment of the 12-Day War?

BOWMAN: Yeah. You'll definitely have to invite me back for a deep dive, but at the top line level, I would say that Israel demonstrated even more what it had already demonstrated the previous October, and that is that it has an incredibly impressive capability to conduct military operations in and over Iran and the ability to basically destroy anything above ground in Iran, and that Mossad has infiltrated the Iranian military and regime to an incredible level. And the way that Israel was able to sustain that campaign and have so much success was incredibly impressive, and I think the United States military, which I believe is the best military in the world, can learn a lot from what the Israelis did there, especially the way that they used drones for intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance and targeting, overlaying that with geospatial capabilities. I think there are real lessons to learn from the U.S. military that can be applied, God forbid, for us in the Baltics or the Taiwan Strait in the coming years. And so, incredibly impressive military campaign.

I'm with Admiral [Mark] Montgomery in the assessment that, as far as I can tell, that the Israelis weren't done, that they could have used some more time, and I admire that this administration supported Israel in doing what it needed to do to defend itself and take the fight to the terror patron in Tehran. But I would've liked them to have a little bit more time and I think it's unfortunate that the plug got pulled there. With that said, I admire that President Trump finally matched kinetic action with words in a way that no president in American history has, and when push came to shove, he put his money



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where his mouth was and used American military power to do what Israel, as I and others have said for a long time, could not do in hitting some of the hardened and deeply buried targets.

Unfortunately, the war plans at the unclassified level that I'm familiar with, that would've truly obliterated the program, would've required many days, if not weeks, not a very, very impressive one strike. And so, what I'm saying is incredibly impressive, both the American and Israeli military actions, but insufficient to really deliver the knockout punch that both you and I would've wanted. And so, I think it's going to be really important going forward that Israel enjoys America's full support, just like it has in Lebanon, to go back in [Iran] as much as necessary to protect their interests and finish the job.

When I look at the four sources of conflict in the Middle East, they all come back to Iran. One is a regime that's dedicated to the destruction of Israel, the world's only majority Jewish state. That remains unchanged. So we've set their nuclear program back by months or maybe two years, depending on how you define that, as you know better than me. But they remain dedicated to the destruction of Israel, they remain committed to the support for terrorism. I'll remind your listeners that just on July 16th, the U.S. Central Command issued a release about the Yemeni National Resistance Forces intercepting over 750 tons of munitions and hardware, advanced cruise, anti-ship, and anti-aircraft missiles, warheads and seekers and other components, hundreds of drone engines, manuals written in Farsi, built by a company affiliated with the Iranian Ministry of Defense that is sanctioned by the United States going to the Houthis.

So if that's not evidence of the regime's continued support for terrorism (Houthis), which, by the way, is conducting the worst assault on freedom of navigation and maritime shipping in decades, I don't know what is. And listen to what the U.S. Central Commander said, he said, "Limiting the free flow of Iranian support of the Houthis is critical to regional security, stability and freedom of navigation." So, what I'm saying is they remain committed to the destruction of Israel, they remain supporting terrorism, and they still have an enormous ballistic missile program, which, by the way, China is going to help them reconstitute with their shipments of ammonium perchlorate. So what is all that when you put that in a pot and stir? Where does that leave us? That leaves us with a regime that we have every reason to believe is going to continue to want to revive its nuclear program and continue to represent the leading threat to American interests in the Middle East, to Arab partners, and to our best ally, Israel.

DUBOWITZ: So Brad, I want to also move to some of the, I think, really groundbreaking research that you've done. You've been leading FDD's Axis of Aggressors research, which really spans multiple programs at FDD and centers and capabilities, pretty impressive scope for the research. And I think it also underscores something that you're alluding to, which is that the Islamic Republic is not just a threat to Israel, to one of our closest allies, but it's a threat to the United States in and of itself, but also in this axis with China and Russia and North Korea. Talk a little bit about the research you've been doing, what are your preliminary findings and recommendations and how that should shape U.S. strategy?

BOWMAN: Sure, thank you. The bipartisan congressionally mandated National Defense Strategy Commission published in its report last summer, in their final report, they said something along the lines that we confront the most dangerous situation the US has confronted since 1945, I paraphrased that earlier, agreeing with it. I think that is true, and one of the reasons I think that is true is because of the growing cooperation between China, Russia, Iran and North Korea. If one is familiar with U.S. military budgets and plans and these sorts of things, as Admiral Montgomery and I are, you will know that we are not resourced to fight two major wars at the same time, that's just the reality. We've had some fiction in the past where we kidded ourselves that we could. The reality is that we don't have the military we would need to simultaneously fight major war in the Baltics or the Taiwan Strait. And what's happening with this growing cooperation between China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea, Mark, is that it's making each of these adversaries who are united by their opposition of the United States and our allies, have increased military capability, capacity, resilience, and readiness.



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In some way or another, the Ukrainians are fighting all three of these adversaries in Ukraine. I did this podcast in this room with the Air Force pilots who were actually flying on the night of April 13th, 2024, describing as they shot down Iranian drones and cruise missiles. And the point that we made in that discussion was those drones that they were shooting down were Shahed 136s. Those are Iranian-produced drones that, yes, have been used to attack Israel, but they've also, as these Air Force active-duty pilots who fought on the night of April 13th said, they've been used to attack U.S. troops in the Middle East, and they've also been given to Vladimir Putin so they can kill Ukrainian men, women and children in their homes.

What's my point? My point is that the Iranian regime is not just Israel's problem. It's a global problem. It's an American problem. It's a problem for Europeans because the largest war in Europe since World War II is being supported by the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Now, I don't need Israel, I don't need the IDF, from a selfish American standpoint, sailing in the Taiwan Strait. I don't need the IDF in the Baltics. What I need them doing is exactly what they want to do, is being the most capable and motivated partner we have in the world to go after a subset of the Axis. Because of these four Axis members, Iran is the weakest. The Islamic Republic of Iran is the weakest, and they're the only one without nuclear weapons – for now. And we've got to keep it that way, and we've got to see this government that doesn't represent the Iranian people eventually go into the dustbin of history.

And the way we're going to do that is by external pressure, pushing back, delivering consequences and counterpunches on them, not just the terror puppets, but the terror patron and empowering the Iranian people to finally have a government that's more interested in their welfare than the export of terrorism. That's the plan.

And so the summary or the zoom out is if you accept what I'm saying, and by the way, Mark, these aren't vacuous comments, Lydia LaFavor, and others here on our team, we have established five categories of security cooperation. We've looked at weapons development, arms sales, intelligence, military exercise, military diplomacy, those five categories, Mark, we've documented over 480 instances of cooperation among these four countries since 2019 alone, and that's just in the military domain. Mark Montgomery and Elaine Dezenski have found similar concerning things in their cyber, economic, and financial domains.

So when you put this all together, it's making each one of these adversaries more capable in their respective spheres of aggression and making them, as an aggregate, more concerning. So in this moment when our adversaries appreciate the value of partners, we shouldn't be taking our partners for granted. We have an incredibly motivated and capable partner in Israel.

Empowering them is not charity. It's a wise investment. Just like supporting Ukraine is a wise investment and not charity, as Kyiv degrades daily, the second-leading conventional threat we confront, I would apply the same logic to Israel. When you have a partner like that, you don't say, "Okay, here you go, we're kind of busy." It's like, no, gosh darn, the more effective you are, the more you help us against this axis which is dedicated to hurting Americans.

DUBOWITZ: Yeah, and unfortunately, I mean there's, Brad, as you know, there's been this huge debate in Washington, and there's certainly a wing of both parties, an isolationist wing of both the Republican and Democratic parties who I think maybe in some respects have overlearned the lessons of Iraq and Afghanistan. Important lessons to be learned, but one can overlearn these lessons. And one of the ways in which they've overlearned the lessons is that American power should never be used or even credibly threatened.

And the other way that I think that they have misunderstood what you are saying is that they want to abandon our allies, instead of empower our allies who are prepared to fight and die, not only in their own defense but against common



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enemies. And both Israel and Ukraine have demonstrated remarkable courage and capabilities against the Islamic Republic of Iran and Putin's Russia. And it's baffling that we would want to actually abandon those two incredibly competent allies, and in doing so, I guess, undermine what I think is a really important model for the United States.

If we don't want to send hundreds of thousands of U.S. men and women to fight against these enemies, then empower those countries who are prepared to do so, who are willing to risk the lives of their soldiers, give them what they need in terms of military capabilities, intelligence support and political support, and then we can focus our energies on our most dangerous long-term enemy, which is the Chinese Communist Party.

You would agree with that?

BOWMAN: I would. I would. And I could spend an hour giving a boring lecture on deterrence theory, but at some of this just comes back to the playground metaphor that I use over and over again. If you're on a playground and the bullies are getting together, and they're coming at you, and they're coming around the corner, it's good to have friends. When the bullies come around the corner, it's good to have friends. And if one of your friends is particularly effective at smacking one of those bullies in the face, you want that friend to be as powerful as possible. And making that friend of yours, helping them have the muscles of the tools they need, actually empowers your negotiations with those bullies so they take what you say more seriously, right?

Next time the Iranians are trying something and President Trump says, "You better or else," well, after the 12-Day War, they might take that "or else" a little more seriously. This is the shadow of power that George Shultz talks about that I quote too often that, if you don't have the shadow of power over the negotiating table, then it's just some form of appeasement.

Well, Donald Trump and Israel have cast the shadow of power over the negotiating table. Now what are we going to do with it? Are we going to let that shadow of power be frittered away? Are we going to convert battlefield success into sustainable policy and political success, something that America has struggled with for a long time?

And then just one last comment, if I may, on one of the core grand strategic debates in Washington right now is most of us agree, as I do, that China's the number one threat America confronts. We need to do more in the Pacific. But that's where I get off the train when a lot of people then say, 'Well, gosh darn, we need to do less and less and less in the [Middle East]' nevermind the fact that we're already way below the highs of what we used to have in the Central Command area of operations.

Well, here's my point. In Army doctrine, battlefield doctrine, which I'm familiar with, it's not rocket science when you say it, you have a main effort, and you have a supporting effort. Why do you do a supporting effort? You do a supporting effort for all kinds of reasons. One reason is because while this is the main thing over here, this is important too. And if you don't allocate sufficient resources, time, and attention to the supporting effort, something that's maybe not your number one threat, but still something that you have an interest in addressing, then small things become big things ultimately requiring more time, resources, and attention.

So this is an argument I've been making about the Middle East for a long time. Yes, we need to do more in the Pacific. Yes, I'm concerned about China, but if we don't maintain sufficient forces in the Middle East and empower Israel and work to develop a regional security architecture there, then small problems will become bigger. And if you only care about China, and that's the only thing you care about, which I think would be a mistake, that would deal a body blow to your China-first strategy because it's going to pull finite DOD [Department of Defense] resources from the Pacific into the Middle East.



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And this isn't theoretical. Look at what happened in 2011 in Iraq. We made a timeline-based, conditions-ignoring military withdrawal from Iraq against the advice of military commanders. I was there on the phone call when a congressional staffer asked someone in the Vice President's Office, "Hey, you're using the Status of Forces Agreement as an excuse to withdraw. If we got that tomorrow, would you reverse the withdrawal?" "No, we wouldn't." It was a politically motivated withdrawal ignoring conditions on the ground and the advice of commanders.

We withdrew, what happens? It catalyzed a series of events that leads to the rise of ISIS. We had to go back later at a higher cost. It's an economy of force mission and part of a sound grand strategic economy of force mission for the United States and the Middle East is when you have an ally, like Israel, that is motivated and capable, you arm them to the teeth so they can secure themselves, defend our common interest, and punch our common adversary in the face.

DUBOWITZ: Okay, well, let me ask you about this, arm them to the teeth because, I mean, the other debate in Washington, for those who might accept this grand strategic vision and the importance of deterrence, is Brad, that's all great in theory, but can we actually arm our allies to the teeth in practice? And you published a monograph in April called, *The Arsenal of Democracy*, talk a little bit about that really deep granular dive into this question.

Because I think what I've got in mind are recent events, which is when it came to the 12-Day War, preceding that there was, in my understanding, there was a knockdown drag out fight between CENTCOM [United States Central Command] and the Office of the Secretary of Defense for Policy on whether the United States should be militarily supporting Israel in its efforts, and certainly whether the United States should do what President Trump finally ordered the U.S. Air Force to do, which is to fly B-2 bombers and drop multiple 30,000-pound massive ordnance penetrators on these key nuclear sites. Now, thankfully, CENTCOM won that debate, and I think it certainly redounded to the success of the United States and to President Trump, but they could have just easily lost that debate against people who were saying, "Love to support them in theory, we don't have the weapons systems and the ammunition to support them in practice."

And we certainly heard that argument repeatedly on Ukraine. It was only just a couple weeks ago where it looked like we were not willing to actually provide any more military support to the Ukrainians. And thankfully, President Trump reversed that decision coming out of the Pentagon. So all of this means that there are strong voices inside the U.S. government and outside the U.S. government, both sides of the aisle, who are really calling for the United States to do less because we have less. What did your *Arsenal of Democracy* research discover?

BOWMAN: Yeah, and a real preemptive shout out here to my great colleague, Ryan Brobst, who played such a critical role in this research. But about two and a half years ago, Ryan and I looked at the situation in Washington and felt concerned that at some point in the near future you might have individuals looking at delays in the delivery of weapons to Taiwan and try to blame that on Ukraine as an excuse to deprive Ukraine of the means of self-defense as it was confronting Putin's unprovoked invasion. So that was our initial idea, and we said, "Hey, that's an empirical question. We can look at what weapons are being delayed to Taiwan, and then we can say, is the reason for those delays helping Ukraine, yes or no?" Hard to do unclassified, but we said, okay, we can do that.

And then October 7th happened. We said, "Oh, shoot." And I was worried that enemies of Israel, or people that want to deprive Israel of the means of self-defense, might use a similar argument that, "Oh, we got to stop arming Ukraine because arming Israel is hurting our ability to arm Taiwan," so we put Israel into what now became a trilateral analysis.

And so we identified 25 weapon systems where there was either overlap between two or three of those three beleaguered democracies, or a potential overlap, and asked ourselves the question, the duration of any delays in orders placed by Taiwan or Israel resulting or likely resulting from helping Ukraine. That was our research question.



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And what we found was, and we defined material delay as more than one year, we found that not in a single instance of those 25 weapon systems, was there a delay that could be blamed on support for Ukraine. So sorry. Sorry, folks who want to not help Ukraine or not help Israel. You cannot blame delays to Taiwan in that. There were some weapons that were delayed, but you can't blame it on our support for those other beleaguered democracies.

But anticipating the rebuttal to that statement, we then asked a second question, "Okay, no material delays that can be blamed on support for Ukraine, but what is the health of the respective defense industrial base for each of those 25 systems?" And what we found was that of the 25 systems examined, only about 28% of them were deemed strong by us.

So what are we looking at? We're looking at production capacity, we're looking at inventory levels, we're looking at supply chains, but 72% of them we assessed were either yellow or red. We go into a big long explanation of why that is and how we got here and why there wasn't an overlap between [most of] them. Without going too much into detail, each of these partners are confronting different adversaries, different geographies. They often need different weapons. In many cases, you have Taipei or Jerusalem, which are trying to acquire new systems, where with Ukraine, a lot of the systems we would provide were older systems from our inventories. There's all kinds of reasons. But recognizing that 72% of these weapons systems had real problems with our defense industrial base, we identified 18 recommendations of ways to strengthen our defense industrial base.

And so the argument that H.R. McMaster and I made in a letter to *The Wall Street Journal* building on what we argued in *Newsweek* last year, and we've been saying for a long time, is the answer to this is not to abandon Ukraine or Israel or Taiwan. The answer is to see that by helping them we're helping ourselves, but there's a whole lot we need to do to strengthen our defense industrial base, and you start with this.

The Trump administration requested a base defense budget for next fiscal year, which is the same as last fiscal year. That doesn't even keep up with inflation. So if you buy what I'm saying about the danger of the geostrategic moment, that makes no sense. You can't have a Trump peace through strength policy on a Biden defense budget.

So I'm so thankful that the reconciliation package includes about \$113 billion for next year. But at a time when we're beating up the Europeans to spend 3.5% on defense by 2035, not soon enough, maybe we should lead by example and do that ourselves. And without that reconciliation package, we would've been down below 3%. Mark, compared to what? 3%, what does that even mean? Well, for the last few years, we've been hovering around 3%. Other than three years right before 9/11, the last time we spent that little on defense, measured as a percentage of GDP, was 1940, one year before Pearl Harbor, which reminds me of George Marshall's famous quote, which I quote too much. This is George Marshall, the Army Chief of Staff talking on July 22nd, 1940, "For almost 20 years we had all of the time and almost none of the money. Today," speaking in 1940, "we have all of the money and no time."

What we spend today affects whether our warfighters accomplish their missions and come home to their families two to three years from now. And if you buy what people are saying about the Taiwan Strait in 2028 and us having some fundamental decisions to make on Iran in the coming years, that's why I keep coming back like a dog on a bone on these defense spending issues.

DUBOWITZ: So let me ask you about, we'll zero in back on the Iran-Israel war. I mean, it's called the 12-Day War, but it's not a 12-day war because clearly the Islamic Republic of Iran has been at war with Israel and the United States since 1979. And one expects unless the Islamic Republic goes down, and one can only hope, this war is going to continue. It may be in the shadows. It may break out in the open again and again, but it's going to be important for not only the United States and our defense industrial base, but Israel's defense industrial base.



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Talk a little bit about the challenges that Jerusalem faces with respect to its defense industrial base, and how should it be partnering with the United States going forward? Because there's obviously a lot of calls inside Israel, and in the United States, for Israel to achieve greater independence from the political vicissitudes of Washington, which they certainly faced after October 7th when the Biden administration delayed munitions supplies to Israel on some very key munitions that they needed against their enemies.

BOWMAN: Thank you, Mark. This has been a real area of focus for me, and I spent a lot of time working on it, and I appreciate the opportunity to talk a little bit about it. October 7th, as many of your listeners know, was some horrible combination of 9/11 and Pearl Harbor for Israelis. But instead of the murderers coming from thousands of miles away, they came from just over the hill into people's bedrooms, and it was such a great grand strategic shock. And following that, that first week or so, I thought President Biden's words were just incredibly powerful in the way he stood with Israel, and I really admired him for it, and it meant a lot to me and to other people who support Israel. And what followed was the second most impressive U.S. security assistance campaign that I've seen in recent years in terms of the quantity and variety of weapons that went. That's all true. That's true.

What's also true is that over time we started to see the slow rolling of some munitions and the outright holding of one or two others. And then on top of that, you started to see public criticisms of our ally, Israel. Sorry to go back to the playground twice. But to me, where I come from, that little rural school I told you about, when you got a kid, a friend, your best friend on the ground being kicked by bullies, you don't come up to your friend and start kicking your friend physically or verbally. You don't do that. I have criticisms of what Prime Minister Netanyahu does, I have quite a few, and when his folks visit, I share them. But where I come from, you don't do most of that publicly. That's not the way you treat a friend. And I didn't appreciate that. I know a lot of Israelis didn't appreciate that, and I'm with them on that.

And so the reaction to that is like, holy cow, in this horrible, horrible moment for Israel and for Jews and for anyone with a heart, you're going to slow roll weapons!? What the blank, right? What the blank? And so how would I react to that? I'd say, "Holy blank, we need to get as self-sufficient and independent as possible in producing our weapons because we may not be able to rely in a future conflict on our most important grand strategic partner."

But the problem is, and Rich Goldberg and I made a version of this argument in a research memo, I guess early 2024 it was, and thankfully a lot of that's being adopted now is that Israel is a technological superpower, it is not a defense industrial superpower and it never will be. The United States of America is not independent in the production of our weapons. As a pathetic example, a large portion of our weapons systems have Chinese parts in them. Not great if you're going to be fighting China in 2028 in the Taiwan Strait. And so God bless you, Israel, you're never going to be independent. You will not and if you try, you'll fail and you're going to waste a whole lot of money.

Okay. But that sounds pretty unsatisfying after October 7th. So what do you do? What we humbly recommended to our best friends in the region, Rich Goldberg and I, was that you focus on the systems that you know you're going to need that are most likely to be deprived by the United States because of political reasons. And what is that? It's munitions. It's air-launched munitions and ground-launched munitions. And thankfully, I'm not saying it's because of our memo, but thankfully that's essentially where they're focusing. And so, you know, stockpiling, they should absolutely be stockpiling right now as much as possible. I would be scrutinizing their requirements. We know that Israel's military requirements on October 6th were not right. I'm confident that their requirements, a fancy military term for how much do you need and what do you need, have been revised since October 7th.

But Israel has expended a huge quantity of Arrow interceptors, a huge quantity of air-launched munitions. The top priority has to be restocking those and starting to build less dependence on the United States in munitions, particular air-launched munitions because of this perverse offensive/defensive distinction would be made by some people in Congress. But



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there's a real discussion to be had, I think, Mark on where we should have redundancy in the United States given some of the political problems that you and I see particularly on the far left in the Democratic Party. I do believe there's a pro-Israel, pro-America argument to be made that we need to have complete production redundancy in the United States for key systems, including Arrow.

Right now, the way Arrow – you know this, and probably most of your listeners do – Israel has a tiered aerial missile defense system, Arrow, different versions of Arrow, David's Sling, and Iron Dome... Currently roughly 50% of Arrow parts and supplies are produced in the United States. I think we need to take that to 100% and the final assembly and integration for Arrow occurs in Israel. I believe it makes sense to get that 50% to 100%. Not replacing what you have in Israel, my goodness, Israel needs to be self-sufficient on Arrow, of course. But let's replicate that in the United States from 50% to 100% and let's also have full integration assembly here so that on Israel's worst day, that might be far worse in the future than it was this time, as bad as it was, America in its best moment can come and help Israel.

And by the way, when you have things getting blown up in Israel, including factories, you're going to want to have some redundant production capacity in the United States. And, and we saw this with Gaza, when you call up reservists, where do a lot of those reservists come from? I mean, you know this better than I do. They're coming from facilities where you're producing weapons. So that's the horrible moment for your production capacity to drop when you're at war, right? So that's not a problem, Lord willing, that we're going to have in Kansas or Arkansas. And, by the way, when you build weapons for both the United States and Israel in the United States, you build increased political and parochial support for working with Israel.

So for all those reasons and more, one of the things I'm looking at is get approvals to Israeli requests as quickly as possible. I think the Trump administration is doing great on that. They're rolling through abuses by some members of Congress on the tiered review process. Stockpile, build less dependence and key munitions, the ones that are most likely to be deprived by the United States, but also look to build redundant production capacity in the United States so that American its best moment can be there for Israel in a future worst day.

DUBOWITZ: Brad, you mentioned this distinction, this offensive/defensive distinction that we certainly hearing from some members of Congress, I think we would've heard, I think, from a Harris administration if there'd been a President Harris who would've been facing very strong pressure from the left wing of her party to cut off offensive weapons to Israel, while I think in her heart she cares about Israel and would want to remain committed to Israel and providing defensive capabilities. Talk a little bit about as a military man, both as an operator and as an analyst, is this a reasonable distinction?

BOWMAN: I think it is a distinction that is wildly abused on a regular basis on Capitol Hill and in political rhetoric by people who often have never fired an M-16.

(LAUGHTER)

That's one way to say it. Is an M-16, as a tank an offensive or defensive weapon? Well, most people say, "Well tank? That sounds very offensive." They have these World War II visions of crashing through the hedgerows. "Oh, that's offensive." Well, I mean, if you're parking it on a border and say, "Don't come here. I'm going to defend my border." I call that M1 Abrams tank, a defensive weapon. I'd say the M1 Abrams tanks in Eastern Europe right now are defensive weapons saying, "Vladimir Putin, don't try it. Don't mess with NATO." I call that M1 Abrams tank a defensive weapon, but you better believe that defensive tank can very quickly become an offensive weapon if Putin makes a mistake.

I'd say the same – let's look at the Israeli strike that took out Fuad Shukur, this Hezbollah terrorist who had a huge role in the murder of more than 200 U.S. service members in 1983 in Lebanon. We put out a Rewards for Justice announcement on him saying, \$5 million reward to help us bring him to justice. Sat there for years and years. Nothing, nothing, nothing.



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Strongly worded communiqués from Washington, nothing. Well, you know what happened? The Israelis killed him. How'd they do it? They did it flying an American-made fighter jet and, as far as I can tell, fired an American-made air-launched munition. Fuad Shukr is never going to kill another U.S. service member again, not because of our Rewards for Justice program, but because of the Israelis. Was that missile coming from that aircraft offensive or defensive? I call that defensive because Fuad Shukr wanted to kill a whole lot more American Marines, he's never going to do – so that air-launched munition in that case was used in a defensive way. So I honestly see–

DUBOWITZ: Or if you're taking out missile launchers that are launching hundreds of ballistic missiles at Israel.

BOWMAN: Right. Exactly. Taking out those rocket sites, those missile sites that are literally aimed at civilians and Tel Aviv, a war crime, is taking out that launcher offense or defense? That's totally defensive. So what I fear is happening, Mark, is that this offensive/defensive distinction that has been made on the anti-Israel far, far left has convinced some well-meaning centrist Democrats to join them in what is a political warfare campaign with the single-minded focus of depriving the world's only majority of Jewish state of the means of defense for the purpose of its ultimate extermination. If I could just be blunt, we live in serious times. That's the bottom line.

So this offensive/defensive distinction is bogus and doesn't withstand the most basic scrutiny as we just laid out with three anecdotes and is the first step, it's the camel nose under the tent, in an effort to deprive Israel of the weapons it needs to defend itself and prevent many future October 7ths.

DUBOWITZ: Because we're a nonpartisan think tank I want to be fair here because we've talked about the problems in the far left of the Democratic Party and how this is bleeding into unfortunately the Democratic center. But let's face it, Brad, I mean, you worked for two Republican senators, you worked with people who understood the importance of American allies and American power, but there's an element of the Republican Party, of the right today, the isolationist wing of the party that actually sees Israel as a liability for America and not as an asset. And so you've sort of got this horseshoe convergence, kind of the radical left and the radical right all coming together. And by the way, not just on Israel, but I would argue on America itself. This sort of sense that America is not a force for good in the world, even though obviously you and I know America makes mistakes, sometimes egregious mistakes, I think we agree America is a great force for good in the world.

But this sense on the left and on the right that America sins, America aggresses, these other countries around the world are just merely responding to American aggression or Israeli aggression. I think it's a significant political problem on both sides of the aisle, and obviously it's something that you and we and others are trying to push back against. You've argued the opposite. You've argued that Israel is an asset and not a liability for the United States, so why?

BOWMAN: Thanks. So part of it is the top line metaphor I used earlier that when you're confronting a bunch of bullies, you need friends and Israel's a capable, motivated friend. So I start there. And then you have practical considerations like the Fuad Shukr example I just gave you. We were unable to bring him to justice and Israel did. So, I mean, thank you. And then there's other examples that I've cited for years. I was honored to play a role in crafting the congressional authorization language to authorize terror tunnel cooperation between the United States and Israel, which Israel was leading on. But we came alongside and helped them and helped fund it, and that helped secure Israel. And as horrible as October 7th was, none of those individuals came underground and they didn't come underground because of that terror tunnel cooperation. And then when IDF went into Gaza, they took that terror tunnel technology with them that helped them map out those, in an expeditionary way, the terror tunnels inside Gaza and identify key terrorist leaders in them. And there are Hamas leaders that are dead because of that terror tunnel cooperation between the United States and Israel.



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So that's great for Israel, but how do we Americans selfishly benefit from that? Well, as my former boss, Senator Kelly Ayotte got on the congressional record, which someone can find on Google if you search it, that very same terror technology that Israel played a lead role in developing with our modest help and funding, has been used on our southern border to detect drug tunnels. The very same tunnels that terrorists will come through to try to kill Americans. So our southern border is safer because of Israeli terror tunnel technology. That very same technology has been used to protect, in the past, American bases in Syria where ISIS was tunneling to try to get closer to attack our bases. And so the list just goes on and on.

In the most recent conflict with Iran, it is only a slight oversimplification to say this was American aircraft with a whole lot of American munitions making Russian air missile defenses look kind of silly. Now the Israeli in the room says, "Hey Brad, you give us some credit here?" Yeah, okay. The Israeli—

DUBOWITZ: Credit to the pilots, or the pilot.

BOWMAN: The Israelis souped up the F-35I, they souped up the F-15I, incredible pilots. Yes, yes, and yes. But the point still stands. And so time and time again where I look, and I'll end with this, one of the cool things you get to do as a Senate staffer is you get to design congressional delegations, decide where to go, design the itineraries and then accompany them. I designed a congressional delegation for Senator Ayotte and a couple of Democrats, and I selected Israel, Ukraine, and Afghanistan, and this was years ago. There I was standing at a leading base in Israel, their air missile defense headquarters base, and there was a colonel, a U.S. Air Force colonel there, American, who's kind of the liaison to the IDF. And as I often did, as the senators were talking with the mucky mucks, I went over and talked to the colonels where the real knowledge and work was getting done.

I said, "Hey, Colonel, I'm going to be going back to the U.S. Senate after this. What do you think the US Senate needs to know that they don't that know?" And he didn't know me from Ayotte, I just asked him. He said, "Brad, they need to understand we get far more than we give in this relationship." I was like, "Oh, wow." Then I went back and just time and time again, I saw that that was true. Americans, listeners, in your personal life you know that when the bad guys are ganging up, it's good to have friends. We have an incredibly motivated and capable friend who's going after in a way we could not match a subset of our adversaries. We should not take that for granted. We should not erroneously view it as a hassle or charity to support them. By supporting them we're empowering ourselves and getting the kind of partnership that we need now more than ever.

DUBOWITZ: Well, Brad, just on that note, I mean, you also were instrumental in the creation of a U.S.-Israel Operational Technology Working Group on military innovation. Say a few words about that and how that came about, because I think it's just a great example of the strength of this relationship. And again, tying it back to the topic of the podcast and certainly the topic of the past few weeks, the fight against the Islamic Republic of Iran, against this regime. Tell us a little bit about the OpTec Working Group, how that actually came about, and why that's important for U.S. national security.

BOWMAN: Well, when you gave me the real privilege to come and work here, I kind of said to myself, I have conversations with myself. I was like, "Hey, life's short, Brad. You don't know how long you're around. Let's do something that matters." And I say, "Okay, what's one of the biggest problems we confront as Americans?" Well, we take too gosh darn long to go from concept to fielded combat capability. And there's a whole lot of Iraqi and Afghanistan veterans who didn't come home to their families as a result of us taking too long to get them what they need to conduct their missions and come home. And I think, as we eye a potential conflict with China, that if we don't address that problem of taking a decade or more from concept to fielded combat capability, we're going to pay a much higher price in the future for that tectonic pace of weapons development and fielding.



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Okay, there's my premise. What can I do about it? Because this is the culture that you've established of not just admiring problems but really trying to get after it, and I said, "Well, who's the quickest in the world at going from concept to fielded combat capability?" Well, it's Israel. The answer is Israel. Now, there's all kinds of reasons for that. It's smaller country. They're surrounded by enemies trying to kill them. Necessity.

Speed is a necessity and a virtue. I said, "Okay. How can we help ourselves and help Israel and benefit from their speed in going from a requirement, a military term or concept, to fielded combat capability, and by the way, maybe help them stretch their insufficient defense budget further by purchasing greater quantities and helping Israel benefit from economy of scale, buying 600 instead of 60? I came up with this idea of the U.S.-Israel Operations Technology Working Group in 2019 and undertook a two year or so campaign of trying to explain to folks on the Hill, in the media, and elsewhere why it made sense. Proud to say that it was authorized in the section 1299M of the fiscal year 2021 National Defense Authorization Act, and created in, I believe, November of '21. It's existed since then.

There are six sub working groups focused on the most important modernization priorities for the U.S. and Israel, including things like directed energy, hypersonics, counter drone, network of networks, these sorts of things. Under the leadership of MAFAT [Directorate of Defense, Research and Development] in Israel and Danny Gold and formerly Heidi Shyu here in the Pentagon, and now we'll see how it goes in the new administration. I'm told at the classified level that I now no longer have access to that it has fielded real significant combat capability to both countries.

By the way, when I first started talking about this, Mark, in 2019, I got more than one condescending pat on the heads from Israelis and Americans saying, "Oh, silly, little ambitious good-meaning American. Don't you understand? Haven't you heard of Iron Dome? Haven't you heard of all that we do with Israel?" I said, "Silly little condescending person, haven't you heard of something called the Trophy Active Protection System?"

This is something that Israelis fielded, I think it was 2011, on their tanks and armored personnel carriers to defeat anti-tank guided missiles using a shotgun effect. Well, not until 2018 when then-Army Chief of Staff General Milley went and visited and had an inert round shot at him in Israel, I'm told by someone who was there, to show him that this Trophy system works did he become a four-star action officer and say, "Huh. The Israelis developed that. We should probably have that. Procure that. Procure it now." We bought it, put it on our M1 tanks, put those M1 takes in ...Europe, to deter Russian aggression. People are, "Hey, that's great. Israeli tech." No, not great because listen to the timeline, 2011 to 2019.

DUBOWITZ: 8 years.

BOWMAN: How many people got blown up in Iraq or didn't come home with a leg because we didn't have that Israeli technology? Now take that and copy paste that into the first island chain. Then you're talking about hundreds or thousands of people not coming home to their family. I'm sorry, condescending person. Take your condescension and put it in a bag and get out of here. Because I've been around Washington long enough to know anyone saying the status quo is awesome is probably not right. Anyway, sorry, I get a little excited.

But so that was the thinking and the motivation behind it. I'm not saying it's a panacea. It's not a cure all. There's other entities like the Irregular Warfare Technical Support Directorate. I did an interview on Jon Schanzer's Morning Brief with Adam Tarsi, who's done as much for Israel almost than anyone in the Pentagon, is just a national treasure. But it's helping – to anyone listening on Capitol Hill, section 1299M has a reporting requirement due on March 15th. If your boss is on the armed services and foreign relations committees, why don't you go down to Senate security and read that report and see if we can hold that entity accountable for even better results in the future? Unsolicited advice to congressional staffers.



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DUBOWITZ: Well, it's interesting because you really flip the paradigm on its head. For many years, I think wrongly, but I think for many years the sense was like, well, we're providing Israel with billions of dollars in military aid in order to protect the Israeli war fighter.

BOWMAN: Yeah.

DUBOWITZ: But you actually flipped the concept and said, actually, let's leverage Israeli innovation—

BOWMAN: Right.

DUBOWITZ: —and time to battle in order to protect the American war fighter.

BOWMAN: Yes. If I rattle off some of the six sub-working groups, those six sub-working groups within the Operations Technology Working Group are basically directly aligned with the most important modernization priorities of the Pentagon. The very things we most need in a fight for the Baltics or in the Taiwan Strait. The directed energy that we're working on in that sub-working group with Israel, Israel might use it in Iran or Syria or Lebanon. We might use it in the Baltics or the Taiwan Strait. Who cares? In many cases, it's the same capability.

When you combine that with like, "Is there any country in the world that has flown F-35s and F-15s in combat lately that might have some best practices and lesson learned that we can apply? Oh yeah, Israel. Yeah, Israel." In that podcast I did with the two Air Force pilots, they were talking about the challenges associated with helping to defend Israel on April 13th. The little elephant in the room that was only partially mentioned was, "Wow, if we were struggling with that, how much more are we going to struggle in the first island chain?" We'd better get busy right now and linking up with our Israeli allies to get their lessons learned so that we can learn those now and not pay for it in a more costly way in the future in a war with China and in the Baltics.

DUBOWITZ: Brad, I want to end with this. You mentioned the F-35. It reminded me of a project you've been working on and the FDD been working on for many years. Obviously there's been a tectonic shift in the Middle East. I think geopolitically one could argue the Islamic Republic's never been weaker, certainly since the Islamic Revolution, and the Hezbollah is severely degraded, Hamas eviscerated. The Assad regime goes down. Israel goes into the 12-Day War with the United States and severely degrades Iran's nuclear capabilities, missile capabilities, but into this power vacuum in Syria, moves Erdoğan and Turkey.

BOWMAN: Yeah.

DUBOWITZ: And the Islamist party of Turkey.

BOWMAN: Yeah. Yeah.

DUBOWITZ: In order to recreate, I think Erdoğan's vision of this a new Ottoman Empire.

BOWMAN: Yeah.

DUBOWITZ: With the base of that being Syrian or a Turkish influence in Syria.

BOWMAN: Yeah.

DUBOWITZ: You remember this, I think you were in the Senate at the time, but we had worked very closely during the Obama administration with U.S. Senate in a Russia sanctions bill to say that anybody was buying Russian air defenses couldn't buy our F-35. Obama signed that deal. But as a result of that, Turkey was expelled from the F-35 program. Now we're back in this Trump administration, and it seems that President Trump is seriously considering, the Pentagon is



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seriously considering allowing Islamist Turkey back into the F-35 program. Say a little bit about that. Does that concern you? What are the practical and moral arguments that underpin your concern?

BOWMAN: Thank you. I was here at FDD during that first go around and was outspoken at the time publishing multiple pieces, explaining why it would be a mistake for Turkey to acquire the S-400. Let's just review how ridiculous that is. Turkey is a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. The leading threat to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization is Russia. You have a member of the NATO alliance purchasing an air missile defense system from the leading threat to the alliance. Hello? Right? Yeah. Note to self, that's ally in name, not acting like an ally, as I said at the time. I wrote a piece in *Breaking Defense*, something like... The title was "S-400 or F-35, Erdoğan Must Choose." And he chose, and they created this lie about how they couldn't get the Patriot, which was absolutely false. The Patriot was offered. He didn't want the Patriot for some reasons, and he chose the S-400 over the repeated warnings of the United States leaving us no choice but to evict him from the F-35 program.

Why? Why? Because if you put an – if you station F-35s in a country where there are S-400s, then I'll cut out all the technical nuance here to make it quick, you're basically going to give that S-400 repeated opportunities to rehearse detecting, tracking, and shooting down F-35s. You better believe the Russians, either because Erdoğan gives it to them or they acquire it when they're there sustaining and maintaining those S-400s over the next 10 or 20 years are going to get that information. Okay. Follow me. Erdoğan acquired the S-400 from Russia. The practice the S-400 would get tracking F-35s stationed in Turkey as well, would find its way almost certainly into Russia's hands. What's going on with Russia right now? Russia has major IOUs to pay back right now to China, Iran, and North Korea for all the help they've given him for his war in Ukraine.

We have to assume that there's a strong likelihood that those details on how to detect, track, and shoot down F-35s will find their way to Iran and to China. For those taking notes at home, dead American F-35 pilots, dead Israeli F-35 pilots, dead South Korean F-35 pilots, dead Japanese F-35 pilots. There's the practical argument. Some things are more complicated than that, so we talk about the NDAA [National Defense Authorization Act] and how they're – right now, Erdoğan hacks are lobbying Roger Wicker, Jack Reed, Jeanne Shaheen, Jim Risch, Mike Rogers, Adam Smith, Brian Mast, and Gregory Meeks, trying to get them to support editing out that pesky little word "possession" in the NDAA provision, allowing them to have both the S-400 and F-35. If you don't buy that practical argument and you don't have concerns about the most advanced fighter jet on which Israelis and Americans and others are going to depend for our security for the next 20 years, if that doesn't get you, maybe this one will get you: After October 7th, the worst single day slaughter of Jews since the Holocaust put the choice to Erdoğan, and he chose Hamas over the United States.

I don't know how else to say it. When you look at the parade of terrorists that went and visited Erdoğan, if you look at after Israel brought justice to Haniyeh, the Turkish consulate or embassy in Tel Aviv lowered their flag to half-staff in Tel Aviv. Are you kidding me? He chose. They murdered Israelis, they murdered Americans, they murdered Jews, and after that, Erdoğan chose Hamas over the United States. Are we going to reward him by giving him our most advanced fighter jet? Come on. I'll give you a three-hour speech on the technical application of how you employ F-35 in combat. But give me a break. Do you want an ally of Hamas to have our most advanced fighter jet? I say no. What am I saying? I'm saying S-400 or not, they can send S-400 to the moon. At this point, I don't care. After what he did on October 7th, he should never have the F-35, in my opinion.

DUBOWITZ: Yeah. That's a nightmare scenario, right? Over the Mediterranean, Israeli and Turkish pilots flying our F-35s in a dogfight. All of a sudden we've actually empowered the Islamists in Ankara.

BOWMAN: I don't – people are hearing me, they might think I'm getting joy by saying this – I'm not, because I'm enough of a student to history to understand that Turkey in the past has been an important ally to the United States. When I was in



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Afghanistan, Turkey was responsible for security in Kabul. I slept safe at nights because Turkish folks standing guard, but that's why I mourn what's happened in Turkey with Erdoğan. That's why I mourn it. I'm sad. That's why we ended, Sinan Ciddi and I, ended our *Breaking Defense* piece that I'm referencing here by saying Turkey has been an important ally to the United States in the past, but it's lost its way under Erdoğan. Maybe I over-moralize things, but I see moral components from time to time in foreign policy, and you've got a little whiff of that as I've been talking about October 7th in Israel. And I'm sorry, if you choose a designated terrorist organization as your ally after October 7th, I think you've disqualified yourself from having our most advanced fighter.

DUBOWITZ: Yeah. Yeah. Listen, as you say, we don't say this with glee. I've been in Turkey many times. I went to Turkey for the first time in 1990 just fresh out of college with a backpack and spend a couple of months hiking around Turkey. Wonderful people. Amazing food. Beautiful scenery. A very different Turkey.

BOWMAN: Yes.

DUBOWITZ: This is not your father's or your grandfather's Turkey.

BOWMAN: No. No. That's right. Sadly.

DUBOWITZ: This is the Islamist Turkey.

BOWMAN: Yeah.

DUBOWITZ: I think we all hope to see a free and democratic Turkey. Speaking of that hope, I hope we get to see a free and democratic and peaceful Iran.

BOWMAN: Right.

DUBOWITZ: With that, Brad, I just want to thank you again for your service, for everything you do for our country, for everything you do for our allies, and everything you've done for FDD. Love to have you back.

BOWMAN: Thank you, Mark, for the opportunity. I really enjoyed it. Thank you.

DUBOWITZ: Thanks, Brad.

Brad, thanks again for slicing through the complexities of the latest provocations from the Islamic Republic of Iran. From the kinetic fires of the 12-Day War to the strategic underpinnings of this Axis of Aggressors – Iran, Russia, China, and North Korea, you really gave our listeners clarity – moral clarity, strategic, and military clarity –that we can understand. We can demand tougher and smarter policy. As the regime in Iran grows more aggressive – and more oppressive – at home, we'll keep pressing our leaders to match words with action. That's it for today's deep dive on "The Iran Breakdown." I'm Mark Dubowitz. I'll see you next time when we break it down all again.